



**BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CHURCH
WHICH MENNONITE BRETHREN SHOULD EMBRACE**
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The title of this paper is somewhat a misnomer in that it isn't broad enough to encompass the assignment that was given me by the steering committee. Eventually, however, this paper will get to what the title suggests should be its primary focus. My assignment is three-fold: first, to outline the fundamental character and tenets of the Church Growth Movement (henceforth abbreviated to CGM); second, to note both the positive and negative influences of the CGM on the Mennonite Brethren Church; and third, to outline the basic biblical perspectives which the Mennonite Brethren Church should embrace.

It might also be well to note that this paper must be seen as one part of a larger whole, which I share with colleagues who will address other facets of this subject. Inevitably and unfortunately, there will be overlap with the other writers. However, I have deliberately tried to avoid moving into the subjects which others are asked to address.

I. BASIC TENETS OF THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT

Introduction

"'It is my duty to warn you that it will be held against you', cried the inspector, with the magnificent fair play of British criminal law."

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)
in Dancing Men

It is only fair, indeed, that in attempting to establish the basic tenets of the Church Growth Movement (CGM) we should go directly to the founding fathers and their writings. It is almost axiomatic that every worthwhile movement soon attracts a fringe element which distorts the defined centre by highlighting one propositional aspect of the movement at the expense of others. The CGM deserves to be defined, not by the fringe element, but by its most serious thinkers and

articulate spokespersons. Fairness is a great virtue and I hope not to betray that quality.

C. Peter Wagner is correct when he suggests that after thirty years of dialogue, testing and writing "... the CGM is [now] commonly recognized as a permanent feature on the religious landscape of America and the world".¹ It is exactly this record which I wish to explore with the intent of outlining its basic tenets. There are four fundamental issues at the centre of this movement.

A. The CGM as a reaction to a unique historical/cultural setting.

Four distinct ideas came together to give birth to the Church Growth Movement. The first flowed directly out of the experience of missiologist Donald McGavran. Almost every serious treatment of the CGM begins with McGavran's frustrating experience as a missionary in India. While reviewing the records of a year's missionary enterprise in India in the early 1950's, McGavran became deeply disturbed that only fifty-two persons had been added to the church, although \$125,000 had been expended in the effort. Surely, he thought, there must be a better way to do missionary work.

Responsible church growth writers freely admit that pragmatism is at the centre of the movement. However, it is not a bald, crass pragmatism for its own sake; rather, the pragmatism is seen as an ethical issue. McGavran was of the mind that too many missionaries were working with the attitude: "Sow the seed and leave it to God to produce the harvest". While reading and reflecting on the Great Commission, the command to "go and make disciples of the nations" (Matthew 28:19-20) seemed more intentional than merely "sowing the seed and leaving it to God".

McGavran became convinced that the missionary enterprise ought to be evaluated, not on a well-meaning "sowing of the seed", but by results. He argued that too many financial and

personnel resources were being used in inefficient ways. And so the seeds of the Church Growth Movement were sown.

The second factor was the inroads of liberal theology into missions. Wagner sets out the case bluntly:

"Back when The Bridges of God was published, liberal Christianity was having a heyday. The social gospel was in, and a massive effort had been mounted to redefine the terms 'mission' and 'evangelism'. Mission means fulfilling the cultural mandate. Evangelism meant giving a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus and helping Muslims or Buddhists become better people. Advocating conversion to Christianity was regarded as distasteful, something akin to coercion or manipulation. Donald McGavran, who himself had once advocated these positions, now saw their spiritual emptiness. He launched a thirty-year crusade to bring the meanings of mission and evangelism back to their classic, biblical moorings".²

This issue was so crucial in the formation of CGM, that Wagner, who now occupies the Donald McGavran Chair of Church Growth at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA., surfaces this argument again and again in his writings. He cites the rise of the CGM as the filling of the vacuum created when

"... the rebellious anti-establishment social psychology of the 1960s"³

began to ebb and when, finally,

"... the negative correlation of liberalism and membership growth and the positive correlation of theological conservatism"⁴

had been established by leaders of declining mainline denominations.

