

The Praxis Manifesto

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Introduction

We realize there are exceptions to everything we are about to say in the next few paragraphs. Our goal is analysis of trends and situations in the Body of Christ, not criticism. We want to state up front that we are grateful to God and to the faithful men and women of the faith who contend for the real, authentic and lived presence of Jesus.

As we write this, we want to avoid the “angry young man” label which many may wish to put on us. We are neither angry nor young, just two guys living with a holy discontent stirred within us by the Spirit of God. While we are not experts, we are also not neophytes – we’ve lived church life and been involved in the ministry of the church for decades. We aren’t “anti” anything concerning the Church – we just don’t like what it has become in the West. We are not for small churches or large churches; we are for *the Church*, in whatever local form it takes.

What we share here, we do so as a prod – hoping to spur the reader on to love and good deeds – and to foster a spiritual revolution in the Church in the West.

Domestication of Christianity

Western Christianity has become rather sanitized and civilized which results in a sterile faith that focuses more on right and wrong, separation and sin than it does righteous living, inclusion and the Good News of the Gospel. The focus tends to be more on principles that lean more towards control than faith. The Church in the West tends to place its emphasis on personal blessing instead of being a blessing for others, the community, and the world. The underlying thought to this seems to be one that believes that if we can control our world and control our God through right practices and behaviors, then we will be blessed and have a comfortable existence.

The Church has become more like a zoo, tame and domesticated, rather than a people who are roaming the wild to impact life. Like the zoo, people come to see the animals of the wild, watch a lion roar, see a tiger, etc. The Church has become a place where we believe that if people come they will be awed and won to Christ. The Church tends to make tame the life that was once in us and then confines its constituency to a cage of respectability and safety instead of releasing people back into the wild where the Church is meant to live untamed, full of love

and life in the midst of sin, pain, despair and suffering, incarnating the very presence and love of God.

The language in our churches is often that of life (the wine) but the focus seems to be more on technique or the wineskin. Our churches are often filled with excellent presentations of life without the substance of it like a family that invites people to dinner and never serves the meal.

Our world is hungry and ripe for an encounter with the living God. In simple language, unless we provide a relational environment for people to encounter God, as we are encountering Him, then we have done nothing more than creative marketing that has forgotten to provide a quality product.

The Church is then analogous to a family that provides a wonderful meal for their neighborhood. They invite everyone to come for dinner. As people walk in they smell the delightful aroma of a home cooked meal, enjoy the ambiance provided by the followers, the music and the warm greeting by the members of the family. The embrace is so loving, the feeling of belonging and acceptance is near perfect. The anticipation grows for the meal, light snacks are provided to help curb the appetite and build towards the main course. To the surprise of the guests no meal is served. Rather it is described in great detail with PowerPoint presentations and even a movie clip that enriches the picture of the meal for the hearers. The guests leave the house with a great idea of what the meal is but still find themselves hungry. Although the service and hospitality at the house were great, near perfect, it did not meet the great need of hunger within; and so, the guests go elsewhere in search of food to satisfy their hunger.

In our churches in the West today we often have the relational dynamics down, the ambiance, mood altering worship, technology, the relevant sermons, etc., but we forget to provide the actual meal -- the stuff that actually makes us the Church. The atmosphere where a real life God-encounter can take place and people can feast on the Lord to satisfy the deeper spiritual hunger of their souls. People don't go to a sports bar to watch soap operas. Since we are the Church, maybe we should not hold back on what we do, so that people will encounter God as He is. It's one thing for people to come to our churches and leave hungry because we do not provide a meal. It is entirely another for people to come to our churches and experience the meal and find themselves with a choice to eat or not. At least if they leave hungry, they do so because they chose to reject the Lord.

The Church as Vendor and as Circus

Hollywood is no longer the "entertainment capital of the world" – it is now your local church megaplex. The church in the West, bent on attracting people to a location has become a consumer-driven vendor of spiritual goods and services. In short, it has become a circus where the performers are polished and the vari-

ous acts of the performance timed to the minute. Very often churches which follow this path often end up **competing for the same market share – Christians in other churches.** (It is still the case that 95% of church growth in the USA is transfer growth.) Whoever has the best product and environment is then the one who wins the loyal support of its constituency. The pressure on the church is then to satisfy its customer base and continue to be a vendor of spiritual goods and services.

