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# THE RATIONAL SHEPHERD: CORPORATE PRACTICES AND THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

*Crises and shortcomings of various sorts have prompted calls, especially from powerful corporate elites and organizations, for greater managerial expertise and training within the churches. This article examines a few select examples of growing reliance upon managerial techniques in church life and practice in recent years as a prelude to considering whether more areas of pastoral organization should be transformed by ideologies and techniques derived from for-profit corporations. Using examples drawn primarily from contemporary Catholicism in the United States, this article aims to contribute to ecumenical discussions in ecclesiology, ethics and economics.*

KEYWORDS

*capitalism, Catholicism, Christian ethics, discipleship, ecclesiology, lay formation, management, managerialism*

## *Introduction: Can Corporations Save the Church?*

'The Catholic Church in the United States is going through the greatest crisis in its history.' So declares Frederick W. Gluck, former managing director of McKinsey and Company, a worldwide firm specializing in corporate consulting and management. The proximate cause of this crisis, of course, is the scandal of sexual abuse of children by priests; the inability to solve the problem, in his view, has been due to management failures within the church.

The solution, in his view, is greater reliance upon, and internalization of, corporate managerial practices in several areas: human resource

management, finances, leadership, and adjustments to changed market position in the larger arena of consumers of religion. In terms of human resources, Gluck notes the problems of 'insufficient talent and inadequate processes for managing it'. This leadership – secular clergy and religious – is aging rapidly, its numbers are down significantly over the past 40 years, it is demoralized due to scandals and conflict, and reflects the reality that 'the church is no longer the first choice of the best and the brightest'. Further, he laments the absence of a 'performance measuring system' at any level, and the lack of a planning mechanism in terms of clerical/lay roles in the future; overall, 'the church seems to lack even the rudiments of an effective human resource management process or system'.[1]

On the financial side, 'the church's traditional sources of revenue are drying up', potential liabilities from the sexual abuse scandal are enormous, and church financial management systems are fragmented and uncoordinated. This corporate-consultant view of church leadership laments that 'The U.S. church is a subsidiary of a large enterprise located in a foreign country where management has been historically committed to resisting change and maintaining the status quo'. This same national church lacks a central leadership able to drive a movement for change, this church's leadership is old and allergic to change, and hierarchical thinking dominates most thinking about how to manage. All of this exacerbates problems caused by a 'potential market ... much better informed and aware of options available to them than in the past', especially inasmuch as 'many of the faithful (customers) no longer feel committed to the product line and openly reject portions of it as irrelevant to their lives'. The abuse scandal has lowered the church's reputation and the market's trust in it, all of which contributes to deterioration in the church's market position.

The answer, from Mr Gluck, is straightforward – the church should adopt more fully the sort of managerial practices and norms defined by for-profit corporations. His prescription for a 'turnaround' in the US Catholic Church includes a variety of financial and managerial changes, addition of comprehensive human resource policies, and similar initiatives. Doing this properly will require the creation of 'an advisory board of prominent Catholic laypeople capable of devoting substantial time and effort' to the managerial overhaul of the church. The US bishops should make clear to the Vatican 'the absolute necessity of adopting modern management methods in the US church' as part of the turnaround strategy.[2]

Mr Gluck is not alone in his demand for greater ecclesial inclusion of corporate practices and structures. For example, several researchers have

[1] Frederick W. Gluck, 'Crisis Management in the Church', *America* 189.18 (1 December 2002).

[2] Gluck, 'Crisis Management'.

described the inadequacy of internal financial controls in church life, leading to unacceptable levels of pilfering and embezzlement by church people – pastors, lay staff, and volunteers.[3] A noted ecclesiologist in the United States laments that priestly formation has been altogether too 'spiritual' in nature, and needs a healthy dose of managerial training in order to equip pastors to serve the modern parish and its members.[4] Among marketers and advertising executives, there is a widely shared sense that matters for the church would improve were Christianity given something of a 'rebranding' and repositioning in the religious market via greater research on consumer preferences, demographics, and changes in church life and advertising that reflect this information.

Given all of this, it is fitting that, two years after his first article in the Catholic journal *America* referenced above, Mr Gluck would return to offer additional advice on the necessity for a corporate revamp of Catholicism. Toward what exemplar should the Church look to see how best to operate in the modern world? Gluck answers without hesitation – the church can and must learn from Wal-Mart, the goliath, worldwide discount retailer. Despite controversy over some of the firm's practices (paying unlivable wages, dumping its employees' medical and other needs on public welfare programs, unscrupulous manufacturing practices among its suppliers, rabidly anti-union ideology, and seemingly unavoidable tendency to demolish local businesses of almost all sorts), Gluck says the Church could learn many things from his corporate success story.

> With over one million employees, the Catholic Church in the United States is comparable in size to Wal-Mart, but it still follows a feudal model of governance and management ... Such a feudal approach misses the benefits of modern management. In these days of modern communications and management, the benefits of capitalizing on economies of scale and learning in the management of human, financial and physical (land, buildings and equipment) resources are available to any enterprise with the leadership, courage and skill to make use of them.[5]

To his previous list of areas requiring corporate overhaul, Gluck adds purchasing practices (centralized rather than decentralized purchasing of everything from paper and pencils to telephone service and medical supplies, saving millions, perhaps billions, of dollars) and investment

[3] For example Sandee Dolbee and Mark Sauer, 'Report shows diocese's accounting system lacking', *San Diego Union-Tribune* (31 July 2007); Robert W. West and Charles Zech, 'Internal Financial Controls in the U.S. Catholic Church', available at http://www.villanova.edu/business/assets/documents/excellence/church/catholicchurchfinances.pdf.

