

*ἐκκλησία*: AN INSTITUTION OR MOVEMENT

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## *ἐκκλησίᾳ*: AN INSTITUTION OR MOVEMENT

Two previous papers entitled “The Epic Problem” and “The Epic Solution” called for decentralized evangelical missional communities or more succinctly, Freedom Communities. The papers recognized the critical imbalance that currently embodies the evangelical church, which leads to passive consumerism instead of active Christian involvement. Accordingly, Freedom Communities encourage movement dynamics in order to balance an overemphasis on the institutional establishment. Unfortunately, for centuries the concepts of institution and movement have fought against one another. For example, the Protestant Reformers dissented mightily against the *institutional* church by criticizing its claim to unlimited authority as well as its perceived and real abuse of power.<sup>1</sup> More recently, D. A. Carson, an influential Reformed Evangelical scholar, castigates the emerging church *movement* by suggesting it engages in reductionism, condemns confessional Christianity, while simultaneously embodying a “theological shallowness and intellectual incoherence.”<sup>2</sup> This paper steps aside from pitting the two sides against one another and instead, reconciles the critical importance of the interrelationship between institutions and movements. The paper commences with an overview of institutional and movement dynamics and the arguments for both. Next, a biblical analysis from the book of Acts commences, which harmonizes the relationship between movement and institutional dynamics. Finally, an examination of practical methods of convergence of institution and movement dynamics ensue.

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1. Joseph A. Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 140.

2. D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 57.

## THE MOVEMENT AND INSTITUTION ARGUMENTS

In preparation for an analysis of movements, institutions, and the relationships between the two, an attempt at defining each component is necessary. Hugh Hecló may provide the most appropriate modern definition of an *institution* by stating, "Institutions represent inheritances of valued purposes with attendant rules and moral obligations."<sup>3</sup> In other words, institutions, including the institution of the church, attempt to preserve the purposes of the organization through structured guidelines. Alternatively, Tim Keller explains, "A church (or group of churches) with *movement* dynamics generates its own converts, ideas, leaders, and resources from within in order to realize its vision of being the church for its city and culture."<sup>4</sup> The key to Keller's explanation is the recognition that holding too tightly to institutional dynamics stifles movement. In his book, *Built to Last*, Jim Collins succinctly summarizes the important interplay between institutional and movement dynamics by coining the phrase "Preserve the Core/Stimulate Progress."<sup>5</sup> All too often, institutions attempt to preserve the core, but lack progress, while movements stimulate progress, but risk losing its core.

Consistent with Keller's definition, the specific type of movement dynamics incorporated into Freedom Communities originate from within the local community of believers. In fact, the decentralized and multiplicative nature of Freedom Communities, by definition, must spontaneously spawn activity from individuals within the institution or the activity no longer qualifies as movement. Allen Roland uses the phrase "spontaneous expansion" to describe the movement dynamics necessary for healthy progress and defines the term as "the expansion

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3. Hugh Hecló, *On Thinking Institutionally* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 38 [emphasis mine].

4. Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 337 [emphasis mine].

5. James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the church explaining to others the Gospel which they have found for themselves.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in alignment with the Freedom Community initiatives of grow, share, and serve, Allen explains, “Spontaneous expansion begins with the individual effort of the individual Christian to assist his fellow, when common experience, common difficulties, common toil have *first* brought the two together.”<sup>7</sup> Allen’s explanation of movement dynamics accurately portrays the necessity of decentralization down to each individual participant.