Church growth leaders brought a combative style to missions. It is explained in terms of the theological antagonism between conservatives and liberals:

"Dr. McGavran's combative style reflects the polarisation which existed in the mission debate in the 50s through to the early 70s. Then evangelicals were attacking what they considered to be the syncretism and universalism of the liberals, while the liberals accused the evangelicals of preaching a truncated gospel of personal salvation to the exclusion of social justice as an essential element of the Good News".⁵

The third factor in the emergence of the CGM was its understanding that missions was not in need of another plan, but rather, of a strategy -- a theory which would research and embrace the

universal principles of church growth. Emerging, during this time, from the shadows of the pure and applied sciences, were the social sciences. Liberal theology had already embraced the social sciences and used them to propagate the notion that the missions era was over.

McGavran and friends disagreed and began to use these same social sciences, but with the difference that they married them to theology, to arrive at their church growth principles. While McGavran was the first to bring these together, Wagner insists this remains the continuing goal of the CGM. He writes:

"Students of church growth strive to integrate the eternal theological principles of God's Word concerning the expansion of the church with the best insights of contemporary social and behavioral sciences, employing as the initial frame of reference the foundational work done by Donald McGavran."⁶

And fourth, a special vocabulary, with specifically defined terms, began to emerge to give respectability to the movement. Since the CGM was fighting liberal theology, which argued that the day of missions was over, and since McGavran himself had admitted that "sowing the seed and leaving the results to God" wasn't an adequate answer to the missiological questions of the 1950s, a new, clearly-defined and specifically-interpreted set of words needed to be established. This was also necessary so that the fringe element might not soften the impact and direction of the CGM.

So particular are church growth scholars about definitions that they not only produce glossaries (e.g., almost 200 words and phrases appear in the glossary of C. Peter Wagner, ed., Church Growth: The State of the Art), but they also argue that they continue to have the exclusive right to define terms. One church growth writer puts it this way:

"I use the terms 'Church Growth Movement' or 'Church Growth Theory', to refer to the body of teaching associated with the approach of Donald A. McGavran, Alan R. Tippett, C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn and others of the so-called 'Fuller School'".⁷

In summary, the CGM was born through the frustration of not seeing sufficient church growth materialize for the measure of financial and personnel resources being expended. This fell on very receptive ears since many missionary agencies were experiencing the same frustration. Giving impetus to this new look at missions was a very particular milieu characterized by the advent of liberal theology which was eroding the historic missiological stance of the mainline churches, and the emergence of the social and behavioural sciences as valid fields of study.

B. Defining Church Growth.

The CGM, as indicated earlier, is very fussy about definitions. While accepting, for example, the fine definition of evangelism, as carved out by the Anglican Archbishops in 1918:

"To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit that men and women shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and to serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church"⁸

-- a definition which J.I. Packer,⁹ together with many others, accepts; the CGM soon parts company with Packer in its application.

This is because the CGM is not so much concerned with a general definition of evangelism as it is defining, in precise terms, the principles of church growth, which they see as a very particular part of evangelism. So church growth is not defined as evangelism, but rather in the following way:

"Church growth is that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting, multiplication, function and health of Christian churches as they related to the effective implementation of God's commission to make disciples of all people".¹⁰

Although McGavran warms the heart by saying:

"We are increasingly perceiving that all men and women have the inalienable right to follow Jesus Christ and be members of his special family, a basic human right too often denied or ignored in the recent past",¹¹

it falls to C. Peter Wagner to articulate how the CGM sees the relationship between church

growth and evangelism.

Wagner does this by suggesting that there are three major theologically-driven views of evangelism.¹² These three are called presence, proclamation and persuasion.

"Presence" evangelism consists of helping persons who are in need, in the name of Jesus. The very words of Jesus are used as rationale for this form of evangelism (Matt. 10:40-42; Mk.9:40; Lu. 10:25-37).

