The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: Megachurches In Modern American Society

Scott Thumma dissertation, Emory Univ. 1996

It can be obtained from UMI 300 North Zeeb Road P.O. Box 1346 Ann Arbor, MI 48106 Phone: 800-521-0600 http://www.umi.com. This research was funded by a Louisville Institute Fellowship. I want to thank Nancy Ammerman and R. Stephen Warner for their comments and encouragements.
This is copyrighted so please honor the copyright.

DISSERTATION TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE. 1

CHAPTER ONE : THE STUDY OF A MEGACHURCH CONGREGATION... 7
FOCUS ON THE STUDY OF CONGREGATIONS........... 9
MEGACHURCHES ON THE RELIGIOUS HORIZON........... 10
A Particular Megachurch........... 13
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS........... 14
My Entrance: The Right Place at the Right Time 17
An Aside -- The Meaning of Membership........... 19
Juggling My Multiple Roles........... 21
HOW THE TALE UNFOLDS........... 27

CHAPTER TWO: FOUNDATIONS OF THE KINGDOM 29
THE SOUTHERN CONTEXT 30
THE SEED OF THIS GENERATION........... 32
A FIRM FOUNDATION IN THE FAITH 35
A Sectarian Beginning 35
A Father's Success........... 39
A Pentecostal Preacher's Kid 41
THE SECOND-GENERATION SECTARIAN........... 43
A PROGRESSIVE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN........... 45
A DENOMINATIONAL PLAYER........... 46
THE CITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS........... 49
THE BEST OF TIMES........... 52
A FALL FROM GRACE........... 53

CHAPTER THREE: IN SEARCH OF A VISION (1960-1972) 60
WESTWARD TO A LAND OF PROMISE........... 61
A Vision of a Return to the Lions' Den........... 62
The Birth of a New Identity........... 63
THE PERFECT POPULATION........... 66
A TABERNACLED TIME OF CONGREGATIONAL TRANSITION........... 67
THE HARVESTER FAMILY........... 68
THE STRUGGLE FOR SUCCESS........... 70
INSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCE........... 72
PREACHING REBIRTH -- FALLEN BUT FORGIVEN........... 74
A Key to Everything -- Paulk's Allegorical Sermons........... 75
The Forcefully Spoken Word........... 78
LIFE AT GOSPEL HARVESTER 79
Laboring in the Field -- Outreach to the Community........... 80
Civil Rights Involvement........... 82
CHANGING WITH THE TIMES........... 84

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LITTLE CHURCH BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD (1973-1976) 88
THE SUBURBS OF MILK AND HONEY 89

REFUGE FOR A NEW FLOCK........... 91
BODY LIFE 96
A Congregational Family 98
Familial Relationships........... 99
Success and Prosperity........... 102
A Practical Message........... 104
Orderly Charisma........... 107
QUESTIONS OF AUTHORITY........... 109
Relational Authority........... 110

CHAPTER FIVE: PRELUDE TO THE KINGDOM (1976-1978).... 116
CHARISMATIC RENEWAL........... 117
THE CHARISMATIC CONDUIT........... 122
Paulk's Charismatic Conversion 123
The Congregational Conflict over Lynn........... 126
INFLUENCE OF THE LATTER RAIN MOVEMENT........... 128
A BLENDING OF INFLUENCES. 130
THE WORLD OF THE SPIRIT 131
The Spiritualizing of Authority........... 136
A Singular Authority........... 140
Re-Legitimating Authority........... 142
Structuring the Spirit........... 145
A Special Spiritual Purpose........... 148
LIFE IN THE END TIMES........... 150
SUCCESS EQUALS PROOF 151

CHAPTER SIX: SUCCESS: PROOF OF THE PROPHET (1978-1980) 154
THE BIRTH OF ALPHA........... 155
The Attraction of Charisma and Sex 159
Rock and Roll Appeal 161
Cult Appeal -- Adolescent Rebellion........... 163
Refuge and Family Appeal 164
Success Appeal........... 171
A MIXED BLESSING: ALPHA AND THE CHURCH........... 173
A Parental Authority........... 174
Prophetic Confirmation........... 176
PAULK VERSUS THE BOARD 177
LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION........... 178
THE CONGREGATIONAL CHARACTER -- AFTER ALPHA........... 183
A Growing Diversity........... 184
We're Not Like Anybody!........... 189
Alpha and Worship........... 191
Alpha and Doctrine 193
THE KINGDOM OF GOD HERE AND NOW........... 195

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ULTIMATE KINGDOM (1981-1984).... 202
A TROUBLED CONTEXT 204
ORGANIZING THE ORGANIZATION........... 207
Spiritualizing the Organization........... 208
Re-Forming Ministry 211
Ordering the Media........... 213
Bringing Form to Worship........... 214
Building Order........... 216
ORGANIZING THE PEOPLE........... 220
Shepherding the Flock........... 221
A Kingdom Christian at All Times........... 227

Our Christian Dues........... 228
Our Christian Rewards........... 230
ORGANIZING THE THEOLOGY........... 233
Kingdom Ideas........... 236
Dualism but not Dualism 238
Kingdom Relationships........... 239
Confirmation of the Kingdom........... 242
ORGANIZING PAULK'S IDENTITY........... 245
Founder........... 245
Presbytery Father 246
Prophet........... 247
Bishop........... 249
Multiple Bases of Authority........... 252
ORGANIZING THE CONGREGATION'S IDENTITY........... 255
An Atypical Local Church........... 256
First among many Brethren........... 257
Atlanta: Spiritual Capital of the World........... 258
A Demonstration of the Kingdom........... 260

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE TESTING OF THE KINGDOM (1985 - 1987). . . . 264
INTERNAL CHALLENGES 265
Disappearance of the Dissenters........... 266
Cracks In Covering........... 270
Conflicts over Charisma 272
Organizational Necessities........... 273
Orderly Respectable Worship........... 275
Planting for the Next Generation........... 277
PROVOKING EXTERNAL CHALLENGES........... 280
The Hunt for Seducers........... 282
The Clash of Televangelists........... 283
The Scholarly Critique........... 285
A SUCCESSFUL TOTAL KINGDOM 288
Signs of Success........... 290
The Power of Racial Diversity........... 294
Benefits of the Kingdom........... 299
Local, National, and International Exposure........... 301
Suffering for the Kingdom's Sake........... 303
A ROSE IS A ROSE, IS A ROSE........... 309

CHAPTER NINE: THE TRIUMPHANT CHURCH (1988 - 1990).... 314
A MEGACHURCH CONGREGATION........... 316
THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE VISION........... 323
A Local Demonstration 325
A Demonstration to Government........... 332
A National Demonstration 336
A Demonstration to the World........... 337
THE CENTER OF A CITY OF HOPE 339
A CLOUD ON THE HORIZON?........... 343

CHAPTER TEN: THE SPOILING OF THE KINGDOM (1991-)... 347
THE FORCES OF EROSION........... 349
The World Congress 349
Bearing the Cross of a Cathedral 350
Who Are These Spectators?........... 353
Breaking The Ties That Bind........... 359
A TENUOUS ENVIRONMENT........... 361

THE JUDAS SPIRITS........... 362
THE COUNTER-OFFENSIVE........... 369
The Success of a Full Cathedral 370
Satan Attacks Success........... 373
I Told You So... 374
We Are All Family........... 375
SICK WITH DESPERATION........... 378
STAY FOR THE VISION! 381
THE NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS 384
THE VISION IS YOURS -- DO SOMETHING TO SAVE IT 387
A "WILD KINGDOM"........... 389
It Is Not My Fault........... 390
It Is God's Fault........... 393
Those Shaken Loose........... 394
"SO THERE IS SOME TRUTH TO THESE RUMORS!"........... 398
THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE........... 402
ANOTHER SPIRITUAL SOLUTION........... 406
A CALM BEFORE ANOTHER STORM 408
THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE........... 410
THE LAST CHAPTER?........... 414

CHAPTER ELEVEN: MEGACHURCHES -- A NEW WAY OF BEING RELIGIOUS.... 418
(Newer information about megachurches can be found on our website section about megachurch research.)
THE STORY OF ONE MEGACHURCH........... 418
THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MEGACHURCHES 427
A Recent Social Phenomenon 427
Mega-Sized........... 428
A Suburban Sunbelt Home........... 432
Functionally Nondenominational........... 433
Three Expressions of One Basic Message 434
A Distinctive Visionary Identity........... 439
Something For Everyone 441
An Innovative Spiritual Entrepreneur 444
The Membership of a Megachurch........... 447
Networks of Like-minded Congregations........... 457
MEGACHURCHES: A MODERN CULTURAL FIT........... 460
A Mega Institutional World 461
The Modern Megachurch Member 463
The Religious Reality 465
Megachurches -- A Symbolic Presence in American Society........... 466

BIBLIOGRAPHY

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

PROLOGUE

> *"To explore the congregation is to penetrate to the grass roots of American religious culture.*" (Brooks Holifield, 1994:47)

On Sunday morning in Atlanta and in numerous cities around the country anyone can become acquainted with the subject of this work, The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, or as it was previously known, Chapel Hill Harvester Church. All one needs to do is to turn on the television. As the hour-long program begins, the television screen fills with a close-up shot of its senior minister, Bishop Earl Paulk. This distinguished, silver-haired gentleman wearing a clerical collar, and a black suit is surrounded by a bookcase and a picture of his wife in the background. From the opening frame, the message is clear, that Bishop Paulk is the public voice and central focus of this congregation. In fact, the television program, like those of most televangelists, is advertised and known primarily by the senior minister's name.

In the introduction to one particular program on "quality Christian living," Earl Paulk opens the show by announcing to the camera, "The church ought to be the place that presses you to the highest level of quality living...." As his comments continue, the viewer is given a glimpse of the "quality living" demonstrated at Chapel Hill Harvester Church. The visual scene is a recorded performance of the church's liturgical dancers, four women dressed in flowing white robes. Images of a packed sanctuary, the orchestra, tuxedoed and gowned singers, and two grand pianos flash into and out of focus as the young dancers swirl around the stage.

The dance scene fades to a taped excerpt from Paulk's first sermon in the 7700 seat Cathedral. The view is a sweeping panorama of the inside of the sanctuary. In the upper left corner of the screen Paulk the preacher stands enveloped by a massive, ornately carved wooden pulpit. At center screen sits the white marble altar, surrounded by the deep maroon carpet. The dominating feature on the screen, however, is the people. They are everywhere, packing the three tiers of seats which rise to the rafters of the cavernous sanctuary. This 1991 scene captures the high point of the church and the fulfillment of Earl Paulk's thirty-year-old vision. The inauguration of the multi-million-dollar cathedral, over 8000 in attendance, with blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Asians all worshiping together -- this is the embodiment of a successful megachurch.

Again, Earl Paulk's image fills the screen as he speaks, "Jesus came to give life and to give it abundantly. And that is the church, in every area of life. The rule of Christ in total living." These few

words concisely summarize the ideology of the congregation. The "Kingdom Theology" of this church posits Jesus Christ as the King, as the ruler of all of life, both the kingdoms of this world and of the future celestial domain. This kingdom vision encompasses all institutional spheres: government, family, economy, and the arts. It is a total, all-inclusive, and intertwined picture of reality and religion. It is also the goal of Chapel Hill Harvester Church -- to actualize the "Kingdom vision" in everyday life.

These comments end with a closeup shot of the church's massive steeple piercing the blue sky. Fast paced contemporary music begins. A series of collage-like images flood the screen, offering visual proof of the church’s demonstration of the kingdom in everyday life, in the "world’s" social institutions.

Pictures of Earl Paulk and former President Bush seated together, newspaper headlines of church activities, and the words "Government" and "Business" which rapidly float across the screen attest to the extensive influence of the church in the political sphere.

Immediately a new set of images, to demonstrate the church’s influence in the religious realm, replaces the previous ones. Bob Mumford, a well-known Charismatic Christian leader, is pictured addressing the congregation several years earlier. "There are hundreds and thousands of people out there that would love to find this place," he states. "You know why? Because there is love, acceptance, racial harmony here...." Mumford's words remind television viewers that this church, with its success and racial integration, is the envy of the Charismatic Christian community.

Once again, the sweeping images shift. This time those watching are offered dramatic evidence of the church’s involvement in the arts. Scenes of orchestral performances, dramas, ballets, and singing are interspersed with the words "Worship" and "Arts."

This musical portrayal of the church’s worship is interrupted by the recorded comments of Atlanta's former mayor, United Nations ambassador, civil rights activist, and minister, Andrew Young. His words praise the church in grand fashion, "...You are what God intends for this planet." His presence again conveys the political power and social influence of this congregation.

The collage images return: pictures of the Cathedral and Earl Paulk; news articles about the success of the church’s local ministries; and the words "Community" and "Education." The music and lyrics which accompany these images now make the meaning of the symbolic portrayals explicit and obvious.

> We're making a difference in community,
> restoring the arts to heights,

reaching out to the city,
speaking into government.
The local church of Christ...

As the singing continues, large cut out letters spelling "the local church" float across the screen. These words echo a powerful particularist and parochial impulse which is characteristic of the congregational culture. Behind these letters flash three scenes: a picture of the congregation in the midst of expressive worship; an aerial view of Atlanta; and an artist's rendering of the completed Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. These scenes remind the viewer exactly which local church is "making a difference" and what city it is "reaching out to." At this point, the song swells to a crescendo. A woman's voice concludes this introduction with the announcement, "Welcome to the Cathedral at Chapel Hill from Atlanta, Georgia with Bishop Earl Paulk."

This is the manner by which most people have been introduced to the congregational reality that is known variously as Chapel Hill Harvester Church, the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit at Chapel Hill, or Earl Paulk's church. The televised media portrayal, however, presents a highly subjective, albeit entertaining, view of this intriguing megachurch. This dissertation offers a somewhat different perspective of this congregation which in 1990 was ranked by the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* as having the tenth largest congregational attendance in the United States.

Since that ranking, however, the church has undergone a tremendous reversal of fortune. Two years after the glorious morning of the Cathedral's christening, only the lowest of three tiers of pews comes close to being filled. Membership has been reduced by three-quarters. With a weekly attendance of 2000, the congregation is still technically a megachurch; although it now can hardly be considered successful. After numerous scandals and accusations of wrongdoing, the church's ministries and influence are a fraction of what they once were. The church budget has decreased by many millions of dollars a year. The vision of the kingdom which used to motivate and inspire, was turned back upon the leadership in critique, calling them to accountability. This kingdom message eventually provided disillusioned members with a reason to leave the congregation.

In the midst of this rapid disintegration, the spiritual power and influence of the charismatic leadership turned destructive. Former long-time members who chose to leave the church were overtly denigrated from the pulpit. The church presbytery brought suit against seven of these persons. Eventually, I, too, was threatened spiritually, legally, and physically. These events, although not very complimentary, have much to say about the potential hazards connected to the megachurch experience.

Unfortunately, the tales of religious abuse are at least as plentiful in our society as are the stories of success. Both stories are instructive.

None of these events were ever witnessed by the watchful eyes of the television-viewing public. This version of the congregation's history was never captured on video tape or broadcast into thousands of homes around the country. In order to become acquainted with the full story of this church's checkered history, its successes as well as its excesses, one must get to know the actual congregation in its social and historical context as it developed in an Atlanta suburb in DeKalb County, Georgia. To become acquainted with this contextualized and historicized congregation, follow me on the drive I made several times a week for five years to Chapel Hill Harvester Church.

The ten and a half mile trip from my home to the church offers a sketch both of forty years of Atlanta's history and of the influences which shaped the church in its short history. I resided in Decatur, an independently incorporated town which was swallowed by Atlanta's mid-century sprawl. This town was only a few miles from the church's first permanent location. Most of Decatur is composed of quaint 1950's suburban neighborhoods of well-kept frame and brick homes with manicured lawns and filled with a few older persons of the Second World War generation, many upwardly mobile white baby boomers, and an occasional family of African Americans. Traveling southeast toward the church from my home in just such a neighborhood, one would wind past the stately stone structures of Agnes Scott College, an exclusive women's school, and Columbia Presbyterian seminary built in the 1880's and 1920's respectively.

Passing the boundary marker of the town's jurisdictional limits, the scenery changed instantly and dramatically. Homes from the same era now had dirt yards, doors adorned with peeling paint, old cars rusting in the driveways, and scores of young black children playing in the streets. The original Caucasian owners had fled this area in the 1950's and their new African American neighbors. Within ten years the flight of whites out of and the migration of African Americans into this area had completely changed its demographics. For several miles I drove through neighborhood after neighborhood abandoned by middle class white residents during the expansion of blacks from the inner city.

Interspersed between these communities were the remains of shopping districts, churches, theaters, and businesses. Housed in these structures, discarded by the former occupants, were countless African American entrepreneurial ventures such as Sister Margaret: palm reader and advisor, McAfree's liquor store, Hodges BBQ, and Edna's beauty shop. The ubiquitous fast-food restaurants,

pawn shops, and cut rate department stores also shared these spaces. In the midst of these business enterprises sat one of Atlanta's earliest shopping malls, looking as if on the verge of collapse.

Crossing the 285 expressway that encircles Atlanta marked yet another abrupt shift in the appearance of the neighborhoods. This area had been developed in the 1960's by many of those fleeing suburbanite whites pushing out from the intown suburbs in search of segregated living. Being further out from the city, these neighborhoods had a "bedroom community" feel. Twenty years later when I drove through this area, many of these white residents had again departed, continuing their quest for segregated and supposedly safe living in distant suburban and exurban communities.

By the mid-eighties, middle class African Americans had begun to make this area their own. The sprawling wood frame ranch homes of these sixties' subdivisions were well maintained. Flowers dotted the carefully tended expansive front lawns. The considerable street traffic kept local stores and shops full of eager customers. A brand-new branch of the county library, a recent mega-market, several new strip malls, and late 1980's upscale subdivisions were indicative of the affluence of this latest wave of residents to the area.

Turning onto the tree-lined, divided parkway that led to the church, although over a half a mile from the church itself, one could see the first indication of its influence -- several small abandoned church buildings. The initial evidence of the church soon appeared on the left, the Earl Paulk Institute. This building housed the church's Bible college and high school, behind which lay several tennis courts and a pro shop. Directly across the street stood an office park of three large buildings owned by church members which bustled with activity during the weekday. Beyond the office park was the church's elementary school, the Cathedral Academy, a gym, a beach and swim club, and numerous baseball and soccer fields. These all teemed with youngsters when school was in session. Across the parkway sat the church's first sanctuary in this South DeKalb County area, a unique octagonal stone structure. This building now houses classrooms, counseling offices, and several of the church's social ministries. This structure also marked the beginning of Chapel Hill Harvester's seemingly endless parking area. Further down the parkway several of the planned church communities were being constructed.

Beyond a cluster of trees surrounding a private residence whose owner refused to sell, sit the present and former sanctuaries. In the midst of an expansive well-lit parking lot and surrounded by attractive landscaping, rises the newest sanctuary, the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, a massive red brick "neo-Gothic" edifice. To the right and on a slight hill sits another recent brick structure, the John

Garlington Mall. This two-story building complete with fountain and plant-adorned atrium houses a snack bar, gift shop, book store, clergy offices and an extensive tape library. Connected to the mall is another former sanctuary, a brick and steel "warehouse" looking building, called the "K Center." In all, this expansive ministerial complex covers over 100 acres and has been the spiritual home to tens of thousands of members in its short history.

This is the context in which the televised version of Chapel Hill Harvester Church resides. Without this grounded perspective the TV program makes little sense. Likewise, this church's theology, leadership structures, and difficulties can be, and have been, misinterpreted without an understanding of its and Earl Paulk's history. Therefore, I invite you to join me in an historically and socially detailed analysis of this fascinatingly successful and troubled congregation and its visionary leader Earl Paulk. This is a tale of spiritual innovation by a religious entrepreneur with a unique vision of the kingdom. It is also the story of the interrelationship between a congregation of committed believers and its powerful charismatic leader. Most of all, however, this work is a detailed description of the history and development of one megachurch.

A nuanced portrayal of this congregation forms the basis for, in the final chapter, a more generalized exploration of the recent religious phenomenon called megachurches. These very large churches, numbering over 400 in the United States, are not religious anomalies. Taken together these very large congregations represent a distinct form of religious organization that has arisen in relation to modern social needs and cultural norms. The detailed analysis of this particular megachurch, as well as the description of the phenomena in general, has much to tell of the modern appetites and needs of religious believers in the United States.

CHAPTER ONE : THE STUDY OF A MEGACHURCH CONGREGATION

Congregations everywhere are thick gatherings of complicated actions, each parish distinctive in its expression, each possessing its own genius yet incarnating in that peculiarity the worldly message and mission of Christ.

(James Hopewell, 1987:17)

Welcome to Chapel Hill Harvester Church! Wherever you're from, whatever circumstance has led you to cross our path, we receive you with joy! It's not accidental that you have joined us today. Be assured that it's part of the divine purpose of God. By now you're probably aware that you've come to an unusual church today. For one thing, you'll find the message will be challenging. For another, the worship in music and dance may be a new experience for you. You may never have worshiped in a church of this size, or one with so many ministries and facilities. Maybe even the racial harmony is new to you. That's because Chapel Hill is a church with a vision -- a divine mission to fulfill. And that's what we hope you'll sense while you are with us today.

(Chapel Hill Harvester Church's first-timers brochure)

The religious life of Americans has been poked, prodded, and analyzed in every conceivable fashion over the last half century. Several times a year, pollsters report how many citizens believe in the virgin birth, claim to be "born again," or have ever spoken in tongues. The rising and falling membership rates of various denominations are watched as carefully as stock market fluxuations. The escapades of aberrant cult leaders and flamboyant televangelists are carefully scrutinized. Yet, even with all this attention being paid to religious phenomena, researchers and reporters seldom turn their attention in any depth toward the place of origin of these beliefs, the fortunes of denominational figures, and even the cult prophet or TV preacher -- ***the congregation***.

The congregation is the "bedrock of the American religious system" (Warner, 1994:54). It is in this institution, the local church, that the spiritual journeys of almost all religious persons are birthed and nurtured. Without an understanding of congregational life, data on religious beliefs and practices are little more than meaningless, disembodied statistics. These beliefs are not generated spontaneously out of

thin air. They are grounded in a particular context, have a distinct historical tradition, and find their life or death within congregations.

Likewise, denominations are not composed just of membership figures, organizational styles, or pronouncements regarding homosexuality and the ordination of women. Denominations are collections of congregations. As go individual churches, so goes the denomination (Warner, 1994:58-59). After all, the local congregation long preceded the denomination as a social and religious institution (Holifield, 1994).

Even those media-hungry TV preachers and televangelists are not just "talking heads." Most of them represent a particular church and shepherd a congregational flock as well as entertain a television audience. At the very least these religious entrepreneurs and purveyors of Christian infomercials were formed, for better or worse, in congregations. An appreciation of their specific religious traditions and revivalistic heritage might even make their messages and popularity more comprehensible.

This dissertation addresses religious beliefs, denominational trajectories, and television personalities as well as many other topics but within the context of the local church, the congregation. This is specifically the story of one megachurch, one very large congregation called Chapel Hill Harvester Church. It is a narrative which tells of the church's founding, its senior minister's life, its development into and appeal as a megachurch, and its near death as a viable congregation. Yet, this narrative also demonstrates the wealth of knowledge about religion in America that is contained not just in this particular congregation, but in any religious community when it is examined carefully. In the words of Wind and Lewis, "To overlook the congregational character of American religion is thus to overlook much of the source of American religious vitality" (1994:9).

The study of congregations does not just describe the religious sensibilities of Americans; it also provides one with a glimpse into American society. Congregations are not isolated, "closed systems" functioning independently of the cultural, social, and personal milieu of American society (Dudley, 1983). Societal influences are at work shaping each congregation, religious service, and church member. Even unknowingly these factors are reflected in the actions of every religious community. Whether it is the worship liturgy, the petitions in prayer, or the pastor's sermon, volumes are spoken about the ideals of a group of people. Not only do these overtly religious acts tell of the everyday lives and cultural realities of the parishioners, but so too do the more informal rituals such as the greeting of visitors, the Wednesday

fellowship dinners, and the gossip around the Sunday school coffee pot. Thus, a sensitive and nuanced analysis of one congregation can shed considerable light on the cultural, social, and personal religious dynamics present in the society. One picture of congregational life can be worth a thousand questionnaires, denominational pronouncements, and televangelist exposes when it comes to understanding religion in America.

FOCUS ON THE STUDY OF CONGREGATIONS

The story of Earl Paulk and Chapel Hill Harvester Church demonstrates the "rich and strange" complexity of congregational life. This reality is true not only for a community of 10,000 but also for a fellowship of 100 (Williams, 1974). For too long, researchers and commentators on the religious life in the United States have overlooked the value of an intense socio-historical study of individual congregations. This dissertation is offered as one of several recent efforts to correct that oversight.

The field of congregational studies, as this study of the cultures and world views of churches has come to be called, is a relatively recent addition to the examination of religion.[1] Throughout the last century scholars made various attempts to survey and understand churches. These efforts almost always relied on either statistical analysis of questionnaires, theological critique, or pragmatic organizational investigations aimed at improving ministry. For the most part, these inquiries advanced the scholarly understanding of the congregation, although they often lacked a ground level perspective on the phenomena, overlooking the culture and meaningful everyday experiences of the social life of the participants.[2]

In the 1970's, several pioneering studies, notably Heilman (1973) and Williams (1974), employed ethnographic research techniques and the perspective of anthropology and symbolic interactionism to examine local religious communities. In doing this these authors provided a picture into the everyday lives and religiosity of real people. They treated their respective religious organizations, the synagogue

[1] See Wind & Lewis, 1994; Stokes and Roozen, 1991; Hopewell, 1987 for the history of efforts to study congregational life.

[2] One exception to this generalization is Joseph Fichter's excellent book *Southern Parish* (1951).

Kehillat Kodesh and Zion Holiness Church, as distinctive subcultures with important and instructive stories to tell. Their rich "thick descriptions" of these communities offered a view that was seldom seen in the study of religious phenomena (Geertz, 1973).

In the early 1980's, another group of researchers produced a novel perspective of a single congregation. Carl Dudley, as the editor of *Building Effective Ministry (1983)*, enlisted the participation of numerous scholars with different disciplinary approaches to examine Wiltshire United Methodist Church. What this study lacked in depth and richness demonstrated by previous studies, it made up for in breadth of analytical lenses. This book clearly showed the importance of multiple research perspectives in understanding the congregation.

Following this effort, the academic discipline of congregational studies began to take shape, aided by James Hopewell's *Congregation* (1987) and the collaborative *Handbook for Congregational Studies* (Carroll, et al.,1986). These books, and the several conferences and institutes supported by significant grants from the Lilly Endowment, gave the discipline a necessary boost. These efforts were paralleled by the more pragmatic, less academic, attempts by church consultants and growth specialists to provide practical insights and "how to" manuals for those interested in improving their own congregations (Mead,1972; Miller, 1990; Schaller,1980; Towns et al., 1981; Wagner, 1976).

More recently academic researchers have turned their attention upon singular congregations in an effort to understand religious life and history from the perspective of the local church (Ammerman, 1987; Warner, 1988; and Wind & Lewis, 1994a,b). Many of these studies intensely examined the subculture of specific churches while relating their internal realities to larger contextual and societal issues. In describing the functioning of one fundamentalist church, Ammerman (1987) offered an overview of the Protestant Fundamentalist movement. In a similar fashion, Stephen Warner (1988) illuminated the diverse societal trends and cultural tensions pulling at Mainline Protestantism in his study of Mendocino Presbyterian Church. The present study follows in that tradition in an attempt to describe a recent religious phenomena, the rise of megachurches, through the lens of an indepth examination of one such congregation.

MEGACHURCHES ON THE RELIGIOUS HORIZON

Very large congregations have existed throughout the history of the world's religions. For

centuries massive Catholic cathedrals, Islamic mosques, and Protestant "First Churches" had a presence in heavily populated urban centers. Likewise, an occasional charismatic personality might attract a following which numbered in the thousands.[3] These numerically successful religious enterprises were often seen as marvels to admire, anomalies to investigate, or aberrant incidents to dismiss. Seldom have they been understood as symptomatic of distinct cultural currents or reflective of new societal trends. With the rapid numerical proliferation of these mega-congregations in recent years, however, that is exactly how they must be viewed. Both religious researchers and the general public must begin to view these churches not as individual isolated cases of extreme success, but as a religious organizational pattern which has arisen in relation to distinct societal changes.

[3]John Vaughan (1984:30-32; 1993:17-28) , offers an excellent summary of some of these historic large congregations.

Since 1970, the numbers of these enormous Protestant congregations have risen dramatically. In 1949 an informal study of what were called ”very large“ Sunday school programs identified ten such congregations, all of which were Baptist (Entzminger, 1949). Twenty years later, Elmer Towns (1969) complied a list of 15 congregations with Sunday school attendance over 2000 persons. With the new decade, however, rapid growth took place within many churches. In 1976 Towns listed forty Sunday Schools with attendances that large (1976). By 1980, he and his coauthors reported at least one hundred congregations with average attendance of 2000 persons in worship services (Towns, et al., 1981). More recent efforts by several researchers, including Olson (1988), Vaughan (1990,1991,1992,1993), Zook (1993) and Thumma (1993b), have identified over 350 megachurches with worship attendance of 2000 persons or more.[4]

Megachurches, as they have come to be called, include the largest and some of the most powerful churches in the United States, yet they have been overlooked as a category of study by most academic researchers of religion in America.[5] The appearance of these very large congregations is one of the most significant recent developments on the religious landscape in the last thirty years (Schaller,1990; Vaughan,1993).

The label of "megachurch" has come to denote any congregation with an attendance of 2000 or more persons each week at its worship services.[6] This label has been applied to Protestant Christian congregations, to the exclusion of religious gatherings of Roman Catholics, Muslims, and persons of other faiths. The final chapter of this study will address this issue further as well as other structural and demographic characteristics which generally characterize megachurches. Initially, however, a Protestant Christian theological perspective and the size variable are presented as the definitive characteristics of

---

[4]Any exact count of the number of megachurches in the country is complicated by the independent, nondenominational status of many of these churches as well as their fluxuating attendance figures.

[5] Several researchers (Brasher, 1992; Miller & Kennedy, 1991; Richardson, 1991) have done recent studies of megachurches, although these studies say little about the phenomenon as a whole. Only Vaughan (1993) and Schaller (1990,1992) have attempted to generalize about the megachurch movement.

[6] Researchers doing initial analysis of megachurches were divided over what attendance figures constituted a megachurch with Brasher (1992) suggesting 1500, Schaller (1990) using 1000, and Olson (1988) even including church as small as 800. More recent research (Thumma, 1993; Zook 1993; Vaughan, 1993; Neibuhr, 1995) appears to agree on the 2000 figure as the general numerical cutoff for a megachurch.

the modern megachurch in the United States.

As of 1995, there were nearly 400 such congregations in the United States. The average weekly cumulative attendance at these churches is over one and a half million persons. Smaller churches continue to attain the megachurch size criterion at the rate of one every two to three weeks (Vaughan, 1990a, 1993). Many of the current megachurches are among the fastest growing congregations in the country (Vaughan, 1990b, 1991, 1992). The patterns of "successful" ministry, as demonstrated by these large churches, are held in high esteem by many smaller churches, patterns which they desire to duplicate (Schaller, 1990 &1992; Eiesland, 1995). From all indications, the megachurch phenomenon will not disappear anytime in the near future.

It is not just the rapid proliferation and powerful ministerial influence which makes the megachurch phenomenon such an important religious reality. These massive congregations have a distinct resonance, a "fit," with contemporary American culture and values, especially with the middle class, suburban, baby boomer segment of society. Parallels can be drawn between the appearance of these churches and the rise of other mega-institutional realities such as the megamall, the warehouse supermarket, the multiplex theater, and the massive conglomerate high schools (Schaller, 1990 & 1992; Eiesland, 1995). The same social tastes, cultural norms, and market forces shaped each of them. A study of megachurches, therefore, has much to say about both the spiritual needs and cultural realities of a significant segment of American society. This theme will be addressed in detail in the final chapter.

Furthermore, the actual social power and influence these congregations exert is considerable. The monetary resources they generate, when combined with their abundant volunteer labor force, present a sizable force for societal change. In service to individuals in their communities, megachurches effect tremendous personal change through their "seven-day-a-week" ministries (Schaller, 1992). These congregations offer tutorial and educational programs, health clinics, job networks, psychological counseling, and a diverse array of self-help services. As an economic base of the community, these churches not only generate funds which are then distributed throughout the locale, but their extensive membership provides a considerable pool of clientele for the neighboring restaurants, gas stations, and other local businesses. These congregations may ensure social stability for neighborhoods in transition. Likewise, many of these churches offer their facilities to the local community as "public gathering spaces." Politically, megachurches have become the favorite haunts of those seeking public office. Politicians

frequent these churches when attempting to rally support for new legislation. Few other social settings provide such an ideal opportunity for addressing thousands of concerned, registered voters as does the megachurch. With the power of this voting constituency in one's pocket, the megachurch pastor is able to wield more than just moral persuasion when attempting to influence the decisions of city and county officials.

Finally, the symbolic message of megachurches is at least as impressive as their actual presence in society. They represent a tangible and powerful presence of God in a secularized world. They seem to offer sizable evidence which directly counters the secular expectations of the demise of religion in modern society. Whether they actually challenge the secularizing effects of modernity is another question. With their size, central location, extensive ministries, and abundant public relations budget, however, megachurches are not only highly visible and prominently successful, but they also symbolize a powerful public religious presence.

For each of these reasons, then, an understanding of the megachurch phenomenon is necessary for anyone interested in religion in the United States. Yet like all religious realities, this phenomenon must be examined at ground level, in its congregational form, to be fully understood. This study attempts to portray this grounded reality.

A Particular Megachurch

At first glance, the church which is the focus of this study, Chapel Hill Harvester Church, seems hardly a representative example of an American congregation, either large or small. In 1991 the church was identified as one of the ten largest Protestant congregations in the United States. Even more unusual, it was one of the few very large Protestant Christian congregations which could boast of an integrated, multiracial membership. Its founder and senior minister, Earl Paulk Jr., has had a successful national and international television ministry. He is the foremost proponent of a variety of Pentecostal Dominionist thinking called Kingdom Theology. Likewise, few congregations have endured as much controversy and allegations of sexual and authority abuse as this church. Yet, even with all its distinctiveness, the narrative of Chapel Hill Harvester Church and the personal history of Bishop Earl Paulk, provide numerous insights both into the life of megachurches and into their fit in contemporary American religious life.

At the same time, the following historical narrative of Chapel Hill Harvester Church/ The Cathedral at Chapel Hill is not intended to function conclusively as the representative example of all megachurches. An investigation of the history, development, and structures of this church, however, does highlight many of the characteristics shared by a majority of large churches. The advantages of resources, community visibility, and social prominence are addressed as well as the considerable difficulties of organizational complexity, membership cohesion, and clergy authority which result from the mega-proportions. Being a megachurch brings with it an unique set of both benefits and problems. This tension, along with many other dynamics of the megachurch, can be seen best through the lens of an in-depth study of one such congregation.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before beginning an exploration of the church, however, a description of the methodological approach of this study is in order. My original intent was to examine the contemporary social reality of this congregation. I had planned to describe this phenomenon from the static, single frame standpoint of a present moment. I, then, expected to explicate the symbolic and structural components of this photographic image frozen in time with the aid of certain theoretical categories. Approximately two years into the study, however, I realized that a snap shot portrayal of this social reality would be inadequate and deceptive.[7] Many of the most significant dynamics and characteristics of the congregation were those which could only be observed across time, longitudinally. For this church, and most megachurches, adaptation to a changing context is what facilitates their success. This contextual flexibility, likewise, shapes the nature of the interaction between the church's leadership and its membership. Therefore, I intentionally adopted a social historical approach mid way into the study. Using this approach I was able to illuminate key patterns and significant trends evident within this congregation's dynamic history, but often latent in its present everyday reality.[8]

---

[7]Warner (1991b:178) points out some of the problems with "freeze-framing social process to a static model" and draws on Van Maanen (1988) in support of this position.

[8]Wind and Lewis (1994b) make a strong argument for employing historical insights in attempting to understand congregational life. This is one of the guiding premises of their two volume edited works *American Congregations.*

In undertaking this study I chose what Wind and Lewis (1994a:10) described as "methodological pluralism" as the most adequate way to uncover the treasure within this "earthen vessel" (Gustafson, 1961). With that in mind I employed multiple disciplinary methods in the study of this congregation. For five years (from 1988 to 1992) I was engaged in participant observation of 145 worship services, numerous weekly staff and administrative meetings, and other classes, healing services, marriage retreats, and new members orientations.[9] I formally interviewed 42 congregational members selected randomly from the church roster, as well as 49 members of the clergy and staff. I further conducted focused group interviews with 47 members from this random interview listing (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). In addition, I had informal discussion with hundreds of members, former members, Atlanta's community and religious leaders, and local residents in the church's neighborhood. I examined the church's extensive archival material and viewed over thirty video-taped services from the period between 1978 and 1985. From the church's audio tape library, I randomly selected recordings of five services for each year from 1974 to 1991. I engaged in extensive content analysis of these tapes. I was also given tapes of certain sermons determined by the church presbytery to be "pivotal" for the life of the congregation. Finally, I distributed approximately 2000 questionnaires during Sunday worship services and performed analysis on the 694 useable forms which were returned to me. The research appendix contains more methodological detail, including copies of interview schedules, content analysis forms, and the questionnaire.

[9] Following Adler and Adler (1987), Burawoy et al. (1991), Jorgensen (1989), and others, this path of investigation is based on the theoretical assumptions of the interactionist theorists Mead and Goffman as well as the ethnomethodologists and existential sociologists such as Becker (1963), Douglas (1976), and Schutz (1970). This approach is grounded in the insight that all social knowledge and meaning is the product of interaction. My intention was to study this congregation "in their own time and space, in their everyday lives" (Burawoy,1991:2).

The data gained from these diverse methodological sources acted as a corrective to the subjective and perceptional biases sometimes associated with participant observation. By cross-referencing and comparing the various results derived from the questionnaire, the content analysis of the audio tape and archival data, the findings from the interviews, my qualitative observations, and reflections based on my experiences, I was better able to check and correct misperceptions or mistaken inferences in relation to the empirical data.[10] In an attempt to determine the representativeness of this single case, I also engaged in an extensive investigation of the writings on megachurches along with the literature provided by dozens of these large congregations throughout the country, and visits to fourteen megachurches in the Atlanta area and several others around the country.

The decision to frame my research as a social history, likewise, required me to reevaluate my predetermined mode of presenting my results. Rather than forming the chapters around set analytical and interpretative themes with the story as data, I chose to allow the story of the church to guide the writing. Not only did this presentational form seem better suited to the research method, but it also resonated with the character of the church itself. Although Earl Paulk has produced many books, the oral tradition of the congregation was central to his preaching, members' commitment, and the church's identity. The church grounded its sense of itself, its congregational identity, in this interactive and narrative portrayal of its history (Hopewell, 1987). With this in mind, a narrative retelling of the church's history seemed to be the most appropriate mode of presentation for this dissertation.

This work is not, however, just a rehearsal of the church's history as the members would describe it. I have shaped the telling of their story in my own way. To deny this would be not only dishonest, but impossible to accomplish in the first place. All our portrayals of reality are personal and interpretative. Nevertheless, I have attempted to present as historically accurate a picture as possible. With that in mind, I use the actual name of the church, with the church's permission granted in 1988. I have also not disguised the names of the church leadership since they are actual persons in this historical account. I have, however, avoided using names, or used pseudonyms for those persons who reported statements to

[10] This method of comparatively using diverse methods of data collection to arrive at a more complete perception of the social situation by compensating for the limitations of each of the methods has been called "triangulation" by Warner (1991b:177) and others.

me in confidence or regarding a sensitive subject.[11]

Many former members have confirmed this story's authenticity. They say they recognize themselves in it. That is high praise to an ethnographic researcher. At the same time, this portrayal is not solely in their "words." The theories of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and history inform its telling. It is not these theories, however, which guide this study. Rather it is the church's narravtive itself and those themes which arose in my research as important for how the church was structured, how leadership functioned, or how the congregation made sense of itself.

---

[11]Warner (1991b:184-185) discusses his similar handling of his case study of Mendocino Presbyterian Church in an attempt to write ”real social history“ and yet protect the privacy of his subjects.

My rendering of this congregational narrative is based on a number of sources, some of which are more interpretative than others. Human recollection of past events are always reshaped to fit a present reality. This is certainly true of some of the resources used in this study. Much of the data regarding Earl Paulk's early life is derived from his official biography with its obvious agenda of presenting Paulk as an extraordinary man of God.[12] Many of the "facts" reported in relation to initial years of the church are dependent upon this source. Although in terms of the church's history personal recollections and archival records temper the bias of the biography. Another factor influencing the presented data was that interviews with disgruntled former members were often the source for many of the more recent "contested allegations." Finally, an additional source of church's history from 1985 to the present included my own direct involvement in and experience of the congregation.[13] Hopefully, my self-disclosures throughout this work will inform the reader of any of my own personal and theoretical biases.

This narrative, however, represents the diverse "facts" about the church as I came to uncover them. The story is shaped around the social patterns and time periods which appeared to be the most significant in understanding the life of this church. This portrayal is, at points, considerably different from the official version of the history which developed in the minds of the leadership and was transmitted to the membership. Paulk's biography and his various comments in news reports offer another side of the story, an official portrayal of the church's history and position on various significant events. Before I begin with the story of the congregation, however, let me lay out for you the story of my involvement in the church.

My Entrance: The Right Place at the Right Time

In the Spring of 1988 I sat in a Chapel Hill Harvester worship service with Frank Lechner, an Emory professor. Having previously studied the church's ministry to homosexuals (Thumma, 1987), I was there attempting to explain to him the general dynamics of this unique and intriguing congregation.

---

[12]The bias in this biographic narrative was confirmed by its author, Tricia Weeks. Likewise, in the following pages ample evidence will be offered to prove this point.

[13]See Warner (1988:73-79) for a discussion of using ones experiences as data for the case study.

Knowing that I would begin a PhD program that Fall, he suggested I make this group the focus of my dissertation. I initially balked at the idea of researching a congregation with as many members as the city of my birth had residents. Nevertheless, the idea appealed to me and in July of that year, I petitioned Earl Paulk for permission to study the church. This began five years of interaction with Chapel Hill Harvester Church.

My initial meeting with Bishop Paulk lasted several hours. In this interview the Bishop "tested my spirit" to see if I was as I claimed, "objective and unbiased." Once satisfied, he granted me complete access to the church, its records, and its membership. Earl Paulk encouraged me to record what I saw going on at the church and above all to be, as he said, "scientifically objective and critical. That way the world will respect what you report." The senior minister challenged me to correct the misunderstandings "the world" had about their ministry. He fervently insisted that I use the church's name and not attempt to disguise its identity. He asserted that their ministry was, "A model of the local community church, to enliven what I see as a dying church in America." Finally, he noted offhandedly that they were not a "cult" as some people had claimed since they were not isolated and secretative. He assured me they were open to the "world's reporters" including myself. After all, he insisted, they had nothing to hide.

What he, no doubt, also perceived in me at that meeting was ignorance. I was completely unaware that the church had recently been harshly criticized by the larger evangelical world (see chapters 8 and 9 below). My introduction into the congregation coincided with a period of intense public relations efforts initiated by the church leadership to correct their tarnished image. My suggestion of honestly reporting the activities and life of the congregation must have sounded enticing after what I later found they had just endured because of being judged by their "words" rather than their "actions." I had unknowingly given Paulk and the leadership another avenue by which the church's accomplishments could be recorded and proclaimed.

I chose to study this particular congregation for several reasons. First, I was already familiar with the church. I was also intensely fascinated by the success of this and other megachurches. I wanted to know how and why this tremendous growth had taken place. I was somewhat puzzled by how the church’s fervent conservative theology supported an active community outreach and progressive social ministries. I was also intrigued by the racial and economic diversity of the congregation, and how such differences could be unified. Finally, I had a great interest in Protestant Charismatic Christianity.

My studies in sociology of religion led me to realize that the Protestant Charismatic movement, especially among nondenominational churches, had been seriously neglected as an area of study. My personal religious quest had brought me into fellowship with several Charismatic congregations in the 1970's. Once upon a time I had learned the Charismatic "language," spoken in tongues, listened to Christian rock, watched people being healed, and been the recipient of several prophecies. Although the Charismatic Christian perspective was no longer my way of understanding God or framing my spiritual experiences, I was still sympathetic to this religious form. More than many of my colleagues in sociology of religion, I felt that I could relate to this religious community as an insider. I realized that the Protestant Charismatic world was one which was seldom given a voice in academic circles. And I felt as if I was in a perfect position to make that world accessible. With that in mind, I joined the church a few months into my study.

An Aside -- The Meaning of Membership

At Chapel Hill Harvester, as in many megachurches, membership is very loosely defined, theologically. Anyone can participate or join with a minimum of effort. What constituted "real" membership for the church leaders was **commitment**. The church holds that total commitment to its vision is what actually defines a "real member." This commitment, described as "being in covenant," was primarily an internal and spiritual orientation. Externally, both committed and marginal members looked quite similar.

In reality, there were at least four observable categories of membership in the approximately 12,000 member (5000 households) Chapel Hill Harvester congregation of 1990.[14] The first two categories, "**core**" and "**committed**" members, could be described as exhibiting a very high level of commitment with the majority of persons having joined the church prior to 1985. The third membership category, "**moderate**" members, was defined by a medium level of commitment, although still considerably higher than the average Christian as described by Gallup (1991) or Roof and McKinney

[14]This categorization is only partially based on questionnaire data, my initial perception of these membership categories came from observation and interviews. The 1990 questionnaire over-represented those in the most committed categories. The characteristics evident in the questionnaire for each member group confirmed my earlier observations.

(1987). This group of members included persons who joined throughout the church's history. "**Marginal**" members, the fourth category, were persons of low commitment levels, with a majority of these persons having come to the church since 1985.[15]

"Core members" accounted for approximately five percent of the church (250 households, 600 people). They were almost entirely Caucasian, middle aged, and middle class. They were overwhelmingly members of the clergy, church staff, and ministry leadership. These members often spent well over fifteen hours a week at the church. They always gave both a tithe (10 percent) and offerings (any amount beyond the 10 percent) totaling more than 15 percent of their income. They were almost all two-parent families. For most of these members, the church was their life.

"Committed members" made up about fifteen percent of the congregation (750 households, 1800 people). These members always tithed, spent at least five hours a week at church, often volunteered in ministries, participated in small group gatherings, and submitted to the authority of their deacon and pastor. This group equally comprised white and black members, was somewhat younger and financially sound. Many were typical middle-class families, although there were some singles and nontraditional families.

"**Moderate members**" totaled approximately 30 percent of the membership (1500 households, 3600 people). Moderate members attended church weekly, might tithe, and occasionally participated in church ministries. They were less inclined to submit to the authority and discipline structures of the church. Nevertheless, they were "good" members. Approximately 65-70 percent of this group were African Americans. This group was considerably more diverse in age and marital status, as well as economically and educationally.

Finally, "**marginal members**" accounted for the remaining 50 percent of the membership (2500 households, 6000 people). Persons in this group had low levels of commitment. They might attend once or twice a month. Seldom did more than a quarter of this group attend any given week. Only fifteen percent of this category had a record of any identifiable giving in a year. If others in this group contributed, it was anonymously in cash. About 75-85 percent of this group was African American. It also comprised more single persons and single heads of households, as well as more members of the

[15]The generic descriptions of the size and characteristics of these membership categories are only approximate and function as "ideal types" (Weber, 1949:42-44)

working class and those persons with less education.

Juggling My Multiple Roles

I was an okay "moderate" member. I attended worship services every week just as other moderate members. I took copious notes. I chatted after church. I even volunteered to do menial tasks such as pasting labels on copies of the church newspaper. I was not just a participant; however, I was also an observer and researcher. This multiplicity of roles created for me, as it has for many other persons engaged in fieldwork, many complex social situations (Adler & Adler, 1987; Ammerman, 1987; Jorgensen, 1989; Warner, 1991b). I never tithed, nor submitted to the spiritual authority of my assigned "shepherding pastor" as a committed covenant member might. My hours away from the church were filled with the mundane but necessary research tasks such as the tedious transcription of conversations, a detailed recording of my observations, and the filing of the pounds of miscellaneous pamphlets, flyers, newspapers and bulletins collected in the field. I also had to balance the roles and responsibilities of PhD course work, a job, a marriage, and later raising several children with my research. At certain times the roles overlapped, and for the first several years my school duties kept me from too great a commitment to the field.

I had entered into this social situation with the hope of being an unobtrusive participant observer. Having previously researched smaller and more intimate social settings, I approached this massive organization with little worry of either affecting or contaminating its social dynamics. The church's size and reputation definitely gave me, as an unobtrusive researcher, a considerable advantage in interacting with most members. Nobody ever pretended to know everybody else and yet, as Charismatic Christians, most members were very outgoing and would talk to anyone. When I informed others of my research, the church's sense of self-importance and uniqueness provided them with sufficient reasons for my interest.

Given this level of acceptance by the general membership, I spent many enjoyable hours listening to stories, sharing meals, swapping insights into an earlier sermon, and commiserating about the deteriorating state of the country. From these interactions I gained valuable information about members' lives and what the church meant to them. For the first two years of the research project these pursuits occupied what little free time I had apart from the PhD course work and my wife. The research was not my life, rather it was essentially an "interesting hobby." I had no problem distinguishing between my

researcher role and the many other parts of my self-identity.

By early 1990, I began to realize, however, that Sunday worship and the views of the general members offered only one side of the story of the church. In order to get a fuller and deeper understanding, I would have to pass through a metaphorical "glass ceiling" which kept the leadership dynamics and the inner workings of the church hidden from a majority of the congregation. I later thought of this barrier to the upper echelon as a "one-way mirrored glass ceiling" since from the point of view of the general membership those above looked just like the folks below. From the vantage point of the leadership, however, one could clearly perceive the considerable differences between the two levels.

In the ecology of the organization there were a number of ways to gain entrance into this exclusive realm. First, one could become a very active "covenant partner in the Kingdom" which required considerable personal sacrifice, including submission to a spiritual authority and large monetary contributions. Entrance in this manner would have necessitated a level of commitment which I was unwilling to adopt. A second mode of entrance was through blood or spiritual familial ties to Bishop Paulk. This path was not open to me either. A third path was to be employed on staff and then strive to gain the trust and confidence of those involved in this upper tier of church leadership. It was this third path that became my entrance venue. This avenue was inadvertently opened as a result of the role Bishop Paulk bestowed upon me, somewhat against my explicit wishes. He and the staff seemed to make sense of my presence and involvement by envisioning me as the unofficial chronicler of this "unique move of God." Staff members later told me they had seen me as the one who would proclaim to the world their efforts at embodying the Kingdom of God.

At first I thought this role might be acceptable. After all it had gained me entrance into the upper echelons of leadership. Functioning within this role, I could be "neutral" and objective about the "facts" I uncovered. The church leadership readily accepted many of my early observations, both those of praise and of criticism. I soon realized, however, that interacting at this level in the organization forced me to question both the role assignment and my implicit assumptions about "unbiased" research. My academic pursuits required me to ask challenging and sensitive questions. Pastors and staff members perceived me as disobeying my Bishop-defined role because I was also interested in the less flattering church dynamics. I was encouraged to record insightful prophecies and moments of success, but reprimanded for writing down certain potentially embarrassing comments and actions.

As I dug deeper into the workings of this level, I began to hear people "joking" about my being a spy. Along with a commonly-held suspicion of the press by most nondenominational Charismatic megachurches (especially during the scandals of Bakker, Swaggert and others), other events in the church's history had produced a guardedness among the staff. I was watched carefully. Access to unflattering documents was mired in verbal red tape. I later found out that conversations and interviews I had with staff members were reported verbatim to senior clergy persons. In formal meetings of ministry leaders or administrative personnel, my presence was **always** casually acknowledged, possibly so everyone knew I was in attendance. It soon became very clear that at this level in the church's organization, there would be no "inconspicuous marginality" to my interactions.

I began to compensate for the leadership's guardedness. I became more cautious about what questions I asked, and to whom I asked them. I also turned to an intense investigation of historical physical documents (tapes, church records, and videos) which were less easily distorted. Finally, and mostly unconsciously, I began to redefine my social role with certain staff members by becoming more personally vulnerable and socially intimate. This effort was successful to some extent, and my roles as informal church historian and social researcher blurred into friendship. These developing relationships provided me with a few key informants who offered accounts of meetings I missed. This evidence showed significant differences in what was said and done when I was not present at a meeting.

The redefinition of my roles and relationships was also partly a consequence of the now three years of involvement in the church and my growing commitment to this dissertation project as a full-time venture. More of my self-identity became tied up in this research. I began to lose a clear sense of my multiple social roles. Who I was had become more and more defined by my study of this congregation.

This dynamic was aided by another natural social psychological process. Unbeknownst to me, I had begun to be socialized into the ethos of the church. This ethos was characterized by an aggrandized devotion to Bishop Paulk, an elitist sense of self-importance, a feeling of being persecuted, the knowledge of spiritual superiority, and a strong triumphalism. The influence of this perspective became more pronounced as I finished my exams and began to spend all my free time at the church. Over a period of years I unconsciously began to accept this exaggerated self-portrayal. I heard myself defend the church's reputation before my colleagues. I, too, saw the efforts of the church as unique and on the cutting edge. I was becoming an ideological member, a native.

I was never fully conscious of my becoming schooled into thinking as a member of the group; although this process did create certain tensions in me, especially when I engaged in intense interactions with the core group of church leaders. Access to the closed ranks of the leadership increased the social pressure on me to conform and obey the social norms. At times, I left meetings feeling vaguely guilty about my lack of commitment to the church since after all I was questioning the decisions and judgments of the leadership. I found myself spending more time with the leadership, while distancing myself from interaction with the ordinary members. I began to cherish the weekly staff lunches, and the chance to see friends, exchange gossip, and laugh over some insider joke. Finally, I began to develop a mild sense of pride in having direct access to the leaders of this special move of God.