[4] Robert Kress, 'The Priest-Pastor as CEO', *America* 186.8 (11 March 2002), p. 9.

[5] Frederick W. Gluck, 'Can the Church Learn from Wal-Mart?' *America* 190.17 (17 May 2004).

policies. While he adds what seems like a pair of pro-forma disclaimers in this latter piece ('The church is not, of course, a corporation' he notes, and he recognizes that church problems 'cannot be solved by better management alone'), he concludes that

> If the church is prepared to welcome the laity as full partners in important positions of authority and in key policy and decision-making bodies, the challenges of effective management will quickly be met. If the current conviction that only the clergy can play primary roles in the management of church affairs persists and the all too obvious short-comings in the church's capacity to manage its affairs continues, the current decline in effectiveness and relevance of the church will undoubtedly continue and accelerate as the clergy continues to age and replacements of equal capability and commitment are not forthcoming.[6]

By this it is reasonable to assume that it is the professional and managerial subset of the laity that Gluck intends most to empower, rather than washer-women and peasants. We'll return later to this point.

Are people like Gluck correct – is it the case that more managerial expertise and reasoning is essential to move the church forward, to enable it to serve God's purposes in an increasingly complex social, cultural and political world? In appraising calls for increased corporate managerialism[7] within the church, it seems essential to assess the experiences of the recent past as part of the discernment process. This paper, then, is a modest contribution – focusing primarily but not exclusively on select aspects of Roman Catholicism in the United States over the past few decades – to the sort of inquiry this year's conference as a whole has assumed for itself.

To state my conclusions in advance, I am persuaded that, while the church has a great many problems, more managerial expertise and rationality as exemplified by for-profit corporations are not the solution for most of them. Rather, given its considerable formative powers – its capacity to shape attitudes, dispositions, and ways of inhabiting the world – managerialism threatens to transform the church more than serve it, accelerating the already deep accommodation of the church to the non-Christian world in ways detrimental to the gospel and way of life it establishes in the

[6] Gluck, 'Can the Church Learn from Wal-Mart?'

[7] Definitions of managerialism abound, but MacIntyre remains a useful benchmark. To him, managerialism's claim to justified authority includes two major assumptions: 'the existence of a domain of morally neutral fact about which the manager is to be expert'; and the ability to identify and utilize law-like generalizations about human and institutional life sufficient to 'mold, influence and control the social environment'. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 77. This strong fact-value distinction is joined to an unwillingness 'to think of effectiveness as a distinctly moral concept', p. 74.

world. By looking at some examples of how corporate tools and complexes may work to refashion the church into something more akin to for-profit corporate structures, we might be better equipped to contemplate the sort of forward-looking recommendations made by Mr Gluck and his friends – and he and his friends are very powerful players in the world of Catholic politics in the United States.

### *Interlude: Should the Good Shepherd be Rational?*[8]

In choosing the title 'The Rational Shepherd', I have given myself permission to explore whether making the shepherd more rational might entail draining the goodness from that same shepherd. At a minimum, it seems clear that a rational shepherd is not *necessarily* a good one, except perhaps in those traditions of modernity that conflate rationality (or deflate goodness) until one term defines the other. Such may well make for a better bottom line, or more sheep-per-shepherding-unit, for example, but it does seem to go against the grain of much of what we know of God as the good shepherd exemplified in the New Testament.

In fact, God as revealed in Jesus Christ seems anything but rational as understood in modernity, anything but a good steward of resources. Consider, by way of example, the many ways in which God displays a poor business model. He seems to recommend paying latecomers to the vineyard's labor the same wage as those from whom he's extracted a full day's effort (Matt. 20:1–16). God seems willing to leave 99 sheep alone just to recover one lost one – leaving the majority unprotected against the predations of wolves or more aggressive shepherds; at a minimum, the time spent on just one sheep could obviously be put to better use – increasing the size of the flock, or perhaps diversifying out of shepherding into another sector (Matt. 18:12–14). What looks to be God's personnel policy may generate public relations benefit (for employing the 'differently abled'), but recruiting the poor, the lame and the marginalized (Lk. 14:12–14) is not how a rational actor builds an enterprise. The quality of human capital matters greatly, after all, talk of stones the builder rejected notwithstanding.

Other manifestly irrational policies seem to typify the God that Jesus conveys –promising persecution and perhaps martyrdom to those who get your corporate message right (e.g. Mk 13:7–13; Lk. 9:23–26), putting the first in last place, not charging for healings, miracles, or loaves and fishes, and much more. God seems unaware that this management approach leads inevitably to bankruptcy: either God wasn't being literal in ways binding

[8] This section derives from Michael L. Budde, 'God is Not a Capitalist', in R. B. Laytham (ed.), *God is Not* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003).

on the rest of us (our preferred reading, in most cases), or else God needs sober-minded lower managers to protect God's patrimony from God's overly generous heart. That would be our job, of course, in most understandings of all of this – as in a business where layers of functionaries protect the enterprise from the profligate generosity of the kindly but out-of-touch founding patriarch, now reduced to a figurehead role.

One may object, of course, that all of this describes God, and we are certainly not God. Such is both true and trivial, especially if it allows us to evade the deeper point and questions of how to read Scripture communally in these contexts. Christians have long believed that whatever we conclude God to be or not to be should have some significant influence on what we as the church should or should not be. If God is merciful, the church should not be extortionate. If God loves enemies, so should the church practice enemy love and reconciliation rather than vengeance and retributive bloodlust. While God's mission does not rely upon the church perfectly acting as God acts, direction does matter and similarity does matter, making the church's imperfect witness of today a herald of the eschatological fulfillment promised in the Lord's time. And while one may not be able to derive a 'theology of organization' directly from the New Testament, no theological approach to such concerns can be wildly at odds with the picture of God in Christ offered therein.

