An integration of Systems theory, Chaos theory and Complexity science as
turnaround strategies for the small dysfunctional church

A Thesis

By

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ABSTRACT

Every organization that exists or will exist has lived by iterative factors that combine and form the organization and system. These factors are material as well as spiritual. Closed churches function on the basis of certainties. These certainties, called myths, are influenced by a cultural / spiritual understanding of how the church should work. Information, defined broadly, flows into any church system from the outside. In a closed system, the information flow loops around itself until the new information fits the pre-existing myth. Spiritual leadership is systems thinking in conjunction with spiritual, influencing, pastoral leadership allowing for the possibility of the closed, untrusting system to be opened and turned into a system that can self-organize along healthier lines.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have always firmly believed that a thesis or even a proposal is ultimately the work of a community, to paraphrase, "it takes a community to raise a child".

To my wife, Debbi, who kept the home fires burning while working on her own papers as well as in pastoral ministry.

To the United Methodist Church of which I am happy to be a pastoral member and voice in the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference.

To Dr. Keith Rieder, who acted as reader and friend as I wrote this paper.

Finally, to the many churches that I have served, I appreciate their life situations and I was thankful to be of some little service to them, even as they were of service to me.

CHAPTER ONE

WHY CAN'T PEOPLE THINK?

The mainline church is in trouble today. It seems to lack purpose and is seemingly at odds with its own leadership, both denominational and internal. While hope does lie in our future, as God will not let the church disappear, there are severe problems that need addressing in our mutual journey from "here to there." This essay will address one possible path with a blueprint provided for others, using an integration of systems theory, chaos theory, complexity science in a philosophy of science approach integrated with the theological approach of Walter Wink

As we start this essay, several considerations inform my thesis. I look at the writings of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willamon in their book, Resident Aliens.[1] Published in 1989, it caused a minor shaking of the church's foundations, as it postulated the reality of the church's continued cultural connection with the state, and finally produced evidence of the church's betterment without the state. As a result, the churches will return to a point of remembering themselves as places of Resident Aliens, people whose permanent homes found within the realms of heaven. Yet, I believe that its thesis is critical to the church that lives in its struggle with the ending of modernity and the beginning of the reality of post-modernity.

[1]Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens, A provocative Christian assessment of culture and ministry for people who know that something is wrong* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 15 - 29.

Another informational consideration: the integration of science with theology to allow for a more integrated faith development. This is an essential as all people become more deeply involved with the issues of modern science, while lacking the necessary theological and ethical thinking processes to allow for these issues to be intelligently integrated within their faith, and perhaps increase this faith to grow beyond the limitations placed upon it within the local parish and/or community.

Another assumption that I work under is that the church will eventually learn to allow science to inform its theology so that issues that are more important than mere morality can be addressed in an informed theological, scientific and ethical fashion. Certain movements within the United Methodist Church are currently suggestive of this, with the pending formation of a committee on science and theology at the 2000 General Conference of the United Methodist Church as well as the investing and development of a committee with financial and organizational commitment via committee started at the 2004 General Conference. Other impressive movements that are sources of hope are the recent publications of John Polkinghorne, physicist turned Anglican priest, and others who are crossing the bridges between religion and science.

There is a need to take seriously the importance of science as it informs our religious institutions and church bodies in general. This is a prime consideration, not merely in theory, though that is important, but in actually practice. The value of systems theory is that even in its pristine, purely theoretical forms, systems theory applies to human beings and organizations. In human terms, it deals with everyday economic, and in alternative applications, as complexity science or chaos theory, deals with human interactions.

Every human institution can by described in terms of causal loops and interconnections. An organization might be open or closed. The intention of this paper is to provide a blueprint, so to speak, for guiding openness within the organization and directing those organizations to a better way rather than forcing its will upon others. In other words, the church has much to learn in order to become a learning community.

CHAPTER TWO – BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC
RESOURCES[1]

Postmodern Era

According to many philosophers and theologians, we have entered a new

era. This is the era of postmodernism. It is poorly defined, poorly understood

and I suspect understood better in hindsight rather than foresight. It is a time of

transition, of the old rules changing and a new understanding attending the

sciences, the arts and literature. I am indebted to Michael Vlach who has

provided me with a better understanding of the realities of postmodernism.

Postmodernism is "post" in that it rejects certain characteristics of the

Enlightenment or the modern period. Postmodernism is known for its: 1) loss of

confidence in reason, 2) denial of the objectivity of knowledge, 3) rejection of

absolutes, 4) unbelief in the inevitability of progress, 5) rejection of

foundationalism, 6) dismissal of metanarrative, 7) rejection of the idea that

language has extralinguistic referents, 8) embracing of philosophical pluralism, 9)

the universe may not be a self-contained unit.[2]

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[1] All Scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version.

[2] The problem of the beginning and end of modernism and the beginning of postmodernism are still powering debates. Most authors agree that the movement called postmodernism began in the 1960's. Michael J. Vlach, "What is 'Post' about Postmodernism?" [online] TheologicalStudies.org, 2002, cited January, 2004 available from <http://www.theologicalstudies.org>.

