

*Straight Bible:*

**INDEPENDENT  
GOSPEL  
OUTREACH**



**NO INSTITUTIONS NEEDED**

*John Brown, January 27, 2012*



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Written by John Brown, Feburary, 2012. This essay will explain the futility of containing the gospel of God within a Babylonian style (pyramidal) not-for-profit corporation. It then to offers an alternative organizational method for proclaiming the gospel of God.

Questions and comments about this essay can be directed to the author by using the contact form at <http://straightbible.com>

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## Prologue

The mission of all Christians is the deliverance of God's people by preaching the whole gospel of God, the message of deliverance, from death into the life in the kingdom of God. This deliverance is partially realized in this flesh and fully realized in the kingdom to come (I Corinthians 15:50-58 & I John 3:2). This was total activity of the Jesus' apostles in the first century: delivering the message. Their message is still the same message which all Christians should be delivering today. The message has two parts: salvation and full knowledge of the truth.

*ESV: I Timothy Chapter 2 [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*

Most Christians attempt both parts, salvation and the knowledge of the truth, through a not-for-profit corporation. The *Adizes Organizational Lifecycle Theory* describes how these organizations evolve. This affects all Christian outreach ministries working through a not-for-profit organization. I have half a century of experience with such a not-for-profit religious organization that exemplifies the pattern in the theory. I'll use this personal experience as the example in this essay.





## Organizational Theory

There are a number of variations of Organizational Life-Cycle Theory but all have one thing in common. All organizations changed over time as the organization grows, hires staff, buys buildings, and develops an organizational structure. When a group of people incorporate, there are several features required in their articles of incorporation. These are a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and a board of directors. Other officers fall under these authorities in a pyramidal fashion. As the organization grows, more staff are hired, salary and benefit packages negotiated. This grows the pyramid and introduces middle management levels.

Integral to incorporating is a mission statement for the organization, its purpose for existing. For Christian evangelical not-for-profit organizations statements are written about outreach to unbelievers or the non-converted to Christ. All the officers, paid staff and volunteers are focused upon this mission. In the early stages of the organization, under its founder, all resources are poured into the mission. Everyone has a stake in the mission's success. Thoughts of salary or benefits are secondary to the mission. The front line people, who carry out the mission directly to the clients (unsaved or new people), which includes all the volunteers and donors, are considered the most important people in the organization. The front line people carry the political power as the ones who make it all work. At this early stage, the mission is everything. All the participants are equal but very often the front line workers are more honored for their direct contribution to the mission and all resources are offered to them for the sake of their work toward the mission. Political power is vested in the front line volunteers and donors.

In effect, at the early stages of the organization, it operates more like a tree than a pyramid. The front line volunteers and donors are like the leaves at the top. All the energies of the organization support and feed the leaves and branches at the top of the tree. Officers of the lower supporting structure often view the top leaves and branches with envy, as the true mission workers. The leaves are honored by the workers of the structure.

At this early stage, such evangelical organizations are exciting, vibrant and full of expectation of success. Eventually the mission is realized or it

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fails. If it succeeds, the organization will grow and predictably change. This effects the mission execution and the perceptions of the roles of its officers.

A fresh and vibrant outreach oriented organization functions like a living growing entity. Much like the tree below with those most concerned and active for outreach with its message represented as the leaves. The supporting structure exists only to support the leaves, it has no other purpose, no other motives for its activities.



## Organization Mission Change

Predictably, over time, the officers of this religious organization, in my example group, shifted their view of themselves from mission-servants to bureaucrats, functioning to preserve the organization. This took retraining the original leadership and training a new generation of leaders under the new focus. The focus had shifted from the clients (new people) to the stakeholders (officers and donors). The focus shifted from outreach with their message to internal maintenance with a view to the treasury. Protecting the treasury is viewed by the aristocratic bureaucracy (to use *Adizes Organization's* terms) as the unity of the stakeholders who support the organization. This includes holder of corporate titles and the volunteer donors who work the front line.