So, one crucial consideration among others when assessing the utilization of for-profit tools and norms in church life is whether such allows the church to witness to this most unusual sort of God – one for whom profligate generosity and self-emptying bankruptcy is constitutive of God's own self. It does not rule out *ab initio* all learning from non-Christian sources, but it does suggest that one test of such innovations is whether they help form Christians capable of giving as God gives, and shepherding as God does. Does the church redefine 'rationality' in ways consonant with this good and generous Shepherd, or does the rationality of modernity redefine the gospel in ways more conducive to itself? Might it not be the case that the most 'rational' shepherd in the gospel drama is the much-maligned Caiaphas, a religious manager par excellence, whom crisis forced into recommending the death of one for the good of the people (Jn 18:14). To these sorts of questions we shall return later.

## *The Formative Power of Managerialism*

Elsewhere I have examined several cases in which adoption of for-profit corporate practices has done violence to ecclesial aims and aspirations. The Church's embrace of advertising and marketing has given us the licensed use of the image of Pope John Paul II for a brand of potato chips and pre-paid telephone cards. The encroachment of so-called 'death

corporations' – giant conglomerates that are fast taking over thousands of funeral homes, cemeteries, crematoria and the like – has led some Catholic diocese to enter into dubious partnerships with such firms, while other dioceses have stayed independent but adopted several of the conglomerates' questionable tactics.[9] More recently, product placement has entered the picture, as the Walt Disney Company created a contest that offered $1,000 and a trip to London to a pastor who mentioned 'The Chronicles of Narnia' in a sermon during the film's promotional period – pastors had only to submit their sermon to Disney to be entered in this drawing. In a similar merger of corporate promotion and congregational life, General Motors sent singer Patti LaBelle and a fleet of Chevrolet SUVs into 14 African-American megachurches for inspections and test drives.[10]

Beyond these sectoral cases stand some larger, more significant questions. It may well be that managerialism's most potent threat to the church flows from what can only be described as a contest of formation between them. Both seek to shape the affections, dispositions and desires of their disciples, both make definitive claims about the nature of reality and human existence, and both require that other loyalties and allegiances be oriented to them in an inferior or subordinated fashion. To the extent that the sort of rationalism embodied in corporate managerialism dominates within church life and practice, to that extent will the church shrink in significance and importance as a divinely gathered people charged with heralding and prefiguring however imperfectly the inbreaking Kingdom of God.

The formative powers of business managerialism are impressive precisely as they seem mundane in our day. As noted by John Haughey,

> the main influences on business conduct are affections that have been generated by the world of business itself. Growth, productivity, efficiency, the bottom line, being competitive – these are constitutive aspects of the Western business enterprise. But they can also be seen as affections. The objectives of the business enterprise frequently become affections ... One can go from being efficient as an objective to internalizing efficiency as an affection ... [11]

[9] See Michael L. Budde, *The (Magic) Kingdom of God: Christianity and Global Culture Industries* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Michael L. Budde and Robert W. Brimlow, *Christianity Incorporated: How Big Business is Buying the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002).

[10] 'Product Placement in the Pews? Microtargeting Meets Megachurches', *Knowledge@ Wharton* (15 November 2006).

[11] John C. Haughey, SJ, 'Affections and Business', *Proceedings of the Second National Consultation on Corporate Ethics*, Center for Ethics and Corporate Policy, Chicago (13–15 May 1978); reprinted in Max Stackhouse *et al.* (eds.), *On Moral Business* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 688 therein.

Paul Hessert notes how the phenomenon of money, and its centrality in our world, itself is a profoundly formative force. Our monetary structure, he says,

> trains us to think in certain ways. It is derived from the fundamental notion which first generated money and then was universalized by money, that 'reality' is quantifiable, that it can be divided into identical units and so be measured, compared, and manipulated.[12]

This is a matter of great significance, he notes, inasmuch as money as universalizable quantification is a concept and abstraction that, although a convention, forms the world in determinative ways. '"Everything that exists exists in a measurable quantity" is the creed of our culture,' he writes. Such a convention is profoundly important to theology inasmuch as it structures the distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' in modernity.

> What is quantifiable, and because it is quantifiable, is subject to the universal mediation of money, is 'real'. Those things which elude this kind of quantification are 'spiritual' – love, loyalty, tradition, courage, honor, family, pride, and the like. There is no common unit which brings these two different realms together.
>
> Quantification, by dealing with certain aspects of life, identifies these as real and outer. By the same means, quantification isolates a realm called 'inner' and 'spiritual,' designating it (by default) as less than real. Religion does not so much challenge this structure in order to give an independent validity to the spiritual. Rather, it supports quantification by accepting at face value its own province of the 'spiritual' which quantification relegates to it. In other words, religion in our culture legitimates this quantified and secularized version of reality.[13]

That a specific notion of quantity and measure forms not only the professionals but the modern world is recognized by some scholars within professional disciplines themselves. Accounting scholar I. C. Steward notes the social power that accrues to managerial and business professionals to define objectivity, expertise and reality.

> Accounting practice is framed by an overarching metaphor of numeracy. The columns of figures with their dual structure and mathematical accuracy create a presumption that the accountant's work is objective, that the accountant is representing reality 'as is' through the use of [numbers] that are objective and value free. The profit and loss, for example, is not thought of as a 'mere' matter of interpolation, dependent on the accountant's perspective, values or skill. The accountant is paid

[12] Paul Hessert, 'Theology and Money', *Explor* 4.2 (1978); reprinted in Stackhouse *et al.*, *On Moral Business*, p. 629.