<u>Chaos Theory</u>

> For want of a nail, the show was lost;
> for want of a shoe, the horse was lost;
> for want of a horse, the rider was lost;
> for want of a rider, the battle was lost;
> for want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.[3]

So begins one of the strangest elements in the new physics, the Butterfly Effect. As we look at systems, we need to start with the normal unpredictability of human systems. It has been a little applied fact that human beings in any average social group, are composed of people who are by nature, chaotic.[4] This fact also means that people live in the midst of middle or real number systems. Analytical science is very good at working in large numbers and very small numbers. Examples of very large numbers would be the number of red blood cells in the entire human body. Pure math allows this number's generation from a blood sample of one drop and then the red cells in that drop counted. The same is true for the very small numbers, such as the number of atoms found in the head of a steel pin. The facts are that very large and very small numbers both start from estimates. Without the "pure" mathematics, analytical science could not work in medium number systems, as the mathematics involved is not pure nor clear enough. To use a new physics term, the math is fuzzy. Thus science, before the point of the "new" science, could not even begin to explain the behavior of even a single individual. Chaos points to these facts.

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[3] Poem attributed to Benjamin Franklin used as an illustration of the Butterfly Effect as cited in James Gleick, *Chaos, Making A New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 23.

[4] Gerald M. Weinberg, *An Introduction to General Systems Thinking* (New York: Dorset House, 2001), 20.

<u>Every individual lives within a solipsistic universe.</u> This is a philosophical theory as well as a real world fact. This theory states that the self is the only thing that is real and verifiable. Whatever we have in our heads, we call reality. Chaos theory also helps us understand the small, complex ways that errors act in conjunction with the normal patterns of thought among individuals. However, it is "errors" that add complexity to the model that a scientist wishes to see. These real world errors describe real world systems that are much more dynamic than most scientists ever believed from the pure but far more simplistic models that are based upon pure mathematics. This leads us to the concept of non-linear systems; or systems that change as you live in them.

Non-linear systems would have us look to iterations (repeating patterns) within the system. A Koch curve actually looks like a real-life, rugged coastline   A Lorenz Attractor looks to be a butterfly in flight (Butterfly Effect). Mandelbrot sets are utterly beautiful, artistic creations but filled with a semi-mathematical precision of repeating patterns. As I utilize Chaos Theory for Bradenville, I am looking for the patterns of the individual. Since we are talking about patterns within people, we are talking about repeating patterns of thought.   I am also looking for the errors (that prevent non-linearity) that creep into their thought processes. These errors are biases, prejudices and myths. Accidentally, we fill with cultural myths. One of these is the reality of the myth of redemptive violence, which gives us the culturally based Domination system.   This system is an example of errors providing motives for the way people behave. Finally, I utilize chaos theory to look for the desire for stability patterns for the individual. This is <u>equilibrium</u>. All individuals seek equilibrium defined as a way of having the myth inside the head match the reality in the real world.

Complexity Theory

The weakness in chaos theory is that it does not provide much help in answering real world system questions. Complexity theory's design permits it to look at individual behavior patterns. Therefore, we turn to another emerging science, the science of complexity. Developed by social scientists, complexity science allows us to ask these real-world questions[5] "Why do families in the rural village of Bradenville seem unwilling to believe that they are a church in the process of dying?" An offshoot of chaos theory, complexity theory works best among groups of people. Complexity theory provides the additional understanding that this group of people is a system in equilibrium until destabilized. Once destabilized, in a healthy way, they are free to produce an active re-organization or before it can produce any alternate systems.

To understand this, we need to realize that no system is every left by itself. Equilibrium, like certainty, is deadly over the long term. The best example of this is a pot of soup sitting on the stove, burner off. According to chaos theory, this is a system, consisting of the pot, the soup, and water in the soup. It is a simple system, in that we can touch, taste, and feel the system components. This is a system in equilibrium. This pot can sit on the stove and no change will occur, for a short time anyway.

Now, comes the wonder of complexity. Can any human agent push the system out of stability? I can destabilize the systems catastrophically by punching a hole in the pot or simply overturning it onto the floor. I can let the soup sit in the pot for several days, allowing mold to grow. Of course, this is a silly idea if I wanted soup for lunch. (I

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[5] M. Mitchell Waldrop, *Complexity, the emerging science at the edge of Order and Chaos* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 9-10.

also create a mess, a term used by the way, in systems thinking.) So, I ask myself, how can I destabilize the system and still have soup for lunch? The simple answer is to turn on the heat.

This action of turning up the heat demonstrates the principle of <u>spontaneous self-organization of small group and the larger system</u>. Many things start to happen. Soup starts to heat up at the bottom and a heat flow starts moving the soup from bottom to top. The pot is also heating up, sides as well as the bottom. Energy in the form of heat is beginning to flow from many sides now. Side currents start to flow into the middle and top of the soup. Bubbles raise first small ones finally larger form on the top.   and in the center of the soup, each carrying larger amounts of heat into the mixture. All of these things act together to form a complex system of heat energy, convection currents, and heat transfer into the closed soup pot. The system has adapted itself to the influx of heat. This is the <u>principle of adaptation</u>. The soup is using this destabilization to develop new systems of heat transfer, new to its context.   I have now led the system to be complex in the number of dynamic functions occurring at the same time.[6]