"Proclamation" evangelism puts the emphasis on verbalizing the gospel so that unbelievers hear the Word of God and understand it. Paul is very clear (Rom. 10:14ff) that it is in the proclamation and hearing that the Good News is circulated. And Packer reminds us strongly that:

"Evangelism is not producing converts, but rather, it is faithfully making known the gospel message".¹³

The third is "persuasion" evangelism -- this is the one the CGM embraces, and for some very distinct reasons. McGavran, very early in the history of the CGM, rejected the idea that "sowing the seed" was enough. So it is logical that CGM leaders would say:

"Persuasion does not reject either presence or proclamation. Both are regarded as necessary for biblical evangelism. But it does not accept either as a goal. The goal of evangelism for the Church Growth Movement is to persuade unbelievers to become followers of Jesus Christ and responsible members of a Christian church. No matter how many times they hear the gospel, if they do not become confessing and practising disciples of Jesus Christ they are still regarded as being unevangelized".¹⁴

This view is centred in the Matthew 28:19-20 text which is held up as the final and primary command of Jesus.¹⁵ It takes precedence over all other words of Jesus. While admitting to a rather narrow view of evangelism, and that many strong leaders in the field of evangelism do not hold to such a tightly focused view of evangelism, CGM leaders, still, forthrightly reject an notion of "holistic" evangelism. Holistic evangelists insist that good deeds and evangelism are inseparably tied together and cannot possibly be separated.¹⁶ The Church Growth Movement not only disagrees; they, in fact, deliberately separate the two and give priority of evangelism over

social ministries. The CGM declares flatly that

"... evangelism is more important".¹⁷

In summary, CGM writers describe the relationship between the broader definitions of evangelism and the narrower focus of the movement in the following terms:

"The fields of evangelism and church growth are distinct, but they enjoy a close and often symbiotic relationship. The field of evangelism is broader than church growth in educational, theological, social and methodological aspects. The field of church growth is broad in missiological and ecclesiastical aspects. The two intersect and become synonymous when the goal of evangelism -- the bottom line on which success or failure is evaluated -- is to bring unbelievers into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and into responsible church membership".¹⁸

C. CGM as a theological movement.

"We stand in the sunrise of missions",¹⁹ the oft-repeated, optimistic, missiological catchphrase coined by Donald McGavran, is more than a blithe missiological slogan. It is rooted in CGM's biblical understanding that the age of missions is not in the sunset phase of activity, as many have proclaimed it to be; but rather, it is just now dawning.

This conviction is born in the fertile soil of conservative, biblical theology. In looking back over thirty years of church growth, McGavran notes:

"The Church Growth School of Thought [sic] is deeply theological. If you understand the church growth position at all, you must see it cradled in theological concepts -- doctrines -- which have been common to all denominations from Baptist to Roman Catholic. Only an unshakeable conviction that God wants His lost children found produces or long maintains biblical mission".²⁰

In a profoundly moving defence of the CGM as being more than merely a sociological process, McGavran argues strongly that the issue is one of faithfulness to God. The church must be tuned to the heartbeat of God. Indeed, he asserts, where there is no faithfulness in proclaiming Christ, there is no growth.²¹

Growth is what God wants; he desires it. But the growth he wants is a very specific kind of growth -- a growth which involves at least three components. First,

"Church growth is humane action: the strong bearing the burdens of the weak and introducing to the hungry the bread by which man lives. Nevertheless, God's obedient servants seek church growth not as an exercise in humanity, but because the extension of the Church is pleasing to God. Church growth is faithfulness".²²

Second, since the CGM isn't content with merely proclaiming the Good News and leaving the results to God, it follows that they would say:

"Church growth follows where Christians show faithfulness in finding the lost. It is not enough to search for lost sheep. The Master Shepherd is not pleased with a token search; He wants His sheep found. The purpose is not to search, but to find".²³

The third theological premise which drives the CGM is its emphasis on what has been boringly called "follow up". Hear, again, what McGavran has to say:

"Church growth follows where the lost are not merely found but [are] restored to normal life within the fold -- though it may be a life they have never consciously known. Faithfulness in proclamation and finding is not enough. There must be faithful aftercare. Among the found, also, there must be fidelity in feeding on the Word".²⁴

Therefore, the CGM is not interested in the lesser definitions of evangelism, but rather is consumed by the idea of bringing together a comprehensive, intentional strategy which includes proclamation, persuasion, the intentional finding of the lost sheep, and the deliberate nurturing of these new converts so that they will become active, mature members of the local church.

Therefore, in summary, the CGM sees itself as a theological movement.

"Church growth is basically a theological stance. God requires it. It looks to the Bible for direction as to what God wants done. It believes that Acts 4:12, John 14:6, and scores of similar passages are true. It holds that belief in Jesus Christ, understood according to the Scriptures, is necessary for salvation. Church growth rises in unshakeable theological conviction".²⁵

D. CGM as a methodological movement.

While asserting that its primary focus is theological, the CGM nonetheless is probably noted more for its methodological genius than for its theological formulations. Certainly, much of the CGM's writing in the past decade has been in the area of methodology.

