



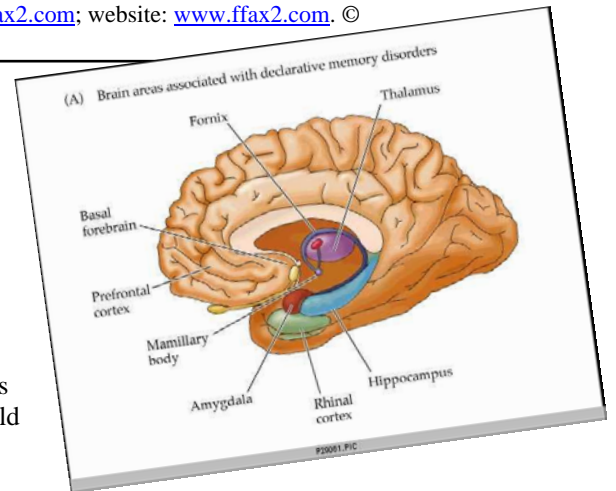
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Kingdom-focussed E-Mail news-bulletin with inspiring reports of God at work around the world, with special emphasis on the current global reformation of Church and Missions. **Editor:** Wolfgang Simson. Subscription: €30/ US-\$ 40 per year. Freitagfax 2.0, PO Box 1248, D-79397 Kandern, Germany. Email info@ffax2.com; website: www.ffax2.com. © Dawn Europa e.V.; 22 issues per year, available in English and German.

Can The Church Rediscover Itself?

Could it be that, like someone waking up after an accident with profound amnesia, the Bride of Christ, the Church, after being run over by several trucks in the course of church history, is shaking herself and is now trying hard to remember who in the world she is? Amnesia, defined as the partial or complete loss of memory, prevents someone to know who he is – and act according to his standing. Could it be that God is treating his church to experience a global recovery from century-old amnesia - and actually rediscover itself?



Floyd McClung, well known for his evangelistic work in Amsterdam's red light district and co-author of the recently published book "Starting A House Church", posted a review of Alan Hirsch's new book on the web called "The Forgotten Ways". Floyd says: "The church in the West is no longer engaging the culture or a force for transformation in society. The church is irrelevant to most people. Those same people are interested in Jesus, pray and believe in a higher power. They have not said no to God but they are not attracted to the cultural way we package church. That says to me we need to re-imagine church, to seriously look at new ways of doing church, ways that get us out of the church bubble and into the world. Here is the review:"

Alan Hirsch begins his new book, *The Forgotten Ways*, with a challenging question: why do some Christian movements grow so incredibly fast absent professional clergy, official leadership structures, central organization, and the ability to gather together in large group meetings? And what should this observation mean to us today? His answer is that they live out a radically different paradigm of 'church' - a missional-incarnational model, which he contends is the organic people movement Jesus initiated, rather than the hierarchical, religious, institutional model we have pursued during the last 17 hundred years.

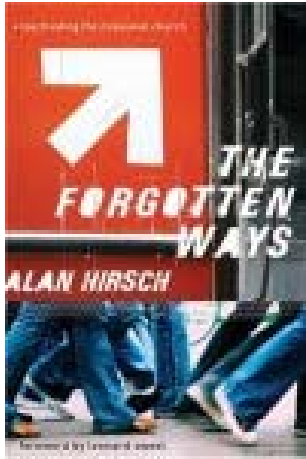
This new paradigm of church cannot, in Hirsch's opinion, be merely a tag-on to what already exists. The system forces of church-as-usual disallow the co-existence of the emerging paradigm - when it is implemented as just another program to attract the younger generation. New wine has never performed well in old wineskins. A revival of the movement Jesus gave life insists on change at the very core of today's Christianity. Our systems story must be re-imagined - i.e. the very basis for how we feel, think and behave.

Hirsch believes that the key to fulfilling God's call to His church is based upon whether or not missional DNA is the basis of their re-creation in Christ. In the current church paradigm, religious institutions hold the template for what church ought to look like. Man is in control, measuring other men & women by their own interpretations of what is deemed sacred. Alternatively, when the Spirit dwells within a newborn Christian, it is the God Himself who moves the individual, not a creed or institutional handbook. Fear of heresy has compelled centuries of church leadership to usurp the role of guide from the Spirit, thus installing clones of a man-made religion throughout the world, rather than reproducing a Spirit-led movement built on missional DNA.

