

Chapter Two: The Shape of Our Known World

Quietly, irrevocably, something enormous has happened to Western man. His outlook on life and the world has changed so radically that in the perspective of history the twentieth century is likely to rank – with the fourth century, which witnessed the triumph of Christianity, and the seventeenth, which signaled the dawn of modern science – as one of the very few that have instigated genuinely new epochs in human thought. In this change, which is still in process, we of the current generation are playing a crucial but as yet not widely recognized part. Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1989).

INTRODUCTION

The phrase Known World describes a set of habits, values and frameworks that have been in place over a long period of time. The ethos of this Known World is characterized by two overarching, interconnected systems: Christendom and modernity. Whatever else has changed and ended, both Christendom and modernity are over and we are in that in-between time reaching toward a new and, as yet, unknown future.

It is a truism to say that Christian life in North America is moving through a period of massive change. The favored status of the church has ended. Over the last fifty years the world in which pastors were trained to lead has all but disappeared. The world that shaped Christian leaders for most of the 20th century has gone. As a result, common sense assumptions and conventional wisdom about the nature of leadership in the church make less and less sense. This change is not just happening to church leaders. At every level of North American life similar dynamics are turning common sense wisdom about leadership on its head.

Leaders are increasingly aware of this profound shift. The business world discovers ways to take advantage of these uncertain times, to “thrive on chaos” and re-invent themselves. Advertisers, using this awareness of dramatic change, communicate that in the midst of revolutionary times there are companies negotiating the change curve and offering products for a new time. Volvo communicates that its automobiles are designed for this radically new kind of world. An ad puts into words and image what people sense but are not sure how to

articulate: too many of our common sense assumptions about how the world works are making less and less sense. This ad assures people that they are right in believing there is a revolution going on – and Volvo is on the cutting edge of that revolution. In forming the maps needed to negotiate this revolution we must understand the frameworks that gave this Known World its shape.

LIVING IN EQUILIBRIUM

Imagine trying to teach a goldfish the meaning of water. When something lives and functions inside an environment so amorphous and all pervasive as water it is almost impossible to “see” its presence. The very thing that gives life is not visible -you just don’t ever see its presence. This is how culture works. Culture shapes our lives; it forms how we see, taste, smell, hear and read our worlds. Culture is to humans what water is to fish. Most of the time we don’t think about our culture; it’s just the “common sense” conventional way of living. Just as a fish would never think about the water as long as the delicate balance it requires to live remains unchanged, so human beings tend not to think about how their culture shapes their lives as long as that culture continues to provide meaningful symbols and frameworks within which to function. This is called a period of cultural consensus and integration. There is a stable relationship between the symbols that explain the culture and the meaning that people receive in the culture. This is what is called living in **equilibrium**.

Denominations and congregations, as organizations, are cultures. Indeed, disciplines such as *Congregational Studies* research the cultures of congregations in order to describe their ways of acting, believing and behaving. This type of study is important because, as with all cultures, the way congregations and denominations behave, believe and act is very much like the way a fish operates in water – the culture is actually not recognized but it shapes their existence. Furthermore, organizations are not simply inanimate structures. They have a life and dynamic within themselves giving them shape and meaning. In this sense they are like a living organism. In fact this biological metaphor of an organism is a helpful way to understand organizational culture as well as what is happening to the shape of leadership in North America at this moment. For an extended time (up to the mid-point of the last century) there existed a period of relative integration and equilibrium between congregations and denominations and the main currents of North American culture. In this period, the churches and their leadership, like an organism in an environment, developed ways of functioning that worked in that culture. This was a period of dynamic equilibrium and gradual, integrative change between church and culture.¹

Equilibrium is a simple concept with huge implications. It is the comfort zone of balance where all the elements required for life are in sync with each other; it is the autopilot for functioning within a world that makes sense and doesn't change radically. The principle of *equilibrium* explains our search for balance in everything we see. A water droplet, as it rests upon a solid flat surface, obeys certain laws of physics, drawing its mass together into a round spheroid shape. In this way it is in a stable, resting state – the equilibrium of several conflicting forces. Drawing a plain dot creates a similar state. It is a shape at rest with no tension and no dynamism. This concept is used by artists to create eye-catching logos. Look at the following logos and trademarks. Observe how the eye is pulled to the center because each image is balanced and stable.²



Trademark of
CBS
by William
Golden



The
Woolmark
by Francesco
Seraglio



Portion of the
Photography
by Fulks logo

In extended periods of equilibrium the world makes sense because everything seems to function around a coherent world of common sense symbols and meanings that give shape and direction to accepted actions and relationships. The symbols, frameworks and methods people, or organizations, use within this equilibrium, explain how things work so well that they are hardly ever questioned or challenged. But cultures are like living organisms; they go through lifecycles that demand they adapt. Without adaptation, organizations, like organisms, become diseased and die. When cultures are shifted out of equilibrium they enter a period of discontinuous change where conventional wisdom from the period of stability becomes less and less functional. Unless a leader, or organization, learns to adapt they will, like any organism, become weak and dysfunctional. In many ways this is what is happening to leadership within the church. In a period of discontinuous change organizational structures, leadership styles and activities that once functioned well become prisons. The equilibrium that once gave organizations such a powerful functionality becomes, instead, a source of their death. Several illustrations, from history, nature, and contemporary life make this point.

HISTORY: In her wonderful biography of Galileo Galilei, *Galileo's Daughter*³, Dava Sobel describes Galileo's conflict with the church over the question of whether the earth was the center of the universe or rotated on its axis as it traveled about the sun. Such questions would not concern us. Our common sense understanding is that the earth does rotate around its sun. In Galileo's day, common sense was a radically different matter. Since Aristotle, in the 4th century BC, and Ptolemy, in the 2nd century, common sense placed

¹ For a helpful overview of the life cycles through which cultures move see Alan Roxburgh, *Crossing the Bridge: Leadership in a Time of Change*, pages 31-46.

² Adapted from the Web information site: ***Gestalt Theory and Photographic Composition*** by Michael Fulks

³ Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

the earth at the center of the universe. It was believed that Scripture, the central source of truth, confirmed this as fact. This long established, conventional wisdom permeated 17th century Europe. There was no need to question this conviction. Astronomers built models and designed maps based on it that explained the movements of the heavens. The model wasn't "broken," indeed it was used to navigate the globe. Equilibrium existed between the model and the travels of explorers. This conventional picture of a stationary earth at the center of the universe had been the conventional wisdom for over a thousand years and was deeply embedded in people's imagination. Sobel captures its power when describing the arguments church leaders made against Galileo. She states that his writing about the earth rotating on an axis about the sun was "the most stunning reversal of perception ever to have jarred intelligent thought: We are not the center of the universe. The immobility of our world is an illusion. We spin. We speed through space. We circle the sun. We live on a wandering star."⁴ She shows the power of the conventional wisdom that had created so extensive a sense of equilibrium:

The apparent steadiness of the Earth lulls the mind into a false stability. The body's footing feels so secure that the mind naturally interprets the daily bobbing up and down of the Sun, the Moon, the planets, and the stars as motions entirely external to the Earth. Even at night, under the open sky, assaulted by the intimations of infinity scintillating through the cope of heaven, the mind would rather cede revolution to the universe than relinquish the solace of solid ground.

This incontrovertible perception of earthly rest gains support on every hand. The halting drop of each autumn leaf adds weight to the case for stillness. Indeed, if the earth really turned toward the east at a high velocity, falling leaves would all scatter to the west of the trees. Wouldn't they?

Wouldn't a cannon fired to the west carry further than a salvo to the east?

Wouldn't birds lose their bearings in midair?⁵

⁴ 153.

⁵ 153-154.

NATURE: In their book Surfing the Edge of Chaos⁶ Pascale, Millemann and Gioja recount the story of the dodo bird whose habitat was in the South Pacific. Prior to the period of European colonization the dodo had lived for long period of time in a state of equilibrium. Consequently, with few predators to deal with, this large bird had lost the capacity for flight. When European's arrived with firearms the dodo's known world of equilibrium was radically transformed into massive disequilibrium in a very brief period of time. The bird had no adaptive defenses and went extinct. But this is not the only example. "In Hawaii, prolonged isolation gave rise to species of plants and bird life that lacked defenses found in more diverse environments. There was no real threat from indigenous browsing animals, so plants bore no toxins or thorns. Many species of birds found it more convenient to nest on the ground. After the introduction of rats, pigs, goats, and mongooses, 88 percent of Hawaii's native birds and 10 percent of its plants disappeared."⁷

CONTEMPORARY LIFE: In his book The Lexus and the Olive Tree⁸, Freedman describes how his world of understanding as a New York Times reporter was thrown into chaos by, symbolically, the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980's. The wall had symbolized a world of dynamic equilibrium that had existed throughout most of the 20th century. At least three generations had known nothing else except the geopolitical world formed in the first third of the last century. That world was shaped around simple, basic and terrifying dichotomies of politics, economics and military strategy. The dichotomies can be illustrated using the simple table below.

⁶ Richard T. Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja Surfing the Edge of Chaos (New York: Crown Business: 2000).

⁷ 22.

