Natural Church Development: an evaluation

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Introduction

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were
being saved. - Acts 2:47, ESV

Congregational revitalization is a commonly discussed topic today among Lutherans. There is a real concern among pastors and laity alike over faltering membership numbers, budget problems, and an overall lack of zeal and apparent commitment within our churches today.

Our Lord said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."[1] And yet, it seems that the church constantly struggles to fill the pews and the coffers. Too often this results in the church focusing inward and loses the urgency of the mission to "Go and make disciples," focusing instead on surviving.[2]

This trend is not new and is not restricted to any denomination. While somewhat hyperbolic, it is probably not entirely inaccurate to say that any Christian body that has a substantial history has encountered this trend.

One man in particular is credited with beginning a movement to reverse this trend. In 1960, Donald McGavran established the Institute of Church Growth, beginning operation in 1961 on the campus of Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. The Institute was moved, in 1965, to Fuller Theological Seminary where McGavran became the dean of the Fuller Seminary School of World Missions.[3]

McGavran 's emphasis was on evangelizing the world and bringing the lost of the world into the fold of Christ's flock. The "Church

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1   Luke 10:2, *ESV*

2   LCMS: World Missions, "Mission Revitalization Process",
http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=11973 (accessed: 3/4/2008).

3   LCMS - CTCR, *Evangelism and Church Growth With Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement*, Sept. 1987, p. 20, retrieved from:
http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/Evang-011.pdf (last retrieved: 4/21/2008).

Growth Movement" shares McGavran 's desires and, though there are unique emphases among its leaders, there are several generally recognized "missiological principles" by which the movement operates. Among these principles is the use of the social sciences (sociology, ethnography, etc.) as an aid to growing the church.

While the Church Growth movement has always maintained that their principles are biblically founded, they have often failed to articulate that foundation in a compelling and systematic manner. As a result, careful evaluation has been difficult and the use of "Church Growth Principles" has been suspect in many theological traditions. The skepticism and controversy surrounding "Church Growth" has reduced its impact within Christendom.

The work of Christian Schwarz has identified this issue and has endeavored to correct this deficiency. The result of this effort is "Natural Church Development" (NCD).[4]

It is the goal of Natural Church Development to inaugurate a "Third Reformation".[5] The first reformation, according to Schwarz, was a reformation of doctrine. "[Luther's] central theological achievement was his rejection of Roman Catholic objectivism, which permeated every area of theology, from the doctrine of God and anthropology right through to ecclesiology. In almost all questions Luther dealt with, personal values replaced the objectivist categories."[6]

According to Schwarz, the original Reformation of Luther became mired down in the age of orthodoxy, resulting in a system no better than the Roman Catholic scholasticism against which Luther fought so vehemently. The rise of Pietism was "a critical approach to the

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4   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in th Church*, Church Smart Resources, St. Charles IL, 1999. - "I have come to the conclusion that the greatest obstacle to strategic church development is not a lack of methodological know-how, but deep-rooted theological blockages. ... I am talking about theological blockages in Christian groups whose doctrinal 'correctness' is beyond question. The fact that some of the greatest obstacles to church development are to be found in these circles is, in my estimation, the real dilemma." (p. 7). Also, "In this book, I try to link church development with some of the *loci classici* of the systematic theological discussion." (p. 9).

5   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 88-95.

6   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 86.

formalism of Protestant orthodoxy."[7] This second Reformation "ranges from the classical pietism of the baroque period at the end of the 17th century, via the revival movements at the beginning of the 19th century and the fellowship movement of the 20th century down to the evangelical movement of our time."[8] Pietism "was concerned with the appropriation of personal salvation."[9]

Schwarz perceives that both of these reformations were incomplete. The original reformation reformed theology, recovering it from the "objectivist" realm of scholasticism. The second reformation recovered the spirituality of Christianity, restoring its vitality by emphasizing the "practical application of what the Reformers had formulated theologically."[10]

The failure in both of these reform movements, however, was that they failed to see the need to reform the structures. "However much Pietism attempted to return to the theology of the Reformers and to fight against Protestant orthodoxy, however revolutionary its achievements were with regard to the practice of spirituality, it remained largely bound by the spiritualistic or institutionalistic paradigm when it came to the structural question. The advocates of Pietism did not see clearly enough that this would have negative effects on their spirituality, and thus eventually on their theology (which had to justify the wrong practice)."[11]

As an heir of these two reformations, NCD intends to remedy the fact that "the wonderful insights of Reformation and Pietism are largely smothered in the mire of unsuitable structures. In the third reformation we need to create structures which will be suitable vessels so that what the first two reformations demanded can be put into practice."[12]

In this way, NCD draws on the theological tradition of Luther's reformation, the spiritual reformation of Pietism, and the structural

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7   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 88.
8   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 88.
9   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 89.
10   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 90.
11   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 91.
12   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 91-92.

reformation of Church Growth to develop a complete theological framework for the church. While the main focus of NCD is church structures (i.e. ecclesiology). As we will see, like the two reformations from which it draws, the theological implications of the paradigm under which NCD operates extends beyond simply the institutional structures of the church.

It is the purpose of this paper to examine Natural Church Development and the theological consequences of the thought pattern within which NCD operates.

The first section of this paper will present the principles, strategy, and theology of Natural Church Development as it is presented in the two books, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*,[13] *Color Your World with Natural Church Development*,[14] which the movement itself considers its most important works as well as the booklet *The Threefold Art of Experiencing God: The Liberating Power of a Trinitarian Faith* which is intended to be an introduction to the trinitarian approach of Natural Church Development.[15] In this section, the intent is to present the salient points of NCD, attempting to faithfully convey what NCD believes and teaches.

The second section of this book will examine the theological methodology of NCD; tracing some of the theological influences upon which NCD builds and also examining it's treatment of history as well as its exegetical presuppositions and conclusions.

Finally, the third section will examine the writing style of the works considered to ascertain how it contributes to the goal of educating others about the theological concepts that underlie the NCD Strategy.

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13   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in th Church*, Church Smart Resources, St. Charles IL, 1999.
14   Schwarz, *The Threefold Art of Experiencing God*, St. Charles:Church Smart Resources, 1999.
15   Schwarz, C., *Color Your World with Natural Church Development*, Church Smart Resources, St. Charles IL, 2005.

Chapter 1: What is NCD?

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
I Corinthians 3:10-11 *ESV*

Natural Church Development (NCD) purports to explain the theological paradigm behind the "Church Growth" movement. The ultimate purpose of using the strategy of NCD is to "create conditions in which the growth automatisms God uses to grow his church can be better released."[16]

As can be seen, NCD is not focused primarily upon the numerical growth of the church. Rather, it sees numerical growth as the fruit of a "healthy" congregation.[17]

NCD teaches that the growth of the church is dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit. "The church as an organization can be 'manufactured' by humans; the church as an organism cannot. We have control over the organization, but never over the organism. . . . In natural church development, all we can do . . . is subject the elements we *can* influence to the criterion of functionality in such a way that the elements that are beyond our control may take place. We do not make them; rather they happen 'all by themselves.'"[18]

One aspect to understand the elements of the church as organism is to understand the biological processes of living organisms within God's creation and apply these to the church as an "organism."[19]

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16 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 248.
17 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 9 - "...the question of numerical growth seems ... to be just a side issue - albeit an important one - of church development. It is not the strategic goal, but one of many natural consequences of a church's health to experience growth."
18 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 20-21.
19 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 233. - "Natural (or biotic) church development is an attempt to study nature, and thus God's creation, to discover principles that are applicable far beyond the realm of biology. ...[it] involves the use of analogy as a method of perception."

Drawing from the Sermon on the Mount, NCD teaches that part of the intent of Jesus' statement, "See how the lilies of the field grow..." is to point us to a careful examination of the underlying processes of biological growth and development to understand how God's creation operates. This understanding can then be applied to the Church as a living organism.[20]

This description, in part, shows how NCD views God's revelation of himself. In addition to this "Creation Revelation," where God reveals himself, his will and his operation "by leaving the marks of his handwriting on creation," NCD teaches that God has revealed himself through the work of Christ in the "Salvation Revelation." The "Personal Revelation" is "where what God did for us objectively in Christ becomes a subjective reality. ...The revelation of the Holy Spirit is the revelation in our hearts. ...In all three revelations, we encounter the one God, but each time we encounter him in a different way. His threefold communication with us, which should correspond with a threefold response on our part, is fundamental to the nature of God as revealed to us in the Bible." One tool to help achieve a proper balance of the "three ways of experiencing God," is the "Trinitarian Compass."[21]

One of the main problems that NCD sees with the "church growth movement" is that they have not adequately grappled with various theological topics including the doctrine of God.[22] This is one

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20 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p.235. - "We are to study and examine them, to meditate on them, and take our direction from them ... and we are told that we need to do so in order to understand the principles of the kingdom of God. This approach describes exactly the procedure of natural church development."

21 Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, pp. 8-9.

22 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 9. - "What is its [church development's] relevance in relation to doctrine, ethics, and the understanding of Scripture? What is the effect of the underlying paradigm on the discussion about baptism and communion, on church traditions, on the question of church planting and ecumenism? What concept of spiritual gifts is the consequence of this approach, on what understanding of conversion is it basd, and what is the outcome of this paradigm when related to social and political questions? Finally, are the movements that put 'church growth' or 'church development' on their agenda restricted to a particular school of theological thinking, or do they present a method which is theologically neutral? Is this 'school of theology' (or 'method') orthodox? All of these questions are fundamentally theological ones which require a theological answer. This is a challenge which the church growth movement ... has not faced up to sufficiently."

void that NCD aims to fill.

NCD as a Strategy

NCD characterizes itself not as a model or program, but as a strategy. There are certainly programmatic aspects to NCD. However, the core of NCD is not a specific methodology or program. Rather, NCD is a paradigm of thought and builds upon key principles and strategies, derived predominantly through empirical research, to help churches become healthy.

All the tools of NCD are intended to provide the framework for a church to develop their own methodology and programs.[23]

For this reason, NCD considers itself an inter-denominational approach.[24] NCD claims that, while it possesses a certain theological mindset,[25] the strategy itself can be applied within the context of any denomination that recognizes the validity of the "Bipolar Paradigm."

The Bipolar Paradigm

The over-riding paradigm of NCD is the "Bipolar paradigm." According to the "Bipolar paradigm," the church can be thought of as possessing a "dynamic" and a "static" pole. The dynamic pole is seen "in New Testament statements which describe the church in biological, organic terms and therefore emphasize the aspect of 'growth.'" Examples of this type of statement would be those statements which speak of the church as the "Body of Christ" and individuals Christians as "parts of the body".[26] The static pole speaks of the "institutional" aspects of the church. These are created by the church because they are functionally

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23 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 238-239. - A strategy is "in a way located between principles and programs ... it ... offers a rough framework within which churches can develop their own programs."

24 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 77 - "...the bipolar paradigm ... is broad enough to include widely differing churches, but it is 'narrow' enough not to lose sight of the central goal - that the church of Jesus Christ should develop, grow, and multiply."

25 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 82 - "Church growth ... can never be atheological ... there is a definite theological paradigm behind it."

26 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 17.

useful in building up the church. These aspects are, at best "*useful* for the development of the organic [dynamic] pole. But they can also be a hindrance to its development. They are theologically legitimate in as far as they prove their usefulness."[27] Aspects of the "static pole" include doctrine, Sacraments and Office within the church. These institutional items are intended to stimulate and build up the church (i.e. the dynamic pole).[28] The dynamic and static pole interact with one another such that the dynamic pole produces and creates functional institutions (i.e. the static pole), which serve to stimulate the further development of the dynamic pole (i.e., faith, fellowship, and service).[29]

This "bipolar view" of the church is not universally accepted. Often churches that are "institutionalistic" overemphasize the enduring quality of the institutions that have been built to promote the work of the Church. Examples of the "institutionalistic" mindset include the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches.[30]

According to NCD, "Meaningful communication is simply no longer possible, " with those who have not become enlightened enough to understand the relevance of the "Bipolar Paradigm." One example of this is the response of the Greek Orthodox church to a survey inquiring regarding the plans of the church in the third millennium and what changes the church would make to achieve these aims:

We regret that His Eminence is not able to answer your

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27 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 19-20.
28 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 18 - "In other words, whenever faith, fellowship, and service - or just one of these elements - are missing or neglected in an institution, we should not regard this institution as 'true church.'"
29 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 20-21. - "The church as an organization can be 'manufactured' by humans; the church as an organism cannot. We can have control over the organization, but never of the organism. The well-trodden discussion of whether we can 'make' a church grow is hindered by the fact that these two levels are usually not distinguished."
30 The word "institutionalistic" and cognates have a very specific meaning within NCD. Specifically, the core of what NCD considers, "The Institutionalistic Misconception," is the fact that those who hold this misconception reject the concept of "functional structures." Instead, the institutionalistic misconception, "identifies the 'organization' with the 'organism.' Instead of evaluating the institutional side of the church from a functional point of view, institutions are assumed to have an almost magical quality: wherever certain institutions are present, the church of Jesus Christ is guaranteed." (Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 24). See the chapter on "Bipolar Ecclesiology" below for descriptions of the "static" and "dynamic" poles of the church.

questions. This is because of the questions . . . You should consider that the church is not a commercial enterprise and that the bishops and priests are not managers whom you can ask about future plans, changes in management, and obstacles that may be in the way . . . According to orthodox belief, the church is the body of Christ in the sense of the New Testament, the church of the saints, God's new people. It is the place where its crucified, risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ works in the world through his Holy Spirit to save it. That happens today as in the days of the apostles, as in the first and second centuries, and it will continue to happen in all coming ages up to the moment when Christ returns and the world is perfected. The task of the church is not to make plans, to implement changes and make 'improvements' or to prepare a special contribution for the third millennium, but rather to fulfill the task given by its Lord.[31]

Indeed, to a church that would respond thus, the concept of Natural Church Development would seem absurd.

The Eight Quality Characteristics

The research NCD has conducted has identified eight "Quality Characteristics" which mark a healthy congregation. These are:

- Empowering leadership
- Gift-oriented ministry
- Passionate spirituality
- Functional structures
- Inspiring worship service
- Holistic small groups
- Need-oriented evangelism
- Loving relationships

"These quality characteristics are not meant to be normative in a dogmatic sense. Rather, they are tried and tested instruments to ascertain how healthy a church is."[32] After thousands of surveys and many hours of research, NCD has discovered that healthy churches exhibit these eight characteristics.[33] What's more, churches that exhibit these eight

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31   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 81.
32   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 21.
33   Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 14-16. - Natural Church Development began with an

characteristics are churches that grow![34]

These eight characteristics are not, however, without doctrinal relevance, "they certainly have a doctrinal relevance, and they must be reflected from a doctrinal point of view."[35]

In the book, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*, the chief architect of NCD explains how these principles properly integrate both the dynamic and static poles of the "Bi-polar Paradigm" of the church. This book also attempts to use the "Bi-polar Paradigm" to shed light on many of the long-running tensions evident throughout church history and explain how an ecclesiology based upon the "Bi-polar Paradigm" resolves these traditionally difficult issues.

In addition to the "Bi-polar Paradigm", the eight quality characteristics, and the "Trinitarian Compass," Natural Church Development, through the study of the biological sciences, has discovered six "biotic principles" that serve to answer how the church as an "organism" can grow. These "biotic principles are:

- Interdependence,
- Multiplication
- Energy Transformation
- Multi-usage
- Symbiosis
- Functionality

These principles provide the framework and boundaries for the institutional structures of the Church. "To put it in a nutshell: the more we apply the biotic principles in each of the eight areas mentioned, the greater the growth potential of a church will be."[36] "If we think more

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international research project including 1000 churches in 32 countries. The lead researcher set out to scientifically investigate the claims of church growth. "I was not willing to accept the fact that after 2000 years of church history and the publication of hundreds of books on church growth, no research had been done at an international level to verify whether or not the 'principles' promoted in these books were really universally valid." (p. 14).

34 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 21. - "In these analyses [studies of local congregations] we have discovered eight quality characteristics which are measurably more developed in growing churches than in stagnant and declining ones."

35 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 8.

36 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 243.

deeply about these six principles, we will notice that in the final analysis they are just variations on a single theme: 'How can we generate conditions in which the growth automatisms God uses to grow his church can be better released?'"[37]

Finally, to identify the structures within the church which require the most attention, NCD utilizes the "minimum strategy" which. Based upon an analysis of the congregation, NCD evaluates the level of each of the eight quality characteristics. The strategy of "natural church development is based on the following assumptions: The church will grow quantitatively until the arrow meets the least developed quality characteristic (minimum vactor). If the church wants to continue to grow, it should deal with this quality characteristic. If it is sucessful in developing quality in this area, quantitative growth will resume and continue until the arrow meets the next minimum factor."[38]

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37   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 248.
38   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 249.