A perceived loss of unity among the donor base threatens the treasury and thusly is viewed with suspicion and mistrust. The clients have become a nuisance to whom lip service is given but they are no longer the real focus in the bureaucracy. The organization has now been transformed, tuned upside down, and taken on the appearance of a pyramid with layers of management over seeing the volunteers and donors. Instead of supporting the volunteers and donors, in what ever efforts they are engaged in, it is now the job of the corporate officers to guide and direct the volunteers and donors in corporately defined and approved activities for the sake of the organization.



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Disloyalty among the donors threatens the bureaucracy's performance, their self-perception, and thus threatens their continued employment. A poor review of the unity of the donors under them or how well they move the organization's products, would be cause to consider replacing that corporate officer with a more able person. Success, which was once measured in the numbers of new people (clients), now shifts to a measurement of the unity of the staff and followers (stakeholders). This stage of organizational development is predictable and precedes the demise of the organization. Witch-hunts, to ferret out the disloyal donors or non-donors still attending, "cleans" the organization but reduces and weakens its support base. Demise occurs when there are too few loyal followers left to sustain its treasury.

Revitalization is not likely to occur unless these shifts are seen as a fatal disease. In such a situation, the officers who presided over the organization's decline and demise must be replaced and even vilified to refocus the loyalty of the volunteers and donors. Such a change would also entail a dismantling and restructuring of the bureaucracy. It would require a complete reversal of the corporate culture. This is not likely to occur unless the organization's death is visibly imminent and becomes the focus of the upper echelon aristocratic leadership. Even then, revitalization might not be attempted as too painful for the status quo.

An alternative to demise is for some who have not forgotten the original visionary mission, is to splinter off and form additional organizations based on the original mission. This should be an effort by the parent organization, but in my example, it was not. The spin offs from the original organization were in protest against the original organization's change of emphasis and direction. That severed any connection between the parent and its offspring.

Using human development as a metaphor, the parents disdained their offspring, like rebellious children. The parents threw their children to the wolves and made no effort to rescue them, cutting off all communications. The children became orphans. Worse, the children felt so abandoned and abused by their parents that they will never submit to them again. The rift is permanent.

The children went on and have formed 'families' of their own, in some cases, clones of the original. The original outreach program was reconstituted under its original name and is overseen by some of its original leaders but its disconnected from the original. These orphaned children have even organized substitutes for all aspects of the original leadership training and educational programs. However, instead of the offspring being unified among themselves, each one of the original programs now function separately, disconnected from each other and even a competes with each other. Some of these separate and competing clones have even surpassed in size and scope their parents, becoming more significant in society than their parent organization.

A network of local fellowships, nearly identical to the original, also exists under a new name, although this child organization does not exert central control, in protest of the ways of its parent. Local member fellowships are associated only by the social history of their leaders, having been involved together in the original organization. This does not represent a rebirth or revitalization of the original mission. It only represents a repetition of the forms of the original which were used to support the original outreach mission.

These disparate fellowships only are engaging in the social activities of the original, repeating the rhetoric of the original but not banded together to make each dovetail into a central mission like the original. Their efforts are scattered, diluted and fragmented with each having a somewhat different flavor of the original mission. The parents are like middle aged adult, 'empty nest' parents, and the offspring are like adult orphans, without parentage, without connections to their past. The parent organization has spawned many children organizations but each is on his own as an isolated orphan.

Both these parents and their orphaned children, indeed all human organizations, are based upon a single organizational method. Scripture calls it Babylon. Read what the apostle John has to say about it in Revelation, chapters 17 and 18 and you will see many of the possible corruptions inherent in every Babylonian system.

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Babylon as a human organizational method, is a copy of the spiritual realm. It is a copy of how God has organized His kingdom. The rebel Lucifer (aka Satan) copied the godly system but under himself as the top authority, as a system to control of the world. This is an authority he obtained from Adam and Eve in their disobedience. This system came to its first peak in ancient Babylon. The Hebrew prophets spoke extensively about it since Israel had been taken captive by the Babylonian Empire. Through their prophesies, Babylon, a place and a kingdom to them, became the symbol of the evil systems in this world. That's the use of the name in John's Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

## The Question About Babylon

Babylon as executed in the earthly realm, is a system of organizing humans under a single leader at the top (king, president, ceo) who lives by the efforts and contributions of the masses (members, followers, employees, donors, etc.). All corporations and governments employ this system. All civil corporations, secular or religious, follow this same hierarchical system. Babylonian systems are all about influence and control. Man made Babylonian systems are susceptible to corruption due to its origin in human affairs. But the real purpose of Babylon incubates, hidden from most eyes, until it finally hatches in the organization's mature stage: control of the masses under an aristocratic bureaucracy.