⁸ Freedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree

EQUILIBRIUM OF THE 20TH CENTURY WORLD

EAST	WEST
Communism	Democracy
Totalitarianisms	Free World
State Socialism	Capitalism
Left	Right
Soviet Union	United States
"Dark Empire"	One nation Under God

The list could go on, but the point is made. Within this bi-polar world (we will soon discover that bi-polarity is a primary characteristic of the late modern period) other nations were described as either aligned or non-aligned. All military strategy was designed by each side to thwart the other, even to the point of having huge arsenals of ballistic missiles aimed at each other's country in a so-called *MAD* defense strategy. This world, Freeman pointed out, was not difficult to understand even if there were many complexities in its details. It, too, was a world of equilibrium in which everyone understood the rules and knew how to take a side. It was a world of alignments. In the last decade of the twentieth century this stable world fell apart and with it all the habits and equilibrium that had given it meaning. A Known World came crashing to the ground. With its ending has emerged a period with little clarity and competing interpretations about where the geopolitical world is moving. The emergence of ideas and movements such as *globalization* do not return a period of equilibrium but signal the confusion of values and purpose in which people currently find themselves. Events such as the 2000 protests in Seattle and the 2001 protests in Quebec City and Genoa illustrate this lack of clarity, confusion of values and struggle to know who makes and how decisions are made in a world made much smaller by the internet and global communications yet much more opaque with the end of the old dichotomized equilibrium.

While equilibrium provides species and organizations with solid frameworks within which to function, at the same time, it can lead to death because it also embeds practices which, as certain as they might feel within equilibrium, no longer represent how things work. When someone, or something, comes along to challenge and upset that equilibrium, it is often difficult for species or

people to let go of their known world habits. Convention exerts a powerful control over our lives. This is why it is so important for leaders today, in a period of massive discontinuous change, to understand how leadership has been shaped by a certain period of equilibrium often identified as modernity and, for the church, a world of functional Christendom where it was near the center of the culture.⁹ The common sense, conventional ways of seeing and thinking about the world, or leadership, or the church, in these periods of modernity and a functional Christendom became so deeply embedded in our imaginations that they continue to have a powerful influence on the ways the church approaches leadership. In this sense, conventional, common sense ideas formed in an extended period of equilibrium function something like the immune system of an organism. The purpose of the immune system is to protect the organism from foreign substances that would threaten its equilibrium. Similarly, the common sense, conventional wisdom about leadership and how organizations work, formed over the long period of stability of modernity and a functional Christendom, act like an immune system blocking contrary ideas or frameworks from disrupting the equilibrium of our world, our churches, our leadership frameworks.

In a time of discontinuous change formerly common sense, conventional ways of leading become prisons that block adaptation. This is why skills are needed for leading organizations out of this known world. What are some of the common sense, immune systems we inherited that still control our imagination even though the equilibrium of our known world is over? This is way of asking how we become aware of the maps that have formed North American culture for much of the 20th century. Some understanding of these maps helps us to shape new maps based on self understanding and awareness.

THE DISLOCATION OF OUR KNOWN WORLD

What We Know Becomes the Way We Live

Educator, Parker Palmer, states that what teachers (which are what pastors and denominational executives do a great of the time

⁹ See *Missional Church*, chapters 2-3

in the church) actually believe about the world is a powerful factor in how lives get shaped. What he means by belief is what philosophers call *epistemology*. Epistemology is about how we know and the maps we use to make sense of this world in which we live and need to function. Palmer addresses his comments to educators on university and college campuses, they also offer helpful ways of engaging this discussion. What Palmer wants to do is to:

...try to reach into the underlying nature of our knowledge itself. I want to reach for the relation of community to the very mode of knowing dominant in the academy.

To put it in philosophical terms, I want to try to connect concepts of community to questions of epistemology, which I believe are the central questions for any institution engaged in a mission of knowing, teaching, and learning. How do we know? How do we learn? Under what conditions and with what validity?

I believe that it is here at the epistemological core of our knowledge and our processes of knowing that our powers for forming or deforming human consciousness are to be found. I believe that it is here, in our modes of knowing, that we shape souls by the shape of our knowledge. It is here that the ideas of community must ultimately take root and have impact if it is to reshape the doing of higher education.

My thesis is a very simple one: I do not believe that epistemology is a bloodless abstraction; the way we know has powerful implications for the way we live. I argue that every epistemology tends to become an ethic and that every way of knowing tends to become a way of living.¹⁰

Palmer is saying some very important things for our conversation about leadership in this new context. It is important to attend carefully to what he is saying before moving on to the next section. The implication is that leading out of our known world is as much about how and what we *know* (epistemology) as it is about actions or

strategies. In fact, how and what we know will have profound effects on how we act. This is why Palmer is adamant that epistemology is not a bloodless abstraction. What does all this mean?

If one were to ask most people the question of what are the ways we know the world, they would have a strange, bewildered puzzling look on their faces. Normally, one does not bother to ask such “abstract” questions because in a common culture one assumes there is some form of broad agreement in place about what we know and how we know. This is one of those fish and water relationships. But we begin to see why the question is important by stepping back a little from our own group or time. What about fish swimming in a different bowl of water – do they know the world in the same ways as we take for granted? For example, imagine we could step back into twelfth or thirteenth century (this seems to be done quite easily on television these days so such an imaginary journey may not be that difficult) Europe and ask someone a question like: “Why does a specific type of tree grow the leaves that it does?” They would likely respond that it was because the spirit, or soul, of that type of tree caused it to grow in that kind of way. If we pressed a little further and asked them how they knew that was why the tree grew that kind of leaf they would, with a bemused smile, tell us quite simply that was because Aristotle or the Scriptures, or tradition taught such truths and everyone knew that to be the authority by which truth was revealed. If we then went to the late 20th century and visited a high school classroom with the same questions we would get a very different set of responses. As to why certain trees grew the leaves they did we would be given a brief statement on species diversification, habitat adaptation and genetic determination. These are, clearly, answers of a different sort. When asked how the student knew this was the case they would respond in terms of observation, studies in empirical research using sophisticated tools for dissection and longitudinal studies in different environments together with data from other species-specific trees in other parts of the world. Again, there is a different source to this kind of knowing.

The different sources of knowledge create vastly different responses and actions. In the 12th century, because trees are somehow shaped by spirits, or soul, this determines a way of acting toward the trees. They are something more than merely inanimate things, they are animated by

¹⁰ Parker Palmer, “CHANGE, COMMUNITY, CONFLICT, AND WAYS OF KNOWING WAYS TO DEEPEN OUR EDUCATIONAL AGENDA.”

spirit and this elicits a way of living with and toward them. In the 20th century example, trees have become, by and large, inanimate objects, they are things and this creates its own set of responses and actions toward them. In these examples one can see that there are different ways of knowing – it is not all just obvious common sense. Furthermore, these different ways of knowing result in different ways of acting. This is Palmer's point about the fact that the way we know forms our consciousness, that is, it gives us the way we respond to and act in the world. The ways in which we act in the world are generally described as *ethics*. Thus, putting these two ideas together, Palmer is saying that *epistemology* is not a useless, abstract, bloodless idea that philosophers talk about because they don't have much to do with the real world. On the contrary, *epistemology* (how we know) determines our *ethics* (how we act). How we know directly affects our values, those things we deem important and valuable, as well as our actions, the actions we take based on what our values and ethics. This is why Palmer makes the powerful statement: "...we shape souls by the shape of our knowledge..." What we know does become how we live. Yet, referring back to the initial metaphor of the fish and water, most of the time we are unaware of how we know, of what is actually shaping our souls and our actions.

All of this has important implications for those who seek to draw new maps for our context of discontinuous change. Maps, we begin to recognize, are not neutral. Maps are about our *epistemologies*, about how and what we know of the world. And maps shape the way we live and act in the world. Therefore, before attempting to imagine new maps, it is a wise traveler who first makes sure they have some awareness of maps that have been shaping them to this point. This discussion has significant bearing on how the church will re-shape its imagination and structure its organizations in this moment of discontinuous change. Within the church the tendency is to believe that the ways in which we act, the ways our organizations and leadership function are based primarily on theological convictions given by traditions, the Scripture, and church teaching (preaching and seminary education). The observer of the fish swimming in this particular water would want to argue that most of the metaphors and beliefs actual come from the unobserved world of the larger culture. This reality is captured in the words of one pastor who, when reflecting on the practices of his denomination,

stated: "What we say we believe and what we do are two different things!"

How do we go about recognizing these epistemologies, these images and metaphors that have shaped us? How does the fish see the water in which it is swimming? Lesslie Newbigin is, again, a helpful reflector on this question. His ability to describe the maps that have shaped the church in the West came from the fact that he had spent the better part of his life outside his own culture as a British missionary serving in India. This cross-cultural experience enabled him to see his own culture through the lenses of another. From the perspective of a missionary in India he gradually came to see how deeply he had been conditioned by his own culture. At the same time, indwelling the way in which the variety of Indian worldviews accounted for how they knew the world, Newbigin began to see the plausibility structures that informed his own European culture. He described this process of becoming aware:

Initially I am not aware of this as a myth (the worldviews that shape western culture). As long as I retain the innocence of a thoroughly western man, unshaken by the serious involvement in another culture, I am not aware of this myth. It is simply 'how things are'...No myth is seen as a myth by those who inhabit it: it is simply the way things are.¹¹

Few leaders in North America today have this kind of opportunity. But the current transition moment gives to church leaders this kind of opportunity. It is as if a giant earthquake has shaken the foundations of western culture so that we are able, as it were, to look into the fault lines and actually see the structures on which our own culture has been constructed. Here is the unique gift of this moment. For a brief period of time we have the opportunity to be like cross-cultural missionaries in our own context. It has become possible to combine the reflections of people like Newbigin with our own experiences of dislocation to gain insight into the plausibility structures, the maps and myths that have shaped every part of our existence as congregations, denominations and leaders in North America. What then are these maps, the epistemologies that

¹¹ Newbigin, *Christ and Culture* (Scottish Journal of Theology, 31: 1-22). See also The Open Secret, chapter 9.

so deeply shape the way we act as church leaders in this culture?