Chapter 2: Theological Framework of NCD - "Bipolar Ecclesiology"

Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ... Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.
I Corinthians 14:6,19-20 *ESV*

The Church

Natural Church Development is a strategy to properly align the structures of an institution in order that God might bring about the reality of the church in its midst. NCD teaches that the reality of the church is recognized where there is faith, fellowship, and service. According to NCD, these three aspects do not constitute the church, but "the criterion for all churches should be whether faith, fellowship, and service become a reality; whether God becomes manifest in them; whether the Holy Spirit works in them;... In other words, the criterion for every institution should be how *useful* it is for building up the body of Christ. To the extent that it fulfills this criterion, it is a 'true church.'"[39]

This "usefulness" is brought about by the Holy Spirit who "makes sure that God is manifested among us and that the church as an organism becomes a reality. Conversely, the fact that God becomes manifest and the church as an organism becomes a reality is a sign that the Holy Spirit is working." This operation of the Holy Spirit can be referred to as "*pneumatic functionality*". According to the teachings of Natural Church Development, we can recognize the operation of the Holy Spirit among us by judging "whether Jesus is lifted up as Lord and

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39   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 73.

the church is built."[40]

It is important to note that functionality, within NCD, should not be confused with pragmatism. Within pragmatism, an initiative is geared to a very specific goal. The functionality spoken of in NCD recognizes that the overall health of the church is the result of a complex interdependence of several aspects. It would, therefore, be impossible to develop a pragmatic or programmatic solution to improve the health of the church. The number of "variables" are numerous and dynamic. Change in one aspect alters the entire system.[41]

Bipolar Ecclesiology

NCD asserts that ideas and beliefs regarding ecclesiology have historically been dominated by two thought patterns: the "Institutionalistic Paradigm," (advocated, for example, by the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches) and the "Spiritualistic Paradigm," which in the extreme renounces any sort of institutional anchors and often consider themselves "led by the Spirit."[42]

In contrast, NCD works under the "Bipolar Paradigm" in which the structural/institutional aspect of the church are placed in a functional relationship to the development of the church. Where "Jesus is lifted up as Lord and the church is built," a structure is considered to be functional and should be retained. Where this is not true, the structure should be dispensed with or replaced with a more "functional" structure.

To fully understand the Bipolar Paradigm, it is best to consider it alongside the institutionalistic and spiritualistic paradigms.

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40 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 71. - cxref. I Corinthians 12:3,7; 14:1-5.
41 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 242ff. - "We soon found it to be a rule that when a church changes just one of the quality characteristics (positively or negatively), this has - empirically demonstrable - consequences for all other areas." (p. 242.).
42 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 23. - "It can be demonstrated that major parts of church history are characterized by a conflict between subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and institutionalism, dualism and monism, mysticism and magic - on other words, by a conflict between two misunderstandings of the Christian faith."

The Institutionalistic Paradigm

Adherents of the institutionalistic paradigm believe that the institutional structures comprise the church.[43] They have identified the institutions of the church (e.g., liturgy, preaching, the Sacraments) with "the Church." Within this paradigm, the thought is wherever these institutions exist, the Church exists. This paradigm can be identified by five characteristics: Objectivism, Heteronomism, Formalism, Rationalism, and Magic.

The Spiritualistic Paradigm

Adherents to this paradigm reject any sort of institutional structures.[44] The characteristics of this paradigm are "polar opposites" of the institutionalistic paradigm, namely: Subjectivism, Autonomism, Duality, Irrationality, and Mysticism.

Objectivism/Subjectivism

An objectivist understanding of the church sees the church as something that can be "guaranteed" to exist. This understanding, "arises out of an understandable human drive for security."[45] "It is no mistake when objectivists remind us that we cannot equate God's revelation with our own pious feelings. The mistake lies in the wish 'that revelation should be secured - in such a way that in reality the church secures itself.'"[46]

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43 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 24. - "The mistake of the institutionalistic misconception is that it identifies the 'organization' with the 'organism.' Instead of evaluating the institutional side of the church from a functional point of view, institutions are assumed to have an almost magical quality: wherever certain institutions are present, the church of Jesus Christ is guaranteed."

44 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 33. - "the spiritualistic paradigm ... has its genuine roots in a dualistic world view which is antagonistic to institutions as a matter of principle. This position largely corresponds to the phenomenon known in theological discussion as the 'enthusaists.'"

45 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 25.

46 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 26. quoting: Weber, *Grundlagen der Dogmatik I*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 3rd edition, 1964, p. 202.

A subjectivist understanding turns away from the objectivists desire to secure the reality of the church through the institutions of the church. "Their mistake is that ... they make religious experience the standard by which everything else is judged."[47]

The bipolar understanding of the Church, as we previously discussed, places the organizational elements and the organism of the church in a functional relationship. The institutions of the church do not "guarantee" the existence of the church as if they have a "magical" quality.[48] Rather, the institutions exist to stimulate and build up "faith, fellowship, and service."

Heteronomism/Autonomism

The heteronomist has "a longing for a legalistic, manageable authority."[49] Again the desire is for security. In this case, the security come from being able to "contain" God in such a way that the heteronomist can claim to know and understand God. The result is the use of external order, hierarchy, and discipline "as a means of protecting the immutable Christian truth..." as was the attempt, for example, in the Inquisition.[50]

"Spiritualists [i.e. autonomists] answer heteronomism by emphasizing the direct experience of the Spirit." There may be an acceptance of God's revelation in history and the authority of Scripture, but "the direct contact between the spiritualist and God is, at least, equally valid."[51]

The bipolar ecclesiology of NCD avoids both heteronomism and autonomism by understanding that structures are necessary to support and stimulate the "faith, fellowship, and service" of the church.

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47   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 33.
48   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 24-25.
49   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 26 - "One example [from Protestantism] ... is the orthodox teaching that Scripture is an axiomatic authority. Or, ... [from Roman Catholicism] the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope."
50   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 27.
51   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 34.

Institutions are created or developed by the church in order to serve the purpose of enhancing or building up the church.[52] Because the purpose of structures within the church is to serve to stimulate and develop the church, they must always be submitted to the question of functionality.[53]

To stimulate, develop and protect the three aspects of faith, fellowship and service, numerous institutions arose early in the development of the church. Among these were the biblical canon and doctrine (faith), the sacraments (fellowship), and office (service).

NCD maintains that the creation of these elements by the early church were, in part, an effort to preserve the church from the influence of false teachings.[54] Other elements, for example the Sacraments, were created to foster the fellowship of the Church.

Formalism/Dualism

Formalism can be characterized by the maintenance of institutions that have long since ceased to be functional. Some examples of formalism include static forms of liturgy and prayer and an emphasis on the academic preparation of pastors "not on the spiritual gifts of the candidates."[55]

As opposed to the objectivist who clings to the tangible forms as primary over the content they were meant to convey, the spiritualist opposes formalism, giving absolute priority to the spirit over and above matter. This type of dualism is often justified by the fact that creation is fallen and "although it is still postulated as the work of the one God, it

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52 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 20 - "...the development of the church as an organism inevitably leads to the creation of institutions. On the other hand, the aim of these institutions is to be useful in stimulating the development of the church as an organism."

53 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 20. - "At best, institutions can be useful for the development of the organic pole. But they can also be a hindrance to its developent. They are theologically legitimate in as far as they prove their usefulness."

54 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 19 - "For example, the Gnostics appealed in the same way s the church 'to the Spirit speaking and working within them.' Thus, three institutional elements arose early on which proved to be helpful in this critical situation: the biblical canon, the rules of faith, and the episcopalian hierarchy." - quoting Kasemann, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen I*, Gottingen, 1960, p. 129.

55 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 28.

can no longer be understood as a positive entity." The result is a denegration of any and all institutions and structures as, as best unnecessary and at worst harmful to the purposes of God.[56]

In contrast to both of these approaches, the bipolar paradigm of NCD recognizes that the "Church as an organism can never find expression in a vacuum, free of all institutions." [57] NCD relies not on spiritualized principles, but the observation of natural phenomena to understand the manner in which God operates; applying the principles gleaned from examination of the natural world to the growth of the church.[58] At the same time, by applying functionality as a criterion for the retention or rejection of institutions, NCD protects itself against the formalism that has characterized the institutional church throughout the centuries.

Rationalism/Irrationality

"Rationalism is, in a sense, a form of institutionalism on the level of philosophical reflection." In its radical form, theological rationalism "rejects all forms of religious 'experience.'" The rationalism of the institutionalist paradigm works in "predominantly linear logic with a static pattern of cause and effect." The result of rationalistic thinking is to make the church itself the object of faith, "and even places theological value on the premise that the *communio sanctorum* has nothing to do with experience."[59]

The irrationality of the spiritualistic misconception is "an overestimation of religious feelings." As a result of their dualistic thinking, they deny that reason is a gift from God. Only "occurrences that cannot be explained rationally" are considered to be "from God."

The bipolar paradigm of Natural Church Development avoids the rationalism of the institutionalistic misconception and the irrationality of

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56   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 34-36.
57   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 19.
58   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 214ff.
59   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 28.

the spiritualistic misconception by properly maintaining the reciprocal relationship between the dynamic pole of the church as the body of Christ and the static pole of functional structures which are established through the proper use of reason and observation in order to promote faith, fellowship and service.

Magic/Mysticism

The characteristic of "magic" is best seen in the objectivist/institutionalist conception of the sacraments. The instutionalist misconception considers that "merely performing the sacrament automatically guarantees its effectiveness due to its integral qualities. "This structure of thought and action ... seeks to bring God within our grasp." It can be seen not only in the sacraments, but in other areas as well. The belief is that "by maintaining certain traditions (for their own sake), the preservation of the faith is assured *ex opere operato*; by the institution of a bishop or pastor, the church of Jesus Christ is guaranteed *ex opere operato*, when a person rationally assents to certain doctrinal facts, the personal commitment is guaranteed *ex opere operato*."[60]

"It is no accident that mysticism is a form of theology that is mainly defined in its terms of negatives." The thought pattern of mysticism, in an effort to escape the institutionalistic misconception, believes that it is institutions in themselves that must be rejected. Owing to the dualistic paradigm under which they operate, adherents to the spiritualistic paradigm that exhibit the tendency of mysticism believe that institutions, as part of the created world, are to be viewed skeptically. "The mystic believes that the freedom of the Spirit forbids commitment to any sort of external form."[61]

Unlike mysticism's rejection of institutional structures like the sacraments, Natural Church Development regards the sacraments as

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60   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 28-29.
61   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 36-37.

salutary when they can functionally "stimulate the development of faith, fellowship, and service."[62]   However, "any form of theological doctrine that aims to convince people that a sacrament is a guarantee of faith is rejected.[63]   Within the bipolar paradigm, "different doctrines of the sacraments are possible"[64] however, "It must be clear that the presence and working of Christ - whatever concepts we use to describe them - are not dependent on our interpretation of his presence and working. ...It would have saved us much trouble if the advocates of the various concepts had assumed that the doctrines of the sacraments have no influence on the reality of the presence of Christ, but are just a series of human attempts to begin to explain something that is impossible to capture in mere doctrinal formulations. Here, too, we must ask ourselves how useful the formulations we have found are for the life of the church."[65]

As has been seen, there are numerous misunderstandings that arise when there is an "unbalanced" approach to the static and dynamic aspects of the church. "There are ... very few positions which are pure forms of the thought patterns described."[66] In fact, it is often true that within the same individual or organization, tendencies in both of the extremes (institutionalism and spiritualism) often occur. The purpose of the Bipolar Paradigm is to provide a framework of thought to avoid these extremes.[67]   The argument of NCD is, "that spiritualistic and institutionalistic tendencies should be overcome, no matter where they occur..."[68]

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62   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 148. - "...the bipolar paradigm asks here, too, what form of administration of the sacraments is most likely to stimulate the development of faith, fellowship, and service in a specific context?"
63   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 148.
64   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 148.
65   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 148-149.
66   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 39.
67   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 40. - "...the more the bipolar paradigm of natural church development is integrated into the life of the church, the higher, metaphorically, is its level of immunity to disease, and the better it will be able to resist such infections."
68   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 39.

The Bipolar Paradigm and The Eight Quality Characteristics

The research that NCD has conducted has "repeatedly underlined" the operation of the bipolar paradigm within growing churches. These churches (consciously or unconsciously) apply the bipolar paradigm within their church and, as a result, they exhibit the eight quality characteristics measured in the NCD surveys. By using the bipolar paradigm as a guide to adopting practical measures, the strategy of NCD is to "subject the elements we can influence to the criterion of functionality in such a way that the elements that are beyond our control may take place."[69] The aim of these practical measures is to implement institutions that are "useful in stimulating the development of the church as an organism."[70]

The strategy of NCD, however, is not to programmatically "implement" the eight quality characteristics. NCD assumes that, in some form, each of these areas is already represented in the church. There are few, if any churches that do not have leadership, ministry, spirituality, structures, worship services, small groups,[71] evangelism, and relationships. Therefore, there is no need to implement these "institutions."[72]

However, to assert that the existence of the institutions is all that is necessary would be to fall prey to the institutionalistic misunderstanding discussed above. It must be remembered that within the bipolar paradigm, the institution/structure (static pole) serves a functional role to the dynamic pole. "It is the concepts underlying the adjectives (empowering, gift-oriented, passionate, and so forth) that are the decisive secret of growing churches."[73]

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69   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 22.
70   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 22.
71   Some in LC--MS circles may dispute the existence of "Small Groups" in their parish. However, the concept of "Small Groups" encompasses any regularly meeting group including the LWML, Quilters, LLL, any "men's group," Lutheran Youth Fellowship (Youth Group), and others.
72   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 243.
73   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 242-243.

The next section will explore the origin of these concepts as it explores what NCD teaches about God and His self-revelation.

Chapter 3: Theological Framework of NCD – God, Revelation and Scripture

Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.

John 20:21-23 *ESV*

      According to Natural Church Development, the reason that many people fall into the institutionalistic or spiritualistic misconception regarding ecclesiology is that they hold a wrong view of God.[74] Therefore, "A theological justification of church development ... must penetrate to the heart of the matter. This heart is the revelation of God..."[75] For, "where we do not understand the nature of God, however conscientiously we phrase the details of our ecclesiology, we cannot really understand the nature of the church."[76]

      The cause of this incorrect view of God is an "unhistorical" view of God taken over from Hellenistic philosophy.[77] The historical context which initially gave rise to this view of God was a legitimate attempt to contextualize the biblical faith. The problem that arose is that, "these historically rooted decisions became dogmatized, then liturgically and legally canonized."[78] The ultimate result is that many in Christendom now operate with this "unhistorical" Hellenized view of God that is not

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74   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 49. - "a wrong (e.g., institutionalistic or spiritualistic) ecclesiology ... are merely symptoms of a far more deep-seated defect: a wrong view of God."

75   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 49.

76   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 49.

77   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 54. - "The danger now is that... this Hellenistic view of transcendence, which is in conflict with the biblical faith, creeps into the Christian doctrine of God. ... The traces can be found wherever Christian theology concentrates more on God's nature *in itself* than on the *relationship* between God and us humans." -- In the later sections of this paper on "History and Truth" and "Exegesis and Exegetical Conclusions" within NCD, the case that NCD makes for this assertion will be more closely examined.

78   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 51.

the God of the Bible. And, as NCD points out:

> Anyone who starts from an unhistorical view of God cannot understand the concept that God becomes reality in our time, that he 'happens' (Exodus 3:14). Therefore, such a person also has difficulty with the notion that the church has to 'happen.' This person prefers a trans-historical view in which the life of the church as an organism need not become manifest, at least not in any empirically observable way. In his or her imagination many things may happen, but this fits in with the unhistorical starting point: away from tangible historical fact towards the abstraction of though (in the institutionalistic paradigm) or the inner world of feelings (in the spiritualistic paradigm). ... The fact that both misconceptions are just different manifestations of one and the same illness, the illness of unhistorical thinking, is not accidental; it is inevitable. Where mysticism [spiritualistic] and magic [institutionalistic] begin, history ends.[79]

According to NCD, "The biblical understanding [of God] is that God is a person."[80] As a person, God must be encountered to be known. "This new understanding - away from speculation about God's nature as such towards a recognition of his deeds for us - was the so-called 'tower experience' which Martin Luther himself described as the trigger ... that led to the Reformation."[81] In order that we might know God and be in relationship with him:

> God [has] revealed himself in three different ways. What we now call the "doctrine of the Trinity" was originally nothing more than a category of experience. The early Christians recognized God as Creator, experienced Christ as God through prayer, and sensed the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In other words: they *experienced* God in a threefold manner - and as a result they *thought* about the Trinity. The same holds true today. The crucial point is not that we believe in the Trinity, but rather that we believe in a trinitarian way; in other words, that we experience God in a threefold manner.[82]

It is this trinitarian understanding of God "as Father, Son and

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79   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 53-54.
80   Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p. 6.
81   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 55. Also, Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p.8. - "the God of the Bible can only be appropriately understood in his relationship "to us," ... It is characteristic of all three revelations that God not only reveals 'something' of himself, but also His own nature."
82   Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p. 7.