Satan's ultimate goal for a Babylonian control system is to obscure the truths revealed in the Hebrew scriptures and to subdue the God's elect under his control. God offers deliverance and life, while the substitute Babylon offers bondage and death ... all the while the slaves think they are successful, doing something godly and feeling good about themselves. Babylon functions to capture the faithful into bondage, subverting the knowledge and experience of their godly deliverance.

All Christians are convinced that they are to be loving and giving. This is true and scriptural. However, Babylon diverts the faithful into loving the wrong things and the wrong people. It diverts the faithful into giving to the wrong entities and causes. Scriptural giving was always to individuals for a purpose. Even when resources were collected, and delivered as a collective package, it was redistributed by godly men to the persons for whom it was collected. The simplicity of Christian giving is individuals giving to individuals in support of one another. This is the realm of the blessings of God in giving: building up the believers by supplying one another's needs so all can be free to preach or support the preaching of the gospel of God by their unique contributions.

As an example of what I am talking about I'll offer this evidence. There is an independent community church, located in a suburb in Florida. I found these statements on their website:

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“At Crossroads, our purpose is to lead people into a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. We want all, regardless of background, to feel welcome and comfortable in our church.”

That wish is altruistic and sincere by its leaders even though it is an invitation to join their local branch of religious Babylon. But this next ungodly notice was also posted on the same website:

“A reminder -- IRS regulations do not allow Crossroads to accept tax-deductible contributions designated towards specific individuals.” (<http://crossroadslargo.org>)

Babylon is defiant of the godly principle of giving. All non-for-profit organizations, religious, charities, scholarship organizations, grant programs, etc, etc, submit to an ungodly rule enforced by national Babylon. As soon as you incorporate, you have just submitted yourself to a system that defies the principles of the living God revealed in His Word. Babylon requires that you cannot serve the Body of Christ in the physical realm as seen in scripture. It requires funds be spent on things which are in support of all persons, without reference to race or creed. That defies the principles seen operated by the believers in scripture where they supported the believers only.

Babylon makes illegal any system which does not serve its own greed. Disallowing distribution of funds to Christian individuals immediately guarantees that the believers offerings will be diverted out of the fellowship of believers. It also guarantees that the funds will be spent in a way to collect more taxes on those purchases. From a spiritual perspective, the rule governing use of contributed funds is an attack on the assemblies of the believers and an effort to extract more out of them for the sake of Babylon. Very few Christians ever gain this insight and thus remain in bondage to Satan's system.

Babylon enslaves the faithful. What do nearly all Christians do when they see a need and wish to address it? Incorporate as a not-for-profit organization! Both Christians and altruistic unbelievers are obsessed with working through a non-for-profit corporation to accomplish any altruistic



goal. I hope you have seen this because it is vital to understanding bondage and slavery. This obsession to incorporate is what the apostle John calls in his gospel of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the mark of the beast on the forehead and hands. Yes, the mark is the idea lodged in the mind, that submitting to Babylon is a requirement to do anything worthwhile or godly. This mark controls both the mind and the work of people's hands. This mark is just one of the bondage methods of Babylon but there are others as well.

Babylon coerces the faithful with bribes. How? Giving to a not-for-profit Babylonian system is deductible from other Babylonian taxes. How wonderful is that? This motivates corporations to support charities. But most individual giving to non-for-profit organizations is motivated differently, motivated by emotions. It is motivated by 'feeling good about yourself' for your gift. That's the individual bribe, feeling good. That's how most religious corporations survive: on your good feelings. They cultivate this emotion, using it against you for their own benefit. It is a substitute for feeling good about yourself by believing what the Word of God says about you. God's Word should be the source of your self image, not Babylon's false image fostering an emotion based on lies.