For the past three hundred years a specific kind of culture shaped our epistemologies with massive implications for how denominations and congregations have been led. *New York Times* writer, Thomas Petzinger, summarized some of the characteristics of this known world:

Sir Isaac Newton was the new Moses, presenting a few simple equations – the “laws of nature” – that never failed in predicting the tides, the orbits, or the movement of any object that could be seen or felt. Output was exactly proportional to input. Every action begat a reaction. Everything was equal to the sum of its parts. The entire universe was seen as a clockworks that could be understood by analyzing the individual parts. Newton’s mechanics seemed so universal they became the organizing principle of post feudal society itself, ‘the best model of government,’ as one authority said in the 1720’s. The principles of mechanics inspired Frederick the Great to structure the Prussian army as an assemblage of standardized parts, equipment, and command language.

The very equations of economics, including those in use today, were built explicitly on the principles of mechanics and thermodynamics, right down to the terms and symbols. The economy was said to have “momentum,” or was “*gaining* steam.” A successful company ran like a “well-oiled” or “fine-tuned” machine, a poorly performing company was “off track or “stuck in low gear”... The Newtonian worldview was appropriate for a time... upon closer inspection the science turned out to be – well - wrong, or at best correct only within the tolerances of Newton’s instruments.”¹²

Petzinger ably summarizes some of the dominant metaphors that have shaped our reality. These metaphors have had major implications for our understanding and practice of leadership. What follows is a brief description of some of these significant metaphors.

¹² Thomas Petzinger, *The New Pioneers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999) 18-19.

DEFINING METAPHORS OF OUR KNOWN WORLD

A NEWTONIAN WORLD

“Newtonian science looked upon the physical universe as an exquisitely designed giant mechanism, obeying elegant deterministic laws of motion” (Ervin Laszlo, [The Systems View of the World](#), 11).

It was Sir Isaac Newton’s (1643-1727) brilliant discoveries and elucidation of laws defining the operation of the universe that created a long, three hundred and fifty year metaphor about the nature of reality and how we know reality that has dominated modern culture and modern understandings of leadership. In 1687 his great work *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* was published. It contained the center point of his worldview, the law of universal gravitation. Newton argued that gravity was a “force” which caused all phenomena in the universe to operate through predictable, mechanical laws with mathematical regularity. It was an invisible force in the universe that explained all other actions (this image was later translated into Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” of economic theory that still shapes much of the economic imagination even to this day). With the invention of calculus, Newton defined the actual and possible motions of all bodies in space in terms of exact, predictable equations. It was an accomplishment of immense intellectual power. Einstein described it as one of the greatest advances in thought that a single individual was ever privileged to make. Newton introduced into the Western mind a new conception about what and how we know the world.

A: The Machine as Dominant Metaphor

As a result of Newton’s work the lenses used to read our world emerged from his depictions of these universe laws. From his work emerged a picture of the universe as a great mechanical clock operating on the basis of deterministic laws. While Newton did not create or support this clockwork, machine-like picture, it quickly became the dominant image for knowing reality in the modern period. This way of knowing makes some sense when placed in

context. In 1656, the pendulum was invented, making clocks more accurate. In 1504, the first portable (but not very accurate) timepiece was invented in Nuremberg, Germany by Peter Henlein. The first reported person to actually wear a watch on the wrist was the French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). With a piece of string, he attached his pocket watch to his wrist. In the 17th century this new machine comes to dominate the imagination of the emerging modern culture. Consequently, it becomes the dominant metaphor by which everything else is explained. The idea of the machine, a mechanical, predictable, controllable human invention enters the imagination of the West as the primary metaphor for knowing what the world outside of us is about. Rene Descartes, looking at this new invention and the emerging age of the machine declared:

We see clocks, artificial fountains, mills and other similar machines which, though merely man-made, have nonetheless the power to move by themselves in several different ways.... I do not recognize any difference between the machines made by craftsman and the various bodies that nature alone composes.¹³

Descartes makes the epistemological connection clear: the organic and natural world are understood to be machines and interpreted on the same level as the newly invented machines like the clock.

A parallel example in our time is the invention and pervasive presence of the computer. The human mind is currently described as a complex computer. The language of the computer pervades conversation about a multitude of things indicating that another way of knowing is replacing the mechanical – a different kind of machine is coming to define the way we know the world. The pertinent point here is that from the mid-sixteen hundreds to the latter part of the twentieth century, the dominant metaphor for understanding and functioning in our world has been the machine. This is what is meant by the phrase “Newtonian World” which is an integral part of what is meant in this book by the phrase “Known World.” This epistemology is the framework that has formed the modern

imagination in education, politics, science, business and the church. In this light it is important to remember the observation of Parker Palmer that we shape souls by the shape of our knowledge; the way we know becomes the way we live. Epistemology determines ethics and actions.

Our lives not only tend to take form around dominant metaphors about how and what we know about reality. How we organize our lives, systems and worlds also takes form around such metaphors. Leadership frameworks, for example, become concretized expressions of our epistemologies. Like the fish in water, these dominant metaphors unconsciously shape leaders and the organizations in which they operate. First, we shape the way we know the world (as Newton did) and then that epistemology shapes us (it, literally, becomes the eyes with which we see and the ears with which we hear). When a specific way of knowing and acting are in place over an extended period of time (the modern world created by this Newtonian mechanism was in place for more than three hundred years) stability and equilibrium result in a specific epistemology shaping the organizations and leadership frameworks out of which a culture operates. The whole system comes to be viewed as the normal, natural way things work, the “common sense “ of the culture. But the machine metaphor is only part of our “known world” epistemology. There are other, connected, elements.

B: Reality is Fundamentally about Things or Objects

A corollary of the machine model is the view that the world outside us is comprised of a series of discrete things or objects like stars, planets, atoms, viruses, and so forth. Epistemologies not only answer the question of how we know but also determine what it is that we know. Epistemologies answer the question of what we know, of how the world is actually put together. Descartes', one of the founders of this worldview, responded to this question of how the world actually operates by stating that it is divided into two distinct parts. First, was the world of the thinking mind, the core center of the independent human self. He used the Latin phrase *res cogitans* to describe this. Second, there was all the rest of reality, which he described as *res extensa*, that is, the material objects extended outside the self in the physical world. Note how this predefines how we know – through the rationale categories of the

¹³ In Frijof Capra, *The Web of Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996) 67.

thinking mind we come to know and define what exists outside ourselves in the world. Already there is here a way of seeing the world – it is separate and apart from human selves. Therefore, one of the primary metaphors that have formed our known world causes us to “see” the world in terms of things, objects outside the thinking, rational self. Immanuel Kant, another shaper of this worldview, applied a similar way of thinking in the area of ethics. For Kant the only way of knowing how to act in the world was through objective, universal categories for moral life that were, in effect, abstract moral laws applying to all people, at all time, in all places.

The objects that comprised this mechanical, clockwork universe were governed by a series of laws determining their actions and defining their relationships with each other. One could imagine a pool table (leaving aside for a moment that it is not a three-dimensional picture) on which lie a series of billiard balls set out across the table. This is something like the metaphor of reality that has persisted for most of the three hundred years or so of modernity. As a part of this epistemological framework, the modern period believed it could harness the powers of objective observation to identify and describe invariable and predictable laws regulating the operation of all objects. In this way the objects could be forced to reveal their secrets, they could be controlled and directed.

C: Laws provide predictability and control over things.