Now, I need to be careful. I want to bring the pot of soup with all of this heat energy to the simmering point. I do not want the system to destroy any of the contents of the soup pot because I do not want my soup out of the pot and making a puddle on the stove. Nor do I want it to cool off again. Therefore, I loop my way to a higher sense of equilibrium again. I am also developing a new qualitative state. I do this by turning down

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[6] I am thankful for the idea of explaining complexity in this more elaborate story than is cited in my resource. Please forgive my oversimplification. M. Mitchell Waldrop, *Complexity, the Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 33.

the control knob of my stove and carefully watching the bubbling of the soup. When I am

satisfied at the simmer of the pot of soup, I can finish my looping, or my constant

watching of the soup and turning down of the heat control knob.   This is the principle of

the <u>edge of chaos</u>[7], still heating without boiling over or cooling off.   I observe this by

watching the process of self-contained feedback loops. In real-world terms, small groups

of people process the new information given to them.

All social systems act in this fashion. Churches are no exception. A local church

acts like this also. It is a stable system (in equilibrium) until something acts upon it. A

social system in equilibrium is boring.   According to chaos theory, there are individuals

within the church that wish to maintain the status quo. These are stabilizers within the

church system. Others wish the church to work on a higher level of activity at least to

avoid total equilibrium that leads to death.   These are the destabilizers of the current

church system. As of this point, there are very few destabilizers. This is because the

church is one big entangled family. In other words, the church system in Bradenville is

stubbornly in balance.

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

Walter Heisenberg aptly demonstrated that light could be either a wave or a

particle.   In doing so, he gave us a valuable theory that is helpful in dealing with the

uncertainty of real world systems. There is always an element of uncertainty within the

real world. . As any engineer will say, paper is fine if your building is based on paper

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[7] I have continued the analogy of the pot, as it is more real world while still carrying accurate information as cited in *Ibid*, 230-233.

alone. Factors such as metal fatigue in steel I-beams or whether a wooden plank has enough give for a specific application are factors that all engineers take into account. This is the reason that engineers are required to take courses called "Strength of Materials". The designer usually does not. The functions are different. This is simply because the real world does not match the paper or computerized models of design complexity.

We used the uncertainty principle in this case of systems complexity and systems thinking, as the important elements are human-based. As you will recall, chaos theory calls to mind the fact that all of the systems that we may examine, whether business, manufacturing or social system, including church systems, are human or have strong degrees of human interactions built within them. All humans systems are chaotic according to basic systems and chaos theories. Chaos implies uncertainty. For example, people may not always tell the truth or attempt to hide the truth or even completely ignore the truth. Sometimes, even under the very best situations and conditions of trust, some people may not want help. They may prefer to live within a comfortable myth, so to speak, as the energy to make any necessary changes may not be present.

In the church dimension, I can speak of faith as needing to be uncertain, too. God is not a subject of scientific fact. God is a subject of faith. Can a group pretend that God is more certain than God may be? My reality of faith resides more in the realm of uncertainty than certainty.[8] If my faith is certain, then I do not need to learn other things. An uncertain faith is a growing faith. Uncertainty paradoxically produces growth. The

real world is also uncertain. A church that does not allow for a larger god than they

themselves can imagine, are unconsciously but actively practicing idolatry, self-worship.

One wonders if they are a church!

   Another aspect of intuition on the human level is my use of the term intuition. I

cannot footnote intuition nor can I document with any certainty how I use it.

Nevertheless, my intuition is present in all cases, and furthermore, I have learned to trust

it as being an active part of my hidden mind. I hesitate to use the word subconscious

mind, as psychology seems to place an entirely different meaning upon that term.

Therefore, I will substitute the word "hidden" mind. I have often thought that my mind is

like a radar dish that is set up to receive impulses from many different sources. These

impulses filtered by my conscious mind until I get a "clear picture". However, beauty,

love, feelings in general is not something that "processes" the same way.   Here my

analogy falls apart, as I do not have a clearer picture of the way my mind works from the

inside. Yet, I know when a person tells me the truth and when they care about me. This,

within limits, provides answers for me in many unknown ways.

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   [8] Flannery O'Connor makes a very persuasive statement regarding faith being
trust not certainty, as cite in Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God* (Grand
Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 48.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking deals with the entire system, as complexity and chaos theories deal with the building blocks of the system.[9]   The areas that systems thinking deals with are: Openness, Purposefulness, Multi-dimensionality, Emergent Properties and Counter-intuitiveness. Openness is partly defined as a system that can be understood properly only within its own context. Openness, defined as being able to take in information and deal with it in such a fashion that the system can cope with reality.

There are also two types of variables: those variables that we can control and those we cannot control but can only influence. These variables, called "transactional variables", lead us to the understanding that people within the system need to be in agreement with us before any change can occur. Partial change will occur within of the transaction. Normally, we accomplish through education, or in the church, Christian education. Purposefulness, another characteristic of any system, provides a clearer understanding of how transactions within a system work by providing a hierarchy of influence.[10] Hierarchy of influence is the combination of knowledge, information and understanding. Information is data about the other people within the system. Put simply, it is the "what" question. Knowledge is the awareness of "how" people do what they do. Understanding is the asking of the "why" question of the people within the system. If I

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[9] Gharajedaghi provides an interesting shortcut to complexity theory which remains true to the original but is able to be demonstrated in more real world terms, as cited in Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 31.