These natural processes of socialization and institutionalization, often indiscriminately labeled as "brainwashing" and "mind control," are subtle and effective.[16] An incident took place, however, which both brought these dynamics to my attention and enabled me to reorient myself as a researcher. During a conversation with fellow students and my dissertation advisor Nancy Ammerman, I was confronted with having lost my "objectivity." My prolonged, sincere, and open interaction with the church and its leaders had allowed me to be re-socialized by the group's ideology. At the same time, my encounters with my colleagues, and my later self-reflection on their observations, illuminated and then diminished the power these social processes had on my sense of self.[17]

Through this process, I learned a powerful lesson about both the institutional and ideological pressures at the church and the dynamics of Earl Paulk's charismatic authority. The experience of becoming immersed in the church's ethos, of "going native," proved very valuable in making sense of the crisis the church was about to experience. I began to understand how a member's lack of alternative external perspectives contributed to many of the difficulties at the church. I also learned just how fragile and situational the membership's commitment and Paulk's charisma were. I had a glimpse at what it was like to be a member, not just a participating moderate member but also an indoctrinated highly-involved

---

[16]The literature on ”cults“ and the ”anti-cult movement“ will be discussed further below. For an excellent summary of its history see Shupe & Bromley (1991).

[17]Several works on methodology (Such as Warner, 1988:70) speak of the need to intentionally maintain ones multiple roles and outside conversation partners. I did not purposely disconnect from these other voices, but rather it was a natural separation as I spent more time at the church and became socialized into their ethos.

insider.

From the standpoint of qualitative research methodology, this experience taught me that "going native" was not necessarily something to fear. It was not a condition from which there was no recovery. Rather it was a interactional stance in relation to another subject. The loss of an "objective stance" was not a loss at all. All "objectivity" is in relation to a frame of reference. For a while my dominant referent point became the church. Later, with the assistance of my academic conversation partners and especially my dissertation director, I returned to the disciplinary frame of sociology of religion. For me, this experience highlighted the importance of having multiple conversation partners or several frames of reference when one is engaged in long-term field research. Yet, it also affirmed the importance of periodically stepping outside the social scientific frame of reference into the role of being a more authentic participant.

Another pivotal event, which took place many months later, again let me see the depth to which I had been socialized. It also brought to light the difficulty I had maintaining a consistent researcher role while investigating this congregation's complex, multi-layered social reality. One morning during an informal interview, an unassuming staff member informed me that she would soon be leaving the church. Quite curious, I pushed her for reasons. She startled me with a tale that included emotional manipulation, sexual harassment, and spiritual intimidation at the hand of one of the associate ministers. Her personal account was augmented by similar stories, related secondhand, involving other employees, former members, and numerous pastors.

Our conversation appeared to provide her with a cathartic release; however, it left me surprised and intrigued. After several years of research, I was given, in a few minutes time, a glimpse into the back rooms of the inner circle of leadership, rooms I am certain that I was never to see. When I heard these allegations of abuse and betrayal by the leadership, my initial response was, like most of the congregation a year later, characterized by disbelief and skepticism. I set out to verify the truthfulness of her claims and, if they were true, to determine the full extent of the abuse. Interestingly, just possessing this "forbidden" information seemed to open doors for me to hear from other members similar stories of sexual harassment, intimidation, and the use of spiritual threats to insure compliance and obedience.

I was by this time quite conscious of the dynamics of socialization at work in the church, but at that moment I realized that these forces had been so effective that I had mentally down-played many of

the less flattering incidents I had observed and recorded. Past comments and events came immediately to my mind. I had discarded these incidents as insignificant anomalies in the character of the congregation. Suddenly I saw them in a new light. Knowledge of this piece of the organizational puzzle brought a clarity and unity to the entire picture. Whereas previously many aspects of the leadership culture and internal dynamics were confusing and disjointed, they now fit together perfectly; they made sense.

About this same time and for related reasons, a prominent female staff person, whose duties included public relations, ghostwriting Paulk's books, and acting as my liaison, quit both her job and the church. In numerous interviews after she left, she verified many of the stories I had heard and added countless others (see chapter ten). Evidence gathered from dozens of men and women since then has confirmed the existence of abusive power relations between certain pastors and members of the staff and core followers.

The two years of events that followed these revelations are extremely complicated, but briefly they included: a plethora of "rumors" circulating among members, the exodus of over two-thirds of the membership including a number of pastors and members of Earl Paulk's own family, numerous television and newspaper stories, two pastors reluctantly admitting to "past and present indiscretions," a serious budgetary problem which included losses of $80,000 a week (half the budget), a layoff of two-thirds of the staff, and the formation of an informal network of ex-members dedicated to exposing the "cultic nature" and abusive practices which they argued were rampant in the church.

In the midst of all these events, my research role was tossed to and fro. Those inside the church saw me as a spy and perhaps even the person responsible for leaking stories to the press. Certain persons with whom I formerly had good rapport, began responding in stiff, predictable, and plastic phrases. Many of the clergy appeared embarrassed around me, well aware that I knew more than they ever wanted recorded about the church. Bishop Paulk redoubled his efforts to either persuade or intimidate me into presenting a favorable "official" account. To do this, he used spiritual threats about God striking down those who "touched an anointed move of God." When these intimidations did not dissuade me from interviewing former members, Bishop Paulk, in front of his entire staff, "joked" that he had a 38 caliber pistol and would load it and come after me if I used what I knew to discredit him or the church.

At the same time, many of those who had left the church related to me as either a confessor or as an expert to help them understand the spiritual betrayal they felt. Almost all of these former members envisioned me as the person who would expose the truth about this church and in so doing hasten the downfall of the institution they now abhorred.

Needless to say this conflict within the church provided me with an effortless, but not painless, "exit from the field." I realized that it was no longer possible to maintain my research role, even if I wanted to. Although it has not been said to me directly, the clear impression was that the clergy sincerely regretted allowing me to study them. As an involved participant, I had accidentally been present to hear their confessions of sin and witness the abuses of authority. As a sociologist determined to understand this religious phenomenon, I could not ignore those behaviors that were so central to the functioning of the organization.

HOW THE TALE UNFOLDS

The development of this dissertation parallels the unfolding drama of the congregation and its senior minister. Each chapter covers a distinct, often slightly overlapping, time period in the church's history. Many of the breaks between episodes, and between chapters, occur at natural transitions in the story. Several of the later chapter divisions, however, are based on my assessment of the church's development or shifts in the church's character and organization. Each of the chapters, while intimately tied to actual church events and incidents, offers a social and theoretical frame in which to understand that historical period as well as the unfolding portrayal of the complex dynamics of the growth and functioning of modern megachurches.

The story begins not with the church itself but with the early life of its founder and senior minister. Given the profound influence Earl Paulk Junior had on the development and character of this congregation, an examination of his personal history is essential to understand fully the dynamics of Chapel Hill Harvester Church. Chapter two traces his early life, his successful tenure with the Pentecostal Church of God denomination, and his subsequent dismissal from that body. The story continues in chapter three (1960 - 1972) with a description of the young independent ministry, Gospel Harvester Tabernacle, which Earl Paulk established after his departure from the Church of God. Chapter four sketches the three year period, from 1973 through 1975, following the church's move to a new suburban location. This period shows the church experimenting with diverse self-presentations as it

begins to adjust to its new surroundings and a new name, Chapel Hill Harvester Church.

Nineteen seventy-six and nineteen seventy-seven, covered by chapter five, describe a gradual shift that took place in Earl Paulk's theological orientation following the introduction of beliefs from the Charismatic Movement. The period of the church's explosive growth from 1978 to 1980 is discussed in chapter six. At this point in its history the church achieved megachurch proportions as a result of the highly successful and somewhat controversial youth movement called Alpha. Chapter seven, covering the years 1981 through 1984, shows the various theological and structural adaptations undertaken by the church leadership to order the chaotic growth and to organize the congregation as a megachurch around the vision of Paulk's Kingdom Theology.

No sooner had the congregation stabilized than a series of internal and external crises threatens to undermine Earl Paulk's authority and the ideological foundations of this large church. This period of testing from 1985 to 1987 is described in chapter eight. Chapter nine, covering the years 1988 through 1990, offers an overview of the triumphant megachurch that emerges from its trials as a powerful and active "demonstration of the kingdom." The narrative of this congregation comes to a close in chapter ten with a description of the emotional events which take place during 1991 and 1992.

Finally, the concluding chapter ,eleven, offers a summary of the historical tale. Drawing on the story of Chapel Hill Harvester Church and other research on megachurches, a general description of this phenomenon is presented. These very large congregations have arisen within the last twenty-five years in relationship to a changing social and cultural context. It is their fit with this contemporary reality that makes them so popular. It is, however, the way they understand and organize the spiritual lives of their members that makes them bearers of a new, unique way of being religious in America.

CHAPTER TWO: FOUNDATIONS OF THE KINGDOM

All people are the seed of generations before them. Fathers and mothers throughout previous centuries have contributed personal potential to one composite human being. Earl Paulk's story began generations before he was born in 1927 to Earl and Addie Mae (Tomberlin) Paulk. Although all seed can be traced ultimately to one common father, Adam, the created son of God, most people discover their most definable traits and characteristics in the generation preceding them. Parents' identities answer many questions about their seed. Earl Paulk's story begins with the life of the man for whom he was named, the single greatest influence in his life.

(Weeks, 1986:58)

The foundations of Chapel Hill Harvester Church and Earl Paulk Jr. are anchored firmly in Georgia's red clay. Each is uniquely southern, a product of its history and cultural ethos. In order to better understand the dynamics of this church and the motivations of its senior minister, one must explore briefly not only the Paulk family history but also the regional history and distinctive culture that is the South.[18] Seldom is the analysis of a congregation begun with regional or personal history. In this case, however, certain significant characteristics of both Paulk and the church have their genesis in this broader perspective. Certain features of the southern cultural context fashioned a distinctive foundation upon which the later ministry of Earl Paulk Jr. and Chapel Hill Harvester Church was established. Likewise, the influence of the Paulk family's dynamics, and especially Earl's and his father's relationship to the Church of God, had a profound effect on the later development of the church. The seeds of what Chapel Hill Harvester Church was to become germinated, took root, and flourished in this history of its founder and senior minister.

Most megachurches are molded around or formed out of the identity and life experiences of the minister responsible for their growth. These large congregations not only have powerful visionary

---

[18] Although several scholars (Egerton, 1974; Shibley, 1991) have argued recently for the increasing dissolution of Southern cultural distinctiveness, Reed (1982) on the other hand makes a strong case for the continuing important role of this "ethnic" identity as one of the strongest predictors of beliefs and behavior. For a more extended coverage of the South's cultural uniqueness see Bernard and Rice (1983), Escott and Goldfield (1991), and Reed (1982, 1983).

leaders, but these leaders have extended tenures at their churches. In order to understand this, or any megachurch, one must begin with an exploration of its central visionary leader. This analysis should include not just personal and religious experiences, but also cultural, regional, familial, and psychological components of the early life of this core congregational figure. Each of these variables has the potential to shape the collective life of a congregation through the influence of its senior minister.

Congregational realities do not generate spontaneously in a sterile vacuum. Yet, too often, studies of churches are conducted in abstraction, divorced both from the situational and historical components in which they took root and from the lives of their ministers who nurtured them into existence. Because of the intimate relationship between Paulk and Chapel Hill Harvester Church, a strong argument can be made for beginning this congregational study with the personal history of its pastor.

This congregational reality, however, is not as unique as it might seem. Stephen Warner's *New Wine in Old Wineskins* (1989) demonstrates that even the most mainline of congregations may take on the personality and agenda of their pastors. This influence becomes even more pronounced in churches with long-term senior ministers, a congregational polity, or a lack of denominational affiliation. Without this knowledge of and appreciation for the formative regional, familial, institutional, and religious factors shaping the life of the senior minister, the story of congregation may only be half-told.[19]

THE SOUTHERN CONTEXT

Images of a hot humid climate, cotton farming, slavery, and the Confederacy immediately spring to mind when one contemplates the South. Other characteristics, however, have also contributed to the ethos of this region. Those additional features which helped create this distinctive culture include the rural settlement patterns which dominated the landscape until very recently, the limited 19th and 20th century immigration, the monolithic religious character of conservative Protestantism with its authoritative

---

[19] When I first encountered Chapel Hill Harvester Church, I was utterly confused by many of the things I saw and heard. Only later when I began to learn the history of Earl Paulk and what his formative experiences were did I come to understand the church's present reality. Without a knowledge of this personal history certain comments, and more importantly certain congregational dynamics, had no meaning. Without an adequate discussion of Earl Paulk's history the dynamics of this congregation often appeared coincidental, accidental, or random. Such, however, was not the case.

preaching, and a distinct "sense of place" tied to local familial and kin relationships. Equally important to the shape of this cultural character is the persevering poverty of the region. Finally, an implicit, and perhaps collectively unconscious, tragic sense of history resulting both from the defeat in the Civil War and the tragedy of slavery also colors this distinctive regional reality.

Prior to the war, the South's per capita income was 80 percent of the national average, with the Deep South's per capita at 67 percent of the national mean (Rice, 1983). The war, however, destroyed any economic base that may have existed. Property and livestock were devastated. Approximately half the male population was gone and the per capita income levels fell below half that of the national average. It was not until 1960, almost 100 years later, that the income levels reached 75 percent of the national mean (Kirkendoll, 1989).

Losing the War between the States devastated the South's economy. At the same time, this defeat created a permanent blemish on the collective psyches of Southerners (Reed, 1983). In a nation founded on the image of underdogs who had become winners, an entire region carried the stigma of being losers. The "Old South" identity is characterized by an odd regional tension between having lost the Civil War and the desire to "rise again." This situation has resulted in a distinctive sense of regional elitism. The war memorial at Stone Mountain, Atlanta's cyclorama, and Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone With the Wind* each attest to this "victory in defeat" mentality. Even among the most oppressed Southerners, the poorest whites and African Americans, this "regional superiority" can be seen (Reed, 1983 &1986).

These various regional attributes, and this distinctive Southern milieu in general, shaped the character of Earl Paulk Jr. in profound and important ways. Certain of Paulk's more obvious traits as a minister such as his authoritative preaching style, his traditionalism and patriarchal language, his emphasis on the importance of "place" and heritage, and his continual employment of cultural symbols reflecting both an the "Old South" and "New South" reality in his sermons all harken to his embeddedness in this southern context. It is the South's "defeat and rebirth" narrative, however, which seemed to have a more profound effect, at a deeper psychic level, on the developing young minister. This regional myth later provided a rhetorical means by which he was able to make sense of traumatic events in his life and ministry. As will be seen, he intentionally drew on this symbolism to generate the strength to overcome his defeats and rise to create a victorious, highly successful independent ministry. Earl Paulk Jr.,

however, is not just a southern gentleman and minister. He is also the son of a particular couple and the product of their distinctive history and family dynamics. After all, as Paulk's biographer stated, "most people discover their most definable traits and characteristics in the generation preceding them. Parents' identities answer many questions about their seed" (Weeks, 1986:58).

THE SEED OF THIS GENERATION

It was into an economically depressed South Georgia context that Earl Pearly Paulk Sr., the father of Chapel Hill Harvester Church's senior minister, was born in 1904. He was the eldest son of Elisha Paulk, a farmer and Free Will Baptist minister. By the third grade Earl Paulk Sr. had to drop out of school to work on the farm in Baxley, Georgia. At age 17, in 1921, he was saved at a Free Will Baptist prayer meeting and received God's call on his life to go into the ministry (Speed, 1971). His ministry was postponed, however, as he assisted his father on the farm. During those years, while engaged to another young woman, Paulk met and immediately fell in love with his soon-to-be bride Addie Mae Tomberlin. In a few weeks they married. Addie Mae was a woman of "vivacious spirit" with "strength," "humor," "blatant, unrefined honesty" and "inner fire," according to Paulk's biographer (Weeks, 1986:61). Her personality was seen as a complement to Earl Senior's shyness, insecurity, and "too serious preoccupation with abstract philosophical issues" (Weeks, 1986:61). After the two married, Earl continued to farm and occasionally preached in evangelistic services. During this time Addie Mae taught him to read through Bible memorization. Within a year of marriage the couple's first child, Myrtle, was born. Not long after that, in 1924, Earl Paulk Sr. signed ordination papers with the Church of God, Cleveland TN. and became a full-time minister.

Earl Paulk Jr. was born "a preacher's kid" on May 23, 1927. From his conception, at least according to his biography, Earl Paulk Jr. was understood by his family as "unusual" and blessed with a strong sense of his spiritual destiny.[20] Through the voice of the biographer several significant events in

---

[20] Nearly all of the "facts" of Earl Paulk Junior's early life come directly from his biography. There is no doubt its author Tricia Weeks describes the events of Paulk's life much as any myth-maker might employ a certain literary license to interpret the actual events in a way as to make them more meaningful to the present. The biographic description of Paulk's childhood can be seen most certainly as a characterization constructed to support the prophetic Paulk of the mid 1980's. Given that my intent is to explore the church's ethos and history, rather than specifically the factualness of Earl Paulk's early life situations, I have used this portrayal of Paulk's life as it was written and also reported to me. In most cases it is this

Earl Jr's early life contribute to this theme of specialness.[21] In the account of his birth, Weeks comments that the midwife who facilitated the birth of Earl Jr. prophesied, much as Anna did over Jesus, that this child would be a "very special baby" and that he was going "to be a preacher" (Weeks, 1986:63-64). Another time, when Earl was yet two weeks old, his mother, Addie Mae traveled with children in tow to North Georgia by train to join her husband at a revival. While changing trains in Atlanta, his mother tripped and fell on top of him. He was uninjured, nevertheless his mother, living "under a threatening cloud of guilt, blaming herself," prayed fervently for months that no harm would come to him and none did (Weeks, 1986:67). Then, at the age of two, Earl Jr. reportedly was miraculously healed of a very high fever due to chicken pox. In 1931, when he was four years old, he was baptized by his father at his own initiative because "his spiritual sensitivity was remarkably mature"(Weeks, 1986:78). On this occasion, his father voiced his aspirations for his son, "I'd rather this boy become a man of God than the President of the United States" (Weeks, 1986:78).

This theme of Earl Paulk Jr's uniqueness and extraordinary spiritual destiny reappeared again in the biography's description of his calling into the ministry at the age of sixteen. His father was preaching when, as Weeks relates, the Holy Spirit said to Earl Jr., "If you do not accept the call on your life to be a minister of the gospel, your father's ministry will end during this service" (1986:112). At the same moment his father stopped preaching, grasped his head, and leaned against the pulpit. Just after this Earl saw a bright light, like a ball of fire, come through the church. He took this as a confirmation from God. After climbing into the pulpit beside his father, he addressed the congregation and told of his acceptance of the call to preach.

Throughout the biography and in sermons over the years, one catches a glimpse of the family dynamics in the Paulk household and their influence in Earl Jr.'s development. Foremost among these dynamics was the fact that he was the first born son. Like a good Southern son, he was expected to

---

version of his life that has become "reality" in the minds of members anyway. Within the congregation this "history" is an "accurate" and powerful "social fact." This perceived reality has shaped not only the congregation, but also, based on my encounters and interviews with him, how Earl Paulk Jr. understands his own history and identity.

[21] The description of charismatic leaders as having had extraordinary childhoods or unusual callings is very common. Wallis (1982:28), Johnson (1992:s2), and others have identified this as one component of the social construction of a leader's charismatic identity.

receive his father's, and grandfather's, mantle and vocation. Clearly, this was the expectation in the "prophecy" at his birth. Earl Sr. saw his son as his protégé, and in jest even called him "the old man" (Weeks, 1986:98). As Earl Jr. grew he often accompanied his father to out of state revivals where he would sit next to him on the speakers' platform in his own little chair. Weeks comments that "throughout his entire youth, Earl Jr. never knew the perspective of sitting among the people in the congregation in services where his daddy preached" (Weeks, 1986:72). He identified strongly with his father. At the same time, throughout the various recollections of his childhood, it is possible to perceive a competitive edge to the father-son interactions.

Earl Paulk Jr.'s relationship with his mother was likewise portrayed both as tremendously influential and somewhat conflicted. She was revered and adored as the matriarch of the family, yet at other times she "teasingly blamed [Earl Jr's] wide shoulders for causing the fragile health which she suffered most of her life" (Weeks, 1986:64). Don suggested that her only fault was that "she loved too much" ("Kingdom Sounds", May 1991, p.2). This deep motherly love, he continued, did not mean she was permissive. In fact her love was expressed in quite the opposite manner. Don commented that when correcting her children she used "long whips...and was a literal terror. I mean she didn't know when to stop" ("Kingdom Sounds", May 1991, p.2). Numerous times in the biography Earl Jr. was described as "a Mama's boy." Paulk was quoted as saying, "Mama and I could lick the whole world if we had to, even Daddy" (Weeks, 1986:78). On a number of occasions, throughout Earl's childhood and adolescence, the two conspired to circumvent the mandates of his father, for instance to allow him to try out for the high school football team.

The descriptions in the biography of his early development are relatively silent on his relationships with his siblings except for those with his older sister. It was reported that at his birth his older sister, Myrtle, became extremely jealous of him for a few days. After a spanking, however, she championed his cause and became his "lifelong loyal, responsible guardian" (Weeks, 1986:64). A few years later the next child, Ernestine, was born. When Earl was eleven a set of twins, Don and Darlene, were added to the family. Finally, a few years after that the baby of the family, Joan, arrived to complete the household.

Throughout these early family years, Earl Paulk Sr. was constantly engaged in church business. He was portrayed as both emotionally distant and often physically removed from the family for long

periods of time. As the oldest son, Earl Jr. was often "left in charge of tending the home fires" while his father was away (Weeks, 1986:98). As he got older "being in charge" included disciplining his younger siblings, driving them to school, and helping his mother around the house. His younger brother Don commented in an interview that "Earl was more like a father to me than he was a brother." Earl's relationship to Joan, the baby of the family, was similarly described by Weeks as a "...deep affection more like a young father than an older brother" (1986:99).

It is interesting that two of the three younger children were instrumental in the ministry of Chapel Hill Harvester Church. Two of Earl's sisters were intimately associated with the church, one of whom helped start the independent ministry. This familial cooperation in ministry, as well as other family dynamics can be seen as significant later in the development of Earl Paulk's image within the church and in an analysis of the legitimation of his authority as patriarch of a congregational clan.

A FIRM FOUNDATION IN THE FAITH

Another central component in Earl Paulk Jr.'s early spiritual and emotional development was his interaction with and perception of the Church of God in his life. The biography chronicles how the Paulk family and the denomination were inseparable. The family was less than two years old when Earl Senior became a minister in the young denomination. From this point on, the elder Paulk's life and the family's history was inextricably tied to the Church of God. It provided them with spiritual nurture, moral guidance, and financial sustenance. Its organizational networks allowed Earl Paulk Senior to rise to a position of power, respect, and influence. The family's institutional place in the Church of God was a formative influence, a key primary socializer, of Earl Jr.'s developing identity and sense of himself as a Christian person. Later, these same organizational structures and institutional forms became a constricting force in his life. In many ways Earl Sr.'s life in the denomination, as well as that of his son, parallels the growth and development of the Church of God as a whole from, in the words of one historian, "back alleys to uptown" (Crews, 1990:xii).

A Sectarian Beginning

As a denomination, the Church of God was officially less than 20 years old when Earl Paulk Sr. accepted ordination. Its roots, however, went back to the earliest days of the modern Pentecostal movement. In 1886, in a small wooden meetinghouse in a rustic East Tennessee mountain community, a

few people gathered around the ministry of Richard G. Spurling (Crews, 1990; Conn, 1977). Spurling was a Missionary Baptist preacher, who had grown discontented with the liberalizing direction Protestantism in general was headed.[22] Economically, this part of the country was also struggled with the poverty of the post-war South, plus the tensions of industrialization and associated labor unrest. These factors together created a world which seemed chaotic and unstable.

[22] Members of many Baptist and Methodist congregations were attaining middle class positions in their communities. This advancement led to more respectable, formal, and worldly social preaching. At the same time, the Christian world was struggling with the recently expounded theories of evolution, the Social Gospel, and a biblical interpretation guided by a historical, critical method, as well as new forms of spirituality such as exemplified in the Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Scientists (Quebedeaux, 1983:35; Crews, 1990:7)

As an answer to this chaos, Spurling offered a vision of a religious community based on his understanding of primitive Christianity, including separatism, a strict moral code, and a doctrine of perfectionism borrowed from the Holiness Movement.[23] Spurling's original group of eight people called themselves "The Christian Union." Spurling died within one year of this group's founding. After his death, his son took over leadership of the group. For about ten years the small band struggled to survive. Then, in the late 1890's, revivalism and the holiness doctrine became more popular in the Southern and Appalachian regions. For the next five years, till 1902, the enthusiastic practices of this rapidly expanding group became uncontrollable. Fanaticism, which included practices of extreme asceticism, was rampant. In response to these excesses, the group reorganized in 1902 under the name of the "Holiness Church."

The beliefs of the "Holiness Church," and other groups like them, fell under the broad rubric of Pentecostalism. These sectarian religious groups believed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a valid separate experience after salvation. They claimed that this baptism empowered Christians to practice the gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in unknown tongues, healing, prophesying, and other ecstatic experiences. Above all, the Pentecostal believer affirmed the possibility of unmediated interaction with God through a life of strict holiness, separated from worldly influences (Quebedeaux, 1983; Anderson, 1979; Conn, 1977; Synan, 1971).

---

[23] The Holiness movement had its origins in the American followers of John Wesley. Its distinctive doctrine is that of the second blessing, or sanctification, which was seen as a separate experience from salvation and water baptism. With salvation one might retain one's carnal sinful nature, but with sanctification God's grace, through faith, provided a complete and instantaneous eradication of this sinful nature. This experience was accompanied by great emotional outpouring and the possibility, even requirement, of living a holy life characterized by an ascetic lifestyle. This lifestyle or "way of Holiness" was necessary in order for progression to the next dimension of the Christian life, Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit allowed for a greater freedom of worship, an intimacy with God and power to manifest the gifts of the Spirit, including glossalia or speaking in tongues.

One of the early proponents of this Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit was the Holiness evangelist and faith healer Charles Fox Parham. Around the turn of the century, at his "College of Bethel" in Topeka, Kansas numerous students received the baptism, as evidenced by speaking in tongues.[24] In 1905 Parham journeyed to Houston, Texas where he set up another school. One of his students there, an African American and former slave named William Joseph Seymour, accepted his teachings and soon became one of the pioneer leaders of the Pentecostal movement.

In a series of revival meetings held in Los Angeles early in 1906, Seymour began to preach the Pentecostal message. Within a year thousands flocked to his meetings from all over the world. These services were characterized by extreme emotionalism, enthusiastic dancing, jerking, trances, and even seances. Those drawn to the revival included blacks and whites from all economic levels. This revival was unique in that it was not segregated along racial lines (Lovett, 1975; Tinney, 1978; Paris, 1982). Although this integrationist emphasis had disappeared completely within ten years, it is interesting to note that much of Pentecostalism's religious flavor is similar to black church worship in general (Williams, 1974; Paris, 1982; Wimberly, 1987; Franklin, 1994). Seymour's "Azusa Street Revival" waned within five years and ended by 1928. As the participants returned to their homes, they took with them the doctrines and the enthusiasm which helped to spread the Pentecostal message around the world.

Whether there was any interaction between participants of Seymour's revival and Richard Spurling Jr.'s group is unknown, but the latter group did benefit from the increased interest in the "things of the spirit." By 1907 they again reorganized, this time under the name of the Church of God. At this time, the church had approximately 1000 members, but by 1920 membership in the Church of God had risen to 14,606 with its official headquarters established in Cleveland, Tennessee. This fledgling denomination, still experimenting with its polity, had appointed A.J. Tomlinson as "General Overseer for life." It also began accumulating considerable resources, including a publishing company and a large number of church buildings.

What was it about this relatively new religious expression that attracted Earl Paulk Senior and so

---

[24] There is some discrepancy about the accounts and their authenticity, but Parham does seem to be one of the first persons who specifically formulated the necessity of speaking in tongues as the evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. See Anderson (1979), Synan (1972) or Quebedeaux (1983) for a more detailed account of this event and a fuller discussion of Parham's teachings.

many others into its fold? Crews (1990) argues that Pentecostalism, and specifically the Church of God, tapped similar sentiments to those which had made the Populist movement to be so successful in southern politics around the turn of the century (Harrell, 1981). These churches, as did so many other sectarian groups, offered a radical social equality that most adherents could not otherwise find. This egalitarianism allowed them to fill leadership roles generally not available to them in the public world. Participation in these churches enabled members to overcome their poor self-image and low self-esteem through a life of spiritual empowerment.

The Church of God in particular exhibited many other of the characteristic sectarian doctrines in its belief structure and practices.[25] The denomination emphasized the primacy of social relationships between individuals. This personalist perspective fueled an attack on the dominant societal values and institutions. Industrialization was seen as depersonalizing and, therefore, immoral. This capitalist economic model, it was argued would eventually alter social relations to where they would be based solely on profit and greed. Individual change and personal reform were seen as the only cure for these social ills. The leaders in the Church of God wrote extensively on the evils of material acquisition. They despised those who, at that time, were writing books glorifying the "gospel of Wealth" and tying prosperity to the blessings of Christianity (Conn, 1977; Crews, 1990). This sectarian attack on American culture included, for the Church of God, striking spiritual blows at urban middle-class Protestant churches. While such churches succumbed to the corruptions of the "world," Church of God members maintained their stance over against the society, as is also typical of sects. Another common element of such groups was a strong emphasis on community. The doctrine of Spirit Baptism created an emotionally charged atmosphere which was conducive to community formation (Kanter, 1972). Group cohesiveness was further assured by the use of rituals such as testifying, anointing the sick with oil, frequent communion, and foot washing.

The Pentecostal emphasis on an individual encounter with the divine through subjective religious experience had inherent within it the seeds of doctrinal tension and dissension. However, the Church of God, and most Pentecostal groups in the Holiness tradition, often stressed conformity of practice over

---

[25] The general characteristics of sectarian groups can be found in the writings of Wilson (1959, 1981) and elsewhere.

doctrinal or ideological conformity.[26] The goal was not orthodoxy but orthopraxy. Given this emphasis the Church of God had considerable power to dictate the actions of members. Behavior was regulated primarily through the use of strict moral codes, an ethic of negativism, i.e. "Thou shalt not...drink, dance, wear jewelry, smoke, wear makeup...," combined with a strong Protestant work ethic. This system of renouncing one's former practices and manner of dress for a unique and uniform regimen further helped solidify the sectarian group identity and consciousness (Kanter, 1972).

The Pentecostal animosity toward society was not well received. Its adherents suffered considerable persecution at the hands of larger more established denominations, including some of the groups with similar roots such as the Baptists and Methodists. An extreme intolerance of the excessive emotionalism of Pentecostal "holy rollers" resulted in verbal abuse, intimidation, and even physical violence. Much of this persecution may have been due to the class and status differentiations among the farmers, laborers, and impoverished fringe members of society. Church of God members were almost always from the lowest class of the rural mountainous, and later southern plantation, society. The clergy were often poor, semi-literate, and bi-vocational, supplementing their meager church income by working as farmers or mill employees.

From this brief description of Pentecostalism and the Church of God it should be evident that Earl Paulk Sr. joined a group of persons much like himself. The Church of God offered him the credibility to travel as an evangelist and the freedom to preach as the Spirit directed. In addition, it provided the structure and community in which he was able to develop into a self-assertive and productive member of society. For Earl Paulk Senior, the Church of God was to become his ladder to social advancement.

A Father's Success

---

[26] This general statement is not without exception. The Pentecostal movement had several theological orthodoxy difficulties in the early years of its existence such as the oneness controversy (Reed, 1975) or the Latter Rain Movement (Riss, 1987; Barron, 1992). In more recent years, theological questions have risen around the prosperity teachings and the discipleship movement (see the discussion of these ideas in Chapter Five)

Throughout the years of the Great Depression, the Church of God continued to grow at an incredible rate until, in 1933, the membership reached 48,638 persons (Conn, 1977). A year earlier Earl Sr. received his first appointment as State Overseer in Michigan, just eight years after joining the denomination. This began a long and illustrious career for Earl Sr. in the denominational hierarchy.[27] After a brief post as State Overseer in Michigan, Earl Sr. served in that position in South Carolina (1934-35), in Georgia (1939-40), in North Carolina (1950-1954), in Florida (1954-56), in Tennessee (1960-1964), and finally in Kentucky (1964-1966). In addition to these state posts, Earl Paulk, Sr. was twice selected to represent the denomination in its second highest office, that of Assistant General Overseer, from 1941 to 1944 and 1956 to 1960. Only two other men in denominational history served longer in that position. He held a seat on the Executive Council of Twelve for a total of 22 years (1939-45, 46-50, 52-64). At his retirement only five men had served in that capacity longer than he had. He also held positions on the General Executive Committee (for nine years), the Editorial and Publications Board (three years), and the World Missions Board (for seven years) (Conn, 1977). In all, Earl Paulk Sr. had an instrumental role in shaping the Church of God into a stable denomination. The official historian of the denomination attested to this fact in his comments about the elder Paulk (Conn, 1977:257).

[He] was eloquent enough to rank with Johnson as a preacher, and aggressive and dynamic enough to rank with Walker as a leader, so he became a valuable representative of the church. His sound judgment and progressive thinking has helped steer the church into fields of greater service for God.

When he was not involved in denominational leadership, Earl Sr. was assigned to very prestigious churches. For several years he pastored one of the largest Church of God congregations in the country at Greenville, South Carolina. In 1947, when fire destroyed this church, Paulk moved his large congregation into a tent while they raised money and rebuilt an even more impressive building. At

[27] The Church of God polity is essentially congregational in structure. At the same time, however, the denominational leadership organization is hierarchically arranged with a system of state overseers who report to a pair of assistant general overseers serving below a national general overseer. The denomination counterbalances these individuals with an executive council of twelve and a general executive council. Conn (1977) describes this organizational structure in great detail.

that time, this new building was worth a half-million dollars, could hold 1500 people, had a 20 piece orchestra, 150 choir members, and radio broadcast equipment (McKee, 1949).

The stories surrounding Earl Sr.'s ministry are considerable and reflect his importance to the Church of God. There were tales of him praying for and receiving the healing of others. In one account he was credited with "routing Satan" and walking "through fire to conquer public opinion and corner Satan" (McKee, 1949). In the book *Continuing Generations: A History of the Church of God in Georgia* (Jones & Carver,1986:232), a particularly colorful event is recorded.

On one occasion, someone brought a rattlesnake to the service in a bag. When the snake was poured onto the floor of the brush arbor, Brother Paulk reached down and picked up the snake. Immediately, the snake stiffened and became like a rod. Brother Paulk walked outside and killed the snake by striking it against a pine tree. The would-be disrupters were totally disarmed and left knowing that there was a supernatural power about the preacher they came to harass.

Earl Senior's considerable reputation was not always beneficial for his family. There was considerable social stigma attached to the Pentecostal label. Even as Earl Sr. was climbing the ladder of success within the denomination, acceptance outside that framework was difficult for his children to achieve. The children were viewed as social deviants because of the way they dressed and as religious misfits for their Pentecostal beliefs. Earl Jr. later commented in a sermon, "It was not popular to be what we were" (5/30/76). In fact, this religious orientation was so unpopular that his father's early camp meetings were often beset by the Ku Klux Klan or other troublemakers brandishing guns, axe handles, and torches. The revival tents or brush arbors where his father preached were often burnt down. One time a number of vandals even pushed his car into a river (Jones & Carver, 1986:231-32). Although these events happened early in the career of Earl Sr., they left a lasting impression on his young son.

A Pentecostal Preacher's Kid

Every son or daughter of a minister knows the stigma of being a "preacher's kid." In a denomination where the distinctives were primarily behavioral and oriented against the prevailing cultural norms, the scrutiny of a minister's children was even greater. When this pressure for perfection was combined with the fact that one's father was the highest ranking clergy in the state, or later, second

highest in the Church of God nationally, the sense of being on display became intensified. Reports of minor rule infractions by the Paulk children, such as drinking Coke or being present at a dance, would filter through the grapevine until they reached Earl Sr. ears. He would administer corporal punishment for his children's lack of attentiveness in church services and often required a public confession of their sins.[28]

Earl Jr. disliked being associated with the negative image of "holy roller." Even more so, however, he was embarrassed by the cultural strictures of the Church of God. These including no involvement in organized sports, no movies, no dancing, and no Coca Cola - which in the South was tantamount to treason. The Paulk children had to dress and act differently from their friends. They were subjected to ridicule and torment for being "holiness preacher's kids." Once Earl Paulk Jr. was "totally humiliated" by a group of boys who tied him to a tree because "his father was a holiness preacher" (Weeks 1986:86). He remained bound to that tree until his older sister came to his rescue.

Since the denomination required the family to move every few years, the social pressures and ridicule surrounding their cultural status was a constant and ever present source of embarrassment. This was especially true as the children grew older and as Earl Sr. was assigned to churches or state supervisory posts in urban settings among more middle class parishioners. It was a stigma, judging from his subsequent comments, from which Earl Jr. never shook free. He later characterized his general relationship with the Church of God as very negative and detrimental. He described it as authoritarian, rigidly bureaucratic, and without heart or compassion. This is certainly in contradiction to the role the denomination played in his father's life, where it functioned as a vehicle for social prestige and power.

The Church of God prohibitions concerning organized sports constantly upset the young Earl, especially given his natural athletic ability and the social value of sports such as football in Southern culture. According to his biography, Earl Jr. went out for football a number of times. He would make the team, only to quit when his father discovered what he had done. Finally, he was allowed to participate in the "low profile" sport of track and field. His father, however, became very displeased when Earl Jr. received considerable public notoriety for his abilities. Earl Senior's concern was that the publicity would

---

[28]On one occasion, Earl's sister Myrtle had to apologize to the congregation for talking in church. Another time Earl Jr. was made to go before the denominational headquarters staff and ask their forgiveness for being present at a school dance.

reflect poorly upon the denomination.

Throughout his youth, Earl Jr. rebelled against the rigid and uncompromising cultural strictures of the denomination. It is recorded in the biography, "Perhaps those humiliating childhood memories of being taunted as the 'holiness preacher's son' emblazed within him a burning determination to be a winner" (Weeks 1986:103). Yet his relationship with the denomination had other positive and negative aspects as well. His father's standing in the denomination, and his own early involvement in it, provided him with a sense of importance, destiny, expectation, and considerable pressure to follow in his father's footsteps. Indeed, as his history with the Church of God shows, Earl Jr. became intent on surpassing his father's position in the hierarchy. By watching his father's interaction with the denomination he was taught a model of unquestioned obedience to religious authorities. As Weeks notes, "Earl Sr.'s loyalty to the church was a stronger truth to his son than all the 'do' and 'don't' rules which irritated him" (1986:100). He realized the totality of the call of God to preach, but was also aware of the detrimental effects of it upon one's family. Not only was the family required to undergo "tremendous personal sacrifice" (Weeks, 1986:86), but the hypocrisy, gossip, and bickering about church politics caused considerable personal pain to the Paulks (1986:87). Finally, the ecstatic hyper-emotional freedom in worship which characterized the earlier days of the Church of God left a lasting impact on Earl. In a sermon in 1977 he stated this feeling very more succinctly, "I used to go to camp meetings and I used to dread it with a holy terror." On another occasion, he commented (5/30/76),

As a kid I watched the hyper emotionalism and vowed, 'God I want to serve you...but I don't want that because I don't understand that. It has no meaning to me.' And that grew deeply in my heart as I grew older.... Because sometimes the frustration was more than you can imagine.

THE SECOND GENERATION SECTARIAN

Another indirect, yet potentially powerful, dynamic at work in the early experiences of Earl Jr. was his position as a member of the second generation in this Pentecostal sectarian movement. By the time Earl Jr's reached adolescence his parents, along with many of the Church of God members, had increased in wealth and gained middle class status (Crews, 1990: 138ff). In short, this sect had become a denomination, a church planted firmly in the middle of mainstream Evangelicalism Protestantism. Crews describes the changes which took place after the World War II (1990: 138-139).

> In the postwar years, the Church of God's sectarianism mellowed. It repudiated snake handling.... The church changed from a pacifist organization to a much more militant one. Even the church's insistence on rigorous personal morality began to erode. Pentecostal worship became less emotional and less dependent on the supernatural.... As local congregations became more urban and middle-class, they demanded an increasingly professional clergy and a more sophisticated liturgy.

With the social and economic advancement of their parents, the children of the Church of God leadership were greatly influenced both by the optimistic atmosphere of the post World War II era and by the social, educational, and economic ideals available to them as new members of the middle class. This second generation of believers no longer occupied the same social location from which their parents had come. For a number of these younger elite members, the sectarian values and religious commitments did not correspond to their social context, spiritual needs, or emotional temperament.[29]

Earl Paulk Jr. can be seen as representative of a generation of up and coming Church of God leaders who exhibited a diminished animosity toward wealth, less rejection of the "world" and its cultural baggage, and a greater appreciation of education (Conn, 1955:299). He was one of the first of his generation to attend college and, according to his biographer, one of the first "Pentecostal-born" preacher to receive a seminary degree (Weeks, 1986:136-138). Although he began his schooling at the fundamentalist Bob Jones prep school, he quickly transferred to Furman University, a conservative Baptist college for his undergraduate education. Following this, he received a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Candler School of Theology, a rather liberal (by Church of God standards) United Methodist Seminary. In his career with the Church of God, Earl Jr. also led several challenges to outdated cultural proscriptions, introduced the Church of God to televangelism, and spoke out against racial inequality. He and his cohort, as second generation sectarians, faced the task not just of moving the denomination into the modern world institutionally, but also of introducing it to the middle class culturally. Crews reflects on this dynamic (1990:139).

A younger generation of denominational leaders arose in the postwar period. Many clergymen

---

[29] This progression from sect to denomination is a common social dynamic discussed by many theorists. See Weber (1968), Neibuhr (1957), Wilson (1959 & 1981), Schwartz (1970) and others for a detailed description of this process.

and some officials were second- and third-generation leaders. Younger Church of God ministers were better educated and were earning university or seminary degrees.... These factors help to explain the division of the church into two camps. Traditionalists were typically older, less educated, and less willing to accept change. Progressives were generally younger, better educated, and more willing to experiment.

The magnitude of this generational shift is further compounded when seen in light of the concurrent changes which were taking place in the Southern region itself. The first significant change was economic. The years during and after the Second World War brought rapid growth to the states key to the Church of God. In the decade after the war the urban population of the South grew fifty percent faster than the rest of the nation's urban areas (Kirkendoll, 1989). Much of this growth was due to returning servicemen immigrating from the Southern rural areas. The urban areas were seen as a symbolic economic Mecca. Federal money poured into Southern cities in the form of increased defense spending through the establishment of major military installations and new weapons factories (Rice, 1983:30ff). The government also encouraged growth through expenditures in the form of grants for urban improvements. The South in general, and Atlanta in particular, was perceived as having an excellent quality of life and developing cultural attractions.

In the midst of this post war economic growth and social optimism certain traditional values of church, family, and country remained intact, especially in the South (Reed, 1986). The supposedly settled nature of society, probably in response to recent migration patterns, reinforced traditional norms and ideals including the importance of the nuclear family and Southern "ideals of masculinity" (Flynt, 1981) The Southern family was central. One must have a "place," be rooted in a heritage and lineage (Wilson, 1990; Eiesland, 1995). Likewise the region's ideals of masculinity were a strong determinant of attitudes and behavior (Reed, 1982). Southern men do not quit. They are physically and emotionally strong, committed, deep of character and full of integrity (Reed, 1983 & 1986). They are ladies' men, attractive and virile. Yet, in the midst of this traditionalism, there was the push toward progressivist values of education, racial harmony, and gender equality, toward the development of a "New South."

A PROGRESSIVE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN

Earl Paulk's biographer, while not explicitly highlighting this societal and cultural transition taking place, does represent it in her tale of Earl Paulk's character development and attributes as a progressive Southern gentleman. Earl's athletic prowess, his strength, and speed were noted often. His athleticism was highlighted in his desire to play football and then by his celebrity status due to his track and field achievements. Likewise, family was important for Earl Junior. His biographer often portrayed him as revering his father and mother. Even from an early age, he is shown to be a responsible "family man." His lineage and his roots in the family home of Baxley, Georgia, and in a particular Southern heritage are given great significance.[30] Yet, this biographic tale also portrayed Earl Paulk as a "New South" gentleman too, struggling against the traditionalism of the Church of God and the racism of the "Old South." He is shown to prize education, social activism, and racial equality.

In the biographic description of his late adolescence Earl was presented as a "ladies' man," considered very handsome by many women. His first girlfriend became a beauty queen and first runner-up in the Miss America contest (Weeks, 1986:115). When that relationship ended, Earl often attracted large followings of young women at the camp meeting revivals he conducted for the Church of God (Weeks, 1986:118). His family even teased him with questions about the number of young girls he saved at his revivals. This situation got so disruptive to the "serious young evangelist," stated his biography that, at age 19, he decided to do the honorable thing and get married (Weeks, 1986:119). He chose a girl four years his junior whom he had known since she was a child. His future bride, Norma Davis, as Paulk's biographer states, "as long as she could remember had been in love with Earl Jr" (Weeks, 1986:121). Earl was attracted to her quiet, gentle servant spirit as well as her "ironclad strength and steadfastness" (Weeks, 1986:121). After a courtship of a few weeks, he married her on July 4, 1946 in the same house where he was born and before the same fireplace where his parents wed.

After his marriage Earl and his new bride went back to South Carolina so he could finish his schooling at Furman University. During this time Earl served as the state Sunday School and youth director for South Carolina. After graduation he taught briefly at Lee College, the fledgling Church of God

---

[30] An interesting indication of the importance of the Southern heritage and roots to Paulk can be found in the unlikely place of the church's Internet web site. In his verbal introduction to its home page Paulk states, "We welcome you to our Internet site. We are deep in the South, in the heart of the South, Atlanta, Georgia...."

high school and college in Cleveland, Tennessee. It was not long, however, before Earl decided to begin Seminary. Given the conservative anti-intellectual bent of the denominational leaders (Weeks, 1986:137), it was somewhat surprising Earl chose to attend a Methodist seminary, Candler School of Theology in Atlanta. During the first two years of seminary he pastored a small church in Buford, Georgia. While at this pastorate, Norma gave birth to their first daughter, Rebecca Mae (Becky). In the latter two years of seminary, Earl was employed in Atlanta as the denomination's Georgia director of Sunday school and youth.

A DENOMINATIONAL PLAYER

Nineteen fifty-two marked Earl Paulk Jr.'s formal entry into the Church of God denominational system. Although he had been active as a child and youth in teaching Sunday school, then as a teenaged evangelist and preacher, and finally as a seminarian pastor, graduation from seminary ushered him directly into the denomination's bureaucratic structures. At the age of 25 he was appointed to one of the largest Church of God congregations in the city of Atlanta, Hemphill Avenue Church of God. In a sermon in 1976 Earl Paulk Jr. reflected upon the conversation he had with the state overseer, E.L. Simmons, at the time of the appointment. He remembered saying (5/30/76),

'Brother Simmons, I'm too young to go to that big church. It's in the middle of a great battle.' (The church was divided. They had conference after conference that would involve the strong and influential LaFefver Family and Watson forces versus the Graham family.... They would not speak to each other.) And Simmons said to me,'The Lord said that you should go.' And I said, 'If the Lord said it to you then **I Will** submit to you, but I don't feel in myself that I am capable of going there. I need more time to go other places for a while.'

Hemphill Avenue Church of God was a sizable and influential post. According to both the written history of the Church of God in Georgia (Jones & Carver, 1986:241) and Paulk's biographer, Hemphill was "one of the largest most respected churches in the denomination...a choice, impressive assignment... [with] a pulpit normally filled by seasoned pastors who had paid their dues to rise to the top of the denominational structure" (Weeks, 1986:148-49). The church, founded in 1918, was the first Pentecostal congregation organized in Atlanta. In 1939, the church moved into a beautiful brick sanctuary, located

directly across the street from the Georgia Institute of Technology campus and near the center of the city. In 1946, it registered the top Sunday school attendance among Georgia's Church of God congregations, with 366 persons (Jones & Carver, 1986:241). By the time Earl Paulk left the church in 1960 Sunday school attendance averaged 756 (Paulk's sermon 5/30/76) with worship attendance at over one thousand.[31]

The first year that Earl Paulk Jr. ministered at Hemphill was described in his biography as one of the most difficult in his life. By his own account in a later sermon, "...after that first year I had almost totally lost my mind. I did nothing but pray and preach and visit....I fasted every week...and I sought the Lord" (5/30/76). This intense frustration, after a early history of success, nearly destroyed the young minister. From his accounts in sermons and in the biography, the church was experiencing serious tensions and division threatened to split it. When he could not resolve the dissension, "Earl only blamed himself.... [carrying] the divisions among his people inside him like his own personal failures" (Weeks, 1986:152).

Another minister at Hemphill during this time commented in an interview that he did not remember any such conflict. He did recall, however, that during Earl Paulk's tenure the church board was "strong and very powerful...but that they were fairly supportive of the pastor." Whatever the reality, Earl's perception of this situation as being uncontrollable shaped his perspective on ministry both at Hemphill and later in his response to events at Chapel Hill Harvester Church. Along with the normal pressures of a young pastor's first appointment, Paulk had to deal with the dynamics of a large church, the possible tension between internal factions, and the birth of his second daughter, Susan Joy (Joy).

In the midst of this, Earl Paulk Jr. was also embroiled in a larger denominational struggle between

[31] Paul L. Walker, the minister who succeeded Paulk, has remained the church's senior minister for over 30 years. Under his leadership the church was renamed Mount Paran Church of God after it moved from downtown to the Mount Paran suburb of north Atlanta. At this location the church grew rapidly, recording a 1978 membership of 4000 persons (Shealy & Reetz, 1978). In 1990 Mt Paran was estimated to have an attendance of over 8000, making it the most prestigious congregation in the Church of God (Schaller, 1990). The Mount Paran congregation will be referred to at numerous times throughout this work because of its one time connection to Paulk. Throughout the history of Chapel Hill Harvester, perhaps, an unintentional competition developed with Paul Walker and the Mount Paran church. For instance both churches were in the list of ten largest congregations in the country in 1990. Likewise, both churches had very popular and successful youth ministries (Alpha & Airborne) in the late 1970 's and early 1980's. These youth ministries were focused around Christian rock band (Alpha & Mylon LaFefver and the Holy Smokes, later called Broken Heart).

the up-and-coming younger urban ministers and the older established, often rural, denominational leaders. As stated above , these more traditional leaders were conservative in their outlook and very resistant to change, especially in regard to cultural accommodation. One historian of the Church of God noted that, even with term limits on denominational positions, a small group of older, and significantly more conservative clergy, controlled the church from the 1940's to the 1970's (Conn, 1977). This group, which included Earl's father, perceived accommodation to "the world" as tantamount to heresy and apostasy. With so many members taking advantage of military educational benefits, the accumulation of wealth, and a bolstered Southern economy, the upwardly mobile Pentecostals soon found themselves with increased amounts of wealth and leisure time. This increase of middle class families in the denomination after the Second World War brought considerable pressure to bear upon Church of God leaders to drop many of the cultural prohibitions. During this time period heated debates about movie attendance and the wearing of jewelry took place (Crews, 1990). Prohibitions concerning sports involvement, the use of medical doctors and the attitudes toward education began to be relaxed. The cultural and social context was ripe for progressive visionaries. As Earl Paulk Jr. would soon find out, the traditional denominational leaders and the institutional structures under their control were not so easily changed.

In 1952, Earl Paulk Jr. was appointed to the National Boards of Sunday School and Youth. Weeks reports that he was seen as one of the spokespersons for the younger leaders who held progressive ideas about the direction of the denomination (1986:146-47). He spoke against the prohibitions on mixed gender swimming and the wearing of wedding rings. Paulk reported that he was frustrated with the hesitancy of denominational leaders to change. Weeks relates that because of his outspokenness members of the denominational hierarchy began to label Earl Jr. as "everything from a young liberal intellectual to a trouble-making communist" (1986:147). If this is an accurate account, these were harsh accusations especially during the early 1950's and the era of McCarthyism.

Earl's relationship with the denomination must not have been all negative, however. He sat on the National Youth Board for six years from 1952 to 1958. Likewise, in 1953 he was the first Church of God minister to televise his services. This broadcast came at a time when the denominational leaders were still debating members' personal use of the medium (Crews, 1990:44-45). Paulk wrote an article for the denominational magazine *Evangel* the following year entitled "Church of God Makes Television

Debut" describing his efforts. He enthusiastically reported on the evangelistic potential of the medium, stating, "many have come to our regular services as a result of seeing the television service" (Crews, 1990:46). The rapid increase of television ownership between 1950 and 1960 in the United States augmented the potential exposure one had with this medium. Even Paulk's biographer noted that, "Television exposure brought Earl public recognition as a well-known pastor throughout the Atlanta area" (Weeks, 1986:160). Earl Jr. was, according to Weeks, "a natural actor, relaxed but dynamic, in front of the camera" (1986:158-60). From these early experiments with television, Paulk developed a commitment to its potential for outreach. He has firmly held to the evangelistic use of radio and TV throughout his years of ministry.

This media exposure continually pressured Paulk and the Hemphill congregation to produce quality, performance-oriented, worship services. The church was home of a famous Southern Gospel singing group, the LaFefver Trio. This group sang at denominational functions, touring engagements and weekly church services (Church of God, General Assembly minutes, 1954). In an interview, one nonPentecostal minister from the Atlanta area remembered that he, and others, would often go to Sunday evening services and special performances to hear the group. This talented trio was quite a drawing card for the church. Earl Paulk learned the lesson well, and professional quality music as an evangelistic "hook" became another aspect of Paulk's later ministry that formed during his Hemphill days.

