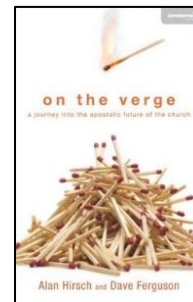


# Alan Hirsch & Dave Ferguson : On the Verge – a journey into the apostolic future of the church

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Notes by Alison Morgan



‘The task of this book is nothing less than to call the church to recover her most ancient, her most potent, and also her most beautiful form, that of the apostolic movement.’ Alan’s sense of calling is to call the church to recover her original apostolic ways and become a high-impact Jesus movement again in the West. He calls it a Verge movement. This book is an attempt to apply the Apostolic Genius paradigm (see *The Forgotten Ways*) to existing churches. Dave is a church planter turned mega church pastor. He leads Community Christian Church in Chicago. He summarises the book as follows: The church in the US is facing a life-threatening problem. Without innovative problem solving it will flame out in its generation. The solution lies in reactivating the church as a missional movement.

## 1. On the verge of the future

All that is needed for an idea to become an inevitable reality within any given population is for significant adoption by 16%.

Cultural shifts – not so much postmodernism as the emergence of large-scale cultural forces – globalisation, climate change, technological breakthroughs, international terrorism, geopolitical shifts, economic crises, the digitalization of information, social networks, the rise of bottom-up people movements, the rise of new religious movements, etc. All these marginalise church as we know it.

Concept of red and blue oceans (Kim&Mauborgne, business strategists) – red oceans is the known market space. Blue oceans are all the industries not yet in existence, the new space, where demand is created rather than fought over. We need to do church in blue oceans, but we do it in red ones, competing in the 40% of people who will be reached by the kind of thing we offer, rather than in the 60% unchurched missionary space.

Post Constantine – our challenge is to recover the movement form of Christianity, to move beyond the institutional. It’s the institutional imagination which keeps us from becoming missional and exponential. We have to rethink the paradigm, change the metaphor, reframe the story of church – there is no shortcut, we have to do the conceptual spadework. ‘The church Jesus designed is a movement and not a religious institution.’ 40 – which explains why he reserved the harshest judgement for the religious elite.

Apostolic Genius (see *The Forgotten Ways*) is a term that encompasses the 6 elements of mDNA:

- Jesus is Lord
- Disciple-making
- Apostolic environment
- Missional-incarnational impulse
- Organic systems
- *Communitas*

All organisations are merely conceptual embodiments of the idea of community; they need enough order at the centre to give common identity and purpose, but enough chaos at the edge to give permission to creativity and innovation.

How do we do it? 4 stages – the 4 parts of this book.

1. Imagine
2. Shift
3. Innovate
4. Move

## PART ONE: IMAGINE

### 2. The Silver Imagination

*He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery – Harold Wilson*

Henri Matisse once noted that to look at something as though we had never seen it before requires great courage. We are framed by 17 centuries of Christendom. Thomas Kuhn suggests that paradigms are a way of trying to understand our world and solve the problems of understanding by relying on a set of assumptions, which in turn help us interpret our situation and therefore give rise to possible solutions. A paradigm is made up of assumptions, metaphors, a working model, and manifestations of organisational culture. Reframing the central paradigm of church is one of the keys to change and innovation. Paradigms filter things out too. Angela Monet – those who dance are thought to be quite insane by those who cannot hear the music.

‘The fundamental job of apostolic imagination is to produce out of the church we now experience a vision of the church Jesus wants us to experience.’, 68.

Much of our energy is put into pastoral programming and worship, but this has failed to develop mature disciples. If we put similar effort into apprenticing people to Jesus we can expect significantly different results. No use planting churches – we need to plant the gospel, and the church will grow out of it. Our primal message has to frame the church, not the other way round.

How:

- Solitude and prayer. We need to spend time thinking. Yale researchers have found that brainstorming can actually *reduce* a team’s creative output; the same number of people generate more and better ideas separately than together.
- Apprenticeship is critical for reimagining – about 10% of church members know they are sent by Jesus to incarnate the gospel in their context
- Experiential teaching eg on mission
- Leaders sparking imagination through innovation and through story

### 3. Mission to the Mind and Heart

*Sometimes I try to think of six impossible things before breakfast – Alice in Wonderland.*

Many organisations suppress creativity in the cause of protecting the status quo.