[10] Hierarchy of Influence, as cited in Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 33

can find out why people do as they do, I stand a better possibility of correcting their blocked thinking.

To understand how this is the case, we need to look at the ways that we can influence people. This is the Dimensions of Decisions system principle. People influenced <u>rationally</u>, <u>emotionally</u> and <u>via the culture</u>. A standard saying within this systems principle is that "The world is not run by those who are right; it is run by those who can convince others that they are right."[11]

First, let us deal with the dimension of decision-making called <u>Rationality</u>. We need to understand that rational decision-making may not give us the best of all decisions; it merely gives the better answer in relationship to other answers around us. If an answer is too new, it may be because not enough people are aware of this new possibility or too many people are not willing to challenge the prevailing belief.

Are many decisions rational? Certainly, but these decisions have much in common. As a principle, they are adverse to <u>risk-taking behaviors</u>.[12] One example comes from the Ford Foundation: A Ford Foundation representative went to India to teach birth control and contraception. The Indian people seemed very much aware of the necessity for birth control and contraception. Yet, as incentive, to attend lectures and take the contraceptives home to use, they had a transistor radio. The director noticed that after certain amount of time had passed, couples still had an average of 4.6 children. India, at the time, had no Social Security or retirement plans. The retire plan as enacted by the natives was simple; they needed three sons. Since genetic planning was not an

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[11] Dimensions of Decisions, Ibid, 34

[12] Dimensions of Decisions, Rationality in decision-making, Ibid, 34

option nor was abortion for gender selection available, statistics point to the fact that to

have three sons, you need 4.6 children. To verify this, all that the Director had to do was

count the number of people who stopped at having just three sons. So, from this

perspective, the Ford Foundation was acting irrationally in asking a couple to give up a

working, living retirement system just to own a transistor radio. On the other hand, the

experience taught the Ford Foundation to attempt to solve the proper problem next time.

Being risk-adverse is a prime characteristic of the rational portion of the decision-

making process.

Another example, very near and dear to my heart, is the Mon-Valley Vo-Tech,

Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel and University of California employment retraining fiasco.[13]

Here I saw how workplace mythology and management dysfunctionality worked together

to bring about a non-teachable crew of 900 men who were destined to be unteachable.

The second portion of the dimension of decision triangle is the emotional. The

principle here is about beauty and excitement.[14] We do many things because they are

exciting or we find them beautiful or challenging. Risk is an important element of this

portion of decision-making. Described as an intrinsic value, we take risks for excitement,

beauty and challenge. Ask yourself why so many people take rides on snow-covered

roads at higher than sane speeds? Life without some risk would be boring. For that

matter, I play games over the Internet with people who are better than I am at playing this

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[13] I was involved in this attempt at retraining the workers at Wheeling-Pittsburgh
Steel, in close conjunction with the federal government and California University, as
cited in Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline, the art and practice of the learning
organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990), 18.

[14] Dimensions of Decisions, Emotions in decision-making, Ibid, 35

game. I find the challenge exciting. However, it also improves my game skills. If I can

get a person engaged in an argument with me, I can influence them more effectively.

The third portion of the decision-making triangle is that of <u>cultural</u> input. This is

the collection of the norms within the group. Oftentimes, this is the most challenging

portion of the triangle. These aspects are usually unexamined but accepted as normal

behavior for the group. The decision-making member does not often have the freedom to

make a decision, because culture has determined that this option is not what we want or is

not available to us. As a result, we do not have the full freedom of movement within a

system to properly make adjustments.

To recap, A local church may be a church that has made a rational decision,

which is very risk-adverse and freedom limiting, to avoid the more exciting but risk-

taking venture of faith. They have utilized an unexamined cultural perspective to do this.

While more research is needed to examine this cultural perspective more completely, the

issue of money and being paid for what you "do" is a major portion of the myth. How

could it be otherwise in a blue-collar, non-craftsman populated church?

A Good Word for Leadership[15]

A good word for leadership is due. Just my presence alone makes me an active

participant within the church, even if I am not a member. However, a leader performs a

more important function than being present in the church. The pastor can perform a very

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[15] I cite this, with one change to make it acceptable to systems speak. Heifetz uses "habit" in much the same way that Gharajedaghi uses "cultural", as cited in Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1994), 59.

valuable function; the leader can lead to provide leadership and not merely be content to manage.

The leadership of the pastor can destabilize the system. We can choose to destabilize the system downward or upward. If the destabilization is upward, it is leadership, if it is downward it is management. Management, in a passive environment that is deteriorating, is destructive. Leadership, even in a passive environment that is deteriorating, is constructive. As matter of fact, it is probably the most loving thing that a human being can do for a church.

To use the pot of soup analogy, adding heat is constructive. In the Bradenville setting, adding argument and challenging the prevailing myth is caring. The alternative for this church is death.