Unfortunately, when the institution primarily focuses on *preserving* its purposes to the exclusion of *furthering* its purposes, institutional dynamics undermine movement dynamics. As exemplified by the Reformers referenced in the introduction, a long and storied history of institutional attenuation within organized religion fills seminary textbooks. The great religious movements, which provided the impetus for tectonic paradigm shifts, inevitably fade into the institutional structures that attempt to codify the benefit of the movement. Paradoxically, the honorable intentions of institutionalization come with significant risks as observed by H. Richard Niebuhr:

Institutions can never conserve without betraying the movements from which they proceed. The institution is static, whereas its parent movement has been dynamic; it confines men within its limits, while the movement had liberated them from the bondage of institutions; it looks to the past, [although] the movement had pointed forward. Though in content the institution resembles the dynamic epoch whence it proceeded, in spirit it is like the state before the revolution. So the Christian church, after the early period, often seemed more closely related in attitude to the Jewish synagogue and the Roman state than to the age of Christ and his apostles; its creed was often more like a system of philosophy than like the living gospel.<sup>8</sup>

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6. Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes That Hinder It* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1962), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 2, Location 110-14.

7. *Ibid*, Chapter 2, Location 153-54 [emphasis mine].

8. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 168.

Interestingly, Niebuhr's observations, likely written from his office while teaching at Yale's Divinity School, represented the same concerns of Ivy League alumnus James Madison who, a couple hundred years earlier, foiled Patrick Henry's bill to institutionalize Christianity by stating, "The government establishment of religion, since the days of Constantine, had always been bad for religion."<sup>9</sup> In fact, in some ways, most of the major denominations in America including the Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were a reaction to the institutional church.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, numerous attempts to undermine certain institutional aspects of Christianity have occurred.

In America, the emerging church represents the most recent rise of anti-institutionalism. Alan Hirsch, the author of *The Forgotten Ways*, and leader of the emerging church movement suggests the term "anti-institutionalism" is too negative, and instead, recommends the phrase "holy rebellion."<sup>11</sup> Holy rebellion, according to Hirsch, is the key to church renewal and uses Wesley as an example to support his claim that "vital movements arise always in the context of rejection by the predominant institutions."<sup>12</sup> However, Hirsch's argument is shortsighted. Numerous examples of vital movements have occurred within institutions without participants rejecting the institution or the institution ultimately rejecting the participants. For example, it is common knowledge that John Wesley never separated from the Church of England and in a letter to the Reverend Mr. Clark in 1756 states, "I still believe 'the Episcopal form of church

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9. Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh E. Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2004), 48.

10. Ibid., 43-48.

11. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 55.

12. Ibid., 56.

government to be scriptural and Apostolical.”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Wesley’s high-powered and influential movement did not reject the institution nor was Wesley rejected by the Church of England, but instead, it was a “little church within a larger church.”<sup>14</sup> A more recent example is the civil rights movement. A black Baptist minister, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led a movement in which “blacks by the thousands showed their determination to defy and unmask the oppressive laws and practices under which they lived.”<sup>15</sup> The significant majority of protests were nonviolent and the emphasis remained on renewing a government institution, not rejecting democracy. Furthermore, the incredible challenges notwithstanding, the institution did not ultimately reject the leaders of the civil rights movement, but in fact, currently celebrate them. In sum, hinting that the institution needs eliminated or removed in order to solve the current challenges facing the church is naïve for two reasons. First, although it might have seemed easier for Martin Luther King to suggest removing the United States judicial system while sitting in jail, surely the preposterous thought never crossed the reformers mind. Instead, the situation necessitated courage, vision, leadership, and even persecution, not an undermining of the United States government as an institution. Second, if the emerging church succeeds, as Hirsch suggests, in initiating a movement through a system, framework, and architecture of disciple making, missional impulses, apostolic environments, *communitas*, and organic systems, the author will have effectively engaged in the very thing he despises – institutionalism.

The benefits of institutional dynamics must not be underestimated. As any entrepreneur or church planter will attest, once leaders generate significant activity, structure is immediately

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13. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 13-14:211.