[13] Hessert, 'Theology and Money', pp. 630, 632.

> not merely to provide his/her point of view on the profit and loss status of the firm, but to state the objective facts of the matter.[14]

Steward quotes another business scholar, Gareth Morgan, who notes how 'the numerical view highlights those aspects of organizational reality that are quantifiable and built into the accounting framework (for example, flows of costs, revenues, and other values), but ignores those aspects of organizational reality that are not quantifiable in this way'. Morgan further notes that:

> Just as we might attempt to rate the quality of last night's meal on a scale of 1–10, and in giving it a '9' capture that it was indeed a very good meal, the accountant's numerical form of representation provides a very 'thin' and limited characterization. It leaves much of the quality and overall experience of the meal out of the account. The metaphor 'it was a 9' remains silent on so many things.[15]

Steward describes how the power of numerically constructed reality is reproduced and transformative within corporate life. '[R]outine operation of the organization's *internal* accounting systems, for example, people, students, patients, and work teams, become profit centres generating revenues and expenses. Where financial considerations become a major issue, the data generated can exert a decisive influence on the accountant's reality construction'.[16]

Managerialism constructs and participates in a metaphysics of naïve realism, of modernity's relegation of religion to the internal and disembodied, and a specious fact/value distinction that empowers those capable of defining the factual, the real, and the objective. This metaphysics also funds and spreads through colleges and universities in which economics (the 'queen' of the social sciences) and professional business training stand as formative bodies in their own right.

The notion of humanity as self-interested and endlessly acquisitive – a bedrock assumption of capitalist economics and business education – itself turns out to be a self-fulfilling prophesy when one considers that the process of studying economics and business (and affiliated professional fields) may well make students more self-interested and unethical than they were before beginning such studies, and than are those of their contemporaries who pursue other passions.[17] As noted by Jacques Ellul many years ago,

[14] I. C. Stewart, 'Accounting and Accountability: Double Entry, Double Nature, Double Identity', *Crux* 26.2 (June 1990), reprinted in Stackhouse *et al.*, *On Moral Business*, pp. 635–36.

[15] Stewart, 'Accounting and Accountability', p. 636.

[16] Stewart, 'Accounting and Accountability', p. 636, italics original.

[17] For some of the general issues and research see Sumantra Ghoshal, 'Bad Management Theories are Destroying Good Management Practices', *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 4.1 (2005); Aspen Institute, 'Where Will They Lead? MBA Student Attitudes about

far from being more resistant to such socialization processes, the highly educated (including those in business and professional programs) seem to be formed more deeply by them, having willingly immersed themselves in the routines and structured reinforcements of educational systems longer than people with less schooling.[18]

Robert Brimlow notes the similarities between the sort of formation conducted in professional education schools and what used to typify ecclesial practices. As he notes:

> The period of study, trial, and initiation resembles the preparation of priests and ministers: the professional schools operate as proto-seminaries. Indeed, the very term 'profession' originally referred to the taking of vows by religious responding to clerical vocations, vows which could only be taken after years of postulancy and novitiate – analogs to internships and probationary employment. The study pre-professionals engage in parallels biblical study: there are certain sacred texts which characterize the professional fields – the basic and serial scriptures which outline and describe the history and development of the fields. And there are the 'covenants,' or codes of professional conduct, which are binding and normative, i.e. they prescribe and proscribe behaviors, define excellence and determine value for the members of the profession.[19]

In all of this, Brimlow notes, 'professions are paganistic in their ritual practices: in the ways they govern not only the business activities but also the familial and affective lives of their members; and in the way their members come to view themselves'.[20]

For these reasons, one should not draw too much hope from the increased number of professional development and academic programs aimed at improving the managerial capabilities of church personnel and leaders. Among the best of these in the United States is the Center for the Study of Church Management, founded in 2004 by the School of Business at Villanova University, an Augustinian university in Philadelphia. This Center is devoted to 'the study and application of sound business methods to Church decision making', according to its founding director,

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Business and Society', *Aspen Institute for Social Innovation Through Business* (2001); R. H. Frank, T. D. Gilovich, and D. T. Regan, 'Does Studying Economics Inhibit Cooperation?' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 7 (1993); Jeffrey Pfeffer, 'Why Do Bad Management Theories Persist? A Comment on Ghoshal', *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 4.1 (2005); Denis Collins, 'The Voluntary Brainwashing of Humanities Students in Stanford's MBA Program: Student Complaints and Some Recommendations', *Business Ethics Quarterly* 6 (July 1996).

[18] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

[19] Robert Brimlow, *Paganism and the Professions* (The Ekklesia Project, 2002), p. 9. Available at http://www.ekklesiaproject.org.

[20] Brimlow, *Paganism and the Professions*, p. 9.

Charles Zech.[21] It offers educational programs and conducts research in the areas of administration, professional financial management, and human resource management as they apply to the Catholic Church and its institutions.[22]

The Center's programs range from one-day topical workshops to week-long summer certificate programs and an online Master's degree in church administration. The Center is developing an M.S. in church management, which it envisions as an entirely online experience save for a residential learning experience at the beginning and end of the program.[23] The Center emphasizes the concept of 'best practices' in church management, and plans to highlight such cases and norms via its newsletter and other initiatives.

In many ways, then, this Center should be well positioned to make worthwhile contributions to the effective integration of corporate managerial practices into the operations of the Catholic Church. And, in fact, it seems likely to do so – its advisory board includes bishops, church bureaucrats, and corporate leaders (especially but not exclusively in finance and management consulting). Its faculty program committee draws heavily from Villanova's School of Business, especially in the areas of accounting, management, finance and marketing.