This follows the lead of Donald McGavran, who early in the formation of the CGM, tried to

understand why the gospel took hold in some regions more easily than in other regions. This is where the social sciences entered the picture. While contending that the CGM is "...no mere sociological process"²⁶ (that is, ultimately and finally, it is God who builds the church), it nonetheless draws heavily on the social and behavioural sciences in its methodology.

Two ideas are linked in classical church growth procedure: first, the social, economic, political, cultural, behavioural patterns of a society are studied (this is called "contextualization" for the gospel); and second, pragmatism is married to social sciences (that is, does it work?).

McGavran notes that to effectively spread the Christian faith one needs to take into account the cultural context with all of its curious variations and customs. No two cultures respond in the same way to the gospel. But some sociological principles are constant. For example:

"The faith spreads most naturally and contagiously along the lines of the social networks of living Christians, especially new Christians. Receptive undisciplined men and women usually receive the Possibility [sic] when the invitation is extended to them from credible Christian friends, relatives, neighbours, and fellow workers from within their social web".²⁷

The second driving force of the CGM is pragmatism. By pragmatism they mean: does it work? If a methodology doesn't work, throw it out; if it works poorly, refine it until it does.

Wagner says it all when he declares:

"... church growth accepts evangelistic methods which make disciples of Jesus Christ, while rejecting those which are supposed to but don't. Effective evangelism results in church growth".²⁸

This has resulted not only in a plethora of how-to-do-church-growth books flooding the marketplace, but also has led to the formation of church growth consulting companies. Systematized church growth manuals are available by the dozens and, it seems, every rapidly growing church offers its particular version as the latest break-through in how-to-grow-a-church theory.

The language of these systems is surprisingly similar, reinforcing CGM's argument that

certain principles have universal application. For example, the phrase "... paying the price for growth"²⁹ is a very commonly written phrase. It describes the necessity to abandon all interests and ideas which get in the way of single-minded church growth. The pastor pays a price; the congregation pays a price.

In summary, while the CGM argues that it has a theological centre, much of its energies are directed to the research and development of sociological principles which are easily transferred into how-to-manuals. Indeed, the very language it uses in these manuals, such as "audit, quality check, goal setting, evaluation of methodology, people blindness, planned parenthood, resistance/receptivity axis" (and dozens of other such words),³⁰ gives the movement a very pragmatic face. The CGM accepts this as a complement -- it is indeed a pragmatic science.

II. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCES OF THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT ON THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH.

Not only is Wagner correct when he suggests that the CGM is a permanent feature on the religious landscape of North America -- it is also a permanently etched feature on the religious landscape of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

A. Positive Influences

To be sure, some of the influences have left a very positive imprint on the face of the church. These positive influences have not only strengthened and nudged the church toward greater faithfulness in ministry, but have also reinforced the direction which we have understood the Scriptures to teach.

First, the Mennonite Brethren church has always been a missionary movement. This is well documented by writers such as G.W Peters,³¹ J.B. Toews,³² and J.J. Toews.³³ . A missions mindset is deeply ingrained into our thinking and in our past. The strong biblical affirmation, by

the CGM, that the age of missions is not over wears well with us.

Second, the M.B. Church, historically, has been a radical, Bible-reading movement.³⁴ We read the Scriptures; we allow the Scriptures to say what they want to say; and we encourage our members to live out in daily life what they call us to do. We understand following Jesus to be risky, costly business. When McGavran confesses, in straightforward terms, that the CGM is based on the truthfulness of the Scriptures and its directives are to be followed in daily life, we nod in agreement.

Third, we also affirm that faithfulness to God and dependence on his Spirit is the necessary driving force which allows the church to make an impact within the society in which it has its life. An accommodating church is a weak church. We are convinced that it is God's intent that none should perish, but all should have eternal life (John 3:14ff). We affirm and appreciate the CGM for holding this premise strongly and uncompromisingly. We also affirm the idea that God wants us to be much more intentional in seeking lost persons. We call men and women to be reconciled to God, to take their place in the local church and to serve the King of the kingdom with faithfulness.