Holy Spirit... [that] distinguishes Christianity from all [other] religions. It is the specific feature of the Christian faith, it sould also be the premise of our refletion on the practical side of church life. ...A new understanding of the Trinity not only leads us toward a new view of God, it also guides to new experiences with God."[83] We experience this God in three ways: (1) through creation where the god "above us" appeals to us through the Law ("You Shall!") and is experienced by us through nature and the scientific enterprise. (2) This God, "comes through the incarnation of Jesus Christ 'among us,'" inviting us ("You May!") to a relationship with Himself. (3) "And at the same time produces the knowledge of his presence 'with us'" empowering us ("You Can!") through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the individual.[84]

The goal of these three revelations of God is to establish a relationship (fellowship) with us.[85] According to the teachings of NCD, "God reveals himself in the Bible as the one who longs for fellowship with us humans. Real fellowship involves two sides: we must agree to it just as much as God. Appropriating what God has done for us in Christ is part of the revelation. 'The objective event and the subjective acceptance both belong to the act of revelation,' writes Paul Tillich as a summary of the biblical understanding of revelation."[86]

The Trinitarian Compass

This thinking finds its expression through the "Trinitarian Compass."[87] The purpose of the "Trinitarian Compass" is to bring

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83   Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p. 4.
84   Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p. 11.
85   Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 52. - "God's revelation always aims at establishing a relationship." Also, Schwarz, *Theefold Art*, p. 9. - "If this personal appropriation does not take place, the revelation of God has not achieved its goal."
86   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 56.
87   It is important to note that the Trinitarian Compass does not deal with the question of how the three persons of the Godhead relate to each other. "It rather deals exclusively with the question of how we human beings relate to the Triune God. You cannot use the Trinitarian Compass as a tool to interpret the relationship of the three persons of the Godhead to each other, as it has never been designed for that purpose." According to NCD, "Wherever the Trinitarian Compass has been applied, the understanding of the triune God has increased, since people understood the relevance of this doctrine for their daily lives, sometimes for

balance to the experience of God in the lives of individuals and the corporate life of the church. "Whenever one of the three dimensions is neglected, we have an incomplete experience of God."[88]

The "Trinitarian Compass" associates each of the revelations of God to a color (Green = creation, Red = salvation, Blue = sanctification) that are also associated with the ways in which we experience God (Green/creator, Red/Jesus, Blue/Holy Spirit). The "Compass" itself is a region divided into thirds from the center (much like a pie is cut). Each third is colored either green, red, or blue with green positioned as at the "top;" then, in clockwise order, red and blue. Through surveying the congregation, a congregational "Color Profile" is created that places a numerical scale running through the middle of each of these colors to indicate how strongly that particular color is evidenced in the life of the church being studied. The goal is that when a circle is drawn with its circumference touching each of the measured points, that the circle be fairly centered on the image indicating a balanced experience of God in the life of the church. A congregation which underemphasizes any of the three revelations indicates unbalance and, if unchecked, may result in that group becoming heretical.[89] The goal is to recognize that we are unbalanced in our experience of God and are thereby enabled to strive toward balance.

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the first time." [NCD International Community Website, Frequently Asked Questions, http://www.ncd-international.org/community/page069b.html (last accessed: 4/16/2008.)] Also reference - Schwarz, *Color Your World*, pp 70-71 - This issue will be dealt with more extensively in the section regarding "History and Truth."

88 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 52. - "In all three revelations we encounter the one, true God, but each time we encounter him in a different way. His threefold communication with us, which should correspond to a threefold response on our part, is fundamental to the nature of God as revealed to us in the Bible."

89 See images in, Schwarz, *Color Your World*, pp. 60-65 and 78-79. - also, "Heresy is not, as many of us believe, the opposite of truth. ... It's a *partial* truth. ...Since it [this partial truth] is not integrated into the other aspects of truth, but presented as an absolute, it becomes a partial truth and thus a heresy. ... In almost every single case, heretical groups are biblically right in the very aspects they stress. But they are wrong in neglecting countless other aspects of the biblical message." (Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 58.).

The Trinitarian Compass and the Bipolar Paradigm

Those that are prone to over-emphasize the salvation revelation are prone to be institutionalistic in their thinking. To help this situation, they are encouraged to seek out experiences in the creation revelation and the Holy Spirit. Those that over-emphasize the the work of the Holy Spirit are prone to spiritualism and are encouraged to balance this by focusing upon the salvation revelation and creation. Over-emphasizing the creation revelation leads to syncretism. They are encouraged to focus more upon the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.[90]

It is to be recognized that even in their "unbalanced" state there is some truth. However, extreme overemphasis leads to heresy because they neglect the other aspects of God's revelation.[91]

The Creation Revelation

The previous section which addresses "Bipolar Ecclesiology," "functional pneumatology," and the eight quality characteristics of the church, presents much of NCD's treatment of the revelation of the Holy Spirit. The next section, will present what Natural Church Development teaches about the salvation revelation. The remainder of this section will examine NCD's understanding of the creation revelation.

Natural Church Development teaches that we can derive reliable information about God and his will from creation.[92] This forms the basis for the reliance upon empirical research and the study of nature "to discover principles that are applicable far beyond the realm of biology."[93]

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90   Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, pp. 28-29. Also, Schwarz, *Color Your World*, pp. 58-68.

91   Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 58. - "Every teaching can become heretical, if elements of the truth ... are regarded as the whole truth. In almost every single case, heretical groups are biblically right in the very aspects they stress. But they are wrong in neglecting countless other aspects of the biblical message."

92   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 233ff.

93   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 233. - Also, "The dynamics that God implanted in his creation can be studied both by believers and by unbelievers. ...[this] has a highly theological relevance to the efforts of the church growth movement (which are sometimes heavily criticized) to learn from other disciplines, such as biology, sociology, economics, and so forth." (p. 227) And, "Natural church development tries to harness the logic behind the agricultural analogy for practical work in the church." (p. 255)

NCD defends the use of science and other disciplines as theologically relevant saying:

> The dynamics that God implanted in his creation can be studied both by believers and by unbelievers. ...[this] has a highly theological relevance to the efforts of the church growth movement (which are sometimes heavily criticized) to learn from other disciplines, such as biology, sociology, economics, and so forth. . . . The way in which the Bible traces supposed (or real) supernatural powers back to God, and at the same time instrumentalizes them in the hand of the Creator and robs them of their pagan religious qualities, seems to me to be a prime example of how we, as Christians, should treat the insights we find outside the realm of Christianity.[94]

NCD notes that Scripture is replete with analogies taken from nature. Jesus himself often referred to natural phenomena in his preaching. "[The suggestion] that Jesus used these analogies because his hearers lived in an agricultural society and were thus particularly 'receptive' to such analogies ... is only a partial explanation. ...When the New Testament refers to organic dynamics, this is far more than metaphors that could be substituted by other imagery - rather it speaks about *real principles* that operate in the world of nature as well as in the kingdom of God."[95]

The most prominent example in NCD literature is taken from Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, "See how the lilies of the field grow."[96] In this passage:

> [Jesus] does not speak about 'meditative observation.' Jesus is referring 'to the order in nature that bears witness to the abundance of options and resources available to the Creator.'[97] We are not asked to concentrate on the lilies themselves, but rather on their *growth mechanisms*... We are to study and examine them, to meditate on them, and take our direction from them ... and we are told that we need to do so in order to understand the principles of the kingdom of God. This approach describes exactly the procedure of natural church

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94 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 227-229.
95 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 234.
96 Matthew 6:28.
97 Rengstorf, manthano, in *Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament IV*, ed. Kittel, Stuttgart, 1942, p. 417, as quoted in Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 234.

development.[98]

NCD also finds support in the existence and interpretation of Old Testament Wisdom literature. It sees its teaching of the principle of interdependence as, "closely related to what the Bible calls 'wisdom.'"[99] According to NCD, Widsom writings "do not deal with an explicitly 'religious' sphere." Every day life is represented. "Walter Zimmerli correctly observed that the Old Testament is 'an unashamedly human book' in that it assigns such writings, which deal largely with the 'everyday aspects of human life,' an 'inalienable right to belong to the canon.'"[100]

From this it is clear the high value placed upon the realm of nature as a place from which we can derive information about God and his will. From observation of healthy churches, NCD has derived six "biotic" principles. These are "meant to be rules that can help us in every issue to make decisions."[101]

It is important to note that these principles, derived from creation, are not considered an absolute authority. They:

> should not be identified with the principles of God himself. Our perception is imprecise, our empirical methodology may be flawed, our conceptual framework imperfect. However, the principles themselves that underlie the imperfect formulations really are God's principles, in the same way that the laws of nature are God's laws. They were created by none other than God - and those who study and describe them will find that, in the process, they learn more about the way it pleases God to act.[102]

NCD, therefore, does not claim that these principles are dogmatically correct formulations. Rather, they are patterned after NCD's understanding of Old Testament wisdom literature. Following

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98   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 234-235.
99   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift,* p. 226. Continuing, "Examining a phenomenon not in isolation, but rather in its complex interrelationships, and not forgetting the order that God, the creator, has revealed to us - that is the essence of the biblical concept of wisdom."
100 Zimmerli, *GrundriB der alttestamentlichen Theologie*, 4th ed., Stuttgart, 1982, p. 136. as quoted in Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 226.
101 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 243.
102 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 258.

Gerhard von Rad's description of the role of the Old Testament wisdom teacher they are to be considered "advice" that is drawn from experience.[103]

The six *biotic principles* of NCD are:

1. *Interdependence* - "we should understand the church as a complex organism in which all parts are linked together with all the others. ... It is therefore important to gain an ever deepening understanding of the nature of this network, rather than just considering isolated activities or an individual segment of church development."[104]

2. *Multiplication* - "At some point, all growth has its natural limits. ... It is our task to create structure that enable the work not only to be extended, but to be multiplied."[105]

3. *Energy Transformation* - "Instead of destroying the forces of nature by using counterforce ('boxer mentality'), the principle of energy transformation utilizes them by using leverage. Apart from the small force needed for redirection, hardly any energy is expended to achieve the goal."[106]

4. *Multi-usage* - "We should take care that any measures we adopt can simultaneously benefit different areas. ...there should be no 'waste.' What the technocrat regards as 'waste' can, within the larger whole, have an important role to play." ***Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 245.***

5. *Symbiosis* - "... a close association between different organisms for mutual benefit (synergism). ... a variety of forms is far more effective than the monoculture of a single, dominant form. The decisive factor is to bring these different forms into a symbiotic relationship to each other."[107]

6. *Functionality* - "A healthy organism automatically rejects

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103 According to von Rad, the wisdom teacher gives practical help in everyday living, but "not with divine commandments, for which he was not authorized because his directions were largely drawn from experience. What he could offer to help those younger than himself was largely advice ('*ezah*). Such advice demands no obedience, it must be tested; it appeals to the judgment of the hearer and aims to convince him; it aims to make the decision easier." von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Tesaments I*, 8th ed., Munchen, 1982, p. 447. as quoted in Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 244.
104 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 244.
105 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 245.
106 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 245.
107 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 245-246.

forms that are not conducive to its health. ...[In NCD] functionality means first of all to check on the quality of the church by examining its fruit. ...A good tree *does* produce good fruit, and fruit is not invisible (neither in the Bible nor in science)."[108]

The Bible in Natural Church Development

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, if you abide in my word you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.
John 8:31-32 *ESV*

According to Natural Church Development, the Bible "is a binding authority, *but only insofar as it advances Christ*." NCD makes a careful distinction between the "word of God" and the "biblical canon." For NCD, "the word of God should 'happen' in our lives."[109] "The mere existence of the written, codified biblical canon is not, in itself, a guarantee that the word of God will 'happen,' that it will touch and change our life. But it is characteristic of the concept of the word of God revealed in the Bible that this word 'happens.'"[110] With this distinction, NCD claims to follow in the footsteps of Luther who "was the first theologian to put forward a biblical faith that could come to terms with critical Bible research, and is thus fundamentally different form the formally authoritarian, fundamentalistic view of the Bible which culminates in the dogma of verbal inspiration."[111]

NCD teaches that in creating the canon, "the decisions of the church fathers can be regarded as an extremely successful attempt to create institutions that are useful for the life, health, and growth of the church as an organism." Quoting Helmut Thielicke, NCD affirms, "The historical quest for authenticity and apostolic origin is ... only a secondary, additional measure, aimed at combining spiritual conviction

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108 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 246.
109 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift,* p.113. - emphasis added.
110 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 112.
111 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift,* p.113.

with historical security."[112]   Giving in to this need for security is a characteristic or the "objectivist/institutionalistic misconception."[113]

This is not to say that NCD rejects the bible as a normative standard for the church. It affirms, "that when we receive the biblical word, we really do receive the will of God reassuring us and calling us to follow."[114] "In order to know who Jesus Christ is, what he has done for us and what he expects of us, we need reliable information about him. To avoid the danger [of spiritualistic 'enthusiasm'] ... it was a wise and necessary decision to subject the church to a normative standard. The usefulness of the biblical canon for the development of faith, fellowship, and service has been so clearly demonstrated throughout history that ... the pneumatic functionality of the Bible (in the truest sense of the term) is beyond question."[115]

What NCD rejects is "the doctrine of verbal inspiration."[116] It rejects the view that Holy Scripture is "a timeless system of truth."[117] NCD affirms Emil Brunner's statement that in the Bible, "Truth is what happens, what God does."[118]

The important thing in the theology of Natural Church Development is that the word of God "happen," that it becomes a reality. We see this reality where Christians respond in faith, fellowship and service; that is, in the church. This is why the Church is called the "body of Christ." It is the physical manifestation of God. It is how God "happens" in the present time. It is through the faith, fellowship and

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112 Thielicke, *Der evangelische Glaube. Grundzuge der Dogmatik III*, Tubingen, 1978, p. 154. as quoted in Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p.115.

113 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 25. - "People are not content with the *certitudo* of faith; rather, they seek the *securitas* which always tries to reassure itself with guarantees. Whatever version of the institutionalistic misconception is involved [including 'fundamentalism'] ... the basic urge for security can always be clearly seen."

114 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 116.

115 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 116.

116 What is overtly rejected is an extreme view of verbal inspiration which claims that scripture was "dictated by the Spirit." (Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift* p. 117.)

117 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 117 - This view is in keeping with the rejection of the conception of God as a "trans-historical, timeless, self-sufficient being," [Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 53.].

118 Brunner, *Warheit als Begegnung,* 3rd ed., Zurich, 1984, p. 154. as quoted in Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 59.

service of the members of the church that God continues to break into history and encounter people in order to bring them into a personal relationship with himself. This is what NCD means when it speaks of God and the church "happening".[119]

The Bible witnesses to this "happening" as it has occurred throughout history. It is a record of How God has built his kingdom "in and through history."[120] This understanding of the bible "forbids us to regard the historical forms described in the Bible (such as church structures [including the Sacraments]) as being a divine law. ...the fact [is] that there is no uniform New Testament church structure..."[121]

A "fundamentalism" that would hold an "unhistorical"[122] view of Scripture and identify the Bible as the Word of God, as if "the New Testament teaches that the word became book, not that it became flesh,"[123] is a dangerous approach.[124] Such fundamentalism is "inconsistent with the biblical revelation and foreign to the church growth concept. ... It is precisely on the issue of the view of the Bible that we can tell whether a church has understood the radical nature of the biblical revelation - or whether it merely advocates a form of (possibly modified) legalism. 'No canon can give the church security (*securitas*). The church can only be certain of the word that is confirmed in its life by the Spirit (*certitudo*).'"[125]

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119 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p.53.
120 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 53.
121 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 122.
122 See the later section on "History and Truth"
123 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 118.
124 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 119.
125 Weber, *Grundlagen der Dogmatik I, Neukirchen-Vluyn*, 3rd ed., 1964, p. 296. as quoted in Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 123.