And yet, when one inspects the course work offered by the Center, one finds little other than a standard business curriculum that targets church agencies rather than business entities. The formation, in other words, is corporate and empiricist from start to finish – there seem to be few or no opportunities to form the liturgical, spiritual or ecclesial aspects of church employees, managers and leaders. The Center seems to presume that the Church has already well formed the leaders and employees sent to the Center for professional development; it similarly seems to presume that persons interested in a career in church management need no such ecclesial formation before running churches and church-related institutions. Managerial and administrative skills alone seem to suffice.

Standing behind all of the specific formative capacities of business schools, professional training, and corporate life itself, are the broader formative processes of capitalism. The advertising and marketing practices discussed previously are themselves part of a larger cultural ecology that shapes desires, affections and dispositions in deep and far-reaching ways. Even if one restricts oneself to a cursory examination of the cultural power of for-profit culture industries (advertising and marketing, television and radio, print media and the internet, and more), one gets a

[21] 'Director's Message,' Center for the Study of Church Management, http://www.villanova.edu/business/excellence/churchmgmt/.

[22] 'About the Center', Center for the Study of Church Management.

[23] 'Center Programs', Center for the Study of Church Management.

taste of the structures and processes that aim to form persons and the categories through which they inhabit the world and the church.[24]

The statistics are so familiar as to fade into insignificance, while in fact they are crucial in understanding the world in which we live. People in advanced industrial countries spend more hours of the day engaged with for-profit culture industries (television, radio, film, online providers) than they do anything else, except work and sleep. Young people in the United States spend well over 20 hours per week watching television and engaged with digital amusements of various sorts. A major study by the Kaiser Family Foundation discovered that multi-tasking among cultural products exposed children in the US ages 2–18 to six and a half hours per day of media products; young people aged 8–13 averaged more than eight hours per day in a mediated sea of predominantly commercial media.[25] Adult statistics on the whole are not much better. What all of this entails, as many people have explored elsewhere, is that the desires, affections and dispositions of people in late capitalism are shaped in deep and profound ways by the formative aspects of for-profit culture industries and the cultural ecology they construct.

Compared to the saturation of symbols, stories, songs and images delivered by corporate culture industries, the church's efforts at forming its people in determinative ways seems decidedly inadequate. Again, the studies are too well known as to need recitation. For mainstream congregations, Catholic and Protestant, in most of North America and western Europe, lay formation is an underfunded, neglected and often token exercise. It ignores adults in favor of children, generally abandoning even the pretense of engagement by the early teen years; it tends toward the individualistic and subordinates itself to more powerful and presumably more important loyalties – to the state, to middle-class ambitions, and to the market.

The capacity to form anything more than nominal Christians takes more time than the vast majority of mainstream churches and their parishioners are willing to invest. The majority of Catholic church-goers in the United States (who are themselves more engaged in ecclesial life and formation than those who do not attend) spent virtually no time engaged in church life beyond the act of Sunday liturgy. In the course of a year, most Catholics in the United States will read no books about their faith (historical or contemporary, about its social teaching, etc.), subscribe to no Catholic or Christian periodicals – will do nothing, in other words, to broaden or

[24] Portions of this section derive from Budde, *The (Magic) Kingdom of God*, and Budde and Brimlow, *Christianity Incorporated*.

[25] Donald F. Roberts *et al.*, *Kids and Media at the New Millennium: A Kaiser Family Foundation Report* (San Francisco, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999).

deepen an adult appropriation of their faith. The problem goes beyond a lack of information about one's faith tradition – in itself, that is not new. Rather, what is lacking is a matter of fluency and internalization of what it means to think, feel and desire as a Christian.

The failures of Christian faith formation are noted in many studies, most recently and notably by Christian Smith, whose important book Soul Searching even uses the practices of Catholicism in the US as his empirical case for lay formation at its most inadequate.[26] Other scholars have documented similar phenomena, but Smith's theological and ecclesiological acumen make his study especially valuable.

Given this – the power of managerial and corporate formation, buttressed by the formative nature of a culture in which commercially driven appeals are everywhere – it seems clear that the tools of rationalism look to be more powerful than the formative capacities of the gospel. What that means in practice is that the tools and those who wield them, far from being in service to the gospel and the church, are more likely to conquer and transform them.

## *Does It Matter? Organizational Theory, Ecclesiology and Christian Ethics*

How one conceives of the church – as supernatural or human construct, as similar to non-ecclesial bodies in significant ways or qualitatively different – explains much of the variation in whether and with what degree of confidence Christian ethics embraces corporate managerialism or not. Among those ecclesiological traditions that posit strong distinctions between the visible and invisible church (the latter escapes full structural expression, reducing the significance or centrality of the former in significant ways), the church need not worry excessively about the effects of managerialism upon its institutional life.

As explored by Clare Watkins,

> In this ecclesiological tradition the relating of any organizational or management theories to the church depends on an understanding of the institutional Church as an attempt at a structural expression of the mysterious, essentially undefined, community in Christ. In the last analysis, however, the ecclesia 'as a body of Christ ... has nothing to do with an organization and has nothing of the character of the institutional about it'.[27]

[26] Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[27] Clare Watkins, 'The Church as a "Special" Case: Comments from Ecclesiology Concerning the Management of the Church', *Modern Theology* 9.4 (October 1993), p. 374; quoting Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1952), 1951), p. 11.

Watkins sees much of this sort of ecclesiology as derived from the work of Emil Brunner, being carried through liberal Protestantism throughout the twentieth century. As Watkins reads Brunner, 'the Church is still to be seen as structurally special, but not radically separated from other human structures. This allows for the practices of management in the Church under the direction of certain theological assertions'.[28] This notion of visible/invisible church in Brunner itself presupposes a more relaxed understanding of sin, a greater appreciation for points of contact between revelation and the human and created order, and a more optimistic doctrine of providence. The visible church merely assists the non-Christian world to learn what the world can probably learn on its own anyway, so it is both appropriate and uncontroversial for the church to organize itself in ways congenial to secular norms.