THE CITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Another significant influence from this period was Earl Paulk's involvement in the Atlanta Christian Council, a loose association of Atlanta area clergy. His membership in this group allowed him access not only to their weekly television broadcasts, but also to a network of theologically liberal, activist clergy. Perhaps even more important for the future of Chapel Hill Harvester's integrated congregation, Paulk's involvement in the Council introduced him to the Civil Rights movement in the city and facilitated his own participation in the struggle for racial equality.[32]

---

[32] Paulk's involvement in the Civil Rights movement was somewhat unusual in given the Church of God's strict segregationist stance. The few black Church of God congregations which existed were completely separate from the rest of the denomination. They were allowed to elect their own black overseer, however he had no power in the white leadership structure. In the racial tense 1950's, the denominational leadership appointed a white man as overseer of these churches. In the turbulence of the Sixties, however, while under pressure both internally and externally, the denomination showed

considerable signs of change. In 1964, the Church of God adopted a human rights resolution and by 1966 the denomination voted to become integrated. Approximately four percent of the Church's current membership in the United States is African American. See Crews (1990:163-172) for an extended discussion of race relations in the denomination.

Atlanta in the 1950's was a powder keg of Civil Rights tensions. As the city grew both numerically and economically, the disparity between the segregated whites and blacks became undeniable. In 1954, with the Supreme Court ruling on the case of Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, segregation in public schools was ruled unconstitutional. This was the symbolic starting point of a struggle which had begun many years earlier. The ruling focused the country's attention on the racial inequities in the American system. Not long after this, Atlanta native Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as the leader of the Civil Rights Movement.

As a protest against this educational integration ruling, 101 congressmen from the southern states issued a call in March 1956 for a massive resistance to desegregation. Most Southern politicians concurred and refused to integrate the public schools. In Arkansas, the governor closed the Little Rock city schools rather than allow them to be integrated. During 1957 in Atlanta, the same maneuver was threatened. Georgia's educational segregation laws were challenged in 1958 by a federal suit and found to be unconstitutional. It was not until 1960, however, that any black students were admitted into Atlanta's all-white high schools.

In the midst of this public school controversy, eighty white Protestant clergy released a statement called The Atlanta Manifesto. The full text, including the names of the signers, was published in *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (Pennington, 1957). This document stirred considerable controversy, judging from the responses in later editorials and letters to the editor.[33] The text itself is mild in its demands compared to later efforts in the Civil Rights struggle; nevertheless, it marked a bold step for many of the white ministers. According to conversations with numerous signers, a number of these clergy persons had extensive animosity directed at them for signing this declaration. The manifesto called for open communication between leaders of both races, petitioned officials to keep the schools open, and pleaded for prayers in resolving the situation.

---

[33] For a complete description of these events and the text of the Manifesto see Pennington (1957). For a sampling of the reactions to this statement, see the editorials and letters to the editor in *The Atlanta Journal & Constitution* issues 11/4/57 and 11/10/57.

This period of Atlanta's history became very significant retrospectively for Earl Paulk and the church later in its history. As Chapel Hill Harvester began to attract more African Americans in the 1980's, Paulk often portrayed himself as an active participant in the struggle for civil rights. Whether he was a “leader” or not is uncertain; however, it is clear that Paulk was supportive of integration and the basic rights of all persons regardless of color during this time.[34] The accounts in his biography describe considerable tension between his stance and those of his Hemphill congregation comprised of Southern blue collar workers and middle class business persons (Weeks, 1986:161-164).

Concurrent with these racial tensions, another picture of the city was being marketed strenuously. This was Atlanta's metropolitan progressivist image as the "gem of the New South." Under the 23 and a half years of leadership by Mayor William Hartsfield, Atlanta grew both in size and in national stature. In 1957, *Fortune* magazine ranked Atlanta number one in urban regional planning (Kirkindoll, 1989:40). Two years later *Newsweek* proclaimed it as "the nerve center of the New South" (Emerson, 1959:95). Atlanta's population reached the one million mark that same year. In a speech during this celebration, Mayor Hartsfield exclaimed, "We roll out the carpet for every Damn Yankee who comes in here with two strong hands and some money. We break our necks to sell him (on the city)" (Emerson, 1959:95). Indeed they had, for in the previous fifteen years the city attracted over 2000 new firms. About this same time, the city council proposed a $105 million dollar expenditure for 42 capital projects to further modernize the city (Kirkindoll, 1989:40-41). In 1960 the former president of the Chamber of Commerce, Ivan Allen Jr., was elected mayor. He ran on a platform of progress for the city, peaceful integration of the schools, and economic prosperity.

Therefore, even as numerous black student riots kept the police busy, a public relations campaign called "Forward Atlanta" was formed to promote the city, to put its best foot forward. Allen's comment on the relatively smooth integration of the city schools summarized the mood of the business leaders and the ideal they wanted to present, "We're too busy to hate. Our aim in life is to make no

---

[34] In the discussion of these eventful times in Paulk's biography, in sermons, and in a 1990 church play, "The March Goes On," members were given the impression that Earl was an active participant in Civil Rights protests. Further research and interviews indicates that Paulk was involved, but in less dramatic or active ways than implied or even than compared to many other Atlanta clergy. For instance, a 1991 church legal document claimed, as did numerous sermon statements, that Earl Paulk Jr. signed the 1957 Manifesto. He did not. He did sign a similar document released by a larger group of clergy, over 300 Jewish and Christian leaders, on the anniversary of the first manifesto.

business, no industry, no educational, or social organization ashamed of the date line 'Atlanta'" (Emerson, 1959: 95-96). City leaders were out to sell Atlanta as the foremost representative of the successful "New South." This atmosphere was, no doubt, instrumental in shaping Paulk's understanding of what being a member of the "New South" meant and how the media could be used to portray this reality. His own career, too, paralleled the successful optimism of the city.

THE BEST OF TIMES

By 1958, Paulk experienced a rapid swelling of his influence and respectability. The promising career of this young Church of God pastor was demonstrated with the publication of his first book, entitled *Your Pentecostal Neighbor*. This book was intended to explain Pentecostal doctrines and practices to the non-Pentecostal. The preface and introduction of the book included glowing endorsements and praise by several Pentecostal leaders. Charles Conn, official Church of God historian and editor of a denominational magazine and later a general overseer, said of Paulk,

[He is] the son of a renowned Pentecostal preacher and leader, he has become an outstanding preacher and leader in his own right. Successful as a pastor, evangelist, teacher, and counselor, he now has turned his efforts to the written word (1958:7-8).

Howard Courtney, the vice-president of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, also commented about Paulk,

The Church of God in particular and the Pentecostal brethren in general are fortunate to have among their number men of his caliber, stature, and ability. His ministry has already been a source of great inspiration (1958:9).

Not long after the book's publication the Church of God selected Earl Jr. as its first national radio spokesperson. In this capacity, he had to travel to Cleveland, TN each week to record a nationally broadcast sermon. This post brought Paulk even more fame and exposure throughout the denomination. Given his involvement in radio for the denomination and in television at his church in Atlanta, he was chosen as a member of the denomination's newly created National Radio Commission. He served with

that group from 1958 to 1960. He was also appointed to a public relations committee for the denomination's General Assembly in 1959. This small, but elite committee was to assist news reporters and to "protect the public view of the Church of God" (Conn, 1977:324). As the denomination grew, church leaders realized that they needed to improve their public appearance. They attempted to correct many of the negative stereotypes of "holy rollers" and "backwoods snake handlers."

These lessons of creating a socially respectable congregation were not lost on Earl Paulk. It is evident from Earl's early involvement in denominational affairs that he was destined to advance to the top of the Church of God hierarchy. Even at a young age, Earl Paulk Jr. was becoming a well-respected, and very successful, Church of God minister. This success created an expectation of achievement for Paulk. Likewise, his early efforts in radio and television media as a means of evangelism and exposure created a lasting reorientation to his ministry. The multiple cultural influences of this period of Atlanta's history, including the Civil Rights struggle, the city's success and growth, and its progressivist "New South" imagery, further influenced Earl Paulk as he later developed Chapel Hill Harvester Church. Each of these variables, as well as those of his childhood and family life, have played formative roles in the directions the ministry of this man would take. No other event, however, had a greater impact in the future life of Paulk or his church than that which took place at Hemphill Avenue Church of God in 1960.

A FALL FROM GRACE

The first year of this new decade marked a crucial moment in Earl's life and future. One significant event during 1960 became pivotal for Earl Paulk and the development of Chapel Hill Harvester Church. This event was Earl Paulk Junior's adulterous affair with a church member and his subsequent dismissal from the Church of God. Although this incident has remained shrouded in ambiguity and uncertainty about what actually took place, its repercussions have had a lasting and profound effect on Earl Paulk and his later ministry.

In 1960, Earl Paulk's involvement with the denomination could not have been stronger. He was respected by other ministers, trusted with committee work, and honored for his radio broadcasts. He had just published two more books, *Forward in Faith Sermons*, a collection of 52 of his best radio sermons, and *Sunday School Evangelism*, a book which prepared church members for "soul winning in their spheres of influence" (Weeks, 1986:166). At Hemphill Avenue, attendance and income were growing. In

July, 1960 during a congregational meeting, he received an unanimous and hearty confirmation of the entire membership to remain as their senior minister. The congregation had just purchased land in the northern suburbs of the city and was raising money to build a new sanctuary at that site. The Paulk family had also just welcomed their third daughter, Roma Beth, into their family. The thirty-three year old Earl Paulk Jr. was, by most measures, very successful.

In the midst of this success Paulk's biographer records various internal struggles taking place within the young minister. Weeks reports that Earl's progressive and challenging preaching created enemies on his congregation's boards. He felt he had lost popularity with certain parishioners over his involvement in racial issues. Offered in retrospect, implications of these struggles reveal much about Paulk's motives and actions in later decisions. His psychological and spiritual conflict can be seen in Weeks' description of this time period (1986:172).

He knew that many of his ideas for ministry would push some of them too far- press them with radical changes and social confrontations.... He knew many members would react in dismay at the extent of his 'radical' ideas for ministry if he were to share them.

Much of the apparent tension Earl Paulk felt was no doubt due to his exposure to ideas and issues in the seminary of a denomination considerably more liberal than the Church of God. Perhaps, these internal struggles were also attributable to his increasing commitments at the national denominational level. Not only were the stresses of travel and notoriety weighing upon him, but he was confronted with conflicting loyalties and institutional pressures. Furthermore, his biography suggested that his family life, with a wife and three daughters, demanded more of him than he had to give (Weeks, 1986:165).

The increased involvement in the denominational hierarchy brought about many tensions of its own. As Earl gained entree into the bureaucracy, he undoubtedly experienced a new sense of power and a renewed desire to reform the institution. The reality of rigid unwieldy bureaucratic committees and a leadership comprised of denominational hard liners frustrated him immensely (Weeks, 1986:169). The denominational leaders of his generation were for the most part not yet in positions of power. As a rapidly rising member of this group, Earl was in an uncomfortably prominent position. The old outdated moral codes were not changing fast enough to satisfy him. He raised concerns, both publicly and privately,

about denominational policies and procedures. Weeks writes that he even questioned his own loyalty to the Church of God, "more than ever, his desire to be true to his calling from God made him want out..." (1986:169).

A number of social psychological dynamics may have been at work in Paulk's involvement with the denomination. First, he was a metaphorical "point man" for this generational changing of the guard. Second, the tension in Earl toward the denomination was probably partially the result of his independence and free-spirited individualism clashing with a bureaucratic, managerial institutional reality. Finally, he was caught in the shifting structural configuration taking place in the Church of God's transition from established sect to denomination.

Although each of these factors may have contributed to Paulk's emotional instability and his "idealist" frustration with the state of the congregation and denomination (Weeks, 1986:171), ultimately his dismissal from the Church of God was attributable to a pastoral counseling situation. His biographer reports the incident in the following way. Paulk was counseling a young couple with marital problems. Apparently he became too involved in the situation. The woman developed a strong emotional attachment to Earl. Realizing the developing situation would not help the couple resolve their problems, he sought the counsel and advise of Georgia State Overseer, W.E. Johnson. The counsel he received from the State overseer, according to his biographer, was unexpected and unproductive. He was told "just 'to handle' the situation" (Weeks, 1986:173). The overseer commented that even an admission of involvement in such a "precarious situation" could be construed by the denomination as an evidence of wrongdoing. The story continued with Earl becoming more desperate, angry, and self-destructive due to the lack of compassion and oversight from the denomination. Weeks relates his despair in this manner (1986:175).

Uncontrolled, destructive feelings of despair continually surfaced in Earl.... He understood for the first time the loneliness and compulsion of willful sinners. No one felt more desperate than someone who had lost hope, locked away in unchangeable circumstances. No wonder rules meant so little to trapped people.

His resolution of this situation was to leave the church. He came to this conclusion after months of pondering the dilemma as well as having numerous discussions with his family (Weeks, 1986:182-84).

Earl wrote a resignation letter that was to be read to the congregation the following Sunday. This letter explained the reasons for his actions and expressed his love to the congregation. Then, on a hot Saturday evening in August, he, Norma, and the three children, loaded their belongings in a rented trailer and left town. They arrived at the Tennessee home of his sister and brother in law, Myrtle and Harry Mushegan, the next day. Earl's action brought the situation to an end, but the incident was far from resolved.

Paulk's secretive departure caused severe repercussions in the church. The letter he had written was never read to the congregation. The church council members instead announced that Earl Paulk and his family left during the night "to avoid a scandal" (Weeks, 1986:178). According to his biographer, "rumors quickly devoured the image anyone might have had of the tender, hard-working young pastor whom they loved" (Weeks, 1986:178).

These rumors were compounded by the fact that neither Earl Jr. nor the Church of God have ever been explicit about what really happened. Chapel Hill Harvester's official account in Paulk's biography hints that his involvement with the woman never developed into more than psychological transference, exaggerated claims of affection, and the vengeful wrath of a scorned woman. Throughout the years, Earl Paulk claimed it was a combination of all of these things, although he never overtly substantiated exactly what happened. In many ways the ambiguity of this situation has been an asset to Paulk, because it has allowed him to defend his version of the events against the "fanciful and outlandish" stories circulated by his enemies, specifically Church of God members.[35] On the other hand, the rumors and stories existed and have continued to haunt Paulk because he chose to avoid a direct resolution of the issue. For that matter, Mount Paran and Church of God officials were also guilty of dodging the issue. Mount Paran's official spokesperson would not talk about Paulk's time at the church, but rather directed me to the State

---

[35] In 1992, Paulk stated in both a newspaper and television interview that he had a sexual indiscretion in 1960, which he characterized as a "one-time slip during a Sunday School convention" (White, 1992e). He blamed the distorted perception of what really happened regarding this incident on Tricia Weeks, the author of his official biography. He suggested that she had "tried to tie it in with ...jealousy on the part of the church.... That was not a role I took. I told it like it was" (White, 1992e). Within a few days of this admission, however, I was told by a number of members still in the church at the time that Earl denied the reported confession. He argued that the reporters had "put words in my mouth." This 1992 statement was the only overt admission of what took place in 1960 that I ever found throughout the history of the church. Conversations with the son of the woman involved in this incident verify what Paulk confessed to in 1992, that he had a sexual affair with a church member while at Hemphill Avenue Church of God.

offices. After being referred to several different persons at the Church of God State headquarters, the historian there would only confirm that Paulk had been "defrocked for a sexual indiscretion." Most of the current and former members of the church I approached were unwilling to talk with me. Those who did discuss this and other incidents having to do with Paulk could not guarantee how much of what they told me was rumor or fact. The entire situation had become, over the years, completely muddled in innuendo and gossip. On the basis of interviews with several persons close to the situation including the son of the woman involved, the story was simply that Earl Paulk had been involved in an extramarital affair and got caught.

The story of this fall from grace, nevertheless, has become a powerful multivalent pastoral and congregational symbol for the membership of Chapel Hill Harvester Church. The meaning of this event and its outcome has changed over time in relation to a particular situation. In certain sermons Paulk has portrayed this event as entrapment by alienated and jealous board members. At other times he portrayed it as having been instigated by the desperate acts of the scorned woman. Occasionally the incident was suggested to be a momentary carnal slip by an innocent "fleshly" man. Finally, on most occasions it is described as an act of Satan to bring down a successful man of God.

The reality of the situation is not as important as the story built around the event -- the object lesson and how it plays out in the unfolding history of the church. What exactly happened at Hemphill between Paulk and the woman is known perhaps only to them, but the incident has lived on in the narrative of the church. This event became the supreme illustration for countless sermons. It took on totemic significance for the congregation, and in a way became the organizing and unifying principle of the church. The complexity and functionality of this symbolic event will become clearer as the story progresses. This entire situation is the most powerful factor in shaping the future of Chapel Hill Harvester Church and Earl Paulk's ministry.

In my research I heard versions of the story mentioned no less than fifty times in sermons, meetings, and oral presentations of the church's history. Much of the influence this one event had on the congregation is speculative. Nevertheless, five years of research support the fact that this fall affected Earl Paulk, and indirectly the church, on many levels. His feelings of rejection by the denomination which previously ordered his entire existence (familial, economically, and spiritually) propelled him into chaotic uncharted waters. The severe humiliation following on the heels of his meteoric rise in the denomination,

no doubt, scarred Earl Paulk's self-image. This sense of being "an outcast" and a "despised member of society" came to form the nucleus of his new church's vision. His lifelong and, he claims, God-given mission to reach out to rejected and hurting people like himself follows directly from this incident. The loss of a venue for advancement and increased social status may have also played a part in Paulk's drive for notoriety and success. The establishment of his independent non-denominational ministry was an outcome of the entire situation. Likewise, his fascination and preoccupation with the unconditional acceptance and restoration of clergy accused of sexual improprieties can be traced to this experience. The repercussions of this one event have continued to reverberate throughout this ministry and the church's world view even to the present.

Although this event became the chief cornerstone upon which Chapel Hill Harvester Church was built, the other influences previously addressed from Earl Paulk's early life were quite crucial in shaping what the church was to become. When these are combined they form an historical foundation upon which the future congregation rests. The southern grounding of Earl Paulk's life shaped the content of his later theological message and the style in which he delivered it. This regional influence also provided the context of Paulk's and the congregation's religious belief included, among other things, the issues of poverty, rural culture, and racism. It contributed a powerful symbolic myth in which Paulk was able to frame his fall from grace and from which he could draw the ideological impetus to "rise from defeat." Likewise, Earl Paulk's early life and family experiences shaped how he, and indirectly the church, developed. His father's relationship to, and successes in, the Church of God were primary in forming Earl Paulk Junior's perception of the character of religious life. As the first born son of a highly prominent and popular denominational leader, Earl Paulk faced distinctive pressures both to follow his father and to excel. The fact that Earl Jr. was a second generation sectarian of a successful upwardly mobile family and denomination, likewise, helped to explain the organizational tensions he experienced within this situation. Another formative variable in his early history which conditioned later congregational developments was his exposure to a "liberal" theological education and to powerful events in the "New South" city of Atlanta. Earl Paulk's experiences with the Church of God, both in his parish responsibilities and in his denominational duties, colored his later assessment of denominational life. His tremendous successes in each of these areas, likewise, established a "golden boy" mind set in him, which then was dashed to pieces with his fall. Finally, the "defrocking" incident became the central issue both of Paulk's

own psychological well-being and of the church's ministry throughout the life of the congregation.

Without these early foundational influences, an investigation of Chapel Hill Harvester Church as it is presently would be inadequate, inaccurate, and uprooted from the soil which gave it sustenance. As in many megachurches, the experiences of the founding minister - his or her driving vision and passions - shape the reality of what the congregation is to become. Without a knowledge of the formative regional, religious, institutional, and psychological factors at work in the life of this central congregational figure, the story of the church is only half told. In order to complete this sketch of the foundation components which later give Chapel Hill Harvester Church its distinctive form, it is necessary to turn to an investigation of how Earl Paulk Jr. put the pieces of his shattered ministry back together.

CHAPTER THREE: IN SEARCH OF A VISION (1960-1972)

And it would be a vision that would change not only the lives of these families, but perhaps the lives and direction of thousands, maybe millions of people.... Like the mythical phoenix rising triumphantly from the ashes, in the desert city of Phoenix, Arizona, God raised up a prophet through the impartation of a vision....

(*Harvest Times*, 6(6):1,8, 1983)

Earl sat in the driver's seat of his white Chevy sedan weeping openly as he and his family members began the long hot drive to California. At age thirty three, he was experiencing feelings he had never before known, feelings of rejection, despair, and a hopelessness for the future. The weeks since leaving Hemphill were spent in contemplation at his sister's home. Reports of rumors and innuendos about him circulated during the meetings of the denomination's Ordained Counsel. These confirmed for Earl Paulk that there was no longer a place for him in the Church of God. After many discussions and prayers with Harry Mushegan, Earl's brother-in-law, the two men decided to join their resources and ministerial futures together. Both perceived their calling to be the establishment of a ministry of restoration and compassion for abandoned and abused people. They envisioned themselves as "harvesters" of "scattered sheep" (Weeks, 1986:191). This theme which formed the core essence of what the Paulks' ministry was to be for the future was taken from Matthew 9:36-38,

But when Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He to His disciples, 'the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.

The future independent, nondenominational church resided as an idea in Earl Paulk's mind. Paulk, now freed from the constraints he experienced in the Church of God, was afforded the opportunity to create something original. This congregational idea formed around Earl Paulk's experiences of his own suffering and sense of defeat. The identity of this yet to be formed church became established by a visionary revelation which was also Paulk's. From its inception, then, the church was an extension of Earl

Paulk's ambition and experiences. This is a central component of many megachurches, as it is most independent ministries. The senior pastor is the ideological and visionary leader. It is his drive and determination which shape the congregational reality from its conception. This distinct vision and sense of itself as a congregation, its unique identity, are crucial in drawing persons to an independent ministry such as this. In crass economic terms, the product must have attractive packaging and an enticing sales pitch in order to be appealing.[36]

At the same time, a unique identity does not, by itself, produce a successful product. It must also be accompanied by significant substance and a loyal audience. These twelve years of the church's early history, then, function as, to continue the economic metaphor, a test market and a time to refine the product among those most loyal to Earl Paulk himself. The familial quality of the relationships between leadership and committed members during this time are most pronounced. The congregation that initially gathered around Paulk understood themselves as a "faithful family," with him as their surrogate father or brother. This early method of Paulk's relating to the congregation formed significant patterns for the future of the church, not just in interaction but also handling conflict and displaying power. Likewise, the minimal pressure of a small family run business allowed Paulk the opportunity to polish his craft in preaching, as well as experiment with relating to the local community and its needs. Almost no megachurch begins large and successful. It is often at the initial formation of such churches where one can see the genius of these congregations and leaders develop and take root. Although this period of the church's history has often been characterized by members as insignificant and transitory, numerous later congregational patterns and social dynamics can be seen as having their origins in this time period. In order to see how and why these threads of the present congregational fabric came to be it is necessary to return to the story.

WESTWARD TO A LAND OF PROMISE

Having agreed upon the "harvester" focus, Harry and Earl decided to begin a new ministry in Los Angeles, Harry's childhood home. Earl's younger brother Don, who had just graduated from the

---

[36] As will be seen in the course of this narrative, however, there is considerably more to the interactional dynamic between Paulk and his followers, between the church and the external social world, than just a crass marketing of a specific religious product.

Church of God's undergraduate school Lee College, also cast his lot with his brother. Paulk's biographer described Don at this point in his life as a light-hearted youthful optimist who saw this as an adventure. Harry, Earl, and Don turned their backs on the Church of God. With strong determination, they packed all their belongings on trailers and, with their families, headed Westward.

A few days into their trip, the caravan of outcasts arrived at the home of Harry's brother in Phoenix, Arizona, to rest before continuing their journey to the west coast. There they met with the predictable outcome of Earl's hasty and unexplained departure from the Hemphill Avenue Church and the denomination. Harry's brother, Nap, had received numerous calls from concerned clergy and church members about Earl's actions. According to Weeks, these tales were greatly exaggerated and embellished with untruths. The seeming betrayal of former friends nearly destroyed Earl. He was filled with feelings of bitterness and rage, but also despair and utter defeat (Weeks, 1986:200-01). While consoling them after this devastating news, Nap shared a plan he believed was from God. He had just been offered a small church building in downtown Phoenix and wanted his brother and Earl to join him. Coincidentally, he was moving into a new house which left his current furnished residence and a guest house vacant. In response to this "obvious" sign from God, the families decided to return to Phoenix after a brief trip to Los Angeles to preach at a scheduled revival.

The Los Angeles revival was a success for Earl Paulk, but more importantly it confirmed two aspects of his ministry. First, the revival was marked by the "outpouring of the Holy Spirit's blessings [which] signified a 'signs following' evidence that God honored their ministry's direction" (Weeks, 1986:203). This success assured Earl Jr. that God's anointing and calling were still upon him. The second confirmation he received related to the continuing and ever-present persecution from the Hemphill incident. Callers from Atlanta had even spread their malicious stories to the leadership of the Los Angeles church. Earl realized that the "rumors" would follow him wherever he went, possibly for the rest of his life (Weeks, 1986).

Upon their return to Phoenix, the Paulk clan began to reestablish their lives and ministry. Earl purchased Nap's former residence. They enrolled the children in school. Their young church grew rapidly thanks to daily evangelistic revival meetings. In a few short weeks Phoenix had become their new home.

A Vision of a Return to the Lions' Den

It was after one of these daily revival meetings, however, that Earl found his plans, and future, drastically altered. He experienced what he identified as a vision from God offering a new direction for his ministry. He was to return to Atlanta. In the city of his defeat, God would raise up Earl's new ministry to address the hurting and outcast members of society. As if by divine confirmation, two letters arrived that day from members of the Hemphill church asking Earl to return and begin an independent ministry. One of those letters was written by, then Hemphill member, John Bridges. He and his young bride enjoyed Earl Paulk's ministry and wanted him to be their pastor even if it meant leaving their church home. With this encouragement, the Paulk clan contemplated a return to Georgia, just ten weeks from the time they left Atlanta.

Earl's vision and the confirming letters did not engender an immediate "leap of faith" into cars bound for Atlanta. Rather in a pragmatic and cautious manner, Don was sent back by airplane to meet with John and Dottie Bridges and other Hemphill members interested in joining with their still speculative church. The fleece was found to be dry. Around a dozen people responded positively to the idea of a new independent ministry. Don called Earl and asked for one thousand dollars to offer as a down payment on a former Lutheran church for sale in Inman Park, a suburban area east of Atlanta. With this guarantee of support, the rest of the family began the long trip back by automobile. In a few days the Paulk ministerial team arrived and, by December of that year, founded Gospel Harvester Tabernacle.

Earl Paulk's Phoenix vision forms a crucial facet of both his and the young church's developing narrative and identity. Much like the story of his indiscretion at Hemphill Avenue Church of God, the account of this vision has undergone considerable revision and reinterpretation throughout the church's history. As the context in which Earl and the congregation found themselves changed, so did the specific details of the vision. These revisions will be explored in depth in the following chapters. The significance of this event was that it provided a challenge to be met by the seemingly defeated minister. It also offered him a rhetoric of rebirth and an intentional positioning of himself in a hostile environment. The content and symbolic importance of this vision have grown and complexified over the years, but it remains a powerful unifying social reality even for those who later left the church. This vision, and its embodiment in worship rituals, church structures, and sermon references both defined and ordered the mission of the church. At the same time, participation in these rituals, involvement in the structures, and attention to the

sermons shaped and developed the character of the membership around this symbolic ideal (Geertz, 1973).

The Birth of a New Identity

The long trip out West and back again allowed each of the family members to reflect on their lives with the Church of God and on their future without it. Paulk's biographer records his sentiment about leaving the denomination (Weeks, 1986:197).

That denomination had cradled him, raised him, and provided him a place to minister when he was only seventeen years old. But now the umbilical cord was irrevocably cut. The shock of that severing began a new life, but the uncertainty of his identity now -- and identity crisis with consequences affecting many lives -- left him running like Moses into the desert. Like Moses, he questioned all the unexplainable dealings and callings of God in his life, including God's judgment for his own mistakes and many hurts and misunderstandings resulting from this choice.

Much as the biography describes it, the events of 1960 could be seen as an excursion into a desert wilderness after having left a comfortable, although controlled, situation in a “Church of God Egypt.” This desert journey was, first, in search of a new identity and, then, in hopes of finding a promised land. Borrowing from anthropological insights, this period of Paulk’s life can be seen as the liminal, transitional, phase in a rite of passage through which he had to pass in order to arrive at a stable, reintegrated new state of being (Turner, 1969). Both the revelatory experience and the humiliation of “being run out of town” offered Paulk the symbolic vitality around which he could reorder his own sense of purpose.[37] The theme of rebirth after a fall became Earl's core identity, his "master status" (Becker, 1963) which re-organized the rest of his reality. The "harvester of wounded souls" image provided him strength

[37] The similarities between Earl Paulk’s experiences during this time and Turner’s description of those experiencing liminality in the midst of a tribal rite of passage are considerable. A person in a liminal state loses his or her previous status and social position, is humbled and stripped of power, is often removed physically from the social group, and may be ritually humiliated by the taunts of others. At the same time, those in liminality may benefit from being in the midst of this sacred space and in continuous contact with mystical powers, perhaps even receiving sacred instructions. Finally, as Turner states (1977:103), “The wisdom (mana) that is imparted in sacred liminality is not just an aggregation of words and sentences; it has ontological value, it refashions the very being of the neophyte.”

to continue in ministry. Thus, in response to his own psychological needs, Paulk fashioned a ministerial ideal in which he could shape his own uncertain identity and diminished self-worth. This identity was then confirmed by a mystical experience of God calling him back to the city of his defeat and humiliation.

The image of being restored after defeat has functioned as a powerful narrative not only for Earl Paulk and his family, but also for the church's ethos that unfolded over time.[38] Building a "place of refuge" for the "wounded and outcast of society" became a central focus of the church's missions and ministries. This perspective facilitated the construction of institutional structures which reinforced the identity. In turn, this embodied identity attracted and maintained the participation of a particular type of person, those who were defeated, hurting, and needy. Because of this, the "from defeat to restoration" scenario was replayed countless times, not only in Earl Paulk's recitation of his and the church's story, but even in the actual experiences of many members.

This narrative of overcoming defeat had solid scriptural grounding, as it paralleled the stories of many Old Testament figures, including Moses, David, and Solomon.[39] Even the rejection of Jesus by his hometown, as well as his crucifixion and resurrection, fit into this general theme. These comparisons were not lost on the symbol-astute Paulk. In a sermon in 1976 he reflected on this, "I was to go to what I call my cross, oddly enough at the age of thirty-three, the same age Jesus was."

The rebirth image, likewise, echoed certain powerful cultural themes evident in the rhetoric of both Atlanta and the South in general. Atlanta's own public image and vision for itself had long been connected to the story of the phoenix, the beautiful mythical bird which rises out of the ashes of its previous destruction. The city's devastation during the Civil War led to its 1887 adoption of this symbol for its official seal (Shavin & Galphin, 1985). This resurrection motif was, likewise, a powerful symbol for

---

[38] In many ways this rebirth motif became the central narrative around which the congregation shaped a sense of itself. Initially in its history as a church, this was a more powerful symbol of who they were than was the Phoenix vision, although the two rapidly became intertwined. See Hopewell's (1987) *Congregation* for an excellent discussion of the power of a church's narrative and its function in the life of the congregation.

[39] Early defeats and devastating losses are common themes in the stories of charismatic religious figures. Many famous religious leaders such as Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, Ellen White, John Wesley, and even Martin Luther can been seen as having difficult circumstances and defeats which they overcome in their rise to be great leaders. Researchers of contemporary new religious movements (Balch, 1982; Wallis, 1982a, 1986; Johnson, 1992) have noted the characteristics of self-doubt, insecurity, and the experience of defeat in the lives of many new religious leaders as well.

the entire Southern region (Tindall, 1964; Reed, 1983; Smith, 1985). The South's defeat in the Civil War resulted in the investment of considerable emotional energy and cultural capital in its efforts to “rise again” (Gaston, 1970; Reed, 1983, 1972; Smith, 1985).

This identity did not function entirely in a positive fashion for Paulk or the congregation, however. The indelible scars of the events which created this identity seem to have left Paulk with latent feelings of mild paranoia and martyrdom. As will be seen clearly in the following chapters, Paulk often portrayed himself and the church as battered, abused, and despised underdogs. Many times this perspective was merged with stories of his earlier persecution and torment as the son of a holiness preacher.

THE PERFECT POPULATION

The church property which the Paulks purchased was located in an unique and historic part of the city called Inman Park. It was developed in the 1880's by Joel Hurt as Atlanta's first "planned suburb." For over two decades it was the center of the city's social life. Along the tree-lined avenues stood large stately Victorian homes. One-time residents in this prestigious area included Asa G. Candler, the long-time president of the Coca-Cola company and former mayor of the city, Warren Candler, Bishop of the Methodist Church and a former president of Emory University, and Ernest Woodruff, the president of the Trust Company of Georgia (Shavin & Galphin, 1985; Bradley, 1980).

After the turn of the century most of the notable residents moved further north to Ansley Park and Buckhead, or east to the Druid Hills area. The community became a sedate middle class neighborhood. After World War II, however, the status of residents in Inman Park declined even further. Most of the middle class whites moved to suburbs further away from downtown. The beautiful old homes were divided into multifamily residences or stood empty and fell into disrepair. Large populations of Blacks took up occupancy only a few hundred yards west. [40] Many of the residents in the sixties and early seventies were poorer white laborers. A few blocks to the east was the Little Five Points area, which was

[40] African Americans comprise 93 and 99 percent of the total populations in the two adjoining census tracts which lay to West of the Inman Park area, whereas this area’s population included only two percent of African Americans (1960 US Census). Taeuber (1980) discusses the dynamics of residential segregation and white flight in considerable detail.

then and is to this day, the focal point for the city's hippies, beats, and other members of the youth counterculture. By 1960, when the Paulks and Mushegans purchased their homes and the church, the area ranked among the lowest rent districts in Atlanta. It also contained one of the largest and most concentrated populations of low-income whites in the city (Bradley, 1980:115). This area was overwhelmingly white (97.7%). Residents had an average of 9.5 years of education. Approximately ten percent owned their own homes, and the median family income was 4153 dollars (U.S. Census Bureau, 1960).

This was an ideal population for the newly established Gospel Harvester Tabernacle. Many of the local residents were, no doubt, familiar with a Pentecostal-like message. Quite a few were displaced mill workers from other rural Southern areas. Although the members of the Church of God were slowly climbing the socioeconomic ladder, the majority still resembled these residents (Crews, 1990). They could relate to the worship and theology of the church, and Earl Paulk could relate to them. At the same time, the harvester emphasis on outreach to hurting people also fit the situational context of its neighbors. They were marginal members of a rapidly changing city and social environment. Many of them had been uprooted from their family homes to come to the city in search of employment. They were disillusioned with their situation and were in the midst of instability, like Paulk himself. They were outcasts from the booming economic growth in the surrounding metropolitan area.

A TABERNACLED TIME OF CONGREGATIONAL TRANSITION

The early years of the ministry of Gospel Harvester Tabernacle focused primarily on addressing the physical and spiritual needs of its local constituents. Much of this early period, however, has been de-emphasized in the narrative history of the church. Except for a few incidents, the years between 1960 and 1972 constitute a lost decade. If Earl Paulk's personal journey out West and back could be characterized as a liminal period, so too can this phase in the church's history be portrayed as temporary and transitional, an organizational liminality.[41] This intown ministry was understood, perhaps then but certainly in 1986 when the biography was written, as a transitional phase for the church. The Tabernacle

[41] One interesting indication of this tentative nature of the organization was that the church was named "tabernacle." This was an obvious reference to the tent-like portable sanctuary used by the Israelites during their sojourn in the wilderness (Metford, 1983).

was envisioned as a way station, and a prelude to, or preparation for, the important ministry yet to come.[42]

One reason for the historical de-emphasis of this period of the church's history was that the congregational ethos later became oriented around particular revelatory moments, none of which occurred during this period. Both Paulk and the church are later portrayed as moving from one revelation of God's will and direction for the congregation to the next. Within this perspective, the 1960 vision was the first revelatory signpost and the 1973 exodus from the Inman Park area was the second. This spiritual interpretation has severed the lived reality of the congregation from the realization that its current situation was actually the product of a long developmental progression of ideas. This decade of social marginality and mundane ministry did not fit into the revelatory scheme, except as a side note when it related to the later story. Earl Paulk's status as well as the church's sense of itself eventually became completely spiritualized. Given this later ideological situation, it is not too surprising that every one of the charter members I interviewed overlooked this time period. From their perspective very little of significance took place during these years. However, from my archival research a number of the formative themes of the church, both ideologically and institutionally, can be seen developing during these years. The ideas taking shape during this transition period include the church's identity as a family ministry of "Harvesters" who address the fallen and struggle to rise out of the ashes of their defeat. In these years aspects of Earl Paulk's preaching style, worship forms, use of the media for ministry, and response to racial issues began to form around this powerful central identity. Finally, the decision in 1972 to follow the membership to the suburbs set the stage for the next act in the congregation's unfolding drama.

THE HARVESTER FAMILY

The twelve year history of the Gospel Harvester Tabernacle initiated the development of the identity of Paulk's ministry and established the organizational structures which support it. The early

---

[42] An indication of the insignificance of this period of church history can be seen in Earl Paulk’s biography. In this work approximately the same number of pages are used to describe both the ten week trip out West (Weeks, 1986:181-212) and the 13 year Gospel Harvester Tabernacle period (Weeks, 1986: 213-252).

visionary guidance, which "the harvesters" received in the scripture Matthew 9:36-38 prior to their trip westward, directed their ministry to be "dedicated to 'scattered sheep' wanting and needing spiritual restoration and direction" (Weeks, 1986:215). The identity of the church, as reflected in the language of its bulletins, appeared to focus specifically on verse 37 of that chapter in Matthew, "the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." This image is one of unbounded evangelism. Paulk's personal inclination, given his feelings of being rejected by the Church of God, was to turn no one away, regardless of their personal sins. Although an examination of the church's official statement of faith from that time does not overtly reflect this emphasis, it was clearly present in the church ethos as reflected in the weekly bulletins. The ideological conviction of fervent evangelism, to "harvest the scattered sheep who had no shepherd," was firmly established during this phase of the church's history.

If this harvester image provided the impetus for evangelism, the extended family, which later included Paulk's spiritual family as well, supplied the labor to implement that effort. Earl and Harry Mushegan began the church as a joint ministry. Don was employed as the youth pastor and choir director. Within two weeks Don's new wife Clariece Miller Paulk, would become church organist and secretary. Many of the family members taught Sunday School. During those early days Don, Clariece, and Norma created "The Harvester Trio" to provide the special music for the services. The first service, held on December 5, 1960, clearly reflected this pattern of familial involvement. A total of 39 people attended the service, with one third being members of the ministers' families.

The similarities between the family-operated Gospel Harvester Tabernacle and a family-owned business are striking. Paulk began with little capital, but armed with a unique, marketable product he started a small, but eventually successful entrepreneurial business (Drucker, 1985). The ownership and management of this family business were predominantly in his hands as the founder and, less directly, in the hands of other family member employees (Bork, 1986; Dyer, 1986). Likewise, the challenges yet to be faced by this family business, such as outsider participation, the need for expert advice, crisis management, and choosing a successor to the founder, are all issues which parallel the dynamics of similar organizations in the economic sphere (Bork, 1986).[43]

---

[43] Dyer (1986:59-79) has written a fascinating analysis of the role of the first generation in shaping the culture of a family business. He found in his study (1986:60) that the presence and character of a strong, charismatic founder was “one of the most significant factors in the development of the cultural configurations of the family firms.” His research from a organizational management perspective, as well

as that of House (1977), Kets de Vires (1977), Zaleznick (1977), Schein (1983), and Trice & Beyer (1985), discusses the common characteristics that many of the founders of family businesses tend to possess. Dyer (1986:60-61) summarizes this research to arrive at a listing of key attributes of charismatic founders. This list includes the founder: claiming "supernatural or other transcendental qualities," having novel or radical approach that satisfies the needs of followers, becoming "savior" for the followers, possessing self-confidence, dominance, and self-reliance, convincing himself and others in the moral rightness of his position, creating the impression of success and competence, being distrustful of other authorities, ideas, or advice, exercising "power in seemingly arbitrary and capricious ways, being secretive about his activities, and portraying himself and the organization as "larger than life." At this point in the story, Earl Paulk already exhibits several of these characteristics.

In this work, however, I adopt a more "micro-sociological/ interactional perspective in the discussion of Paulk's charismatic identity. This perspective follows from many of Wallis' writings (1982a, 1982b, 1986, 1993) and rests on Weber's (1968) implicit insight that charisma rests at least in part on the recognition of the followers. This idea downplays the image of a leader possessing a certain set of attributes which create his or her charismatic status. The development of Paulk's charismatic authority and the dynamics surrounding it are described in this work as being a socially constructed and negotiated interchange between Paulk, the core leadership, the membership, and the surrounding context. This perspective builds not just on Wallis but also on other sociological writing on charismatic leadership and the "prophet" such as Dow (1978), Barnes (1978), Camic (1980), Swatos (1981), Miyahara (1983), and Johnson (1992). A more complete discussion of this literature and the dynamics of charismatic leadership will be undertaken throughout the following chapters.

The church leadership was organized around the informal interactions among relatives, based on models of family seniority established early in the Paulk family. Earl Jr., as the first born male, became the head of their patriarchal clan. Harry Mushegan, however, was Earl's senior, although not a blood relative of the family. Apparently, a ministerial partnership did not suit either of these strong male egos. Although there is no written indication of friction, within a few months time Harry voluntarily took a temporary position as an assistant pastor at a local Assembly of God congregation. Then, in June of 1961, he and Myrtle "felt led of the Lord" to begin their own church, on the north side of the city, as a sister congregation to Paulk's (Weeks, 1986:235).

The remaining family members were not without role tensions and disagreements. From an early date, Don's comments indicate that there was considerable tension between him and his brother (personal interview; Weeks, 1986:256). Earl Paulk’s patriarchal authority apparently clashed with the personality of Don's new bride Clariece as well. Earl's biographer comments that Clariece grew up in a strongly matriarchal household, and herself was outspoken and opinionated (interestingly, this is similar to the description of Earl's mother). Weeks goes on to state that Clariece, "soon discovered that adjustments to married life included far more than getting along with easy-going Don" (1986:227). The biography never discloses how these tensions were resolved. Clariece, however, in a very brief amount of time came to oversee the worship component of the church which represented a significant portion of a slim budget.

Earl Paulk's later pattern for dealing with dissenting women in the church’s leadership can be seen in his dealings with Clariece. First, she was employed by the church as a staff person, thus making her both dependent and beholden to the organization and to Earl as senior minister. Second, she was given a stereotypical feminine and non-threatening role in the ministry. In Clariece's case, this role included worship and arts, church plays, and all musical performances. Through years of intense and intimate contact with Earl Paulk while planning worship services, the two eventually begin to share similar opinions and perspectives. In essence, her wishes became his wishes and vice versa. Likewise, many of her strongly held desires were satisfied, even at the expense of other programs. Yet at the same time, her efforts were occasionally the target of informal ridicule and jest. This pattern of interaction with women has been repeated numerous times with different women throughout the history of the church.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SUCCESS

The biography portrays the church's first few years as a difficult struggle for the Paulk family. Yet an underlying confidence of building a successful growing church can also be seen even during these early years. Don and Earl had to work full time as carpenters for a local builder to supplement the church income and pay the $30,000 mortgage. Earl also purchased a triplex as an investment during this time. The oldest church records show that by Easter 1961, after the first four months of operation, the church had approximately fifty in attendance, with a $179.02 deficit even after Earl and Harry contributed $1650 of their own money. However, by October 1961, at the first homecoming celebration called "Harvest Sunday," the church had increased to 145 members with 250 enrolled in Sunday School. This rapid expansion prompted the writer of the October 1, 1961 bulletin to exclaim, "the Tabernacle enjoys one of the fastest growing Sunday Schools in the city." At the Easter service the following year, Gospel Harvester had, according to the worship bulletin, 181 members with 317 persons attending the worship service and 228 in Sunday School. The church grew rapidly enough that by 1964 they were raising money to purchase a larger sanctuary two blocks away. By 1967 the offering ranged from 350 to 550 dollars per week and attendance was reported to be consistently in the hundreds.

This fervent desire for successful growth quickly became a feature of the church's identity. In a 1964 building fund drive pamphlet, the church leadership wrote that growth was essential to a healthy church. "Only a church that is expanding its ministry and outreach is fulfilling the commandment of Jesus....The church that stops growing starts dying." Components of successful growth were described as including personal sacrifice ("there is no cause in the world that deserves sacrifice more than the expanding of a church program to win and train people for God"), giving ("less than 20% of our membership tithe consistently"), being in perfect unity ("God will not bless a divided people.... Christian love demands oneness of purpose"), bringing in others, and having a "friendly" openness to all persons ("Churches are remembered by how friendly they are. This is the best way to help your church grow."). Each of these characteristics continued to be emphasized throughout the history of the congregation.

Two other specific factors were tied to the success and strength of the church. First, the booklet made the congregation's health, spiritual maturity, and success directly dependent on the spirituality of its members. "No church is more spiritual than its people. Individual and group consecration are necessary to have a spiritual church," stated the booklet author. The spiritual lives of members were defined as

including several personal disciplines such as prayer, fasting, Bible reading, and giving. This definition of spirituality, however, also included considerable congregational commitment, “group consecration,” such as regular attendance, involvement in activities, and personal individual responsibility for the state of the church. The booklet even offered a measuring rod of one's involvement -- "Ask yourself the question, 'If every church member were just like me, what kind of a church would my church be?'"

A second, and perhaps the most important, ingredient of this success was that the congregation was taught to perceive the calling and vision of the church as extra-ordinary. Much as Earl Paulk's sense of his own destiny, many comments in the early history of the church attest to the "exceptional" nature of the congregational self-image.[44] The earliest Harvest Sunday bulletin of October 1, 1961 promotes this idea.

We have been organized as a church for only 7 months. God has done one miracle after another for us.... Have you ever known a church to grow with such great strides....The blessings of God are more than we could have believed. We will continue to grow with this same pace and one day be one of the largest and most effective churches in the South. **I REALLY BELIEVE THIS**! (their emphasis)

Comments from the 1964 growth pamphlet, such as "No cause as great as ours can reach its goals without full and complete cooperation from church officials, members and friends," and "We need more space NOW, if we are to accomplish the work God has called us to do," further echo this theme. These comments when combined with the early influences to follow in his father's footsteps and his "golden boy" status in the Church of God attest to the fact that Paulk undoubtedly understood his call and destiny to be more than just the pastor "a little church by the side of the road." Along with Paulk's own sense of destiny and the perception of the congregation as exceptional, the members were also encouraged to become a active part of this extraordinary vision. As the October 1, 1961 church bulletin counseled, "If you have not felt the spirit of enthusiasm, you are not a full-fledged harvester.... A true harvester for God is ready and willing to move forward with God. Time is short. We must be diligent.” Becoming a "full-fledged harvester," implied a special membership status in the congregation. Even at this early point in the church’s history, a distinct category had already been established for those fully

[44] A central component of the “ideal-type” genuine charismatic for Weber (1968:246) was to be a visionary, one who proclaimed to have received a new revelation of religious insight .

involved in the life of the church.

INSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCE

Another characteristic of the church which took shape and became firmly entrenched in the congregational ethos during this time was its independent, nondenominational stance. This atmosphere began, no doubt, in response to the sense of abandonment and rejection Paulk felt in relation to the Church of God. Earl Paulk's involvement with the Church of God continued, however, while he established his fledgling independent ministry. Upon leaving Hemphill, Earl Jr. had only resigned his pastorate; he was still an ordained member of the denomination. Within a month of his return to Atlanta, he discussed the possibility of "reestablishing credibility within the ranks of the denomination" with its General Overseer, James Cross (Weeks, 1986:222). Although he received support and encouragement from the General Overseer, the denomination's structures and rules for dealing with wayward ministers were a far less sympathetic or flexible. The denomination's rules would have required that Earl cease preaching for a certain time period, have his case reviewed by a board of clergy for "unbecoming conduct with the opposite sex," and then have his license revoked forever if found guilty of adultery (Minutes of 45th General Assembly, 1954:232-33). Weeks reported Earl Paulk's response to the Overseer as, "I have always been a man under authority. I'll go anywhere to minister under your authority, but I must preach. My call to the ministry transcends my call to this denomination or to you" (1986:222). He was willing to be a part of the denomination as long as it played by his rules, but he would not submit to its authority over him if it meant being forbidden to preach. He saw it as a decision between "obeying God or man" (Weeks, 1986:223). After this visit to the General Overseer, the denomination officially severed ties with Earl Paulk, Jr., the son of one of its most influential leaders.

This encounter, likewise, severed any remaining emotional connection Earl Paulk had to the denomination of his youth. The handling of his case by the Church of God intensified Earl's growing resentment of the denomination's bureaucratic structures, its political backbiting, and its inflexible rules in dealing with errant members. Earl Paulk Jr. became critical of the Church of God and its commitment to "out-dated holiness codes." This experience left him with the firm resolution that large denominational organizations could never be flexible enough to remain relevant to dynamic shifts in contemporary

society.[45] Paulk abhorred bureaucracy. He wrote, "[T]he churches machinery is so complicated and big until workers spend their time oiling the machinery instead of producing; reporting instead of doing something worthy of reporting" [sic] (In Service Training Program Booklet, n.d.). Independence did not mean complete isolation or total withdrawal from society for the church, as is typical of many sectarian groups. At the same time, however, the church did maintain a low profile for the most part. John Bridges recalled that the church "sort of stayed in our shell during those years." Don Paulk confirmed this insular posture in his reflections concerning this period, "Well, we were so hurt we didn't [go out and find out what was going on in the religious world, as another minister John Mears had suggested]. We just sat there for years." One definite result of this independent attitude was that Paulk determined to "do our own thing, our own way" (personal interview). This attitude was clearly reflected in a comment he made many years later to a pastor, "we are never going to do anything like other churches do it, just get that into your mind."

PREACHING REBIRTH -- FALLEN BUT FORGIVEN

During these early years of the church's history, not only did its minister have to contend psychologically and spiritually with being divorced from his home denomination, but he had moved back into the midst of those who were spreading rumors and accusations about him. Paulk's biographer relates that he struggled to forgive the numerous visitors who came seeking reconciliation and compassion, as well as those who came to challenge him (Weeks, 1986: 232-34). In response, he turned the entire situation into a lesson about God's forgiveness. These continuing "painful circumstances" became the vehicle through which God was redirecting his ministry "for higher purposes" (Weeks, 1986:234). Although Weeks portrays Earl Paulk as having reconciled himself with the incident, it continued to shape the rhetoric of his ministry. As stated above, Paulk's return to the place where he had fallen, only to rise again successfully, contributed to the developing rebirth motif in the congregation.

[45] Research on other leaders of new religious movements also show an attitude of contempt of institutional religious organizations (Wallis, 1982; Johnson, 1992). In part, this anti-organizational bent in these figures is to be expected since theirs is often a prophetic message of challenge to existing beliefs and customs.

Between 1960 and 1970 Earl preached a series of sermons and Sunday school lessons focused on prominent figures in the Old Testament. These lessons, accessible to me only in a statement outline format, show how this theme of rebirth was beginning to take shape. [46] The content of these outlines exemplify Paulk's commitment to the idea that God takes fallen people, restores them, and then eventually gives them a valued place in religious history. Over forty percent of the outlines I examined echoed versions of this theme. They illustrate Paulk's use of the rebirth theme in his early preaching. However, before examining these comments it is essential to introduce a key feature of Earl Paulk's style of preaching.

A Key to Everything -- Paulk's Allegorical Sermons

Paulk's seemingly straightforward stories of the fall and redemption of various Biblical characters offer evidence of the most distinctive, and revealing characteristic of his preaching. In his sermons, Earl Paulk frequently uses an allegorical or metaphorical style of preaching.[47] An awareness of this characteristic in his preaching is the key to understanding how he communicates with his parishioners. Paulk's sermons must be viewed in light of the history and the social context of the congregation. The more one is familiar with the historical context and its situational details, the more that person can glean the "latent message" within the blatant sermon content. One, or many, subtexts might be delivered simultaneously to specific listeners. These messages are perceived only by those who know the

---

[46]The outlines Paulk wrote were printed and marketed to other ministers around the country for $1.00 a month (Weeks, 1986:237). They were distributed anonymously under the authorship of "Mr. Outline." Each outline contained possible sermon titles, a paragraph of introduction, several sermon points with scripture references, and a concluding paragraph. These were later collected and bound in booklet form under the title of "The Word In Life." I was able to examine 3 of the 8 advertised booklets of sermons. In addition to these I had access to 68 adult/young adult and 17 Elementary/Junior High outlines of Sunday School lessons from this twelve year time period.

[47] This type of preaching has historical precedents in the early Christian church. Church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Jerome, and possibly Origen used a similar preaching format (Dawson, 1992). This allegorisation communicated different levels of Biblical truth to persons of varying spiritual development at the same time in the same sermon or commentary. This allegorical method was often employed by Clement of Alexandria. A quote from Clement's *Stromata* (4.2) describes this approach,

"Let our reminiscences, as we have often said, for the sake of those reading them unrestrainedly or inexperiencedly, be spread out variegatedly, as their name implies, passing continually from one matter to another, hinting at one thing while demonstrating another.... The quilts of reminiscences therefore contribute to the expression of the truth for the person who is able to seek with reason."