Myths/assumptions which preserve the status quo in the church:

- Build it and they will come
- The church is the bastion of family values
- The church is the guardian of society’s morals
- We need clergy, buildings and Sunday services to be a real church
- We are a bible teaching church (and that’s the key) – it isn’t. ‘The Western church has more theology, commentaries, training, and intellectual tradition than at any other time in history, and it certainly hasn’t produced the desired revival... we are perfectly designed to produce what we are currently producing.

Metaphors, stories, images have *more* truth than abstract propositions, not less. They not only speak to the mind, but also to heart and will.

Get people to list the words and phrases that for them most accurately describe their church or organisation. They will have loads of biblical ones – ask for non biblical ones, these will give a much more neutral picture.

We need men and women in leadership; women are more R brained, creative, men more L brained, analytical. 65% of the leaders in the Chinese underground church are women; 40K of Yonggi Cho’s 50K cell groups are still led by women.

Slogans are powerful – use them!

### Diffusion of Innovation theory – Everett Rogers

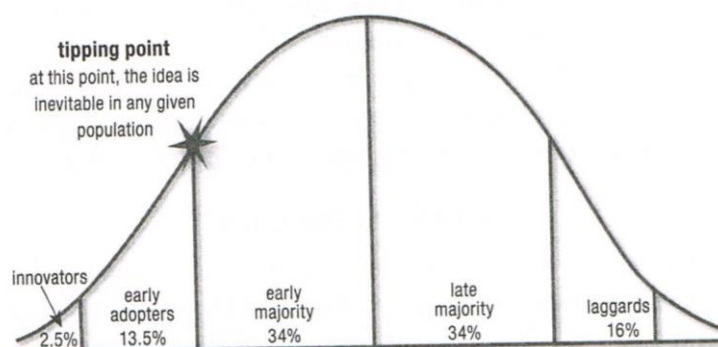


Figure 9

This suggestion of 10 percent buy-in — a missional “people tithe,” so to speak — is an intuitive guess, but it does square well with Everett Rogers’ theory called Diffusion of Innovation, which states that in any given population there are a range of people with different responses to new ideas, including the progressive wing composed of innovators and early adopters (fig. 9). It’s a leader’s job to understand that these people are present and are vital in changing the organization, and indeed for innovation itself. The same theory of knowledge would suggest that all you need is 16 percent of the most progressive sectors of a population for the idea to be inevitable in that system!<sup>25</sup> Gladwell’s *Tipping Point* simply confirms Rogers’ basic thesis and develops it.

This is a well-tested theory, and it ought to be used to further apostolic movement. It’s surely a strategic task of leadership to identify these people (the “berry-eaters,” who are first to try the new fruits at risk of their own lives), legitimize their concerns, fertilize their thinking, give them oodles of permission to dream, and then harvest the results. In other words, create a homegrown think tank and use this as a generative source of imagination, leadership, and ideas.

Maslow maintains that while embracing any idea/action/paradigm, people move through 4 stages:

- Conscious incompetence – they aren't aware of it at all – you have to sell it
- Conscious incompetence – they become aware of their deficiencies
- Conscious competence – they can do it but they have to concentrate
- Unconscious competence – they do it instinctively

## PART TWO: SHIFT

### 4. Apostolic Genius – the genetic code of movement

The Chinese underground church of the last 60 years, where the persecuted church grew from 2m to 120m+, is the most remarkable manifestation of Apostolic Genius in the history of the church. It demonstrates that the church Jesus started already has everything in it to get its job done. It is perfectly designed to fulfil its mission and purpose. And every believer has the same potential for world transformation present in even the smallest part. Elements:

1. Jesus is Lord – missional living is about allowing Jesus to be Lord of your life and then telling the good news of what Jesus is doing in your life.