Babylon corrupts morals. When an organization reaches a mature stage, which does not necessarily reflect its length of existence, the bureaucracy has become internally oriented. Position and title become important. Job performance, reflected in the unity and loyalty of the masses becomes paramount. To purify the masses, any manner to ferret out the disloyal becomes justifiable. Political intrigue, back stabbing and deceit become acceptable behaviors. Any devious method is excusable for the sake of preservation of the organization or improvement in the perceived job performance of the bureaucrat. In a religious organization, that means suspicion and mistrust is a normal, acceptable and justifiable attitude. The religious bureaucrat considers it his job to always be judging the members under him. He is on a witch hunt for the disloyal and any method to expose them is righteous in his eyes. The end justifies the means, no matter how immoral the means may be. They become righteous in their own eyes, above judgment, while continually judging others.

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Not-for-profit organizations do not make these characteristics clear. Why? Because, engulfed within the system, they are unaware of them themselves. They often do not even correctly identify whom they serve, never mind how. Dr. Ichak Adizes in his essay, contrasting profit and not-for-profit organizations makes this observation:

“Not-for-profit executive directors frequently confuse clients with stakeholders; they forget whom they are supposed to be serving. In order to survive, they are forced to play so many political games they start to believe that handling the stakeholders is the major reason for their existence, rather than satisfying the clients for whom they exist.”

Source: <http://www.adizes.com/blog/?p=303>

Religious involvement and attendance in the traditional institutions, with their bondage systems, is waning in modern society. This cultural change has forced Satan to develop alternative methods of control. How? Charities! These have proliferated in parallel with the demise of faithful church attendance. As the one wained the other increased. Charities have become more popular while church attendance less popular. Sometimes, it is the religious institutions themselves who start the charities to retain members within their traditional institutions ... double control. But these charities are again Babylonian systems of control, substitutes for the religious systems. The faithful drift from one worldly control system to another. The mark of the beast in their minds keeps them in one form of Babylon or another: ad nauseum, abandon all hope.



## **The Answer About Babylon**

A different paradigm from humanly executed Babylon is needed for the sake of the purity and longevity of the godly mission: preaching the whole gospel of God. God's mission will eventually be hijacked when enclosed within any human Babylonian system. Humans susceptible to Satan's influence cannot produce a copy of the spiritual and keep it untainted by evil on their own.

Sure, Babylonian systems when small or under the guidance of their founder are very efficient and focused. The problem arises when they become mature organizations. They become corrupted under second and third generations of officers and followers who are often unaware of the organization's founding and its former total dedication to its original mission. The evils of Babylon incubate at first but hatch in succeeding generations.

But God does have an answer for all of Babylon's corruptions. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the faith and head of the church, the Body of Christ. He is the CEO if you will. But instead of a bureaucracy, he directs all members directly by holy spirit in each of his followers, no middle managers involved. The Body of Christ is a theocracy, the rule of a godly ruler with no middle managers hence there is no possibility of the masses lending to the support of the CEO or middle managers. Jesus Christ as CEO directs his entire Body himself without help through each believer's holy spirit. The job of the masses in this scheme is to help one another as equal members, not a few overseers ruling the masses.

All the people in the Body of Christ function as either visionary guides or custodians. The guides are the apostles and prophets who build up the Body. They preach the gospel of God and teach how this Body is stitched together. They preach the whole gospel of God, all things pertaining to the kingdom of God as scripture calls the message. All others, the custodians who care for temple of God, keep it clean and sweet. They handle needs as they see them, be it teaching clearly the gospel of God, be it distribution of resources, be it other supporting activities. All the functions of members in the Body of Christ are equal in usefulness, though they differ in activity. None are better than any others before God

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(I Corinthians 12:12-28), nor is one service better than others to build up the Body of Christ in both quantity and quality.

*ESV: Ephesians Chapter 2 [18] For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. [19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

The only centrality in God's copy of the spiritual is agreement on the message among the guides and custodians in the Body of Christ.

*ESV: I Corinthians Chapter 1 [10] I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*

*ESV: Ephesians Chapter 4 ... [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

After this unifying agreement there is only the details, the nuts and bolts to accomplish this unity in this modern age and take the message of deliverance to others.

(Notice how explaining God's oversight of the Body of Christ is a lot easier than explaining Babylon?)