Chapter 4: Theological Framework of NCD - The Gospel

> ...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we treasure his precepts. Whoever says I know him but does not treasure his precepts is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever treasures his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.
>
> I John 2:1-5

The Gospel

The literature of Natural Church Development does not give a specific definition of "the Gospel." This is not to say that the literature does not contain any statements regarding Christ and salvation, but, pursuant to the "functional nature" of doctrine and the concept of "truth as encounter," it presents no articulation of what the Gospel is or what it means to be saved other than to have a "personal relationship" with God. What is essential is "the central event of the biblical understanding of revelation has to occur: the personal encounter between God an human beings."[126]

Within the "Trinitarian Compass" red is the color associated with the "salvation revelation." "Red churches can be seen as advocates of the 'salvation revelation,' since they rightly emphasize the necessity of a personal relationship to Christ."[127] This is why "the topic of evangelism is of utmost importance to them. People who are lost without Christ need to be saved."[128]

As previously stated, the purpose of the "Trinitarian Compass" is to bring people into a more balanced experience of the one God. While

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126 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 57.
127 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 62.
128 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 62.

this requires people to move in "different directions" they all move toward a balanced center where they experience all three revelations (Creation, Salvation, and Personal) of God and thereby come "closer to the living God."[129]

According to NCD, one who achieves such balance is " 'a radical Christian' in the best sense of this word: a person who is firmly connected to the *radix*, the root, of the Christian faith - to Jesus Christ himself; who pursues all the concerns that were important to Jesus [...]; who reflects all the colors of God's love. [...]as you grow in that way[...] People will watch you and encounter... Jesus."[130]

Because Natural Church Development's focus is specifically on "the Church," it ought not be surprising that there is little direct discussion of the Gospel in the primary writings. Ancillary reference is made in a number of areas which provide a limited corpus from which to attempt to understand what the Gospel is according to NCD. In fact, the personal testimony by NCD's primary theologian is the only direct statement that connects salvation and sin. He relates that when he first became a Christian, it was as if God told him, "never forget what I have done for you. I erased your sin."[131] However, a fuller understanding can come only by looking at the few statements about Jesus that do exist along with what NCD says about anthropology and God's answer to the condition of man.

In describing Jesus, NCD asserts that, "our relationship to Jesus Christ determines our salvation or damnation (Acts 4:12). Through him we receive 'eternal life' (Rom. 6:23)."[132]

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129 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 66.
130 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 136.
131 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 46. - "The day that I came to know Christ personally was overwhelming to me. I was discipled in a congregation that today I would call a 'red church.' It had a clear evangelical focus. However, it was free of any legalistic tendencies that are so often encountered in churches of that color, and I thank God for that. It became crystal clear to me that I had to invest the rest of my life in helping other people find a personal relationship with God. It was as if he was telling me, 'Christian, never forget what I have done for you. I erased your sin. My friend, share this discovery with as many people as you can.'"
132 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 51. - Note, the existence of quotatio marks around the words *eternal life* causes ambiguity. Is it quoted because the text of Romans 6:23 uses

With regard to the work of Christ, NCD speaks of the fact that, "the God of the Bible is neither transcendent nor immanent. If we must have a concept of this type, he is a God of *condescendence*. He came down from transcendence into immanence, he humbled himself and took a step towards us."[133]

Like God, Christ cannot be known except in his action in history. "Philipp Melanchthon described this relationship in the classical words, 'Knowing Christ means knowing his good deeds.' Only because Christ has acted for my good, only by his *beneficia* can I know his godhead."[134]

It is through the work of the historical person Jesus, as witnessed by Scripture, that "God reveals himself ... as the one who longs for fellowship with us humans. ... Appropriating what God has done for us in Christ is part of the revelation."[135] But we must not think of this historical person, Jesus, in the traditional categories of the "two natures" of Christ. For, as "Paul Tillich correctly emphasizes ... the doctrine of the 'two natures' of Christ is 'correct in its formulation of the question, but not in the application of the terminological tools.' The basic mistake lies in the concept of 'nature,' which is 'ambiguous' when applied to humans and simply 'wrong' when applied to God."[136]

When it comes to the absolute claims of Jesus, these must not be understood from an unhistorical, impersonal, or objectivistic understanding of "truth." "Truth is what happens, what God does."[137]

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those words, or is it quoted because NCD, in following Emil Brunner, does not advocate the concept of life everlasting? (The theology of Emil Brunner will be examined more closely in the later chapter on Theological Influence on Natural Church Development)

133 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 54. (emphasis in original)- It must be noted, however, that NCD repudiates a "transcendent" and "immanent" but that God "happens." Transcendence and immanence are "hellenistic concepts" which have no place in a biblical world view. Therefore, the term "condescendece" is a term which is only relevant when combating these other "false" views and would itself be considered an equally false view if it were used outside of this context.

134 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 55. - Quoting: Ph. Melanchthon, Loci Theolgici, Introduction - "*Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia ejus cognoscere*"

135 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 56.

136 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 57. quoting Tillich, *Systematische Theologie II*, 8th ed., Darmstadt, 1984, p. 154.

137 Brunner, *Warheit als Begegnung, 3rd ed., Zurich,* 1984, p. 154. as quoted in Schwarz*, Paradigm Shift* p. 59.

This gives the absolute claims of Jesus "a new dimension which has often been overlooked. ... The absolute truth is not a *doctrine* about Jesus - that would bring us back to ideology - but the *person* of Jesus. Therefore, assent to even the most orthodox Jesus dogma is not what leads us into truth, but only a personal relationship with the one who said of himself that he is the truth."[138]

With this basic understanding of how NCD views Jesus Christ and His work "for us", we are prepared to discuss the underlying view of anthropology and the Gospel within Natural Church Development.

Anthropology and Sin

According to Natural Church Development, sin is not a "substantial" reality. Sin is a "personal event. It is no more nor less than a breach of fellowship arising out of mistrust and rebellion against God. ...But neutristic, abstract thinking [characteristic of the institutionalistic misconception] causes sin to be removed from the level of relationships and understood as substantial, almost by analogy to an organic infection."[139] Sin cannot be conceived of as a "deterministic" reality. Sin is "lack of faith, disobedience, emancipation from God. [...] If we make sin into a biological, substantial fate, we need not be surprised if people have difficulty in facing up to their moral responsibility. Emil Brunner is right: 'If we believe, as has happened frequently, particularly in Protestant theology, that we should glorify God by minimizing the independence and freedom of human creatures, or by removing it altogether in determinism, then we are not serving the God who reveals himself to us in Holy Scripture, but instead an abstract, philosophical concept of God."[140]

"Salvation" then is a restoration of the individuals "personal relationship with God" that was breached by sin. This is what God's

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138 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 60.
139 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 60.
140 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 60-61. quoting Brunner, _Warheit als Begegnung, 3rd ed., Zurich, 1984, p. 93.

revelation of himself to humanity aims to accomplish; namely, the re-establishment of that personal relationship. "The God of the Bible is passionately concerned that human beings should accept his offer of love..." Therefore, "he humbled himself and took a step towards us."[141] This is the Good News, according to NCD: that in spite of our sinful rebellion, God still loves us and in the person and work of Jesus he displayed that love as an historical reality which the Apostles witnessed and recorded so that through that historical reality we would be brought into an encounter with God and restored to fellowship with him.

Understanding that sin is not a "substantial" reality but a breakdown in the personal relationship, the statement, "I erased your sin"[142] cannot be seen as equivalent to an understanding of Jesus work as atoning for the sin of the world. There is no debt to be paid because sin is not a "substantial" reality. Christ's work is not the cause of our salvation (an understanding based upon objectivistic determinism), rather, he himself is the act through which God reveals himself and his will toward us most clearly.

When we have encountered God in this way, the way is open to "faith." Faith is not properly understood if it is thought to mean "believing something is true." "*Pistis* in the New Testament does not mean accepting a doctrine, it means trust in God: commitment, relinquishing internal security and external guarantees, complete dependence. We can only be so dependent on someone who is so reliable that we need no guarantees."[143] "Faith in" Christ, then, is not a passive reception of God's mercy and grace for the sake of Christ. Rather, it is "always the personal faith of trust." Not trust in the work of Christ on our behalf but trust in God himself, the one "who is so reliable that we need no guarantees."

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141 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 54.
142 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 46.
143 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 101.

Chapter 5: NCD – Theology Applied

**And he gave the apostles and prophets, the
evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ... for building
up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of
the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to
mature manhood ... so that we may no longer be
children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried
about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning,
by craftiness in deceitful schemes.**
- **Ephesians 4:11-14 _ESV_**

The Interdenominational Approach

The previous chapters have attempted to present an outline of the
tools and ideas behind Natural Church Development as well as the
theology it teaches as taken from it's primary sources. However, NCD
promotes itself as an "interdenominational"[144] approach. At the same
time, NCD recognizes the distinctive features of each denomination.
"Think interdenominationally, act denominationally," is a summary of
the principle that NCD advocates.

NCD takes the Church Growth's "Both-And" position that there
are certain fundamentals to Christianity,[145] however not only ought
doctrinal distinctives not be divisive, but that it is actually beneficial that

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144   Schwarz, _Paradigm Shift_, pp. 75ff - "I am consciously trying to present an
        interdenominational position in this book.." (p. 76).

145   "As long as these branches of the universal Church believe in Jesus Christ as God and only
        Savior, as long as they believe in the triune God, as long as they accept the Bible as God's
        perfect revelation, they are parts of the body of Christ. They will of course differ on certain
        convictions. ...Nevertheless, all branches of the universal Church are parts of the body of
        Christ." - McGavran , personal correspondence to Christian Schwarz. Quoted in: Schwarz,
        Paradigm Shift, pp. 77-78. - also - "The church growth movement consciously tries to take
        up a 'both-and' position in many of the contentious issues that concern Christians because it
        regards the variety in the body of Christ as basically positive. It wishes to enable advocates
        of different churches to apply the principles of church growth without denying their own
        theological traditions." It should be noted that Schwarz indicates that he would not be able
        to "sign on" to the statements of McGavran which were quoted. This author speculates that
        there are two aspects with which Schwarz would disagree (1) the Bible as God's perfect
        revelation, and (2) Jesus Christ as "Savior." The reasons for this conclusion will become
        clearer in the chapter on the theological influences upon NCD.

there is such diversity in the body of Christ.[146]

Within that principle, each local church "needs a clear identity." "For church development it would surely not be helpful if several positions, all of which have some degree of justification, were advocated in the same church at the same time: both infant baptism and believers' baptism, both charismatic and noncharismatic, both parochial and church planting."[147]   For NCD, these distinctives are "correct" to various degrees.[148] Accordingly, these differences ought not be divisive but to be celebrated. At the same time that an individual denomination's distinctive positions are to be affirmed, they ought to recognize the validity of other points of view.

This is where, most clearly, the influence of the theological background of NCD and the absolute rejection of objective truth comes to the foreground. This specific issue will be dealt with in a later chapter, but places before us the questions: Is there a specific theological viewpoint tied to Natural Church Development? and to what extent must that theological viewpoint be accepted to make use of the NCD strategy for improving the quality of the church?

Measuring Quality

The literature of Natural Church Development would have us believe that the eight quality characteristics were "discovered."[149] However, the research methodology was not designed to "discover" the quality characteristics of healthy (i.e. growing) congregations, but rather it was designed to test whether the identified quality characteristics were positively correlated to a growing congregation.

The initial questionnaires were "developed on the basis of

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146 This is reflected most clearly in the biotic principle of "Symbiosis" with a repudiation of any sort of "monoculture". "It is not *regretful* that people are different; it is God's plan. And we don't just have to *accept* this but to appreciate it, to rejoice in it, to celebrate it." (Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 100-101) - also, McGavran? , *Understanding Church Growth*, pp. 13-14.

147 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p.79.

148 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 79.

149 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 21.

theological suppositions and knowledge in church growth." These were then "tested again and again." Sometime later, "the need for a sociologically and scientifically based survey" was realized and "in 1993 the questionnaire became scientific within several phases and was revised on the basis of the classical test theory so that today it satisfies recognized criteria like reliability and validity." The work to revise the survey was to determine "if the questionnaires used by the Church Profile fit test criteria such as reliability and validity and to improve the questionnaires if they didn't meet the requirements."[150]

"The initial scientific statistical analysis was to evaluate the questionnaires to determine: (1) if the quality characteristics were truly scalar values..."[151] This means that the quality characteristics themselves are a presupposed valid measure of church "quality" and not objectively discerned from all the different things that may indicate church "quality."[152] While the "eight quality characteristics" were subjected to validation, the fact is that, contrary to the literature, the characteristics were not "discovered" as a result of the research done. It is true that they are scientifically validated as being positively correlated with growing churches, but this is different from the characteristics themselves being "discovered" through scientific research into church "quality."

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150   Schalk, "Organizational Diagnosis of Churches: The Statistical Development of the 'Natural Church Development' Survey and its Relation to Organizational Psychology", Wurzburg:Institute for Natural Church Development, 1999, p. 17-18.

151   Schalk, *"Organizational Diagnosis"*, p. 18. - "Starting point was the 1991 version of the 'lay worker's questionnaire' and the 'pastor's questionnaire'. ...The questionnaire is composed of eight scales ('quality characteristics') which consist of a number of different items each, mostly formulated positively: The scale 'Goal-oriented Pastor' (today: Empowering Leadership) has 6 items, 'Gift-oriented Ministry' has also 6 items, 'Passionate Spirituality' is composed of 13 items, 'Functional Structures' of 10 items, 'Inspiring Worship Service' of 10 items, 'Holistic Small Groups' of 5 items, 'Need-oriented Evangelism' of 10 items, and 'High Love Quotient' (today: Loving Relationships) of 10 items. ... The construction of the questionnaire was carried out in the course of some years from an early form which had been developed because of theoretical considerations and had been arranged under inclusion of international research results without attention to test-theoretical points of view. This early form had been used with 250 churches and had been further developed following face valdity [sic.]."

152   Schalk, "Organizational Diagnosis", p. 18. - "Since the questionnaire originally had been developed in a non-scientific way, and since **the items had been assigned to the eight scales** following face validity, it is necessary to test if the items do belong to their scales because of a statistical relationship." (emphasis added).

The method to determine their validity was to ascertain whether or not they correlated positively with the growth of the local congregation, although "without the claim of clarifying the cause and effect."[153] It is also to be noted that this correlation was done with the characteristics as a group and not independently.[154]

In numerous places, NCD points out that the relationship between the eight quality characteristics and the growth of the congregation is not the relationship of the cause to its effect. NCD rather sees both high scores on each of the eight scales that measure the quality characteristics and numerical growth as effects of the Holy Spirit's work in the midst of the local church. This belief is based on the underlying "bipolar paradigm" that undergirds Natural Church Development's thinking. This paradigm, as will be seen in a subsequent chapter, is the outgrowth of a specific theological mindset.

The focus of NCD on "improvement" in these areas is simply an effort to remove barriers to growth and not an attempt to cause growth. It must be said that NCD, in this regard, is transparent with regard to it's claims. They do not assert that it is possible to "make" the church grow.

At the same time, however, it must be recognized that both the eight quality characteristics as well as the bipolar paradigm (which is closely related to the Trinitarian Compass) are all based upon a specific theological perspective.

Theology and NCD Tools

NCD itself warns against separating the principles of Natural Church Development (especially the Trinitarian Compass and the

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153 Schalk, "Organizational Diagnosis", p. 19. - "Hypothesis 4: The score of the eight quality characteristics separates growing churches from non-growing churches significantly. - One practical use of the Church Profile is to identify factors that are responsible for the growth, stagnation or decline of a church. This study will test this theoretical hypothesis, but without the claim of clarifying cause and effect."

154 Schalk, "Organizational Diagnosis", p. 19. - "Hypothesis 2: The eight quality characteristics are provable empirically in the questionnaire and therefore can be reproduced by a factor analysis. The factors must not be independent since this is not demanded by the theory either."

Bipolar Paradigm) from the tools developed by NCD (like the Quality Survey) to measure and increase the quality of a church.[155] It is clear that the theological perspective of NCD undergirds all of the tools and resources they produce.

To attempt to utilize the tools and resources in an effort to improve the quality of the church and yet deny the validity of the underlying theological perspective is to fall into the logical fallacy of "commutation of the conditional."

The syllogism in the context of NCD would run as follows: If the church is growing, the eight quality characteristics will be high. Therefore, if we improve the eight quality characteristics, the church will grow. The fallacy is in the equating the quality characteristics with the cause of growth in the church.

NCD itself warns against this assertion. Instead, they indicate that a proper understanding of man's relationship to God based upon the Trinitarian Compass, and a proper application of the bipolar paradigm to the structures of the church, releases the natural growth automatisms ("all-by-itself growth") and thus the church grows. Additionally, the proper application of these paradigms result in the objectively discernible results of higher scores on the eight quality characteristics.

Thus, when a church uses NCD, in order to achieve the full "benefits" of the strategy, they must apply the underlying theology and purge from themselves those institutionalistic structures (e.g. the Lutheran view of Scripture and the Sacraments) which is in conflict. This is the main message of the book *Paradigm Shift in the Church*.[156]

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155 Schwarz, *Color Your World*, p. 18. - Regularly in the literature of Natural Church Development, there is an assertion that the principles put forward are "biblical principles." However, while most would agree that the principles are "churchly sounding," there is no direct evidence that they have a biblical foundation. In fact, there is nothing in the literature reviewed that places the eight quality characteristics into a biblical context.