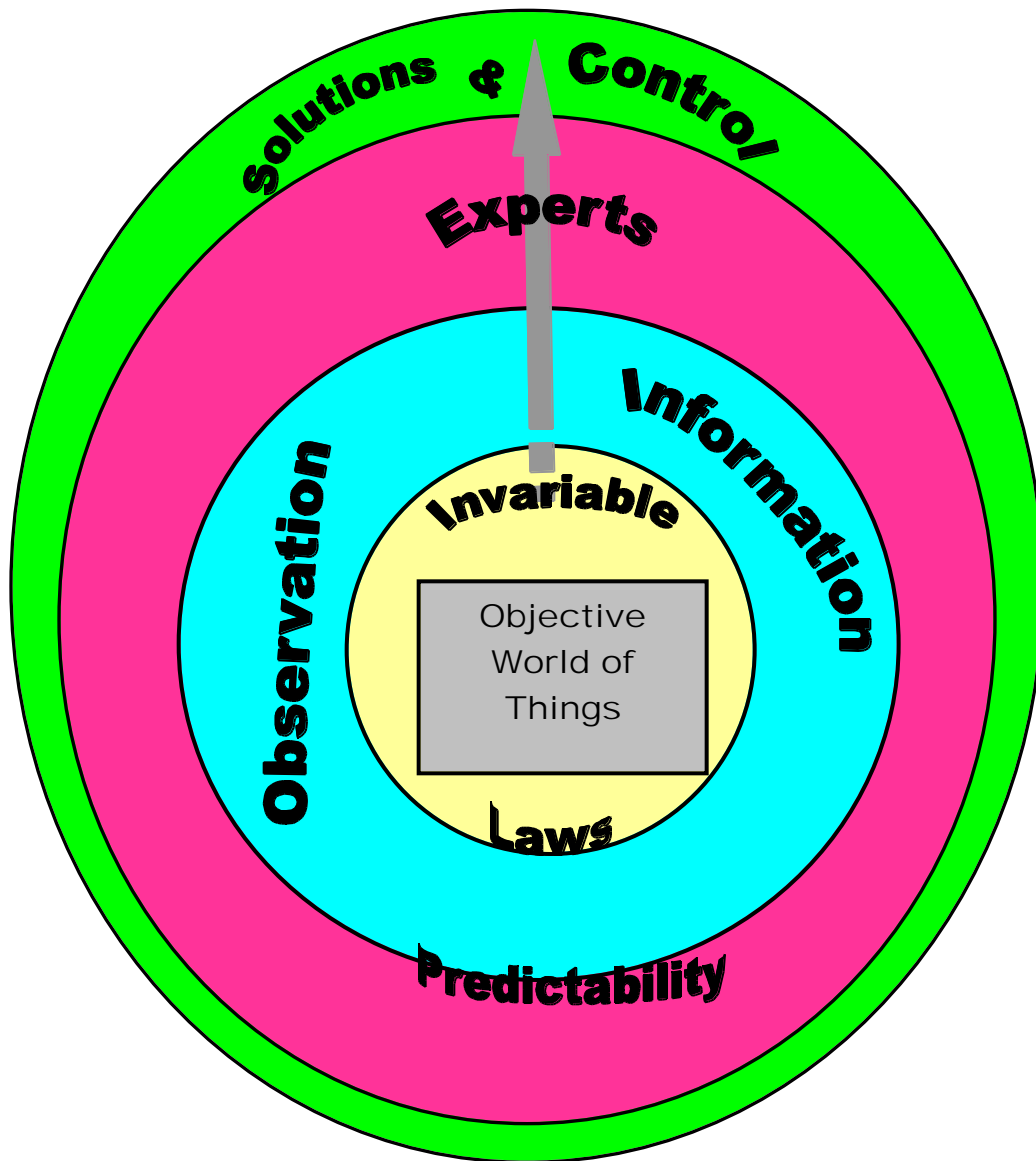
In a simplified way one can describe the dynamics shaping the imagination of this known world as follows. If the world is comprised of objects (objectivity) then the rational laws which the human mind discovers “out there” in the physical world give us the capacity to predict what is going to happen and, therefore, control outcomes. The process is to reduce these objects to their simplest components - the smallest, most irreducible element. By understanding the discrete elements it becomes possible to understand the mechanisms of the whole which, in turn, makes it possible, through the laws that are present, to predict and control how the whole works. This gives human beings predictability and control. Thus, things are studied in separation, as isolated facts. Knowledge became fragmented into professions and the basic relationship of human beings to this objectified world was that of control

and power. It is a world of predictability and control where it was believed possible, with enough information, to define outcomes and guide the future of organizations and systems. Like the billiard balls on a pool table, if one could analyze all the potential combinations of ways the separate balls could interact with one another in some sequence, one could “align” the balls in order to control and reach a predetermined goal. This generally accepted “common sense” way of functioning has deeply effected the imagination of the church in terms of its organizational, planning and leadership structures. Behind a good many of the functional and structural programs being used by denominations and congregations is this basic epistemological framework. It is a framework that continues to determine how we act.

Epistemology does determine ethics. The following section uses the example of strategic planning models, a methodology used by many church organizations and assumed to be value neutral, as a way of seeing how this “map,” or worldview, is operative. This is done in order to understand the power of the maps that shape us so that we might form new maps with some awareness of where we have been. The Newtonian world we have summarized is, in many ways, a world of linear thinking. It carries the assumption that our planning and actions can be carried out in a quite straightforward, uni-directional manner. The assumption in this way of knowing the world is that if, through the competencies of empirical research and observation, it were possible to identify all the elements of a problem and then place them in order of sequence it becomes possible to predict solutions that will lead to control and success. This kind of activity has little to do with relationality but with ordering and managing an external world in order to develop solutions. The next diagram expresses how this Known World framework continues to function in our imaginations. Note the almost irresistible movement out from the center (this deeply embedded view that everything outside the self is “objective reality”) to be defined with controllable solutions that result in preferred futures (language too often used in the church today: developing the ‘preferred’ future for the congregation as if we have that ability to determine reality and make the right outcomes come about). Built into this Known World are assumptions about the nature of leadership and organizations that persist into the present. One

reason leaders find themselves stressed and confused is because they are shaped by this known world to believe that, with the right amount of information, or the correct program, they should be able to produce the right solutions for their

context. This Known World is falling apart in terms of its applications to church leadership.



Implications for Organizations and Leadership

What are implications of this “map” on our understandings of organizations and our practices of leadership within the church? Petzinger writes that until recently “people saw their worlds through the Industrial Age metaphor of the machine and built their organizations accordingly.”¹⁴ While this world was crumbling as a mental model throughout the last half of the 20th century, it continued to define the understanding of areas such as the business, government and the church. Petzinger’s description describes most churches and denominations.

Even as it was toppled from unassailability in science, Newtonian mechanics remained firmly lodged as the mental model of management, from the first stirrings of the industrial revolution right through the advent of modern-day M.B.A. studies. Jobs were divided ever more narrowly, turning workers into so many tiny objects performing mindless, repetitive tasks; the whole, after all, was always equal to the sum of its parts. Management remained an act of calibration and control: input equals output, action equals reaction...

Command and control leadership prevailed to the end of the century. Government policy rested safely in the hands of the “best and the brightest.” Leaders skilled at control became leaders of modernity...Management’s job was assembling the right pieces, pointing them toward the optimum, then making sure the system never wavered.

...Into the moral void came numbers, only numbers. Optimization demanded measurement; all measurements could be abstractly converted to dollars [*read: growing churches*]; and profit thus became the principal ethos of business. Indeed, by the end of the 1980s business stood on only two foundations: “re-engineering” (the application of Newtonianism to repair problems created by earlier Newtonianism) and ...¹⁵

This Newtonian “common sense” way of dealing with the challenges of change still

represents the map used by church systems. Its logic of analyzing, seeking out experts and developing planning solutions shapes the imagination of leaders because this epistemology, the belief that solutions are predictable with the right amount of skill, detail, planning and management, remains powerfully in place. It is as if there is a single, real solution out there to the challenges of change confronting us today. Many leaders continue to function out of a world shaped by the conviction that if they have enough information, do enough analysis and consult the right experts, then they will be able to create a plan that will control and direct the future of their organizations. Yet the fact is that more than 75% of senior leaders in the corporate world report that their strategic change plans do not create the designed or promised results. Those percentages cannot be less and are likely much higher in the church world. Margaret Wheatley describes the power of this Newtonian imagination on the world of organization and leadership in this way:

The machine image of the cosmos was translated into organizations...Responsibilities have been organized into functions. People have been organized into roles. Page after page of organizational charts depict the workings of the machine: the number of pieces, what fits where, who the most important pieces are...In organizations, we focused attention on structure and organizational design...we really believed we could study the parts, no matter how many of them there were, to arrive at knowledge of the whole. We have reduced and described and separated things into cause and effect, and drawn the world in lines and boxes.

A world based on machine images is a world described by boundaries. In a machine, every piece knows its place. Likewise, in Newtonian organizations, we’ve drawn boundaries everywhere. We’ve created roles and accountabilities, specifying lines of authority and limits to responsibility. We have drawn boundaries around the flow of experience, fragmenting whole networks of interaction into discrete steps...We have even come to think of power – an elusive, energetic force if ever there was one – as a bounded resource, defined as “my share of the pie.”¹⁶

¹⁴ See Cecily Ross: *Paradigms lost...and gained*, in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, Saturday, March 13, 1999, page D11.

¹⁵ Petzinger, 19-20

¹⁶ Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 29-30.

To a large extent church leaders do not believe that these descriptions characterize either themselves or their organizations. In fact, the opposite is the case. These metaphors continue to shape and frame how many church leaders function and it determines the models that get used within their organizational systems.

The Known World in Operation

In an early book, (*Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), Lesslie Newbigin described the characteristic dichotomy inherent in this way of knowing and acting. Modernity is dichotomized between a public world of “facts” and a private world of “values,” an “inner” world of intellect and an “outer” world of “objects.” *Foolishness to the Greeks* represented Newbigin’s reflections, as a foreign missionary returning to the England, on the basic framework of knowing that had shaped Western culture and the Western church. He had left England some thirty years earlier. From a cross cultural perspective he looked inside the “fish bowl” to see the “water” we often miss, the Known World of modern, Western culture. He described some of its most basic ways of knowing and acting arguing that fundamental to how we know in modern culture is a dichotomy between

the public and the private. An effective missionary encounter with this culture must address this dichotomy.

One may argue that the modernity Newbigin describes is already broken apart with the emergence of the postmodern and, therefore there is no longer a need for a missionary encounter with it. That is only partly the case; modernity of this kind continues to have a powerful hold on the church’s imagination. The real benefit of Newbigin’s analysis is its ability to provide a lens through which to see how modernity continues to shape our actions. New maps may then be formed with awareness and discernment.