<div align="center">John Wesley</div>

As a good United Methodist, it is only appropriate to say a few words about John Wesley and indicate a few of my reasons for not using him in this paper. Simply put, according to many scholars, his theological system is unable to answer the questions increasingly asked by a 21st Century culture that has changed dramatically from the 18th Century. This is not surprising if you think about it.   There have been newer understandings of both science and theology, in combination as well as alone. Teilhard De Chardin was the first theologian to attempt to use a combination of science (natural law) with theology to attempt to prove the existence of God. Even today, modern theologians also see fit to use analytical science with theology to provide a culturally relevant view of God. However, Wesley admitted that his theological communication of the church's

mission was flawed, with its most glaring failure in relationship to his "evangelical economics"[16] or his understanding of God's preferential option for the poor: "Earn all that you can, Save all that you can, Give all that you can." In other words, Wesley did not plan for the problem of prosperity and the resultant problem of motivation. He also assumed that everyone seems to respond to the Holy Spirit in the same reasonable ways.   This is hardly a surprise, as the latest thinking within the culture of the day was Rationalism. "Let there be freedom of religion for each will find the truth in his own way."[17] To place things into the perspective of systems language, Wesley never fully took into account the reality of the cultural mythos, and as a result, never fully understood a major cultural myth: I was once poor. Now I have become comfortable. IF I can do it, they can do it too. To make this as simple and direct as I can: (I was once poor. Now, I have become comfortable.) is the prosperity part of the myth.   (IF I can do it, they can do it too without help from me.) is the motivational or lack of motivational part of helping the poor.

In addition, Wesley does not speak in a culture that is slowly beginning to see the values of non-linear science vs. analytical, mechanistic science. With Wesley's kind of analytical and linear thinking, there is an underlying thought of

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[16]Jennings, Theodore W., *Good News To The Poor, John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), p.135.

[17] Locke as well as others within the same volume wrote in a dualistic fashion, as if freedom, security and experience could not be demonstrated as needing each other, as cited in: Digests of John Locke, Baruch Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, *Masterworks of Philosophy*, ed. S.E. Frost, Jr. (New York: McGraw-Hill Paperbacks, 1946), 92.

how the game is played that makes Wesley unsuited for the 21st Century

postmodern, non-linear mind-set.

Wesley did not understand the problem of the zero-sum game[18].

Wesley, as most educated clergy and laity understand, developed his

theology using opposing tendencies as dualities. This results in a zero-sum

game. Put simply, if I win, you must lose. In other words, one wins or the other

side wins. The emphasis is upon the OR condition.

In terms of cultural thought, the result must always be a compromise,

which is society's method of reducing conflict.   Compromise places a high

degree of importance upon being in power vs. not being in power. These "being

in power" vs. "not being in power" are the unexamined values of the compromise

position. Power values dominate the culture as well as the church. Staying in

power becomes the more important component of life within the church. This is

the unexamined component of the cultural myth.

Wesley would have done better to utilize multi-dimensionality[19] rather than

duality. Here duality would be replaced by the concept of the opposite but

complimentary.   As I shall attempt to demonstrate this allows for the

development of an AND condition.

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[18] Multidimensionality in complimentary and dualistic systems, as cited in Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 38-45

[19] My analysis of Wesley's inappropriateness for the 21st Century is based upon the analysis as cited in Multidimensionality, Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 39

This results in a non-zero-sum game. Either side may win but this fact does not necessitate that the other side lose. The other side may win too.

 According to some theologians, Wesley would have accepted this analysis. This assertion is backed by John Cobb as he writes:" to keep out certain formulations because they are not found in Wesley would itself be quite unWesleyan."[20] I am not free to guess. The concept of a non-zero-sum game would certainly been a compliment to the otherwise complex entanglement of Wesley's dualistic system.

<p style="text-align:center;"><u>Walter Wink and the Powers that Be.</u></p>

If there was ever a theology written for our times and from a system perspective, it is Walter Wink's "Powers that Be" theology. In this four volume set, Walter Wink, a theologian currently teaching at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City, formerly of Union Theological Seminary, writes engagingly of the culture of dominance and the myth of redemptive violence. He was also a Peace Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in the years 1989-1990. [21]

I am enthusiastic over this work as it demonstrates the systems' approach to ministry so well in a real-world sense. Simply put, this theology deals with the reality not merely of the people within the system of the church, but more importantly deals effectively with the reality of the myth that underlie most current

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[20] Cobb, John B, *Grace & Responsibility*, p.8.

[21] Walter Wink, "Walter Wink, Home Page," [online] Walter Wink's Home Page, 1998-2002, cited January 30,2004, available from <http://www.walterwink.com>.

theological and social systems, in particular those from the 18th Century. As a

side effect, Wink demonstrates the reality of material issues as having equally

spiritual components. Wink starts his analysis by asking the reader what they

understand about power.[22] Wink continues to explain that power is the

underlying reality of the New Testament. The phrase that he uses most often to

have us accept the reality of power in the New Testament is "archai kai

exousias", which is "principalities and powers". It is but one of the paired

phrases used in the New Testament. Some other pair phrases[23] are:

      1. Rulers and great men

"But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers (archontes) of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. " Matthew 20:25

      2. Those who supposedly rule and great men

So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers (hoi dokoutes archein) lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. Mark 10:42

      3. Kings and those in authority

But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. Luke 22:25

      4. Chief priests and rulers

…and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. Luke 24:20

      5. Authorities and Pharisees

Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? John 7:48

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[22] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

[23] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 7.