A similar style of communication was used by African American slaves to convey in their sermons and spirituals a subversive or hidden message (Raboteau, 1980)

situation, who are alert to a particular innuendo, or who can correctly interpret the allegory. To any other listener these subtexts appear as ordinary, although at times confusing, parts of the sermon.[48] Therefore, in order to understand the full implications of Paulk's sermons for the church membership, the contextual matrix of his life in relation to the activities of congregational members must be taken into account in as great a detail as possible.

By employing this allegorical method Paulk was able to "hint at higher truths" for the inner circle while still meeting the spiritual needs of the general congregation. Yet, if challenged about the implications of a statement, he could always retort that he was being quoted out of context, and meant the comment to refer specifically to the scriptural text, not to any other "hidden" interpretation. From within this metaphorical and contextual interpretative frame, sermons concerning the redemption of fallen Biblical characters are almost more illustrative of Earl Paulk's state of mind and his preaching style, as well as the developing congregational atmosphere, than they are instructive regarding the Biblical figures. Although one could be accused of "reading into the text" in order to get a latent message from specific quotes; nevertheless, given the context in which these comments were made these possible alternative interpretations seem quite plausible and reasonable.

In many of these sermon outlines related to important Biblical figures, certain quotes have direct relevancy to Paulk's situation. Paulk noted of Gideon, perhaps in reference to his own experiences, that he, "showed great wisdom, for it is so easy for great leaders to become lifted up by their own importance and devalue the power of God." His reflections on Jacob's life seem to fit his own experiences even more closely. Paulk commented, "...[Jacob's] life has proved that even though we are human and subject to err, God is long-suffering...." In the case of Moses, he noted that Moses' life "serves as an example to us that God can turn our obstacles into stepping stones to accomplish his purpose in our lives." His reflection on the story of Deborah demonstrates his use the rebirth theme. He commented, "This story may be applied to the history of mankind. It runs in some kind of cycle. From defeat to humility, from

[48] Paulk often used this method, especially in his later sermons, to discuss conflictive, volatile, and sensitive issues from the pulpit. He relied on analogy and innuendo to convey his message to those who know all the contextual facts, those who "have ears to hear." I spent several years being puzzled over certain of Paulk's comments until I realized his penchant for this type of preaching. Fortunately, I wrote down his comments even though I didn't fully comprehend the contextual meaning at the time. Later, after I knew more about both his method and the church's history, I was able to go back to my notes and identify the latent references which had previously eluded me.

humility to exaltation, from exaltation to self-dependency and then back to defeat again."

It is, however, in Earl Paulk's discussion of the life of Joseph that he appears to be the most specific in insinuating parallels to his own life. This allegorical comparison with Joseph, as well as with two other stories (that of Samson with Delilah and of David with Bathsheba), has been used and retold continually throughout the history of his ministry. Paulk spoke about Joseph in one of his sermon outlines.

Joseph was an ordained leader of men. His life is a story of jealousy by his brothers, innocent imprisonment, a leadership not only of his own family, but leadership of Egypt.... We shall see how the hand of God is present, even when we cannot see it.... Satan trapped Joseph through the wife of Potiphar, who falsely accused him of improper conduct.... In many ways, he is a type of Christ. He is favored of God, yet despised of men. He is falsely accused, as was Christ, and suffers unjustly. Finally, his mission is accomplished because he maintains his integrity with God. He becomes a deliverer for the very people that have unjustly accused and mistreated him.

These brief quotes offer some evidence of Paulk's allegorical preaching style. It is impossible to overlook the scriptural parallels he drew to his own life experiences. Certainly, those in his congregation who knew of the recent events with Hemphill Church of God could not help but hear the implicit message in these comments. In doing this, Earl reminded these knowledgeable members of his interpretation of the earlier events. His use of the precedents set by great Biblical figures elevated his oppressed status. The implicit message was that Earl Paulk, like Moses, David, Joseph, and even Jesus, could endure the present suffering and would eventually be triumphant.

This allegorical method would have no relevance or power, however, if it fell on "deaf ears." The congregation had to have an intimate awareness of and relationship with both Paulk's and the church's history. This type of preaching created an implicit caste system in the congregation based on one's "insider" knowledge of the relevant events of the church. It also functioned as a reward for those who achieved a certain level of commitment. They were privy to other insider information which enriched the meaning of Paulk's sermons and jokes, as well as congregational gossip.[49]

---

[49] Heilman (1973:152,196) makes a similar observation in his study of a synagogue in relation to congregational jokes and gossip. Those who understood the punch line or perceived the import of a certain piece of gossip were insiders and had greater social status within the community. He also argues that, similar to Paulk's allegorical preaching, jokes at this synagogue are situationally interpreted. The

humor is not contained in the words but rather in the relationship one has with the speaker. Both Paulk's sermons and Heilman's jokes, "are situational; they depend on one's recognizing all the dimensions of the situation and of its participants (1973:201).

The members' experiences had to resonate with Earl's many messages based on the theme of unjust persecution, rebirth, and eventual success in order to perceive the full meaning of these comments. Those "aware" members could, and did, draw strength from this resurrection motif. Not only did it echo the stories of great Biblical characters and Jesus' life, but it helped to order their lives. This message offered members a model in which to interpret their own everyday experiences. It sacralized their struggles, failures, and marginal social status. It not only offered a model for their lives, but it also presented them with a vision of hope and the promise of future triumph. The church's rituals, both the great Protestant ritual of preaching and the sacrament of communion, embodied this interpretative and prescriptive motif, even as it tapped into the regional cultural ethos of the South's rising again and Atlanta's phoenix myth. Perhaps most importantly, Earl Paulk, their spiritual leader and friend, was a living example of this rebirth theme being fulfilled. Members could draw strength and inspiration from his example. Likewise, they could form an emotional bond with him beyond that of just pastor. Finally, they could participate in the restoration, the divine rebirth, of their pastor and the congregation by engaging in diligent efforts to ensure that the church would become successful.

The Forcefully Spoken Word

Another of the most distinctive, and consistent, aspects of Paulk's sermons was his style of sermon presentation. Current and former members I interviewed characterize this preaching style as very authoritative and forceful. An even earlier description from the official history of Church of God in Georgia described him while at Hemphill as preaching with a "powerful pulpit manner" (Jones & Carver, 1986). One member from the Gospel Harvester period suggested that Paulk's preaching was "real authoritarian...and it turned off a lot of people." The earliest taped services I listened to from 1974 attest to Paulk's intense, challenging, and strong verbal preaching style from the pulpit.[50]

This type of preaching became even more intensified as Paulk's organizational power and congregational authority increased. His own sense of a special calling and unique vision of his ministry

---

[50] This type of authoritative, forceful preaching was a stereotypical characteristic of Southern Evangelical preaching, perhaps more evident in novels, a la Elmer Gantry, than in reality. Nevertheless, the southern minister has a powerful image as a "skillful exhorter," a regional defender, a morally upright person, and as an authority figure who commands reverence and respect (Long, 1981).

reinforced willingness to preach in a forceful and prophetic manner. In an early sermon outline on the Holy Spirit he highlighted his spiritual calling while placing it over and against the authority of the denominational bureaucracy. He wrote in one outline, "...the Holy Spirit selected leadership for the early church as he does for us today... There is a grave danger in substituting organization, programs, and committees for SPIRIT-CALLED leadership in the church on all levels." (his emphasis). In fact, the church bylaws state that the pastor had complete freedom in spiritual things as they related to the pulpit ministry and counseling. The majority of Paulk's early sermons, although delivered forcefully and with complete freedom, were within the Church of God tradition and orthodox by the denomination's theological standards.[51]

LIFE AT GOSPEL HARVESTER

---

[51] Many of the sermon outlines I examined were essentially verbatim outlines of the chapters from his earlier book, *Your Pentecostal Neighbor*. The similarities are clearest in issues 1,3, and 4 of "The Word In Life" Bible study outline series when compared to pages 201ff. and 182-83 of *Your Pentecostal Neighbor* . The earliest record of a declaration of faith, dating from approximately 1965, indicates that the church's professed beliefs were very similar to those of the Church of God. This faith declaration includes doctrinal statements on divine healing, a pre-millennial second coming of Jesus, spirit baptism, and sanctification. Interestingly, this statement of faith **did not** include a central Church of God ritual of **humility**, that of foot washing. At the same time, though, with Paulk's use of the allegorical method and set in the context of his own life experiences, these orthodox sermons and beliefs were often applied extra-canonically.

The formal organization of the church during this period, judging from numerous interviews and documents, appeared to temper somewhat Paulk's power from the pulpit as well as the number of family members in leadership.[52] An official board of elected elders and deacons had joint authority with the pastor over the administrative decisions of the church. A quarterly congregational meeting was held to decide democratically all issues of church business. Within this structure were layers of leadership related to the Sunday School, the youth ministry, a "ladies service group," and a "men's fellowship." This was a typical congregational style of organization, similar to the forms of many local Church of God congregations (Conn, 1977). The controlling effects of Paulk's authoritative voice from the pulpit and the considerable familial involvement, then, were somewhat tempered by the multiple layered structure of church leadership during this time.

The worship service itself, following the Sunday school time, was patterned after a typical Pentecostal format except that it was considerably more reserved emotionally.[53] One bulletin from 1964 implies this, "The work of God demands order and organization. Freedom in spirit and worship do not destroy the need for excellent organization...." Weeks (1986:245-46) describes the worship as,

...clearly Pentecostal-flavored, yet the worship and preaching were notably more reserved than old line, shoutin' holiness churches. This charismatic church pulsated without dramatic emotionalism--unless, of course, an emotional response became the mood the Holy Spirit prompted for a particular service. People from every denomination found familiar as well as something new whenever they visited this church.

According to the biography, Clariece's influence was felt in the worship services. She was a concert pianist who appreciated many musical forms and continually attempted to interject more classical pieces into the worship service. Generally, however, the hymns were traditional Pentecostal refrains, intentionally chosen to echo the theme of the sermon (Weeks, 1986:247). One telling sign of Clariece's

---

[52] The family based leadership during this time may be greater than the official documents indicate. Weeks (1986:252-63) details the full extent of involvement in the church by family members, offspring, and distant relatives. She even relates that the church was seen by outsiders and "their most vehement critics" as a "family operation" (252).

[53] Crews (1990:91,151) notes that by the 1960's many urban Church of God congregations had diminished the expressivism of their worship services to a great extent.

considerable influence was that within the first four months of the church's existence one tenth of the entire church income was spent on a grand piano. By 1964, the congregation was again raising money to buy an organ and a new piano. As one 1964 bulletin stated, "...this will cost. God's work demands the best. Music is vital to the worship of God."

The social life of the church was essentially oriented around Sunday morning: Sunday school, the worship service, and the evening prayer meeting. There was also a Tuesday, then later Wednesday, Bible study. The Ladies Auxiliary, which met monthly, offered a social and spiritual outlet for the women of the church, as did its correlate, the Men's Fellowship. Don and Clariece led a ministry for the young couples in the church. No reference was ever found in the church bulletins to any organized recreational or social activities.

Laboring in the Field -- Outreach to the Community

From very early in the congregation's history the idea of the church as an outreach for the dispossessed and hurting members of society was instrumental in shaping ministry. Earl Paulk expressed strong disagreement with the somewhat isolationist stance of the Church of God toward the world.[54] According to one member at the time, Earl often preached that the church must relate to the world in a "personalist transformative mode" rather than in an "isolationist withdrawal mode."[55] Over the years Paulk has retained this inclination toward personal avenues of social change rather than either complete withdrawal or systemic structural change.

This same member recalled Paulk's emphasis on transformation. He commented, "You could hear in his sermons those things...transforming the world but not in a political context....It had much more to do with personal lives. As we Christians relate to the world." This person, referred to here as David

---

[54] This Church of God tendency toward rejecting the "things of the world" was also beginning to moderate by the sixties, in personal morality (Crews, 1990:44-65), in higher education (Crews, 1990:142-43), in ecumenicism (Crews, 1990:148-51,160), and in political activism (Crews, 1990:16-61).

[55] Both the author of this observation and Earl Paulk were in all likelihood exposed to H. Richard Neibuhr's book, *Christ and Culture* (1951), while in seminary at Candler School of Theology. Much of Paulk's language and later thinking about the role of the church in the world parallels Neibuhr's "Christ transforming culture" category. Paulk's stance also points to his movement away from the sectarian approach of the older generations of leaders in the Church of God and toward a more assimilationist, denominational approach of the younger generation of leaders (Crews,1990:139).

Adams, was working on a PhD in Christian ethics in the sixties. He was one of several highly educated, socially responsible, and somewhat idealistic young adults attracted to the church during this time. He had a strong commitment to serve the Inman Park/ Little Five Points transient hippie community and found the Gospel Harvester leadership receptive to this effort. It was this willingness of Paulk and the church to get involved in the community that initially attracted him. He also remembered fondly, although he had not been to the church in over 15 years, how warm and engaging Earl Paulk had been to him.

The church's outreach extended almost exclusively to those in the immediate community, with much of this ministry being provided by Earl, Don, and a few others such as David. Many of the residents in the neighborhood were impoverished and needy. The church offered them food and clothing. This outreach, however, was not by way of organized social ministries. Rather, "outreach" was most often portrayed as the unconditional acceptance of visitors and a loving integration of them into the fellowship. During this time the church leadership encouraged the congregation to exhibit considerable "friendliness." From all indications this call to godly love and kindness had as a desired byproduct that of growth and evangelism. One bulletin, printed during a push to gather in more members, clearly announced their intentions.

Church[es] are remembered by **HOW FRIENDLY THEY ARE**. This is the best way to help your church grow.... Visitors are the lifeline to the **GROWTH** of the church. How he enjoys the service, is welcomed, and invited back has a tremendous influence on him. This is the work of **ALL** church members and friends. Remember that "**FRIENDLINESS IS CONTAGIOUS**." (Their emphasis)

Apparently this friendliness was attractive, especially to the "tuned-out" hippies of the Inman Park/ Little Five Points area. Many of them came to the church not only for sustenance but also for acceptance.[56] Paulk's biographer comments that Earl became like a "father" to a group of them (Weeks, 1986:250).

He was the first one they called from jail or when they were in any kind of trouble. Earl easily and

[56] This outreach to the hippies was very similar to many other coffee-house, "crash pad" type missions established throughout the country in the 1960's and 1970's (Warner, 1988; Jorstad, 1972; Pederson, 1971). Many of the largest and most influential megachurches such as Vineyard, Harvest, and Horizon Christian Fellowships, and Calvary Chapel all began or grew to be successful from similar ministries to wayward hippies (Wooding, 1993; Miller, 1993; Quebedeaux, 1983)

quickly formed a trusting rapport with youth--even rebellious runaways and social dissidents--because he was one preache
whether they liked it or not.

This informal ministry to the displaced youth of the sixties was known around the city. Groups of Candler School of Theology students even visited the church as part of their ministerial training. David reflected on why he thought this ministry to the hippies was successful.

[Paulk] made it clear that here was a place where people were welcome whole-heartedly regardless of their station in life.... If you walked into that church you definitely had the feeling that anybody and everybody was welcome there. People would walk in there with beards and long hair, scrubby looks and sandals and just worship to beat the band. And nobody seemed to be bothered by that, they all seemed welcome.

In the late 1960's Earl, Don, and Clariece participated in another form of community ministry. They joined the local "Bass Community Council," a newly formed civic organization dedicated to "creating community." Its efforts included enhancing the youth recreation facilities, promoting community pride, and later in coordinating the restoration of the historic homes in the Inman Park area. Once again this outreach effort was seen as evangelistic in nature, as a way to plant the seeds of the gospel message in the secular soil of the community organization (Weeks, 1986:252).

One glance at the budget in those early days would identify another central aspect of the church's ministry. This was the outreach made possible through media promotion and publicity. Paulk's years at Hemphill Avenue Church of God convinced him that the media of radio and television were ideal evangelistic tools. In the first four months of operation, Gospel Harvester Tabernacle spent more on radio air time than it did on all the pastors' salaries combined. This commitment can be seen as continuing to the present. The medium of radio and television offered exposure, self-promotion, and legitimation that the non-denominational church needed. At the same time, these evangelistic tools shaped and modified the development of the church and its ministry.

Civil Rights Involvement

The decade of the sixties was perhaps the most turbulent in regards to race relations. In August

1963, 200,000 people gathered in Washington D.C. to protest racial inequities. While there they heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the well-known Atlanta native, deliver his "I have a dream" speech. The following year the Civil Rights Act took effect and King received the Nobel Peace prize, but the tensions did not cease. The riots and protests continued for many more years. In Atlanta the situation was similar. Early in the decade the issue of school integration prompted many sit-ins, some of which became violent. Churches, businesses, and restaurants were picketed. Both blacks and whites, including members of the clergy, were jailed for their involvement. In 1966, while trying to calm an angry crowd, Atlanta's mayor, Ivan Allen, was injured. When Martin King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968, however, a surprisingly peaceful march as a part of the funeral took place in the city. Within five years after King's death, Atlanta had its first black mayor and an African American majority on the city council. It was clear that the city was beginning to resolve some of its racial tensions.[57]

In this context, Earl Paulk expressed an openness to African Americans, and an active emphasis on integration and racial equality. According to his biographer (Weeks, 1986:238), he became a friend of the King family, especially Martin King, Senior. He served on two committees of clergy and business leaders attempting to address the racial problems of the city. He and Don even picketed a grocery chain which sold inferior food to residents of a depressed area of the city near their church.

Not all Paulk's racial involvement took place outside his congregation, either. The issue divided his church as well. A number of members left when Earl invited some African American students from Atlanta University to the church. Because of his "liberal" stance, the church was threatened with violence. According to his biography, on one occasion an angry mob gathered outside the church during a service (Weeks, 1986:239-41). After Paulk talked with them, they dispersed without incident. He received threatening and harassing phone calls. At one point, shots were fired at the church. Another time, Weeks reports in the biography, a fire bomb was thrown on the porch of Paulk's home but it did not ignite (1986:252). Earl's engagement in the civil rights struggle, however, did not noticeably increase attendance by blacks who lived only a few blocks away. By all accounts, although a few African Americans visited sporadically, the overwhelming major of members were white.

Paulk's involvement in civil rights issues seldom took the form of political critique or radical

---

[57] There are many authors, such as Garrow (1989), Martin (1987), Shavin & Galphin (1985), and Orfield & Ashkinaze (1991) who address the history of race relations and the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta.

challenges to existing social structures. The place of the church in society, according to Paulk was to change individuals by the grace of God (personal interview). This stance was exemplified in an article from the *Atlanta Journal* (Speed, 1968). The newspaper reported on the actions of thirty clergy from the Atlanta Christian Council dedicated to seeking outlets for helping the city's poor. Paulk, as a member of that group, was quoted as saying, "We want to see action and put our energies to work immediately" (Speed, 1968). He continued by questioning what the clergy had done to "help domestics get decent paying jobs" or to create "summer recreational programs" (Speed, 1968). The tone of this article, however, was not to revitalize governmental agencies or alter political policy making. Rather the group focused on what could be done within the local congregation. In many ways, Paulk has maintained this personalist and congregational-based approach to racial issues throughout his ministry.

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

One other event during this liminal period of the congregation's history dramatically effected the church's future. This was the decision to leave Inman Park. Beginning around 1970 a number of church members began to look for suburban property to buy in order to build a larger church building. This action was led by a few key members involved in real estate at the time, although there seemed to be a general consensus in favor of the move. The story of how the church arrived at the decision to move and where to relocate is somewhat disputed. A number of members recall a heated debate, with passionate discussions on both sides, ending with a near unanimous affirmative vote to move. Others reported, like one long time church member, "Through prayer and fasting Pastor Paulk knew that it was time for us to move." His biography records the event in yet another manner (Weeks, 1986:264).

To say that Earl had a strong spiritual leading away from Inman Park would be erroneous. He listened openly to the discussions, weighed the various recommendations, and waited for God to speak a sure word to him.

By whatever manner the decision was made, most members from that time agreed a move was imminent. The motivation for the move may be attributed to a number of reasons. John Bridges, the former Hemphill member who wrote Paulk in Arizona and was now a solid family man employed as an accountant and a church deacon, recalled that worship attendance was on a decline in the late 60's,

down to approximately 100. He commented, "That was one of the reasons they wanted to move. A lot of the people that they had ministered to had moved well out from the area and they were dropping off. They would drive in for a while and then quit coming."

The citywide patterns of migration from the urban areas to the newer suburbs confirm this general trend. From 1955 to 1973 three very large shopping center complexes were constructed within a few miles of the six acres the church bought in April of 1971 (Dent, 1980:.80-84). The migration to the suburbs was hastened by the increased popularity of the automobile and an emphasis on private home ownership which occurred after WWII. Suburban DeKalb County grew from 256.7 thousand in 1960 to 449.5 thousand in 1973, when the church began occupying their new building (Dent, 1980:80). The population of the city of Atlanta during that same period dropped from 487.4 to 479.9 thousands (Dent, 1980:80-84). The city's employment rate fell by 6 percent during the period from 1970 to 1975. At the same time, the unemployment rates for the Central City averaged 11.7 percent compared to the 9.0 percent of the surrounding counties (Gruber, 1960:61). When one examines employment rates in what are typical sources of employment for less skilled workers such as those residing in the Inman Park area, the manufacturing and retail sectors, declines of 21 percent and 17 percent respectively show a more critical development than the overall 6 percent decrease might indicate (Gruber, 1960:62).

The resident complexion of Inman Park itself was radically altered by these shifts. Many of the lower middle class families moved to the newly created jobs in the suburbs. In their place came a group of people who were a world apart from the previous residents and from the composition of the church at the time. The "urban pioneers" who moved back to the central city were young, well-educated, secular professionals. A study of those who moved into the Virginia-Highlands neighborhood bordering Inman Park to the north from 1970 to 1973 showed that 80 percent were between the ages of 30 and 39, 87 percent had some college education, 62 percent were college graduates, 69 percent of those employed had professional or managerial positions, and over 50 percent had moved from Atlanta from other cities, often outside the South (McConnell, 1980:143-146). These were not the type of persons drawn to conservative Pentecostal religion. This group was also somewhat less susceptible to the blossoming Charismatic movement because of their education, income, and secularized world view. Earl Paulk commented, in a 1984 historical article in the church's newspaper, that these new residents were "not interested in religion...but only in restoring and revitalizing their homes."

The church's move then can be seen as an effort to go to where the most constituents were. They had to move to the suburbs if they were to serve their clientele. Pastor Don reflected this sentiment in his recollection of how the process of selecting a church site took place. He recalled that the leadership engaged in a systematic process of charting on a map where their members resided and then deciding to relocate to the area with the largest concentration of persons. Whatever the reasons for the move, it definitely marked an end to a distinctive period in the church's history.

This twelve year period was cast as a liminal phase in the history both of Earl Paulk and of the young congregation. Within this transitional time, many patterns of interaction and organizational dynamics, significant in later years, have their roots. Even though these years were de-emphasized in the minds of many members, these patterns and dynamics became integrated into the developing character of the congregation. These dynamics included an evangelistic embrace of societal outcasts, the minister - member relationship being based on emotional and familial ties, an acceptance of Earl Paulk's forceful and allegorical preaching, and a stance in support of racial integration. Several of the organizational traits from this time were the funding of quality artistic performances for worship, a willingness to utilize the media in self-promotion, the church being organized and run as a family business, and the intentional planning for, and expectation of, sustained growth. These characteristics are the ones which are shared by many megachurches. As will be seen, the traits of evangelistic fervor to a target audience, quality preaching and worship, a clear biblical and social stance, self-promotion, and expectation of growth are common traits among these very large churches (Vaughan, 1993; Schaller, 1992,1990).

The most critical congregational characteristic to have its origin in this period, however, was the intertwined identities of the church and its founder, Earl Paulk Junior. The formation of this independent nondenominational congregation upon a distinctive harvester vision given by God to Earl Paulk alone was the most significant event in the church's history. The congregational identity which was produced was based solely on Paulk and his visionary revelation. The story of the church, which at times borders on mythic narrative, merged the destinies of Earl Paulk and the membership. It was "his" church and the members were "his" people. This church was never conceptualized as an ordinary congregation, but as one which had a divine calling and a promising future with Paulk as the center.

The central symbol of this period, that of being "Harvesters," embodied this young church's

developing identity and character. The Biblical grounding of their foundational scriptural passage confirmed the need for a strong shepherd to care for his lost and confused flock. It also reinforced an apocalyptic sense of spiritual seriousness in ministry since the harvest time was at hand. This urgent commission to be laborers encouraged a fervent zeal for evangelism since the fields were ripe for harvest. This vision of outreach and restoration of the outcast, spawned from Paulk's own hurt and devastation, became the guiding image and ideal trajectory which the church would strive to embody. In order for the congregation to reach its goal and reap this harvest, however, they had to relocate to a more fertile suburban field.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LITTLE CHURCH BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD (1973-1976)

As Earl walked on the six-acre tract of land feeling pressed for a definite decision concerning the purchase, he asked God if this were the "promised land" for their church. Earl knelt down beside a little pine tree. As he broke off a branch, the Spirit of the Lord spoke distinctly to Earl's spirit that this was the place where He was leading the ministry. God promised him again that this church would minister to the world. Once he had definite assurance from God, Earl urged the congregation to make preparations to move....

(Weeks, 1986:265-66)

The New Years celebration in 1973 brought about many changes for the church now approaching its teen years. As is often the case following a rite of passage, coming out of a liminal period into one of social reintegration, a new name is bestowed which more adequately reflects one's unique identity in the world. This was true for Gospel Harvester Tabernacle as well. After having purchased six acres of land in the rapidly growing, suburban, Chapel Hill subdivision of South DeKalb County in 1972, the members built a church with their own labor. This wood and stone structure was given the name of the place upon which it had planted roots -- "Chapel Hill." To this title was added the core visionary identification of "Harvester." Finally, the building was called a "Church," denoting permanence and an official status, rather than the temporary "Tabernacle" the congregation had previously occupied.

Yet, comments made in the first worship bulletin, dated January 28, 1973, of the still incomplete Chapel Hill Harvester Church indicated that the leadership had their sights set higher than this structure. The writer of this bulletin, either Earl, Don or Clariece, reflected on the new building, "If I had my own personal way, we would have built about a three million dollar Gothic Cathedral with a $500,000 pipe organ. But then you would have sent me packing!" Even amid the celebration of the new church's official opening, laments of unfulfilled dreams and aspirations could be heard. These comments also foreshadowed the eventual construction of the 7700 seat "Cathedral of the Holy Spirit" still eighteen years in the future.

This move marked a new beginning for the congregation, as the name change symbolized. The previous Gospel Harvester Tabernacle had grown to its full potential and then watched its membership

slip off into the suburbs. The decision to follow the migration of members to the suburban outlying areas was a crucial one in order for this congregation to fulfill its sense of destiny, its dream of becoming "one of the largest and most effective churches in the South" (church bulletin October 1, 1961). By locating in a youthful, middle class, rapidly developing suburban area the church put itself in an ideal position to grow. This was the most significant development in the church's ethos that took place during this brief three year period.

Like almost all other megachurches, this congregation found the suburbs to be fertile ground for planting and raising a mega-ministry.[58] Yet another important idea is demonstrated by this period of the church's history. More is needed to create a megachurch than just a dynamic pastor, a revelatory vision, and an abundant suburban clientele. A congregation must also have a relevant theology that resonates with masses of people and a stimulating, vibrant, and original way of presenting that message. These components, however, are the subject of subsequent chapters. This period of the church's history, then, offers a counter example to the chapters yet to come. Although the leadership tried desperately to construct a unique presentation of the Christian gospel, these attempts produced a minimal response and little in the way of stimulating growth for the congregation. Nevertheless, during this time the church continued as a vibrant, close-knit community, much as it had during the Inman Park days. Within this intimate family-oriented congregation, relational ties were formed which contributed to the development of the complex social dynamics of the future church.

THE SUBURBS OF MILK AND HONEY

---

[58] Many of the reasons for this successful fit between megachurches and suburban residents will be discussed in the final chapter. A number of commentators on megachurches have realized this connection including Schaller (1990, 1992), Ostling (1991), Vaughan (1993), Neibuhr (1995a), and Eiesland (1995).

The Chapel Hill area of South DeKalb was a radical departure from the long established, once glorious but now run down, area of Inman Park. What had been rural farm land was rapidly being subdivided and developed into communities of middle class whites. This area was envisioned as the direction in which a significant portion of suburban communities would concentrate, throughout South DeKalb and eastward toward Stone Mountain (Dent, 1980). From the real estate perspective of the late 1960's, this area was to become a thriving suburban off-shoot of Atlanta (personal interview).[59] Within the previous decade (from 1960-70) the population of this area (South, Southwest, and Southwest DeKalb) increased by 125 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 1960/1970). The following decade's growth in this area slowed to an increase of 40 percent (Atlanta Regional Commission, 1985). The area boasted of fine new schools, modern shopping malls, and easy access to interstate roadways. The majority of the homes in the area were brick ranch style with 3-4 bedrooms, two car garages, and spacious landscaped front lawns. Many of this area's residents fled to South DeKalb after their former neighborhoods closer to the city began to be populated by blacks (Taeuber, 1980).[60] Many of the church's members, who were slowly climbing up the socioeconomic ladder of success, had moved to the suburbs both for jobs and in hopes of a better lifestyle. This was the sixties ideal of suburban country living.

The congregation began meeting in the partially built sanctuary, even as members continued to volunteer their days, evenings, and weekends to finish the building. Once again, they had to struggle to survive as a church. Their move did not provide them with a monopoly on the market of souls in the area. Not far away an established Assemblies of God church was building a much larger facility. Directly across the street from Chapel Hill Harvester Church stood a prosperous Southern Baptist church. Likewise, dwindling membership after the move was cause for alarm. It is uncertain exactly how many people were lost in the move, but every account suggests that attendance decreased noticeably. Folks left for a number of reasons; either they were impoverished and lacked transportation, were unwilling to drive so far for church, or were disgruntled about leaving the inner city and its witness to the Little Five

[59] One clear indication of this expectation of growth and development in central and southern DeKalb County was the placement of shopping centers and malls. A majority of the shopping centers built during the decades of the fifties and sixties were located in these parts of DeKalb County (Dent, 1980; Profile of DeKalb County, 1982).

[60] Nearly 20 percent of suburban DeKalb residents in 1970 had relocated from inside Atlanta City limits within the previous five years (Taeuber, 1980).

Points community.

For those who were attracted by the church's urban outreach to the poor and destitute, the move and shift in ministry seemed to be a forsaking of "its first love and calling." David Adams commented that he thought, "We were making the wrong racial statement." He valued the socioeconomic diversity in worship and eventually left partially because the membership, "just began to reflect suburbia in general."

In no time, however, the church recovered from the losses of the move. According to the church records, approximately 250 people attended Easter service in 1973. By the following Easter, 1974, church attendance was reported to be 450 persons. Judging from the bulletins for 1974 and 1975, morning worship hovered around 300 persons with approximately 60 members attending Sunday evening services. By 1976, the church had at least 425 members, an increase of 70 percent in four years. In general, then, the move to South DeKalb was a good one in reversing the declining membership figures from the latter years in Inman Park. Still this was not the "most successful church in the city."

The congregation's new home was a far cry from the staid, traditional structure from which they had just moved. This church building was, instead, a modern octagonally-shaped, stone structure. Gone were the stained glass windows, the balcony, the ornately carved altar, and the imposing pillars. Clariece was less than pleased with the new building (Weeks, 1986:267). For one inclined toward liturgical richness, this space was bland and uninteresting. The sanctuary was paneled in light brown wood, adorned with very few symbols and no patina from years of use. The choir loft and organ were quite inadequate, according to the music director. Everything about the building connoted a contemporary, informal style. This new building had become a symbolic representation of Earl Paulk's desire to break with the past, begin anew, and reject much of the tradition and denominational baggage of the old life.

REFUGE FOR A NEW FLOCK

The most drastic internal change which resulted from the move, however, was in terms of the church's ministry orientation. The reason for this alteration was the radical shift in neighborhoods, in the church's constituents. The identity which guided the church's outreach was one of being a "harvesters of souls" and a ministry of "refuge to lost sheep." The ideological components of this image remained intact, but its context and focus were transformed. Rather than abandon the core identity of the congregation, it

was reshaped to fit the new social reality. No longer was the church surrounded by the poor and destitute outcasts of society. The hippies and common laborers of Little Five Points area had been replaced by solid, middle class families of the suburbs.

Census tract data for those areas surrounding the new church show that overall less than two percent of the population was African American. Almost 80 percent of the population was married. Nearly 85 percent of males and almost 50 percent of females worked outside of the home. The husbands were employed as professionals, managers, skilled tradesmen, or in sales. The wives worked predominantly in clerical jobs. Median family income was almost $13,000, while Atlanta's median income was 10,700. Over 60 percent of residents had completed high school, with approximately 13 percent having a college degree (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970).

In 1975, the church conducted its own survey of the membership for a photo directory [see Table 1].[61] Judging from the data of this survey, the demographics of congregational members were very similar to those of the surrounding community. The church, at this time, had 230 households . Thirty-five percent of the 45 men who filled out the survey had a college degree; all of them had graduated from high school. Of the 54 women, over 90 percent had their high school degree, and a third had graduated from college. This educational level is considerably higher than for those persons in the surrounding community, perhaps an indication that only the more educated members completed the survey. The occupations of male members were mostly skilled trades, managerial, and sales; the women were either homemakers or employed in clerical positions. These figures, even if not perfectly accurate, show the membership to be composed of affluent, settled, middle class families. In the words of David Adams, who himself fit this profile, "It would be obvious to anyone that we were beginning to attract a more professional and better educated group."

These new members had different sets of problems, desires, and needs from those who came during the Inman Park days. They were concerned about prospering at their businesses, raising stable and loving families, and relating socially with their neighbors. The church was a place to come and learn

[61] This survey should not be considered as scientific, nor fully representative of the entire membership. I uncovered demographic data on one fourth of the approximately 450 people. Several of these fact sheets also contained incomplete information and some of the data was compiled from an examination of the pictorial directory. This survey, nevertheless, provides an adequate statistical picture of the congregation prior to its explosive growth period.

about how to cope with the modern world, as well as to experience the divine. Its leadership naturally responded to this changing demographic reality and the needs of these newer members.

Given this new context, the content of the visionary identity was reinterpreted to fit this new reality. The church continued to be a refuge, but now it was envisioned by Earl Paulk in numerous sermons and church bulletins as a refuge for those disillusioned with "traditional" Christianity or with their former denominational structures. Paulk's own psychological and spiritual quest was moving him beyond feelings of abandonment and isolation to activities of separation from the past and rebuilding for the future. The church's ministry and vision paralleled these changes, reaching out to those who wanted to experience something new and different than "traditional" Christianity. This suburban context of young growing families provided just such people at a time in their lives when they were experiencing new beginnings and breaks with former patterns.

TABLE 1

Demographics For Members Joining Before 1978		
Characteristics	**1976 Survey**	**1991 Survey**
Total Number	230 (varies)	44
Mean Age in 1991	*	45
Mean Age at joining	*	*

Demographics For Members Joining Before 1978		
Gender: Female	?	45.2
Marital Status:		
Married	68.7	80.5
Divorced	6.6	4.9
Never Married	15.4	12.2
Education:College degree or more	n=85 40.0	34.1
Income: +$30,000	*	70.0
Occupation:	n=94	
Clerical	17./Home=20.2	22.0
Service	5.3/Trade=17.0	4.9
Managerial	7.5/Sales=7.5	17.1

Demographics For Members Joining Before 1978		
Professional	6.4	19.5
Self-Employed	9.6	12.2
Southern Birthplace	81.8	79.5
Community of Birth		
Rural/town/city	*	46.3
Urban/suburban	*	53.7
Mean **Childhood Moves**	*	3.7
Characteristics	**1976 Survey**	**1991 Survey**
Worship Attendance:		
1 or more/	*	97.7

Demographics For Members Joining Before 1978		
week		
Hours at Church/ Week:		
0-3 hours	*	7.3
4-6 hours	*	24.4
7-10 hours	*	24.4
11 or more	*	43.9
New Christian	*	25.0
Mean **# Friends** at CHHC	*	4.2
Giving: 10 % or More	*	90.2
Previous Denomination:	n=71	
Liberal/Moderate	19.7	4.5

Demographics For Members Joining Before 1978		
Conservative	25.4	36.4
Pentecostal	40.8	27.3
Catholic	2.8	6.8
Charismatic/Nondenom	9.9	4.5
Other	0.0	13.6
None	1.4	6.8

This new clientele paralleled nicely the changes taking place both in the Paulks' extended family and the former Inman Park congregation as well. Clariece had just given birth to her second child, a son Donny Earl. Earl and Norma's two oldest daughters were married and having children in the early seventies. Likewise, Earl and Don's youngest sister, Joan, had recently married, joined the church, and started a family. John and Dottie Bridges, who could be classified as "spiritual kin" given their long association and intimacy with the Paulk clan, were also expecting their second child. At the time of the church survey in late 1975, the congregation's mean age was approximately 37 years. Over 69 percent of the members were married, and well over half of the households had children under the age of 18. This was clearly a youthful, family-oriented community.

Another characteristic the longtime Inman Park members and the newer members shared was that at this point in their lives both groups were experiencing career advancements, increased prosperity, and social stability. This influx of middle class members infused into the church persons with greater leadership skills, new spiritual vitality, and social enthusiasm. It is significant that the people who would form the leadership core over the next 15 years came during this period. One core group of about three dozen male members, including Earl's large extended family, made up the church board and men's fellowship in 1975. Each of Earl Paulk’s daughters married men (Steve Owens, Sam Lalaian, and Wes Bonner) who would later become pastors and central figures at the church. Strong relationships of trust between the Paulks and the lay leadership were formed and solidified during this period of church history. Likewise, this entire group shared the gradual developments which would radically alter the congregation in the next few years. This core group of people who played softball, ate, and worshiped together as families also rejoiced together when church attendance exploded later under Earl's firm spiritual leadership. It was to this group that Paulk’s power as a prophetic figure was most clearly demonstrated. It was also this cluster of core members that had the greatest level of trust in him as both a person and a spiritual leader.

One such core member was Bob Crutchfield. He was a very successful businessman with considerable administrative skills. Bob was also an accomplished Bible teacher. Within his first month at the church Earl asked him to teach the adult Sunday school class. Bob, his wife Judy, and their children, as well as his brother, father, and mother, were welcomed and immediately integrated into the church community. He commented, "We had found our church home and our new field of service." He soon

became a core Sunday school teacher, a deacon, and church board member, then later an elder and eventually, in 1980, the administrator of the church. Judy and he had an entertaining puppet ministry. His brother, Kim Crutchfield, accepted the position of church youth leader in 1975, after several years at a Bible school. Kim later began the church's adult education ministry, became a minister, and eventually went to seminary.

Another prominent core member who came during this time actually became a deacon prior to officially joining. Charles Bonner was a successful contractor, who lived near the church in an expansive home. He, his wife, and teenaged son Wes, who would later become the husband of Earl's youngest daughter, had left their former mainline church after Wes and his parents received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Like Bob, Charles soon began teaching Sunday School. He became a deacon and later was appointed to the church's board of elders. Wes began to audio tape the church services almost immediately upon joining. He established the tape ministry and later was instrumental in coordinating the various media and publishing functions of the church.

BODY LIFE

This new context, perhaps unintentionally, set the stage for the decidedly inward turn in the church's ministry. "Body Life" became the characterization of this new direction.[62] The phrase implied that the congregation was a body of believers, each with particular functions and tasks. The "body life" idea could be seen as an attempt to unify and enliven the congregation around a common theme. Many of the church's existing ideological emphases were incorporated into this idea. Likewise, this organic metaphor came to symbolize the familial and somewhat egalitarian structure of congregational life at the time. The church was understood as a body rather than as an institution, an organism rather than an organization. Jesus Christ was envisioned as the head of the church while the individual members,

---

[62] No doubt this term is derived from the, then popular, book of the same title by Ray Steadman (1972), although I have no clear proof as to this origin. Body life churches were plentiful throughout the early Seventies, especially in California and Florida (Baybrook,1976). They were the prototypes for many of the methods by which modern megachurches function. These "body life" congregations, often numbering in the thousands, were "theocratic and oligarchic," had countless "cell-groups" or small home fellowships, used intimate, laid-back experiential worship styles, and were composed of intense, committed, and active conservative Christians (Baybrook,1976). An excellent description of "body life" churches is contained in Towns, et al. (1981: 134-147).

including the pastor, were seen as the parts of the body. In a sermon in 1975, Paulk commented on the purpose of a "body life" church saying, "we must address ourselves to the needs of the congregation and to others....We must realize its not Brother Paulk's job, it is a body experience....I'm no more responsible to God than is [he named a respected deacon and elder in the church]. I have a calling in this ministry but we all share in it" (3/2/75).

One key ritual symbolizing this "body life" focus was the practice of anointing with oil. At services throughout the week pastors, deacons, and key lay leaders would anoint any member who had a special need. Judging from the later reflections of participants and from listening to taped services, a large contingent of the congregation would gather around the altar for prayer, anointing, laying on of hands, and warm hugs.[63] This time of emotional and physical intimacy would last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour, often ending with members joyously greeting one another before finding their way back to their pews. Sunday evening services, often called the "body life service," continued this intimacy with even greater periods of prayer, praise, and sharing of each others burdens. This activity was always later remembered nostalgically by members (personal interviews). Paulk's biography also reflects this sentiment, "The 'old-timers'... fondly recalled Wednesday night Bible studies that ended with Earl calling the entire congregation around the altar for individual ministry and prayer" (Weeks, 1986:279).[64]

Part and parcel of this "body life" message and its organic ritual of solidarity was an emphasis on the unity of individuals within this community. As Brother Paulk instructed in the first audio taped sermon, "Each individual is of worth, eternal worth...when you fail to do your part we all suffer...but we need to learn that in family life, at home... and in the power of good relationships....Success is not achieved alone, by oneself" (5/19/74). In these early sermons of 1973 to 1976, the interaction of believers, its body life,

---

[63] This and other direct or implied references to services during this time come from my content analysis of a minimum of six randomly selected audio tapes of Sunday morning worship services from each year since 1974. One of the aspects of this content analysis was a count of the frequency with which certain key words and concepts were used by Paulk in his sermons. Many of the findings from this analysis are presented in graphic form in Appendix B. The methodological appendix also provides a copy of the content analysis form used.

[64] This intensely emotional ritual of public confession and "bearing one another's burdens" solidifies commitment by contributing to the mortification of the "old self," to an increased level of trust of the social group, and to the integration of the person into the "family." These functions, as well as other mechanism of commitment are described in detail in Kanter (1972). McGuire (1982) and Neitz (1987:234) discuss the role of these emotional disclosures for certain neo-Pentecostal groups.

constituted "the church." There was no place for solitary, disconnected, "lone ranger" Christians (Warner, 1988:131). Earl even went so far as to say, "If you are missing out on this body life experience, you are cutting yourself off from what God is doing...." (10/13/74) and "If as a part of the group you also stand outside and criticize it, it means you are immature.... We work our problems out together" (3/2/75).

A Congregational Family

Some of these "body life" themes became permanent parts of the church's character. Perhaps the most prominent theme during this period was that of the congregation being a "family." As one person stated succinctly, "We were a family." Another member characterized her first impressions of the church at this time, "You immediately sensed the Southern hospitality spirit which is so different...and the family-type feeling. It made you feel very comfortable." Bob Crutchfield reflected on this familial characteristic, "The church family quickly became our own family, and we learned to love each other in a special way."

The family emphasis made intrinsic sense for a number of reasons. The Paulk family accounted for at least 25 church members, many of whom were in positions of leadership. The congregation was dominated by families, with over 170 children under the age of eighteen in the church in 1975. The importance of the family was a powerful and pervasive theme in the Southern suburban ethos to which the church now catered (Reed, 1982; Dabbs, 1972).[65] The "body life" metaphor fit well with the image of the congregation as a spiritual family. In addition, Paulk tied his earlier familial rhetoric to this idea in many of his sermons from this period. In the first three years of recorded services, two extended series and numerous individual sermons focused on the family. These teachings offered practical advice on love, relationships, gender, and on the familial roles of husbands and wives.

[65] Eiesland (1995: 56) notes of a similar suburban county in the Atlanta area that churches functioned as the focal point not just of religious life but also social and family life.

In this family atmosphere, "love" became one of the most often used words in sermons during this period.[66] Love was not only to be exhibited within families, but toward all those in the fellowship. The term broadly included an expression of one's feelings toward loved ones, a reciprocal honesty and openness, an acceptance of others' failures and faults, a "tenderness" toward others, a "kind tongue," and a mutual submission to one another. In one sermon Paulk summarized the "Christian Image" as one of love with all of these dimensions (11/24/74). These loving traits were definitive of what it meant to be a Christian and also to be a "mature" member of this "Body."

This comprehensive understanding of love echoed the church's previous rhetorical focus of being accepting of others, but it also reinterpreted it. The former emphasis had implied, because of the ministerial context, an acceptance of strangers, outcasts, and the indigent. This idea now came to be understood in the context of interpersonal relationships. Love was an acceptance of the characteristics and personality traits of other members in the "Body." The church was envisioned as a "hospital for sinners" but it functioned more as a "hotel for saints." This attitude, when combined with the emphasis on "unity in the body," created a strong cohesive social bond within the group. One person who attended during this time stated why he came and stayed, "The people were always very loving and friendly....I felt respected and really loved, respected and a part of the body." Another member reflected upon the atmosphere which embraced her upon coming, "It was a place where everybody was welcome...with a strong emphasis on Christian love, a place of refuge. It had to do with our lives."

The harvester" identity still included the image of evangelism, but this evangelism was now tempered by love. The leadership stressing an inoffensive, loving acceptance approach to witnessing. In early 1976, Paulk summarized this idea stating, "You make an error in pushing people [to make a commitment for Jesus]" (3/7/76).[67] He described this compassionate evangelism in terms of his own history and lack of forgiveness, "If we gave up on every person in error, we would have empty pews" (3/7/76).

---

[66] In the 1974 to 1976 sermons I examined, the word "love" was used an average of 6.6 times per sermon, the word "family" was used 4.6 times per sermon. Refer to Appendix B graphs B-9 and B-10 for Paulk's usage of these terms by the church's historical periods.

[67] Evangelistic politeness and civility have become the standard procedure for modern conservative Christians. Hunter (1983:84-90) examines this tendency toward civil evangelism in considerable depth. Modern Fundamentalist Christians, however, do not fit this model (Ammerman, 1988).

Familial Relationships

Paulk's sermons also clarified the roles of the husband and wife within this accepting, loving family. For the most part, his ideas were traditional and similar to the conservative Christian anti-feminism rhetoric of the period (Morgan, 1973; Sweeting,1974; Walton, 1975).[68] His instructions came at a time when the Equal Rights Amendment had just passed the Congress and the entire country debated its validity. The cultural mood of the country was very mixed, with opinions divided over traditional gender roles. Overwhelmingly, however, the people of Chapel Hill Harvester were raised in very traditional, lower middle class Southern families where stereotypical gender roles were clearly delineated. Paulk, too, was grounded in this traditional Southern milieu with its clear role expectations for women. His strong re-assertion of these values can be seen in his preaching.

Boys and girls roam the streets unattended because women have forsaken the role that God has given them to fulfill. The admonition that the mother should be 'keepers of the home' is so old-fashioned that many are afraid to speak of it, but the truth yet remains that the first call of the mother is the home (5/4/76).

"Don't bring your women's libbers here to protest. I didn't say it [a statement in support of traditional roles for women] but God said it!" (1/26/76).

He also exhibited considerable paternalism in his rhetoric and images about women. During this time he referred to women in ministry as "helpmates," suggesting their place in the church should be "at work behind the scenes, faithfully implementing God's program of reconciliation to the world" (5/4/76). During his sermons, Earl Paulk often punctuated his preaching with comments such as "sweethearts," "my dear darlings," "dear hearts," and "honey." Evidently he received some criticism about such language. On a number of occasions, he stated during the sermon, "Some of you don't like me calling

---

[68] There are a number of detailed discussions of the traditional conservative Christian norms of family life, such as Ammerman (1987:134-46), Tipton (1982:76-78), Richardson et al. (1979) and Neitz (1987, chapter 5).

you sweetheart, but that is part of my nature and I'm trying to get over it" (9/8/74, 6/1/75).[69] The criticism and the congregational makeup necessitated that Paulk temper his comments about traditional gender roles. He found himself with a congregation of middle class households where, by 1975, over half of the wives were employed. In this context church members, like many others in the nation, questioning and puzzled over proper gender roles in a changing society.

Earl Paulk offered advice on how to blend functional gender equality with ideological male headship. In some rather progressive statements he affirmed egalitarian marriages, "As couples you take a vow to help and support each other.... You two working people, share the housework.... You have to work at it" (6/1/75). Outwardly, he never condemning working mothers. Furthermore, his practical relational suggestions challenged traditional marital roles. He chastised husbands for degrading their wives, for directing their interests elsewhere, and for not giving their full love and attention to their spouses. He counseled wives not to, "mother your husbands and you husbands don't ask for it." Finally, he even concluded one sermon in 1975 with a bold spiritual affirmation of mutuality in marriage, "Lord you have loved us through our wives and our wives through us."

---

[69] Paulk was unsuccessful in his attempt to remove these comments from his preaching since they remain in his preaching to the present. In fact, the frequency of such comments increases dramatically at particular times throughout the history of the church. See the graph of Paulk's use of Paternalistic comments in Appendix B-21. He eventually asserted his right to use this paternalistic language from the pulpit, "I got a letter a few years ago that it wasn't good to use (this language) in the pulpit.... Well you **stinking person,** you don't know what is good to use in the pulpit. God didn't call you to preach. He called me to preach" (Paulk's emphasis, 2/25/79). One person I interviewed even went so far as to call Earl Paulk a male chauvinist, saying "if anybody is a chauvinist, he is."

Paulk's fluctuation between the acceptance of traditional norms and his softening of them parallels the actions of many ministers and writers within the larger Evangelical tradition at the time. [70] This generation of Christian pastors was seeking ways to hold fast traditional values and yet relevantly speak to the changing situations in which their membership lived. In doing so, they "softened" and revised the traditional values in practice, while leaving the powerful rhetoric in place.[71]

Paulk's technique for simultaneous affirming of both sides of the gender role debate highlights another aspect of his preaching style. Often in "pastoral" sermons Paulk could be heard expressing a compassionate, progressive stance. These practical suggestions were much more radical than his own explicit theology supported. Therefore, what he preached as church doctrine - the husband as the authority and head of the household - and even exhibited in his own family relations somewhat contradicted his pastoral suggestions. This tendency to say what might have been necessary in a pastoral moment, even publicly from the pulpit, had the effect, later in the church's history of getting Earl Paulk into considerable theological trouble. Likewise, these double messages left the congregation, as well as outside observers, somewhat befuddled and uncertain about Earl's position. His approach made it very difficult to pin down exactly where he stood on a controversial issue such as abortion.

Whatever the verbal admonitions from the pulpit, the organized church activities confirmed both the absolute importance of the family and the necessity of women in ministry. Every church bulletin from this period was filled with opportunities for family fellowship, relationship building, and social activities. Many Friday evenings were designated as "family nights." Statements such as "What better way to spend time with your church family and your own family ...for free" (1/30/76), and "Plan your Friday night with your own family and the church family" (2/23/76), often appeared in the bulletins. Almost all these

---

[70] Certain voices in the Evangelical world during this time counseled families and religious leaders to revise their traditional understandings of gender and familial roles. Larry Christenson's *The Christian Family* (1970) and his and his wife's *The Christian Couple* (1977) were very instrumental in altering these roles. Neitz (1987), Stacey (1990) and Hunter (1983) each discuss the shifting family values and relationships taking place during this time. It is interesting that there are sermon references of Earl Paulk reading several books on how to become a more emotive, "softer" Christian man during this period of church history (2/17/76).

[71] I found evidence of this in my interviews and observations much as Ammerman (1987), Stacey (1990), and Rose (1987) did. Many couples spoke of male headship and submission, yet the women were clearly in charge or at least equal partners. When asked about decision-making on major purchases or issues, they spoke of deciding by mutual consensus through prayer and discussion, only resorting to the husband's "final word on the matter" if they reached an impasse.

events were sponsored and coordinated by women, over half the congregation were women, and most Sunday school classes and prayer groups were led by women.

Success and Prosperity

Given this emphasis on love and acceptance of others, personal success came to be judged by one's relationships and family life. In many ways this message can be seen as counter to the "prosperity gospel" which had become popular in the mid-seventies. Persons such as Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin preached the doctrine that God desired for Christians to be prosperous. Their theology argued that a Christian could pray for wealth, a fine house, cars, and good health and if one's faith were strong enough these "desires of their heart" would be granted by God.[72]

At this point in his history, Paulk had little use for the crass materialism of the prosperity preachers, yet he echoed their language, reinterpreting it from a relational perspective. "We get confused over what wealth is all about...a good family is wealth. You can be so wealthy but if you have a divided home, you are poor. Wealth lies in relationship" (7/20/75 also 5/19/74, 11/9/75). He even used the then-current plight of millionaire William Randolph Hearst to make his point in a sermon in 1976 (2/1/76). He questioned whether Hearst were truly rich with a daughter like Patty.

This deemphasis of wealth fit his own Church of God upbringing, and that of many persons who were raised in impoverished surroundings. They viewed money as a necessary utility. Wealth and luxury were possibly demonic. Personal relationships, evangelism, and service to God were seen as much more important than economic affluence (Schwartz, 1970:47; Conn, 1977; Crews, 1990:13-15,53-54).