14. Gaustad and Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*, 47.

15. Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume II: The Reformation to the Present Day*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), 485.

necessary or the movement risks uncontrollable chaos. For example, Starbucks Corporation began in 1971 as a local coffee retailer in Seattle, Washington. From the outset, the focal point or core of the Starbucks business model focused on high quality coffee. However, imagine a complete absence of institutional dynamics. Without preserving the core purpose, the local store operator could decide to serve hamburgers on Monday, pizza on Tuesday, and back to coffee on Wednesday throwing employees and customers into a state of confusion, regardless of the magnificence of the coffee product. Likewise, imagine a pastor who wears blue jeans one Sunday and an Armani suit the next, preaches Christianity one Sunday and Hinduism the next, alongside a worship band that plays Christian rock music one Sunday and classical music the next. The absurdity of the complete absence of institutional dynamics is obvious. Accordingly, Hugh Heclo appropriately states, “Something deep inside us seems to recognize the dysfunctional, unsatisfactory quality of an anti-institutional way of living. Inwardly we know that institutional values and commitments are important.”<sup>16</sup> A movement inherently understands the important role that institutionalism provides to support the movement, for without some effort to preserve the core of the movement – institutionalization, then no movement can survive. Heclo continues, “To live in a culture that turns its back on institutions is equivalent to trying to live with a physical body without its skeleton or hoping to use a language but not its grammar. A culture wholly committed to distrusting its institutions is a self-contradiction.”<sup>17</sup>

In sum, institutional and movement dynamics must live an interdependent reality, both critically important, both relying on each other for maximum efficacy. Martin Buber states, “Centralization and codification, undertaken in the interests of religion (institutionalism), are a

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16. Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally*, 9.

17. *Ibid.*, 38.

danger to the core of religion, unless there is the strongest life of faith, embodied in the whole existence of the community, and not relaxing in its renewing activity (movement).”<sup>18</sup> In other words, when institutional dynamics focus on *preserving* its purposes to the exclusion of *furthering* its purposes, institutional dynamics undermine movement dynamics, which leads to corpselike stagnation, and when movement dynamics focus on *furthering* its purposes to the exclusion of *preserving* its purposes, movement dynamics undermine institutional dynamics, which leads to irrepressible chaos.

### **BIBLICAL SUPPORT**

Scripture beautifully portrays the important relationship between institutional and movement dynamics within the local church. Luke’s pen provides insight into approximately three decades of the earliest church history in its purest form from the lens of two of the most revered apostles – Peter and Paul. The church begins in Jerusalem under the leadership of Peter by focusing on the Jewish population. Paul then enters the scene and leads the church beyond the borders of Jerusalem by introducing the message of Christ to the Gentile population. Under the leadership of Peter and Paul, the relationships between movement and institutional dynamics develop with exquisite harmony.

#### **Movement: Peter**

The activity commences just as all Christian movements begin, with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4, NASB).<sup>19</sup> As the Holy Spirit prompted Peter to lead and preach, an unbridled movement emerged in Jerusalem. Thousands of individuals gathered and devoted themselves “to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). The

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18. Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 170 [parenthesis mine].

19. Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are taken from the New American Standard Version (1995 update), Lockman Foundation.



excitement built as a sense of awe overcame the new community. The community banded together and pushed against the institutional forces of the Jewish religion and the Roman government to change the world. Accordingly, as with all movements of Holy Spirit, the people praised God and the “Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). God’s mighty power planted the seeds for what proved to be an unstoppable force in a small group of Holy Spirit filled believers. The bliss and cohesion of the new community of believers seemed unshakable as they “continued in one mind” (Acts 2:46). However, as with all movements, chaos was just around the corner.

### **Chaos: Peter**

The movement of the early church resulted in both external and internal chaos. Externally, the religious establishment threatened and imprisoned Peter in an attempt to stop him from speaking or teaching “in the name of Jesus” (Acts 2:1-22). Internally, Peter faced the challenge of dealing with the blatant lie of a married couple who were “members” of the community (See Acts 5:1-11). Additionally, the movement dynamics led to divisive complaints arising from the participants within the community. In fact, Luke directly connects the growth of the church with the grievances by encompassing the two concepts in one sentence: “At the time while the disciples were increasing in number (growth), a complaint arose (grievances)” (Acts 6:1).<sup>20</sup> Complaints are the natural result of movement dynamics and the first church was no exception.