2. Disciple making – the irreplaceable and lifelong task of becoming like Jesus by embodying his message as well as his interior habits. 'Disciple-making (or apprenticeship) is a core task of the church and needs to be structured into every church's basic *raison d'être*.' It must be an ethos felt throughout the organisation. The language of discipleship is present in the church, but the reality of being apprenticed in the way of Jesus is largely missing. The result is that we are being apprenticed, but not by Jesus – by our culture (consumerism). 'We are imitators of Christ and not merely his fan club!'. Discipleship is a prior condition of leadership in the church that Jesus built – that's why the bible says so little about leadership.

3. Missional-incarnational impulse. We forget it's not that the church has a mission as that the mission has a church. Mission should not be a department of what we do, but the determining factor that informs all the departments.

4. Apostolic Environment. APEST and Ephesians 4.

5. Organic systems.

6. Communitas. Teams, deadlines, missions.

All this is a mindset, not a technique.

### 5. Verge vibe – the operating system of apostolic movement

Chapter about the ethos of a verge church – eg everyone is a disciple; what would Jesus do; everyone is in an apprentice relationship; ministry is based on APEST calling; every believer is a minister; high accountability, low control etc. No points scored for trying to change the system overnight, and no need to jettison perfectly good ways of doing church – the way forward for most churches is to embrace the idea of being a hybrid organisation, with some centralised and some decentralised structures. Risk taking; mission as the catalysing principle; managing from the future; cultivating urgency; thinking movements, not institution.

Example of change – when seat belt laws came in we all thought it was outrageous, an invasion of privacy; now we feel wrong if we don't put the seatbelt on.

### 6. Embodying movement – programming practices

Hellenistic thinking – we provide new information to achieve new thinking, hoping new behaviour will follow. But by addressing intellectual aspects, we fail to change behaviour. We can't think our way into a new way of acting, and it doesn't make new disciples. We need a Hebraic approach – acting our way into a new way of thinking; in the context of life. Most churches need to move from core values (nouns) to core practices (verbs) – practices are what you see when values are embodied. Eg BELLS Small Boat Big Sea, Michael Frost's church. Emerging church – 'don't emerge till you've got a mission. If you take the mission out of the equation, all you get is a lot of talk about spirituality, theology, and worship.' 290.

## PART III: INNOVATE

### 7. Innovate or die

A verge leader leads with curiosity, not with certainty. You do need a clear vision though. Pastor Mark Carter: 'when we aimed simply for community, we got neither community nor mission. But when we aimed for mission, we got both community and mission almost every single time.' 213. Acts 2 community came out of Acts 1 mission.

### 8. Out of the Box innovation

Teams that are trusting and trustworthy. Permission is assumed and forgiveness is expected. Risks are taken. The edge is the best place. Putting money where your mouth is. Everyone gets to play.

How do you create an out of the box culture? Turning an idea into an IDEA:

1. Investigate – gain an understanding of your context. What are its needs, its strengths, what does good news look like in this setting? What do you know, what do you not know?
2. Design – what are we going to do, and how are we going to get started?
3. Experiment – we have a pilot project. How will we test it, measure it, and how will we know if it works?
4. Adjust – what worked and why, what didn't, what adjustments must be made, what's the plan for redesigning?

## PART IV: MOVE

### 9. Gaining missional momentum

The church in the US is facing a life-threatening problem. Without innovative problem solving it will flame out in its generation. The solution lies in reactivating the church as a missional movement. We have both a strategic problem (we are using a model of church designed to reach 40% of the population; 60% are left outside. The 40% is declining) and a missionary problem (we have forgotten we are a sent people – every one of us is sent). What kind of church is yours, and how do you help it become missional?

### 10. The making of an apostolic movement

8 movement rules:

1. There are no rules – values are what rule
2. The small rules – Jesus started with a single small group
3. The simple rules – the complex will not be remembered
4. The reproducible rules: if you can't reproduce disciples, you will never reproduce leaders. If you can't reproduce leaders, you will never reproduce churches. If you can't reproduce churches, you will never see movements.
5. The apprentice rules – on the job training
6. The network rules – there are different ways of structuring them, but you must have one
7. The sustainable rules – everything must be sustainable in the long term
8. The Spirit rules - prayer permeates church planting movements.

### Final thoughts

New understandings of doing ministry must be created with each new generation for the church's mission to move forward... the day of the professional minister is over. The day of the missionary pastor has come – Kennon Callahan, Church Consultant.

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