---

[72] This Prosperity movement has been known by several names, (the “faith movement,” the “word movement,” the “health and wealth gospel,” and the “word of faith movement”), all of which are essentially interchangeable. Many of the most prominent televangelists and countless local church pastors subscribe to these ideas. This prosperity message has had a tremendous influence on Conservative Christianity. It has been reported that the central promoter of this doctrine, Kenneth Hagin, sold over 33 million copies total of his 126 books and pamphlets (McConnell, 1988). When one takes into account the many other avenues by which this message was spread such as television, audio tapes, direct mail, teachings in Hagan’s Rhema Bible Training Center, and his correspondence courses the possible influence is tremendous. Several of the major figures in this loosely-knit movement include Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Fred Price, Jerry Savelle, Robert Tilton, John Avanzini, and Benny Hinn. Two scholarly works are central to an understanding of this Christian movement, McConnell (1988) and Barron (1987). The former analyzes the “Faith Movement” from a predominantly historical and theological perspective; the latter does so from a more sociological approach. Other authors who discuss this prosperity doctrine from a variety of perspectives include Harrell (1975), Quebedeaux (1983), Fee (1985) Hollinger (1988), and Neuman (1990).

Earl's comments such as "You can own every acre in DeKalb County and die and go to hell" (7/20/75), and "You can't judge your life by monetary success. Success means to live with yourself at peace with God and with your work" (11/9/75), set distinct ideological boundaries between himself and the predominant middle class values of his "socially snobbish" neighbors (Weeks, 1986:267-68).

At the same time, the "Health and Wealth Gospel" emphasis on financial prosperity and economic advancement offered an excellent fit with the occupational lives and cultural norms of not only the general Charismatic community but with Chapel Hill Harvester members in particular (Hollinger, 1988:145-49). Most of the members of the congregation were employed in managerial, skilled trades, clerical, and sales positions, with a sizable minority being self-employed. The practical suggestions offered in the "Prosperity Gospel" writers encouraged diligence, hard work, and dependability all of which were middle class virtues and often led to greater financial success .

Paulk explicitly rejected a striving after economic prosperity for the sake of selfish material acquisition. He did, however, acknowledge its value, especially when the goal was to fund spiritual endeavors. He portrayed a Christian lifestyle as directly applicable to and including a disciplined, yet creative work ethic. He would preach, "Make your goals...a spiritual matter. With God you can do anything" (6/1/75), and "Christianity is a way of life...applicable in every area of life. It tells you how to deal with success as well as failure" (9/8/74). He often would draw a continuous line from the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers to their own working in the world. In this regard, he commented that at work they were "instruments in the hands of God" (10/12/75). The proper response to the Spirit's wooing was obedience and action in the world. Paulk continued to employ these suggestions for improved living in his sermons throughout his ministry.[73]

A Practical Message

[73] Paulk's emphasis on individual improvement and economic success is strongest in the mid 1980's when lower middle class blacks begin to join the church and when the Alpha youth reach adulthood. See the graph in Appendix B-26 for the pattern of Paulk's use of "success." Schwartz (1970) compares, among other issues, the ideology of two sectarian groups, 7th Day Adventists and Pentecostals, around economic success and attitudes toward work and suggests that Pentecostals are less likely to stress advancement, as does Anderson (1979). Paulk's ideas fit better in terms of the 7th Day Adventist approach (Schwartz, 1970:111,123-26). There is some indication (Crews, 1990) that the views of Schwartz's Pentecostal group are no longer representative of that branch of Christianity since they have begun to enter the modern middle class world.

Paulk's sermons on "practical Christianity," his suggestions for successful daily living, were second in frequency to the family-oriented ones. Often these sermons focused on improving relationships, not just with family and friends but also with co-workers, employers, and customers. He frequently spoke of how to find meaning in everyday existence. A favorite suggestion of his was to have a goal or purpose around which to orient one's life. He preached, "If you can't define certain goals that are worthwhile [in your life], it will become a miserable, cheap, secondary life.... Have a goal to keep a focused life...to have meaning in your life" (6/1/75). He encouraged members to be active in the world and in business. They were to "grow up," to "mature," and to "be responsible for the state of your community." He suggested they should "work hard...be dedicated, sacrifice...." and "be a champion in one area." He further proposed that if members would, "Commit to an honest goal and stick with it...and if it is of the Lord...it will be successful" (6/1/75). He suggested that they be "flexible" and "open to the future... Respond to life....New is not evil.... Different is not evil, adventure and research is good.... Tradition and history can be bad" (3/2/75). He motivated them with lessons he had learned in his own life, which had, by then, become a common theme in the church, "You can't lean on past victories, but you also can't be defeated by **past failures**" (10/12/75, his emphasis).

Much as Max Weber found in relation to the Calvinist pastors, these instructions which were offered as practical guides for spiritual behavior often unintentionally raised the socio-economic status of members (Weber, 1976:177). Many of these admonitions may have directly contributed to the business success that Chapel Hill Harvester members experienced throughout the 1970's.[74] Weber also proposed that these more tangible blessings came as a result of "the elect" striving diligently to confirm their status as one of the elect (1976:112,115,172). Capitalistic success offered the tangible proof of their salvation that intellectual assurances could not.

Throughout the 1970's many Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic believers, too, needed tangible validation of their felt spiritual experiences. Since members' salvation and relationship with God was tied directly to their feelings and emotional experiences, a spiritual and psychological need arose within these folks to confirm that what they were experiencing was indeed from God and not a deception of Satan.

One method by which members of the Charismatic community could confirm the veracity of their

---

[74] Benton Johnson (1960) discusses this issue and argues that the ideals and practices learned by some Pentecostal/Holiness groups leads to economic advancement.

divine experiences was to examine and judge their own emotional states. A conscious evaluation of moods determined whether one was in touch with the Spirit. This was at a time when Norman Vincent Peale's "power of positive thinking" was extremely popular as it merged with the cultural emphases of pop psychology and the "therapeutic" (Rieff, 1987; Bellah et al.,1985). Admonitions to "Smile! Jesus loves you," "Happy is the man who trusts in the Lord," "Rejoice in the Lord always," and "Live above your circumstances" were rampant within the Charismatic Christian community. These suggestions on how to "manage" one's emotions verified one's place in the Charismatic community. A sure indication that someone was not right with God was when they had "lost their joy." This path, however, did not offer continuous assurance, given the variability of human emotions and the tremendous effort expended in this "emotional work" (Hochschild, 1983). In many ways the intense intimacy of fellowship groups functioned as another assurance of salvation. These emotional, effervescent praise times generated considerable group solidarity as well as awesome feelings of the Divine (Durkheim, 1973). This powerful social unity acted as a confirmation of one's eternal security, although it, too, was temporary, dissipating shortly after the meeting ended.

The prosperity preachers offered an alternative confirmation of eternal security, material success. This confirmation of one's faith, tied as it was to economic prosperity, was a tangible evidence of one's felt experiences. Financial security lessened the external strains on one's emotional labor of remaining continually happy. Likewise, financial prosperity did not dissipate after a group meeting ended. Material success, then, became a powerful assurance of faith and an indirect indication of an intimate relationship with God, especially in a religious tradition which was based on intangible emotional experiences. In addition, prosperity and wealth, interpreted as blessings from God, not only gave one status within the religious community. A majority of those in the church’s core group of leaders were also the wealthiest members. Economic success also enhanced one's standing, and witness for Christ, within the secular world. This message of prosperity was intimately wedded to various cultural themes in American society, including those of individualism, personal choice, and the nation's economic progress. This understanding of the Prosperity Gospel as the tangible confirmation of a spiritual status may explain why it became so popular among Charismatic Christians.[75]

---

[75] It should not be surprising that later popular paths of spiritual confirmation, once a majority of Charismatic Christians achieved solid middle class status, included reliance upon tangible spiritual "signs

Chapel Hill Harvester's emphasis on "body life" and its many sub-themes including community, love, family, spousal roles, success and practical everyday applications of the Christian life, significantly shaped church members' world view in the early and mid seventies. Earl Paulk's employment of these themes echoed the concerns of members, their desires, and needs. His preaching gave meaning to young couples who had just begun their businesses and families. He offered them ways to succeed, grounded in a Christian message. With this "body life" emphasis Paulk characterized the congregation as nontraditional and innovative. At the time he portrayed it as unique in its understanding of the corporate body of believers as a family. But most members did not perceive it that way. Many comments from members reflected the perception that the church was a comfortable, ordinary, and balanced congregation. The images of family, love, and success resonated with their lives. They connected with these themes and the church life which supported them. At this point the membership did not perceive Paulk nor his message as extraordinary or as something to which they should commit themselves. Although Paulk's vision may have been exceptional, his ideological symbolism and language for conveying that message was not perceived as such. To this point, Paulk's actions had offered no indication, no proof, of the spiritual charismatic authority he would later claim. Nor had the church structures been created which would support such an image of him.

Even Paulk, in later years, commented on the commonplace, introverted, and self-centered nature of these early days of the Chapel Hill congregation. He would often make derogatory remarks, in the context of reflecting on these early years, that he thanked God they were no longer like the many "little churches by the side of the road."

Orderly Charisma

---

and wonders" and an emphasis on church growth (Perrin, 1989).

Earl Paulk carried his desire for distinctiveness, if not its actualization in the minds of members, over into other aspects of church life. Not only did he distinguish the church from other fellowships on the basis of the "body life" message, but also in terms of worship style. The worship from this early period is very reminiscent of the Inman Park days. The service was approximately one half music and one half preaching, punctuated with periods of reserved praise. The songs most often sung were old gospel hymns like "Blessed assurance," "Since Jesus came into my life," and “There's a new name written down in glory," accompanied by organ music or special choral selections presented by the "harvester trio" or other choirs and groups. The non-demonstrative spiritual celebration time consisted of a few well known Charismatic choruses such as "This is the day," "Thy loving kindness," "Oh how I love Jesus," and "His banner over me is love." The singing of these choruses often accompanied a prayerful, reverent period of praise to God or Jesus. This praise time might include a murmuring of private prayer tongues or sung praise tongues.[76] The overt gifts of the Spirit such as prophecy, revelation, edifying tongues, and their interpretations seldom were practiced in Sunday worship services. Bob Crutchfield who came to the church from a demonstrative Charismatic fellowship remembered,

I had to go and ask them for sure if they were a Pentecostal church. We didn't see a lot of classical Pentecostal demonstrations.... That's what we liked about it. Chapel Hill Harvester had a good balance between the stability of classical Christian views with flexible forms of worship.

---

[76] Poloma (1982:52-55) discusses the variety and frequency of Glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, in charismatic fellowships as do McGuire (1982:76-85), Neitz (1987:39-42), and Warner (1988:133-34).

Just as the central Body Life ritual of group prayer and anointing with oil took place in a collective, communal way, so too were the spiritual gifts expressed jointly and orderly by the entire community. Although Earl, Don and Clariece certainly had some control over when the expressive portions of the service were to begin and end, the audio recordings of worship offer no evidence of any particular person, a "spiritual virtuoso," possessing an abundance of spiritual gifts. The distinct impression was that the praise time was corporate, egalitarian, and rather reserved. This format was well received by many members at the time. One member commented, "The church was very calm.... In my estimation I thought it was a very laid back for a Charismatic or Pentecostal church. They didn't have that fervor, that uninhibited excitement. It was controlled and an orderly kind of service...and I liked it a lot."[77]

Perhaps one reason for this orderliness was the congregation's implicit acceptance of, and deference to, Earl Paulk as the spiritual leader. His own worship style leaned toward reserved praise. This inclination, he later explained, was due to his negative experiences as a child with ecstatic uncontrolled fervor of Pentecostal worship. Clariece also controlled the flow of worship skillfully with her organ playing. On more than one occasion she attempted to stifle a less controlled outburst of praise by increasing the volume of her playing. She too, like Earl, was more inclined toward reverent, dignified, and "high church" worship styles.

Outside the context of Sunday morning worship, there were numerous opportunities for more demonstrative charismatic praise and freedom in worship. From all accounts the Sunday evening service has always been a freer and less inhibited meeting. Likewise, a "Ladies Prayer Meeting," which met on Tuesday mornings, began in the early years as an outlet for certain more spiritually expressive women. It remained small for many years, and was not even mentioned in the church literature until 1976. During 1975, Lynn Mays, a newcomer to the church but not to the Charismatic Movement, took over the leadership of the prayer meeting and its eight female members. From this point on she became a very influential force upon the church. Her story, however, will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The central emphasis of the restrained Sunday worship was an individual’s personal experience

---

[77] This is quite a contrast to my own experiences in Charismatic fellowships where praise services were often spontaneous and uncontrollable. Other studies of Neo-Pentecostalism also describe incidents of controversial, unrestrained praise or prophecy with power struggles among the leadership; one such is Neitz (1987:11-12).

within a fellowship of believers. The most prominent motto of the church at that time was "where worship is an experience." This characteristic paralleled the central tenets of the Church of God and other classical Pentecostal denominations as well as the growing Charismatic Movement (Crews, 1990; Neitz, 1987:191ff; Poloma, 1982 chap.4; Synan, 1971). Freedom in worship, with the format for worship being "ordered by the Holy Spirit's bidding," figured centrally in the affirmation of this creed of experience as guide.

This emphasis on experience, however, eventually led to a significant congregational tension, still in its infancy during this time. That tension was between Earl Paulk as the central spiritual authority, the explicit organizational structures of the church, and the implicit egalitarian and individualistic freedom of the Spirit in Charismatic worship.

QUESTIONS OF AUTHORITY

From its founding in 1960 in Inman Park, the church was organized with Earl Paulk as the primary voice of authority. He was its founder, its leader, and its paternalistic, but benevolent, father figure. His position as congregational authority was even written into the church constitution. He was to have complete license from the pulpit. Yet in the administration of the congregation, Paulk's authority was neither overt nor complete. The church’s administration was formally organized around a board of elders and deacons, to be elected by the membership at quarterly meetings.[78] Paulk went to great lengths in bulletins and sermons to confirm the status of these lay leaders. "Remember I did not select this Official Board, but I surely appreciate them" (5/13/75). "The officers elected each year act in accord with the quarterly conference.... They are your selections" (11/9/75).

The elected board acted as a mediator and restraining device both over Earl's singular authority and certain members' Charismatic independence. This board structure allowed for the individualistic, egalitarian impulse of the spirit-filled believers within the limits of the formal organization of the congregation, just as the worship format gave it limited freedom during services. Paulk, too, supported this constraint, making it clear that the church was not to be run as a simple democracy guided by independent voices, but rather as a representative government. "God has always used representative

[78] From the records I observed it appeared that these "quarterly" congregational meetings actually took place once a year, and often less frequently.

government, never a democracy" (11/9/75). At the same time, Earl's desires for the church had to be formally sanctioned by the board. As will be seen below, it appears that some of his wishes perhaps were frustrated by this group.

The balancing act between these three forces, at this early stage, was relatively simple to achieve. The primary reason for this, no doubt, was because control was not an issue. Everyone knew and agreed that Earl Paulk was their leader, with the board of elders and deacons as advisors. During the settled period of the early seventies there were few important decisions to make; therefore, this leadership arrangement went unchallenged. John Bridges, then a deacon and church treasurer, described the period in the following way, "We were a simplistic operation and it was basically a simplistic board.... We were a group of people who were very devoted to their pastor and he was, in turn, very devoted to us." Like a "body," the congregation was understood to be of "one mind" and in consensus. This may not have been an accurate perception, however.

Relational Authority

In the midst of this perceived unanimity, diverse perspectives of Paulk's authority flourished even during the church's early history. These differences of opinion were due to the relational quality of Earl Paulk's authority. A member's place or involvement in the social organization altered how Earl's authority was perceived and legitimated. This reality becomes quite apparent later in the church's story. Even now, however, the authority Paulk held in relationship to his followers was individually negotiated and contingent upon one's relational, familial, or institutional ties with the senior minister.

For the overwhelming majority of this "body life" congregation Earl was familially referred to as, "Brother Paulk." This title implied not only an intimate relationship but also a willingness to trust the decisions of the "elder brother." As Bob Crutchfield, who was actively involved in leadership and had a intimate relationship with Earl, recalled, "We related to him like a big brother." He went on to characterize the church's structure and Paulk's authority as, "very egalitarian....The whole structure was quite loose-hipped." John Bridges, obviously a long-time family friend as well, described the church decision making processes as, "We'd say, 'Brother Paulk, whatever you feel is best'.... There was a great amount of personal trust...."

Trust of the relationship between Paulk and his parishioners was a common theme, especially as

it related to his love for them. He commented in a bulletin early in 1976, apparently after he had been especially forceful in his preaching, "I really love you. Daddy and Mama said that after they spanked me when I was a little boy. I am sure now they did love me, but I wasn't too sure then. So, you just wait and see. You'll find out ... I really love you" (1/27/76). This authority was based for the most part in interpersonal trust in a relationship.

At the same time, the church's government and Paulk's authority looked considerably different to those outside the family, excluded from church leadership, and not in an intimate relationship with Earl. One such person, who always desired to be a deacon but was never elected to that position, said flatly, "He was in charge, that was it! He didn't appoint the deacons but they only got there if he was okay with the nomination. He had the reins on everything." This person, nevertheless, stayed at the church for nearly twenty years. Another person from this time also reflected on how Paulk's authority was perceived by those peripheral to the church's leadership.

> I know a lot of people, who early on would come into that church and want to be involved and want to work, and would leave saying that he had absolute authority in everything and too much. Everything had to be done not just his way, but there was this close knit group, mostly family who controlled it. And it turned off a few people but not a lot because by and large, there was no meanness, there was no use of this power to devastate individuals in any sense. They were just people who resented it more or less. But there was always that authoritarian rule. He was the pastor, there was a paternalistic order and he was at the top.

Members, at that time, granted Paulk certain legitimate grounds for the authority they gave him. First and foremost, they accepted his authority as the church patriarch, its wise leader. He was seen as a spiritual father-figure. He often cited the Bible as the ground for his religious guidance and counsel. God was the source of all authority, and Jesus was the example of its proper expression. He freely acknowledged his dependence on God's grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. His position before God was due to his calling as a pastor to others and his attitude was one of servanthood. "God, you and I know I'm no good to these people without your help," he prayed (11/24/74). He often petitioned God to make him a "simple channel for thy Spirit" (9/8/74) and "a channel of love" (2/1/76). He also referred very often to his years of ministerial experience to ground his leadership. He constantly used terms denoting

humility such as "servant," "obedient," "tool," and "vessel" when referring to himself. Finally, he would made comments which implied a sharing of the burden of the ministry - "It does not rest on any one of our shoulders" (10/13/74).

Another frequent title which denoted a further basis of Earl's authority was "Pastor." As one member put it, "We respected his credentials." Others talked of his role as leader of the church or head of the board of deacons. There was clearly a sense of respect for the authority of his "office" in the church structure. This authority was, perhaps, clearest in the way he and Clariece held in check members' charismatic expressiveness in worship.

During this period in the church's history, Paulk's authority was not grounded in his spiritual status as a prophet, as an oracle of God's revelations, as apostle to the Christian church, as a Bishop, or even as the visionary founder of the church. It was, rather, based primarily on the relationship he had with the members, with his friends. Yet, even in these early years, Earl Paulk utilized, and was granted, numerous sources of legitimation for his authority. None of this authority could be seen as a charismatic authority described by Weber and others. At this point in the history of the organization, the closer relationship one had with Paulk, the less authoritarian he seemed and the more he seemed like a brother or parent who corrects error out of love. The recognition of Paulk’s preference for a relational style of authority as well as his simultaneous use of multiple methods to legitimate his power in the congregation make the later complex web of authority relationships much more understandable. Within the relatively simple organizational structures of this young Chapel Hill Harvester Church, it is possible to perceive the initial formation of what becomes a convoluted dynamic. This dynamic develops considerable complexity as the church grows in size, develops a greater division of labor, and establishes multiple organizational pathways. Observation of this leadership pattern also can help to explain the diverse layers of commitment evident in the congregation as it evolves. It offers insight into how members of the same church can present such seemingly contradictory statements regarding Paulk's relational leadership style. One’s relational ties to Paulk and the leadership core make all the difference in how their power is perceived and responded to.

Whatever the perception of Paulk's authority at this time, it was certainly not complete, unquestioned, or forced. Much of his authority, being relationally based, was open to challenge on the basis of that relationship. Paulk's exercised authority was reciprocal, interactive, and a

socially-negotiated dynamic. In the words of John Bridges, "Before you can have authority, you have got to have people who are willing to give it to you." The entire congregation mutually recognized the senior pastor as their religious leader. Yet, the board of deacons, as well as members at large, had a certain amount of power over the direction of the ministry, over the accepted legitimacy of Earl's authority, and over the limits of his leadership.

An excellent example of the negotiation of authority and a tempering of Paulk's wishes, authority, and leadership surrounded the question of beginning a church school during this period. The event was unlike any other I found in the church's history because the archival records seem to indicate that Earl Paulk did not get what he appeared to desire. Although no one interviewed recalled an explicit power struggle over the issue, the framing of the issue in sermons and bulletins clearly seemed to identify Earl Paulk's position -- a position which was eventually defeated. This event, too, occurs exactly prior to a monumental turning point in Earl Paulk's portrayal and exercise of his authority.

Throughout the early months of 1976, church bulletins (3/2/76, 5/11/76, 6/15/76, 7/5/76) and Earl's sermons (10/12/75, 5/2/76) were full of veiled references to children being given the "power of choice" and the congregation having the "responsibility to teach its youth." Either Earl or Don Paulk overtly expressed his motivation behind these references in the May 11th bulletin. The writer suggested that the congregation "give serious consideration" to starting a church school for the children. In June, the bulletin (6/15/76) was again used to influence the congregation. This bulletin article boldly stated that the future of the church rested on its efforts at educating the next generation. After sketching the arguments against the proposition, the article's writer, either Don or Earl, went on to present the case for a school.

Those in favor would say that especially in the formative years the boys and girls need to be under Christian guidance. Further, the public education has degraded to the point where it is both physically, mentally, and spiritually dangerous and in the light of the problems that continue to grow in public education, we should prepare ourselves to meet the challenge, for where there is no vision, the people perish.

The author of this bulletin went on to say, "We must not take (our decision) lightly. God has a will for Chapel Hill and when we find it, He will make the way." After this substantially one-sided presentation

of the issue, however, on July 12th the congregation was informed of the negative decision not to begin a church school. The author of that bulletin reported, "Due to the time element and after prayerful and in-depth consideration, the Board deemed it inadvisable to try to begin a Christian school by this Fall. We will continue to work and pray toward some future date as the Lord leads."

The significance of this seemingly minor event cannot be overlooked. From my investigation of the archival data and sermon tapes, this incident marks a radical shift in Paulk's overt expression of his authority. From this point forward, he began to base his authority more and more on his spiritually superior position within the congregation and the trust expressed in him as the sole spiritual "head" of the church. By the end of 1976, he had started to preach on the singular spiritual authority of the pastor within a body of believers. This new emphasis radically altered the theology and direction of the church from that point forward. This theological shift is the subject of the next chapter.

Although it is difficult to establish conclusively what the church was like in these early days at the new property on Flat Shoals Road, the data point to a congregationally-based church with a strong but loving pastor in charge. The organic image of "Body Life," where each person had a vital role in the total expression of the church, best captures the mood. Intimate moments of ministry gathered around the altar were the formative ritual acts. Worship paralleled the Classical Pentecostal format, but there was a distinctly restrained praise time. Much of the preaching and ministry focused on the family and included themes of love and gender relationships. Although it was forcefully delivered, the topics were balanced, practical, edifying, and scripturally based. In these early years there was very little of the emphasis on the ecstatic expressivism and spiritual orientation of the Charismatic movement, which would soon come to dominate. Even Earl Paulk commented in a bulletin, "I thank God that we have a well-rounded church program. All is not just things of the Spirit" (5/13/75). Overall, Chapel Hill Harvester could have easily been just another suburban church, or in the words of a member, "I think you could have walked in there and thought you were in any Baptist church or almost anything else...."

The congregation, during this period of its history, was clearly representative of many denominational Pentecostal churches (Poloma, 1989; Crews ,1990; and Conn, 1977) as well as countless charismatic fellowships from the early 1970's (McGaw, 1979, 1980; McGuire, 1982; Poloma, 1982; Quebedeaux, 1976). This brief picture of this "little church by the side of the road" offers a glimpse into a Pentecostal-oriented independent congregation prior to its embrace of a Charismatic spiritual theology.

This portrayal will show comparatively the tremendous revisioning that the Charismatic theology and its corresponding organizational ideals had upon a local congregation. Although there are some charismatic influences present in the congregation during this time, it is not the dominant ideology due to Earl Paulk’s resistance. When it is accepted by Paulk, this spiritually-based theology revolutionizes the understanding of pastoral authority, member commitment, and congregational structure.

Further this chapter identifies Paulk’s initial efforts to try to find an ideological medium for his understanding of the "vision." The content of the "church of refuge" identity easily altered to embrace "refugees" who were disillusioned Christians. Likewise, Paulk’s adoption of the "body life" image fit well with the new context and its suburban constituents, yet it lacked the theological power and uniqueness to produce more than moderate growth. The next chapter in the church’s history demonstrates the incorporation of a theology which has that power. Nevertheless, an examination of these earlier efforts illustrate how willing Paulk was to conform his message to the new climate. The reader can begin to perceive in this chapter the lengths to which the church was willing to go to produce the "most successful church in the South." A corresponding drive can be observed in Earl Paulk to rise from the ashes of his former defeat and become that beautiful phoenix. As he concluded an autobiographic sermon in May of 1976, I've not been of world renown, but I’ve tried and I’m still trying!"

CHAPTER FIVE: PRELUDE TO THE KINGDOM (1976-1978)

Stone by stone, I am building my temple,

With spirit and truth I'm creating my bride

With flesh and blood I am forming my body

Where the glory of the Lord shall reside...

(Message from the Holy Spirit to the Body of Christ at Chapel Hill Harvester Church, sent through His servant Mrs. Lynn Mays.)

By 1976, the Holy Spirit had a new message for Chapel Hill Harvester Church. This message became the keystone blocks for new spiritual archways and structural formations in the construction of this congregational kingdom. More specifically, crucial aspects of Earl Paulk's theology were beginning to take shape during these years that would directly affect the rest of the church's history. The Charismatic movement, with its attendant subgroups, revised the life of this church as it had many other faith communities in the seventies.[79] In this spiritualized orientation, Paulk found the guiding perspective in which to reinterpret his entire blueprint of the Harvester vision.

Earl Paulk's embrace of many Charismatic doctrines, such as spiritual authority, oppression of Christians by evil spirits, and the discernment and deliverance of these spirits, introduced distinctively new themes into the church culture. Within this milieu, a number of long-present patterns in sermons and church structure, including Paulk's relational authority, the congregation's uniqueness, and the dualism between the natural and the spiritual, were significantly reworked. These new or redefined ideas, in turn,

---

[79] The Charismatic Movement discussed here has also been called the Neo-Pentecostal movement and the Charismatic Renewal. These labels are used to distinguish this emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work in the Christian faith from an earlier similar emphasis labeled Pentecostalism or Classical Pentecostalism. Throughout this narrative I use the term Pentecostal to refer to those Classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Church of God, Cleveland, TN, the Assemblies of God, and the Church of God in Christ. I will use the inclusive term Charismatic Movement in reference to the more recent demonstration (1950's-1980's) of Pentecostal beliefs and practices in mainline Protestant, Catholic and nondenominational churches. There is considerable debate about the similarities, differences, and character of each broad category; however, this debate is peripheral to this narrative, see for instance Poloma (1982:16), Quebedeaux (1983), and Synan (1971) . This narrative demonstrates many of the differences as they are embodied in the practices of this congregation.

affected the church leadership structure and power relations, its worship format, and its direction for the future.

These changes first had an impact upon Earl Paulk's theology and then later revolutionized the organizational shape and practices of the congregation. This shift to a charismatic perspective took place before any great influx of Charismatic believers created the need for the switch in religious expression. The reworking of Paulk's and the congregational ideology came about primarily through the direct efforts of one member in the congregation, although they were reinforced by many indirect influences upon Paulk.

For the second time since its move to Flat Shoals Road, the congregation was undergoing considerable redefinition. This time, however, the redefinition was ideological rather than specifically contextual. If the previous reorientation was the result of catering to a new middle-class suburban audience, this shift in theological scripts came about as Paulk continued to search for a powerful form in which to present his visionary message. The Charismatic Movement's spiritualized approach helped set the stage for Paulk's introduction of the kingdom message. The image of the kingdom would soon be offered as a unifying vision of the church's "harvester" motif of evangelism, refuge, and rebirth. The hierarchical and autocratic organizational ideals implicit in this theology, similarly, provided a means to control the explosive growth of the next few years and to contain the necessary division of labor this growth demanded. This subsequent growth in membership, in turn, would provide confirmation for the validity of these theological and organizational revisions. The narrative of this period of church history vividly displays the effect of charismatic beliefs upon this congregation. In the language and theology of the Charismatic movement, with its related Discipleship and Latter Rain Restorationist characteristics, Earl Paulk found the powerful kingdom image around which he would organize his aspirations of creating a successful megachurch.

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

Chapel Hill Harvester Church was not the only congregation to experience radical reorganization because of the introduction of Neo-Pentecostal beliefs. The Charismatic Movement in the mainline denominations fostered countless incidents of controversy, schism, and congregational renewal (Synan,

1986, 1987, 1991:88-96; Derstine, 1980; McDonnell, 1980).[80] One such event actually precipitated the Charismatic movement's official beginning in 1960. An Episcopal priest by the name of Dennis Bennett, after having received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, shared his experience with his affluent St. Mark's parishioners. Church members in this Van Nuys, California parish immediately called for Bennett to resign, which he did. Later, Bennett accepted a position in a small church in Seattle, Washington that soon grew to a center of the Charismatic movement for the United States. This incident was featured in both *Time* and *Newsweek* and gained considerable notoriety. Although many clergy and lay persons had accepted this spiritual experience in the decade before this event, most chose to remain "closeted" rather than risk the wrath of their denominational leaders. The national publicity of the incident involving Bennett, however, brought into the open the existence of this undercurrent in mainline Protestantism. From that point on, the Charismatic influence became prominent in many Protestant denominations.[81]

---

[80] Early in the history of the Charismatic Movement many leaders and lay persons, after being baptized in the Holy Spirit, found themselves uncomfortable in their current mainline homes, although few left. Often small praise services were established, either in the church or in the homes of members, in an effort to compartmentalize the spiritual fervor. Another alternative was for the spirit-filled minister to begin to integrate Charismatic beliefs and practices into the existing service. This would either lead to the adoption of a Charismatic perspective, with more traditional members having to find a new church home, or to denominational pressures being brought upon the deviant Charismatic Christians essentially forcing them to move elsewhere creating a congregational split and often a new independent Charismatic church. Eiesland (1995) offers an account of this taking place in one United Methodist church.

[81] It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace in detail the history of the Neo-Pentecostal movement. There are many fine general works describing this movement including Synan (1991, 1987), Poloma (1982), Marty (1976), McDonnell, (1976), Quebedeaux (1976, 1983), Hollenweger (1972). Other authors focus more specifically on the Catholic Renewal movement such as Neitz (1987), McGuire (1982), O'Connor (1971), and Ranaghan and Ranaghan (1969).

Within ten years time, every major denomination had been touched by this movement including the Roman Catholic Church. By the early 1970's most of the Protestant mainline denominations had issued special commission reports stating their tentative acceptance of the Charismatic believers in their ranks (Synan, 1991). In the following years of that decade these religious groups had set up service organizations and agencies to attend to the needs of their Charismatic members (Synan, 1987; Hocken, 1988). Nevertheless, a tenuous relationship existed between these denominations and the spiritual expressivist Charismatics in their midst. At the same time, countless para-church organizations and nondenominational groups had been established and were functioning to satisfy the needs of Charismatics of all denominational persuasions. Groups such as Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International, Women's AGLOW, Youth With A Mission, Maranatha Christian Ministries, Jews for Jesus, and Christian Growth Ministries offered Charismatic Christians alternative sources of information, inspirational literature, music, and support that may have been lacking in some denominational quarters.[82] In addition, many disillusioned denominational Charismatics were able to worship at the countless small, informal "prayer and praise" fellowships. These could be found in homes and storefront gatherings in almost every city and town in the country during the sixties and seventies. Often the ranks of these fellowships would swell with Protestant and Catholic Christians who had abandoned their church homes in favor of the more spiritually expressive worship. Many of these informal gatherings eventually became independent, nondenominational Charismatic churches (Quebedeaux, 1983; Synan, 1991:140).

The theological doctrines introduced into Chapel Hill Harvester Church were neither unique nor aberrant within the Charismatic Movement. In fact, by 1976, they were well entrenched in the theology of the Charismatic Movement in general.[83] This Neo-Pentecostal movement had as its central tenet the possibility of a direct experience with God as the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It was this

---

[82] These nondenominational Charismatic organizations will be discussed in greater depth at various places in this narrative. Fuller accounts of these groups can be found in Wooding (1993), Synan (1993), Burgess and McGee (1988), Quebedeaux (1983), Maust (1980), and Shakarian (1975).

[83] Quebedeaux (1983) describes a similar theology to that of Chapel Hill Harvester in his general survey of Charismatic beliefs, as do McGuire (1982), Poloma (1982), Neitz (1987), Warner (1988), and others. My intention in this very brief summary is not to present an exhaustive description and analysis of Charismatic theology. It is rather to offer the reader a brief orientation which will be expanded at appropriate times during the story of the church. Likewise, this discussion primarily focuses on those aspects of Charismatic theology which are most significant to this congregation.

realization that the realm of the Spirit is immediately present and is in fact at least as significant and as "real" as the secular, material world that shaped the Charismatic perspective as it was lived (Neitz, 1987: 30ff.). A foremost doctrine within this general spiritualized perspective was the need for a secondary encounter with this God, following (some said simultaneous with) one's initial conversion to Christianity. This "baptism of the Holy Spirit" was seen as the way by which one received the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. The Baptism was not understood to be a private, emotional "high" (although it often functioned as such) but rather an infusion of powerful "Gifts of the Spirit" to equip the Christian for ministry. These "spiritual gifts" including the gifts of tongues, of healing, of prophecy, of discernment, and of deliverance (Quebedeaux, 1983; McGuire, 1982:28ff.; Poloma, 1982:50ff.; Neitz, 1987:38-56). To these more spectacular gifts were added a host of mundane yet practical gifts such as the gifts of teaching, hospitality, offering monetary support, administration, and intercessory prayer (Poloma, 1982:60-61; Quebedeaux, 1983). It was this awareness of an extra-mundane spiritual realm of existence, the claim of unmediated access to the Holy Spirit, and the active involvement in these ecstatic practices in worship which set the Charismatics apart from "nonspirit-filled" Mainline Christianity (Neitz, 1987:24).

These characteristics were quite similar to Earl Paulk's Classical Pentecostal heritage. Many of these beliefs were a part of Classical Pentecostal theology generally (Synan, 1971, 1991; Conn, 1977; Dayton, 1987; Crews, 1990). One distinct theological difference with the Charismatic Movement, however, was the Classical Pentecostalism emphasis on speaking in tongues being the necessary initial evidence of the Baptism, whereas Charismatics often de-emphasized the experience of tongues as the proof that one was spirit-filled. Certainly the Charismatic movement was also distinct from Classical Pentecostalism in that it had more middle class oriented norms and values. It contained a nonsectarian character, devoid of the "cultural baggage and rigid exclusivism espoused by the Pentecostal churches" (Synan, 1991:119). The Charismatic movement downplayed the Classical Pentecostal idea of leading a sanctified life of holiness prior to, upon, and after being spirit-filled (Synan, 1991). The de-emphasis of the Pentecostal "holiness codes" caused many Classical Pentecostal spokespersons to malign the Neo-Pentecostal movement (Synan, 1991; Crews, 1990:155-59; Hughes, 1974). The Classical Pentecostal denominations' more sect-like identity, less organizational flexibility, and limited openness to the larger world clearly distinguished them from the groups involved in the Charismatic Movement. These factors

made the Old-line Pentecostals less receptive to many of the new organizational and worship forms intrinsic to Charismatic Christianity. For the most part Classical Pentecostal leaders also rejected many of the theological tangents often accompanying Charismatic Christianity such as the prosperity doctrine, teachings on discipleship, and dominionist theology. One significant element intrinsic to the Charismatic Movement was that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" was an "experience" and could be accommodated to any doctrinal form. On the other hand, as Ray Hughes then General Overseer of the Church of God pointed out, Pentecostal beliefs had to be grounded in doctrine, in scripture (1974:1037). This made them less open to ecumenical cooperation in their eyes, especially with Catholic Charismatics.[84]

None of these distinctives, however, can fully explain the radical effect the adoption of a Charismatic theology had on Earl Paulk as a former Pentecostal preacher and on Chapel Hill Harvester congregation. Much of the disruption in the church's status quo can be traced to one other distinctive feature of the Charismatic Movement. Implicit in this experiential perspective, and most often exhibited in independent fellowships and nondenominational churches, was an attitude of spiritual freedom from leadership structures, organizational forms, and denominational bureaucracies. This perspective was rejected by Classical Pentecostal leaders, although seldom directly addressed (Hughes, 1974). In Classical Pentecostalism, the Spirit was often expressed with abandon but always within organized forms, theologies, and structures. In the Charismatic tradition, the Spirit was the form. This focus on the experience of the Spirit created for many Charismatic congregations a spiritual orientation toward church structure, worship, authority, and leadership (Farah, 1987). In short, the entire ethos of the congregation, as well as its members' lives, became spiritualized. It was this distinct feature of the Charismatic Movement which was primarily responsible for revolutionizing Chapel Hill Harvester Church.

Several factors in the history of Earl Paulk and this congregation explain why the influence of the Charismatic movement had not directly affected them until this point in time and why the theological shift took place gradually over several years. First, Earl's Pentecostal upbringing made him skeptical of the Charismatic attention to demon possession and spiritual deliverance. The congregation itself was even still comprised mostly of former Classical Pentecostals, who were slightly older and less affluent than

---

[84] The ecumenical efforts of David du Plessis (Mr. Pentecost) are a notable exception to this tendency (Synan, 1991:86-89; Quebedeaux, 1976:92-95). The Assemblies of God disfellowshipped him however (Quebedeaux, 1976:173).

many Charismatics [see Table 1]. The church's organizational forms and leadership structure continued to parallel the Classical Pentecostal model. Furthermore, the church ethos since 1960 had been one of introversion and relative isolation from outside theological influences. Like the Classical Pentecostal denominational leaders, they generally treated the "johnny-come-lately" Charismatic Christians with skepticism or disdain. Finally, a majority of those practicing Charismatic Christians who joined the church in the early seventies had either come from abusive and over-spiritualized Charismatic fellowships or they were recent denominational switchers who had been kicked out of their congregations after receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Because of these precipitating circumstances, many of the Charismatics in the congregation wanted a "sedate," "balanced," and "low-key" spiritual experience, one which was reflected in the "body life" church of the early 1970's (personal interviews). This congregational atmosphere was about to change, however, beginning with pressure on Earl Paulk from one woman.

THE CHARISMATIC CONDUIT

Although the Charismatic Movement rapidly spread throughout the middle class suburban households around the church, these external forces were not the primary catalyst for the congregation's shift in theological orientation. Rather this change, by all accounts, was due for the most part to the direct influence of one female member, Lynn Mays. Lynn had been introduced to the Charismatic Movement in 1965 within the unlikely context of a Southern Baptist church in Baltimore, Maryland. After her husband's employment transfer to the South, the family attended a local Southern Baptist church. This congregation was not nearly as accepting of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as her home church in Maryland had been. Within a few months she was kicked out for practicing the Gifts of the Spirit. Throughout this time Lynn attended numerous Charismatic fellowships and even conducted healing and deliverance meetings in her own home. After being rejected by the Southern Baptists in 1973, the family found its way to the new octagonal stone church down the street.

Almost immediately Lynn became an active member of Chapel Hill Harvester, volunteering for any task. She regularly attended what would later become her base of operation, the Ladies Prayer Meeting on Tuesday mornings. It was a small group of eight women with a female lay leader, who left in late 1975 to begin an evangelistic ministry. When this vacancy arose Earl, one day after a service, stopped Lynn in the hallway and reported to her that, "In a dream, God told me to ask you to lead the

Ladies' Prayer Meeting" (Weeks, 1986:274). Paulk's biographer relates that Earl "felt inner resistance in asking Lynn with so many unanswered questions about her ministry, but he willingly obeyed the Lord. If Lynn's ministry were valid, good spiritual fruit would quickly prove itself" (1986:274). Lynn later stated, "In a way I had to prove myself after that to show that the Spirit was in it."

This action by Paulk appeared completely contrary to his then-held theological convictions. His own religious training in the Church of God, and his preaching up to that point, rejected the idea that Christians could be possessed by evil spirits. As Paulk's biographer states (Weeks, 1986:274),

> Earl was somewhat skeptical of deliverance ministries. In some circles "casting out demons" seemed like emotionalism or sensationalized melodramas....As with many aspects of the Charismatic flood of "hyped pseudo-spirituality," Earl demanded valid proof of God's power at work. He saw much abuse and misunderstanding on the subject of deliverance.

Yet, according to a number of sources, Earl was being inundated with reports of healings, deliverances, baptisms in the Spirit, and discernments that Lynn was performing for members, including his own daughters. "He would hear from the congregation that they got the Baptism or got healed or delivered from spirits by her," recalled one member. Evidently, Lynn had become the resident expert on the Charismatic Gifts of the Spirit. Her popularity possibly influenced Earl to assert his own familiarity with the Gifts of the Spirit. Paulk commented in one sermon during this time, "I preached (the gifts of the Spirit) when they were not popular...they are not something new to me, or something that I just heard yesterday" (11/14/76). Yet as Lynn later reflected, the membership "needed deliverance here in this church at that time, and Earl Paulk really didn't have that particular ministry -- discernment and deliverance from evil spirits." Her ministry both created and filled this void in the congregation.

Even with Lynn’s growing ministry to the Charismatic members, Earl Paulk remained suspicious of her "gifts" for quite some time. A number of those interviewed, including Lynn herself, suggested that perhaps he was threatened by what he perceived to be her "take-over type personality." Paulk’s response to her potential threat was much like his handling of his sister-in-law Clariece several years earlier. He invited her to be a part of the official church staff, perhaps in an attempt to limit her independent power. Every two years she was promoted deeper into the organizational system. In 1973, Lynn joined the church. In late 1975 she was selected as leader of the Ladies Prayer Group. After her

divorce in 1977, she was appointed as the first female deacon. Then, in 1979, Lynn was ordained as the first female pastor. By offering her these positions he was able gradually to increase his control over her actions. As he did this, however, he opened an avenue by which her influence and spiritualized Charismatic ideas could enter "officially" into the life of the congregation.

Paulk's Charismatic Conversion

Earl Paulk's conversion to Lynn Mays' theological position was not an immediate "Damascus road" experience. He vacillated over this Charismatic perspective from 1973 to late 1976. This wrestling was evident to many of the members. One congregational member reflected, "it seemed like he was struggling in himself about it." How he eventually became convinced that Lynn Mays' perspective was correct is a complex and multifaceted issue.[85] Many factors can be seen as contributing to this gradual acceptance of the Charismatic perspective. One thing is certain, however, once accepted this perspective forever altered church dynamics, as one member's comment attests,

Lynn brought in an element that had not existed. For a long time she moved among the people as a normal person and then began to grow in her influence over Brother Paulk and brought in a level of spiritism that opened him up. He fought it for a long time. He just would not choose to recognize it. Eventually he did and when he did...from that point forward the church was never the same.

[85] For an account of Lynn Mays' early years with the church see Weeks' account (1986: 272-277).

Earl Paulk has suggested that his acceptance of Lynn's perspective came through an "examination of the fruit of her ministry," with "fruit" being interpreted in terms of numeric growth of the Ladies Prayer group (Weeks, 1986:274). This group rapidly multiplied during 1976 and 1977 due to the steadily increasing influx of new persons familiar with the spiritual gifts. As a member recalled, "The people that came with (Earl Paulk) of the Church of God situation were kind of staid in their ways, but all of a sudden these new Charismatics started coming in." By 1977 the morning prayer group became a "Life in the Spirit" meeting and was attended by men as well as women.[86] As was stated above, this group functioned as the heart of Charismatic vitality for the church. In these meetings all the gifts of the Spirit were exhibited in great degree, with countless healings, deliverances, prophecies, and words of wisdom being given and received.

For Lynn there was a down side to her increased involvement in the church. As her influence in the congregation grew, her marriage became increasingly troubled. After a year and a half of marital counseling with Earl Paulk, the decision was made to "submit" the couple's future to the counsel and wisdom of the church elders. Lynn and her husband agreed to allow a group of six elders to "find the mind of God" in this matter. The result was that they counseled the couple to get a divorce in 1977. Her husband left the church within a year. From that point on, as she reflected in an interview, her ministry grew even stronger. Not long after her divorce, she was ordained a deacon in the church. Perhaps it was her act of ultimate submission to Earl's and the church leaders' authority which convinced Earl that her ministry could be trusted and embraced. After all, Lynn had submitted her marital situation to the authority of the ministry. In return, it had not only rescued her from a bad marriage, but had given her a full time ministry.

Paulk himself received a measure of psychological healing from Lynn. This may have also contributed to his gradual acceptance of her views. Early in their interactions she confronted him regarding his "tight reins on emotional displays" (Weeks 1986:274). She attempted to "soften" his

---

[86] Life in the Spirit sessions were very common among Charismatic groups. They were most often well-ordered, soft-sell introductions into the Charismatic theology and the experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. McGuire (1982:63-67) portrays Life in the Spirit sessions as the mechanism which led to conversion into the Catholic Charismatic group she studied. This is not how this group functioned in this congregation, but it is interesting that they chose the same name. By 1978 the name was changed to "Life and Growth in the Spirit" perhaps to reflect the ongoing instructional nature of this group throughout the life of the spirit-filled believer.

dealings with the congregation, especially with its female members. As one member reflected, "he had come out of such hurt, that his family just protected him, and he never really got to the people." Lynn commented later that she "formed a bridge over the gap between him and the people.... It gave him a closer vulnerability with the people." One core church leader characterized Earl and Lynn's interactions as, "a strong relationship developed between Paulk and Lynn, a dependency relationship." This relationship was intensified by the fact that they began to spend large amounts of time together. Bob Crutchfield recalled,

They were constant companions. On many, many occasions both cars were [at his house]. It was so blatantly obvious that you would go anywhere that he was, and she was there. His wife might not be but she was. And if his wife was there, she was also there. That close companionship has tremendous influence. We could all see it.

Another dynamic which may have contributed to Paulk's gradual shift in theological orientation was Lynn's role in verifying and confirming Earl's position and authority.[87] Her confirmation of his status took many forms, including personal prophecies over him, words of discernment for him, and of course the introduction of a theological system that posited him as the primary and singular spiritual authority. In accepting this perspective, Paulk could legitimate and solidify his own position as the spiritual head of the church. Lynn's words of wisdom and discernment provided the spiritual confirmation of this position. Interestingly, this entire dynamic unfolded immediately following a point in the church's history when Earl's leadership and desire to begin a church school had just been challenged and thwarted.

Whatever the exact configuration of influences which caused Earl Paulk to embrace the spiritualized Charismatic perspective, the reality is he did adopt it. Once this conversion was complete,

---

[87] The role Lynn Mays played in convincing Earl Paulk that he was an exceptional spiritual leader was very similar to that of the woman named Maria in Wallis' account of David Berg's gradual coming to understand and accept his own spiritual power and calling in his leadership of the Children of God Movement (1982:31-33). Marie introduced Berg to the spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophecy as well as encouraged "Mo (Berg) to take seriously his utterances as the voice of God speaking through him" (Wallis, 1982:32). Wallis further describes her role, not only as Berg's mistress, but as the one who enhanced, "His sense that what he was doing was of great significance...that whatever words he uttered were of cosmic significance" (Wallis, 1982:31-32). In the development of the spiritual career of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, it was his female cousin and lover who questioned whether he was enlightened which then propelled him to announce this fact publicly (Johnson, 1992).

the church immediately began to experience a pull toward theological and organizational conformity around this orientation. This theological change, and especially Lynn's prominent role in the leadership, did not sit well with many members of the congregation. Her presence on the staff engendered a challenge of Earl Paulk's leadership of the church.

The Congregational Conflict over Lynn

The decision to give Lynn leadership of the "Life in the Spirit" meeting created considerable tension within the congregation, judging from sermon comments and later interviews. Not only was she a woman in the midst of a divorce, but Earl had offered her the leadership of the Tuesday prayer group without consulting the deacons. His defensiveness surrounding this appointment and her deaconship exemplifies the tenuous character of the authority he possessed at the time. This challenge to his decision followed on the heels of the frustrated attempt to establish a school. Likewise, members' comments about Lynn’s divorced status precluding ministry, no doubt, reminded him of the rejection and lack of compassion he felt after the Hemphill incident. Earl had "rescued" Lynn and given her a place of ministry; he would not allow other church members, including deacons, to malign her. It was not until the selection of her to be a deacon, however, that Earl Paulk began overtly and severely to chastise members for their gossiping, backbiting, and intruding in this matter which was "none of their business" (2/20/77, 4/3/77, 7/24/77, 10/9/77, 2/12/78). These comments, made not so gently from the pulpit, exemplify Paulk's analogical preaching style described above in Chapter Three. If members understood the context in which to interpret the vague references, then those warnings or admonitions were meant for them.

Some of you listen up, you need to cut off your tongues and sew it up and listen.... You say, 'well they are just new folks, they've no business taking over at Chapel Hill...' that's none of your business. **That's God's Business!** (Paulk's emphasis 4/3/77)

We are not going to start up in attacking you with gossip, rot and filth...your greatest criticism may come from those you least expect -- your wife.... What you say is of the Devil and I'm not going to accept it. (4/3/77)

God didn't raise you up to be a judge among God's people...that's God's business.... If you are among the crowd that spreads people's sins around among the people, honey, you don't belong at Chapel Hill -- you don't belong to God! (10/9/77)

A little damsel among us, whom the Lord raised up because the body of Christ must be taught a lesson, yet when you stand with critical minds and hearts of judgment.... It's no wonder that God can't put a body together in unity. (2/12/78)

Paulk's defensiveness, combined with Lynn's influence in reshaping his theology, eventually created a situation with which some members could no longer agree. A few of them left, not just because of this theology, but because of Lynn's increasing presence in the life of the congregation. As one of these former members concluded,

When she started having a lot of influence, not just over the church but over him, and his development and his preaching and what he was doing, I said I'm out of here. I could accept a lot of the charismatic influences...but I had this feeling about her that wasn't nearly so congruent, so I quit going.

Although dominant in her influence, Lynn's charismatic experiences were not the only source of Earl's theological revisions. The books recommended by her or other parishioners offered new insight into and confirmation of this belief system. Prior to 1976 many of Paulk's sermon references were to Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian leaders. They included persons such as Billy Graham, Corrie Ten Boon, Kathryn Kulhman, and Catherine Marshall. During this period, however, Paulk made numerous references to well-known Charismatic and Prosperity writers including Watchman Nee, E.W. Kenyon, Robert Schuller, Father Scanlon, Derrick Prince, Kenneth Copeland, and Kenneth Hagan. In the early months of 1977 he reported six different times in the church newsletter that he had been given these authors' books to read. In July of that same year, he mentioned ten more books he had examined at the behest of members. Although the direct influence of these writers is more difficult to ascertain than the influence of someone like Lynn Mays who was present and active in the congregation, they clearly provided a voice of confirmation for the doctrines espoused by her in the prayer group. Paulk confirmed the role of these authors in validating his theological changes in a sermon in 1978. "I know this [the

doctrine of spiritual authority] is of the Lord cause many times after I preach it here, as the months go on, I read about it somewhere else" (3/12/78).[88]

INFLUENCE OF THE LATTER RAIN MOVEMENT

The one other person who possibly had a significant direct effect upon Paulk's developing theology was Clariece's uncle, John Meares. Meares, a prominent minister in the Church of God during the 1940's and early 1950's, was a close family friend of the Paulks. Earl appears prominent in a photo taken at John Meares' wedding in 1944. During the late 1950's Clariece worked as organist for his Washington D.C. church. He also performed her marriage ceremony to Don Paulk in 1960. During the Inman Park days, he had frequent contact with Earl and Don. Don attested to the intimacy of their relationship, "He's Uncle John to me.... Across the years he'd come and visit with me and Earl."

Meares was disfellowshipped from the Church of God in 1955, according to his account, for founding an integrated church. Not long after that expulsion he came into close contact with a large church in Detroit called Bethesda Temple which, as he admitted in his autobiography, had a great influence on his ministry (Meares, 1987:122-23). This church and its minister were an important part of a Pentecostal splinter group known as The Latter Rain Movement. The movement and its distinctive set of doctrines began as a revival in 1948 in Canada.[89] It spread rapidly throughout the Assemblies of God in both Canada and the United States. By the end of 1949 the General Council of the Assemblies denounced it as heretical (Bowman, 1988:12).

The theology of this movement included commonly accepted Classical Pentecostal ideas such as faith healing, the practice of fasting and other spiritual disciplines, and an expectation of the imminent end of the church age. Some of its less orthodox beliefs, however, entailed the establishment of the five-fold

---

[88] One has considerable difficulty in tracing the influence of these works on Paulk and these authors reliance on each other. Both Earl Paulk and these writers, rely on the power of "words from God", "visions" and "revelations" to prove the truthfulness of their perspectives. Revelation does not need a footnote. Words from God are just that. Therefore, even though Watchman Nee preached the text of *Spiritual Authority* in 1948 which was then published in 1972, Paulk's nearly verbatim quotes from the book were "fresh revelation" to the congregation in 1977 during his "Spiritual Authority Series" of sermons.

[89] For a complete description of the Latter Rain Movement from various perspectives see Barron (1992), Riss (1988, 1987, 1982), Darrand and Shupe (1983), and Holdcroft (1980).

ministries (prophet, apostle, pastor, teacher, and evangelist) outlined in Ephesians 4:11, a belief that Christians will overcome death, and an emphasis on necessity of the complete unity of the mature church prior to Christ's return. Another Latter Rain belief was that the full gospel of Christ, which had been distorted and abandoned by the medieval church, was being progressively restored through successive revelations by the Holy Spirit to Martin Luther, John Wesley, several Pentecostal leaders, and finally Latter Rain proponents. Certain Latter Rain doctrines even directly threatened denominational structures. These beliefs including a complete disregard for denominational organizations and the assertion that the unfolding restoration of God's truth was being accomplished by prophets and apostles, not by denominational church leaders (Barron, 1992; Bowman, 1988). There is little wonder why church officials quickly declared this movement heretical.