156 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 98. - "[The bipolar paradigm] is a combination of the systematic theological quest for the 'true church' and the practical theological task of church development. [It] ... is based on the hypothesis established in part 1 that the true church must work for a structure which stimulates the development of the church as an organism."

NCD and Lutheran Theology

Natural Church Development would characterize confessional Lutheranism with the institutionalistic paradigm. In NCD's polemic against "institutionalism" and confessional Lutheranism in particular,[157] it becomes clear that the underlying theology of NCD requires a repudiation of the foundational articles of the Christian faith; namely, original sin (AC II) and, as a direct consequence, a rejection of the atonement (AC III, IV). It also requires a repudiation of the Office of the Holy Ministry (AC V). All of this is predicated on a false definition of the church and its identification with visible organizations which, as "the body of Christ," nurture "faith, fellowship, and service" (a repudiation of AC VII and VIII). The natural consequences are a destruction of the Reformation teaching that the Word and Sacraments are God's means through which he reaches out to humanity, and ultimately a false view of God.

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157 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 88. - "...my criticism is directed at modern 'Lutherans' ... who think they owe it to Luther ... to remain bound by such inconsistencies in a completely different situation. Whenever the reformation principle changes into reformation nostalgia and traditionalism, the institutionalistic paradigm has won the day. Thus by using Lutheran *formulations* Luther's *intentions* can be prevented from being carried out."

Chapter 6: Theological Influences on NCD

> Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you - unless you have believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
>
> I Corinthians 15:2-4,16

NCD's Lineage

"Working out the theological consequences of a bipolar ecclesiology - i.e., the distinction and interrelationship between the church as 'organization' and the church as 'organism' - is, as simple as it may sound, the most important contribution made by our book *Theology of Church Development*. This distinction, which draws primarily upon the systematic theological work of Emil Brunner, Hans-Joachim Kraus and Helmut Gollwitzer, is in my opinion an important foundation for a theological reflection on church development."[158]   It is therefore these theologians upon which NCD draws its theology.

Dialectical Theology

Kraus is a student of the school of dialectical theology. Much of his work is not available in English and so is inaccessible for the purposes of this paper. From what is available, he appears to accept the basic "truth as encounter" concept. In the introduction to his commentary

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158   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 15. - It is here to be noted that the book *Paradigm Shift in the Church* is Schwarz' second attempt to express the theology of Natural Church Development. Having "learned a lot from the criticism voiced over the last few years [in response to previous works]. I hope this new general survey of the subject will overcome some of the misunderstandings that have accumulated, ... [or] at least he or she [the reader] will understand better the background of what we present in our practical tools." - p. 11.

on the Psalms he says, "Only in our encounter with the Psalms are we brought to the basic recognition that anything said of God in the third person is inauthentic; explicitly or implicitly, God can only be thought of and spoken of truly and authentically only in the second person of direct address."[159]   Gollwitzer, as well, is a theologian clearly within the dialectical camp. The introductory paragraph of his *Introduction to Protestant Theology* under the heading of Jesus Christ reads:

> In the center of the Christian faith, and consequently the center also of theological reflection, there stand the event of Jesus Christ and the extraordinary statements that the New Testament writings have made about his universal significance. The humanity of Jesus, and his specific humanity as a Jew, is just as much to be taken in earnest as the absolute character of these claims regarding his significance.The latter have their center in the New Testament words "for us," which signify the self-identification of the eternal God with this concrete human being for the salvation of his human race, in order to bring about the realization of the Kingdom of God.[160]

Emil Brunner

By far, however, it is the work of Emil Brunner which stands front and center in the theology of Natural Church Development. This can be seen simply in the 20 direct citations of Brunner's systematic works; eight of which occur in the span of only six pages in the chapter, "The Root of the Misconceptions: The Impersonal God."[161] Aside from himself, Brunner, Church Growth authors (e.g., McGavran, Wagner) and works from natural sciences (e.g., Vester), the primary theological citations are from historical-critical scholars (e.g., Bultmann, von Rad,

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159   Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, p. 14. Kraus also approvingly quotes Barth, "The object and theme of theology and the content... is neither a subjective nor an objective element in isolation. This is to say, it is neither an isolated human nor an isolated God, but God and man in their divinely established and effective encounter, the dealings of God with the Christian and of the Christian with God. (CD 4/3: 498)."

160   Gollwitzer, *An Introduction to Protestant Theology*, trans. David Cairns, Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1982, p. 62.

161   It should be noted that Schwarz only footnotes direct citations and quotations and not as a method of documenting the source of ideas or concepts. As this chapter intends to show, Brunner's theology is the primary component of most of Schwarz' theological thinking.

Zimmerli), other dialectical theologians (e.g., Barth, Gollwitzer, Kraus, Thielicke), and existentialist theologians (e.g., Tillich).

As far as theologians from an "orthodox" perspective, he quotes Luther when Luther seems to concur with his opinion, but often cautions that Luther was forced to retain institutionalistic concepts by various forces.[162] He defends Luther in this regard saying, "...my criticism is directed at modern 'Lutherans' (or advocates of other denominations) who think they owe it to Luther or other Reformers to remain bound by such inconsistencies in a completely different situation. ... by using Lutheran *formulations* Luther's *intentions* can be prevented from being carried out."[163] Other "orthodox" theologians, for example, Johann Gerhard, suffer a tongue lashing with the whip of "authoritative, heteronomic dotrinalism" for not recognizing that "the Bible emphasizes the word of God is *pneuma*, not *gramma"* and making claims such as: faith in the Scriptures is "the axiomatic premise of all articles of faith," rather than simply *an* article of faith.[164]

Emil Brunner, on the other hand, is not only given prominent citation and lengthy quotation, but even when he is not cited or quoted his thinking closely parallels that expressed by Natural Church Development. This, in addition to NCD's overt statement to this effect, indicates that Natural Church Development clearly finds the source of its theology in the theology of Emil Brunner.

Emil Brunner was greatly influenced by the Historical Critical method of Biblical interpretation which treats the Scriptures as

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162 e.g., Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*. p. 87. - "...it was Luther's conflict with the religious 'enthusiasts' which ... - presumably against his original theological intentions - drove him back to the institutionalistic paradigm (although it was no longer the Roman Catholic form, but now a Lutheran variety."

163 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 88. - Although, it should be noted that Luther is still put on a relatively short leash in many respects. For example, on the topic of infant baptism: "[Luther] could only do so [justify his position] by making the ridiculous assertion that the infant does, in fact, believe." (p. 144.)

164 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 118. - The claim of Gerhard is used to prove that the fundamentalist view is "you believe in Jesus because you first believe in the Bible." While, no doubt, there are some who could be labeled "fundamentalist" who take this approach, it seems highly doubtful and suspect to me that Gerhard was one of them (either a "fundamentalist" or one who takes this approach).

documents solely of human origin and rejects the divine origin of the Scriptures. So taken with the Historical Critical methodology that he goes so far as to say this is a *requirement* for the apostolic church when he says, "scholarly Biblical criticism is an essential to the truly apostolic Church, as is also regularly advancing and self-critical theology."[165] "Genuine Bible faith - because Scripture is the cradle - self-evidently belongs together with Biblical criticism; for a Bible free from error would no longer be human, and contrariwise, the recognition of the humanity of Scriptures calls for a distinction between the fallible vessel and its divine infallible content."[166] At the same time, he endeavored to retain "biblical faith" and the central message of the Scriptures.

Combining the basic message of Scripture with the philosophy of the existentialists, he developed the concept of "Truth as Encounter." This became the the theological epistemology of Brunner and many other "crisis theologians" after him. "Truth as Encounter" removes the grounding of Christian faith in the objective world of tangible things (including historical events and the words of Scripture) and centers it in the interaction between the divine "Absolute Subject" (i.e., God) and the individual person.

This is not to be confused with the "subjectivism" of Schliermacher which is repudiated by both Brunner and Schwarz. Schliermacher moved the center of the Christian faith to the individual's perception of this interaction. Brunner and those following after him ground the Christian faith not in the "objective" God ("God in Himself") nor in the individual ("Man in himself"). Rather, according to Brunner, "The Biblical revelation ... deals with the **relation** of God to men and of men to God. It **contains no doctrine of God as he is in himself** [*Gott-an-sich*], **none of man as he is in himself** [*Menschen-an-sich*]. It always speaks of God as the God who approaches man [*Gott-zum-Menschenhin*] and of man as the man who comes from God [*Menschen-von-Gott-*

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165   Brunner, *Church, Faith, and the Consumation*, pp. 120-121.
166   Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, p. 176.

her]."[167]

Brunner maintains that "the 'formal principle' [of theology is] the Word of God, and the 'material principle,' [is] redemption through Jesus Christ or justification by faith alone. [But that these] are not two but one and the same principle seen in two aspects." That is to say, the Word of God is not the Holy Scriptures, but rather the "Christ event" itself. "[I]n the Bible this two-sided relation between God and man is not developed as doctrine, but rather, is set forth as happening in a story. ...the relation is an event. ...God 'steps' into the world, into relation with men: he deals with them, for them, and in a certain sense also against them; but he acts always in relation *to them*, and he always *acts*."[168]

Thus, the Scriptures are not themselves an authoritative word from God, rather, they are a witness or record of God's actions in history. "The Bible is as little concerned with objective as with subjective truth. The objective-subjective antithesis cannot be applied to the Word of God and to faith. It is a category of thought wholly foreign, not only to the way of expression in the Bible, but also to the entire content."[169]

We can begin to see here the underlying theological perspective of Natural Church Development. First of all, we see the repudiation of "objectivistic" and "subjectivistic" thinking which leads to NCD's bipolar paradigm. We also see the root of NCD's conception of a God that "happens" and therefore a church that must "happen." The church must "happen" because God "happens" in its midst and therein manifests himself to the world.

With regard to the Gospel, the Christian kerygma is not Christ's objective sacrificial death to pay the penalty for the sins of each individual in the world, but rather Christ's death was God's "Word" to the inhabitants of the world that He loves them and seeks to be in relationship to them.

To be sure, Brunner teaches that there is an impenetrable barrier

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167 Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, p. 87. - bold emphasis added.
168 Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, p. 87-88.
169 Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, p. 84-85.

called guilt which must be overcome. It's the separation that exists because of sin. "The separation can only be removed by God, and it must be removed, if there is to be a restoration of fellowship between man and God. But this can only happen if God actually removes that which constitutes the separation."[170] But, what *constitutes* this separation is the rebellious attitude of man in his attempt to make himself independent from God, not the defilement of man brought about by sin. The difference is a difference in relation, not the "quality" of the individual. Thus God must overcome this rebellious attitude, show man who and what he is in relation to God: a rebellious creature. "The human situation is desperate, and it cannot be transformed, fellowship with God is impossible, save through the intervention in the human situation, a re-establishment of man's relation to God, by God Himself."[171] The purpose of the "salvation revelation" is to show man his status as a sinner before God and that God has forgiven him.[172] "But forgiveness as revelation is simply that intervention on the part of God which fundamentally changes the human situation... Forgiveness... is an historical event, something which man cannot achieve or know by his own efforts. ...it is a verdict which must be pronounced by God. **Whether this message from 'beyond' comes through the Prophetic Word of revelation [as in the Old Testament], or through His death on the Cross, [or through the work of the Church as it witnesses to Christ[173]] is primarily less important** than the other fact: that in each case it is something which must *happen* in a region beyond and outside of all human effort."[174]

Scripture records God's salvific activity in time in order that we may come to recognize that God is seeking to have a relationship with us. The "Christ event" shows us that we deserve punishment, even death, for our rebellion against our the sovereign Lord and Creator. It also shows

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170 Brunner, *Creation and Redemption*, p. 291.
171 Brunner, *Creation and Redemption*, p. 292.
172 Brunner, *Creation and Redemption*, p. 292. - "The true perception of sin is a gift of revelation..."
173 See Brunner, *Church, Faith and Consumation*, pp. 134ff. - We will see how this is incorporated when we discuss Brunner's view of the church.
174 Brunner, *Creation and Redemption*, p. 294. - bold emphasis added.

us that God has set aside his wrath and anger toward us and still wills to have a relationship with us. God's message on the cross was the Word of God that speaks to us from outside, telling us what we deserve for our rebellion against Him and, at the same time, to call us back to fellowship, declaring to us that God has forgiven us.[175]   Therefore, it is neither "objective," as relating to something that God was forced to do in order to bring us back into relationship with Him, nor "subjective", as relating only to man's perception of it having been done. Yet, at the same time, it is both "objective," by having its source outside of the individual, and "subjective," by being appropriated by the individual in the response of faith.[176]

Thus, within Brunner's theology, "Justification by faith alone" is protected, yet redefined. No longer does it mean: Christ's death wherein God meted out the real punishment actually due for our sin; an objective fact which we come to believe by the power of the Holy Spirit working faith in us. Rather, it means: our personal acceptance of God's forgiveness which He spoke to us from the cross; our response to this word by coming into a "personal relationship" with Him.[177]   However, this "personal relationship" is not what "knowing Christ" has meant through the history of the Church.

The phrase in historical Christinaity means: trusting in Christ's **meritorious work** and **vicarious satisfaction** which was done in place of the sinner. It is this work and satisfaction that is imputed to the individual and qualitatively changes the individual from unrighteous to

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175   Brunner, *Creation and Redemption*, pp. 271 ff.

176   We see now that the "dialectical tension" from which Brunner's general school of theology takes its name is not, in this case, a true dialectical tension but simply an apparent tension created by the ambiguities of language. The perspective on each side of the dialectical statement is inverted and thus, only apparent. What is subjective for God (forgiveness) is objective for man (the word that comes from outside). At the same time, what is objective for God (man's response) is at the same time subjective for man (as it is "his" response).

177   Seen here is the danger of the language of "personal relationship" which is so prevalent in much of popular evangelicalism today and has found its way into the vocabulary of Lutheranism. While this paper is not intended to prove a relationship between evangelicalism and Brunner's understanding of this phrase (although, this would be an interesting avenue of research), I would submit that, at the very least, the phrase is now made dangerously ambiguous by dialectical theology.

righteous, making the sinner acceptable to God. However, in Brunner's theology it means: trusting the declaration of forgiveness spoken by God upon the cross and on the basis of that word, responding to God. While the later is implied by the former, they are not equivalent. It seems unwise, therefore, to continue to use such an ambiguous phrase without clarifying its meaning. The sad reality is that such clarification would be lost in the milieu that is evangelical protestantism in the 21st century. Therefore, it would be wise to cease using this phrase in favor of something more descriptive of the reality of Christ's death as the actual punishment of God in the sinner's place.

Brunners description is in keeping with a definitions of sin which denies it's "objective" reality and treats it as only a "subjective" reality in the mind of God. That is, something that God must "get over." For the sake of propriety and to maintain the moral order, it was necessary for God to send His Son to suffer and die, "as a 'sign' that God sees this moral danger [the danger of "cheap grace"], and thus gives us a 'proof of His righteousness', lest we should doubt His Wisdom. But this 'proof' is not - as with Anselm - something objective, the fulfillment of an objective requirement, but it is something which is both subjective and objective; it is effective as this 'proof of righteousness' only where man, in faith, identifies himself with Christ the crucified, and understands that it is really he who ought to be condemned to death and executed as a criminal."[178]

What this fails to take into account is that it is God, through the working of His will, creates objective reality. Our guilt is something that defiles us, because God says it defiles us. God had pronounced in the Garden that, "in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." Death as the deserved consequence of sin *is*, as Anselm said, something objective, the fulfillment of an objective requirement. Because God declared that there would be punishment for the sin, it was objectively necessary that the punishment be carried out. The Good News of the Gospel is not

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178   Brunner, *Creation and Redemption*, p. 296.

merely that God loves us and will forgive us, the Good News of the Gospel is that the actual, real, objective punishment that was due to us has already been meted out on the cross at Calvary. We are no longer subject to the punishment that God prepared and declared for those who broke his commands.

If "*Pistis* in the New Testament does not mean accepting a doctrine, it means trust in God: commitment, relinquishing internal security and external guarantees, complete dependence,"[179] and that trust is to be based upon the "word" he spoke from the cross, declaring us forgiven, how can it be trusted? The same God, who declares us forgiven also declared that sin would be met with the punishment of death! If Christ's death is not an actual substitutionary death in my place (i.e., an "objective" reality), then God's word cannot be trusted, because God also declared, "in the day you eat of it, you shall surely die."[180]

Of course, Historical Critics like Brunner and the teachers of Natural Church Development can easily avoid this problem. Since for them, the Bible itself is not God's Word to mankind but only a record of the authors' experience with God, the historical-critic could easily say that it was the perception of the individual that God would punish him, therefore, he wrote of the punishment. But for one who believes that the Scriptures are actually God's Word, promise of punishment for disobedience cannot be avoided. It must be dealt with. And the theology of Emil Brunner and also that of Natural Church Development does not deal with that punishment.