6. Rulers and elders

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, Acts 4:8

7. <u>Kings and rulers</u>

The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah. Acts 4:26

8. Angels and principalities

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers.   Romans 8:38

9. Power and name

When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Acts 4:7

10. Power and wisdom

but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.   1 Cor. 1:24

11. Power and authority

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases.   Luke 9:1

These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast Rev. 17:13

12. Authority and commission

"With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests   Acts 26:12

13. Authority and power

They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, "What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!"   Luke 4:36

According to Wink, these are all examples of the concept of power present in the New Testament as pairs. In fact, these groups are paired and they are often heaped up to illustrate the complex nature of power in the New Testament. Some examples are:[24]

Chief priests, officers and elders

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?   Luke 22:52

Chief priests, rulers and people

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, Luke 23:13

Rulers, elders and scribes

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, Acts 4:5

Synagogues, rulers and authorities

When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say.   Luke 12:11

Wink also states that the language of power in the New Testament is imprecise, liquid, interchangeable and unsystematic.[25] Again, he proves his thesis, applying in one instance to seemingly spiritual powers and the next instance, seemingly to earthly powers. In Luke's gospel, exousias (power) is in reference to the power of Satan.

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[24] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 8-9.

[25] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 9-10.

"But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!" Luke 12:5

Six verses later, the same word is in reference to human authorities.

"When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say;" Luke 12:11.

Wink continues to explain his point by pointing out the usage of words by authors who use the same word to mean different things and different words for the same things.

Wink continues by saying that there are clear patterns of usage of each of these patterns, despite the imprecision and interchangeability. Some of these words are "archon" which always refers to an incumbent in office. "Arche" can indicate the office of an authority figure or the person itself or the structure of power, such as government, kingdom or realm. "Exousia" denotes the sanctions and legitimations by which a government maintains power.

From this point, Wink goes on to state that all of these terms are to a degree interchangeable, one or a pair or a series represent them all.[26] In this fashion, he proves his point so that when he says the "Powers" or "Principalities and Powers"; he really is saying the same thing. It is his fifth point that makes the clearest connection between the "powers and principalities" and a non-zero sum game. He does this when he states that the powers are both human and divine if the worldview includes divine agents. [27]

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[26] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 10-11.

[27] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 11-12.

Dr. Wink may not know it, but he also is referring to the reality of iterative patterns within social systems. Wink states that he is thankful to the new physics as it works in his theology in much the same fashion that the state works for the church; it provides a structure for his uses. He uses the observation of the structure of the New Testament's usage of power and sees the chaotic/ordered nature of the universe of the New Testament. He refers to the world behind the New Testament as being multi-dimensional. His emphasis is upon earthly powers and heavenly powers, human attributes and divine attributes, earthly power structures and heavenly power structures, all that really mean the same thing. The "Powers that Be" are actually material expressions of the inner reality.[28] In other words, he adds spirit to the material reality.

As a recap, Wink believes in the power of myth, as a major force within a life. He includes myth as a part of the real world within the New Testament, adding that the dimensions found within the Bible as well as the world as a whole.

Wink also says that the biggest part of the myth found within the New Testament is the aspect of power. When he is speaking of power, Wink is also referring to the fact that whenever he speaks of "the Powers that Be", "the Powers", or even any one of the multiple names for power, these descriptors also describe not just the word "power" but actually mean the people who display and utilize such powers. In other words, the spiritual realm and the material realm

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[28] Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 104-112.

are in a certain sense connected by the powers of the human actors or institutions that act as powers. Wink calls this an inner and an outer aspect. The shell seen in this life is the outer aspect; the spirit is the inner aspect.

Wink leaves us with this understanding then.

The Powers are good. The Powers are fallen. The Powers must be redeemed. [29]

The Domination System

Probably one of the hardest aspects of the system to define is the Domination system. Yet, it is something that surrounds us daily. This myth became alive during the Hellenistic Era.[30] Its characteristics are easily definable, being characterized by 1) unjust economic relations, 2) oppressive political relations, 3) biased race relations, 4) patriarchal gender relations, 5) hierarchal power relations and the use of violence to maintain them all.[31]

It is a longstanding, according to Wink, having been in place as long as the great conquest states of the Ancient Middle East, approximately since 3000 BCE.

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[29] Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be, Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee Doubleday, 1998), 31.

[30] Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be, Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee Doubleday, 1998), 39

[31] Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be, Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee Doubleday, 1998), 39

Several inventions contributed to the success of the conquest state. One was the invention of the horse. I will paraphrase Wink and state that the domestication of the horse used in conjunction with the wheel made warfare more profitable. The victorious warrior could pile all of the plunder upon a horse or a cart and could carry much more than they could on their backs. Plunder included women, domesticated as slaves, concubines or sexual toys. Males killed and were undesirable as plunder anyway. Taxation developed to allow for the development of a standing army, a warrior caste and an aristocracy.