Although Meares' recorded sermons at Chapel Hill Harvester offer little evidence of Latter Rain preaching, Paulk specifically referred to a number of the movement's main tenets in his sermons prior to and during this formative period (10/13/74, 3/2/75, 10/9/77, and 6/4/78). The parallels between Paulk's theology and that of the Latter Rain movement are even more pronounced in his later sermons. His association with, and reliance upon, a Latter Rain theologian, Bill Hamon in the 1980's is unmistakable (Barron, 1992:76-79). Hamon's book *The Eternal Church* (1981) appears as a blueprint for certain later developments in Paulk's thinking and rhetoric. This connection with the Latter Rain movement was explicitly drawn by Earl's critics in the mid and later 1980's (Barron, 1992; Anderson, 1990; Griffin, 1987).[90]

Along with Meares and Hamon, any number of other Charismatic leaders were writing about these ideas during the seventies. A modified version of Latter Rain thinking was apparent in the writings of a Charismatic subgroup called the Restorationists. This group included later friends of Paulk such as Ern Baxter and Dick Iverson.[91] The Restorationist theology combined Charismatic worship styles and its

---

[90] Earl Paulk commented to the Assemblies of God archivist (in 1987) and Bruce Barron (in 1989) that he did not know of the Latter Rain Movement until after he had begun adopting the views that caused critics to associate him with these ideas. This comment may be true in that he did not know of the actual heretical movement itself but there is ample evidence that his preaching, even during this period of time, often portrayed these ideas. He was not accused of holding Latter Rain doctrines until he began publishing and Pentecostal theologians began reading his books in the mid eighties.

[91] Both Baxter and Iverson were quoted, invited to church conferences, and asked to preach at the church during the eighties and nineties. For a description of their relationship to Latter Rain and Restorationist

small group fellowship format with Latter Rain doctrines all under a new name and with more middle class respectability (Nation, 1990). The Restoration message was popularized in the successful book *Present Day Truths* by Dick Iverson published in 1975. This book described in detail the ideas and beliefs toward which Paulk began to migrate during this period.[92]

Earl Paulk's adoption of the Latter Rain message, although perhaps not blatant or specifically named in the church's history, nevertheless offered an ideological framework for his experiences of the 1960's and early 1970's. These Latter Rain beliefs resonated with his personal experiences of the previous years (Barron, 1992:78-79). After his expulsion from the Church of God, he had a disdain for organized bureaucratic denominations much as Meares, Hamon and others did. He stated, "What denominations and organizations could not do, God by his Spirit is doing" (10/9/77). Instead, Earl chose to follow his own revealed mission from God for the church. "Since this work was built on a vision from the Lord, it seemed good to me that it should be directed by a vision," he commented (10/9/77). Like the Latter Rain theologians, he stressed the unity of the body of believers around his inspired leadership. Fasting and faith healing were central practices in both groups. Paulk also preached that members were living in the " Last Days." He perceived evidence of Christ's imminent return in the catastrophic signs of the times (bulletins 3/9/77, 3/15/77). He commented explicitly in 1977, "The latter rain is what we are seeing take place now. We are now in the midst of the latter rain, an outpouring of the Spirit in the last days, beginning not more that fifteen or twenty years ago" (10/9/77). Therefore, although the influence of Meares, Baxter, and Iverson is difficult to verify, there is no doubt that the unique Latter Rain position was prominent in Paulk's preaching during this period. He adapted it to fit his distinctive "vision" as he merged each of these ideas into his developing spiritualized Charismatic perspective.

A BLENDING OF INFLUENCES

The significance of the short-lived Latter Rain movement grew as it was integrated into the

---

theology see Nation (1990:64-71). Nation (1992, 1990) and Pousson (1990) discuss in detail the Restorationist movement.

[92] It is unknown whether Paulk read Iverson’s book or was aware of it, but specific quotes from the book are very similar to comments Paulk made in his sermons at this time, such as the church not being a democracy, and not voting to determine a prophet, his preaching on the temple/tabernacle of David, and on the church being the glorious bride of Christ.

Charismatic Movement, much in the same way as it did in Paulk's case. Bowman (1988) asserts that the Latter Rain Movement produced or influenced a number of the Charismatic Movement's offspring. He finds direct relational ties between Latter Rain ideas and the Shepherding or Discipleship movement, the Positive Confession/Prosperity preachers, and even the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International. Other researchers (Riss, 1987:140-44; Pousson, 1990; Nation, 1991:65) have also asserted that the Charismatic Movement was indirectly influenced by Latter Rain doctrines, often through the writings of Iverson, Hamon, the *New Wine* magazine, and the *Logos Journal* (Riss, 1982:43-45) or the preaching of Meares, Baxter, and other members of the Christian Growth Ministries. The congruence of perspectives and what each movement offered the other made them a perfect ideological match. The Charismatic movement presented Latter Rain proponents with middle class respectability, a following which had little exposure to the Classical Pentecostal claims that it was heresy, and multitudes of people full of spiritual fervor and vitality. The Latter Rain doctrines provided the Charismatic movement with a method for ordering and controlling its enthusiasm through a hierarchy of leaders, an interpretation of the rise of the Charismatic movement (as the Spirit's outpouring in the last days), a this-worldly activist orientation, and the freedom from the constricting dependence upon denominational structures (Barron, 1992).

Once Paulk became convinced that the spiritualized Charismatic beliefs were Biblical and authentic, the merger between the Latter Rain influence of Meares and these new ideas can be seen in his sermons (especially the sermon from 10/9/77). No doubt Earl received intellectual confirmation for Lynn's beliefs when he realized how well these ideas fit together. In a matter of a few years these Charismatic beliefs introduced by Lynn, the Latter Rain doctrines of his long-time friend John Meares, his past personal experiences with denominational hard liners, and his current rhetorical and organizational needs in the congregation congealed into a consistent ideological whole -- an emphasis on the Kingdom of God.[93] Likewise, he saw the spiritual validity of these doctrines in the success of Lynn's prayer group as well as in the growth of Meares' church, and in the vitality of the Charismatic Movement as a whole. In addition, his theological shift was encouraged, even rewarded, by the ever-increasing influx of

---

[93] Nation (1992, 1990) argues that the idea of the "Kingdom" should be seen as a central principle of Restorationist Theology, however, he finds that Earl Paulk was one of the few to actually employ this idea.

Charismatic Christians into the congregation. Within this short two years period, then, most of the formative doctrines which shape the church's future reality were introduced and began to be incorporated into the ethos of the congregation. The question, then, is what was the character and content of this radical theological shift?

THE WORLD OF THE SPIRIT

The greatest change at Chapel Hill Harvester Church, as was stated above, came about as a result of Paulk's shift to the spiritualized world view implicit within the Charismatic Movement. Prior to 1976 Earl's preaching, and the church's ethos, could be characterized as a subdued Classical Pentecostal approach. The emphasis was on ministry to the members' families and teaching the Bible. Expression of the Gifts of the Spirit and excessive emotionalism were clearly limited. In many ways the church resembled any progressive, "uptown" Church of God (Crews, 1990). The first overt indication of a radical shift to a more spiritualized theology came in Paulk's series of sermons in November 1976 on the "Spiritual Wonders of God." Not long after that, in early 1977, he taught two more sermon series -- one on "Spiritual Authority" early in the year, followed by a second on the "Baptism of the Holy Ghost."

Earl Paulk's preaching soon became infused with an overwhelming sense of spiritualism. By spiritualism I mean that every aspect of the church, and members' lives, began to take on spiritual significance. The Holy Spirit and a spiritual perspective were used to interpret all of life. Events such as the weather, current issues, the crime rate, the success, or lack of it, of the Atlanta professional sports teams, and Paulk's own illnesses all became significant spiritual signs of an unseen Spirit world. Earl's verbal use of the third person of the Trinity in sermons doubled (See Appendix B-3).[94] Likewise, during this time Paulk's sermon references to spirituality, the Gifts and Baptism of the Spirit, healing, spiritual authority, and even his own praise exclamations rose almost as dramatically (See Appendix B-5, B-13, B-14, B-7, B-6).

---

[94] Paulk often used the term "Holy Ghost" as did many others in the tradition of his Pentecostal heritage.

This new orientation required Paulk to spiritualize his portrayal of the church's multi-dimensional identity. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit was meant for more than just personal emotional expressivism. Paulk often stated, "The Holy Ghost didn't just come to make us happy and jump up and down; the Holy Ghost came to empower us to become witnesses" (10/8/78). By preaching this idea, he drew the church's evangelistic "harvester" identity into the spiritual realm. Even the "Body Life" image became a supportive part of this spiritual reality. The Gifts of the Spirit were understood as being for the edification of the congregation, part of its Body Life, and never just as an individual experience. According to Paulk, then, the Holy Spirit had become both an empowering force for "harvesting lost souls" and also an active agent in strengthening congregational unity. In addition, he started to describe the church as being led not just by the original Phoenix "vision" but also by continual, even daily, spiritual revelations.[95] "We have come to a place where we must be directed by the Holy Spirit" and "Since this work was built on a vision from the Lord, it seemed good to me that it should be directed by a vision" (10/9/77). Accordingly, he proclaimed 1977 to be the "year of revelation." In keeping with this theme, he portrayed many of the revisions in his theology as revelations and visions given to him directly from God. He began to preface his sermons with comments such as "God wants this to be understood," "God led me to this," "God told me to tell you," and "the Holy Spirit says that I should say to you." Over and again he stated, "I haven't heard anyone say this [idea] nor have I ever read it...." Perhaps this frequent disclaimer was mentioned in case members of the congregation had read one of the many books in circulation at the time espousing similar ideas.

Another change this increased spiritual orientation created in Paulk's preaching was his radical differentiation between the natural realm and a spiritual reality.[96] Dualist thinking was a constant feature

---

[95] Darrand and Shupe (1984), in their book on a Restorationist church suggest this tendency was prominent within Restoration and Latter Rain thinkers. They write, "'God's revelation is always progressive'....This notion of progressive revelation is often expressed through a three-fold interpretation of church history: early glory, loss of glory, and restored glory" (1984:78). Given this emphasis on restoration and rebirth it is not surprising that Earl Paulk found these ideas appealing.

[96] The interesting feature of this strong dualist emphasis was that while it drew a very clear line between the two realms, this thinking also created a bridge between the two spheres. Thus this dualist understanding actually blurred the two realities into one unified, monistic, world view where both spirit and nature existed together and broke in upon each other constantly (Neitz, 1987:30). The exercise of the various gifts of the Spirit were seen as evidence of the Spirit and spiritual reality penetrating the natural existence.

of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement (McGuire, 1982:34-39; Quebedeaux, 1983). Likewise, this dualist interpretation of reality had been evident in Earl Paulk's earlier sermons. Now, however, this distinction between the natural and the spiritual became paramount. Dualistic references in Paulk's sermons nearly doubled during the 1976-1977 period (1.9 times per sermon in 1974-75 to 3.6 per sermon in 1976-77, See Appendix B-17). Rather than simply perceiving the two realms as distinct, a greater valuation was placed on the spiritual approach. All of life's experiences were seen as having spiritual meaning, interpreted in light of this parallel spiritual universe beyond and superior to the earthly mundane reality. As Paulk stated, "You cannot spiritualize flesh. God can teach you a lot of things in flesh relationship...but it remains a flesh relationship until we are able to communicate it into the spirit life" (5/1/77). This spirit reality was percieved by listening with "spiritual ears," seeing with "spiritual eyes," or tuned into by having one's "spiritual buttons turned on" (2/20/77; Neitz, 1987: 30-31; Ammerman, 1987:61).

Even in the midst of Paulk's increasing emphasis on spiritual dualism, certain paradoxical incongruities arose. An excellent example of this was that he often preached on the importance of physical fitness. Earl was a very strong proponent of healthy living and exercise. He often participated in sports activities, and even wrote a book on running and spirituality *The Divine Runner* published in 1978. This incongruity was even more evident in his comments on education and the rational mind. Since early in his childhood, Earl possessed a strong appreciation of educational attainment. In sermons during this time, he would brag about having attended seminary reminding members, "We are not a bunch of idiots, some of us even got out of graduate school" (5/2/76). On other occasions, however, he expressed very anti-intellectualist views such as "I get so turned off when a spirit-filled person goes to higher education," or more poignantly, "God don't need your PhD's, your MDIV's!" (10/9/77). The "carnal" natural mind could not be expected to comprehend the spiritual realm. "[The mysteries of God] can be understood only by the spiritual heart.... It requires no educational background" (11/14/76).

Another incongruity inherent in Paulk's spiritual dualism could be seen in his preaching on the church's perception of doctrine. Paulk often emphasized the freedom in which the congregation followed the Spirit's leading. Doctrinal statements, even creeds, were de-emphasized, with comments such as, "At Chapel Hill doctrine is not LORD...." (10/28/76), and "We are not a church given to doctrine..." (10/8/78). Yet the new doctrines of the Spirit were taught, studied, and discussed. Paulk gave the imperative that

these beliefs were to be accepted, practiced, and internalized as the absolute truth of God. "Get this (teaching) in your head!," he would exclaim. He insisted that members accept his revelations as self-evident truth, "There are those times when we know that we have received a direct message from the Lord...this message, I am sure, is from the Lord. The Lord has spoken...and **just take it that way!** (his emphasis, 3/6/77).

This dualistic perspective prompted a preoccupation not only with positive spiritual aspects but also with a negative spiritualism focused on Satan and evil spirits in general. The Charismatic movement's increased focus upon the spiritual realm created the need to discriminate between good and bad spirits (McGuire, 1982). Paulk, too, realized they had to know their spiritual "enemy" in order to identify "counterfeit spirits." He made this clear to the congregation. "Mark it down because you are going to hear a lot more about Satan in the coming days" (11/7/76). Indeed the congregation did hear more of their arch-enemy. Sermon references to Satan during this time more than doubled (3.4/sermon in 1974-75 to 7.6 in 1976-77. See the table of Paulk's usage of the term "Satan" in Appendix B-4).[97] The world (both in the natural and spiritual realms) was envisioned as the cosmic battleground between the forces of good and evil. Each person individually was engaged in this struggle. In fact, the level of spiritual warfare became a sign of right-standing with God (Neitz, 1987:35; Ammerman, 1987:65). "Some of the more spirit-minded people seems to be those whom Satan attacks more," stated one bulletin (6/2/76).

In the first few years of his interactions with Lynn, Earl had strong reservations about her emphasis on demonology, discernment, and deliverance. However, he soon conceded to this perspective by making the distinction many other Charismatic Christians had -- separating "demon possession" from "demon oppression."[98] Earl reflected on the shift in the definition of deliverance in a

---

[97] McGuire offers an excellent analysis of how this doctrine of Satan functions both for the Charismatic believer and the entire fellowship (1982: 35-37, 150-152). She suggests the emphasis of this doctrine is linked to issues of power and authority as well as offering a comprehensive theodicy. The functions of this doctrine in the life of this congregation will become apparent as the narrative continues. Neitz also describes the important role of evil spirits and a doctrine of Satan in the Charismatic group she studied (1987:32-38). Ammerman suggests that this emphasis on Satan's activities in a believer's life provides a "theodicy of dualism" which gives them a reason for their suffering without having to blame themselves or God (1987:63-65).

[98] Poloma (1982), McGuire (1982), Quebedeaux (1983), and other researchers note this differentiation. Possession was by far the more serious condition. The majority of times discernment and deliverance

1982 sermon (his emphasis, 7/11/82).

[Deliverance] was new to me. If we're children of God, then Satan can't touch us, is the scripture I read. But many of us overlooked the scriptures that talked about the various powers of Satan that must be overcome in the life of the Christian. Not that he could ever be **possessed** of the devil again, but that he could be **oppressed** in his emotions, by his anger, by his fear, and by his troubles.

Given the personal individualistic nature of the battle against Satan, Christians had to know all they could about the enemy. In general, this included studying books such as *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis or *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey in order to understand how evil spirits operated. One had to know (discern) the names, for instance a "spirit of depression" or a "Jezebel spirit," of particular devils in order to bind them and deliver the Christian from oppression. Therefore, a strict spiritual dualism, an emphasis on Satan, and the reality of individual spiritual warfare all went hand in hand with the gifts of discernment, deliverance, and the principle of binding in the spiritual realm. Members were encouraged first to examine themselves, "Test yourself by asking in what areas has Satan oppressed me?" They were then to allow those with the gifts of discernment and deliverance to "test the spirits" for them. One church bulletin suggested, "When a child of God is sick or is not in prosperity, it is time to turn to God and seek help and deliverance, but in no way allow Satan to accuse to the point of despair" (6/2/76). An individual's protection from, or deliverance from, evil spirits required faith in and complete obedience to the insight of the spiritual discerner. At Chapel Hill Harvester, this meant surrender to the spiritual guidance of Lynn Mays.

A corporate dimension to spiritual oppression also existed. The congregation could have a spirit of "repressed worship" or conversely one of "hyper-emotionality." Corporate discernment was required to make crucial distinctions about the exact nature of the afflicting spirit in the congregation. The person with the gift of discernment was able to wield tremendous power in a group. For instance, by 1978 Lynn Mays employed her discernment to identify persons who had a "spirit of intellectualism." Most often these members discerned to have their minds oppressed by Satan happened to disagree with a particular

---

were used a particular "spirit," such as a spirit of fear, doubt, unforgiveness, worry, or my favorite the "spirit of intellectualism," had oppressed the Christian's life. The cure was to command the spirit to leave "in the name of Jesus."

spiritual direction of the church.

For this period of church history, however, very few indicators exist (in sermons, bulletins, or interview reflections) that point toward corporate discernment being practiced at Chapel Hill Harvester. During these years, discernment and deliverance functioned primarily at the individual level in the context of the Woman's Prayer group or in personal counseling and prayer sessions. A majority of members were not yet fully convinced of the need for this activity nor of Lynn's prominent role in guiding the congregation. Later, after Earl and Lynn solidified their power base in the congregation and this spiritualized world view was integrated into members' thinking and church structures, corporate discernment offered essential guidance for the entire church.

The Spiritualizing of Authority

The Charismatic emphasis on the unmediated experience of the Holy Spirit contained the potential for unbounded antinominalism and uncontrolled expressivism. Likewise, the assertion that each believer possessed both the Holy Spirit and specific spiritual gifts created a situation of multiple, and often competing, authorities. This was especially true in nondenominational fellowships or churches. This need to persuade the entire congregation of the validity of this new spiritual orientation led to a reorganization of church structure and authority.

At Chapel Hill Harvester this tendency was in evidence. As more Charismatic Christians were drawn to the services, and current members were baptized in the Holy Spirit, the amount of time spent in expressive worship began to rise. Likewise, judging from the tapes of services, members were increasingly demonstrative in their expression of their gifts in worship services. The church leadership encouraged this spiritual expression of gifts by ever-increasing numbers of people. As Earl exclaimed, "It is not our desire to strangle or coerce [your gift] but to release and set free the spirit that is within you" (9/28/76). Yet they also needed to ensure order and maintain control.

In the larger Charismatic community the promotion of individual spiritual gifts resulted in two distinctive dynamics. In the first dynamic, the diversity of possible gifts of the Spirit enabled persons to expand their role in leadership. The energies and talents of previously overlooked members came to be valued and released into ministry. In the Catholic and Mainline Protestant denominations influenced by the Charismatic Movement this dynamic increased lay participation and furthered the movement toward

more egalitarian, lay-led organizations. For these religious groups (the more tradition-based, church-like organizations), the Charismatic Movement could best be described as a "renewal movement," often interjecting into the existing structures an expressivism that brought about revitalization (Poloma, 1982:197ff.). These bureaucratic denominational forms allowed for extensive personal freedom of expression while providing an organizational form for controlling any possible chaotic expressivism. Only occasionally did the spirit-filled subgroups within these churches challenge denominational authority and break free of their institutional checks and balances.[99]

In the case of many independent and nondenominational groups (the more sect-like organizations), the Charismatic influence tended to function on the individual level and was seen as a deepening of one's relationship with God. This model was consonant with the emphasis in other historical Holiness movements. This deeper relationship with God was envisioned as bringing about a new level of power for evangelism and ministry. This spiritual empowerment took place in groups which had no extra-congregational institutional or traditional checks. Consequently, these independent sect-like groups were more susceptible to excessive emotionalism, unorthodox doctrines, and to abuses of authority in order to control this expressivism (Poloma, 1982:233).[100]

In order to restrain the frenetic ecstasy, the multiplicity of gifts, and the competing voices of authority, many groups began to introduce doctrines which defined the pastor as spiritual leader and created a ranking of importance to the diverse spiritual gifts. Following from this, a hierarchical system of congregational organizing was proposed with personal submission to spiritual leaders, often called "disciple elders" or "shepherds" as the key feature. During the early seventies, groups advocating this system of spiritual discipleship engendered a controversy among Charismatics and other Christians over the use and abuse of these practices.[101] A number of religious leaders, including Pat Robertson, Dennis

---

[99] Eiesland (1994b) describes one such struggle in a United Methodist church which led to a church split and schism from the denomination.

[100] Catholic and Mainline denominational Charismatic groups were not completely immune to these problems. One famous incident of authoritarian control of personal spiritual freedom occurred in the Catholic South Bend/Ann Arbor Word of God community (Quebedeaux, 1983:137-138). By and large, the structural checks and balances of the overarching institutions of which they were a part kept potential abuses to a minimum. This is not true for the independent groups many of which were charged with abusing their authority (Pousson, 1990:32).

[101] For various descriptions of the shepherding/discipleship movement, the controversy it created, and the

Bennett, David du Plessis, and Kathryn Kuhlman spoke out against these practices (Plowman, 1975; Synan, 1976; Maust,1980). Paulk, too, critiqued these authoritarian discipleship practices during the early seventies. A number of people, including Bob and Kim Crutchfield, recalled being attracted to the church because of its stance against this movement. However, by 1976 Earl had accepted this structuring of authority along with the other spiritual beliefs. "A lot of folk are getting all excited about the use of discipleship or shepherding today but I've got news for you honey, it's scriptural. It is God's word!, he asserted in one sermon (3/7/76).

The primary proponent of these discipleship practices was a Florida based group called Christian Growth Ministries. This organization, led by six men -- Bob Mumford, Charles Simpson, Don Basham, Derrick Prince, John Poole, and Ern Baxter, was organized under this name in 1970 to fill what they saw as a void in the Charismatic movement. In the rapid and effervescent growth of the Charismatic movement during its early years, a need arose for "spiritual maturity, sound doctrine, and discipline" (Digitale, 1990:38). The Shepherding or Discipleship Movement, as it was commonly called, attempted to address that need (Plowman, 1975).

Christian Growth Ministries see Plowman, 1975:52-54; Synan, 1976; Maust, 1980; Poloma, 1982: 235-236; Quebedeaux, 1983:138-142; Warner, 1988:239-242; Pousson, 1990; Digitale, 1990:38-42.

Mumford's group stressed submission to a shepherd or elder as a way to develop spiritual growth and maturity, and of course ensure order and control. As local discipleship groups grew larger than a dozen members, they often divided to form new groups with group leaders always responsible to, and covered in authority and oversight by, their spiritual elder. Thus, a strong hierarchical arrangement was established, one which fit perfectly with the "five-fold ministry" doctrine of the Latter Rain Movement with which Ern Baxter was well-versed. Authority was seen as flowing down from God to the spiritual leader (who was often understood as a prophet, pastor or teacher) to his under-shepherds, and then to the people under their authority. Christian Growth Ministries held conferences and training sessions for shepherds, the majority of which were young, immature, and themselves undisciplined. Many abuses of authority occurred including forbidding marriages, demanding public confessions of secret sins, discouraging school and career plans, and establishing dating relationships for disciple members. The occurrence of abuses resulting from these teachings diminished with time, yet the potential for abuse remained part and parcel of the theological position. Nevertheless, many of these teachings gained wide acceptance among Protestant and Catholic Charismatics.[102]

Not long after he accepted the spiritualized perspective, Earl Paulk began to preach the concept of spiritual authority and congregational submission. His early transitional expressions of this concept were marked by a blurring of the previous organic image of the congregation with this new hierarchical idea. On the one hand, he clearly asserted that "The Body" was the authority to which all members, including himself, must submit. "That rebellious spirit must be totally subdued, and committed to God's authority....I submit myself to the Body of Christ, to a body ministry!" Authority resided in the corporate entity that was the Church. On the other hand, as the "head" of a "Body," Earl had been called of God and was, therefore, the chosen authority for this Body. Following the teachings of Nee, Baxter, Ortiz, and others, Paulk preached of a spiritual chain of command which flowed from Christ as the head of the Church to Earl as the head of this body of believers. Spiritual authority was only partially understood as an individual attribute; it was not personal authority alone but also corporate authority.

---

[102] As an indication of the extensive influence this group had, Christian Growth Ministries published a magazine "New Wine" which at its peak had a circulation of over 100,000 (Quebedeaux 1983:140). Likewise, two influential books which espousing a similar perspective, *Call to Discipleship* by Juan Carlos Ortiz and *Spiritual Authority* by Watchman Nee, each sold tens of thousands of copies.

Spiritual authority, nevertheless, had become the possession of one individual. In this case it resided in the person of Earl Paulk. Paulk's authority soon became tied both to **his** relationship to Christ and **his** calling to the congregation. He preached, "Spiritual authority is kept alive by prayer and communion with God.... You can't fight God. God will raise up those whom he will and it will never be by position but always by calling" (2/20/77). He began to assert that acceptance of his singular authority in the congregation was a requirement for involvement in "Body Life," "If you, my dear hearts, are not willing to submit yourself unto the authority appointed by God...find some place else in the world to worship" (10/9/77). In 1978, he stated forcefully, "Submit to a body ministry, or God can’t use you in this church" and "That rebellious spirit must be totally subdued and committed to God’s authority.... I must submit myself to the Body of Christ...to a body ministry" (2/12/78).

A Singular Authority

Paulk's verbal expressions of the "correct structure of Biblical authority" represented a distinctive ideological change in the congregation. In fact, at this time it was a change that very few members wholeheartedly accepted. This shift still required a reworking of the organizational arrangements, legitimation of leadership, and polity within the church community before these teachings were to have the effect they later did. In order to create these changes Paulk began subtly in his sermon rhetoric to redefine the criteria for power in the congregation as spiritual rather than as a representative democracy or as a traditional trust in the "fatherly pastor." He preached,

No election or position can give you spiritual authority...Jesus wasn't elected and nobody cast any votes to put him on the cross...So you want to be a spiritual authority in a church then you will never assign yourself a position or compare yourself to others, you never have to strive with God's authority (2/20/77).

In redefining this authority he openly challenged the power of the Board of Deacons. He began, not so subtly, to erode members' confidence in the decisions of board members, "I did not have to take a vote about it, I didn't even call the official Board together" (5/1/77). On another occasion he remarked, "That means you’re not in control here, doesn’t it? It means the Holy Spirit is going to do it the way he wants to... and you and your big minds, planning committees, boards.... You don’t know anything"

(10/9/77).

A second tact Paulk used to institutionalize his singular position of spiritual leadership was to propose a more congruent form of organization as a substitute for the deacon board arrangement. He presented a model based on his understanding of Jesus and the disciples. Although it took several years to fully implement, his idea was to surround himself with loyal, hand chosen disciples who would support him in ministry and in maintaining his authority (Ammerman, 1987). His first action toward this goal was to embrace Lynn Mays and several other key deacons as confidantes, an inner circle (Wallis, 1986). This move resulted in gossip, murmurings, and outright defiance from some members. Paulk responded vehemently to these challenges, "You say God doesn't have an inner circle, you're a liar. He has always had.... Jesus knew who he could trust and where he could make himself totally vulnerable" (10/9/77).

Besides this verbal undermining of the board system of leadership, Earl Paulk began to merge the Charismatic ideas of spiritual authority with the "Latter Rain" portrayal of the five-fold ministry. He acknowledged what was a commonly accepted fact in the congregation, that he had been "called" to be a "pastor" and "teacher." At the same time, he also began to assert tentatively that spiritual leaders were also "prophets." He merged the idea of prophetic office with that of God's called spiritual leadership. As he commented in one sermon, "When you are raising up prophets you don't vote for them. That's not a word of the Lord...voting for (the church's) leaders...is of the devil. It can't be of the Lord" (10/9/77). In essence, if church members recognized his calling as their spiritual leader, then they also must recognize him as having prophetic abilities. The full implication of this definitional merger would not be felt in the congregation, however, until later in its history.

Pastor Paulk, in the stereotypical mold of Southern religious orator, had always been bold and outspoken in his preaching style. When he began to perceive and portray himself as the sole spiritual authority, however, his forceful preaching reached new heights. Earl's spiritual boldness was joked about by Don in a 1976 bulletin (9/10/76).

Some strange, if not downright funny things happen in Church! This past Sunday morning was no exception. For instance there was the case of Peggy ruining her hose after the morning worship. It seems she tore up the knees of them crawling out of church.... a number of people have reported cases of very sore toes this week as a result of having them trod upon Sunday morning.

Jumping ahead in the story, but as a point of contrast, by 1978 there was no joking to temper his forceful, and sometimes abusive, preaching style. Paulk commented in one sermon (11/18/78),

A new member came to me and said,'You know I came and the first time I heard Pastor Paulk preach and I heard him tearing people down and ripping them apart, I thought God have mercy, why do they keep coming to hear him preach....' Well you might find out if you listen! There are some things I won't compromise.

During this period of church history, the congregation had not yet come to identify their pastor Earl Paulk as the singular spiritual leader which his rhetoric attempted to portray. Nor was Paulk in a solid position organizationally to demand that they obey or submit to him on the basis of this authority. Therefore, although his sermons contained an implicit message of obedience, Paulk seldom discussed this relationship using the explicit terms of "discipleship," "submission" and "obedience" (See Appendix B graphs B-22, B-23, B-24). Only later when a majority of the congregation accepted his prophetic and spiritually superior status, and this status was organizationally supported, was he able to make overt demands of obedience and submission. For the majority of the congregation at this point, Earl continued to be honored as their pastor, respected for his credentials, and loved like a brother.

Re-Legitimating Authority

It was to these shared congregational perceptions of him that Earl turned in his continuing effort to legitimate this new sense of his authority. Even though he had proclaimed 1977 as the "year of revelations," Earl Paulk did not attempt to ground his spiritual authority in a prophetic status or a supernatural vision for the church. Rather his attempts to legitimate his increasingly centralized authority took the form of over-emphasizing and reworking several generally held images of the relationship between him and Chapel Hill Harvester Church. These four images were Earl's pastoral role of being guided by God, the congregation as family, love as the greatest virtue for an authority, and the need for "oneness of the Body."

First, Paulk clarified his pastoral role by asserting that he, as pastor, was the one who most clearly heard God's voice. Previously much of his pastoral authority had come from his educational achievements, his insight into the Scriptures, or his awareness of the "mind of Christ." During this time,

Paulk began to redefine his pastoral authority based on his being guided by God, unmediated by natural channels such as degrees, book learning, or familiarity with the Scriptures. He used comments such as "God told me to tell you", "God said", "The Holy Spirit would have me say", "The Holy Spirit says that I should say to you," and "The Lord would have you hear" countless times in sermons. He grounded this authority in verbal conversations he had with the Divine, "I would add one final note that the Apostle Paul did not add...and I say this by permission of the Holy Spirit.... I checked it out with the Holy Spirit to be sure it would be alright and the Holy Spirit said it would be" (11/14/76). Comments such as this one implied a reliance upon direct experiential contact with the Almighty. Even his sermon references to the persons of the Trinity, the words themselves, signified his intimate relationship with God and the ground of his spiritual authority.[103]

At the same time Paulk intensified his rhetoric around the image of the congregation as family, "Hear me, harvesters, if you want God to do what he wants around here you are going to start living like a family" (10/9/77). In sermons he began referring to himself more often as "Brother Paulk" than as "Pastor." Many of the images in his preaching were taken from his family's experiences including diaper-changing, his daughters' dating rituals, his marital bliss, and his wife's cooking. His references to family life in relation to the church increased three-fold during this time period (74-75 average 3.0/sermon, 76-77 average 9.4/sermon, see Appendix B-10). In the previous historical period, the family rhetoric in sermons was natural and without subtexts. During this period, however, the same language became not only more frequent, but also intentionally symbolic. The congregation was purposely being directed to perceive itself as a family with Earl as its father/ husband/ big brother figure. To reinforce his status in this familial arrangement, his paternalistic comments like "honey," "sweetheart," "my little children," and "dear darlings" increased dramatically during this time (74-75 average 2.6/sermon, 76-77 average 10.1/sermon, see Appendix B-21).

The familial image Paulk cast of himself, however, was not that of a stern, authoritarian father. Like his portrayal of God, Earl was a loving, yet firm, authority. Authority was not defined by power, force, or coercion but by love, trust, and concern. He often reminded the congregation, "This pulpit is built on

---

[103] Earl Paulk's use of the word "God" in sermons climbed from an average of 67 times per sermon in 1974-75 to 105 in 1976-77. His references to Jesus (19 to 42) doubled as did those to the Holy Spirit (10 to 21). See Appendix B graphs B-1, B-2, and B-3.

love and trust, not on fear" (5/2/76). During this two year period Earl's use of the term "love" in sermons rose by 400 percent to an average of twenty-four per sermon (See Appendix B-9). This theme of love was also used to temper his increasing emphasis on authority. He assured the membership, "[God] has drawn us to him not by constraint, not by the letter of the law, but by the bands of love" (3/6/77). In one of Earl's most powerful sermons on authority, he mentioned love thirty-one times in a 45 minute talk (2/20/77). The expression of love even represented the evidence of the Spirit's power and the "mark of the true church" as the 11/30/76 church bulletin attests.

Someone said of the Sunday night service 'love was flowing like a river among believers'.... That was why we experienced healings, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, tongues, interpretation, prophecy, discernment of spirits and perhaps the other gifts. Praise God! That's the mark of the true church.

Finally, another effort by Paulk to legitimate his spiritual authority came in the form of a renewed call for complete congregational unity or "oneness in the Body." Since spiritual authority resided in the corporate body, and obedience was due specifically to that body with Earl as its head, the unity of the whole was the necessary prerequisite in proving its obedience to God. Dissent, bitterness, and gossiping were signs of the disobedient, signs of the influence of Satan (Ammerman, 1987). Members were to have no fellowship with such destroyers of unity. As Paulk counseled, "If somebody comes among us with an argumentative spirit, St. Paul says not to get involved with them" (11/14/76). On the other hand, he characterized any godly venture as necessarily promoting unity, obedience and social solidarity or "oneness in the Body.... If it is of the Lord, it is always in unity...never in opposition but always in unity" (11/14/76).[104]

This abstracted portrayal of the changes in Paulk's beliefs might give the appearance of a situation of startling and radical shifts of which every member should have been immediately aware. This was not the case, however. Earl introduced these beliefs more gradually than my summary portrayal indicates. Certain themes, long existent in his preaching, were reinterpreted to conform to and reflect this new spiritual reality. Earl's subtle reinterpretations of familiar concepts allowed him to accomplish some

[104] The theme of unity was a prominent one both in the teaching of the Latter Rain Restorationists (Iverson, 1975; Darrand & Shupe, 1984) and for the proponents of the Discipleship/Shepherding movement (Quebedeaux, 1983).

drastic shifts in theology without a majority of members becoming aware of the changes until a few years later. Although certain changes did evoke immediate outcry from the congregation, Paulk's reliance on reworking his previous bases of authority gradually reconfigured the church's ideological framework without a major congregational revolt.

These spiritual doctrines did not exist only in a verbal reality. Paulk's spoken word had power, but these theological changes needed to be embodied in congregational structures and practices in order for them to have the significant impact they had. As this spiritual perspective became more familiar to members, Paulk was able to institute the organizational changes necessary to reshape the congregation into a new entity. An examination of this period of the church's history is incomplete, then, without a discussion of how these new doctrines began to be incorporated into the structures of community life.

Structuring the Spirit

The deliberate reconstruction of the church's institutional arrangement to conform to the new doctrinal reality was a very gradual process. Although the initial reformation began to take place in mid 1976, the process continued for many years. This discussion of the early reshaping of the congregation includes evidence stretching into the middle months of 1978. The first step, already discussed above, was to formalize Lynn Mays' role in the congregation. From the point where she was selected as a deacon, her influence in shaping the congregational practices was clearly significant. A second step in changing congregational practices involved opening the worship service to more vocal spiritual expressiveness and an increased demonstration of the Gifts of the Spirit. Another effort in structuring this spiritual perspective included Paulk's creation of ministry opportunities which allowed individuals to express their diverse spiritual "gifts and callings." Each of these changes aided in incorporating the spiritual perspective into the world view of the congregation and solidifying Paulk's position as spiritual authority.

Part and parcel of the Spirit's wishes, as communicated through Lynn and other Charismatic believers, was to infuse more expressive praise and the practice of the gifts of the Spirit into church life. The Ladies Prayer group was one place in the church where uninhibited praise and expression of the Gifts were fully sanctioned. This group led the way in introducing more spiritually expressive practices throughout the church. By late 1977, worship services began to be punctuated by

shouts of praise, occasional prophecies, and much glossolalia from the congregation.[105] Lynn strongly encouraged this expressiveness, both to Paulk in private and to the entire congregation during her first pulpit opportunity. "This church as a whole has a **'Spirit of Inhibition,'"** she asserted, "We have not been set free to worship" (her emphasis, Fall 1977). Later, in 1978, she again counseled the congregation, "We make ourselves totally given to God...in praise, clapping our hands, with dance, with tongues..." (11/18/78). [106]

---

[105] Exuberant worship is a distinctive teaching of the Latter Rain and Restorationist writers (Nation, 1990:111; Darrand & Shupe, 1984:88ff.; Hamon, 1981:257ff.). Iverson writes, "Whenever and wherever you find the People of God released from captivity [in the days of Restoration] there also comes a new release and desire to worship. It only takes a few minutes in a congregation to tell if they are experiencing a fresh visitation of the Presence of the Lord. A free people will worship freely" (1975: 193).

[106] It is not surprising that a link was made between expressivist worship which included extensive speaking in tongues and the acceptance of spiritual authority. Both activities involve surrender to an external force. Several authors (McGuire, 1982:61-62,68-69; Neitz, 1987:40) discuss the connection between "yielding oneself to the Spirit" and surrender to a spiritual authority.

Earl Paulk responded affirmatively to this imperative. His expressions of praise during sermons increased gradually each year from 1974 through 1977 (from 10/sermon to 40/sermon) but in 1978 jumped to almost 100 praise comments per sermon.[107] Following his lead, and reinforced by the active involvement of the Prayer Group women, the rest of the congregation soon participated fully in this spiritual expressiveness. The amount of time spent in ecstatic praise on the Sunday morning rose from just a few minutes to well over ten minutes. Even the portion of the service reserved for the ritual of anointing with oil was adapted to embrace more overt charismatic gifts of healing, prophecy, and deliverance. At the same time, the Sunday evening service became almost exclusively a time of praise and ecstatic spiritual celebration.

These changes were not without conflict, however. In fact, church records hint at a tension between the worship leader/organist, Clariece, and those promoting this Charismatic expressivism. Clariece's preference for worship music always inclined more toward hymns and "music with a message." Earl's biography addresses her reluctance to switch styles.

The 'Word' songs hit popularity in the late sixties as the Charismatic movement sweep through denominational congregations always included singing scriptures. The Harvesters sang some 'Word' songs in which scriptures and music were well synchronized (which was rare), but hymn arrangements of songs with lasting, edifying messages made up the bulk of their musical repertoire. (Weeks, 1986:248)

Even with Clariece's control over the worship service, the tapes from this period show a distinct shift in worship style. A church bulletin from 1977 summed up the results of this more spiritualized worship ethos, "More and more people want to be **involved** in the life of the church and they want the church to be more "**lively**" (their emphasis, 5/10/77). No doubt this observation was seen as factual and self-confirming since the congregation was beginning to grow, mostly with Charismatic believers.

Another drastic shift in organization was due to the increased diversification of ministries and decentralization of leadership. As more members realized their spiritual gifts and talents, the church

---

[107] Paulk's praise comments were always in English, words such as "praise God," "hallelujah," "Praise the Lord." Never once on the sermon tapes nor in person did I hear Earl Paulk publicly speak in tongues from the pulpit. The only time I ever witnessed him speaking in tongues was in a small meeting of the core leadership.

accommodated their desires to implement these callings. Paulk encouraged this expression of gifts in a September 1976 bulletin, "...God wants to meet people at the point of their needs. It is toward this goal that we attempt to establish ministries that will serve people...So, please, please pray and make yourself available for a mighty move of God" (9/7/76). By the end of the following year the church membership had begun a group for overweight persons, a regular marriage encounter retreat, and a support group for older singles and divorced persons, as well as organized numerous special hobby groups, Bible studies, and prayer fellowships.[108] As Paulk commented in one sermon, "When you come here, sooner or later you are going to get involved. We have very few spectators here" (10/9/77).

The most important of these ministries for the future of the church was the youth Bible study. Duane Swilley, Earl's nephew and a star athlete who just graduated from Georgia Tech, had recently been persuaded by his uncle to lead a week night group for the youth. Duane was young, handsome, and had considerable personal appeal. This Bible study met in the basement of a deacon's home on Thursday evening, later switching to Tuesday night. The group struggled for quite a few months before it "bore fruit" and began to grow. As will be seen in the next chapter, this youth group singlehandedly reconfigured the constituency of the congregation.

As odd as it may seem, this decentralization of leadership actually facilitated Earl Paulk's consolidation of his congregational authority. Not only had he called for and sanctioned these diverse ministries, but they reported directly to him rather than to the deacon board. Likewise, this rapid multiplication of outreach efforts symbolized a successful ministry for which he could take credit. As more avenues for an individual's congregational participation unfolded, the "simplistic" organizational lines blurred. This, too, allowed for a greater consolidation of power by Paulk. Finally, these ministries were tangible proof that the Gifts of the Spirit were in abundance in this congregation.

As the diversity of ministries flourished the image of "Body Life" continued to be refined. The "Body Life" idea began to be institutionalized in order to organize these multiple gifts and callings. Paulk

---

[108] Often in the discussion of megachurches these multiple ministries are seen as marketing tools created to cater to the diverse needs of members. These ministries are looked upon as interest-based groups begun in order to keep the membership happy and involved. The dynamic evident at this point in the church's narrative, however, is that many of these groups were begun in order to give members' a place to minister. After all, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit had empowered these Christians with spiritual gifts. It was up to the church to offer them a structure in which to exercise these gifts.

argues in one sermon, "Body life takes on a very broad aspect. It is the all-inclusive activities of the total church" (8/17/76). As noted above, authority was grounded in the whole body, with Paulk as its head.

This process of diversification and complexification functioned as an unlikely counter to the decentralizing effects of the multiple spiritual gifts being implemented by members. Although Paulk preached and even encouraged the expression of a member's call to serve, at the same time he set limits or qualifications on those engaged in service. He made this clear in a church bulletin, "One day last week I was prayerfully considering our growth in Body-Life ministries. I really felt moved upon by the Holy Spirit as I began making a list of some of the qualifications for those sharing in these ministries" (9/23/77). Along with the expected conditions of salvation, a calling, commitment, and the good report of others, this list also included being "without competitiveness," "understanding spiritual authority," and not being "given to riotous or unruly actions in church matters" (9/23/77).

A Special Spiritual Purpose

In Earl's move to a more spiritualized church structure it was natural that these ideas be reflected in the image of the church. Earl, Don, and other leaders began to speak of the congregation as more than just a "little church by the side of the road," rather it was envisioned as an "unique church," which was "Called of God for a Special Purpose." In one church bulletin a writer commented, "We know that (Chapel Hill Harvester Church) was raised up of God for a particular time and a special need" (10/28/76). Elsewhere in its literature, the church was referred to as "the impossible church." Even the image of "Harvester" became synonymous with a "true," or at least more sincere, Christian lifestyle. Paulk preached one Sunday, "If you are not humble, contrite...God can't use you. You find another little place somewhere. You are not really a Harvester at all" (10/9/77). By late 1978 Paulk got to a point where he defined the church against what it had not long before prided itself in being "a little family church by the side of the road.... God has not called us to have a little family fellowship" (10/8/78).

This dynamic of spiritual self-definition went hand in hand with that of distinguishing themselves from all other religious groups. The number of negative references to other Christian groups increased from an average of .5 times per sermon in the previous period to 3.8 times during 1976 and 1977 (See Appendix B-20). Many of Paulk's comments were indirectly aimed at his former denomination and the church he had pastored. The success the Church of God had experienced in the 1980's overshadowed

his own. The denomination had grown rapidly, doubled its membership over the previous sixteen years. The Church of God was also beginning to prosper financially with an increasingly middle class constituency (Crews, 1990: 139, 151-152, 159). Mt Paran, as Hemphill Avenue Church of God came to be known, grew even more rapidly than did the denomination. When Paulk left in 1960 membership was reported to be approximately 1000. In 1978 they claimed their membership was over 3000. It had become one of the largest and most well know churches in the city and in the denomination.

This effort at re-characterizing the church's identity can be seen in the rhetoric surrounding the tape and radio ministry. The Sunday sermons had been taped since 1974 and a radio program began early in the Inman Park days. However, it was during this time that the tapes began to circulate outside the congregation. Paulk used the responses to these tapes as confirmation of the church's spiritual importance. Often excerpts of letters were read on Sunday morning or printed in bulletins to show the scope of this ministry. This early self-aggrandizement established a pattern for using their media exposure which lasts throughout the church's history. Positive responses were seen as a self-validation of the ministry, a confirmation of its worth, and a verification of the church's unique role as a "Move of God." The promotion of radio and tapes enlarged the sphere of Paulk's ministry, or at least appeared to do so. When a response was received from a distant state, even if it was from a relative of a local member, this was interpreted as a "miracle" and proof of the importance of Paulk's message. As Paulk stated in a bulletin after one such glowing tape report, "It is such a thrill just to be a part of what God is doing in these last days. This adds a new responsibility to all of us here at Chapel Hill Harvester Church" (6/9/76).

As the church began to be seen in a spiritual light, with a God-given purpose, disagreement with a discerned course of action became the sign of spiritual rebellion. Spiritual threats were used as a means of control and intimidation for those who disagreed. Paulk made this very plain in one sermon (10/9/77),

Notice, honey, when the Spirit of God is in it then you take your hands off of it... God has charged his church and they are not to be touched, and when you put your hand on God's church you are in trouble already!... Honey, when you start putting obstacles in the way of God's people, you are in trouble...with heartaches and sorrows that you never dreamed about.

By the middle of 1978 the congregation members had progressed considerably toward accepting a spiritualized perspective of the church and the world. Likewise, the church structures, leadership, and identity were beginning to reflect this spiritualized orientation. What remained to convince members of the truth of this perspective was the tangible proof of it "bearing fruit." Not only had this criterion been established in Paulk's preaching, but it had become an accepted norm in the life of the congregation. Several doctrines emphasized by Paulk during this period contributed to this norm as well as to a congregational atmosphere of expecting some miraculous event.

LIFE IN THE END TIMES

Like any good Pentecostal preacher, Paulk preached on the Return of Christ and the "End Times." This was at a time when apocalyptic panic and heightened expectations of a pretribulation rapture were rampant, propagated by authors such as Hal Lindsey and movies like *A Thief in the Night* and *A Distant Thunder* (Ammerman, 1987:44-45; Balmer, 1989: 58-64). Paulk participated in this wave of pre-millennialists discernment of the "signs," hoping to perceive the "times and seasons" of Christ's return. He related stories of recent earthquakes, crimes, destructive storms, the Three Mile Island disaster, and the Camp David Accord to the congregation as a warning that they were living in the "latter days" (See Appendix B-18 for Paulk's use of end times language.) A March church bulletin records one such warning (3/9/77).

During the past few days we have heard news reports of great earthquakes that have shattered cities, sending hundreds and thousands to their deaths. This always serves as an outstanding reminder that indeed the second coming of Christ is at hand!

By mid 1977, Paulk's messages on "the end times" were punctuated with a new sense of urgency. He seemed convinced, as were many other Christians, that Christ's return to Earth was imminent, perhaps even by the end of the decade. Yet he always seemed to portray Jesus' Second Coming in such a way as to encourage activism, rather than spiritual navel-gazing which was the product of many Charismatic fellowships. Paulk never emphasized an "escapist" mentality regarding the rapture. His view was oriented toward an involvement in the world, primarily in the form of evangelistic outreach. "It seems evident that we are in the closing days of this spiritual generation. It is time for us to be aware

that what we are to do for God must be done NOW," he exclaimed during one sermon (9/9/77). In another sermon he encouraged the membership to be involved, "If we will open our eyes in your communities and in your neighborhoods, I believe God wants to do something that we have never believed possible in these last days" (10/9/77).

Paulk's portrayal of the Second Coming was also probably shaped by the Latter Rain teaching. In this scheme, Christ would return once the Church Universal had matured, after its ranks swelled in a final ingathering of saints during the "latter rain" of the Spirit (Nation, 1990). This idea, when combined with the congregation's own "harvester" identity, provided a powerful motive for evangelistic action and the expectation of an impending mighty harvest of souls. Paulk reinforced these feelings with countless sermon comments similar to the following one (10/9/77).

The latter rain is what we are seeing take place now. We are now in the midst of the latter rain.... God has raised up harvesters to reap the latter rain.... What denominations and organizations could not do, God, by his Spirit is doing... God is raising up laborers into a great field of harvest. We are sent into the field. What is the harvest? It's that last great world-wide ingathering of souls into the kingdom of God...the last great move of the Spirit before Jesus comes...preparing us to move through the tribulation and into the millennium of God.

SUCCESS EQUALS PROOF

Another prominent theme upon which Earl Paulk often elaborated in sermons from this time was that success, defined variously, was the "fruit" of correct doctrine and obedience to God. This idea, too, was very common in Charismatic circles (Poloma, 1982; Quebedeaux, 1983). The idea of prosperity and material blessing went hand in hand with the intense emphasis on spirituality, especially for the upwardly mobile, materialistic middle class spirit-filled believers. Economic success became the tangible evidence of an upright spiritual life. As was shown above, earlier in the church's history Earl rejected the explicit preaching of material success for its own sake (5/19/74 and 11/9/75).

Now, a few years later and reflecting changes in the membership's financial status and the church's own economic advancement, Paulk began to redefine personal success in line with the prosperity authors. "It is when we give liberally to God that we create a legitimate need for more prosperity, the prosperity flows to us automatically," stated one bulletin (1/4/77). Material success and the

power of a victorious live became the characterization of a prosperous Spirit-filled Christian. References in sermons to prosperity, victorious living, and success rose dramatically during the year of 1977 to the highest point in the church's history, an average of 12.4 references per sermon (See Appendix B-26).

On a corporate level, a distinct connection was made by Paulk between the success of the church and the recognition of his spiritual authority. Corporate success was primarily defined as an increase in attendance, although additional buildings, ministries, and staff members also counted as spiritual blessings. This emphasis on success, most often determined by numerical size, as a measure of exceptional spirituality was evident in many of the Charismatic fellowships and movements throughout the seventies and eighties (Caldwell, 1985; Barron, 1991). Paulk had previously used this formula to determine whether Lynn Mays' perspective was a theologically sound one. He now employed it again as an incentive for the congregation to accept both the spiritualized theological perspective and his singular authority. This formula argued that if the church was prosperous under his singular spiritual leadership, then this was a certain sign that his leadership was valid. Earl Paulk described this condition in a 1977 sermon. "We will follow authority because there is effectiveness in ministry. And when effectiveness in ministry is lost with in also goes a corrupt ministry that will end in bankruptcy or a radically diminishing from lack of support" (2/20/77). Conversely, and more importantly for intensifying this aura of expectation, if the congregation accepted Paulk's theological perspective and his authority as legitimate, they could expect success. Although neither of these conditions nor the resulting blessings materialized immediately, this preaching facilitated the creation of an atmosphere where members began to anticipate growth and success.

These themes in Earl Paulk's preaching, along with several seemingly miraculous gifts of money at exactly the moment they were needed, resulted in an intense anticipatory mood in the congregation as 1978 began. Paulk both encouraged and capitalized on this expectant atmosphere in his sermons.

"A few weeks ago the Lord spoke to me and showed me people standing around looking for a place to sit" (10/10/76).

"God will do a mighty thing here but he has got to get it lined up just like He wants it" (2/20/77).

"We are going to have a harvest like we never thought possible... If we will open our eyes in your

communities and in your neighborhoods, I believe God wants to do something that we have never believed possible in these last days " (10/9/77).

"There are going to be some new innovative ministries soon. IT'S TIME TO GROW! [to God] You would never have given us a vision...without it coming to pass" (4/16/78).

The period of church history from 1973 to 1975 introduced the church into a new environment and a new constituency; however, this two year period from 1976 to 1977 brought about even more revolutionary changes. The ideological influences of the Charismatic and the Latter Rain Movements filtered through Earl Paulk's sermons and into the minds and worship practices of the congregation. In so doing, the character of the congregation began to change. Like so many other congregations touched by the Charismatic Movement, Chapel Hill Harvester had become a spiritual community. The radical changes which resulted from this ideological shift were not immediately apparent. The embrace of this spiritual perspective, however, forever altered what Chapel Hill Harvester Church and Earl Paulk as its leader were to be. This theological shift contributed to the church’s development toward becoming a megachurch by providing the frame for a new and powerful leadership structure. Likewise, the Charismatic Movement, with its spiritual power and vitality, became the reservoir of energy from which the church drew its strength. The unique combination of this spirit-filled perspective and the Latter Rain ideas provided Paulk a foundation for what would become the unifying congregational image of the Kingdom of God. All that remained to integrate this spiritualized world view into the congregational ethos was the evidence of God's blessing, the proof that Paulk was the spiritual authority of this unique and anointed move of God. This evidence came in the form of thousands of teenagers descending upon the unsuspecting, but expectant congregation.