A contrasting view of the church leads to a more circumspect approach to management and corporate tools. This latter view, evident in Barth and Catholic theologian Yves Conger (among others), makes strong claims that the church is a special sort of institution, brought into being by the work of God with structures and purposes unlike those of other institutions. It emphasizes the single nature of the church rather than seeking recourse in visible/invisible distinctions, and takes seriously the notion of the church itself as part of God's revelatory action.

> An ecclesiology which wishes to assert that certain aspects of ecclesial structure are 'ontologically anterior' [Congar's phrase] to the community would appear to have some problems in employing management science in the ecclesial realm. In this case the institutions themselves are so radically bound up with the divine that managerial analysis and reform would be inappropriate.[29]

Such a statement must be qualified, of course, inasmuch as theologians like Barth and Congar were identified with church reforms of various sorts; what must remain unchanged, however, is the notion of the church as a community of people called into a distinctive way of life, the visible and material quality of which is not accidental or contingent.

This visible/invisible segmentation of the church is of a piece with the unhelpful dichotomies of inner/outer and sacred/secular mentioned previously as cause and consequence of modernity. As noted by Javier Martinez, Catholic Archbishop of Grenada, the implications for Christianity are significant:

> [A]s soon as the sphere of the religious, in which Christianity as a whole is placed, designates a particular sphere of human activity next to other

[28] Watkins, 'The Church as a "Special" Case', p. 374.
[29] Watkins, 'The Church as a "Special" Case', pp. 371–72.

> spheres (philosophy, morality, the sciences, the arts, and so on), it is thereby severed of any other human reality; it becomes autonomous, but it has to become unreal also, since to every parcel of reality corresponds its own sphere of knowledge ...
>
> To religion there is no reality left, and therefore it cannot be even a kind of knowledge, it has to belong to the purely private and subjective realm of sentiment and preference. Its concern, if it is conceded that is for something 'real', has to be for a wholly otherworldly 'reality'.[30]

Not surprisingly, conventional organizational and management theory is more compatible with ecclesiologies that de-emphasize the special nature of the church, and in fact seem to reinforce trends that minimize the church as part of God's revelatory action in the world. One of the most common expressions of this is to see the church as part of 'civil society', the category in modernity that is neither state nor market, and in which political and social thinkers of many types have invested their hopes for human improvement. Actors in the realm of civil society are supposedly able to provide social cohesion, norms of communal solidarity, and insulation against the corrosive effects of capitalism and the modern state.

Indeed, given this ecclesiology, it would be 'irresponsible' not to embrace the best of corporate practices – not to do so would grant this visible, historical church a distinctiveness and importance it does not merit, because Christianity itself need not be seen as all that distinctive. To reject this open ecclesiology would be to consign the church to premodern irrelevance and mediocrity, precisely at a time when the tools – corporate managerialism – for relevance and expertise are more readily available than ever before.

Nonprofit organizations are key to the importance of civil society in much of this literature, and indeed the church itself is commonly thought of as a nonprofit organization itself these days. Designating the church as such – as a voluntary organization of like-minded people who join together in a common interest or pursuit of common tasks – situates the church as a useful part of the public order, serving the nation by providing goods and services beyond the confines of church membership. Equating churches with nonprofit organizations is a distinctly Protestant notion in the modern era, specifically an expression of the rise of denominationalism in ecclesial and public life. As noted by Craig Van Gelder:

> The inherent logic of a denomination is that it is organized to do something, normally doing something on behalf of God in the world. It is essentially functional in its identity and purpose. This follows the

[30] Javier Martinez, 'Beyond Secular Reason: Some Contemporary Challenges for the Life and Thought of the Church', *Communio* 31.4 (2004).

> logic of organizational sociology. An organization when it is formed must seek to accomplish some goal. Building on the foundations of free-church ecclesiology, denominations and their congregations were formed around a functional and organizational rationale.[31]

Among the foremost voices in management theory as applied to the church, at least in North America in the twentieth century, Peter Drucker stands out. Considered the founder of managerial theory in a career that spanned six decades and influenced everything from how scholars and practitioners think of leadership in corporations to the restructuring of the Japanese auto industry after World War II, Drucker has had a significance influence on the thinking of many church people as well. In addition to his consultative work over two decades with Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* and a founding force in the evangelical megachurch movement, Drucker has helped form large numbers of church pastors and administrators through a variety of institutional vehicles and books.

One book of relevance here is *Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principles and Practices*, published in 1990. In this book he uses churches and nonprofit organizations interchangeably with one another, and makes churches part of the larger universe of nonprofit organizations capable of learning from the actions of other nonprofits. Nonprofits of all sorts, according to Drucker, 'exemplify and fulfill the fundamental American commitment to responsible citizenship in the community ... We now realize that [the nonprofit corporation] is central to the quality of life in America, central to citizenship, and indeed central to the values of American society and of the American tradition'.[32] While he once envisioned the large capitalist firm as the locus of community in the years after World War II, he now looks to nonprofits in general and churches in particular as supplying this need – the latter seen not as religious entities, but as social centers providing communal centers for an otherwise fragmented culture.[33]

Reinforcing the centrality of formation in matters of management, Drucker notes that:

> The 'non-profit' institution neither supplies goods nor controls [as do businesses and government]. Its 'product' is neither a pair of shoes nor an effective regulation. Its product is a *changed human being*. The non-profit institutions are human-change agents. Their 'product' is a cured patient, a child that learns, a young man or woman grown into a self-respecting adult; a changed human life altogether.[34]

[31] Craig Van Gelder, 'Rethinking Denominations and Denominationalism in Light of a Missional Ecclesiology', *Word & World* 25.1 (Winter 2005), p. 26.