Though we may not accept fully the recent trends toward charismatic groupings, we, nonetheless, applaud CGM's openness in examining both the biblical basis and the empirical evidence which such movement present for examination.³⁵

Fourth, since all truth is God's truth, we instinctively know that the social sciences have something to add to our understanding of human behaviour. As a church, though we may have never articulated it in sociological terms, we know from experience that the gospel travels most naturally and productively along the lines of social networks. How else do we explain the relative success of the M.B. Church in passing the faith on from one generation to the next generation. Therefore, when church growth thinkers suggest that the church pay attention to social and family

networks, we must have no opposition to such parlance.

Fifth, if pushed hard enough, there is sufficient pragmatism in all of us and our churches to make us admit that we want (to put it crassly and boorishly) "value for our missionary/church dollar". Evaluation is difficult business. We frequently allow inefficient but good-hearted efforts to continue to swallow meagre resources because we have no taste for the brutal task of evaluation. The CGM has the nerve to confront such thinking and to call for honest evaluation -- evaluation based on carefully established criteria.

In summary, we are much richer and well-served by many of the emphases which CGM has highlighted. We have been instructed and nurtured by much of their work; and our churches have experienced authentic growth.

B. Negative Influences

As is so often the case, the seeds of destruction are contained within the strengths which give a movement its self-sustaining energy. A movement becomes vulnerable when it refines and pushes one facet of truth at the expense of another. This is the "achilles heel" of the CGM.

First, while we agree and affirm the priority of evangelism and church growth, the CGM moves onto shaky ground when it sets one word of Jesus (the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19-20) over another word of Jesus (the Great Commandment, Luke 10:25ff). Clearly, Jesus fully expected both words to be read and to be obeyed. He wants the Great Commission to be as enthusiastically embraced as the Great Commandment. It isn't one or the other; it is both -- both, with full heart, mind and will.

By setting one over the other, the CGM takes upon itself the right to elevate one important word of Jesus over the other. Every serious Bible-reading believer is nonplussed by this act. What the church needs is not more of one and less of the other, but rather more of both. The degree to which the church narrows the mandate of Jesus is the degree to which it cannot

address the needs of the world.

Second, while affirming the axiom that all truth is God's truth, a caution needs to be expressed against the idea that we can explain the mysterious moving of God through sociological data. While sociological principles provide much valuable insight into human behavioural patterns, not everything runs true to sociological form.

The curious human penchant to put God into a predictable, behavioural model and to plot on a graph how the church will grow frequently flies in the face of God's interaction and intervention in the affairs of humanity. We do well to take note of Richard Mouw's caution:

"Our faithfulness cannot always be realized through programs of epic proportions -- God himself seems to avoid such programs on a regular basis".³⁶

Furthermore, though CGM thinkers would deny that sociological methodology overshadows theological thinking, it is nonetheless true that it is easier to articulate sociological church growth principles than it is to articulate and codify the mysterious workings of God. The evidence for this is all around us -- just look at the plethora of How-to-grow-a-church handbooks and manuals that have inundated the marketplace in the past dozen years, and the few books that help us to understand the nature and character of God.

We become somewhat edgy when how-to manuals, replete with step-by-step recipes for success, become the primary stimulants for thought. When George A. Kelly was asked why he wrote the provocative book entitled, Who Should Run the Catholic Church? Social Scientists, Theologians or Bishops?, he answered:

"Because it was apparent to me that Social Science was being misused to promote changes in the Catholic Church which would in the long run be unacceptable".³⁷

Though it is true that God usually works within the established sociological patterns of human behaviour, he just as often works in other ways. For example, it is well documented, particularly in our history, that renewal movements and accelerated church growth go together.³⁸ Renewal movements tend not to follow the carefully charted lines of sociological methodology, but rather, against all odds, they simply follow the mysterious winds of the Holy Spirit.

Third, the highly centralized form of church government required to put in place church growth theory is problematic. While it is agreed that Wagner (particularly)³⁹ encourages the training and sharing of leadership in the local church, the CGM places inordinate emphasis and power into the role of the pastor. In certain settings this might be appropriate, in others it is not!

(Please note: I raise this important issue only briefly since another author has been commissioned to address this in another paper.)