### **Institutionalism: Peter**

The apostles responded institutionally to the complaint, which preserved the peace so effective ministry could continue without interruption. An important initiative of the first church

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20. Parentheses mine.

entailed sharing financial resources for food and shelter so that “there was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:34). Accordingly, the believers would gather the proceeds from the sale of property and allocate the resources “to each as any had need” (Acts 4:35). However, the Greek-speaking believers complained that the Hebrew-speaking believers were receiving preferential treatment because the Greek widows were “being overlooked in the daily serving of food” (Acts 6:1). The leaders of the movement realized that taking their eyes off their primary purpose of ministry to personally distribute the food would have been a grave mistake, so they explain to the congregation, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). Instead, the apostles solve the problem institutionally by appointing seven reputable men, often regarded as the first church deacons, to be in charge of the task of impartially allocating the resources. Joseph Fitzmyer, in his commentary on the book of Acts, astutely notes, “Unity and peace have to be preserved, but not by having the Twelve spend time on such *trivia*; the Twelve are depicted manifesting a proper sense of priority.”<sup>21</sup> The leaders of the movement understood that institutional systems were necessary, not as the primary function of the church, but so the movement and core purposes of ministry could continue without interruption.

### **More Movement: Peter**

Too often in modern Christendom, the institutional issues become the primary focus, but the biblical perspective is for the institution to solve problems and resolve issues that hinder progress so clergy and laity can devote themselves to active ministry effort – the movement (see Acts 6:4). In other words, institutional dynamics exist to support the movement; movement dynamics do not exist to support the institution. The biblical pattern always starts with movement, and then leads to chaos, which necessitates institutionalism *for the purpose of* more

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21. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2010), 344 [emphasis mine].

movement. Accordingly, four verses later, Luke confirms that instituting the seven deacons resulted in more movement: “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 6:7). The pattern of “movement – chaos – intuitionism – more movement” continues throughout the book of Acts especially under the leadership of Paul as the ministry of the church extends beyond Jerusalem.

### **Movement: Paul**

The first half of the book of Acts primarily focuses Peter’s leadership, but Luke turns to Paul’s ministry for the majority of the second half of Acts. Analogous to Peter’s call from the Holy Spirit, while Paul and his co-laborers “were ministering to the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul (also known as Paul) for the work to which I have called them’” (Acts 13:2).<sup>22</sup> Although some credit the institutional church for sending Paul to the Gentiles, nothing could be further from the truth. Movements of God are neither man-made nor man-initiated. In response to the promptings of Holy Spirit, Paul joined God with a herculean effort to transmit the Gospel beyond Jerusalem to Gentile nations. Accordingly, Paul’s three missionary journeys initiated an explosion of growth as church after church plant sprouted across the Gentile population under Paul’s leadership. However, as with Peter, the movement generated almost immediate chaos.

### **Chaos: Paul**

Just as Peter faced ubiquitous chaos, the movement dynamics surrounding Paul’s ministry quickly led to both external and internal chaos. Externally, the religious establishment was jealous of Paul due to the huge crowds gathering to hear his sermons, so they “incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution

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<sup>22</sup>. Parentheses mine.

against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them from their district” (Acts 13:50). Accordingly, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Iconium and then to Lystra where Paul healed a man, which led the jealous religious leaders to stone Paul and kick him out of the city, “supposing him to be dead” (Acts 14:19). Internally, certain men were teaching the believing community that salvation was contingent upon circumcision and “Paul and Barnabas had great dissension with them” (Acts 15:1-2). Unfortunately, similar divisiveness continues to exist in modern Christendom, as over half of the self-professed Christians 18 and older likewise believe salvation is dependent upon certain identified good works.<sup>23</sup>