[32] Peter Drucker, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principles and Practices* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), p. xiii.

[33] 'The Business of the Kingdom', *Christianity Today* 43.13 (19 November 1999).

[34] Drucker, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*, p. xiv.

Drucker's approach is focused on helping corporations of all types see the importance of mission statements, tailoring its work to specific and achievable goals, and creating 'value' for customers rather than simply maximizing profits. Indeed, another founder of the megachurch movement, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church, once kept a poster outside his door with the Drucker maxim: 'What is our business? Who is our customer? What does the customer consider value?'[35] An ecclesiology that gives people what they want, that defines would-be adherents as customers, that defines the church as a business, is one in which managers and pastors embrace in a pact of growth and good feelings. This disposition to using market research to customize the church fits well with Drucker's emphasis on the rise of the 'knowledge sectors' of society, which requires that nonprofits assume greater chaplaincy responsibilities in modern life; at the same time, churches themselves are filled with people working in and formed by knowledge sectors, and in need of care and counsel themselves.[36]

Perceptive critics like Eugene McCarraher have noted the idealized, almost romantic, picture of corporate life that Drucker paints in his work.[37] Such a rosy picture of corporate managerialism as empowering employees rather than manipulating them, creating an ethos of cooperation rather than exploitation, appears among Drucker's admirers as well. But among some of his admirers – too few, however – there is an acknowledgement that Drucker's picture of corporations as embodying a healthy and affirming balance of objectives depends on profitability, prosperity and the lack of competitive pressure.[38] It is a luxury, in other words, rather than constitutive of corporate practice.

All of this, of course – the diminished significance of the visible church, the positioning of the church as a subset of civil society and an example of one sort of nonprofit organization among others – comes into question when one seeks after a more robust ecclesiology that sees the church as something akin to God's 'demonstration plot' in the world,[39] a people called by God to embody a new form of human sociability not built upon exclusion or violence. This view of the church, taking its 'mission statement' from the priorities and practices of Jesus as related in the Gospels, recognizes 'the corporate character of the church, expressed in such language as "people

[35] 'Jesus Christ's Superflock', *Mother Jones* 30.2 (March/April 2005).

[36] 'The Business of the Kingdom'.

[37] Eugene McCarraher, 'Money is the Root of All Order: Corporate Humanism as Domestic Containment, 1945–1965', unpublished manuscript, pp. 46–47.

[38] Dennis P. McCann and M. L. Brownsburger, 'Management as a Social Practice: Rethinking Business Ethics after MacIntyre', *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1990); reprinted in Stackhouse *et al.*, *On Moral Business*, p. 513 therein.

[39] Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).

of God," konini, "body of Christ," "covenant people," "household of faith". It is this character of the church which makes it also a place for moral formation'.[40]

Among other things, this sort of ecclesiology resists the repositioning of the church as a nonprofit organization, and its reduction to an element of civil society. Civil society in general, and nonprofit organizations in particular, are creatures of the state, defined by the modern state for specific purposes and exist at the pleasure of the state. Far from the idealized contractarian notions of civil society giving rise to the state, as an historical matter the causality is generally opposite – states create civil society and set its parameters.[41] A church that willfully redefines itself as a nonprofit entity created by the state and in business to serve society as a source of cohesion, trust and fellow-feeling, I would suggest, is not a church but a chaplaincy.

In contrast to the notion of Christian ethics derived from the sort of Brunnerian ecclesiology mentioned by Watkins – a translation exercise that seeks commonality between worldly norms and Christian 'principles' – Arne Rasmussen makes Christian ethics intrinsic to the church as a special sort of institution unlike any other on earth.

> Ethics is then nothing else than discipleship, sanctification, spiritual life, or however one wants to describe the Christian life. It has to do with the whole of life and not with specific universal duties, and no sphere of life is outside of it. In this sense, Christian ethics is inevitably a theological ethics (in contrast to autonomous ethics); it is embedded in the whole network of Christian convictions, practices, rituals, and dispositions.
>
> That the church is a place for moral formation and discernment means that the church, with its common practices, symbolic world and moral training, is a prerequisite for right Christian discernment ... Ethical discernment thus requires training, the shaping of character. And this is a communal process.[42]

The formative practices of the church, in other words, are primary and ought to go deeper than those associated with any other discipline, including that of corporate managerialism. Indeed, Christian formation aims to offer a construction of what is 'real' and 'realistic' in ways that other institutions – profit, nonprofit or otherwise – cannot, and indeed often find unhelpful as they seek to realize the operationalizations of their mission statements, goals and initiatives.

[40] Arne Rasmussen, 'Ecclesiology and Ethics: The Difficulties of Ecclesial Moral Reflection', *Ecumenical Review* 52.2 (April 2000).

[41] See, for example, William T. Cavanaugh, 'Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is Not the Keeper of the Common Good', *Modern Theology* 20.2 (April 2004).

[42] Rasmussen, 'Ecclesiology and Ethics'.

### *More Managerialism?*

All of which is well and good, but what might it mean for discerning how to think about future recommendations to increase the breadth and depth of corporate managerialism in the life of the church? Let us examine one proposal in particular, one in fact associated with multinational management consultant Frederick Gluck, with whom we started our time together.