Thanks be to God that He did deal with it!

"*Pistis*" in the New Testament means placing your hope, your security, your trust, and being completely dependent upon the real objective truth of the doctrine that Christ died in order that you would not be subject to death. It is to know that you are a sinner, and that because you are a sinner God will punish you for your sin. At the same time, *Pistis* is to know that God in His mercy, love and grace sent His

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179   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 101.
180   Gen. 3:17.

Son to live a perfect life in your place and take that very punishment that was due to you upon himself, to suffer and die in your place at the same time, giving to you His holiness and righteousness.

But in Natural Church Development, "God reveals himself in the Bible as the one who longs for fellowship with us humans. Real fellowship involves two sides: we must agree to it just as much as God,"[181] our justification becomes our work in responding to God in faith instead of a free gift of God which comes to us. The monergism of the Gospel is replaced by the synergistic ego of man.

This synergism plays itself out in the definition of the Church used by Natural Church Development. If "the criterion for all churches should be whether faith, fellowship, and service become a reality; whether God becomes manifest in them; whether the Holy Spirit works in them;"[182] man's active response to the free gift of forgiveness actually *constitutes* the church. This is the second of the "two testimonies of the Ekklesia," according to Brunner.

> The Spirit who is active in the Ekklesia expresses Himself in active love of the brethren and in the creation of brotherhood, of true fellowship. Thus the Ekklesia has to bear a double witness to Christ, through the *Word* that tells of what He has bestowed upone it, and through the witness of its *life*, through its being, which points to Him as its vital source. These two testimonies of the Ekklesia through Word and life corroborate each other, and neither is fully effective without the other. The Word of Christ is truly effective only where it is accompanied by the life-witness of the Ekklesia. ...This Word can awaken true faith only when it is proclaimed by the Ekklesia, the brotherhood, in which alone it is vitally present.[183]

and further:

> He who receives the Word of witness - through faith - is at the same time united with the Ekklesia and incorporated into it. But, as we saw in an earlier context, it can be the other way around. A man is laid hold of by the life of the fellowship, moved by the love which he experiences there; he "grows into"

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181 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 56.
182 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 73.
183 Brunner, *Church, Faith and the Consumation*, p. 135

the brotherhood, and only gradually learns to know Jesus Christ as the Church's one foundation. His way to Christ is through the fellowship; through receiving human love he comes to believe in Him from whom this love originates. ... But since both the Word that bears witness to Christ and the love created by it have the same source, the second way, which leads through fellowship, through reception of the Spirit of love, to Christ as the source of this Spirit, is just as much to be reckoned with as a possibility, although true faith comes into being only through the unity of Word and Spirit, of truth and fellowship, of knowledge of Christ and the heart-felt experience of love.[184]

With this understanding in mind, then, we see the reason that Natural Church Development asserts, "In other words, whenever faith, fellowship, and service - or just one of these elements - are missing or neglected in an institution, we should not regard this institution as 'true church.'"[185]

This "second way" of encountering God is the basis upon which the eight quality characteristics are built:

- Empowering leadership
- Gift-oriented ministry
- Passionate spirituality
- Functional structures
- Inspiring worship service
- Holistic small groups
- Need-oriented evangelism
- Loving relationships

It is interesting that these "characterisics" are specifically defined only by the questions which are asked in the surveys that measure them and not elsewhere in the literature. A review of the questions make clear why the subtitle of the protocol used to determine their reliability is, "The Statistical Development of the "Natural Church Development' Survey and its Relation to Organizational Psychology."[186]

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184 Brunner, *Church, Faith and the Consumation*, p. 136.
185 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 18.
186 See APPENDIX I for a list of questions from the early surveys that relate to each of the quality characteristics.

This only serves to highlight the fact that *none* of these characteristics have any direct relation to the Gospel. Furthermore, the concepts themselves, with only slight modification,[187] can exist in almost any kind of organization.

These things will attract and retain people because in each case, they play into the human ego. People like to feel *empowered* and *loved* and have their *needs* met. They like to feel special, and having a unique *spiritual gift* that is recognized by others is attractive to the ego. The individual likes the feelings of being *inspired* by worship. And, finally, everyone needs close friends and is likely to remain active and involved others in their *small group* of friends are active and involved. It isn't surprising then, that churches that have these characteristics fulfill the criteria by which these characteristics were validated as indicating the "quality" of a church; namely, greater attendance at worship.[188]

But even this wrong understanding of "quality" and the lack of a direct connection to the Gospel fits within the theology that underlies Natural Church Development. The quality characteristics have been validated by seeing if they lead to numerical growth in worship attendance. According to the teachings of Natural Church Development, we can recognize the operation of the Holy Spirit among us (and thus know that we are "true church") by judging "whether Jesus is lifted up as Lord and the church is built." And all this can happen without a direct connection to the Gospel because "both the Word that bears witness to Christ and the love created by it have the same source, ...[a] second way

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187 Passionate Spirituality would simply need to be changed to Passionate Living ("it is decisive that the Christians live their faith with passion." - Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 124) and Inspiring Worship changed to Inspirational Gatherings ("'Inspiring worship services' are characterized by the presence of many enthusiastic Christians who worship God together. They speak of everyday questions and needs of the congregtion, and they project a positive atmosphere both verbally and non-verbally." - Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 149.)

188 NCD, "Avoiding Circular Reasoning," Frequently Asked Questions, NCD Community Website, http://www.ncd-international.org/community/page027a.html (accessed 4/22/08) - "we had to look for an 'out criterion' that is objectively measurable and can be related to the qualities we tried to identify. In that area, we had to decide for a 'quantitative' criterion, ... From all available options (size of the church, increase of membership, offerings, etc.) the growth of worship attendance turned out to be the best fit."

[to faith], which leads through fellowship, through reception of the Spirit of love, to Christ as the source of this Spirit, is just as much to be reckoned with as a possibility."[189]

The problem is that these definitions are wholly inadequate. It is not possible to validate quality by increased worship attendance. And furthermore, the demons confessed Christ and "Lift up Jesus as Lord."[190]

The sad reality is, there is no "second way." And practitioners of Natural Church Development who attempt to "reckon with [this] as a possibility" allow people to be come comfortable and complacent having their felt needs met in "inspiring" worship services, feeling loved in their small group and empowered to passionately exercise their "spiritual gift" in their functional ministry, all the while thinking they are in a "personal relationship" because they see the pneumatically functioning Spirit all around them. Yet, many of these very same people will join the demons in the lake of fire because they have not heard and understood the fact that they are sinners with a death sentence hanging over their heads - And the only hope they have to avoid having that sentence carried out is the objectively true historical fact that there baby born in Bethlehem who is true God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and true man, Born of the Virgin Mary, who was nailed to a tree and really and truly, in his own flesh, died in their place. This is the only "personal relationship" with Jesus that matters, trusting the truth of the scriptural doctrine of the vicarious substitutionary atonement by the Son of God.

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189   Brunner, *Church, Faith and the Consumation*, p. 136.
190   Cxref: James 2:19; Matthew 8:29; Mark 1:24; Luke 4:33,34; Acts 19:15

Chapter 7: History and Truth

An overseer, as God's steward ... must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instrution in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers...

Titus 1:7 *ESV*

What is "Truth"?

"Truth as Encounter", as originally articulated by Emil Brunner, means Truth is a person; Jesus Christ himself. NCD concur's with Brunner's belief that truth is not to be found in the Scriptures. The Scriptures merely witnesses to the self-revelation of the one who *is* truth. As Brunner says, "Scripture remains the sole *source* of our knowledge of revelation, to which we are absolutely obliged to turn, but it is in no way the *norm* of our knowledge and our doctrine."[191]

Without the norm of Scripture, Natural Church Development finds the multitude of doctrinal perspectives as valid, even beneficial to the church.[192] "Even in the New Testament, there is no uniform doctrine

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191 Brunner, *Doctrine of God*, p. 48. (emphasis original) - "...this is the point at issue: that the real norm is the revelation, Jesus Christ Himself, who Himself witnesses to us through the Holy Spirit, who, however, in addition to this His self-revelation, makes use of the witness of the Apostles. ... In so far as the Bible speaks about subjects of secular knowledge, it has no teaching authority. Neither its astronomical, cosmological picture of the world, nor its geographical view, nor its zoological, ethnographical or historical statements are binding upon us, whether they are in the Old Testament or in the New. Here, rather, free course should be given to rational scientific criticism. Even in these sections the Scripture remains the sole *source* of our knowledge of revelation, to which we are absolutely obliged to turn, but it is in no way the *norm* of our knowledge and our doctrine. ...the doctrine of [i.e., contained in] Scripture as such, although it is the absolute basis of our Christian doctrine, is only in a conditional sense the *norm* of the same. Critical reflection on the adequateness, or inadequateness, of the Biblical doctrinal testimony for the revelation to which it bears witness, is not eliminated; we still have to face it; a final resort to a single Scriptural passage is impossible for us. Hence in each instance all Christian doctrine is, and remains, a venture of faith." (Brunner, *Doctrine of God*, pp. 47-49. - emphasis original).

192 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 109. - "_The_ functional doctrine does not exist, if we understand it in the sense of a static set of theological statements that are valid for all times and in all cultures. ... this approach leads to the conclusion that different doctrines can be right at the same time (as they each serve God's purposes in their given context)." Also, p.

of Jesus Christ or the church, but rather, through divine providence, a variety of types of doctrine, which find their unity in Jesus Christ himself. Unity can never be sough in timelessly binding theological statements as that would be an **unhistorical**, **unbiblical** and (for church development) **ineffective** concept of unity; but only in the person of Jesus Christ."[193]

Such a view of truth is what led Theodore Engelder to say, "Enthusiasm in its gross form and Enthusiasm in is dialectical form [or, in our case, "Bipolar" form] is an evil thing. It is destructive of all assurance, of the certainty of salvation, and of the certitude of the doctrine."[194]   NCD has no problems destroying all assurance and certainty,[195] but denies that it is dangerous. In a rather lengthy footnote[196] NCD denies the title "enthusiast" applies to their theology by attempting to redefine the term away from its traditional usage. "It seems to me problematical, however, to see everybody who is labeled 'enthusaist' (*Schwarmer*) in church history as belonging to the spiritualistic paradigm. This applies especially to some adherents of the 'left wing of the Reformation,' who, in some aspects, touched the heart of what we today would call church development more consistently than the 'orthodox' reformers." The footnote goes on to quote Brunner who charges that the original Anabaptist movement was misunderstood. And the charge of "subjectivism and illusionism, that was voiced by all the Reformers does not [...] apply [...] The Anabaptist movement had to pay

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148 - "the deliberations up to this point lead to the conclusion that different opinions on the sacraments are not necessarily divisive for the unity of the church. (The opposite opinion would be a typical symptom of institutionalism...) It can even be decidedly beneficial that there are different practices in this area that can appeal to different people. ... Whether they are 'right' or not depends largely on how well they serve to achieve the desired results in their particular context."

193   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 109. - emphasis added.

194   Engelder, "The Principles and Teachings of the Dialectical Theology", *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Feb.-Jun. 1936 vol 2-6, pp. 81-93,162-174,241-252,329-339,401-411, St. Louis: CPH, 1936.

195   See the discussion on *pistis* in the chapter on the Theological Framework of NCD -- the Gospel.

196   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p.33, footnote 2.

the price of being ahead of its time[...]"[197]   According to NCD, it is protected from enthusiasm because "functionality" is limited and "thus subjected to the intentions of the Bible itself. The goal of this functionality is to stimulate faith, fellowship, and service in our times - not to get in their way."[198]

However, since "The church can only be certain of the word that is confirmed in its life by the Spirit."[199] *and no doctrinal formulation, including that of Scripture, has binding significance outside of its specific context,*[200] it is difficult to see what "limitation" truly exists.

As additional support for this concept, NCD appeals to "Luther's concept of truth in his fight against Roman Catholic heteronomism [where] 'Reason,' 'conscience,' and the 'Holy Scripture'" - these are the tree central concepts in Luther's argument (which is neither autonomist nor heteronomic: it is *theonomic*)."[201]

As this statement is examined in light of NCD's view of God and the description of the Trinitarian Compass, there is an interesting parallel between the three concepts: "reason," "conscience," and "the Holy Scripture" and the three "ways", God reveals himself: in nature (reason/science), salvation (the Bible), and conscience (experience). In NCD, it would seem that these three are put on the same level. The Bible (the "salvation revelation") is subjected to rational and historical processes (the "creation revelation") and the structures of the church (including doctrine and the Sacraments) must be "confirmed in its life by the Spirit" (the "personal revelation") to be considered "functional". While NCD nowhere makes this comparison itself, it does seem to fit into their categories quite nicely.

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197   Brunner, *Dogmatik III, Zurich, 1960, p. 98ff - quoted in Schwarz, _Paradigm Shift*, p.33.
198   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 121. - in a footnote, Schwarz refers back to his earlier discussion on functionality where he describes the limitation thus: "It is only by studying the demonstrable effects of church structures (or dogmas, traditions, and so forth) that we can understand their nature. Nature and function are not contradictory concepts; rather they interpret each other."(Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 66.)
199   Schwarz, Paradigm Shift, p. 123. - Quoting Weber, *Grundlagen der Dogmatik I, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 3rd ed., 1964, p. 296*
200   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift, p. 109.*
201   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 85.

However, when we look at the entire quotation of Luther, it is difficult to see how NCD finds support for this position. Luther stated, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience."[202]

That Luther here meant Holy Scripture when he said, "the Word of God," should be obvious. In the first half of the first sentence, it is specifically "Scripture" and not the ambiguous concept of "the Word" that is pitted against the authority of the Pope and councils. In the second half, "bound by the Scriptures" and "captive to the Word of God" are coordinating phrases indicating equivalence. Luther, like most people, did not like continually repeating the same word in a sentence and thus used, what for him, was an equivalent term. It is clear from the quotation that there is a solitary authority for Luther, the clear and plain teachings of Scripture. All else must come into conformity with this.

The statement Dr. Engelder made in describing Emil Brunner's theology, seems an equally apt description of its descendant, Natural Church Development: "Brunner [Natural Church Development] bases his [their] theology on the 'Word of God,' - but not exclusively. He [NCD] relies to a great extent on an additional *principum cognoscendi* - and that is philosophy, his dialectical [or, in NCD's case, "Bipolar"] philosophy."[203]

We can only speculate what NCD's lead theologian means when he says, "I am completely convinced that God wants us to make correct theological statements. But what is 'correct' is not formulated in some timeless, heavenly dogmatic work of reference. God is concerned instead that the tools we develop should serve his purposes as revealed to us in the Bible. ... Theology is always a tool. Whenever it aspires to become

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202 *Luthers Works*, Volume 32, Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1958, pp. 112-113.
203 Engelder, "The Principles and Teachings of the Dialectical Theology", p. 244.

more, it becomes a false theology."%Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 110.

What is "Historical"

Almost as unique as it's understanding of truth is the view of the concept of the "historical" that underlies NCD. In relation to God and His work in history, only the actual interaction between God and man is "historical." Any report or record can only witness to the historical happening. As witness, such a report or record presents only one perspective and one interpretation of the event. Therefore, such a report "calls for a distinction between the fallible vessel" and the actual historical event itself.[204]

This principle seems active in NCD's treatment of the overall history of the Church just as much as it does in regard to the historical record of the Scriptures. This is most clearly true in regard to NCD's treatment of the Reformation and their assertion of "Reformation Principles" as well as the interpretation of the events leading to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The History of Luther's Reformation

Here, for example, is Natural Church Development's summary of the Reformation:

> When Martin Luther drew up his 95 theses, he had neither a plan nor a program for the reformation of the church. The radical changes in the Reformation began with the *theological* - or, to be more precise, exegetical - discovery of what Luther himself called the "justification of the sinner" by faith alone.
>
> But the more time progressed and the more Luther and his companions thought through the consequences of this insight for all areas of church life, the clearer it became that this discovery would leave hardly anything unchanged. The theological discovery had set off a development which had a dynamic of its own and directly led into the Reformation.

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204   Brunner uses these words in pointing out the need for historical criticism to differentiate between the writings of the Biblical authors and the actual "content" of Scripture.

In a gradual process, the Reformer successfully freed himself from the institutionalistic, sacramentalist approach of the Roman Catholic Church and became more and more skeptical towards the abstract metaphysics and scholastic theology that legitimized Catholicism....

Even though these streams very soon became involved in a bitter struggle with each other, there was one concern which, without doubt, they all shared: their rejection of the clericalistic theology of the Roman Catholic Church. They were united in believing *that* the institutionalistic paradigm was to be rejected - their argument was merely what the proper alternative should be like.