But is this really what the church is supposed to do? Nothing wrong, mind you, with the idea of trying to meet people where they are. We are just questioning the whole concept of “doing church.” The New Testament seems to lay a foundation that tells us the Church is a community of disciples who live out the message of the Cross. What we don’t find in the New Testament is the early Christians trying to “do church.” Rather, what we find is a community of disciples who are the church.

It seems that we spend so much of our time and energy trying to **do** church that we forget to actually **be** the Church. Maybe that has a lot to do with why the church seems so impotent in its ability to reach our world. We market our message well to those who are already in the faith, but not to those who are outside the fold. Scripture makes it plain that Jesus came “to seek and save what was lost.” (NIV, Luke 19:10)

The Church is called to be a community of disciples who not only embrace each other well, but also reach out to the world in a language and style they understand, so that we might live out for them the greatest message on the planet. It’s not as important how we “do church” as it is that we *are* the church. This generation is crying out for something real and tangible that can explain the greater mysteries of our existence. People know there is something more; they just don’t know where to find it.

The Dream

What if.....

- **Every local church** could become a fruitful, committed community of disciples who loved God, loved others and made more disciples everywhere they went?
- **Every pastoral leader** knew who they were in Christ, knew what they were called to do for Him, had the skills to pull it off - AND the character to maintain their integrity throughout it all?
- **Every new church plant** was established based on the “**irreducible core**” of Jesus’ teachings, focusing on **loving God, loving others** and **making disciples**?

- **Every denomination or church network** could become a move of God, energized by the Holy Spirit, vital in the life of Christ, spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom across the planet?

We believe this is possible. Not only that, we believe that it is probable. But it won't happen without change coming to the Church in the West. In fact, the change which is needed is of such a scale that nothing less than a **spiritual revolution** will be necessary.

At Praxis, we are looking to help facilitate this change by developing leaders in the Church of today and the ones that will be leaders in the Church of tomorrow. We are not satisfied with the status quo, and we're just not going to take it any-more! The gloves are coming off-we're not holding back. So, if you are serious about God extending His Kingdom, read on-**and join the Revolution.**

The Revolution

Something HAS to change....

The culture in the West is slipping away into the hands of the Enemy. The Church has been self-marginalized and continues to decline in the West-the **ONLY** place on the planet where it is **NOT** growing. A revolution is needed to overthrow the status quo and bring the Church to a place of new vitality. But this cannot be a revolution of destruction, but one that brings life. It's not about tearing down, but building up-and building with the simple principles of Jesus. "Church as usual" just doesn't work-and the Revolution is needed to usher in a new era.

What is Christianity: Religion or Revolution? Jesus came to start a revolution for the redemption of the human heart. Many are Christianized, know the Bible, the principles of holy living, but have not met Christ or do not meet with the Christ daily -- instead meeting with the principles and practice, and not the Person. The Way is a Person. The Truth is a Person. The Life is a Person. (John 14:6)

The Revolution is not about angry pastors and leaders who are disgruntled with the Church and seek to utilize the platform of a revolution to execute their own personal agendas, seeking relief for their personal torment and pain. **Rather, the Revolution is about** pastors and leaders who are hungry for more, who realize that what the world calls "success" is not necessarily the same as obedience to God, that making an impression is not the same as having an impact, that having a crowd is not the same as having disciples of Christ, that transforming a neighborhood, a town, or a city can only take place where individuals and families are transformed, and the people that comprise the Community of Faith called the Church actually love God and love each other, living out the biblical reality of genuine koinonia.