Fourth, while it is certainly necessary to evaluate and critique every program in missions and evangelism, and while it is granted that it is better to make tough, objective decisions (if that, in fact, is possible) regarding the mission enterprise, it nonetheless is not the entire story. Not everything can be evaluated on such grounds. If our definition of evangelism is only broad enough to accommodate our pragmatic inclinations -- that is, if it works, keep it; if it doesn't work, scrap it; if it works poorly, make it work⁴⁰ -- then we will lose something that is hard to gain back again. The idea proposed by J.I. Packer that evangelism occurs when the Good News is proclaimed⁴¹ (even though a positive response of the decision-makers is not forthcoming) means that the Good News, nevertheless, is sent forth as God has instructed it should be done, and it will accomplish what he intends for it to do (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Fifth, the CGM asserts strongly that it is a theological movement. By this they mean that they find the impetus for the movement within the Scriptures. This we applaud. However, the CGM is hardly a theological movement. It has not added very much to our understanding of the Scriptures; rather, it has read the Scriptures with a certain bias (as we all do) to justify the

philosophical and sociological directions its major research has taken.

When pragmatism rules in the church -- that is, when the question of "how" something is done takes centre stage -- then the "Who" who is behind the church tends to get lost in the shuffle.

Even a cursory reading of the Acts of the Apostles leaves us in no doubt that it was the power of the risen Christ indwelling the infant church which was the sole impetus for the remarkable growth of the early church.

* AMEN
The heart of the matter, it seems to me, is not so much in the writing of slick, glossy how-to manuals (although they have a place to stimulate church growth thinking) but in a recovery of the presence of God within the life of the church. If we must fall into the trap of making priorities, and the CGM is very good at that, then let's, at least, make the priority a fresh touch from God who wants to renew a church easily seduced to pagan values.

III. THE BASIC BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES WHICH THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH SHOULD EMBRACE.

The genius of the Anabaptist reformation was that our forefathers read the Scriptures with the intent that they should be obeyed. A faith, they argued, without obedience isn't faith at all. The Anabaptist leaning toward biblical theology was quite deliberate -- let God be God; let the Lord of the church set the terms for discipleship; let the Scriptures speak even if they create tension for us. This we do well not to forget.

What, then, are the biblical perspectives we ought to embrace? Allow me to name four for discussion.

First, at the centre of the church is Jesus Christ. He is not only the primary, but also the only focal point of the church. Hopefully no one will dispute this fact. If we do not actively teach and affirm that the church exists only through the redemptive purposes and intentions of God and that

we are incorporated into a body of which he is the solely the Head, by and through his sovereign will and grace, we begin to lose the majesty of being part of a King who has a kingdom.

At the centre of God's purposes are not the pragmatic growth schemes of the church, but rather his majestic glory. Too much church growth writing is sociological scheming -- of course, with the honourable intent of making disciples. Very little and very infrequently do these writing set out the majesty and glory of Christ.

I fear for a church that loses its God-consciousness. I fear for a church more interested in providing a full-service agency (with amenities such as adequate parking, innumerable programs designed to make our worship life easier, etc.) for a consumer-oriented society, than existing for the glory of the risen Christ.

The amazing growth of the first century church cannot be attributed to slick churchmanship; rather it is attributed directly to a church caught up in wonder, in prayer and in worship of the risen Christ.

Second, we need to reaffirm our openness to hearing God's word even if it creates tension for us. It might be easier to do church if we simply "prioritize" God's complex word to us. It might make churches function more smoothly, but we will soon be the poorer for it. It is always easier to lead a single-dimensional church than to allow the church to express all the broadness of the Creator and his word to us. The church needs to affirm that all of God's words represent his will for us and are to be obeyed. This means we will often struggle to bring balance to our witness. Indeed, a cup of cold water, given in the name of the risen Lord, is witness. It is also obedience to his command. No one may notice this act, but Jesus knows and commends such action (Matthew 10:40-42).

Again, the Acts of the Apostles are full of such holistic thinking. The apostles didn't walk away from the person sitting at the gate of the Temple (Acts 3:1ff). It was true that they didn't

have gold and silver to give to the man. They gave him what they had -- a chance to become whole both in body and in spirit.

The terrible judgement on Ananias and Sapphira was that they lied to the Holy Spirit concerning the material goods they were bringing to meet the needs of the fledgling, young church which held all things in common. Concern for both the spiritual and physical needs was being expressed (Acts 4:32ff; 5:1ff; 6:1-7). Their sin was that they lied about the material goods which would have helped sustain the young, poverty-stricken church.