Newbigin describes the way of knowing and acting in modernity as its “plausibility structure,” i.e., the frameworks, or “glasses” we wear that determine how beliefs function and which beliefs are acceptable. He observed a culture functioning out of a dichotomized world. Emerging from the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, it had created a divided plausibility structure of the public and the private. The diagram below illustrates this way of knowing and acting:



Dichotomies that shape us

The left column indicates the primary ways we practice our knowing and acting in what we view as the largely public world of everyday life. This is the practical, functional world of our activities and organizations. Here truth is normally conceived as that which functionally and operationally explains the cause of things. It is a world open to empirical verification. The right hand column describes the largely private, personal world that functions as a separately realm from the public. It is the world of personal belief, private faith, values, and church life. In this world faith predominates in context that cannot and does not require empirical verification. Such a construction of reality, precisely because of its deeply embedded dichotomy, separates ends from the means. Causes, ends and means are limited to verifiable, measurable explanations from within the left hand column. Notions of final causes, what theology would call teleology and the biblical world, eschatology, are all removed from any meaningful place in this dichotomized world. This is, perhaps, why for the churches of North America, growth has become the goal. Growth is measurable and controllable; it is all about rational goals and appropriate ends. This preoccupation with growth is the other side of the loss of teleology and the reduction of eschatology to dates, times and numbers as if these were the primary categories for determining how the church ought to frame its own understanding of reality.

This is an important point to make in terms of leadership and the development of new maps. It is often made in more complex language by saying that teleology is split off from causality. Teleology has to do with the purpose of things, the reason for which something exists. It relates to the values and belief systems we use to give an account of why things behave as they do in terms of their ends or goals or purposes. In terms of the diagram, the idea of teleology is set over on the right side. It is part of values and beliefs not facts and truth. It is this kind of dichotomy which lies at the root of why people can operate in separate worlds relative to their actions and beliefs. Thus, for example, for many people the worlds of economics and business are distinct and separate form that of faith and belief. Similarly, this gives account of why there is often deemed a separation between politics and faith. It also begins to explain why leaders will readily take up models

and programs from the worlds of business, for example, and use them uncritically in the church context without any reflection on their implications for belief (i.e., theological reflection which includes teleology). The left column is a world of facts from which purpose in the Christian and biblical sense of final ends has been removed as a source of explanation for those so-called facts. Because modernity has so deeply indwelt this dichotomy it seems normal and common sense for people to live inside it without an awareness of the basic divisions that are in operation shaping everything we do and the ways we think about things and ourselves. But this also begins to account for the profound sense of disconnection and loss of a larger purpose people experience in our culture. When means and ends are dislodged from their larger meaning, their teleology, then the results are the creation of human social life in which people themselves become little more than means and ends, commodities to be used or not used in a larger system. In this reductionistic world people only have usefulness in the limited sense of being a commodity. Hence the palpable sense of isolation and loneliness in the North American spirit where people increasingly turn in upon themselves, seeking in their own emotional fulfillment some means of discovering a meaning greater than commodification. Epistemologies are never neutral they invariably form a way of being that works itself out in how we behave toward and live with one another. It may be helpful to expand this important point with one example of how it has worked itself out in the North American church over much of the last century in terms of the much-debated distinction between what is called evangelism and social action.

Evangelism- vs. -Social Action

The ongoing debate over the relative place and importance of social action and evangelism is an example of this dichotomizing framework. In general, evangelism has been viewed as the primary and most important expression of Christian witness while social action has been given a secondary and supportive role. This is because in evangelism, normatively defined as referring to witnessing to another for salvation of their soul, the right column is viewed as the locus of primary significance for Christian life – it is about the individual soul, the spiritual world, the future state of the human spirit. Here teleology has its place – urging souls to prepare to meet

their God. The spiritual world (usually, in this dichotomized model its full reality lies in the future and is deemed to deal with “eternal” rather than “temporal” realities) is paramount and, therefore, evangelism takes precedence over social action.

In the last forty years evangelical theology has been compelled to wrestle with the implications of a kingdom theology (given its early and compelling articulation in the writing of George Eldon Ladd in the 70's¹⁷). In this theology the kingdom of God is rightly understood as having both “already” and “not yet” elements in the sense that Jesus has both brought and embodies the kingdom in its present reality while, at the same time, its completion and fullness lie in the future at the parousia when time and history are brought to completion in Jesus’ return. In its dialogue on the meaning of the kingdom, evangelical theology increasingly recognized that the kingdom Jesus announced and embodied was about economic and social justice in this time and place. The shalom of God, the announcement texts like Luke 4 where not simply about a future beyond time but involved the presence of the kingdom in this world. It was becoming clear that addressing poverty and injustice was not an ancillary element of the gospel of the kingdom but part of its essential character. Consequently, through emerging groups and movements such as Evangelicals for Social Action and Sojourners there emerged a new and often intense debate about the relationship between evangelism and social action. What characterized these debates were various attempts at bringing the two sides into a far closer balance while still maintaining the priority of evangelism. What seems to have been largely missed in these discussions is any recognition that the very framing of the debate, on both sides of the divide, is itself a reflection of an argument from within this dichotomized framework – the fact-value split of modernity. Therefore, the debate itself reflects an inability to self-critically extricate itself from this powerful bi-polarity. Because the debate remains grounded in this framework, evangelism is viewed as a separate and distinct activity of the church which, because it relates to the spiritual reality of the soul, must be paramount. It is blindness to this captivity to modernity that

¹⁷ George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament

continues to compel some to suggest that, in the future, the church will be relevant to the extent that it does both evangelism and social action. In point of fact, what is needed is for the church to recognize the ways it functions within the categories of modernity and is, therefore, blinded to any kind of alternative imagination which might radically deconstruct its theology and practice at this point in its relationship with modernity.

But there is a second response that characterizes much of the evangelical church in terms of the fact-value split. This response creates results that move in a direction opposite to first. It was indicated that the two columns represent the two ways that modernity divides reality while failing to see that such a division is itself a value. In other words, behind the framework lies another framework, a more overarching value about what is important and what is secondary. This meta-value is that the realm of fact, nature and the objective world is far more important and critical in terms of the day-to-day, cause-and-effect, practical, functional living of life. Consequently, the left hand column takes pre-eminence in determining the practical and functional ways in which the church actually operates and carries on its life. Organizational, programmatic and leadership frameworks for the church are drawn from and based upon the frameworks derived from the left column. After all, this is the real world of hard facts and practical experience. This is why the world of faith, with its use of Scripture and theology, is perceived to be a function of personal, private piety and values while the world of facts, which uses science and research based in the social sciences and business worlds, is perceived to be a function of public truth applicable to concrete actions in the actual functioning of church systems. Therefore, when it comes to the church acting and functioning in the world the move is always in the direction of the left column where the primacy of fact, social science and business research shapes reality. Scripture and theology become secondary resources that form a prolegomena or legitimating framework to the program and systems developed from the left column. Text and tradition become more like proof texts that suggest certain programs and structures can be given legitimacy in the church because they reflect themes in both text and tradition. But the operational reality is that the right column becomes secondary support for actions shaped by the left column.

This description is not intended to deny the legitimacy of the social sciences but to indicate how, by operating uncritically within this framework of modernity the church actually gives precedence to ways of functioning and acting that make the biblical and theological engagement operate as only secondary and supportive prolegomena to the primary actions and decisions drawn from the left column. The problem this creates is profoundly important and relevant for imagining alternative maps in our new context. The challenge it presents is one of how the church might discover how to indwell the biblical texts and its traditions in ways that become primary and transformative.

We don't choose to think in these dichotomies nor are our theologies intended to support them. The late French philosopher Gabriel Marcel made an important distinction between two kinds of knowing or believing. They are "believing that" and "believing in." By the former he meant a way of knowing which is about facts and truths to which one gives intellectual ascent. The creeds of the church and doctrines, such as the Trinitarian theology of Nicea, are illustrations of this type. In the main they are viewed as requiring intellectual or cognitive assent. It is "believed that" these propositions are true. By the former, Marcel sought to capture a different way of knowing. There are things we do not believe only as intellectual constructs, logical propositions or because they are teachings of the institutions to which one belongs. On the contrary, we align our practices and actions around these beliefs. This argues Marcel, is a different way of knowing, rather than "believing that" this is "believing in." Most pastors and denominational leaders would "believe that" their convictions are the opposite of what is expressed in the diagram above. But, in the structure of Marcel's description, the decisions and actions they make suggest that they "believe in" the reality of this dichotomized world. Despite good and right theologies from our traditions and histories, the plausibility structure of modernity dominates and shapes the imagination and decisions of leadership. A further illustration will make this clear.

Decision Making Processes in the Church

This is a reflection on how congregations and denominational systems actually function. In my own tradition there is a normative process of

congregationalism whereby the members of the congregation meet in assembly as the people of God to discern God's purposes for their life and make decisions. How this actually occurs reflects the presence of this dichotomizing process. Usually, at such meetings there is an agenda drawn up. It is described as the business of the meeting. The order of this business is usually quite invariable and has reached the level of a habitual practice in most congregation and denominational meetings. Initially, there is a brief period of "devotions" in which someone, usually the clergy present, lead with a brief reflection from Scripture and then a prayer. Sometimes there will also be a song, or hymn, to initiate the meeting. This usually takes no longer than fifteen minutes on the agenda. Following this there is a change of leadership when a non-clergy official comes to run the "business" of the meeting. This is the main section of the meeting and, rather than being shaped by any biblical or theological framework, it is run on the basis of *Roberts Rules of Order* which, as noted in Chapter 1, is itself the product of a specific set of events and experiences in modernity. In other words, referring back to the two columns above, the meeting of the church begins, briefly, in the right column and then quickly shifts over to the left column for the actual functioning of the meeting. No one thinks for a moment that there is anything unusual about this process. No one is aware of the actual plausibility structure at work. In fact, what tends to drive the decisions and the planning of the meetings is largely taken from the left side of the column. It is assumed that the most effective resources, tools and frameworks for making decisions about the programs, organization and actions of the congregations and the denomination are best drawn from the worlds of social science (for example: graphs, statistical information in giving patterns and worship attendance, demographics, organizational structures) and business (for example: purpose driven models, strategic planning designs, organizational effectiveness, categories for determining organizational health). To a large extent the theological convictions and frameworks that formed the core identity of the group are assumed but they usually play little more than a prolegomena in the process. This is because the public side of the column is seen to be the more important in areas of planning, organization and decision-making, that is, the actual and real decisions of the public world where actions and decisions need to be taken.