### **Institutionalism: Paul**

Similar to the apostle’s response to the complaints Peter faced regarding feeding the widows, the apostles responded institutionally to the internal divisiveness Paul faced. By now, elders already existed in Jerusalem so no appointments were necessary. In fact, Paul appointed elders for every church he and Barnabas had planted (Acts 4:23). Accordingly, the apostles and elders gathered to address the argument that circumcision is a requirement for salvation (Acts 15:6). After a significant amount of debate, Peter announced the decision to the believing community (Acts 15:7). In short, Peter explained, “We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11). In other words, grace was the medium for salvation, not circumcision or other human acts. At that point, the people kept silent (Acts 15:12). Fitzmyer explains that the believers’ silence represents acceptance of Peter’s position since culturally “silence gives consent.”<sup>24</sup> Again, the institutional response to the divisive argument preserved the core purpose of the ministry so the movement could continue without interruption.

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23. George Barna, *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus* (Ventura, CA and New York: Metaformation Inc. and Strategenius Group LLC, 2011), 37.

24. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 548.

### **More Movement: Paul**

At this point, one may inappropriately conclude that the apostles and elders compose a type of board or group boss whose job is to direct the movement. However, the Holy Spirit is clearly in control of the movement as Paul and others follow His promptings. Furthermore, the concept of the apostles and elders exemplifying a boss like function defies Jesus's words:

“You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Without question, the function of the elders is to *serve*, and the exemplary service delivered by the council at Jerusalem is unmistakable. The parties involved in the movement asked for help from the elders and the elders responded admirably. Accordingly, the movement continued in force and the “churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily” (Acts 16:5). Once again, the reader notices that the institution is crucial, not to serve itself, but to serve the movement of God and the activity of His people in order to further the impact of the movement. Paul's church planting effort continues to demonstrate the pattern exhibited in Peter's ministry: movement – chaos – intuitionism – more movement, providing a powerful method for current church growth initiatives.

### **PRACTICAL APPROACH TO INSTITUTIONAL AND MOVEMENT DYNAMICS**

FINAL SECTION COMING SOON...

TABLE 1

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Movement</b>
<b>Procedures</b> Held together by rules and procedure	<b>Purpose</b> Held together by common purpose, vision
<b>Responsibilities</b> A culture of rights and quotas; a balance of responsibilities and rewards	<b>Commitment</b> A culture of sacrificial commitment
<b>Extrinsic Rewards</b> Emphasis on compensation, “extrinsic” rewards	<b>Intrinsic Rewards</b> Emphasis on celebration, “intrinsic” rewards
<b>Process</b> Changes in policy involve long process, all departments, much resistance and negotiation	<b>Vision</b> Vision comes from charismatic leaders; accepted with loyalty
<b>Procedural Decisions</b> Decisions made procedurally and slowly	<b>Relational Decisions</b> Decisions made relationally and rapidly
<b>Top Down</b> Innovations from top down; implemented in department silos	<b>Bottom Up</b> Innovations bubble up from all members; executed by the whole
<b>Fractional</b> Feels like a patchwork of turf-conscious mini-agencies or departments	<b>Holistic</b> Feels like a unified whole
<b>Stability</b> Values: security, predictability	<b>Risk</b> Values: risk, serendipity
<b>Slow</b> Stable, slow to change	<b>Quick</b> Dynamic, quick to change
<b>Tradition</b> Emphasis on tradition, past, and custom; future trends are dreaded and denied	<b>Future</b> Emphasis on present and future; little emphasis on past
<b>Tenure</b> Jobs give to those with accreditation and tenure	<b>Results</b> Jobs given to those producing best results

\* The above table represents a brief comparison of institution and movement dynamics. See Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 341 [titles mine].

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