## Modern Mission and Message

In ancient times, communications was slow and limited. Sometimes it was even dangerous due to bandits and thieves who preyed on travelers along the roads. It was always possible that the message and messenger might not even arrive at the destination. Not so in this modern age of instant electronic communications. The challenge today is how to take advantage of these modern methods of communications to carry out God's mission, to further salvation and the knowledge of deliverance.

Nothing substitutes for being with someone in person. The closest modern technological method available for personal interaction is video conferencing. The best version of this technology would be using wide screen TVs and dedicated devices hooked to the Internet. Then at least the images of the participants begins to resemble real life sizes, diminishing the focus on the technology in use.

Video conferencing, as it stands today, is still in an adolescent stage. Quality at the consumer level is still wanting. Reliability does not equal what people expect from traditional telephone calls. Video conferencing technology in its current state is still suitable for one-on-one conversations and even a very small groups with some technologies. Even then, to accomplish this at any real quality level is an investment of time and money which may not be practical for most people. It's just not plug-and-play yet, like telephone technology. But video calling technology can be very useful for individuals engaged in the mission of outreach. It can already be used for personal conversations and limited teaching sessions.

Another useful technology is Internet Websites which teach the knowledge of the truth in a consistent and coherent manner. Such information is best presented in a step by step manner, in a seminar or on line class. Disseminating information this way is being done by a number of religious institutions, all promoting their own brand of the faith. These institutions are all branded Babylonian systems, transferred to the electronic network. But, the Word of God needs to be disseminated without the confines and bondage of such systems. That means unraveling and disconnecting the influence of the bondage systems from the pure truth of scripture. Then present that on the Internet in a coherent fashion.

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Unraveling the truth of God's Word has been my endeavor for a number of years. For most of the last 50 years, I thought I knew the truth without religious overtones but more recently, I have come to discover that my own background was just as much a Babylonian system as any other religious system. My own background also contained gentile foreign elements and worse, the organization I was so fond of changed its mission and evolved out from under me. That sent me on a quest to relocate my faith in scripture only. I examined every tenant of my faith and every method I knew about for outreach.

The first discovery was that my comprehension of how to get started in a journey to the true faith was flawed. My introduction to coherent Bible teaching was a class which threw at me a list of errant doctrines and their corrections. However, making this my own entailed reviewing my notes from that class, a repetition of taking the original class. Eventually I rose up to believe that every believer must determine what is the true faith based upon scripture, not upon theologian's opinion. I didn't know what to do about this method of pitching one teacher's opinion against another until I determined that every believer needs to do his own study of scripture. The Berean method as some teach.

*ESV: Acts Chapter 17 [11] Now these Jews [in Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*

It's in each believer's own study of scripture that he finds his faith and gains a solid foundation of belief for himself. But, even this doesn't help until there is an understanding of HOW to go about this endeavor. That led me to research solid principles of reading scripture which everyone can comprehend and apply. That is where one's foundation starts: comprehensive reading of scripture.

I developed a series of principles as a HOW-TO for reading scripture. The whole series revolves around correctly applying various contexts to any specific passage. To disseminate this knowledge, a website was developed in the form of a seminar. The website becomes a tool to assist

believers to grow into their custodial duties to keep the Body of Christ clean and sweet. It partially substitutes for the physical presence of teachers. It can serve as a base line starting point for any believer to learn HOW to intelligently and comprehensively read scripture for himself.

But this starting point is not enough. There are so many other matters which must be understood to break out of religion into freedom. Over the centuries since scripture was written and collected into a book, much evolution of the common understanding of the faith has occurred. This evolution must also be unraveled and presented to searching believers. So I went on a journey of discovery to find the original faith of the founders of Christianity, to find the whole truth about my deliverance.

One of the most destructive elements I discovered in my comprehension of the faith of Jesus and the first apostles was to realize that the way I read my Bible was foreign to the literature itself. I was an alien to scripture. I was reading it as a Western gentile, steeped in a culture derived from the Roman systems and Greek metaphysical way of thinking. However, I was reading literature from the ancient Hebrew culture and Hebrew way of thinking. Once this was discovered, I realized that encouraging people to read their Bibles was not going to lead to any in depth understanding of scripture nor any unity of the faith.