Peter raised Tabitha (Dorcas) from death -- a woman given to good deeds, who, if she remained dead, would be missed terribly. Her witness was centred in her good deeds (Acts 9:36ff).

The narrower the definition of evangelism, the less able the church is equipped to respond to God's world with the Good News which changes humanity fundamentally at the core of their being. Therefore, we must embrace equally "presence" and "proclamation" and "persuasion".

Third, we need an ecclesiology which embraces actively the priesthood of all believers, not only giving lip-service to it. To separate the church into the artificial categories of leaders and followers is to fall into the trap that bedeviled medieval, middle ages Christianity.

Paul, that towering figure who strides through the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament with awesome power, was one of the brothers in the church. Though gifted with amazing strengths, he accepted the call of his brothers and sisters in the local church at Antioch, and the call of the Holy Spirit through this congregation, to begin a preaching mission. He remained accountable to them for his ministry by reporting back what God had done through this unique partnership.

Jesus was very clear that there are to be no barriers between the members of his kingdom. The basin and towel are eternal symbols of how we are to serve one another. Furthermore, the

sign of greatness is the ability to wash another's feet. In a day when power in society gives persons the right to order the lives of others, the church must increasingly reaffirm the call for humility and servant leadership. Indeed, the church needs fewer Chief Executive Officers and more servants.

Fourth, the conflict of the ages which has raged since the announcement that the Son of the woman will crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15) is most certainly a passionately-contested spiritual war. The early church knew that the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fellowship around the eucharist, and the study of the Scriptures were the way to develop strength for this ongoing struggle. Jesus warned his disciples again and again that the issue was not one of flesh and blood, but of principalities and powers. He warned that some things can only change and be won through fasting and prayer. The Mennonite Brethren Church will not rise or fall on the smoothness of its administrative, decision-making capacity, or on its willingness to embrace sociological formulations that are true and helpful; rather, it will rise or fall on the willingness of the whole church to become involved in the life and death struggle of spiritual warfare.

Eugene Peterson warns that anything, including the gospel, can be sold if it is properly packaged.⁴² We need to acknowledge that we do the church, which is the visible sign of the Kingdom of God on earth, much harm when we package the gospel so that it becomes attractive, marketable and saleable. — *but you need to gain a hearing - you can teach discipleship later.*

Concluding comments.

The CGM was created in response to a very particular set of personal frustrations, cultural and theological trends. It has developed rapidly through the past three decades becoming a powerful influence, shaping the direction and form of the evangelical church of the western world.

Its strength is the single-minded devotion to church growth which it elicits from those who embrace its teachings. It has as its primary objective the task to outline, in precise terms as possible, the reasons why churches grow. This it has done boldly and openly.

The spin-off effect of all of this is that in attempting to create single-mindedness in church growth, it has also tended to create single-dimensional churches. Since no one church tradition or movement -- whether it be 19th century pietism or the 20th century social gospel movement, whether it be the intellectually-oriented student movements of the past century or the compassionate ministries of the Salvation Army, whether it be the revivalist movements of Jonathan Edwards or the charismatic renewal movements sweeping our day -- adequately represents, though they all passionately argue for their point of view, the wholeness of the church, the body of Christ.

The CGM, like all of these other movements, is part of the work of Christ's church, which is the visible sign of the Kingdom of God. We do well to hear its call to us to be faithful in seeking and finding "the lost sheep". We also do well not to make it the only focus of our church life and ministry. We must be open to hearing God call us to the widest possible range of ministries so that all of his purposes will be expressed within the church and within society.