Some denominations exhibit this Known World dichotomization and plausibility structure right in the documents they use to operate. In books of order and canon laws the same type of dichotomy is operative. At the beginning of these documents there tends to be powerful and well developed theological statements regarding basic convictions about the nature of the church and the

purposes of its life. Following these sections, are much larger sections describing the functionalities of the denomination, how it practically operates and makes decisions. These have little relationship to the earlier theological statements about identity and purpose.

The diagram can be filled to express this as follows:

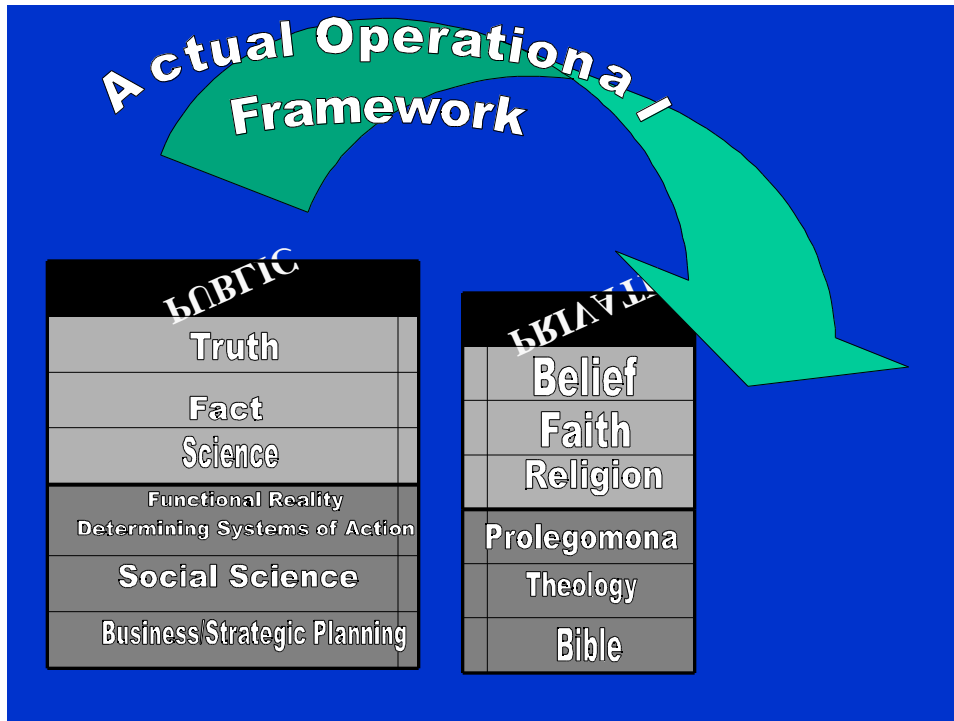
ОБЪЕКТИВНОСТ			БИБЛИЧНОСТ		
Truth			Belief		
Fact			Faith		
Science			Religion		
Functional Reality Determining Systems of Action			Prolegomona		
Social Science			Theology		
Business/Strategic Planning			Bible		

In effect, most of the decisions and practices at the everyday church level for both congregations and denominations are shaped out of this dichotomized reading of the world. In this framework what takes precedence is the left column. It is, therefore, the social sciences and business models that shape the church's practices. To a large extent the Biblical and theological are either simply assumed, in the sense that they are taken for granted as what everyone believes and so don't need to be brought into the discussion, or, they are not deemed relevant because they belong to the private part of life.

Craig Van Gelder captures this process when he describes how functional and organizational frameworks, usually taken from the social sciences and the business world, take precedence in determining the life of the church

today.¹⁸ What is left out of the church's practical, functional, organizational life is the continued reflection and integration of its theological and biblical traditions. This is, again, because of the way our Known World framework controls our imagination. It is not to suggest that the social sciences and the world of business are unimportant and have no place in the life of the church. Such is not the point. The point is that while functioning in the Known World that emerged in the modern period church leaders continue to be shaped by its categories and frameworks. This Known World becomes the framework through which the private world of our theological convictions and biblical imagination are themselves shaped. What occurs within this Known World framework is as follows:

¹⁸ Craig Van Gelder, The Essence of the Church, 20-24.



In this diagram there are two operational frameworks. One is the **actual** operating model that is running the day-to-day life of the organization (Marcel's "belief in") and its leadership, the other is the **ideal** mental model or set of values that people assume lies behind the way things are operating (Marcel's "believe that"). What this model shows is that this is not, in fact, how organizations and leadership are functioning. The ideal mental models, our theological and biblical convictions, are subsumed under the overriding functional models of the Known World.

Planning Models as Examples of this Known World Framework

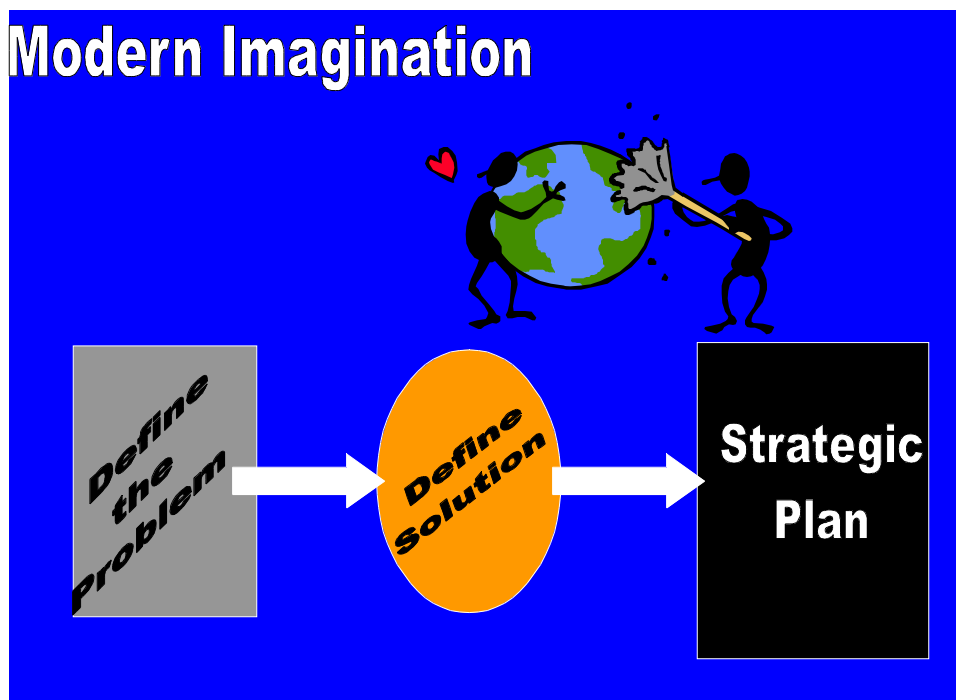
Planning is a vital part of any leadership process. It occurs at the levels of creating goals, structures and processes for shaping an organization. The idea behind planning is to align the organization with its stated goals and purposes. The kinds of planning processes used within an organization will indicate the underlying metaphors and frameworks characterizing the imagination and values of its leadership. What is being suggested is that within church

organizations planning models are formed out of the dichotomized framework outlined above and are uncritically generated from the left column of the diagram, from the public rather than the private side of the dichotomy. It is social science and business that shape our assumptions about planning and these assumptions are still rooted in the Newtonian, machine-clock mental models. The ways in which strategic planning functions in church organizations is an example of this process. The Introduction indicated that strategic planning models continue to dominate how church leaders plan. Usually, there are a series of elements involved. Denominations can purchase contracts with consulting organizations to do a wide variety of strategic planning. When this planning is done in a face-to-face relationship with a skilled, experienced and theologically integrated facilitator it can be useful. But the reality is that its basic assumptions are those of our Known World, the Newtonian world of the billiard balls and the mechanical clock, the world of prediction and control.