Gluck is part of a powerful network of Wall Street investment bankers, corporate lawyers, management consultants and corporate leaders who have joined multimillionaire investor Geoffrey Boise in forming the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management. This group of prominent and wealthy corporate leaders has embarked on an ambitious plan to bring the latest in managerial expertise and corporate 'best practices' into the life of the church at all levels – from parishes and dioceses to the level of national bishops' conferences. Their project has found allies in many quarters of the church bureaucracy, including several dozen key American bishops and several Catholic journals of opinion and commentary. The Leadership Network claims to have no interest in changing church doctrine or policy, but instead seeks a greater leadership role for lay expertise in managing church operations and functions.

Via a series of conferences, publications, consultancies, and media initiatives, the Leadership Network seeks to improve church administrative procedures at all levels. It has entered into a partnership with the Archdiocese of New Orleans on matters of Catholic schooling, and it aims to spread its vision of 'best practices' in human resources, finance and management throughout church entities at all levels. Doing so, according to the Network's leaders, will allow the church to benefit from lay expertise and experience drawn from the corporate world.

How should one view such an initiative? It may be significant that two commentators as dissimilar as Eugene McCarraher – a Catholic social historian and self-described socialist – and Richard John Neuhaus – a champion of Catholic neo-conservatism in politics and economics – would find common ground in being troubled by such a mobilization among Catholic corporate executives and philanthropists. Boisi *et al.* seem to exemplify that sort of bureaucratic-managerial takeover of Catholicism, under the guise of 'lay empowerment', that McCarraher explored in a piece entitled 'Smile When You Say "Laity": The Hidden Triumph of the Consumer Ethos' in 1997.[43] Neuhaus has recently expressed fears that the purported neutrality of this wealthy group is a smokescreen for a liberal assault in

[43] Eugene McCarraher, 'Smile When You Say "Laity": The Hidden Triumph of the Consumer Ethos', *Commonweal* (12 September 1997).

favor of issues like the ordination of women and married people.[44] One wonders whether Neuhaus's concern is not for rich people shaping church policy, but that these are not his kind of rich people – Geoffrey Boisi and not, for example, conservative billionaire Tom Monaghan. Still, both seem skeptical that expertise can in fact be 'neutral' in effect and eventually in intent, and that calls for greater efficiency may in fact be nothing more than a grab for power.

How can the church discern a path forward in all of this? One modest suggestion would be for the church to conceive of itself as something of a cultivator of poesis, a community in which tools and talents are consistently and routinely kept in service to appropriate ends – in this case, embodying the gospel in a people called to discipleship in the world.[45] Can the church see management tools – from the mundane to the revolutionary – as intermediate goods that must not be allowed to occlude or redefine ultimate goods? Such would take seriously MacIntyre's caution about the ongoing tension between practices and the institutions necessary to sustain them even as institutionalization constantly threatens the integrity of those very practices.

Such an approach would take more seriously the power embedded in corporate managerial practices – far more seriously than is evidenced by their practitioners and those among us who take their disciplinary and formative powers for granted. To use an old category, a church alert to the dangers of managerial power might approach innovations and changes with a risk standard similar to that confronting pharmaceutics (at least in theory) in the United States (unsafe until proven safe), rather than a surgical model (safe until proven unsafe).

Taking the formative powers of managerialism seriously might impose a set of requirements for persons presuming to 'modernize' or bring 'expertise' into church life. A mantra in such circles is that church leaders – bishops, priests, clerks, volunteers – all need professional development, training, workshops and immersions in order to be rational and efficient leaders. But if the goal is to keep shepherds good and not merely rational, perhaps business leaders and corporate consultants, and those employing the skills of business and administration within the church, should be required to submit to intensive, lifelong Christian formation as a prerequisite for serving the church. One wonders how many of Boisi's power elite would agree to a regular and intensive regimen of long retreats, scripture study, direct practice of the works of mercy, and other 'inefficient'

[44] Richard John Neuhaus, 'Checks, Balances, and Bishops', *First Things* (September 2006).

[45] Eugene McCarraher, 'The False Gospel of Work: Against the Cant of Dilligence and Virtue', *Books and Culture* (July 2006); on this point thanks also to members of the Liturgical Identities Seminar in Christian Scholarship at Calvin College, July 2007.

and intrusive practices before being unleashed on church agencies and personnel. These exercises in Christian formation should be constructed preferably by religious communities and traditions not usually disposed to corporate chaplaincy, in order to provide at least some distance and critique of the fundamentals of power (and not simply its incidentals and event-specific ethical questions). Without such a transformative experience – without attempting to 'convert' the baptized among corporate executives and thousands of low- to mid-level managers in the church – such powerful persons will likely be unable to keep the church and its agencies discernibly 'Christian' in any worthwhile sense, will be unable to keep means from redefining ends and instead becoming agents of the further diminution of the gospel in our day. In fact, such a series of discipleship-forming practices for corporate leaders and experts might become an invaluable prototype for a more comprehensive commitment to lifelong lay formation within the Catholic tradition and others in which Christian formation has been a neglected and faltering practice. Such would seem to be essential in order for the church to begin to define a notion of rationality that is distinctively Christian in inspiration, of ends and means rightly joined in faithfulness to the gospel, rather than one bunkered in the liberal canons of modernity. Whether such a notion of 'ecclesial rationality' might be possible or worthwhile, of course, presupposes the creation of a people capable of communal discourse and discernment distinct from that of business-school socialization.

Were something like this to be tried, were the contested politics of formation both be recognized and resolved in favor of privileging one's baptism over one's role in the managerial hierarchy, one might see steps toward keeping the shepherd good and not merely rational. An altogether new sense of 'best practices' might yet emerge, in which the generosity of God finds reflection, however incomplete, in the common life of those who aim to be disciples of Jesus.