Peter Marshall once prayed:

"O God, our Father, let us not be content to wait and see what will happen, but give us the determination to make the right things happen. While time is running out, save us from the patience which is akin to cowardice. Give us the courage to be either hot or cold, to stand for something, lest we fall for anything. In Jesus' Name. Amen".⁴³

Endnotes

1. Rainer, Thom S. (ed), Evangelism in the Twenty-first Century: The Critical Issues. Wheaton: Shaw, 1989, p. 23.
2. Wagner, C. Peter (ed), Church Growth: State of the Art. Wheaton: Tyndale, 1989, p. 23.
3. Wagner, C. Peter, Leading Your Church to Growth. Regal: Ventura, CA., 1984, p. 15.
4. Ibid. p. 33.
5. Gibbs, Eddie, I Believe in Church Growth. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1981 p. 21.
6. Rainer, Thom S., Evangelism in the Twenty-first Century. p. 25.
7. C. Peter Wagner quotes Ebbie C. Smith, of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in the opening chapter of the book Church Growth: State of the Art, p. 27.
8. Wagner, Leading Your Church to Growth, p. 21.
9. Packer, J.I., Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, 1961, p. 40.
10. Rainer, Thom S. Evangelism in the Twenty-first Century. p. 25.
11. McGavran, Donald and Hunter III, George G., Church Growth: Strategies That Work. Abingdon: Nashville, 1980, p. 22.
12. Rainer, Thom S., Evangelism in the Twenty-first Century, pp. 27-28.
13. Packer, Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, p. 40.
14. Op. Cit., p. 27.
15. Ibid. p. 28.
16. Ibid. p. 28.
17. Ibid. p. 28.
18. Ibid. p. 33.
19. Wagner, Church Growth: State of the Art, p. 15
20. Ibid. p. 38.
21. McGavran, Donald A., Understanding Church Growth (Revised Edition). Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1980, pp. 5-8.

22. Ibid. p. 5.
23. Ibid. p. 5.
24. Ibid. pp. 5-6.
25. Ibid. p. 7.
26. Ibid. p. 6.
27. McGavran and Hunter, Church Growth: Strategies That Work, p. 30.
28. Rainer, Thom S., Evangelism in the Twenty-first Century, p. 31.
29. Wagner, Leading Your Church to Growth. All of Chapter 2, pp. 41-71, "Church Growth Is Not Cheap", covers this subject matter.
30. Wagner, Church Growth: State of the Art. Appended to the manuscript in the "Glossary" are 22 pages of technical and common church growth words and phrases that have specific meanings attached to them.
31. Peters, G.W., Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions. Kindred: Winnipeg, 1984. Note: Peters, in the "Author's Introduction" celebrates a sweep of 120 years of MB missions. He notes that it was the intention of this small church denomination to "reach around the globe with the gospel of Jesus Christ".
32. Toews, J.B., The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire. Christian Press: Winnipeg, 1978. Note: Elmer Martens, in the "Publisher's Preface, notes that the "Mennonite Brethren, representing a small segment of the Christian world, have been strongly involved in missionary outreach in their 118 years of history" (p. 5). He then cites statistical evidence to give credence to his claim.
33. Toews, J.J., The Mennonite Brethren Mission in Latin America. Christian Press: Winnipeg, 1975. Note: Paul G. Hiebert, in the "Introduction" (p.11), focuses attention on the strong Mennonite Brethren grassroots interest in missions. He cautions readers not to forget "... the thousands of people who worked and gave of their means to support the work".
34. Toews, J.A., A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Mennonite Brethren Publishing: Hillsboro, 1975. Note: Toews again and again describes the gathering together of church leaders and of local churches to hear the word expounded to them. The Scriptures were to be understood by every believer.
35. Rainer, Thom S., Evangelism in the Twenty-first Century, pp. 32-33.
36. Mouw, Richard, "A Kinder, Gentler Calvinism". The Reformed Journal (October, 1990):12.
37. Kelly, George A., Who Should Run the Catholic Church? Social Scientists, Theologians or Bishops? Visitor: Huntington, IN., 1976. (See "Introduction")
38. Toews, J.A., A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Note: Toews traces the histories of all of the provincial and district conferences of the Mennonite Brethren church in North America. Repeated references are made to the renewals which broke out in the church. These renewals triggered a renewed sense of mission both overseas and in the local area. Following these renewals the churches experienced an influx of new members.
39. Wagner, Leading Your Church to Growth. Note: for a fuller treatment of the leadership question, see Chapter 2, "Church Growth is not Cheap", pp. 41-71.

40. Rainer, Thom S., Evangelism in the Twenty-first Century, p. 33.
41. Packer, Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, p. 40.
42. Peterson, Eugene, A long Obedience in the Same Direction. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, 1981, p. 12.
43. Quoted in Barclay, William, Epilogues and Prayers. London: SCM Press, 1963, p. 47.

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