No matter how high a woman might rise in the hierarchy, men controlled her sexually and reproductively. This highly patriarchal, authoritarian and rigidly hierarchal society deprived women to speak their minds and control their bodies. Those in power created myths or evolved new myths to socialize women, the poor and captives into this now inferior status. Priesthoods, backed by armies, courts of law, and executioners, inculcated in people's minds the fear of terrible, remote and inscrutable deities. Wife beating and child beating began to be as not only normal but also a male right. Evil blamed on women.[32]

Wink points out that to have Domination system, one needs a myth to explain how things got this way. When the myth is repeated enough (closed

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[32] Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be, Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee Doubleday, 1998), 41

loop) and confirmed in daily life, (a closed loop) it becomes accepted as reality itself.[33]

The Myth of Redemptive Violence

"Violence is the ethos of our times. This also makes violence the spirituality of the modern world."[34] Wink goes on to describe violence as having been granted the status of a religion, with the devotion paid to violence being a form of religious piety. This myth started in Babylon, according to Wink, as the Enuma Elish and the gods Apsu and Tiamat.[35] Using Paul Ricouer's commentary upon this myth, even creation became an act of violence. There is no problem, as evil is a fact. It is the myth of the religion of the status quo.[36]   It is also the myth that allows for the domination of women by men.   Even today, Wink makes the point of stating that popular modern culture has not escaped this myth. In its most pervasive form, it is in children's comics and cartoons: some examples are Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel, Superfriends and others. Its influences found in foreign policy, the Cold War, militarism, the media and televangelism. Ultimately, according to Wink, the myth of Redemptive violence is

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[33] Wink is restating how action loops function within a system. In this case, the double loop, the first loop (the myth is repeated often enough) and the reinforcing loop (confirmed in daily life) act to make this double loop "reality".

[34] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, 13

[35] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, 14

[36] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, 16

in a uniquely modern invention, the National Security State.[37]   As this is an

institution, it must have an ideology. Wink believes that this ideology is the

ideology of the national security state, as it is our form of the myth of redemptive

violence.

> The unique contemporary form of Western redemptive violence (the Soviet
> Union had already shaped its own version under Lenin and Stalin) was sired by the
> Cold War. In 1947, the United States created new political institutions that would
> dramatically alter the character and even the future prospects of democracy: the
> National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency. To propagate
> national security doctrine, the National War College was established in Washington
> in 1948. Through its doors have passed thousands of military and police officers
> from Latin America and other "Third World" nations. These institutions were but
> the outer form of a new Power being spawned: the national security system. Every
> Power, as is demonstrated in Naming the Powers, has an inner spirituality as well
> as an outer institutional forms. The spirituality of the national security system is
> the ideology of the national security state.[38]

However, even as Wink proves the reality of the Domination System and

its widespread nature within the world, he also draws us to the fact that there are

other ways to address this problem of violence. There is the passive, no

resistance plan. This plan is lived by demonstrating "<u>no resistance</u>" against the

system. However, as Wink sees it, Jesus teaches a third way, there is also the

way of non-violence but active resistance.

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[37] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, 25

[38] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, 27

The Way of Active Non-violent Resistance

The New Testament is overflowing with Jesus and his actions in engaging the Powers That Be.

> And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples--for there were many who followed him. [16] When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" [17] When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." (Mark 2:15-17)

> According to Interpreter's Bible, in this story, another barrier falls: that of sin. Resistance to Jesus' words and actions of forgiveness shows that the separation of the sinner from God is not the only barrier created by sin. Humans divide themselves into categories of "righteous" and "sinners," but Jesus rejects that division. The "righteous" think they know the conditions under which persons may expect to receive mercy from God. Those who experience God's mercy and compassion are already trying to shape their lives by God's law. Their desire for holiness is not wrong. The failure occurs when the scribes mistake Jesus' ministry to sinners as blasphemous disregard for God's holiness.

> Jesus' work here is a *pattern of resistance* (italics mine) to the understanding of the Pharisees, the resistance to the categories of sin that humans place other humans into, and also provides an entry point into the faith community that is yet to be for those who desire healing of their sins. Jesus establishes a pattern of holiness that invites the outsider into fellowship. Forgiveness is essential to the new community around Jesus. The story of the paralytic also reminds us that forgiveness is central to healing. Psychoanalysis has taught the twentieth century that deep-seated, irrational guilt and self-hatred can generate imprisoning physical symptoms. That story highlights another important feature of the social context of illness: The faith of the paralyzed man's four friends initiated the healing encounter with Jesus. For many people, the most difficult part of enduring a severe illness is helplessness, the need to rely on others for one's basic functions of daily life.[39]

Wink would see Jesus' as working non-violently to the Pharisees but also being actively reactive. He is avoiding violence, but demonstrating to the

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[39] *The New Interpreters' Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002) [CD-ROM]; available from NextPage, Abingdon Electronic Publications.p.551

Pharisees that he is still able to react. He does not fall into the trap of

helplessness.

An even better example is found in Matt. 5:39.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'
39 But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right
cheek, turn the other also; 40 and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat,
give your cloak as well; 41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the
second mile. 42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone
who wants to borrow from you. (Matt. 5:39)

Most Christians would read this as "do not resist evildoers" as an active

command to be passive.   Wink makes the point that the word anthistemi[40] or

"resist" is a military term. Its meaning varies but various scholars agree with the

general meaning of "counteractive aggression" or "to draw up battle ranks

against the enemy". Therefore, it is better understood as "to stand your ground".

Jesus' injunction should read this way: "Do not violently resist the evildoer."

Neither should you be passive against them. Resist in a non-violent way.'

According to Wink, this is Jesus' Third Way. He spells out this Third Way

according in a chart form.[41] I will simplify it here.