The author presents six elegant features of a healthy Jesus Movement:

1. Jesus Is Lord - Everything having to do with life here on earth must be brought under the rule of God. When we live out a dualistic notion of existence - i.e. separating sacred space where God is found from secular space where God is considered absent - we end up with operational polytheism. God must rule in every aspect of life as

the Alpha and Omega. Christians must continually assess whether other gods are leading in their lives - the god of consumerism, of power, of popularity, of financial security, etc. Be loyal to the One true God.



2. Disciple Making - Disciple making is one non-negotiable of any genuine expression of Christianity. Today's church has bought into the consumerism model, which has unwittingly made 90% of our members passive spectators, thus - for all intents and purposes - pagans in sheep clothing. Jesus must be embodied within us enabling each one of us to become the gospel to those around us 24/7 - as living love letters. The notion that right ideas alone will transform people is erroneous. Discipleship is about living out kingdom principles on a daily basis, as spiritual practitioners, among those we seek to disciple.

3. Missional-Incarnational Impulse - This is the practical, centrifugal, seed-spreading, de-churchifying, contextualizing, outworking of the missio Dei. There are four dimensions to this: Presence - as God lives within us, we must be living in authentic relationship with others; Proximity - God, having brought us into various relationships, calls us to be regularly accessible to folks in the place where they live out their lives; Powerlessness - we live to serve with humility, not to rule or to pontificate; Proclamation - we are to invite others to follow Jesus. We are called, as the Christ incarnation archetypically exemplified, to exercise a genuine identification and affinity for all others.

4. Apostolic Environment - If we really want missional church, then we must have a missional leadership system to drive it. Apostolic ministry is a function, not an office; a calling and a gifting, not an earned DMin. Biblically, this is not about having a charismatic personality, CEO acumen, or the appropriate denominational pedigree. It is about having a persistent, Spirit-led influence that awakens the church to its true calling and identity. Apostolic environments are enticingly visionary, persevering stubborn despite opposition, alliance building among those of similar convictions, consistent mentors of the next generation, and tireless in their efforts to restructure church structure so that it can remain a dynamic movement rather than a static institution.

5. Organic Systems - God is both beyond his creation as well as fully present in even the smallest subatomic particle. Therein lies the basis of our confidence in organic systems - it must always and entirely be seen as a God thing. When the Spirit indwells a believer, that person can be confidently sent out without the need of hierarchical control. Instead, the believer is networked with other believers while engaging in relationship building with non-believers. Movements are structure-lite and authority de-centralized because God is trusted to do as promised - to teach and guide each believer. Some have labelled this liquid church, meaning it is more immediately adaptive and responsive to the surrounding context because it takes seriously being both in Christ as well as part of the body of Christ. Christ is the undisputed, trusted head. Simultaneously we remain vitally and dependently connected to one another within the body. As in nature, organic systems intentionally reproduce (not clone) so that they maximize diversity, which - contrary to the thinking of the hierarchical model - actually decreases vulnerability.

6. Communitas, Not Community - Could middle-class culture actually be contrary to authentic gospel values? If our culture is preoccupied with safety and security, for ourselves and particularly for our children; if we are obsessed with comfort and convenience and thus the penchant for consumerism - then the pejorative and proverbial bourgeois shoe probably fits. How might this change? Hirsch posits that by leaving the context of security and entering the context of liminality (the initially disorienting arena at the margins of our expected community of comfort and safety) we are driven to develop bonds of communality - communitas - among others suffering similar life difficulties. Throughout history liminality and communitas have been the more normative existence of God's people when they were living at their spiritual best. Against this is the tendency of all living systems toward equilibrium, with a concurrent loss of adaptability and diversity. Stasis actually diminishes the possibility of survival because we become reluctant, even resistant, to change which is the one constant of life in this world. The Spirit is wisely and continuously moving the church to the edge of chaos where we must take risks and creatively rethink every aspect of being in order to continue as kingdom people."

Alan is also the co-author of "The Shaping of Things to Come". Alan and his wife Debra (see picture) recently moved from Australia to the USA. Find out more on the web at www.theforgottenways.org