The Revolution is an ever-growing movement in the landscape of Western Christianity and beyond that is igniting the passion of men and women of faith of various theological persuasions, age groups, and ethnicities to live out and incarnate a transformed Christian faith that seeks nothing less than encountering God authentically and daily, the total transformation of the self, our families, neighborhoods, cities, and living together as the family of God, a community of God's sons and daughters. These men and women, these spiritual revolutionaries, are willing to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship" in pursuit of Jesus and His Kingdom. The Revolution is about **being** the Church, not just **doing** Church. It is about living what matters most in life and settling for nothing less than becoming disciples who are captivated by the love of God in such a way that captivates the world around them.

The Mission

So, how do we get there?

Well, since everything about the Christian life is about **incarnation**, the Revolution will emerge through the **transformation of people-specifically pastors and leaders**. We believe that deep within your heart is a passion to see God's Kingdom extended. We can talk with great fervor about the mission and even execute wonderful marketing schemes that boldly declare our message but still lose sight of the one element that is meant to drive the Mission - **LOVE for God which results in a LOVE for people**. God is looking for a people whose eyes are wet, who have hearts that are broken and knees that are bent.

The Praxis mission is to reorient pastors and leaders around what we call the "Irreducible Core" of Christianity.

- **Loving God** (Matthew 22:37-38).
- **Loving Others as yourself** (Matthew 22:39)
- **Making disciples as you go** (Matthew 28:19)

Jesus made it clear with the two Great Relationships that we are to love God with all of our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves. From these two Great Relationships we find the Great Commandment which tells us that as we go make disciples of all nations. From the Great Commandment the Bible makes it clear that we are to do this together as the Great Community (Acts 2:42-47). The "Irreducible Core" makes it quite clear that the Mission is a relational enterprise that flows naturally from one's relationship with God, resulting in love for others, the formation of community, and love that drives the community to make disciples as a way of life. As a result, the ministry of Praxis is to **resource through relationship**, providing development for pastors and leaders through training, coaching, mentoring and consulting.

Disciples, Not Attendees

The focus of the Revolution is on something simple: Making Disciples

- A disciple is someone who is living the Irreducible Core and is **devoted to Christ, devoted to His Church and devoted to His Mission** of world evangelization.

The Church in its local expression is a **community of disciples**, not a gathering of consumers.

We need to become a "Fellowship of the Cross." Real community is formed when koinonia or fellowship is based in mission as in Tolkein's classic, *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*.

We live in a world where koinonia or fellowship is a commodity that is in high demand but in short supply. No wonder the sitcom, *Friends*, was such a hit for 10 years, as we enjoyed the relationships of six individuals that somehow, in spite of encountering great difficulties, not only maintained their friendships in the series but more amazingly in real life. This friendship was powerfully forged when the actors decided to band together and negotiate their salaries evenly. Whatever one gets paid, they all get paid - they did not like the idea of one being paid more or less than another. The show involved all six actors and all six should get the same paycheck. Now that is a friend, a team, and reflects rather powerfully the biblical definition of koinonia. God help us find this type of koinonia in our churches!

Hollywood powerfully illustrated what a fellowship or true koinonia is in the movie, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. What Tolkien's world tells us is that fellowship finds its origins in the context of mission. That is, where there is a purpose, greater than ourselves or even the meeting of our own personal needs. Like the nine characters in the movie, who volunteered for the dangerous mission of returning the ring to Mt. Doom, we find ourselves in a similar situation in our churches and in our world. There is an evasive evil in our world that seeks to destroy us, and most of those that inhabit earth, including many Christians, who are simply unaware of the danger that looms about us. God has placed it on the hearts of His people to make the journey to Mt. Doom, if you will, with the fellowship (that is, of the "Cross") to destroy the evil influence (I John 3:8b). It is a journey that has unenviable odds, enormous obstacles, and armies that outnumber and outclass us at every angle. It is the battle for our families, our cities, our state, our country, and even our world. Our Mt. Doom, like that of Tolkien's world, seems impenetrable by the likes of us and cannot be done by an army of one. It is only in the "fellowship of the Cross" that we find the full power necessary to defeat the armies of hell. Scripture makes it clear that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church (Matthew 16:18). Jesus never said that it will be one church or a denomination that will be able to resist hell, but the Church, unified in

the cause of the Mission. It's that Church that hell cannot stop. Maybe that is why Satan works so hard to help us focus on our petty differences, find reasons to fight and disagree, gossip, take sides, etc. If he can keep the army quarreling amongst itself it will lose its focus, and eventually, destroy itself.