As I learned the differences between the two cultures, their ways of thinking and how differently they express themselves in literature, I began a journey to unravel how much had been lost due to cultural translation. One lesson learned was that Babylonian systems are part and parcel of the modern Western culture but foreign to the ancient Hebrews. My journey was taking me out of the familiar, out of all my comfort zones, into frontiers previously unknown to me.

The result of this journey, back to the original faith of Jesus and the first apostles, eventually was documented in a book called, *Christian Essentials*. This journey must be repeated by every believer. This new Hebrew faith knowledge must be available to assist believers in coming out of Babylonian systems into freedom. It is not enough to publish this knowledge in printed form. Neither is it enough to publish it on line only.

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Both forms of communications must be used. But, both forms of communications are only an assistant to the believer for his own journey. They are resource for those called of God to work the trenches on the field, delivering people from bondage. Sharing this journey shortcuts the path for others. A shortened form of the journey can be shared on the Internet as a seminar.

Website based seminars and other on line coherent teachings systems serve as a substitute for the physical presence of visionary guides and teachers for lay ministers. They also conserve the time, energy and resources of the minister by allowing him to minister to many persons more easily and in more distant places, where ever he has entry. This allows the minister to introduce friends and family to the freedom in Christ without religious overtones. This allows the lay minister to introduce friends and family, who may be distant from his physical location, the same teachings, the same information. Then he can follow up with them, knowing what they have been taught.

In this way, the knowledge of the truth can be made available world wide, reaching people unavailable to meet with in person. But this has another advantage. The lay minister is not hooked into a specific organization which requires support for buildings and salaries. He is not pulled into a specific program for his ministry. The on line resources are simply a support resource for him to minister as God has called him to do.

The on line seminars of Straight Bible function as a teaching resource to all believers who wish to know the real truth of this Christian faith without being forced into someone's specific organizational brand, methods and schemes.

But possibly this brings up another question. What about men and women who feel called into full time ministry? There is no organization to support them ... or engulf them into a system. This is handled through a system of independent Patrons, just like Straight Bible has a Patron which supports it development and its developer. The only network tying all users of the Straight Bible resources together would be an email news letter or conference phone or video calls. The request for a Patron could



be put out that way. Then responses go to the individual making the request, not through an organization.

I might put out such a call myself to produce the seminar, *Christian Essentials*. I have been offered the beautiful classroom facilities of Kaiser University in their new building, on Waters Ave., formerly a financial office building with client impressive luxury. However, I might need the assistance of paid interns to handle the technological aspects of production. If so, I might need additional Patron assistance to produce this project.

The Straight Bible on line seminar series are remote learning, much like many schools and universities are doing these days. However, offering biblical truth, unconnected with a religious organization is unique. It's not that others have not made blogs and even a series of Bible teachings available on line (even my brother does it). But the Straight Bible series is more ambitious, more comprehensive and more understandable than other efforts. Only the Straight Bible series offers insight into Christianity as a continuation of the Hebrew faith. All others approach the faith from the traditional Western Greek metaphysical form.

By using the Internet to network believers for communications, education and support, Christian believers can be tied together to support one another in their individual efforts but left free and independent to serve God as they believe they are called. This provides the community support of traditional not-for-profit organizations but leaves the local independent minister free to minister as he is led of the spirit.

The illustration on the next page provides a lasting image of this method of supporting local independent ministers and local assemblies of believers.



World Wide Web connects and supports the living tree of the outreach of the message of salvation and knowledge of the truth.

## Appendix

This cycle of life, typical in not-for-profit and religious organizations, was very well described in a blog post by an officer in a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving poor communities with Christian ethics.

### *Cycle of Life*

Posted September 2010 by Bob Lupton

Alaska has the second largest rain forest in the world – second only to the Amazon. I learned this from our guide who led the way through winding footpaths that snaked amidst towering pines and hardwoods, clinging vines, lush plant-life and an impenetrable maze of moss and lichen-covered undergrowth. A drizzling rain (measured in feet, not inches) dripped from every branch and leaf, filling small pools on the forest floor and trickling into streams that meandered toward rushing valley rivers. Misty fog hovered in the trees giving the eerie appearance of an ancient primordial world.