Flight	Jesus' Way	Fight
Submission	Assert your own humanity	Armed revolt
Passivity	Meet force with ridicule	Violent rebellion
Withdrawal	Break the humiliation cycle	Direct retaliation

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[40] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, p.185

[41] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, p. 189

Surrender   Recognize your own power   Revenge

Wink sees this as the only way to break the cycle of violence that is active in our world. This is not an easy cowardly way either. We need to break out of the Flight stage, which allows for domination and useless suffering. Better but not useful is the Fight Stage which allows us to grab our own anger and use it to gain inner strength. Yet, if we stop there, we miss the better way for our spiritual needs as well as the opposition's. We choose the active, non-violent Third Way.

Wink is clear then that this is a choice. However, included within this choice is the use of coercion. It must not be violent coercion, but if it makes the opponent angry, this does not trouble Wink. Change is occurring as someone, once being abused, becomes not abused. This quote by Barbara Deming, (noted homosexual rights poetess and activist), makes this clear: "in nonviolence "one exerts force upon the other, not tearing him away from himself but tearing from him that which has been loaned to him by all those who have given him obedience."[42]

Finally, Wink makes it clear that this use of Jesus' Third Way does not meant avoid conflict. Christians all too often call for non-violence when they really want a return to tranquility. Usually, the Domination System deals with conflict by suppressing it. Conflict, according to Roy Oswald, of the Alban Institute, is essential. A quote from his workshop at the Morgantown Pastoral Counseling Center, makes this very clear. "There should be at least one conflict

occurring in your church at any given time. It sharpens the minds of people and better than this, they engage each other which stops stagnation within the church."[43]

On Not Becoming What You Hate

Yet, Wink also cautions us to not take the next step and become what we hate. He cites as an example U.S./Soviet relations in the 1980's. He recalls how Richard Nixon understood this Soviet strategy of bankrupting our economy, and despite it, played into the hands of the Soviet military and they into our hands. He recalls how Ronald Reagan was rendered susceptible to bankrupt our own nation by his hatred of the Soviets. As an affirmation of this fact of human nature, he quotes William Blake, "They looked at one-another & became what they beheld."[44]

Hating evil is not the way of resistance. "You always become the thing you hate the most." says Carl Jung.[45] History has proven Jung and Blake correct. Prohibition did nothing but increase alcoholism and drinking. The same thing is happening with the war on drugs.

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[42] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, p. 192

[43] Oswald was speaking of the reality of polarities within the local church system, as a reality for pastors as cited in Roy Oswald, "Empowering the Congregation" (Morgantown: WV: Morgantown Pastoral Counseling center, offsite at the Morgantown General Hospital, November 13, 2003).

[44] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, p. 195-196

[45] Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, p. 196

Using historical proof, Wink points out that this problem is part of human nature. The Maccabees' battle with their Hellenistic overlords ended with the Maccabees taking on the Hellenistic kingdom and bureaucracy for their own use. Roman success to overcome Judea ended with the Roman philosopher Seneca to complain that Jewish customs had entered Roman life. Rome, not learning it lesson from earlier wars, attempted to destroy the Catholic Church, becomes its Holy See. The Roman Catholic Church fought the successors of the Gnostics, the Cathari and the Albigensians. The church declared evil and heretical their Manichean conception of eternal warfare against light, good against evil and God against Lucifer. In its attempt to exterminate heresy, the church became Manichean. "Kill them all, God will recognize his own!" was the cry of the papal legate as twenty thousand people, heretics and Catholics alike, were brutally murdered in Beziers, France, 1209.

The Jews emerged from the nightmare of the Holocaust crying "Never again!" and are now treating the Palestinians brutally.

However, this precept of "becoming the thing you hate the most." is very useful and when used with Walter Bruggerman's guerrilla theatre, becomes a very powerful weapon in the hands of the subversive pastor, just as it is within the hands of the subversive congregation. Wink warns his readers very clearly to watch carefully the evil that you resist.

This is a large amount of material to recap.

Walter Wink is correct in assuming that the system starts out good, that the system falls and then the system must be redeemed. Wink is also correct

about the failures of the "powers that be". His exhaustive proof with the word, word pairs and other configurations illustrate that the New Testament is concerned about those who use, yield and are the subjects of powerful people.

One effective way to utilize the power of the "powers that be" and the power of myth is through the judicious use of coercive force. To do this, we must utilize leadership skills rather than management skills. Along with tying Wink in with Heifetz book, this line of thought clearly delineates that leadership is leading people to a better place and management in a deteriorating environment is destructive. Leadership can be many things, but always it is to be helpful. As I look at A local church, I realize that it is not a solitary island. It is within a system that it voluntarily joined. If it chooses to disconnect with the larger denomination, this is always its option. This local church, as well as any other church, needs reminding that it is a United Methodist church. It is a part of the larger system of United Methodist churches. This means that it cannot always get the pastor that it wants, that its former pastors have left for good, to return only under the rules given to them by the Book of Discipline. It also means that, in return, it will be able to participate within the system.

If the "Powers That Be" seem unfair, then it is up to A local church to try to work within the system to change the rules.

During this time of postmodernism an effort to communicate that the rules have changed needs to be made, the rules under which the church community previously lived have changed. Indeed, there is a better way, the way of working

within the system to endorse change. I believe Jesus would call it a non-violent

way of change.

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