CHAPTER SIX: SUCCESS: PROOF OF THE PROPHET (1978-1980)

The Spirit of God, by revelation, said to my heart, "Listen, don't miss that revelation." And I listened and I didn't miss that revelation. The church grew thereby!

(Earl Paulk)

In September, 1977 twelve youth from the church gathered in a basement of a member's home for a Bible study. The group, led by Earl Paulk's youthful and personally charismatic nephew Duane Swilley, floundered and almost died a quick death from disinterest. Yet, in spite of this rather insignificant beginning, this youth-oriented Bible study transformed Chapel Hill Harvester into a congregation of megachurch proportions in less than three years. Not only did this group, "Alpha" as it was later called, rapidly enlarge the church rolls with a flood of young vibrant members, but it also was responsible for focusing the attention of the city upon the church, for giving it notoriety. The story of Alpha offers a glimpse into the development of Earl Paulk's charismatic leadership and the attraction of a successful, growing church. After all, it is this appeal of a powerful charismatic figure with a prosperous, publicly known, ministry which lies at the heart of much of the attraction to megachurches in modern society.

The process by which this unintentional youth movement reconfigured the congregation and Paulk's image is both fascinating and revealing. Although formally a part of the church, this youth group informally operated for some time as a distinct and independent entity within the congregation. Eventually a large percentage of Alpha's membership found their way into the church. Likewise, various components of Alpha's attractiveness came to be integrated into the rhetoric and ideology of the church as a whole. Because of the profound effect this youth phenomenon had on the character, inner workings, and future of Chapel Hill Harvester Church, an extensive analysis of this group is necessary.

The phenomena of Alpha itself is descriptive of many such youth-driven organizations which arose out of the "Jesus People" and Charismatic movements of the 1960's and 1970's. Alpha's appeal for its youthful members had many facets including a latent sexual attraction, the enthusiasm of a rock and roll concert, an outlet for adolescent rebellion, and a refuge from secular vices. Alpha offered an exciting yet structured religious alternative as well as providing a path back to familial and societal reintegration, as did many other groups like Alpha who "saved" wayward teens from this period of social

unrest in America

The relational leadership dynamics of Alpha influenced how Earl Paulk would be perceived for the next decade. Likewise, the group's system of organization became a model for the church as a whole. This mighty army of adolescents also needed a unifying vision around which to rally. They provided Paulk with the challenge of adapting and invigorating his original vision. A theological image of the Kingdom of God, which had just begun to appear in Paulk's sermon rhetoric, was called upon to provide an identity and order to this unsettled and chaotic congregation. Finally, and most importantly for the continuing development of Earl Paulk's identity as spiritual leader, Alpha proved to be the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding a great "latter rain" ingathering of souls. This horde of teenagers provided evidence of the authenticity of Paulk's new spiritual orientation. This movement became the legitimation for his singular spiritual guidance of the church. They were the fruit of his success, the proof of the prophet.

THE BIRTH OF ALPHA

The initial youth meetings which led to the Alpha phenomenon were anything but invigorating for all involved, judging from the accounts of several of those earliest members. The Bible study struggled to survive; meeting day and time were changed, and still it floundered. In fact, the group remained stagnant till soon after the new year. The group's initial success came near the time when its leader, Duane Swilley, determined to quit his well-paying job, give up ambitions of playing professional football, and become the church's full-time youth leader. Weeks records this series of events as causally related (1986:290).

Duane made a serious commitment to the ministry that drastically changed the direction of his own life. He set spiritual priorities. Sports, money, ambition -- those things would never make him into the man God had called him to be. As he opened his spirit to God's will, the Bible study gradually began to grow. Soon crowds of teenagers were spilling throughout the rooms of the house, out the front door into the yard. Kids were coming from everywhere and bringing their friends with them.

The idea of this Bible study originally came as a result of the church leadership's concern for their

adolescent children. Many of these teens were being tempted to stray from "the straight and narrow." [109] The vices of sex, drugs, alcohol, and rock and roll were rampant at the local high school, Southwest DeKalb. The concerned fathers felt that the added structure of another church meeting would address this problem.[110] Therefore, even though a dozen or two of the church youth were strongly encouraged to attend, the Bible study floundered.

Several months later, youth attitudes began to change regarding the meeting. Duane formed a singing group of Bible study members, with himself as the lead singer. In a sense, Duane stepped from being the leader to become one of the youth, a part of the band. He joined them at their level. He was, after all, only a few years older than most of them. This egalitarian, music-oriented, teaching format caught the interest of the church youth. They began to enjoy it and invite friends. The fellowship group soon grew to almost forty members.[111]

As the leader of the band, Duane could express his vibrant and magnetic personality. This was his medium. Having grown up as the son of a traveling evangelistic couple, he had developed into an accomplished gospel salesperson, singer, and musician. The Bible study's band also offered a way for the youth to express themselves and their own spiritual gifts. It set this youth group apart from other more passive and cerebral Bible studies. Members were encouraged to invite their friends, and that they did. As invitations were passed from locker mate, to dating couples, from class mate to athletic team members, the news of this band and unique Bible study spread throughout the local high school. The story of Barry Smith, one of the leaders of Alpha and later a pastor in the church, demonstrates how the initial attraction and recruitment process operated.

---

[109] Randall Balmer (1989:103-107) presents an interesting discussion about the offspring of sectarian Christians often hearing only rules, not a message of grace from their religion. Others have discussed this tendency in sectarian religion as the "problem of second generation" (Niebuhr, 1957; Schwartz, 1970:67-68; Ammerman, 1987:184-187).

[110] No one interviewed ever mentioned the "concerned mothers." Perhaps since they did not have an organizational "voice" in the church, their concern did not count in the memories of Alpha participants.

[111] Similar fellowship dynamics could be seen in church youth groups and informal parachurch fellowships throughout the United States at this time, due primarily to the influence of the Charismatic movement. The stories of the "Jesus People" churches like Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel (Balmer, 1989:18ff; Enroth, et al., 1972), the Young Life organization (Hargrove, 1976); and in more mainline Protestant congregations (Wolfe, 1976) attest to the prominence of this pattern of small group organization and music-centered expressive worship (Balswick, 1974).

Barry was a senior at Southwest DeKalb High School. The school, less than a mile from the church, was a recently consolidated, mega-high school of over two thousand middle class, predominately white students. It was known throughout Atlanta for having a fine athletic program as well as the typical youth-related problems. Barry grew up under a Christian influence. His father had been a minister in the Nazarene Church. During adolescence, however, Barry recalled feeling disillusioned with church and organized religion. He commented, "The church I was in didn't carry with it a message for me. I didn't feel like I was growing...so I quit going to church, but I was as hungry as could be; I was hungry for God." In the high school's Christian community Barry found fellowship and a active life of faith. This community included a large youth led morning prayer group, which had merged recently with a very active chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. As the popular star halfback of the football team, Barry was seen as a leader of this prayer group. Its membership included the most popular jocks, cheerleaders, and other class leaders. The football coach, a fervent Southern Baptist, was its faculty sponsor.

Around this time the Church's Bible study had captured the attention of most of its own youth. The study had recently been moved onto the church property, having outgrown the member's home. An early video tape recording from a special television program about the Youth Bible Study offered a glimpse of the group at the time (*Harvester Hour* Y-233, 10/29/78). Attendance appeared to be around 30 to 40 people, although Duane stated during the program that the group had 75 members. This membership included white youth of all ages and a few black teens. The band, which Duane referred to as "Harvest" (this was prior to it being called "Alpha") was the focal point of the meeting. "Harvest" was composed of Duane, Cindy Bridges, and Don Paulk's daughter LaDonna, along with two male guitarists, Duane's brother on drums, and Clariece Paulk at the piano. Their music could best be classified as easy listening country gospel. In the television program Don introduced the group by commenting that he once thought it was blasphemous to have drums and guitars in church. After numerous songs, which were rather upbeat hymns focused primarily on God's grace and protection, Duane gave a brief invitation to salvation. He ended the show with an enthusiastic promise that the group was, "even going to grow and get bigger so if you want in on something great, you come here some Monday night."

Barry's girlfriend had promised Cindy Bridges, a singer in the group and daughter of long-time core member John Bridges, that she and her boyfriend would come listen to the group perform someday. They eventually did visit the youth meeting, not long after this October telecast. In no time, Barry and his

girlfriend joined the group and were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Barry recalled the repercussions at school when this happened.

> I came back [to the school group] and told everybody, "This is a good thing." Well, the coach had a fit. He was a strong Southern Baptist and tongues were taboo. But the experience was real...and they were loving people and that caused major friction between me and the coach. Well, the whole school found out about it, about this tension. It became BIG TALK! He and I split, and kids began visiting [the church youth meeting] because they were curious. Me and Matt [the school's fullback] and the most popular kids in the school were going.

Almost overnight, participating in the Monday night youth meeting became the "in" thing to do. Baptism in the Spirit and involvement in the Charismatic movement came to be viewed as being "rebellious" at Southwest DeKalb. More kids flocked in. As one of Lynn Mays' daughters, who had just graduated the previous year, commented from her perspective inside the church, "It happened among the kids, they were going to the malls and skating rinks, and the hangouts...but pretty soon Alpha became the cool place to be."

With this great influx of youth, the level of excitement and enthusiasm rapidly increased. By January 1979, the youth group took the name Alpha, symbolizing a new beginning; indeed it was a new beginning in the history of the church. Alpha began pushing limits of respectability almost immediately. In January they had a "record bust," where over 4000 dollars worth of rock and roll records were set afire. By February, several hundred people were attended Alpha. This figure equaled the total membership of the church at the time. In February, 1979 another television program was dedicated to promoting Alpha and Harvest (*Harvester Hour* Y101, 2/24/79). This program differed considerably from the previous one, however. The presentation was more performance oriented (there were no shots of the audience). Harvest had a distinctive "rock" sound, band members now wore costumes (brown tuxes with wide collared shirts for the males and long peasant dresses for the female singers), and Clariece Paulk was no longer a member. Following the singing, Duane informally discussed the Christian faith with his special guest, a member of the Atlanta Falcons football team. Earl, dressed in a contemporary white turtleneck shirt, concluded with an invitation to salvation.

Alpha soon developed into a significant youth movement in the local area. As the group grew

more successful and outrageous, its excitement and enthusiasm captured the attention of young people from age 12 to 25 and from all the schools in the surrounding counties. One rather academically inclined student ("a nerd") commented on the status of going to Alpha, "All my friends went. It was like being on the football team or basketball team." Another former Alpha member summarized the faddish nature of participating in the youth group.

A lot of my high school was already coming to Alpha.... My best friends were coming to listen to the music. I heard it was a lot of fun, hundreds of teenagers, and they were playing the music that I listened to, with a live band.... Everything about it was appealing.

By 1980 almost 1000 youth attended every Monday night. Pulsating colored lights, screaming spectators, a flashing ALPHA sign, and explosive pyrotechnics combined with the rock-oriented (almost hard rock) music. The group had, by this time, taken the name Alpha and added another guitarist, two organists, and a third female singer. In January of this year Alpha sponsored a second burning of records, drug paraphernalia, and concert tee shirts, called "Disco inferno," with over $20,000 in merchandise being destroyed. Alpha had grown so rapidly and to such an extent that it was obvious to all that the youth group had eclipsed the church in size and as an attraction.

How and why Alpha grew so successful is an intriguing question in itself. Every single person interviewed strongly asserted that the growth of Alpha was due to a unique move of the Holy Spirit. They argued that Alpha grew regardless of their best efforts or their worst mistakes. The spirit of the movement has since proven impossible to capture, duplicate, or repeat. Although the intervention of the Holy Spirit seldom becomes a variable in sociological equations, it is a valid issue to raise in this situation. Researchers have no language for speaking of divine influences in the mundane social reality. Our linguistic inadequacies or theoretical preconceptions, however, do not rule out such "spiritual" factors. The following discussion of components which led to the success of Alpha does not fully explain the phenomenon. Questions such as why Alpha happened to this church when it did and in this configuration, but did not happen to another local congregation attempting a similar venture, or what brought together this particular arrangement of factors at a crucial time in the church's history, can not be fully explained by social or psychological variables. With this in mind, several of these variables did contribute to Alpha's success. Foremost among those was the group leader himself.

The Attraction of Charisma and Sex

Duane Swilley deserves much of the credit for the success of Alpha. In the words of one of the youth, "Duane did not make Alpha, but he had the charisma to carry it." He had a knack for relating to the kids who came. He was honest, sincere, and vulnerable. His willingness to be loving and real with them was very appealing. One woman reflected this in her comment,

After all these years, I still tell him that he is my hero. My father was a dictator and didn't have a soft side. I never saw a man who had a compassionate and loving side and that's what I saw in Duane...and that's what kept me coming back.

A core male member echoed this sentiment, "You felt like Duane would do anything in the world for you, like he had known you all your life.... He liked everybody...and everybody could relate to him." Duane's personality and "heart for youth" were not his only attractive features.[112] One component seldom discussed in relation to the charisma of leaders is their physical appeal. In Duane's case this characteristic was mentioned countless times in interviews with former Alpha participants.

Duane was described by one newspaper writer as "tall, blond and handsome - a powerfully sensual figure and this figure full of 'what the little girls understand'" (Thomas, 1980). The band, too, consisted of attractive people. Over half the female Alpha participants mentioned their physical attraction at that time to the group or to Duane, echoing the words of these former members.

"For many of us older girls, it was a sexual thing. I can remember us talking about how Sunny [Duane's wife] was so lucky to be married to such a wonderful man."

"He was very good-looking. I remember we'd stand down there and go crazy. They, the guys in the band -- Freddy, Mark, Duane, and Guy -- and the girls were going 'ahhhh....' We thought they were

---

[112] Johnson (1992:s1-s3), in his discussion of the key factors that explain how new religious movements develop, described this as the "personal factor." His discussion of the personal characteristics are limited to more psychological attributes. Certainly for both Earl Paulk and his cousin Duane their psychological makeup was a crucial component of the development of Alpha and this church, but so too was their physical presence, athletic build, and good looks. Their physical appearance functioned as an attraction for both males and females, although for different stated reasons.

the most gorgeous things on earth."

"Duane was married, but all the girls thought he was so cute. The others [guys in the band] weren't [married] so they were the object of all our oogling."

The male interviewees made countless similar comments about the female band members and participants. One commented bluntly, "I started going because I liked the girls I met there." Another male participant reflected, "The band was very appealing. The girls were fine-looking too." Several males suggested that Duane's athletic prowess was what attracted them.

"He was a big football player."

"He was a star at Tech, and he knew all those pro [football] players. That was cool."

"He could outrun any of us."

The physical attractiveness of the meetings in general was noted by a number of former Alpha members as their sole initial interest in going. Jay, a single guy at the time, summarized this phenomenon.

A lot of these good-looking jocks over at high school would come. Then the girls and the other football players would come. They were willing to help out all these cute girls...just loving them like Jesus loves. The girls were coming to see what was going on.

This physical intimacy was interpreted immediately as an appropriate Christian expression of "agape love" or, in Jay's words, "loving them like Jesus loves." One woman commented, "For some strange reason there was a lot of closeness, but it wasn't so much a sexual relationship as agape." Jill, whom Jay invited to Alpha and married not long after she joined, recalled a situation which she said exemplified the difference between a "worldly" and a Christian interpretation of this intimacy.

I remember one night when I saw a lot of people going down the aisles. I stopped to pray for this guy. The next time he saw me he noticed my wedding ring and about jumped out of his skin. He said, 'do you know what that means (pointing to my ring), it means forever.' I said, 'I love you in the love of Jesus,' and we sat there and talked. Once kids got in there and saw that it was just Christian love, they learned something. They learned that affection in the church was OK.

Rock and Roll Appeal

Another component in the success of Alpha was the music. The youth saw it as "their music." Most of the songs were written by band members. It was homegrown rock and roll, sung with a Southern drawl, and expressing their joys and pains. It didn't matter how bad Alpha's singing was, what mattered was it belonged to them. Jay and Jill discussed this during an interview, while one of their old Alpha tapes played in the background for my benefit.

Jay: "Some of them (the band members) couldn't sing and play the piano at the same time."

Jill: "Just listen to some of this tape, they are awful! They couldn't sing all that good. But we loved them. We'd put those tapes on and go in the car and sing to the tapes as loud as we could."

Jay: "Every time we went in the car, we had those tapes on.... Everybody loved the band, the message."

The 1970's was the era of Christian Rock. Sparked by the music of the Jesus Movement and fueled by masses of youthful Charismatic consumers, bands sprang up overnight performing every type of music style with more or less discernable Christian lyrics. Groups such as Andrae Crouch and the Disciples, Love Song with Chuck Girard, Barry McGuire, 2nd Chapter of Acts, Amy Grant, Honeytree, Keith Green, Randy Stonehill, and Larry Norman became very popular and sold millions of records (Wooding,1993; Justice, 1993; Enroth et al., 1972).[113] Concerts featuring these singers imitated secular folk, pop, hard rock, or heavy metal ones, except without drugs or alcohol. On a smaller scale, Alpha duplicated the ecstatic enthusiasm of a rock concert in church every Monday night, as one former Alpha member suggested.

You got there 45 minutes early to get a good seat. It was like a concert at the Omni every week. Five to ten minutes before it started everybody got excited and began clapping. The excitement was more than we ever had at church.

---

[113] Romanowski (1990) provides an excellent summary of the history of the contemporary Christian music industry. He argues that, until the Christian performer Amy Grant's success in the 1980's, Christian music was never as profitable as the secular music industry. He does admit, however, that the industry had a tremendous influence upon the Evangelical and Charismatic communities in the 70's and 80's. During the mid eighties, Grant's string of platinum albums (sales of over 1 million copies) propelled Christian music into the secular arena, beginning a "crossover" trend among many artists which included among others Bruce Cockburn, Mr Mister, and U2.

Alpha capitalized on another common occurrence of the seventies Jesus Movement, the outdoor Christian rock concert, in order to attract youth. Influenced by events such as Woodstock, Christian band promoters combined multiple singing group performances at an open air concert with the traditional revivalist, tent-meeting format. These huge concerts merged classical approaches to evangelism, including preaching, estatic praise, and altar calls with contemporary music and the trappings of outdoor rock concerts. Throughout the country, huge Jesus rallies, such as "Explo 72" in Dallas, "Jesus

oy 1972" in Madison Square Garden, "Festival of the Son" (described in Warner, 1988), and "Jesus 72,73,75,76" gatherings in many major U. S. cities, drew thousands of young Christians (Wooding,1993; Justice, 1993; Enroth et al., 1972). This phenomenon reached a crescendo in the Summer of 1980 with over 500,000 participants at the "Washington for Jesus" rally in the Nation's capital (Barron, 1992; Synan, 1991; Quebedeaux, 1983).

The Alpha youth group participated in several local outdoor Christian rock concerts in 1979, such as "Hallelujah 79," "Jesus 79," and the indoor "Jesus Music Festival" in Atlanta's Omni Arena. With the group's notoriety continuing to climb, the church sponsored its own outdoor istian rock concert in June 1979 appropriately called "Alpha 79," a tradition which continued through "Alpha 86." The "Alpha 80" gathering attracted approximately 4500 persons. Besides this, the band performed at various local high schools and colleges, entered a float in the Peach bowl parade, and hosted a night of entertainment at an Atlanta Braves baseball game. By the end of 1980 Alpha had released three, self produced, albums of their songs. These multiple exposures +p

moted the band and the youth ministry even further. The Alpha youth participated vicariously in the band's success and notoriety. Then, with the creation of a 120 voice choir called "Kingdom Express" many of them were able to actually provide accompaniment for the band.

Cult Appeal -- Adolescent Rebellion

From Barry's tale another dimension of Alpha's appeal becomes apparent. Adolescent rebellion played an important part in the growth of Alpha. This fact cannot be underestimated. Numerous persons recalled parental tension at home because of their participation in Alpha. A long-time core member reflected, "My level of commitment did cause a little problem with my mother because she was unfamiliar with the church here.... She didn't understand." One former youth leader at a neighboring Methodist church recalled that she was told by her senior minister, after a trip to the Monday night youth meeting, not to take the church's youth there again. She obeyed but many of the youth continued to attend against the wishes of their parents and pastor, perhaps because it was against their wishes.

Newly saved Christians are often evangelistically fervent. The hundreds of recently saved Alpha teenagers, however, produced chaotic over-zealousness. One person recalled, "W all felt like we were out of control," and then quickly added, "in a good way." Another Alpha participant described this transition from salvation to evangelism, "We got saved and we were really on fire for the Lord...and Alpha was there...and it got you on fire and all involved....We went overboard....I got really rebellious."

The demonstration of this rebelliousness expanded the boundaries of the traditional structure of witnessing. Bumper stickers proclaiming the Alpha ministry were plastered throughout the city, including illegally affixed to stop signs and the police station (a practice that brought the wrath of city officials upon the church). Masses of Alpha members participated in very vocal witnessing in any public place they could find. Former members proudly recalled being thrown out of the airport, various malls, and schools for their outrageous evangelistic antics.

Duane's brother and the group's drummer, Mark Swilley, idealized this rebelliousness for many of the youth. He once had them banned from a high school after a concert for using profane language. A former Alpha leader related his impressions of Mark's actions.

He pushed everything to the limits and would cross over, and you were constantly having to bring him back over. He satisfied the rebellion part in us, the "living on the edge" part of us as teenagers, and you identified with that...in a Christian way...running around, throwing his drum sticks in the air. He was wild and we loved it.

Collectively, these actions began to earn Alpha the label of "cult."[114] At the time when the tragedy at Jonestown was a fresh memory in the minds of many, this was a serious charge. Gossip and outlandish stories began to circulate that the youth of the church were worshiping Duane, using a crystal ball, and staging mass gatherings on the roof of the church to await the Rapture.

The negative publicity took a concrete form on November 9, 1980 with an article in the *Atlanta Journal/Constitution* weekend magazine. A freelance journalist wrote a piece on the youth group entitled "The Alpha Imperative" (Thomas, 1980). In the four page article she discussed the outrageousness of the music, their evangelistic antics, the sexual overtones of the meeting, its program of training youth counselors, and the extensive commitment exhibited by some of those involved. Judging from the reflections of certain city and county leaders during my interviews, her opinions were shared by numerous public officials at the time. One local government official reported, off the record, that during this time an informal investigation was begun concerning the church's activity on Flat Shoals Road. This negative public attention added to the rebellious appeal of Alpha. "A lot of people who were sort of rebellious didn't mind it being called a cult. People thought they were being rebellious yet they were with the Lord," stated one former male member. Many felt like they were being persecuted for their faith. This adverse publicity, however, solidified the youth group even further. As Jay reflected, "It was like being a member of an outlaw band."

Refuge and Family Appeal

If the faddish nature of Alpha, its sex appeal, the rock music, and the youthful rebellion of belonging to a "deviant" enterprise originally attracted the youth, then its fellowship, love, and family atmosphere kept them there. Alpha addressed specific needs in this multitude of young people. It offered an alternative to the drug culture. It provided them with a sense of self, a purpose, and direction in life. Finally it offered them a new outlook on religious life.[115] The church, and the youth ministry in

---

[114] In this instance I am using the term as it has come to be understood in common parlance and in Evangelical Christian circles -- referring to an unorthodox religious group of persons gathered around an authoritarian and destructive charismatic person. I will later discuss this popular perspective and the more sociological interpretation of this phenomena.

[115] Tipton (1982, chap. 2 & 5) discusses the various ways in which the sixties and seventies "neo-Christian" groups functioned to reconfigure social and ethical meaning for their members.

particular, functioned as a refuge for lost and hurting souls -- this time those souls were young disillusioned teens. This existing church motif of being a "refuge to the outcast" was broadened to include these adolescents, both those turned off by traditional Christianity and those recovering from addictions. Paulk made this clear in his sermon rhetoric, "The church has got...to be a place of refuge" (4/16/78). He poignantly invoked the image of the "good Samaritan" to drive home the refuge theme (7/8/79).

That's what Alpha is about...its finding boys and girls who have been stripped and left by the side of the road.... But we love you because Jesus loved you. I've been down that path where you have been and I know what it is like.

Every former Alpha member described the Monday night Alpha meetings as overwhelmingly full of love and acceptance.[116] The intimacy and fellowship demonstrated to every participant that they were accepted and valued. One woman told of a time she cut her hair before a meeting, so that when she arrived no one recognized her. She recalled being overwhelmed by greetings, hugs, and attention when she walked in the sanctuary. "No wonder we loved it there," she exclaimed to me. Another person told how moved he was the first time he attended Alpha and saw the unconditional acceptance of a large group of mentally handicapped young adults. Duane summed up this loving atmosphere during an altar call at the conclusion of one meeting, "At Alpha I am loved and that is better than the excitement of the world. You have never been loved like you will be loved here at Alpha" (Thomas, 1980).

Much of this comraderie and fellowship was shaped by familial images. Young men talked of Duane as a "big brother." For the very young girls and boys, at that time, he was envisioned as "older brother" or "Father." "Duane...led by love, concern and care...he even took people into his home...you felt as though he loved you like you were his own child," commented one person. Another compared him to the "perfect parent," "As a teenager, I couldn't talk to my mom or dad but just knowing that I could call Duane, even though I never did, just made me feel good."

In this environment, Alpha members began to see each other as "one big happy family." Alpha

---

[116] A full 30% of those who came during this time period and completed the 1991 survey noted that what first attracted them to the church was its "love and acceptance." This is a greater percentage than for persons from any other period in the church's history. Twelve percent of this group said it is what is still the most attractive feature. Twenty-two percent stated that Alpha was what first attracted them to the church.

became a surrogate family or a "second home" for many participants during the trying times of adolescence. Another youth recalled how Duane would take them under his wing and instruct them in everyday living, something their parents avoided.

Duane was so much into our lives. He'd preach about how to treat a girl. He'd talk about guys, sexuality, and our relationships. It was right at what was going on. He would explain things. Not talking down to us, but at our level.

This love and nurturing familial identity further unified the group but it also provided a bridge into the family-oriented culture of the congregation. To draw the youth into the existing congregation, Earl Paulk encouraged the membership to see this generation as needing their parental compassion. "The church can be a loving father for these wayward children," he instructed the congregation (3/4/79). He often preached on the themes of love and acceptance. In fact, his use of those terms in sermons rose to the highest points in the church's history.[117]

As previously in the church's history, love was envisioned paternalistically in familial terms. Paulk used "family" language an average of over 10 times per sermon during this period, more than at any other time (See Appendix B-10). This family was increasingly headed by a strong, stern authority figure. Paulk's paternalistic comments such as "my dear darlings" and "honey" ranked second most of any year (15/sermon, Appendix B-21), while references to "spiritual authority" rose to their highest level, 34 times per sermon in 1978 (Appendix B-7). Earl used the term "discipline" more during this time than any other period of church history (2.5 times/sermon, Appendix B-22). At the same time, Paulk's emphasis on "unity and oneness in the Body" peaked at an average of 31 in 1978 (Appendix B-25). He combined this theme of oneness in the church family with acceptance of and deference to him as the patriarch and spiritual authority of the clan.

This family motif language, combined with the family imagery of Alpha, helped integrate these youth into the church structures. Paulk insisted, "I'll be a father, I'll be a mother, I'll be a companion" (4/16/78). This fit the needs and desires many of them had for a family and for structure. "We were a 'headless generation' many of us had come from broken homes or family situations less than perfect,"

[117] Paulk mentioned "love" an average of 25 times per sermon and "acceptance" 8 times per sermon during this period. See the graphs B-9 and B-11 in Appendix B.

suggested one Alpha member. Another person confessed, "I was just looking for a father...." and, indeed, that is what Paulk provided.

As the exemplar Christian father, Earl taught his household what it meant to be a Christian. One Alpha participant, who went on to become a pastor said, "I was raised here and trained and taught about how to recognize the anointing of the Lord." An adult church leader at the time reflected, "All these kids were new-comers, people who came to know Christ and accept this experience. They had no frame of reference except what they were hearing." Not only did the church teach what Christianity was about, but also gave them instructions on how to behave. Earl stated in one sermon, " I said to Duane...if [these boys and girls] are not being taught discipline, [specifically, how to act in church] then you are not loving them" (3/4/79).

Again like a good parent, Earl gave his children chores to do. He and Duane offered them a place to serve and put their new-found faith into practice. In the Winter of 1979 Alpha organized its masses hierarchically into discipleship groups similar to those used by the Christian Growth Ministries and other Charismatic groups (Plowman, 1975; Synan, 1976; Digitale, 1990; Frame, 1990). Duane selected several "senior elder disciples" to act as his lieutenants. Each senior elder oversaw several "elder disciples" who in turn acted as spiritual authorities for "disciples." Finally, each disciple had 10-15 "ordinary" members under his charge. This structure offered a way to control the chaos and integrate newer Alpha participants into the group. It enhanced intimacy and social support even as the group grew larger and more unmanageable. However, like the discipleship movement generally, this format bred abuses and "enthusiastic excesses" (Digitale, 1990; Frame, 1990). I heard numerous reports from former Alpha members of young, barely emotionally stable, Christians counseling others with serious problems. Stories circulated of elder disciples forcing members to pray for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and of disciples taking sexual or emotional advantage of those under their care. Nevertheless, this discipleship arrangement was so effective in organizing the masses of youth that it later became the model of organization the church adopted when the congregation began to overflow with the Alpha youth and their parents.

The original impetus for the youth group was specifically to offer an alternative to the drug culture. Alpha succeeded not only in keeping many youth away from drugs, but it also successfully removed

many young adults from further involvement in the drug culture.[118] Quite often those "potheads" who visited Alpha for the music or other reasons did not immediately discard their old habits. Stories of teens coming to the Monday Alpha meeting specifically to buy drugs were common. Because of the considerable peer pressure, most "druggies" either converted or stopped attending after a very short time. Invariably, once the drug user was saved he or she completely abandoned the drug culture.

The story of Jessie provides a good example of the process of salvation from the drug culture. When he and his wife came to Alpha they stood out from most of the crowd. Not only was he married but he was almost ten years older than the high school students. As an old hippie, his long hair, tattoos, and disheveled appearance did not quite fit in with the "well-scrubbed flock" (Thomas, 1980). Jessie had been doing drugs for ten years and during the previous two years was mainlining cocaine. He commented that he was curious about the Monday gathering and came to hear the music and "check it out." While at Alpha he and his wife continued doing drugs, he even came to meetings high. Jessie reflected on why Alpha appealed to him even though he was still in the drug culture.

I had role models who I could identify with and relate to. One night Paulk stood up and said he heard that people were saying that men with long hair were going to hell. He said he didn't care how long your hair was. He defended us, we knew then that we had a friend. We knew that man cared and we stand by someone like that because he stood by us.

Soon, Alpha's lyrics ("you can smoke dope till there ain't no hope....or open your heart to Jesus"), Duane's messages, and the testimonies of other ex-drug users began to get to him. Then his wife gave her life to Jesus and quit taking drugs. This made his life "a living hell," he recalled. Two months later, he too stopped using drugs -- a next day he gave life to Christ. "I woke up and did not have the urge to get high.... I had no withdrawals," he stated. Still clad in old ripped jeans he began to slip in the back of the sanctuary during the Wednesday evening services. Much later, almost six months after being saved, he came to the Sunday morning service and joined the church. Not long after this Jessie accepted a staff position in church maintenance and grew to be an indispensable administrative staff member until he and

[118] Many of the early Jesus People fellowships and churches intentionally ministered to members of the drug culture. See Wooding (1993), Warner (1988), Tipton (1982), and Jorstad (1972) for diverse descriptions of religious groups composed of and directed toward converting drug users.

his family left the church in 1992.

Jessie and his wife were not the only persons to experience such a profound transformation and acceptance into the congregation. According to members' reports, Alpha had a sizable minority of counter cultural converts, nearly one fifth of those who came to Alpha. One couple, who were the spiritual gurus for a few dozen youth at a communal farm, came to Alpha and the church after they closed the farm. Many of the commune's former members followed them. Chapel Hill Harvester not only embraced them as members of the congregation, but offered them an institutional framework in which to reestablish their group living arrangement. This couple and several other families, sparked by their desire to create a "community for God's service," began a group-living ministry, called Genesis House, for runaways and emotionally distraught persons. [119]

In addition to helping to organize Genesis House, the church's leadership also gave its approval for several former drug users to establish a ministry to assist other addicts and alcoholics in the recovery process. This ministry, called Overcomers, was highly successful and was later expanded to include many other 12-step based recovery programs for overeaters, homosexuals, divorced persons, single parents, and persons in abusive relationships. With these initial ministries, the church was able to incorporate the more marginal members of Alpha into the life of the congregation.[120]

The Alpha youth were helped, perhaps even re-socialized, in ways other than just these few specific ministries. Over twenty percent of the Alpha members I interviewed credited Alpha with raising their self-esteem and giving them a sense of purpose. In the words of a female Alpha member, "What I

---

[119] The former hippie communards warm reception by Paulk and the positive relationship between "Genesis House" and the church are in distinct contrast to the checkered history of a similar group, "Antioch Ranch," and its sponsoring congregation, Mendocino Presbyterian church," as described by Warner (1988). The distinctions between these two examples of church relations with former hippie, charismatic communities may be attributed to any number of differences between the cases. One difference the comparison clearly shows, however, is how open Paulk and this independent nondenominational church were to embracing others different from themselves and providing them a place in the organization to minister. This pattern of openness continues throughout the history of the church, and will be seen clearly in the later narrative.

[120] These ministries offered in response to the needs of the community were developed by lay members in the congregation out of a profound sense of ministry to others. They did not originate in the leadership planning meetings nor were they undertaken by ministry experts. This sincere "grass-roots" origin of these ministerial efforts, including youth groups like Alpha, is often lost to "church growth" experts who attempt to intentionally construct successful programs. This realization even escaped the leadership of Chapel Hill Harvester, in later years, as they attempted to duplicate and market their "secret formula" for church growth and successful ministries in "how to" conferences.

really wanted to know was that there was a purpose for me...and that is the one thing that I heard preached. Duane told me, 'You can make a difference right where you are, right now'." Duane Swilley taught these Alpha youth to have self-worth. In his sermons he encouraged them to identify a purpose in their lives and then work to achieve that goal. A male Alpha participant expressed this sentiment,

It got us excited, and gave us a purpose in life. It picked up a lot of disillusioned and disoriented type people, from unstable homes, and gave us an identity.... It pushed a lot of self-esteem buttons.

The activities of Alpha channeled the energy and emotions of these young adults into constructive endeavors. It was the formative teenage influence for thousands of youth. Ten to fifteen years later many former participants, both those inside and outside the church, fondly recalled Alpha's influence on their lives.

It made being a teenager easier.... It met the needs of our lives that it saved a whole generation of kids from having to drink, try drugs - I didn't even experiment with cigarettes. It was fun. It gave us healthy things to do. It filled a void in a lot of peoples' lives. It kept a lot of people out of trouble. It is a time I will always treasure.

Not surprisingly, the comment I most often heard about Alpha was that it developed members' Christian walk. As one member put it, "For some of us it filled a hunger for God and for others it created the desire to know God better." Barry's comments about why he stayed at Alpha exemplified this attraction, "What caught me at Chapel Hill was that every time I came, I was growing. I thought, 'This stuff, it applies, it works. I'm learning and growing.' That was the first thing that caught me."

For those unchurched Alpha members conversion to Christianity was relatively painless in this situation. As one person said, "It wasn't a radical change but a decision to do what I thought was right...and of course with a lot of your friends already doing it, you have got support." Numerous members spoke of Alpha not as pressuring, forcing, or brainwashing them into adherence but as offering them something to commit to, a place to serve God. The words of one former member echo this idea.

Alpha fit me. It fit what I was about.... I could pour my energy into something that I knew was productive. I loved it. It asked for a commitment, that was something I had never heard before. Nobody had ever asked for a commitment from me before I came to Alpha.

For these young people, Alpha was an easy entrance into organized religion. The youth group demonstrated that Christianity could be fun and exciting. It offered them a different perspective than "old time religion," one they could readily embrace.

Success Appeal

If Alpha was anything, it was successful. It grew so fast that the only explanation anyone at the church could give for its success was that it was "a move of God." Much of this numerical success was not accidental. Both the leadership and the youth themselves placed a strong emphasis on evangelism -- they wanted to spread the "good news." In the words of one youth, "It was like the bigger, the better. We were into evangelism, that was our mission...and it was so wonderful, I wanted everybody to be a part of it. The more that came, the more exciting it got!"

Growth was seen as a greater blessing of God. In turn, ever increasing numbers aided in the generation of collective effervescent energy which fueled the experience and created group solidarity. At the same time, evangelistic efforts offered a time-consuming activity for the hundreds of energetic youth hanging around the church. As one Alpha member noted, "You would come up here any night and there would be dozens of kids just hanging around waiting for something to do. We would just decide what to do and go do it. It was great." These evangelistic efforts not only structured their time but also helped to construct their self-identities as Christians. The group witnessing demonstrated how they should act as Christians while it taught them, in a supportive situation, what they should say to unbelievers.[121] Some times their evangelistic efforts were rowdy and aggressive and led to being thrown out of area malls. Other times the evangelism was low-key and non-intrusive, as one young women recalled fondly.

I enjoyed going to the beach to witness, but it was more like demonstrating our faith. Because there was so many of us and we were having a good time, people would stop and talk. Our fun attracted

[121] The use of witnessing and other evangelistic activities as mechanisms of group commitment and reinforcement of a personal identity are prevalent in the research on religious groups. Another example of the group witnessing method can be seen in the early efforts by Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel (Balmer, 1989: 12-30).

people, then we would have a service on the beach. It was an easy way to evangelize and it taught me a lot about what being a Christian was all about.

This exploding youth movement not only attracted the attention of other teens but it also aroused the curiosity (and at times the ire) of parents, teachers, and pastors. As many as a few hundred adults might come to a Monday meeting to check it out or to contain the chaos. In one case a young girl brought her parents, who were nominal Methodists at best, to check out the service. They loved it and eventually became church members. She, along with her brothers and sisters, have since left the church but her parents became very active church leaders. Another woman transported her daughter to her first Alpha service. The mother was enthralled by the meeting and continued coming. Her daughter did not like it and never went back. One older male church member, who was charged with monitoring the meetings, recalled that he enjoyed Alpha more than church services. He commented, "I liked Alpha. I used to go all the time. It was really good. It helped me to grow as a Christian." The comments of a number of parents, then reformed hippies or aging "free-spirits," suggested that by participating in Alpha they were able to recapture the enthusiasm of their own adolescence. Alpha's vibrance demonstrated to many of them that church, or Chapel Hill Harvester Church in particular, was not the stodgy, dull establishment they had previously rejected.

Other adults visited Alpha out of curiosity, but with the specific intent to denigrate the experiential faith of the teenagers. Youth pastors and teachers, as well as parents, were skeptical of the validity or depth of the religious experience. Parents often grew concerned when their children exhibited too great an interest in religion especially after countless newspaper and television stories of brainwashing and forced conversions by groups such as the Children of God, the Moonies, and the Hari Krishna. Many of these people came and judged the group to be, in the words of one parent, "a superficial experience-hyped snowjob." Others were drawn into the church, over their foredrawn negative assessments, by the perceived authenticity of the youthful spirituality.

One such person was Tricia Weeks, who later wrote Earl Paulk's biography, edited most of his other works, and became the church's public relations person. She and her fellow Christian teachers at Southwest DeKalb high school had prayed for revival in their school for several years. When it came in the form of Alpha they had a difficult time accepting it initially. Tricia reflected on her hesitancy,

When Alpha hit I was as wary of the thing as anyone because I saw such a change in so many of the students. Some of the students that I had witnessed to...were so against church in general...and all of a sudden they were carrying their Bibles around the school and witnessing. I didn't understand what could happen to make that radical of a change.

With several other teachers, Tricia tentatively ventured to a Monday night meeting to "check it out." She was soon totally convinced that Alpha was "a move of God." Tricia and her husband came every Monday night for two years, although they were active members of a local Presbyterian church. The couple decided to join Chapel Hill Harvester Church not long after they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

A MIXED BLESSING: ALPHA AND THE CHURCH

Alpha's antics, ecstasy, and reputation produced all sorts of problems for the church. Some long-time church members left. Others complained about the music. The church was threatened by angry parents. Paulk received considerable negative publicity in the newspaper and around town. One former Alpha member remembered, "Bishop Paulk took a lot of flack for Alpha...but he hung in there with us." Once again, he responded to this challenging situation by accepting and embracing the "outcast." His immediate reaction to the challenges and adverse publicity was to come to the defense of the group at any cost. In fact, he even turned this persecution into an indication of the validity of the church and its youth ministry. "If there is no persecution against the cause of God, there is no validity in the cause of God," he preached (2/4/79). Earl's defensive support of Alpha meant a great deal to these youth. He was seen by many as a defender of their cause.

Paulk's acceptance of the youth created a conducive atmosphere in which many felt welcomed at Chapel Hill Harvester. At the same time, however, the worship styles, members' attitudes, and organizational forms were not sufficiently reconfigured to incorporate the Alpha masses fully into the congregational fold. Paulk insisted, from early on, that Alpha needed to be a ministry under the auspices of the church, under his control. Alpha, however, almost entirely functioned as an independent entity. As one church leader put it, "When Alpha came along...the pastors that were here turned that totally over to Duane. The only time we entered into it was to go to the big meeting on Monday nights as monitors."

The youth also knew the difference between the church and the Monday night meeting. The two were not synonymous, and a tension always remained between them. If the Alpha movement was to make a significant contribution to the life of the church, these youth had to be converted into the congregation. However, in order to entice the youth into the congregation, Chapel Hill Harvester itself would have to change.

These efforts by Paulk and the church leadership to accommodate to the Alpha youth took several forms. Earl Paulk attempted to alter the character of his identity as church leader. This included a restructuring of his authority, confirmation of his prophetic status, and the development of a television self-portrayal. The increased membership diversity challenged the congregation to redefine the church's own identity as well. Worship forms also would have to be revamped to appeal to the younger constituency. Finally, theological and symbolic changes were required to promote unity and a sense of community. These changes were not directly caused by the Alpha explosion, but for the most part, they were necessary if the church was to respond in a positive fashion to the new situation in which it found itself.

A Parental Authority

Paulk's tendency to legitimate his spiritual authority by numeric success soon created difficulties between him and his nephew. For quite a while more people were going to Alpha than to the church. In fact, during this time people often referred to the church as "that Alpha Church." Likewise, many of the youth did not immediately filter into the church service. Several interviewees suggested that this success threatened Earl's position of power, due in part to his own criterion of success and influence. Even when the youth did integrate into the congregation, they related to it in a qualitatively different manner. As one said, "It is a church; but Alpha was like our whole life." In this unsettling situation Earl exerted considerable pressure upon Duane to keep him obedient and under his authority. This was accomplished primarily through exertion of his familial authority over his young nephew. In doing this, Earl reappropriated a legitimation strategy from the congregation's earlier days and introduced it to a new generation of church members. In the 1960's Paulk's image as Patriarch, big brother, or a surrogate father was the central ground of his authority. The entire church operated as a family business. As the church grew in the 1970's, his authority came to be based more on professionalism, friendship, the deacon board organization, or on gratitude for services rendered. With the Alpha situation Paulk was

able to re-energize his familial authority not just with his blood relations but in connection with the entire congregation. This authority , however, was distinctively different than before due to the fact that it was now integrated into his newfound spiritual and prophetic status.

"Uncle Earl" demanded familial respect, obedience, and deference from Duane. Duane, in turn, taught these virtues to his flock of young Christians. An Alpha Disciple Elder who was then being groomed as a future pastor explained the situation, "I gained a high respect for Bishop through Duane, because I saw the way Duane respected him." This authority, however, was not experienced as oppressive or domineering. One Alpha youth recalled, "There wasn't the issue over authority like there was later.... It was more of a family type atmosphere." Another person elaborated on this "homey" family motif, "Bishop would come and teach about just how far you were supposed to go on a date and share things in his own life. The Bishop wasn't a **Bishop** yet, he was just our **Uncle Earl**." At the same time, however, the basis for a stronger authoritarianism lay just beneath the surface of this language. This powerful quality was implied in the comment of an Alpha member, "It's like the Bishop has preached before 'to a child, parents are **God**'." Literally, for Duane and figuratively for the Alpha participants Earl Paulk was both "Uncle" and the ultimate authority.[122]

Quite often, however, Duane challenged and disobeyed the "parental" authority exercised by the elder Paulk. Perhaps because of his relationship established over many years with "Uncle Earl," Duane felt free to disobey Earl's guidelines. Unlike other church leaders, pastors, and staff, Duane knew his relationship with Earl was intact no matter what because it was based on blood ties. He constantly pushed the limits of Paulk's tolerance in the Alpha meetings. He would walk sheepishly into ministry meetings the following day to await his punishment. Numerous church leaders remembered Duane being "blasted every week" by Earl's forceful reprimands. One former pastor described the scenario,

Every Tuesday morning [Earl)]would usually **NUKE** Duane for something done or said wrong.... What it appeared like was that they [Alpha] would do as much as they could without prior approval and were just willing to take the blast after the fact.... They would push it to the line and past, and if they got

---

[122] Wallis (1982a: 30) notes that early in the history of the Children of God David Berg was also affectionately known to his followers as "Uncle Dave." Wallis suggests that this title for Berg denoted his ordinary human status rather than indicating his charismatic persona. This is also true in part for Paulk's identity, but the church's extensive family network created a situation in which this identity became a powerful tool for obedience and submission.

away with it, well they would keep pushing till they got called on it.... Duane was willing to take the lumps, and he would kind of "puppy out" saying, 'well, you know Uncle Earl, kids will be kids,' and then he would go right back to [pushing limits].

Even if Earl's reprimands did not curb Duane's behavior, they certainly succeeded in teaching the other pastors and staff what authority demanded and the price of disobedience. Unlike Duane, many of their ties with the senior minister were more tenuous. These dramatic weekly obeisance rituals between Duane and Earl exerted a significant influence on the development of the leadership dynamics. One church leader and pastor reflected on the interaction and the lessons he learned from it.

Duane kind of had guts, stupidity, or the family ties, or something to just be dumb.... Duane was the scapegoat much of the time. Probably through Alpha and Duane we learned, we were given the message that you don't buck the system. Not only do you not buck the system, but you don't even ask questions. Even if Paulk threw it open for discussion...you knew you would either be discounted or discredited.... You would never do it again or you would do it so softly, weakly, that it was meaningless. I was not willing to put myself on the line.

Prophetic Confirmation

Countless sermons by Paulk throughout 1977 and early 1978 echoed an expectancy of rapid growth if only the congregation would be obedient to and unified around his authoritative voice. Although these proclamations were seldom labeled explicitly as prophecies, they had that latent implication. These frequent statements created both an atmosphere of expectation and a consistent pattern of foreshadowing upon which Paulk could later base his prophetic prowess.

"There is an expectancy among us to see God accomplish his will..."(1/11/77);

"God will do a mighty thing here."(2/20/77);

"God is doing a mighty thing here."(7/24/77);

"God is going to do something on this side of town you can't believe will happen....I believe God wants to do som

"God has brought us to a peculiar place...we are something special to God." (2/12/78);

"You are going to see things in these last days that you never thought your eyes would behold" (3/12/78).

Once Alpha began to mushroom Paulk often brought to the congregation's remembrance his former statements. He explicitly commented on his foretelling of Alpha's success in a 1979 sermon, "Some of you looked at me a year ago and said 1000 young people here is impossible" (10/14/79). He confidently began to assert his prophetic status.[123] In March 1978, he commented, "Put this down as prophecy!" (3/5/78). The following month he proclaimed, "I'll give you a prophecy today, there are going to be some new innovative ministries soon" (4/16/79). In January 1979 while preaching on "How to know if you are a prophet," he even stated that he spoke as an "oracle of God" (1/14/79).

With this consistent prompting, the membership soon began to identify Alpha's success as the fulfillment of Earl's words of prophecy. One person recalled, "It was really exciting, people were coming out of the woodwork...we were so happy that God was doing what he said he would." Another exclaimed, "It was just like a dream come true.... What we were working and working for just happened by the Spirit." These Alpha-confirmed "prophecies" did not give Paulk immediate or complete power in the congregation. Nor did these fulfilled prophecies revolutionize his status among the members. They did, however, contribute to an identity that was developing since Lynn Mays had introduced the spiritualized beliefs of the Charismatic movement into the congregation. The connections between obedience and success, between success and power, and between power and Paulk as spiritual leader were being forged.

Yet, at this point in the church's history, Paulk still did not possess sufficient authority to maintain complete unity and control. The church was reeling from the chaos created by Alpha. Tensions remained between him and Duane. Allegations and rumors were circulating over Lynn's ordination as pastor. Likewise, his two independent decisions to begin a television ministry and to propose plans for a larger sanctuary engendered controversy within the church board. In almost every sermon, Earl railed

[123] More than anything the growth of Alpha confirmed Paulk's status as a prophet and spiritual leader in his own mind. He began to give "prophetic utterances" and to refer to himself as a prophet before a majority of the membership saw him in that role. It is interesting that even in the earliest stages of Paulk's developing charismatic identity these followers, his audience, play a critical role -- though at this point in time not an active, role-affirming one as will be seen later.

against signs of discord and unfaithfulness in the congregation with comments such as, "The one thing that God can't stand is gossips, religious people backbiting.... They are not welcome in this church" (10/8/78, see Appendix B-36 for a graph of Paulk's comments regarding congregational strife). Earl offered a graphic summary portrayal of the state of church affairs as he related one of his dreams: "I had a dream the other night of a giant in armor battling many enemies, then I saw a group of friends come behind him where he was unprotected. They pulled out a knife and killed him" (11/12/78).

PAULK VERSUS THE BOARD

Even in the midst of this unsettled situation, Earl Paulk continued to develop his identity as a solitary spiritual prophet, clothed in the raiment of a tribal patriarch. During this time he even addressed his desire to run the church by himself, "It would be so much easier to do all this by myself.... My nature is to do it all.... I want to do it myself so often, that's my nature" (3/12/78). Although this prophetic image was continually strengthened by the successes of Alpha, his attempts to exercise this authority created continual difficulty for Earl. This consolidation of power into one person directly conflicted with the previous organizational arrangement of congregation leadership. The board of deacons and elders presented a structural challenge to Paulk's developing prophetic, charisma-based, spiritual authority. This period of church history, then, was marked by confrontation with and the redefinition of the church's board structure. Over time, the board was transformed from an independent counter-balancing entity into a dependent, supportive cadre of pastors and lay leaders.[124]

In sermons during this period Earl began making comments that directly challenged the authority of the Board. After borrowing money in the name of the church without the Board's approval, he jested, "We may have to elect us another board if they don't like this, because you are not going to get another preacher" (2/25/79)! Paulk, by asserting his singular spiritual insight, reinterpreted the board as a supportive entity for the prophet rather than as co-participants in decision-making. Unity of perspective became the test of obedience and a requirement for board membership (10/8/78).

---

[124] Johnson (1992:s5) discusses this tendency toward selecting a core of committed elite followers as an indication of the emergence of "two worlds" in a new religious movement. These two worlds are the world of the followers and the world of the founder and the founder's most intimate circle. As will be seen this is exactly what happens. Several researchers have pointed out similar dynamics in other new religious groups (Wallis, 1982; Weightman, 1983).

A requirement to be part of this staff is ABSOLUTE UNITY [4 times] and it must move right into our official board...and you'll say 'well pastor there ought to be sometimes disagreement' and there will be areas of discussion but when it is all said and done and the final word has been spoken, **there must be total unity**!

He proposed a system of governance based on kingship as the most appropriate model of religious authority as a replacement for the representative board system. "Every kingdom must have a king," he commented, "Without a king, without authority...the church of Jesus Christ cannot prevail" (10/8/78). Obviously the church did not agree at the time because a year later he reasserted, "God is looking for a king, a David, at Chapel Hill" (10/14/79).

With Alpha's phenomenal growth in numbers, Earl was able to justify his singular authority and his challenges of the board system by arguing that powerful leadership went hand in hand with success. One former board member made this clear, "For your success, there's a huge price to pay. You need somebody very, very strong to lead a movement like this." Paulk's efforts at confirming his authority can be seen in his increased sermon references to the church's growth and his own spiritual authority (See Appendix B-7 and B-35). In the midst of this negotiation over power, Earl Paulk exercised his tenuous "kingly" authority, making a unilateral, but very controversial, decision to televise church services.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Earl Paulk's decision to enter the world of televangelism decisively demonstrated his willingness to wield absolute power over church affairs. Apparently, the idea of televising services had been discussed informally among the board and staff with a negative reaction. Earl, on the other hand, wanted this exposure, especially now that Alpha's success gave them something upon which to capitalize. No doubt the memory of the 1976 church school issue was still fresh in his mind; therefore, Earl decided not to trust this vote to the board. Rather, he announced to the congregation one Sunday morning that on the following week services would be televised (Weeks, 1986: 288). He contracted with an independent production company to do the filming. A church member rushed to build camera platforms and install additional lights in the sanctuary during that week. On June 14, 1978 church members were met by a camera crew and a much brighter sanctuary.

This new situation was not to everyone's liking and a number of folks left either because of the way the decision was made or because they disagreed with services being televised. One former member recalled, "My dad left after he came in that Sunday morning and the whole church was lit up like a studio. He was a deacon, and there was no talk about this at all. And they spent thousands of dollars on lights."

Kim Crutchfield, a pastor at the time, reflected on Paulk's actions, "Earl's position was that if you put it to a vote, they [the board] would have voted it down. So he wanted them to experience it first." Of course, once the cameras and lights were in place there was no turning back, no undoing what was already done. Paulk had successfully exercised complete control in this matter.