We paused as our naturalist guide pointed out a large rotting log, three to four feet in diameter, that lay across the forest floor. Exposed to the elements, its protective bark long gone, decay was slowly reducing the giant into the soil from which it had emerged centuries earlier. A closer look revealed the presence of young green shoots sprouting from the fallen tree's spongy surface. "It's a nurse log," our guide informed us. It



supplies moisture and nutrients to seedlings. Its elevation above the congested forest floor offers seedlings exposure to sunlight and even provides them protection from certain pathogens hostile to particular tree species. Once germinated in the rich decaying humus, a young

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tree will push its roots downward, into and around the nurse log, and eventually embed them into the earth. In death the nurse log gives birth to new life.

A little farther into this lush-green world, we came upon a huge tree supported by massive roots that supported its main trunk several feet above the forest floor. A full-grown man could easily take shelter beneath the cave-like opening at its base.



“The child of a nurse log,” our guide told us. When the nurse log which gave this great tree its start eventually disintegrated, it left open space beneath the tree. Here bears, birds and other rain forest creatures had taken shelter over the years. The nurse log, even in her demise, had created sanctuary for others.

In this pristine rain forest whose unending eco-cycles have endured across eons of time, I was reminded of another unfolding evolution.



The divine Breath that gives life to the intricate natural world has breathed a distinctive life into the human creation. Down through the centuries the Creator has stirred within the spirits and affairs of humankind, touching lives and shaping the course of history. The church, like great trees of the eco-forest, is one of the more visible manifestations of this creative force. And like trees, the unfolding history of the church can be charted in both the new shoots that spring forth in every season and in the decayed remains out of which they emerge.

There still exist rare towering giants that have remained for centuries, magnificent specimens that have endured the storms of conflict and fires of persecution. But old-growth forests inevitably yield to the ravages of time. Winds of adversity, political climate change, pathologies of various sorts, and old age all take their toll. Roots weaken, limbs fall, strength ebbs and one by one these once vital structures topple to the earth and quietly disappear. It is the cycle of life – institutional life as well as that of the natural world.

The Western church is in such a decline. Viewed against the backdrop of history, however, the current demise of denominations is predictable. In time, all institutions follow a similar pattern. They begin as fresh movements, new and exciting, abundant with vision and creativity. But in order to survive, a movement must develop structural strength – mission statement, doctrinal distinctives, leadership structure, decision-making processes.

Vigorous change takes place during this organizational phase as a seedling becomes established, sinking its roots and spreading its branches. Staff are hired, budgets are created, policies are instituted, goals and objectives are set, property is purchased. As the organization matures it becomes a source of security for its employees. Health insurance, vacation pay, cost of living raises, retirement benefits are negotiated. Gradually the mission shifts from the founding visionaries to hired employees and with each subsequent ring of management the passion that originally inspired the movement becomes slightly diluted. Marketing, management, and funding consume increasing amounts of organizational energy. With its own sturdy root system, it now commands its fair share of sunlight and space on the forest floor.

By the time the organization enters the institutional phase of its development, it is fully vested in its own self-preservation. Instead of a movement spending itself on behalf of a noble cause, it has become a respectable institution consumed with preserving its own viability and legacy. It may still use the same stirring language of its past movement days, and it may still perform important work, but it spends the lion's share of its energy on buildings, communication systems, internal politics

## *Organizational Life-Cycle Theory*

and self-promotion to ensure its longevity. Good stewardship demands its preservation. It is the way of all institutions.

The time-line from germination to maturity is influenced by far too many factors to explore in a brief reflection. However, many experts in organizational theory say forty years is a fairly predictable cycle. In other words, by the time a church is two generations old, its culture has been set, it will be clinging to the security of the familiar, and it will be concerned with its own longevity. Little wonder that a younger generation of progressive, open-minded “seedlings” seek out new ground that fosters their creativity and values their ideas.

It is sad to see great trees weaken and topple. It is never-the-less reassuring to see the profusion of new shoots springing to life from the deep, rich ecclesiastical soil layered century upon century. Consciously or not, these seedlings are being nurtured and shaped by fallen nurse logs that fulfilled a vital role in the history of the faith...and still do. It is the cycle of life.

(Source: <http://fcsministries.org/blog/cycle-of-life/> )