It is no accident that the question of the sale of indulgences was the external incident that triggered the Reformation. The practice of indulgences in the late Middle Ages was a typical expression of the institutionalistic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The '"excess good works" of the pious were, in the official doctrine, a (substantial) treasure which could be transferred to the sinners who were arrears in their "account" (*objectivism*). The transfer of this "credit" was performed by the church, and especially by the Pope, who, as the successor of Peter, held the keys for binding and releasing (*heteronomism*). Indulgences could be acquired by paying money or undertaking certain exercises for which there were clearly defined rules (*formalism*). The efficacy was independent of any subjective experience (*rationalism*). They came into effect through the fulfillment of the conditions laid down (*magic*). By means of this practice, so said Luther's accusation, the institution assumed an authority which was only rightly due to Christ. In other words, the practice of indulgences combined all those elements thar are consequences of an institutionalistic understanding of the church. Here, we have more than just one of a number of reformable errors.

...When, on December 10th, 1520, Luther threw not only the papal bull, but also a canonical book of the law into the fire, this was not a symptom of unreflected reactions in emotionally heated confrontations. The "holy law of the church" - which is what the canonical books of the law stood for - was the epitome of a heteronomic, clericalistic doctrine. With the canonical book of the law, metaphorically speaking, the whole institutionalistic paradigm of Roman Catholic Orthodoxy went up in flames![205]

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205   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 83-85.

No doubt the last paragraph quoted is intended as a bit of hyperbole with regard to Luther's intent. However, what is telling is that Natural Church Development glosses over the bell-weather event of the Reformation. Completely absent is the events of June 25, 1530; the day that the Augsburg Confession, the teachings of the Lutheran Reformation, were read before Emperor Charles V. The Augsburg Confession, which Luther had no small hand in developing, was by no means the repudiation of the "heternomic, clericalistic ... institutionalistic" paradigm of the Roman Catholic Church.

Article IV of the Augsburg Confession retains the concept of merits being a "substantial" treasure. However, it moves the source of those merits from the "pious" to their rightful source in Christ which are imputed (objectively "transferred") to the "account" of the sinner. Article V confesses the "heteronomism" that there is a specific office, the office of the ministry, which is established by God Himself, and is to be filled and carried out, according to Article XIV, not by anyone with a specific spiritual gift, but only by one who has "a regular call." Furthermore, in Article V, it is confessed that through the communication of the Gospel and through the administration of the Sacraments, God "gives the Holy Spirit" and in such a way that it is "independent of any subjective experience" ("rationalism"). Rather, the Spirit is given through these means not in order to promote "functionality" but to work in us the "subjective experience" of faith "when and where he pleases." But this is predicated on *hearing* "the Gospel" ("magic"), which is an objective word declaring the forgiveness of sins wrought by the vicarious satisfaction of Christ for sin.

With their repudiation of any objective truth, NCD would warn us against using "Lutheran *formulations"* lest *"Luthers intentions* ... be prevented from being carried out."[206] Thus, it doesn't matter that many teachings that Natural Church Development would consider characteristic of the "institutionalistic paradigm" are to be found also

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206   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 88.

within the Augsburg Confession. It also doesn't matter if the teachings of NCD contradict the recorded teachings of Luther. NCD would claim that these contradictions, " reflect a 'partially unresolved tension between the "inherited" tought patterns, with their tendency towards substantial *res* thinking, and the new, personal description of the favor of God,' as Helmut Thielicke phrases it"[207] removing them from the table of discussion.

The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity

By glossing over the Augustana and the whole Book of Concord, NCD revises history, pointing out only those things that make their point that Luther is responsible for creating the "bipolar paradigm" with his rediscovery of "the Gospel."[208]

What suffers most drastically at the hands of such revisionist history is, "what distinguishes Christianity from all [other] religions... the specific feature of the Christian faith;"[209] namely, the doctrine of the Trinity.

Taking a cue from Emil Brunner's treatment of the Trinity NCD quotes Brunner's statement, "that this fatal idea [of substance] was taken into the *Credo* was a real disaster,"[210] What is truly telling is the manner in which NCD ignores the actual history of development of the Nicene Creed.

Here is how NCD dismisses this historic creed:

As long as we limit ourselves by understanding the Trinity as a category of experience, we are not confronted by insurmountable intellectual problems. God has revealed himself in a threefold way, and he has always revealed himself as the one, complete, perfect, undivided God.

But problems do occur as soon as we ... [stop] meditating on

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207 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 140. - quoting Thielicke, *Der evangelische Glaube. Grundzuge der Dogmatik III*, Tubingen, 1978, p. 328.

208 See "Theological Foundations of NCD – The Gospel", for NCD's definition of "faith."

209 Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p. 4.

210 Brunner, *Doctrine of God*, p, 239.

the relationship *we humans* have to the one God ... [and ask the question] what kind of relationship these three persons have *to each other*.

This was the starting point of intense discussions which shook the church in the fourth century AD and finally led to the official doctrine of the trinity. The church was looking for verbal formulas which expressed not only the "unity of God," but lso the "diversity of the three persons." But which terms were suitable for this purpose? There were bitter struggles about this question. The Roman Emperor Constantine ... was looking for ways to end this dispute. He invited ... the bishops and theologians to a large council in Nicea and spared no effort ... in finding formulas with which all opposing parties could identify, so that they would finally calm down.

From these discussions arose the classical doctrine of the Trinity, which applies to this day: God is understood as "one substance," but "three persons" (*una substantia, tres personae*). ...

At the time of the Nicean council, there were almost no meaningful alternatives to the terms used. But today we can express the same truth differently. We do not have to believe in the (Nicean) doctrine of the Trinity; but rather we should strive to encounter the God who has revealed himself in a threefold manner, holistically.[211]

The first thing to notice is the conflating of the Athanasian Creed's "*una substantia, tres personae*" with the Nicene "*homoousious*."[212] This, in itself, is fairly benign and may be able to be explained by a simple historical error with Schwarz assuming that Athanasius (a significant figure in the council at Nicea), was the actual author of the Athanasian Creed because of its title.

But when taken together with statements made couple of pages earlier, this apparent historical oversight becomes a significant lapse in historical investigation.

God revealed himself in three different ways. What we now call

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211 Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, pp. 12-13.

212 Which, though it does not appear in this description, it undergirds the discussion of "substance" when talking about "The Impersonal God" (Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 56-57.). The conflation becomes more apparent when it is realized that Brunner's comments are directed against the Athanasian Creed, but NCD applies them to the Nicene.

> the "doctrine of the Trinity" was originally nothing more than a category of experience. The early Christians recognized God as Creator, experienced Christ as God through prayer, and sensed the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In other words: they *experienced* God in a threefold manner - and as a result they *thought* about the Trinity. The crucial point is not that we believe in the Trinity, but rather that we believe in a trinitarian way; in other words, that we experience God in a threefold manner.[213]

It was not that the church fathers "experienced God in a threefold manner - and as a result they *thought* about the Trinity." Rather, they read the Scriptures and attempted to formulate a succinct confession of the Scriptural teachings. The historical circumstances necessitated this. It was not, as NCD would have us believe, a heteronomic "means of protecting the immutable Christian truth."[214] What was being protected were the people of the Christian community that would be led astray by listening to false teachings about God that brought into question the full divinity of Christ.

The formulation of the creeds was an attempt to confess the objective doctrinal content of Scripture. They wished to be faithful to Christ by "continuing in His word."[215] They were endeavoring to faithfully point to the narrow gate so that others would not be led down "the wide road that leads to destruction."[216] They felt it their job to protect the sheep under their care so that they would not be devoured by the ravenous wolves, the false teachers of their day.[217] This is the "functional" purpose of any confession of the Church.

The debate over "*homoousious*" was not a debate about the metaphysical reality of God separated from His revelation, it was intimately tied to His revelation of Himself in Holy Scripture. True, it was an attempt at using the known categories of that day to state the biblical truth. However, the intent was not to use the metaphysical

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213   Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p. 7.
214   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 27.
215   John 8:31
216   Matthew 7:13
217   Matthew 7:15

categories denoted by the words themselves, but rather, to invest those words with the scriptural truth they were endeavoring to convey.

Originally, the attempt was made to use only Scriptural terms and avoid the Greek metaphysical categories. However, "Arian-sympathizing bishops could be seen, it is said, winking and nodding, confident that they could twist a scripturally worded creed to their advantage."[218] Thus, it became necessary to make clear the meaning that was intended. The problems associated with using this term were not unknown to those at Nicea. Many participants had serious misgivings over the use of the word because of potential misunderstandings as well as the word's "checkered past."[219]

All of this history is glossed over and continued use of the creed is abrogated by Natural Church Development in order to refashion the doctrine of the Trinity.

> The terminology used may have been the best available at the time. However, when we apply our *present* understanding of 'person' to the formula that was developed at that time, immense confusion arises. It is simply impossible to think of 'three persons' as anything else but 'tri-theistic,' regardless of how much one protests against this interpretation. In the same way, our present conception of substance, when applied to God, leads us to an understanding which does not have much in common with the view of God presented in the Scripture.[220]

While the concern over misunderstanding the creed based upon modern conceptions of what those words mean is valid, it does not negate the fact that the creed, when properly understood, expresses biblical truth. One has to wonder, then, why Natural Church Development would protest against the use of the Creed which primarily repeats the teachings of Scripture in the words of Scripture, yet, has "functioned" well for well over a thousand years (when used with proper catechesis) in favor of some pretty colors and a few words that need

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218 Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils: Their History and Theology*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990, p. 59.
219 Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 61-62.
220 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 13.

several paragraphs of explanation.[221]

While NCD protests greatly that they are not seeking to "replace" the classical formulation with it's "focus ... on the question of how the **three persons of the Godhead** relate to each other," and that "the Trinitarian Compass focuses on the question of how **we (the believers)** relate to the triune God," there is a clear message that the Creed has not only outlived its usefulness, but its continued use is actually a destructive force within the church.[222] The conclusion to be drawn is that we should discontinue use of the creed and begin use of the Trinitarian Compass to the end of "encountering the God who has revealed himself in a threefold manner, holistically." While technically not a "replacement" the effect is the same.

Natural Church Development itself provides the reason for this: "A new understanding of the Trinity not only leads us toward a new view of God, it also guides to new experiences with God."[223] Using the Trinitarian Compass, we are supposed to have a "new view of God," and "new experiences with God."

One can only speculate as to what that actually means. From what we have seen thus far, what can be said is that it means that we should no longer "view God" as one who sent His only Son into the world to pay the penalty due for our sin. As such, we will not "experience" the forgiveness of sins that He promises to us in His Word and through the waters of Holy Baptism and through His Body and Blood given and shed for that purpose. This is the result of the teachings of Natural Church Development.

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221 See images in, Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, pp. 14ff.

222 Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p. 13. - "We do not have to believe in the (Nicean) doctrine of the Trinity; but rather we should strive to encounter the God who has revealed himself in a threefold manner, holistically. ... It can be shown that the formulas which were found - even though they were meant to achieve the opposite - contributed in their historical effect toward a segmentation of God. Of course, God has not really been segmented, but what has been segmented is the possibility of experiencing God in a holistic way. ... This division of God corresponds to a segmentation among Christians, which is in turn the reason for numerous self-made blockages which dominate the Christian church up to this day.

223 Schwarz, *Threefold Art*, p. 4.

Chapter 8: Exegesis and Exegetical Conclusions in NCD

And the tempter came and said to him, If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But he answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Matthew 4:3-4

Previously it was mentioned that the underlying view of Scripture in Natural Church Development is the Historical-Critical method of biblical interpretation. The presupposition of this methodology is that Scripture is purely a product of human work. One chief departure from this view of scripture within Natural Church Development are certain quotations recorded in Scripture as coming directly from God or Jesus directly. Below, we will examine two of these and the exegetical results provided by Natural Church Development as it uncovers the "real meaning" behind the stated words.

I Am that I Am

In Exodus 3:14, in response to Moses' question: Whom shall I say sent me?, God is recorded as responding: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה which was translated in the LXX as: εγω ειμι ο ων and subsequently is most commonly translated in English as, "I am that I am"[224] or "I am who I am."[225]

However, such a category of ontological being does not fit with a view of God as solely relational. "However we formulate our translation in order to transport the tremendous variety of the verb *hayah* into our more static language, we can be sure that it is a refusal to lock the nature of God into the cage of an ontological definition. ...'If the question about

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224 KJV
225 ESV

the name was aimed at ... finding ways to gain access to his power, then the formulation in Exodus 3:14 is all too obviously a gesture of refusal.'"[226] Rather, NCD asserts, "This text would probably be better translated, 'I will show myself as the one I will show myself as,' or 'I will happen as I will happen.'"[227]

The problem, according to Natural Church Development, is that in the course of the translation of the LXX, "this completely un-Hellenistic statement" was mistranslated to indicate "precisely what the Hebrew text was meant to prevent. "Behind the phrase 'I am the being one' in the Septuagint is the concept of absolute being in philosophical speculation. The one whose nature is to show himself as he wishes to show himself is transformed into *the being one*, or even *being* itself. The one who is undefinable is made into an ontological definition."[228]

The problem with NCD's understanding of this passage is that Jesus' words in Luke 20:37-38 flatly contradict it. In speaking of the resurrection from the dead, Jesus refers to the interaction between Moses and God which led to God's answer "I am that I am." Jesus points out that Moses refers to God as "the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,". And, furthermore, that "he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live [by/of/from] him."[229]

A reference to εγω ειμι also comes from the lips of Jesus himself in John 8:58, normally translated, "before Abraham was, I am (εγω ειμι)," but more closely translated, "before Abraham came to be, I am." Here Jesus uses εγω ειμι to refer to himself. This is understood by the Jews as Jesus equating himself with God because this is how God disclosed himself to Moses.[230] For this, Jesus is nearly stoned.

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226 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 52. - quoting Kraus,_Systematische Theologie im Kontext biblischer Geschichte und Eschatologie_, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1983, p. 145.
227 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 52. - The footnote to this later translation, "should not ... be interpreted in terms of the content attributed to it by 'process theology.'"
228 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 52-53.
229 When combined with Col 1:15-17 and John 8:58, there is good reason to take this as a causal or instrumental dative (Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, Boston:Ginn and Company, 1900, p. 251.) and not a dative of advantage as it is commonly understood.
230 Exodus 3:14

Yet, with these two references (one direct, the other less so), to Exodus 3:14, Jesus did not endeavor to correct the supposed misunderstanding precipitated by the Greek phrase, "εγω ειμι," rather, He embraced it as a confession of Himself and His own "being."

Thus, the supposed "hellenization" which led to a misunderstanding of God as "the being one," is an untenable interpretation of Exodus 3:14. It would be impossible to conceive of Jesus, the sinless one who came to reveal a proper understanding of God to the world, as having intentionally misled those who were to hear him and not correcting the misunderstanding.

Look at the Lillies of the Field

To justify the "biotic approach" of Natural Church Development, an appeal is made to Jesus' words in Matthew 6:28, "See how the lilies of the field grow" and an attempt from the etymology of the word "καταμαθετε" to indicate that this statement of Jesus means, "We are not asked to concentrate on the lilies themselves, but rather their *growth mechanisms* ('how the lillies ... grow'). We are to study and examine them, to meditate on them, and to take our direction from them. All these aspects are included in the imperative verb form *katamathete*, and we are told that we need to do so in order to understand the principles of the kingdom of God."[231]

But when we examine the entire context, we find that Jesus is not speaking at all about "the principles of the kingdom of God," much less about growing the church. This statement comes in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus is offering comfort to his hearers that they are loved and will be cared for by "Our Father, who art in heaven."[232] The focus of attention is not the lillies nor even the Kingdom of God, but it is the Father in heaven who nourishes the birds in the sky.[233] The imperative is used not to indicate that Jesus is emphatically telling us to

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231   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 234-235.
232   Matthew 6:9
233   Matthew 6:26.

look at the "growth mechanisms" of the lillies, but so that the hearer would stop focusing on themselves and their own anxiety[234] and look to God who is in heaven and promises all good things to His children.

This becomes clear when the whole thought of Matthew 6:28-30 is taken into consideration:

> why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?[235]

We see, then, that the focus is on having faith in the Father who loves and cares for His creation and promises to take care of it. The point is that we need not worry about our needs, that they will be supplied.

But there is something far more insidious in this misinterpretation than in the "two completely different systems of thought in conflict" in the previous exegesis. Natural Church Development diverts our gaze from faith and trust in the one true God to a focus upon His creation. St. Paul warns against such a diversion saying that those that do so are "futile in their thinking... Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God,"[236] focusing instead upon the things of nature.

Prior to this, St. Paul speaks of God's, "eternal power and divine nature" being "clearly seen" in nature and says some "became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" when they "exchanged the glory of the immortal [incorruptable] God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."[237] In other words, for diverting attention away from God and focusing instead upon His creation.