The biblical concept of koinonia, the basis of community, cannot take place unless there is a sense of commonality of heart and purpose - a mission that unites us. Koinonia for the Western 21st Century Christian has been reduced to potlucks or coffee and doughnuts. You know, "stay after the service and enjoy the fellowship." True fellowship can only take place where people are willing to share their lives as they share their hearts for something bigger than themselves. This is wonderfully illustrated in Paul's relationship with the church at Philippi. The basis of Paul's thankfulness for the people at Philippi is clearly their active participation with him for the sake of the gospel (Philippians 1:3-5). The word used for partnership is "koinonia", often understood to mean fellowship. Here, it appears that it is referring to an active involvement that would include financial support.

Biblical community involves the investment of one's heart which involves participation in the mission of the Kingdom which is to love God, love others, and make disciples as you go.

The Church is organic in nature and function, which is not the same as the attraction model or mode that many churches rely upon. This is not to say the Church is not attractive, but rather to clarify that living organisms attract life and give life as a natural process, whereas attraction mode does not bring life or create a living organism. Where life is happening people will be attracted -- *it is life that is attractive*, not the simulation of life.

Mahatma Gandhi once said to some missionaries in India: "You work so hard at it. Just remember that the rose never invites anyone to smell it. If it is fragrant, people will walk across the garden and endure the thorns to smell it."

The apostle Peter instructs us to live in such a way that others will inquire of the hope that lies within (I Peter 3:15).

Environment is Everything

It is how we live together in Christ, how we treat one another and relate in His love, that defines us a "church." It is all about the environment the Lord creates in our midst. What the environment of our churches should do is *facilitate, enhance, and release* the spiritual reality of the new birth in individuals and the culture around us.

What the environment of a local church should provide is –

- The atmosphere that is most conducive for the creation of life -- *salvation*.
- The atmosphere that fosters and allows for the on-going development of life -- *spiritual growth, as we learn to love God and love others*.
- The environment by which life can be multiplied -- *making disciples*.

The local church is a spiritual ecosystem where living people (living in their biotic community) learn to live together in their local environment. A local church functions as a dynamic and complex whole interacting within the larger framework of the universal Church (ecological unit) making up the One Church that belongs to Christ. The result is a life of being a blessing and unity around the issues that matter in the environment of the Kingdom of God.

The Earth is one ecosystem as well as many ecosystems. The size and scale of an ecosystem can vary widely as it does in the life of the Church. It may be a whole forest as well as a small pond. We even see that different ecosystems are often separated by geographical barriers, like deserts, mountains or oceans, or are isolated otherwise, like lakes or rivers. As these borders are never rigid, ecosystems tend to blend into each other – they are separate and yet, connected. As a result, the whole Earth can be seen as a single ecosystem just as the Church is separate and connected, function as One Church (Ecosystem) and yet many churches (ecosystems).

The problem is that our churches in our day and age function more like a biosphere than part of the ecological whole, since the Earth is an ecosystem in and of itself as well as many ecosystems within the whole. If you are biosphere your church is isolated from the ecological whole -- the spiritual environment called the Body of Christ.

Some Assembly Required

Jesus said that He would build His Church (Matthew 16:18), but it is also clear that He chooses to do that in partnership with us (I Corinthians 3:6-9). He has reserved for Himself the things which we **cannot do**, and He has reserved for us those things which He will **not do**. So, your participation in the Revolution is requested. To facilitate the needed change in the Church in the West, we ourselves as leaders in the Church must first be changed. We must throw off our domestication and lay hold of the dangerous, vital life of Christ again. No longer playing it safe, we must risk it all with Jesus once again. Embrace the inner change – and become a change agent in the hands of your God.

***The Dream is real. The Revolution has begun. The Mission is now.
The Choice is yours.***