Strategic planning models are based upon an assumption and a relatively simple mental model that has been pervasive in our Known World of modernity and Newtonian, cause-effect definitions of reality. The assumptions behind

strategic planning are predictability and control. The basis of these assumptions is another assumption, namely, we are functioning in a world of gradual, or, incremental change. This is the belief that our world today is not all that different than it was fifty, or a hundred years ago and that change is gradual, based on what has gone before. Within this Known World assumption of continuous, gradual change, planning can have

predictability; the future can be managed because it looks like the past. The mental model that operates within this assumption is that if one can define a problem through analysis, then one can, next, define a preferred solution and, finally, come up with a strategic plan to operationalize the solution and achieve the stated goals. The following diagram illustrates this framework:



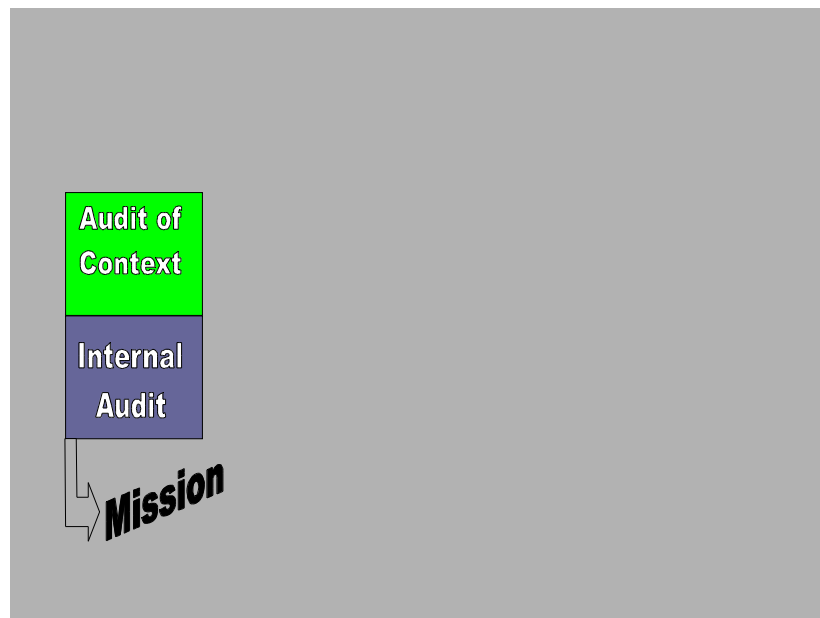
Strategic planning usually moves through a series of stages. These may be briefly summarized as follows:

STAGE I

Begin with the some form of what is called an internal audit. The objective is to gather as much information as possible about the values, structures, objectives and convictions of the organization. The result of this process is a comprehensive report on where the organization currently finds itself as well as a summary of its basic ethos and values. Complementing the internal audit is an external audit of the organization's context. This could be the community within a five-mile radius of a congregation, or it might be the demographic and life-style ethos of a whole state or province. The purpose is to gather information on the beliefs, values, habits and convictions of the various people groups resident in a designated target area. These two audits comprise an overall picture of the current church and its ministry context.

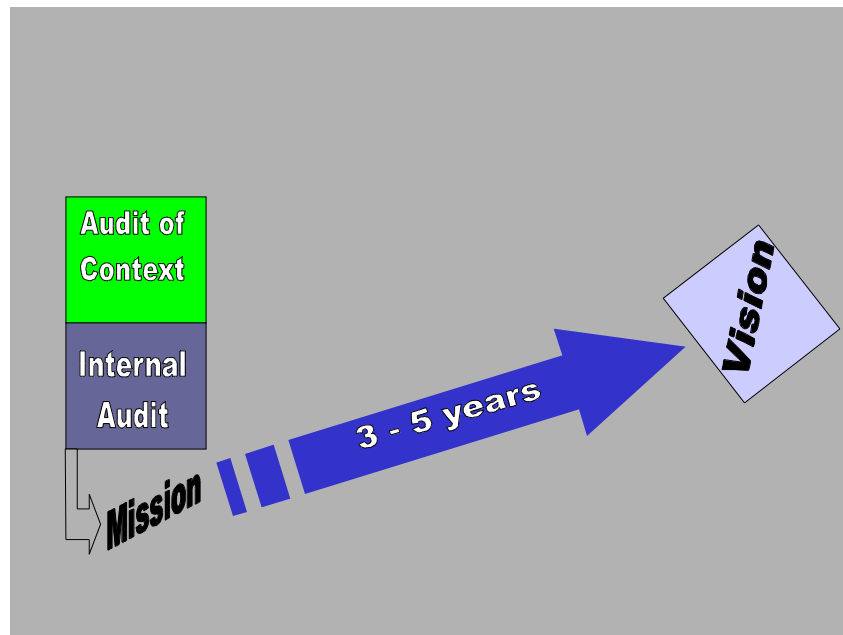
STAGE II

The second stage involves establishing a mission for the church or denomination. This is usually cast in terms of discerning God's purpose for the church. It involves engaging people in Bible study and reflection on key documents and texts from within the denomination's own theological world. Often, in a church, the process is to collect a group of diverse, key members who forms themselves into a mini community to discern God's mission for the church. The formation of such a mission can be either highly process driven, involving many meetings and dialogues across the broad membership of the church, or fairly limited in involvement and input. At the end of the process what emerges is a mission description that defines the beliefs and convictions of the organization about what it is to be about in its contexts. The next step involves taking all of this information and the mission description and writing a clear, compelling, shared mission statement based on stages I-II. These two stages can be diagrammed as follows:



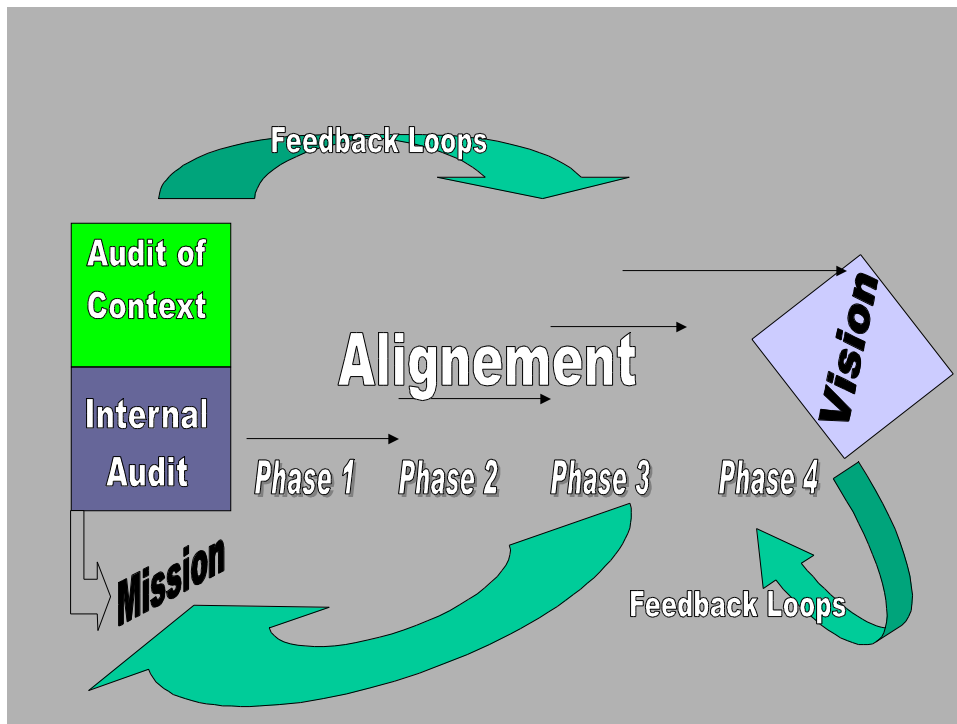
STAGE III

Based upon Stages I & II, the next step is to create a vision statement that will be a clear, compelling picture of the preferred future that the church wants to have given its mission statement. Such a vision can include descriptions of what the church wants to achieve in areas like: evangelism, growth, leadership, and worship, etc. It is normally stated in terms of a preferred future three to five years into the future. Note that this is now beginning to have characteristics of the Known World frameworks described above. There is linearity, of a world in which there is continuous rather than discontinuous change, and the assumption of a cause-effect world. The diagram can continue to be filled out as follows:



STAGE IV

At this stage the church develops a plan comprised of a series of stages along a time path to achieving the vision. These are the concrete action plans and measurable events that move the church toward the achievement of its vision. One of the important words that are used in this process is *alignment*. This means that all the programs, resources, ministries and people are brought into line with the vision plan and its action stages. Today, many strategic planning models attempt to deal with the reality that we are no longer functioning in a world of regular, predictable, continuous change by creating what are called **feedback loops**. This means the plan creates points in its progress where, on the basis of new information and feedback from inside and outside the organization, it can make adjustments to the various stages of the plan and thus continue the progress of reaching the goal of the vision. Thus, the overall strategic planning model can be completed in the following diagram.



This book comes out of a long period of engagement with these models, my own use of them and my struggles to understand their functionality in the church. At one level I was working through the theological and ecclesiological implications of a missional theology as developed by the likes of Newbigin, Bosch and the GOCN. And yet attempts to live out their implications as a leader in an existing congregation by using the skills and models of the world for which I had been trained brought conflict and confusion. It was not just the intellectual frameworks of modernity, rooted in this Newtonian, billiard ball, world of cause and effect

that were at odds with the emerging missional ecclesiology; the leadership paradigms of that world were also becoming increasingly problematic. They too needed to be thought through in a new way.

My experience as a pastor was drawing me, increasingly, to the conclusion that leading in the church is more akin to herding cats than operationalizing a strategic plan. Cats are highly resistant to herding! This is especially the case when the incentives to be herded are very few. Churches do not pay salaries to their members; the notions of voluntary societies that have come to shape the modern church make it highly unlikely

any form of sustained alignment process can be made to work. In the business world the strategic planning process is designed to make possible the "aligning" of the employees with a corporate vision for selling products and producing growth. One can understand how the incentives of a company could create such alignment. In a world of discontinuous change this leadership model can no longer function with the effectiveness it once did in a Known, Newtonian world of predictability and incremental change. The rules are changing for how we lead in this new time of discontinuous change.