What we really see here is the craftiness of the devil who would

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234 Matthew 6:27.
235 Matthew 6:28-30, *ESV*.
236 Romans 1:20-21
237 Romans 1:20-21

use God's Word[238] and masquerade as an angel of light[239] to deceive the world into unbelief and perdition.

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238   As he did both in the Garden (Genesis 3) and even in confronting Christ in the wilderness (Matthew 4, Luke 4)
239   2 Corinthians 11:14

Chapter 9: What Makes NCD So Attractive?

> Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you to will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us - eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.
>
> I John 2:24-26

In a time when church attendance and membership is declining, there comes the desire to "do something" to reverse the trend. Natural Church Development attempts to provide what amounts to a topographical map on which to base a roadmap to reverse the trend. However, as has been demonstrated, it does so based upon questionable presuppositions and theology which is incompatible with the historic Christian faith.

The flawed theology of Emil Brunner was recognized 70 years ago when it first came out as a danger to true, biblical faith.[240] However, through Natural Church Development, it has been resurrected, hidden under pious phrases and presented in a manner that disarms the reader into accepting it as true, in spite of the fact that he disagrees with it. The question arises: What, then, makes NCD so attractive? There are a number of techniques used to convince the reader of the correctness of Natural Church Development.

Shifting Paradigms

Early in the literature, there is much talk about a "Paradigm Shift." This is the very title of the main theological work of Natural Church Development: "Paradigm Shift in the Church." With this concept, the reader is immediately confronted and told that his way of thinking is wrong. As a result, his conclusions are faulty, because he is

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240   Engelder, *Principles and Teachings.*

applying the wrong methodology to reach them. Thus begins the task of "reorientation" or initiating a "Paradigm Shift."

When the reader disagrees with the conclusions of NCD, he is told that he simply is not thinking correctly and once he becomes enlightened and understands the proper paradigm, he will come to agree with the position of the author. Thus, the reader accepts statements made in spite of disagreeing with them.

The danger is, as the reader continues reading and rereading the text, it comes to make "more sense." He finds he is able to agree with more and more of the conclusions of NCD with which he previously disagreed, having previously accepted them under the presumption that he misunderstood the methodology used to arrive at them.

2 Paradigms in Conflict

We have already discussed NCD's unique manner of handling the historical record to add credibility to their position. In addition to this, using the Bipolar Paradigm, NCD endeavors to explain the historical controversies which have occurred in the church. The descriptions of the "institutionalistic" and "spiritualistic" paradigms in the conflicts over "Faith," the Scriptures, and the Sacraments present the extreme views that would characterize these paradigms.[241] Very few, if any, Christian theologian would subscribe to the views on either side.[242] However, they are pointed to to show the "tendencies" of each position against which we must always be on our guard.[243]

The heart of the difficulty, according to NCD, is a "wrong view

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241 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, pp. 104-125.
242 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 39. - "In reality, there are probably very few positions which are pure forms of the thought patterns described. ... If we apply the concepts developed here, we will find that there are theologians who adopt an institutionalistic position in some areas and a spiritualistic position in others."
243 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 39. - "In real life, dangers to the right and to the left (i.e., towards institutionalism and spiritualism) are unavoidable. ... In the reality of the situation, we are repeatedly faced with the task of identifying institutionalistic and spiritualistic tendencies which, in varying degrees, affect us all, and overcoming them as far as possible."

of God."[244]   In actuality, there are two conflicting positions, the right view of God (posited by NCD), and the wrong view of God (that leads to institutionalistic or spiritualistic tendencies). Thus, the situation is set up that if the reader disagrees with NCD on an issue, the reason is they have a "wrong view of God." The subtext is that if the reader's view shows tendencies either toward institutionalism or spiritualism, they have a wrong view of God. Considering that, to varying degrees, everyone shows these tendencies,[245] it is almost guaranteed that the reader will find themselves in the situation of being told that their view of God is wrong.

This sets up a certain "existential crisis" within the reader. Once the reader is off-balance in this way, he is presented with the "right" view of God. The reader has virtually no choice but to accept the view presented since he recognizes in himself tendencies toward spiritualism and institutionalism and has, with the help of NCD's descriptions, seen to what absurd conclusions they lead. The choice becomes: Agree with NCD's description, or you're "one of *them*."

"What were described as the spiritualistic and institutionalistic paradigms in the first two parts of this book, I did not first deduce from a study of theological history. Rather, I have observed it in my practical work with churches, and particularly with pastors. I have noticed that there are certain thought patterns which often occur in people who have problems with natural church development. At first I could not make sense of these observations, but then I set out to find the theological roots of these patterns. The results of my search for an explanation of this phenomenon are the content of the first two parts of this book."[246]

We can clearly see in this quotation that if you "have a problem with natural church development"

One additional method of marginalization of opposition is the very title of the strategy - "Natural Church Development." There are very

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244   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 49. - "a wrong (e.g., institutionalistic or spiritualistic) ecclesiology ... are merely symptoms of a far more deep-seated defect: a wrong view of God."

245   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 39.

246   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 214.

few pastors I know who wish the church to shrink. Any true pastor wants the church to grow. The word "development" has a connotation of improvement. Thus, if you are against "Natural Church Development" you are against "church improvement."

Selective Argumentation

One literary and rhetorical device used is to further unbalance the reader is to plainly state a controversial conclusion before providing the evidence. After presenting the conclusion, NCD inductively argues and provides selective evidence to support its conclusion. Generally, the evidence is true, corresponding with something that the reader already accepts or knows from other experience. The implication is, "If you accept all this as true, you must accept the conclusion previously stated." It's a subtle form of argumentation and is often effective. We can see examples of this form of argumentation in NCD's treatment of historical events as described above.

For example, in discussing the history of the first Reformation, the quotations of Luther and discussion of his "tower experience" are typically legitimate, as is the inclusion of Luther's words, "conscience," "reason," and "Scripture." However, as we have seen, when additional context is brought in, the conclusion that was supposedly supported by this evidence cannot be maintained.

"Blessed Assurance"

The assurance that different theological traditions are "valid" in spite their being incompatible or even mutually exclusive, reduces ones resistance to differing theological "opinions" as expressed in the teachings. This leads to the conclusion that NCD can be used without compromising one's theological beliefs. However, as has been seen, this is not really possible. NCD itself agrees saying, "I find fairly often that pastors and churches make use of the practical tools provided by our institute, but attempt to integrate them into their old (i.e.,

institutionalistic or spiritualistic) paradigm. It is understandable that the results are less that satisfactory."[247]

The goal of NCD is to change theological thinking from the "inside-out." Under the Bipolar paradigm, doctrines are to be "functional" and conform to what has been confirmed in the life of the church. Doctrines have a right to exist only where they can be functionally justified as helpful for church development.[248] In a declining congregation, a "functional" test for structures cannot but help change practices. Since the new structures are presumably, "confirmed in the life of the church," the theology underlying the previous practice is brought into question.[249] Thus, while lip service is paid to the ability to maintain a distinctive theology, the distinction can only be temporary. By the time the congregation realizes it has moved away from its original theological positions, it is unlikely to theologically examine the situation since the changes have been, "confirmed in the life of the church."

"What does this Mean?"

One other practice seen in the writings of NCD is the use of equivocal and ambiguous language. The quintessential example is the phrase, "personal relationship." Just what does this phrase mean? NCD itself provides no clear answer in the literature beyond trusting in the one that is so reliable that no guarantees are necessary. However, the phrase is commonly used by most people in evangelical Christendom and thus, the meaning can be assumed to be "common knowledge."

This is a false assumption. For Brunner, it means a personal encounter with God and the re-establishment of man's proper

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247 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 214.
248 According to NCD, a false church, "is a church whose structures have not been justified in terms of how useful they are for effective church development." (Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 66.)
249 Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 65. - "If what is accepted as theologically correct is wrong in practices (i.e., obviously has destructive consequences), then we should at least be allowed to ask if the 'theological correctness,' which is postulated with such *pathos*, is really as correct as is claimed. Often, the practical test is an unambiguous sign that there is something basically wrong with the theology." [Note, "destructive" in the context of NCD would mean anything that in any way interferes with "faith, fellowship, and service."]

relationship with God made possible by "the Word" of the "Christ event" which speaks and tells us that God has forgiven us. What it does *not* mean is the reliance upon the substitutionary death of Christ in the place of the sinner, which is how most Confessional Lutherans would interpret it. This ambiguity allows a Lutheran to read the text and agree to propositions which, if all the words and phrases were clearly explained, they would by no means be able to agree.

"The Bible Tells Me So"

There are countless times where NCD uses the phrase, "the biblical position is..." or "that is an unbiblical position..." without explaining where or how Scripture supports or refutes the position. Whatever the position, any argument against the point being made is immediately dismissed as "unbiblical." As with equivocal language, this is a favorite technique of Emil Brunner as well. It is clear that much more than a basic theological view was subsumed by NCD from Brunner.

In addition to such assertions, the literature of NCD also provide apparent exegetical support for a number of key components. These are meant to lend credence to all assertions of what is and is not "biblical." Each includes an analysis of the original languages as well as support from other theologians.

However, when one starts to investigate the context in which the passages are found, he feels a little like Dorothy after Toto has pulled back the curtain in The Wizard of Oz.

Both are very short phrases that seem carefully chosen to be very familiar to most people. So familiar, in fact, that it seems a silly exercise to look them up. After all, who does not know that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Look at the lilies of the field," and to Moses, God said, "I Am that I Am." Such familiarity protects the assertions made because there is no need to look them up to assure they actually exist in Scripture. Furthermore, the discussion is a technical discussion about the

specific words of the quotation, and thus there seems little need to investigate the context.

"It Just Makes Sense"

Finally, throughout history the church has recognized a certain "bipolar" nature to the church. This can be epitomized by the common phrase used especially in reference to liturgy, "*lex orandi, lex credendi*" (the rule of prayer, the rule of faith) which posits that people come to believe what they pray. Here we see both poles of the bipolar paradigm. The "static" pole of doctrine or beliefs and the "dynamic" pole of prayer.

There are many such examples that could be produced. NCD would posit this as proof that the bipolar paradigm is correct. While the bipolar paradigm might be useful in describing these realities and even be useful to point out erroneous views, NCD takes the use of the Bipolar paradigm one step further.

Instead of using it simply as a model to describe the reality of a situation and point out erroneous views, it makes the model a principle around the church should intentionally govern its work and life. The practical effect is that the principle becomes the Lord of the Church rather than Christ who spoke to us His Word and caused it to be written for, "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."[250] It is not the "essence" of Scripture or any "principles" that are to govern the church, it is the words of Christ Himself.

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250   II Timothy 3:16

Conclusion

Much more can be said to point out the differences between the theology of Natural Church Development and traditional Christianity.

However, from what has been presented, it is clear that the enterprise of NCD is to redefine the church in a manner incompatible the historic Christian faith. That the theology of Natural Church Development is such a radical departure traditional Christianity is pointed to as a strength by the movement itself:

> We must remember that there was a time – the much extolled 'Christian' age – when expressing the sort of ideas we find, for instance, in a book like this, would have been a sure way to be burned at the stake.

> ...Many things that Christians tenaciously cling to are irretrievably past. We do not want to *go back to* things of the past, - we want to *go forward* to new experiences that we ourselves do not yet know!

> ...As long as we permit **the sort of church we are developing for tomorrow[!!!]** to be more influenced by the taste and expectations of clericalistic, traditionalistic, or fundamentalist Christians than by the questions and needs of those we want to reach, all our efforts for church development will be nothing but spiritual cosmetics.

> ...As we have seen, the different paradigms described are not just thought paradigms; they are life paradigms. ...It is not difficult to understand the new paradigm. But it is far more difficult to accept the effect it has on our lives.

> ...Only an existential crisis can put enough pressure on us to cause us to adopt a new paradigm. I am therefore convinced that God will send his people many crises in the coming years to prepare them for the tasks he wants them to fulfill.

> ...Conflict will increase rather than decrease. This is normal for a time with conflicting paradigms – until the new paradigm overcomes the resistance from advocates of the old ways who cling more and more tenaciously to the old structures as the

new ways become more and more established.

There are Christians who think it is an illusion to suppose that the concern behind natural church development can be fulfilled by means of reforms. They believe that we should not try to improve existing conditions, but rather set up a better version. They compare all efforts to reform the existing system with the rearrangement of the furniture on the doomed Titanic. What is really necessary, they argue, is not a reformation, but a revolution. Maybe they are right.[251]

No better response can be given than the words of St. Paul:

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort you hearts and establish them in every good work and word.   (II Thessalonians 2:13-17 *ESV)*

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251   Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, p. 269-271 - bold emphasis added.

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APPENDIX I[252]

Goal-Oriented Pastor ("Empowering Leadership")

8. Our pastor has an inspiring optimism.
15. Our pastor prefers to do the work himself rather than to delegate it to others.
24. Many Christians are involved in preparing our worship services.
30. Our pastor concentrates on the tasks in the church for which he is gifted.
34. Our pastor looks for help from lay workers to complement those points for which he himself is not specially gifted.
40. Our pastor prefers to evade conflict.
50. Our pastor has too much work.
59. Our pastor gives a lot of church members the opportunity to help in organizing the church service.

Gift-Oriented Ministry

1. I know my spiritual gifts.
9. I enjoy the tasks I do in the church fellowship.
16. I feel that the church supports me in my task.
25. It is my experience that God obviously uses my work for building the church.
31. The tasks I perform in my church are in accordance with my gifts.
35. I feel my task in the church is a great challenge.
45. I know what value my work has in the total work of the church.

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252   From Schalk, "Organizational Diagnosis," pp. 37-44.

Passionate Spirituality

2. I know that other church members pray for me regularly.
12. I enjoy reading the Bible on my own.
26. I experience the tranforming influences faith has in the different areas of my life (e.g., profession, family, spare time, etc.).
32. I am enthusiastic about my church.
36. The Word of God is the most important authority in the decisions of my everyday life.
46. Our pastor is a spiritual example to me.
53. Very often I have reason to thank God for his work in my life.
57. I firmly believe that God will act even more powerfully in our church in the coming years.
60. I often tell other Christians when I have experienced something from God.
63. People in our church are highly motivated to do church work.

Functional Structures

3. I am fully informed about our church's plan for church growth.
13. I know which goals our church will pursue in the coming years.
17. It is my impression that the structure of our church hinders church life rather than promotes it.
27. The activities of our church are characterized by successful planning and organization.
41. In our church we try new things very often.
47. I could write down the organizational structure in my church.
54. The lay workers of our church are trained frequently.

Inspiring Worship Service

4. Attending the worship service is an inspiring experience for me.
11. I enjoy listening to the sermons in the worship service.
18. I feel that the church service has a positive influence on me.
21. I feel that the sermon in the worship service speaks to my personal situation.
42. The music in the church services helps me to worship God.
48. Our worship services are creative.
51. Our worship service is prepared by a team.
58. Optimal care is given to our children during our church services.
64. I am often bored in the worship service.

Holistic Small Groups

5. I am a member of a group in my church where it is possible to talk about personal problems.
19. I am a member of a group in my church in which others will pray with me and for me if needed.
22. I am a member of a group in our church in which we talk about spiritual questions.
28. I enjoy my small group very much.
37. I am a member of a small group in my church in which I feel at home.
62. In the small group of our church to which I belong, we spend lots of time on things which are irrelevant to me.
67. The personal relationships in my small groups are excellent.
68. In my small group we have trust towards one another.
69. I can be as active as I like in my small group.
70. In the groups to which I belong, it is easy for newcomers to be integrated into the group's life.

Need-Oriented Evangelism

6. I know that programs exist in our church which are particularly applicable to nonchristians.
33. Our church has particular activites for those who are new in faith.
38. People having newly come to faith find friends in our church quickly.
43. It is my impression that the evangelistic activities in our church lack imagination.
49. Creative evangelistic activities aren't our strength.
52. When new people visit church events, we approach them openly and lovingly.
55. In our church the question of evangelism is discussed at all possible opportunities.
61. New visitors are welcomed warmly.
65. Evangelism is an important topic in our church.
66. The communication in our church is characterized by religious jargon.

High Love Quotient ("Loving Relationships")

7. It is difficult for me to show my feeling to other Christians.
10. I find it very positive if people laugh in our church.
14. I find it easy to tell other Christians about my feelings.
20. In our church it is possible to talk with other people about feelings and problems.
23. I would describe the relationships which I have within the church as quite superficial.
29. There is a lot of joy and laughter in our church.
39. The atmosphere of our church is strongly influenced by praise and compliments.
44. When someone in our church does a good job I tell them.
56. When someone in our church has a different opinion from me, I prefer to be silent rather than to endanger peace