But this model continues to dominate church leadership. I recently had an extended conversation with the pastor of a large mainline church. This pastor understood well the missional theology and its implications for ecclesiology. He had come to a church comprised of a large number of professional people (many of them had received early pensions in the large levels of downsizing and re-engineering that has swept through parts of the business world) and they wanted to see a strategic plan in place that would turn their church from tradition to mission. The pastor had read a variety of books on church leadership and strategic planning. He recently read one of my books on leadership and transition and wanted advice on dealing with the challenges he was now facing three years into this change pastorate. His story is familiar. He had been invited to the church after demonstrating success in a prior congregation. The present church has a history of stability with long pastorates (twelve plus years on average), pastors who were essentially chaplains to the congregation. After the retirement of the previous pastor the congregation articulated a wish for change. Its stated desire was to shift from the status quo toward mission. The new pastor, now talking to me on the phone, arrived three years earlier with a strong mandate from the congregation for change. Convinced from his theological engagements with missional theology and ecclesiology he was committed to the creation of a missional church. The leadership of the church had bought his vision of a missional church without a lot of understanding about what that might mean or involve. Now, the pastor, staff and session of the church were deep into a process of using a strategic planning model purchased from a church information company. They worked to establish a strategic plan for change and mission based on this program. It had a series of phased-in stages around a vision for

growth: staffing for the vision, developing facilities for the vision and, finally, programming for the vision. Each phase was intended to align the congregation and its resources with the vision for growth articulated through biblical preaching, Bible study and congregational votes. The pastor was describing a classical strategic planning process. As he named the books used to arrive at the plan I knew that behind it lay assumptions borrowed from specific business models and applied to the church.

The reason for the call to me was that a lot of the "cats" were refusing to be herded and many had left for other churches. The point here is not to discuss the details of this situation, it is not unusual, but point out the prevalence and power of this Newtonian-world model. It is not to say that such strategic planning is inappropriate. Rather, it is that often such planning models drive the life of the church or denomination. These models are taken up and used with little theological reflection on what it means to be the people of God. Such models betray a continuing and deeply embedded commitment to the cannons of modernity. They remain linear and deterministic in their approach with the assumption that we are able to control and determine a preferred future by managing the multiple elements in the environment. What one experiences, and this may be why the church "cats" gets restless so quickly even after voting for the plan, is that such planning is about engineering people around a pre-set agenda. Ideas like "alignment" and "fit" fill people with an anxiety that they are being programmed. And behind it all there lurks this intractable modern conviction that if one can only get an overall picture of what is going on, line up the billiard balls, put the various elements in their appropriate places and boxes, then one has actually figured out how to control outcomes and create a successful church. The reality is that most of the time these assumptions simply don't work. But even though this is not how the world works there seems to be a deeply embedded conviction that such methodologies are the way to lead the people of God. There are numerous reasons for this, most of which have already been discussed.

This is the Known World that continues to function as the real operational framework driving the day-to-day life of our churches and denominations. As leaders we often don't know any other way of dealing with the incredible levels

of change that confront us. What we are now experiencing is that the "cats" aren't getting with the program they initially voted to support!

YOU CAN'T HERD CATS

Against this kind of background I have needed to go through a journey of transformation myself. Even though I was moving my theological imagination more deeply into a missional ecclesiology I still lived in the "common sense" world that had taught me how to lead by developing plans and futures for the congregations I pastored. I was functioning in a divided world. In my head and theological frameworks I was being shaped by the missional ecclesiologies coming out of GOCN conversations and my reading. I was also doing a lot of study in the areas of systems and complexity theory. But, on the practical, common sense side of my life I continued to function out of leadership models in which I saw myself as primarily responsible to create (albeit with others and involving inclusive conversations) the grand plan for the future of the congregation that would result in a preferable missional future. In this way I continually viewed the cat metaphor negatively. Cats were those intractable people in the congregation (the majority of them if truth be known) who failed to get with the plan. "Cat" was the pejorative description of the problem that needed to be fixed. If only one could find a way of getting the congregation to align itself with the plan and commit to actually engaging in the program all would be well. But that is not how things work in real life.

I clearly recall the evening I resigned as pastor of a congregation. I was doing a lot of traveling and teaching and had been offered a position as a consultant with a company that resourced denominations with information systems and strategic planning tools. I stood to tell the people of my decision. After describing the way my life was being shaped in terms of consulting, teaching and writing I could not resist sharing with them my sense of how they functioned. I told them that leading this church had been like trying to herd cats – they were cats and they were impossible to "lead." After the initial laughter, they were less than thrilled with the description because they read it for what it was, a scolding for not following the agreed plan. At the time I thought myself insightful and correct. There it was, I had defined the problem and it was them –

they were "cats" so what could one expect except the inability to carry out the strategic plan with all its long consultative process, votes, bible studies, systems and feedback loops.

A year later I found myself coming to radically different conclusions about the nature of leadership and the reality of leading congregations. I was beginning to find ways that connected my discoveries in missional ecclesiology with the question of how to lead in the church. My own Known World frameworks in this area were crumbling and being replaced by a radically different kind of "transition" imagination. To a large extent the designation "cats" is correct. Leading congregations and denominational systems is like herding cats. What I was coming to understand is that this is not the description of a problem; it's a great description of how things actually work. It's not a bad thing, nor is it to be "managed" so that the "cats" get aligned with some agreed to vision and plan for them. Further, I began to realize that becoming like a "cat" in the presence of someone else's plan for my life is probably quite a healthy response so why be critical of congregations when they too don't "line-up" with the plan?

As these kinds of recognitions began to impact my worldview what came into focus was something I had felt and known for a very long time as a pastor. So much of what happens in my life and among the people of congregations is non-linear; it's neither predictable nor controllable. We all know how the smallest, unexpected element creates massive impacts and re-arranges our worlds. One small, unforeseen event changes everything. I knew all of this from a theoretical perspective. I could describe the experiments Edward Lorenz, the meteorologist who stumbled into chaos theory. How he assumed that a very small decimal number in an equation would have no effect on the weather models he was generating. His discovery was that the smallest of changes and perturbations result in massive, unpredictable changes in weather patterns. This theoretic framework was not new to my thinking. I understood nonlinearity. But I was functioning out of two radically different frameworks – my theological and intellectual imaginations were not in any way connecting my Known World, Newtonian, common sense way of leading in the church. There had, for a long time, been a struggle inside me about the meaning of leadership. It was as if there was something trying

to be born that I could neither name nor give description to its form. Then, one day sitting in a coffee shop struggling with my discovery about cats, it all began to tumble out onto paper. It was as if I had been taken from a billiard ball, linear-manage and control world and placed on an entirely different path where I was beginning to see leadership from a different place.

Having come to this rather startling conversion (it all seems so obvious and clear as I sit at my desk and describe it at this moment) while sitting in a coffee shop on the West Coast I found myself catapulted into a new imagination about leadership and what God may be about in these strange attractors we call congregations. What was opening before me was a world for which I was not prepared. That world began to form itself around a question: How does one lead if, in fact, reality is more like the actions of "cats" than billiard balls aligned on a table managed by strategic plans and preferred futures? When I explained the themes I was wrestling with in my own mind, he asked: "But how do you avoid chaos?" I had not yet learned why that is exactly the point. You don't avoid chaos! I was yet to learn that chaos is unlike anything I had imagined to this point.

Initially, my questions and new discoveries about leadership created anxiety and fear within me. What was happening to me? Had I finally come to that place I had called the "non-leader leader" role? Was I starting to become like the politician who said: "There go my people, I am their leader, therefore, I must follow them"? Was I going "soft" and opting for some "chaplaincy" image of simply "caring" for people but never taking them toward engagement, growth and mission? These initial questions scared me! What would happen to my vision for the church if leadership were not about creating plans that take everyone into the promised land of my vision (or a congregationally agreed vision) as a leader? These may seem like strange questions to some people and, while I was very good at denial, they churned about inside me. They stuck under my skin like an irritant that rubbed and rubbed so that you never really escaped from focusing your attention on the thing. In response, I started to read about systems and complexity theory. I filtered this growing awareness and discomfort about strategic planning through my theological frameworks, my understanding of God, of creation, of what it means to be a human being and how I understood

the ways in which God calls and shapes us as human beings. I wrestled with biblical frameworks of God's reign, election and eschatology. And in this process of gestation I kept going back to my own experiences as a pastor and church leader. Had I always known at some level that my strategic planning had never really been what created the life and vitality, the mission and transformation in the congregations I had served? But, still, in this transition from one world to another, I was struggling to let go of habits so deeply ingrained in my psyche as a leader. The glasses I had worn for so many years to read my world were very difficult to take off. I was becoming aware that they no longer really gave me an accurate picture of what was happening in the world of "cats" but when I took them off for a moment, all was a scary, disorienting blur.

My experiences with the "cats," my engagement with Scripture, theology and reading in systems and complexity theory were changing my world. They were coalescing into a new kind of lens through which I could read the world. The scary part was that I just didn't know how to function in this new kind of world being birthed in my Christian imagination. But I also knew that the predetermined "maps" were not working any longer. As a pastor and consultant struggling with these issues and coming to terms with the fields of systems and complexity theory, what began to emerge was a view of leadership that seemed to express more focally a commitment to missional ecclesiology and a theological framework in which systems and complexity theory seemed to offer a more adequate response in a postmodern context. In order to describe this new understanding about leadership that was emerging for me, it is necessary to say something about what is replacing this Known World and how it is affecting our leaders.