The experience of televising services live, and then later on tape, forever changed the dynamics of the worship service. As a church member reflected, "Services had to be different.... We stopped the preaching at an exact point in time. It changed the character of the ministry." The celluloid image took control of the service. The **appearance** of the congregation was now a significant consideration.[125] Suddenly, the church had to "sell" itself to the world. Bob Crutchfield recalled, "We began to evolve into something other than a local ministry, all of a sudden we became something for the world to see." Paulk's biography even reflects on these alterations (Weeks, 1986: 288).

The congregation had to adjust to "thinking" television for the services. When necessary, Donnie Harris [Paulk's brother-in-law and head of the TV department] insisted that the entire congregation sit on one side of the sanctuary to insure that the television audience saw a good crowd at church.

Likewise, the introduction of television further complexified the symbiotic relationship between Alpha and the church. As stated above, special broadcasts would highlight the very successful Alpha ministry, enhancing its outreach, popularity, and effectiveness. At the same time, the church used the

---

[125] The appearance of not just the minister, but also the "set" (the sanctuary) and the "live studio audience" become significant and show the extent to which television draws the entire congregation into its synthetic, but public reality (Quebedeaux, 1982:70-71). This ideal form which the electronic church embodies becomes the model by which other congregations, both those televising services and those tuning in each week, pattern themselves or aspire to attain (Quebedeaux, 1982:70). The image set by early televangelists of professional quality performers, smooth effortless operations, mesmerizing celebrity ministers, and picture perfect sets often unconsciously became the goal of many other congregations, including Chapel Hill Harvester Church (Hadden & Swann, 1981).

success of Alpha to characterize itself as a vital, relevant, and dynamic congregation. This exposure not only allowed Paulk to advertise the incredible success of Alpha, but it also brought other ministers to the church to examine how Alpha worked.[126] Paulk summarized this situation in a 1980 sermon, "[Alpha's] notoriety and its fame, or infamy, began to spread quite widely.... The newspapers began to extol some things done among us and churches began to call us from far and near to find out what is going on" (3/23/80).

The structure imposed by the independent production company soon became too restrictive for Paulk and other members who saw the potential benefits of television. Within four months time, a push was made to purchase equipment and produce the programs by themselves. Prior to making this decision, however, the leadership sought the counsel of a professional televangelist. A number of church members, including Bob Crutchfield, Donnie Harris, Clariece, and Earl, visited CBN (the Christian Broadcast Network) and "the PTL club" (which stood both for "Praise the Lord" and "People that Love") in order to talk with its host Jim Bakker and learn from an expert.

---

[126] Quebedeaux (1982:71, 117), Christians (1990) and others suggest that television exposure allows a religious leader to create the impression of even greater success than actually exists. Much of the controversy surrounding televangelists such as Bakker, Robertson, and especially Falwell in the early 1980's was over the actual numbers of supporters each had. The impression, and their own reports, greatly exaggerated their actual viewership (Hadden & Swann, 1982; Hadden & Shupe,1988).

The time period from the early seventies to the late eighties can be seen as the heyday of the televangelists, of the "electronic church." Although the phenomenon of religious television broadcasting began prior to this period and has continued to the present, the attention of the country was directed at the TV preachers in a distinct way at that time. The charm of Robert Schuller surrounded by his sparkling new Crystal Cathedral, the novelty of the emotional couple Jim and Tammy Bakker, and the promise of political power by Jerry Falwell captured reporters, researchers, and the public alike. Then just as quickly, with events such as the dissolution of the Moral Majority, the scandals of Bakker and Swaggert, and Pat Robertson's failed presidential bid, these persons lost the public's attention as well as much of their viewership and influence.[127] Hadden and Swann (1982) point out that considerable diversity of styles and approaches could be seen among these major television figures. Some such as Pat Robertson's *700 Club* and Bakker's *PTL Club* were modeled after secular talk shows. A majority of televangelists, however, functioned in and projected on screen their simultaneous duties as ministers of both their material congregation and their "electronic" congregations.[128] It was this model of "electronic church" broadcasting that attracted Paulk and the one which the church adopted.

While on this excursion to learn from a television expert, the members of this fact-finding mission determined that Chapel Hill Harvester had an unique and distinctive message to present to a television viewing public. As Paulk later commented, "There is not one "Body Life" church on TV today like Chapel Hill Harvester" (10/8/78). On the way back to Atlanta, the group arrived at the conclusion that the church had a "Rembrandt message presented in a dime-store picture frame." Bob reflected on that meeting, "We felt like if we were going to produce TV programs, and we had something worthwhile to say, then it needed to be done right. We would invest in television equipment." With that decision made, the television ministry soon became a primary budgetary focus, requiring a sizable amount of the church's

---

[127] It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss the full history, audience and political and religious influence of the "electronic Church." Many other works such as Hadden and Swann (1981), Hadden and Shupe (1988), Hoover (1988), Voskuil (1990), Hoover (1990), and Schultze (1990) discuss this phenomenon in depth.

[128] Hadden & Swann (1981:51) discuss the February 1980 Arbitron ratings figures for the top ten religious programs. It is interesting that the church-based shows rate much higher than do those of the talk show format. At the same time, even among the congregation-oriented programs it was often the celebrity minister who was portrayed as the attraction. None of the shows were known by the name of the churches these televangelists served.

revenue.[129]

Television greatly altered the complexion of the church's self-identity and Earl Paulk's own image. Within a year's time, the show was seen in numerous cities nationally and by 1984, internationally. Therefore, not only was Paulk becoming the sole spiritual authority, a prophetic figure, and patriarch of the Alpha clan, but he was also becoming a television celebrity and the ministry's singular public face. After a discussion among the TV ministry personnel, it was determined that successful televangelists "market a personality not a ministry." Intentional marketing and public relations strategies were employed to showcase "Paulk the personality" rather than the church as a whole. Bob Crutchfield recalled this discussion.

If we were going to say something to the world we needed to polish it up. We had to decide how to market it. We began to talk in marketing terms. We don't market ventures, we market personalities. You don't know what James Robison's church name is, you know James Robison. The same with Oral Roberts. We began to gear him up to become the focal point, that's what the *Harvester Hour with Earl Paulk* was for.

[129] This observation comes from interviews with former church administrators and business managers. No records of television expenditures or revenue exist from this period that I could find. This type of budgetary records were not kept till later in the church's history.

Not only did the television audience begin to see the "created TV character" of Earl Paulk, but this persona also was reflected back upon the congregation. After all, the worship services were taped live as Earl preached both to the congregation and the television audience. Paulk's stature became larger than life, he became a "media personality" (Quebedeaux, 1982:117)[130] This identity was confirmed by the numerous letters from viewers. These outside positive responses to the telecasts were often read in services to counter the complaints of members still upset about Earl's decision to televise. Paulk would comment about these affirmative reports, "See what our outreach ministry is doing!" (10/8/78).

The exposure also brought the church both new members and money at a time when Alpha had caused local residents to regard the ministry skeptically (Quebedeaux, 1982:7). Visitors from outlying villages, towns, and suburbs, as well as from out-of-state began to arrive at the church.[131] This influx of television "converts" became the living verification of the worth and effectiveness of the ministry. In fact, Paulk always referred to the sermon broadcasts as an "outreach ministry." Not long after the TV ministry began, Earl used one convert, who had just testified to having been saved as a result of the television program, as an example to any "doubting Thomas" (10/8/78).

This woman is a Christian due to our TV ministry.... She and her husband came here today, saved, because of the television ministry of this church. How many believe this one soul is worth the whole wide world?

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHARACTER -- AFTER ALPHA

Although Alpha had only an indirect influence on the television ministry, the controversial youth ministry can be said to have had a monumental effect on the character and complexion of the

---

[130] Christians (1990) discusses that television creates a "personality cult" around the central figure of a religious program. Quebedeaux (1981) likewise identifies television as one of the sources of the rise of the cult of personality. Hoover (1988:222-227) argues that the television personalities like Robertson are "less important as individuals than they are as symbols," symbols of **perceived** power and credibility.

[131] The Atlanta Journal writer of the article "The Alpha Imperative" commented on seeing license plates from many different counties (Thomas, 1980). The 1991 questionnaire data from those members who joined during this period show that more of this group grew up in small villages, towns, and cities (56%) and moved more often in childhood (an average of 3 moves) than those filling out the questionnaire who came during other periods of the church's history.

congregation. The foremost change introduced by Alpha was in the size of the congregation, which in turn required the addition of new clergy and staff persons. Alpha also significantly contributed to an increasingly diversified congregational demographics. The rapid influx of new members during this three year period virtually destroyed any clear sense of unity or congregational identity. Worship, too, was gradually altered to reflect youthful tastes in music and hunger for experiential praise.

It is impossible to overestimate the impact of the Alpha generated growth on Chapel Hill Harvester. In this three year period, church attendance increased by 500 percent. In 1977 attendance totaled approximately 300. Between June 1979 and March 1980, a reported 331 new members joined. By September 9, 1980 the church began a second morning worship service. At the end of 1980 attendance was estimated at over 1500 with a yearly budget of 1.2 million dollars (Thomas, 1980). This rapid growth was instrumental in redefining Earl Paulk's role in the church, as his biography records (Weeks, 1986:280).

Suddenly he didn't even know the names of people who sat in his congregation after they had joined the church. He depended on others to inform him about emergency situations in people's lives. He could no longer attend personally to everyone's daily needs for ministry. Could he find other pastors with his conscientious spirit who would love and minister to people just as he would himself?

Indeed, more ministers were needed immediately and Paulk responded by doubling his ministerial staff in a year. By the end of 1980 there were twelve pastors, seven elders, 36 deacons, and 150 associate deacons (*Harvest Times*, 12/80). During this time Earl's daughters and their husbands were brought on staff, many of whom were given ministerial roles. Lynn Mays was promoted from deacon to pastor, as were several core members with varying backgrounds, none of which had seminary degrees. These new additions including Steve Hodges, a missionary, Bobby Brewer, a local Realtor, Dan Rhodes, a mechanical engineer, and Kirby Clements, a dentist. As the above quote suggests, Earl's criterion for the ordination of pastors was whether they would "love and minister" as he had. Paulk made it clear that this new leadership was to be trusted implicitly, even if their actions were immoral, since they had been selected and chosen as a "delegated authorities" (10/14/79, see Appendix B-7 for Paulk's use of the term "authority").

God works through delegated authority.... I don't care if Brother Don joins the mafia, if Brother

Duane and Steve wear women's clothes, if Clariece becomes Castro's number one aide in Cuba, and I don't care if Sister Lynn robs a bank...that still doesn't give you the license to disobey God's authority.... If leadership cannot be trusted, I guarantee you down the road the church will suffer.

A Growing Diversity

Alpha introduced huge numbers of youth into the predominantly middle-aged congregation. These youth, however, were also distinctive in several other areas. Based on the 1991 figures of those who came during this time, stayed, and completed the survey, these new members were more solidly middle-class and were or would become better educated than much of the existing congregation [See Table 2].[132] They were from educated, middle-class families where their fathers were managers, self-employed, or in skilled trades, and their mothers were homemakers or in clerical occupations. Almost thirty-eight percent of those who came during this time were new Christians and most of them grew up in non-Pentecostal churches. For quite a few of these new members the ways of the South were foreign to them, with 27.5 percent having been raised in nonsouthern regions. This diversity contributed to the general confusion felt by the congregational old-timers.

Race became a further demographic complication which exerted pressure upon the congregation during this time. Nearby communities were beginning to feel the effects of rapid black migration and white flight. A few miles northwest of the church, in certain pockets of South DeKalb, property values were plummeting.[133] A number of African Americans began filtering into the congregation, most often through Alpha. By 1980 approximately ten percent of the congregation was African American.

---

[132] Numerous former Alpha members confirmed the general characteristics of new members who came during this time as identified by the survey. This survey sample is a highly selective population and is primarily meant for comparative purposes with figures from other church periods. The sample from this period over represented the African Americans and older persons who came during this time. It might be significant that these two groups stayed at the church and filled out the survey, when many of the younger white participants either left the church or chose not to fill out the questionnaire.

[133] Several articles in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution (3/12/78:1b,5b; 4/1/79:9b) noted that the area to the northwest of the church had the most home foreclosures in nation and was struggling with a "big image problem". The census tract data where the church property was located showed that in 1970 the African American population was slightly less than 2% whereas in 1980 Blacks accounted for 33% of the area population. An even more striking racial shift could be seen in the census tract immediately west of the church, where the African American population jumped from 6.3% in 1970 to 76.9% in 1980. This pattern was repeated for most of those tracts north and west of the church, whereas those to the east and south experienced almost no racial change during this decade.

Paulk led the church with a strong affirmative stance toward the diversity. He welcomed all the new-comers, preaching the acceptance of all persons regardless of age, class, or race. According to reports by several pastors, in early 1978 when the first few blacks came to the church the leadership discussed the situation during a meeting and decided, from the recollection of one pastor, that the "Christian thing to do...was to make them feel comfortable." By 1979 sufficient

Table 2

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1978 and 1980

Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Total Number	47	22	69
Mean Age in 1991	38.3		40.8
Mean Age at joining	26.7		29.2
Gender: Female	61.7		59.4
Marital Status:			
Married	59.6		60.9

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1978 and 1980			
Divorced	14.9		17.4
Never Married	19.1		15.9
Education:College degree or more	63.0		55.8
Income: +$30,000	74.5		73.1
Occupation:			
Clerical	19.1		22.4
Service	19.1		20.9
Managerial	10.6		9.0
Professional	12.8		13.4
Self-Employed	23.4		17.9
Southern Birthplace	74.5		72.5
Community of			

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1978 and 1980			
Birth			
Rural/town/city	52.2		55.9
Urban/suburban	47.8		44.1
Mean Childhood Moves	2.9		3.0
Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Hours at Church/ Week:			
0-3 hours	15.9		15.4
4-6 hours	25.0		21.5
7-10 hours	15.9		20.0
11 or more	43.2		43.1
New Christian	38.3		37.7

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1978 and 1980			
Mean # CHHC Friends	3.8		3.8
Giving: 10 % or More	86.6		87.9
Previous Denomination:			
Liberal/Moderate	34..0		29.0
Conservative	29.8		39.1
Pentecostal	14.9		10.1
Catholic	6.4		5.8
Charismatic/Nondenom	4.3		4.3
Other	4.3		4.3
None	6.4		7.2
Live in Church	37.8		41.8

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1978 and 1980			
Zipcode			
Mean Paulk Books Read	5.6		5.5

numbers of African Americans had joined that the leadership felt it necessary to appoint the church's first black deacon, Kirby Clements, who was promoted to an associate pastor position the following year.

Throughout this period Paulk occasionally commented on the race issue, "In God's kingdom there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, black nor white, orange or red. And if you are offended it's because your ears haven't been sanctified" (11/12/78). He began to preach not just the equality of the races but the insignificance of race as a category. "We don't even have any color barriers around here. When you really get saved, God makes you colorblind" (7/8/79). By late 1979 his comments about race in one particular sermon (10/14/79) were impassioned and militant. White flight had begun to threaten the stability of the immediate community around the church. After discussing the sinfulness of whites fleeing the neighborhood, he chastised the congregation, "You will never see God if you are a black hypocrite or a white hypocrite!" Continuing, he again broadened the category of those accepted into this "church of refuge" to include blacks, "If they want me, I'm going to be their pastor.... Maybe you are just a black woman.... I don't care who you are you are as precious to God as the President of the United States" (10/14/79).[134]

In contradiction to the rhetoric from the pulpit, however, numerous persons recalled that the congregation had difficulty with this enormous amount of diversity. Several persons reportedly left during this time because of the influx of African Americans into the congregation. Many more moved from the neighborhood, but continued to come to the church on Sundays. Others never adapted to the large number of youth and their music in the services. One person even commented that he left because "too damn many Yankees were coming to the church." Those who embraced the diversity also noted that the subgroups of members did not merge well into one unified organism. Rather it seemed as if the church was becoming several smaller congregations. One church leader suggested this happened because the church had been caught off guard by the growth. With no structures in place to integrate the newcomers, they formed their own social, age, or racial cliques. Certainly this was the situation with the youth. They

---

[134] This was an unique sermon in that it contained a large number of references to race. Throughout this period, until 1985, content analysis of random sermons showed that Paulk mentioned race an average of only .6 times per sermon. From 1985 to 1991, the frequency increased to an average of 3 times per sermon. See the Appendix B-29 graph of Paulk's racial comments per sermon for each of the church's time periods.

had developed their own structures such as the discipleship groups, singing ministries, and outreach activities which were later absorbed by the general church. One Alpha member who became a pastor recalled, "Ministerially Alpha was a two-edged sword...exciting, but there was difficulty in merging what was going on in Alpha and the pastoral ministry.... It was almost like a church within a church."

Another repercussion of Alpha's rapid growth for the church was the immediate need for more space. By the time the octagonal sanctuary was seven years old, the congregation had outgrown it. Paulk constantly encouraged the membership to fund expansions of the facilities. In these few years they had adding a gym, Sunday school classrooms, a formal entry way, several offices, a prayer chapel, and a maintenance building. But the new wine from the fruit of Alpha could no longer be contained in old wineskins. On "Harvest Sunday" (the annual celebration of the church's founding) in 1978, Paulk proposed a move to a larger sanctuary (10/8/78).

I'm not calling you to build another church, that's God's business.... We need to move out to where God will have us go. The choice is: shall we move forward today by faith to fulfill the mission God has called us in obedience or will we back away.... It's time to move forward in faith. We might not build a glass cathedral, we might build a BARN!

In response, the church purchased an additional 68 acres of land in March 1980 with the intent to build a 6 million dollar, 5000 seat sanctuary. In conjunction with this expansion, plans were also envisioned for a counseling center, a "Christian store", a retirement center, youth retreat, a recording studio, an office complex, a day-care center, and numerous homes for staff members. It was to be an entire "Christian City." By the end of the year the congregation had raised over 300,000 dollars and hired an architectural firm to design a complex that, in the words of Earl Paulk, would "be as unique as the congregation" (*Harvest Times*, 4/80).

We're Not Like Anybody!

Chapel Hill Harvester had always considered itself "unique." With the addition of the controversial Alpha ministry, its spectacular growth, a bi-racial congregation, and extensive plans for an elaborate worship center, new superlatives were needed to express adequately this uniqueness. During

this time, the leadership began to describe the church as the "forerunner," "the lead domino," "a showcase," and a "witness to the world of what a church could be." Even with these grand images of the church, the congregation's sense of itself as a "church of refuge" was most prominent. A huge outdoor billboard proclaimed this appellation to the entire community.

Because of Alpha's antics and Paulk's own besmirched past, the church had become infamous throughout the city. Partially as a result of this reputation, Earl often railed against the more respectable Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal congregations in the city. His former congregation, Mt. Paran Church of God, frequently was his favorite target. Its minister, Paul Walker Jr. was very influential in the Church of God as well as being a minor but active participant in the national Charismatic Renewal movement.[135] Walker's church, sitting on the northern side of the city, boasted over 4000 members which made it the largest church in its denomination. The church's successful youth group also sang Christian rock music led by a nationally famous singer, Mylon LaFevre, and his band, Broken Heart. The theology of Mt. Paran was traditional, pre-millennial, and rapture-oriented. Walker had succeeded in distancing himself from many of the antiquated holiness codes of the denomination and had embraced the crowds of middle-class Charismatic Christians in the seventies. The congregation, under the influence of these members, worshiped much as Chapel Hill Harvester did. In many ways, these churches were too similar, perhaps due to an unconscious sibling rivalry.

In sermons, Paulk often contrasted himself and the church in relation to his former denomination saying, "The Church of God was narrow and clearly wrong, we don't praise God by backing away from the world" (11/18/78). More generally, he also distinguished himself from all organized "nominal" denominations, much as did other ministers within the Latter Rain movement tradition (3/4/79). He complained, "In Protestantism, we made the church a little mewing, puking, gray matter that didn't mean a thing in the world" (11/12/78). Paulk's focus was always directed at the importance of the local congregation. When he commented, "The church is God's authority in the world," he often meant "church" at the congregational level rather than what he saw as "dead, dull bureaucracies." As he

[135] Paul Walker participated in the significant gathering of Charismatic Christians at Kansas City in 1977 as several *Atlanta Constitution* articles made clear to the city (Murray, 1977a,b,c). Several other points of similarity can be seen between him and Paulk. He, too, received his degree from Candler, had an influential father in the Church of God, and moved his church to the suburbs.

observed in one sermon, "God knows how denominations have missed the point over and over again.... We have made ourselves institutions" (3/23/80).

He chastised those denominations which practiced ritualized formal worship, devoid of the experiential power of the Holy Spirit. "People get cut off from God because of the rigid structures of the so-called Church," he suggested (3/23/80). Many of his sermons were preached for the benefit of the multitude of mainline Charismatic believers in attendance (Thumma, 1993c). He often commented, "At Chapel Hill, whatever your background may be Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist or Catholic - when we come to church its not just a mere ritual or mere formality" (10/14/79). Chapel Hill Harvester, it was suggested, offered a better product for Charismatic Christians -- spirit-filled worship with powerful authoritative preaching. In a mock conversation during one sermon he advertised this product.

'Pastor Paulk, my roots or my tradition is in such and such a denomination but I'm not being fed. We are not really being taught the word of God and when things are spoken about the Spirit of the Lord it is done so apologetically. What shall we do?' I've got news for you honey, this pulpit addresses them!

Paulk's sermons were full of references contrasting Chapel Hill Harvester to other groups and to the negative influence of the "world."[136] Likewise, Paulk's use of dualistic imagery, long present in his preaching, nearly doubled from the previous period of church history (See Appendix B-17). The dualist split in his rhetoric became so pronounced that both the empirical, taken-for-granted, everyday reality and human reason became suspect. "Some of us want to operate totally by what we see...but God wants to lift us, by faith, to a NEW DIMENSION," Paulk counseled during one sermon (Paulk's emphasis, 10/8/78). During the same time, his references to Satan jumped to a record 16 times per sermon, higher than at any other time in the church's existence (See Appendix B-4 for Paulk's references to "Satan") .

Within this atmosphere, Paulk even set himself and the church apart from many highly successful independent ministries with whom he had much in common. At this time, Oral Roberts was completing his 120 million dollar "City of Faith" in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Kenneth Copeland had just purchased 1800 acres in Oklahoma to build the "revival capital of the world" with the revenue from the millions of books he

[136] Paulk's use of derogatory comments about other churches rose to 5.7 times per sermon, while his comments about "the world" tripled from the previous historical period (to 7.6). See Appendix B-20 and B-19.

sold. John Gimenez of Virginia Beach, Virginia and other organizers were assembling over a quarter of a million people to participate in the "Washington for Jesus" rally (Hadden & Swann, 1982; Quebedeaux, 1983; Synan, 1984). Yet Paulk appeared to want little to do with any of these ministry efforts. He mocked Schuller's "glass cathedral." At the same time, Paulk cast aspersions toward "Christian Pharisees" and "showmen knocking down people and claiming everything" (7/8/79). He often commented, "The power of God isn't traveling evangelists, it's in those who stay with people in a body for 25 years" (3/12/78). In the midst of the most successful period for the Moral Majority, with Jerry Falwell claiming responsibility for Reagan's presidential victory, Earl even distinguished himself from that movement by attacking Falwell's perspective and approach. Paulk argued that the Moral Majority had forged too strong of a connection with the Republican party.[137] In a three page article in the church's newspaper, *Harvest Times*, Paulk outlined his disagreement with both Falwell's approach and beliefs. In this article he espoused a middle of the road stance on abortion, homosexuality, racial prejudice, and prayer in schools (*Harvest Times*, 12/80). In this process of emphasizing their uniqueness, the watchword became "doing things our own way." Paulk exclaimed, "There is a better way than conformity -- than the way it's always been done. Break this and go another route" (3/5/78)!

Alpha and Worship

One of Alpha's most obvious effects upon the church was in the area of communal worship, especially the Sunday morning service. In the words of one member, "Alpha invigorated the Sunday worship service.... To hold the young people you had to carry some of that excitement over into the worship service.... It kinda flowed over." Clariece had to rethink her service format with hundreds of young people now in attendance. Judging from the taped services, the music became less dependent on traditional hymns and gospel quartets. The congregation soon was singing more charismatic choruses and Alpha-created songs. Electric guitars, an electric organ, and drums were added as musical accompaniment to Clariece's grand piano.

---

[137] This is a similar criticism to the one made by Baptist televangelist James Robison just minutes prior to Ronald Reagan addressed a large gathering of conservative Christians at the National Affairs Briefing held in Dallas in August 1980 (Hadden & Swann, 1981: 132). Other Christian leaders known to Paulk such as Tommy Reid and John Gimenez had also adopted this middle of the road nonpartisan stance (Barron, 1992: 84-85).

The combination of Alpha youthfulness, increasing numbers of Charismatic Christians, and a growing minority of African American worshipers created a situation where expressivism in worship was valued and necessary. Paulk's own use of spiritual praise exclamations during services rose to its highest point at any period of church history, almost 69 per sermon (See Appendix B-6). Clearly, this period was the high water mark of Paulk's own emotionalism and spiritual expressiveness. Likewise, the time devoted to prayer, praise, and singing during the service was the most of any period.[138] In was not uncommon to hear shouts of praise punctuate the sermon or the gift of tongues being expressed in a loud, even disruptive manner. Not all members were thrilled with these changes in the worship style. One recalled, "I didn't like the music, and the energy they [Alpha] brought was a shock...but it was great to see the kids getting saved." Another member recalled the transition in this way.

There was the awkwardness of adjusting, as the tenor and tempo of our congregation changed. There was so many adjustments to be made about the style of music, ministry, personality differences...and a lot of it boiled down to music, to a matter of taste...but they saw what God was doing with [Alpha] so what could they do?

Tension regarding the change was apparent in these and other comments. With "success" as the indicator of God's direction, however, members were placed in a double bind. Alpha was hugely successful, so what could anyone say against it. Therefore, members tolerated the shift, even if they disliked it. As they silently endured, the vitality of the Alpha youth effectively reshaped worship as well as these members' appreciation of diverse musical styles.

Some disgruntled members refused to remain silent after one particularly exuberant service. Several church elders were ministering one evening to a few members who had come to the altar for prayer, but the volume and fervency of the praise kept them from being able to communicate with these persons. These elders publicly criticized Paulk for not containing what they felt was excessive emotionalism. Paulk responded by preaching one of his most famous sermons entitled "Forms and

---

[138] See the graphs in Appendix B for Paulk's references to several ideas which indicate the expressive and spiritually charged nature of the service. In addition to B-6 showing Paulk's times of praise, B-5 and B-7 record his use of spirituality and spiritual authority, B-13 and B-14 show references to spirit baptism and the gifts, and B-15 and B-16 indicate how often he referred to the gifts of healing and discernment during this time.

Powers"(3/23/80). In it, he asserted both his complete authority over the congregation and his total commitment to expressivist worship. He challenged these elders, "God called me and you can't fire me. He anointed me and you can't unanoint me, and **I'm going to play before the Lord**! (Paulk's emphasis, 3/23/80) In a rare turn, he also admitted an error had occurred, "We missed it last Sunday night when the elders were trying to minister.... We were so loud and carried away with the music that they couldn't hear, but that was your pastor's fault" (3/23/80). He, then, immediately tempered this concession with a stern warning,

When you begin to talk among yourselves or to someone who is not in a place of spiritual authority, you commit a grave error.... The Holy Spirit said to me, 'You show me a church who isn't willing to play before the Lord and I'll show you a church that's barren.'

Alpha and Doctrine

The church's theological perspective was not immune from the influence of Alpha either. This aspect of congregational life, however, was affected in a more subtle and indirect manner than other sectors of the church. The huge influx of teenagers did not sidetrack Earl Paulk from continuing to develop his recently adopted spiritualized Charismatic beliefs. Rather the success of Alpha confirmed the correctness of these ideas much as they had confirmed his prophetic status. Alpha, then, facilitated the congregation's acceptance of these spiritualized beliefs which Paulk preached. This sudden descent of a "great army of Christian soldiers" upon the church was construed to be of tremendous spiritual importance. Paulk turned to the "Latter Rain" teachings to interpret the significance of this phenomenon. Alpha was seen as part of the final "great inpouring of souls" into the church in the Last Days. Earl spoke of the youth as a "chosen generation," claiming that this generation would be the one to see Christ's return. These young adults had been called, he said, for an "unique purpose."

From the Latter Rain/ Restorationist traditions Paulk also found the purpose and goal for these hundreds of energetic youth. The church was to perfect itself by being an influence in the world -- in the church's language, "to demonstrate God's Kingdom." He began to preach, "The church must offer solutions and not be a part of the problem.... The church is a living influence in the world today" (4/16/78).

This call to action struck a responsive chord throughout the entire congregation.[139] Most members agreed with Paulk's challenge, "We have to move out from the prayer rooms and deliverance services. Get up and say, 'What is my Kingdom work today?' It will take commitment! You can't do it by sitting in a pew" (7/22/79). This message was specifically directed at the Alpha generation, but applied to the entire congregation. He instructed the congregation in one sermon, "What can God do through these young people? God has given you a harvest field. God has called all of us. I don't care what your talent is, use it!" (10/14/79).

The imminent expectation of the End Times empowered Paulk's urgent call to serve humanity and perfect the church. During this period he referred to the "last days" on average about three times per sermon. This was more than any other time in the church's history (See Appendix B-18). Unlike the Rapture-oriented material in circulation throughout many Evangelical circles at the time (Balmer, 1989), Paulk diminished the importance of the Rapture (Barron, 1992). This de-emphasis of the Rapture became one of the most important distinguishing features that set him apart from his former Church of God congregation.[140] Mt. Paran was fervently dispensational, pre-millennial, and anxiously awaited the Rapture. Paulk, on the other hand, preached that the Church Universal needed to accomplish many tasks before Christ returned. Jesus was coming soon, and Paulk had the troops to get things done before his return.

As his status as a prophet and sole spiritual authority increased, Paulk became less focused on doctrines in his preaching (Barron, 1992:121). He often preached, "We have no creed or doctrine, just the word of the Lord" (11/30/80). He challenged the congregation to trust him as "God shall lead, if I understand by the Spirit" (7/22/79). Faith in God and God's delegated authority was critical, after all "God spoke through a man and revealed his truth" (1/14/79). Traditionally divisive doctrines were de-emphasized as this comment by Paulk demonstrates, "Some may question about Creation theories, 'Are

---

[139] In a conservative Christian atmosphere which was at least aware of the Moral Majority's activities, Paulk's call for action in the public sphere would sound quite familiar. The church still held a premillennial view of the end times, but as mentioned above Paulk down-played the "escapist" tendency often connected to this doctrine. Furthermore, the "harvester" image at the root of the church's narrative implied a "this-worldly" activism. Within another year or two, the postmillennialist views of the Christian Reconstructionists would merge with this weak premillennialism (Barron, 1992).

[140] It was also one of the traits that earned him the theological condemnation of an official Assemblies of God study group in 1987 (Steinberg et al., 1987; Barron, 1992).

they symbolic or accurate?' I could care less; but what God is saying to you is..." (1/14/79).

Much of this impetus to move away from doctrinal orthodoxy was organizationally motivated rather than spiritual derived. A familiar comment heard during this time was the desire for "unity of faith, not doctrine." Paulk's intentional avoidance of controversial, "nonfundamental," doctrines was, no doubt, a strategy to unify this diverse congregation. Solidarity was also sought by encouraging members to develop a "unity of purpose."[141] This effort required the leadership to organize members around a common perspective and plan of action. It was in this context that Paulk introduced his concept of the Kingdom of God to the congregation.[142]

THE KINGDOM OF GOD HERE AND NOW

[141] Paulk's references to unity were over 4 times greater than the previous periods, from an average of 4 to 18.3 references per sermon. See the graph in Appendix B-25.

[142] These themes of Jesus Christ's imminent return, the need for complete unity and perfection of the Church, and the church's active involvement in the world were merged into Paulk's goal of "demonstrating the Kingdom of God on earth." The Restorationists argued that Jesus would only return for a "perfected" church, "a Bride without spot or wrinkle." Christ would not return as long as the "Church Universal" was wrought with strife, torn by dissension, split by denominational differences, and remained powerless and ineffective. In other words, the Church had to "get its act together" before Jesus would come again. This idea is expressed to different degrees in Paulk (1984a, 1986), Hamon (1981), and Iverson (1975). This idea is discussed critically in Barron (1992) and Nation (1990).

Earl Paulk's use of the concept of the Kingdom of God echoed a theme present in the Latter Rain/Restorationist writers, although it was one which was seldom given predominance (Nation, 1990). In this unsettled period of the church's history, Paulk, no doubt, employed this image of the Kingdom as a way to unify the congregation theologically. Perhaps he also found in this idea a symbol by which he could make sense of and order the chaos of the situation both for himself and for the congregation (Swidler, 1986). The organizational pattern inherent in this idea (hierarchical, with one monarch having complete control) certainly fit the structure and system of authority he was attempting to implement.[143]

On February 12, 1978 Earl abruptly introduced the idea to the congregation in a sermon entitled "Thy Kingdom Come" where he mentioned the word "kingdom" 104 times. In that sermon Paulk described the church's situation as one of "Kingdom Power, the coming-into-our-own age." This marked, in Paulk's conceptualization, the initial phase of the fulfillment of the promise God had made to him years before in Phoenix. In the sermon he outlined theoretically what life in the Kingdom would entail.

The Kingdom of God is.... When God's will is done on earth, when rebellious spirits are put down.... [It] is in the demonstration of God's power to perform what he has promised.... God's kingdom is present in the here and now. We will be in that Kingdom before too long...as rulers and reigners. What God is waiting for is the fruit...signs and miracles. We literally postpone the Kingdom coming. We must assume authority in this world.

In a very real sense, this sermon was Paulk's manifesto that God had finally rewarded his obedience and persistence. The kingdom blessings were, for Earl at least, "here and now." Organizationally and practically for the congregation, the reality of this kingdom was yet to be actualized

[143] It is unknown whether certain ideas of other writers contributed to Paulk's understanding of the Kingdom. One indication that he might have known of other's writings on the subject can be seen in the first sermon he preached on the Kingdom. Toward the end of this sermon he states, "God has brought Chapel Hill to a peculiar place. I'm sure we are not the only ones across the land but God is making some revelations in these last days" (2/12/78). This theology, now known as "Kingdom Theology" and "Kingdom Now Theology," has become his "trademark" theological orientation with him as its preeminent voice. This theology can be seen in the writings of several other Christian figures including Reid (1988) and Gimenez (Barron, 1992). Clearly aspects of this theology were present in the Latter Rain doctrines (Nation, 1990; Riss, 1987). Hamon (1981) also highlights some very similar themes. I do not know if he and Paulk ever discussed these ideas in the late 1970's. Hamon made a trip from his home in Florida to Atlanta in 1978 where he claims to have received a "prophetic utterance" telling him to write his book (Hamon, 1981: 6). These ideas about the Kingdom do not show up in Paulk's preaching at all before 1978 and then only sporadically until 1980.

nor would it be till much later in the church's history.[144]

At the same time, however, this image could be seen as beginning to operate as a mechanism for social control, to ensure unity.

That rebellious spirit must be totally subdued and committed to God's authority. It's only then that the Kingdom of God can take place and, honey, that means some personal suffering sometimes. I submit myself to the Body of Christ, to a body ministry.

---

[144] Even though Paulk preached this powerful sermon on the kingdom, and many others during this time especially in 1980 (See Appendix B-8). Yet not one single person interviewed recalled that Paulk preached his "kingdom theology" this early in the church's history. Everyone "remembered" his emphasis on the kingdom beginning around mid 1981 or early 1982.

As demonstrated above, the image of "King" was being used to subvert the power of the deacon board, offering an alternative structure of governance. In this first kingdom sermon Paulk employed the concept as a way to enforce unity, order, and obedience among the membership. He exclaimed, "Until God can break down spirits of rebellion the body of Christ cannot surface in all of its authority in these last days.... Only in violent spiritual warfare is the Kingdom of God born" (2/12/78).[145]

Judging from the events during this period of church history, the "Kingdom qualities" of unity, order, and obedience were **not** present in the congregation. Paulk, therefore, reintroduced the idea in a second major sermon on this topic entitled "Thy Kingdom Come **NOW**" almost exactly one year after the first (Paulk’s emphasis, 2/25/79). His addition of the imperative "Now" perhaps betrayed an impatience and frustration on his part with the lack of acceptance of this idea by the congregation. This sermon was characterized by a forcefulness missing in the former sermon. Buoyed by the church's success, Earl Paulk was determined to assert the immediate presence of this Kingdom. Given the changing circumstances at Chapel Hill Harvester, members were almost ready to believe him. Paulk encouraged them, "We are not 'going to be' citizens of the Kingdom, we **are** citizens of the Kingdom '**right now**'! This great Kingdom is already here and now...in the midst of you" (Paulk’s emphasis, 2/25/79).

This second sermon, then, appeared as a reaffirmation of the Kingdom message: that Chapel Hill was, "The demonstration of God's power to perform what he has promised...." It also clearly defined the content of the Kingdom culture, its "inward quality and character." This Kingdom was one which emphasized obedience, love, service, and, above all else, a call for congregational action in the world. Paulk concluded the sermon with this call to action, "It's time for the children of God to take hold of this world...and remember if we are going to rule and reign with God eternally we have got to start it here and now" (2/25/79).

The call to this-worldly Kingdom activity marks a theological step in a new direction for the congregation. Given the predisposition of Charismatics for rapture-oriented, other-worldly escapism, many Christians, even in this congregation, were predisposed to sit in praise meetings and cry "Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus." As stated above, Paulk had previously attempted to de-emphasize the Rapture in his preaching while using the harvester image to encourage members’ evangelistic activity in

---

[145] Darrand and Shupe (1983) suggest that the Latter Rain concept of "Tabernacle" was used for the similar purposes of creating structures of social control, ensuring unity, and promoting obedience.

the world. His strong dualist split of the spiritual and physical realities stood as a hindrance to the establishment of a this-worldly kingdom. This situation required an ideological reconfiguration. In fact, this sermon constructed a bridge across this dualistic divide. Paulk translated his dualistic understanding into kingdom language. He spoke of the spiritual and natural realms as two Kingdoms, an earthly humanistic kingdom of darkness and a heavenly divine kingdom of light. In doing this he then was able to call for an infiltration of light into darkness. As he stated,"God wants to establish the principles of his kingdom in this world." Later in the life of the church he adopted more radical language to discuss this infusion of light into darkness. He spoke of the saints in the Kingdom of God overthrowing and taking dominion of the Kingdom of this world. He assured the congregation, "The kingdoms of this world will become God's kingdom" (7/29/79). [146]

By the time of Earl Paulk's next significant sermon on the kingdom, again almost twelve months later, the church had evolved into a significantly different social reality. At this point, not only had the Alpha success continued but Paulk was beginning to consolidate his power. Likewise, the "kingdom" label was being used everywhere in the church. There was a "kingdom express" singing group, a "kingdom cleaners," a "kingdom beauty salon," and a "kingdom dancer and mime troupe." During January, 1980 Earl Paulk delivered a series of sermons on "kingdom Living." Even the series title itself implied a general acceptance of the concept, although suggesting that the congregation needed instruction on what life in the kingdom entailed. Paulk described this dual reality in a sermon from that series (1/20/80).

Perhaps one of the most familiar words you hear at Chapel Hill is Kingdom. God is presently building that Kingdom...and the principles of that Kingdom are already beginning to take place in our lives.... We can begin to live by the principles of that Kingdom that will be a reality.... We can help to usher it in, or to bring it to pass.

---

[146] Paulk's shift to a more revolutionary language of "dominion" was strongly influenced by the Christian Reconstructionists. They are a loose affiliation of scholars whose writings express the idea of restructuring all of society in relation to Biblical law literally interpreted. See Barron (1992) for an excellent description of this group and Paulk’s similarities with this movement. Paulk read the books of several Reconstructionist leaders. These books and others were sold in the church bookstore, and many of the authors including several based in Atlanta were asked to speak at various church functions.

Taken together these three sermons, one from each year of this historical period, show a definite progression in the development of Paulk's Kingdom Theology language as it related to the congregation. Paulk's use of the language and idea was directly related to the context and changing situations in the experiences of the congregation. The reality of the congregation had to develop to a point where the idea of a kingdom made sense of the experiences of the membership. The image fit very few persons in 1978 but by 1980 it was beginning to resonate with the experience of most of the congregation. It took another year or two, however, before the kingdom became the guiding image of the church.

Paulk's use of kingdom in these early sermons also points to a tension existent throughout the history of this concept. This tension has its root in the question of whether the kingdom is established by human efforts or by divine intervention. Paulk's answer to this question was forever muddled by his continual juggling of the concept to fit a particular congregational situation or context, in his now well-established analogical manner of preaching.

Throughout Paulk's preaching, his use of the kingdom has had two referent points. He used it to imply, on the one hand, the future Kingdom of Christ yet to be established. On the other hand, Paulk also identified it as the present Kingdom, implying how one should live in the church now -- "as if the kingdom were present." Often, Paulk was very clear that Christians did not, nor could they, establish the kingdom. That task was God's responsibility. At other times, however, Paulk clearly stated that by living out a kingdom-oriented daily existence (and all it entails) members participate in hastening the actualization of its reality. They could demonstrate what the Kingdom of God would be like if it were contained in a local congregation. By demonstrating this reality, they help it come into being. Paulk stated, "We help to usher it in, or bring it to pass" (1/20/80). A natural extension of this reasoning, at least in the minds of many of those I interviewed, was that the church, Chapel Hill Harvester Church, **becomes** the Kingdom of God embodied on earth in a tangible way as each member lives as if the Kingdom were a present reality.

Within this reality, the goal of every Christian was no longer "Body life" but "Kingdom life" (1/20/80). Those who lived by "Kingdom principles" exhibited the characteristics of love, equality, submission to authority, giving, prayer, fasting, powerful spiritual gifts, and kindness. Members were to develop a "Kingdom mind" which meant they were to be "pure and naive...for to the pure, all things are pure" (1/20/80). When these characteristics were realized, "then the kingdom has come to you" (1/20/80).

The Kingdom of God, therefore, was not just a future eschatological reality and a demonstrated congregational identity, but it was also a personal lifestyle and a normative virtue ethic. This multi-leveled portrayal and use of this kingdom concept perplexed quite a few church members as several of the more thoughtful and theologically inclined of them attempted to assess the full implications of this kingdom message. This confusion was in part due to Paulk's analogical preaching style. He used the Kingdom language to accomplish many tasks and convey many messages. While this strategy proved enormously useful institutionally and motivationally; it posed many problems for Paulk and the church later, theologically and practically. [147]

Two sermons preached at the end of 1980 exemplify Paulk's tendency to use the Kingdom idea institutionally and motivationally. He was in the process of selling church members on the idea of building the six million dollar worship complex. According to Bob Crutchfield, this effort had met with resistance from certain pragmatic "reason-oriented" skeptics such as himself. During an August sermon entitled "The Unshakable Kingdom" Earl chastised these members. While doing this, he literally equated the building of **this** sanctuary with the building of God's Kingdom (Paulk's emphasis, 8/31/80).

We are going to **build** God's Kingdom.... The Kingdom is not built on reason. It's not built on intellect. It's built on the fact that God promised something.... If I operated by reason, I'd quit.

In another sermon later that year he again attempted to sell the new building plans with appeals to the Trinity, "You need to hear this morning what the Spirit would say to the church.... God said, 'Pastor Earl, you build a church!'.... The Lord said, 'I've called you to build a temple...and I want them (my people)

[147] In the published books about his Kingdom Theology, Paulk seldom identified the context in which they were to be interpreted. These comments could, therefore, be read from a number of equally-valid perspectives. Most often when they were read from the perspective of an "orthodox" Pentecostal or Conservative Evangelical doctrinal stance they were judged lacking (See Chapter Eight's discussion). Bruce Barron's experience with Paulk exemplifies this dynamic. He comments in a footnote of his book, "Before my visit to CHHC...I submitted a summary of Paulk's theology, based on five of his books, for his examination. To my surprise, on point after point he disavowed the teaching I had attributed to him, even though I had carefully documented my work" (1992: 206-207). Also see Barron's discussion of these contextual problems on pages 119-121 of his work. Paulk often argued that when he was quoted "**in context**" his views would not be seen as heretical nor did he ever intend to be unorthodox. This judgement will be left for those concerned with Christian orthodoxy; however, these comments do indicate once again that to understand Paulk one must identify the referent context in order to perceive the "actual" meaning of his words and ideas. As I stated in the first chapter, my concern is less with Paulk's orthodoxy than with the way his ideas were embodied in the culture of the congregation.

to share in the building'" (11/30/80).

Judging from my conversations with him, Paulk would deny that he actually meant to imply that building this new church meant they were building the Kingdom. After all, this was the approach he had taken with Bruce Barron and other researchers (Barron, 1992:120-25,183,197,206; Griffin, 1987). He would, no doubt, argue that this statement was spoken in haste, in the context of the situation, to overcome the reluctance on the part of certain members. He did use the concept of the kingdom in this manner, to accomplish the task at hand. His casual and analogical use of the kingdom language, however, not only confused his critics when such statements were published, but they also left his congregation with many mistaken impressions about their role in establishing the kingdom.

This three year period of the church's history, then, can be seen as the prelude to the kingdom. It was thoroughly dominated by Alpha and its repercussions. Alpha wrought havoc on a congregation barely out of its own adolescence. One member summarized the effects of Alpha most dramatically.

You know you've got this -- almost like an electrical wire that's sparking and flopping around on the ground, and if you don't put some people that you can trust to do the right things... and somehow get control of this live wire then... it's going to destroy the ministry.

Yet for all the trouble this mass of young adults caused, Alpha was also responsible for the church's growth, Paulk's solidified prophetic status, and much of the national notoriety. In all likelihood, if there had been no Alpha there would have been no kingdom megachurch, at least not so suddenly. In the words of another Alpha participant,

Whether credit is ever given there or not, Alpha is what made our church grow. The young people came, and they were there because they wanted to be there. We brought our parents. It wasn't parents bring their kids....That's what did it.

The years between 1978 and 1980 were remembered fondly by every interviewee, but each of them also characterized this time as chaotic and out of control. Out of this chaos, however, came the building blocks for a structure which was to organize and sustain the church for many years. This period can be seen as giving substance to Paulk's prophecies, legitimation to his position, proof to his charisma, and the reward for his obedience to a vision. But, most importantly, it provided him with a huge audience

and the resources to build the Kingdom. Earl Paulk's next step, then, was to order and organize this rabble into a Kingdom people.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ULTIMATE KINGDOM (1981-1984)

"The Kingdom is not born by simply saying words, and so we have moved from speaking about it to demonstrating its power."

(Earl Paulk, church bulletin 2/82)

"God is a God of order and design.... Christ waits until you and I prepare the structure over which he becomes King."

(Earl Paulk, sermon 9/12/82)

"When the tide that lifted a charismatically led group out of everyday life flows back into the channels of workaday routines, at least the 'pure' form of charismatic domination will wane and turn into an 'institution'...so that it becomes a mere component of a concrete historical structure"

(Max Weber, 1986:1121).

Month after month hundreds of people came forward to join the church. In the mind of every member, this had become a "great move of God." As the church continued to get larger and more successful, even the size of the congregation itself became a drawing card. Two, and then three, Sunday services could not handle all the worshipers. This flood of new members, however, created a logistical nightmare. Like a mom and pop general store caught in the middle of suburban sprawl, Chapel Hill Harvester had to find ways to cope with the increased business. The leadership desperately needed to impose some order on the swelling tide of new members.

This four year period of church history is dominated by multiple concurrent efforts to organize the various aspects of the congregation. The organization of the system was crucial for its survival and continued growth. As in the case of many megachurches, the existing methods of order, prior to the growth, no longer fit the enlarged context. Yet, given the recent appearance of the megachurch phenomena, there were few models in the 1970's and 1980's from which to pattern the new structures. The most available model was that of a business system, however, this form was somewhat incongruent with the character of charismatic leadership in a religious context. For this megachurch, and many others, its organization evolved through trial and error, with the constant tension between having a dynamic spiritual product contained in a rational, bureaucratic form.

Given the chaotic growth of the church, its out-dated structures required immediate attention. This effort became the responsibility of one person, Bob Crutchfield. He approached this task as he would any business venture, forming the organization to fit its function, following standard management practices. The business order that he created, however, was not governed by a CEO or corporate professional. This system, therefore, had to "receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit" if it was to be appropriate for Paulk’s spiritual leadership. The church’s ministries, worship forms, and its building program were reshaped as well in the wake of this organizational effort.

The swelling mass of members themselves were also in need of structure and order. Initially this meant finding ways to connect the congregation relationally through well-defined lines of mutual accountability and submission to spiritual shepherds. This concrete ordering was complemented by more ideological efforts at organization through the language of covenant, being a "Kingdom Christian," and defining one’s spiritual "dues" and "rewards".

Likewise, Earl Paulk's developing theology of the Kingdom required further refinement as it related to and reflected the enlarged congregational context. As a part of this effort at organizing his theology, Paulk began to publish his sermons in book form. These objective embodiments of his teaching were then distributed widely. The initial positive response of like-minded religious leaders was employed to strengthen and confirm his theological construction.

Earl Paulk’s identity, too, had to be reworked and given institutional grounding in this push to organize the congregation. The previous means of legitimating his authority had been eroded by the chaotic growth of the church; they no longer carried the same weight as before. In this new context, Paulk incorporated multiple images of himself as church founder, the presbytery’s father, a charismatic prophet, and an ecclesiastical Bishop into his identity as sole church authority.

Finally, the tremendous influx of demographically diverse new members challenged the congregation’s past understanding of itself. Even as this megachurch expanded and its organization complexified, several images were employed in an attempt to create a unified congregational identity. Envisioning the church as an atypical and ground breaking "move of God" encouraged members to realize their uniquely important calling and national leadership. Linking the church’s success to the symbolic "New South" identity of the city of Atlanta, likewise, helped frame the church’s transition from a scorned to a prosperous congregation. However, it was the image of being "the Kingdom Church" which

finally organized the congregation's identity. The merging of Paulk's kingdom theology with his formative, although fluid, Phoenix vision created a powerful unity of the membership around the core congregational identity of demonstrating the Kingdom of God on earth. It was this central focus which functioned to hold together the thousands of diverse individuals who flocked to this megachurch.

A TROUBLED CONTEXT

Before discussing these congregational efforts to create stability, a brief characterization of the chaotic situation in which the church found itself in 1981 is in order. Like most megachurches at some point in their history, the church's organization structures could not adapt quickly enough to keep pace with the rapid growth in attendance. Neither church members nor leaders had anticipated such an explosion. As an article in *The Sheaf,* the church's weekly bulletin, attested, "Things are moving so rapidly at Chapel Hill till we never know from one service to another what the next move of God may be" (April 25, 1982/ 3:4). The need for space was critical and immediate; three services could not contain all the people.[148] Plans for a new sanctuary were expansive, expensive, and far from becoming a reality. Decisive administration of the growth was essential, yet none of the pastors possessed the necessary organizational expertise. Growth was crippling the church.

The multitude of new members strained the senior minister even more than they did the facilities. Paulk's favored identity as "pastor" took a back seat to the new demands on his time and energy. No longer did he have the freedom to "know his sheep." Earl Paulk acknowledged this in one sermon, "While the dimension of my ministry had to change because of the size of this church, I want you to know that the heart of this pastor has not changed" (11/22/81). Likewise as the church's membership expanded, so too did his national popularity. He was invited to preach, lecture, and instruct those outside his local congregation. Earl's travel itinerary soon occupied much of his time between Sunday sermons. The television exposure, with its successes, further divided his interests while occupying his time.

---

[148] Judging from the figures reported in church bulletins, sermons, and the monthly newspaper, the church received new members at a rate of at least 75 persons per month during this four year period. The greatest monthly influx of new members I found was in May 1982 when a total of 182 persons joined the church. One week during that month (May 22nd) 126 persons visited the church for the first time, according to the church's bulletin. In a sermon in 1983 Paulk made reference to having received 240 persons for membership in a four week time period although he did not indicate when this took place.

With the heterogeneity of the new members, Paulk could no longer assume a common culture or expect a unified opinion. The middle aged, parochial, Southern born and bred, Classical Pentecostal, trusted friends from the Inman Park days were now a minority. In the majority were young, independent, cosmopolitan, Northern, Charismatics who claimed to hear from God and wanted a share of the power. Paulk's comments from the pulpit attested to this dynamic. "Some of the big-mouthed people around here never do anything, but they always give me notes [saying] 'Here's what God said, Pastor.' Well...[and he blew a raspberry at the congregation]" (3/1/81). He warned his associate ministers and then his wayward "sheep" in another sermon, "The sheep [membership] have become a law unto themselves.... Some of you [sheep] are going to lose your family, your health, maybe even your salvation..." (11/22/81).

Even as he had begun to consolidate his singular authority in the late 70's, Earl Paulk now found it rapidly eroding as each wave of new members was added to the enlarging congregation. The senior minister suddenly found himself surrounded by a sizable staff of associate pastors, administrators, and support personnel, all necessary to carry out the day to day duties of this megachurch. The size and independence of this group challenged Paulk’s still rather tenuous grasp of complete control. The numerous pastors he ordained competed for members' affection and loyalty. New staff persons, hired to accomplish a particular task but seldom dismissed afterwards, had to be kept busy. Not all these people felt the same commitment to the church's mission. For some it became "just a job," and employment problems increased. "You are NOT hirelings, you don't bargain for salaries," Earl exclaimed in one sermon (Paulk’s emphasis, 11/22/81). Even his brother Don, who progressively lost power and influence as each new minister came on board, began causing problems by exhibiting a brotherly disobedience and a sarcastic, irreverent behavior -- a very detrimental attitude if contagious.

Many independent ministries sprang up within the church, each with its own leadership, mission, and constituents. No single identity unified these enterprises under the church's umbrella. Likewise, rumors circulated about the Alpha ministry’s disciple leadership. Paulk added credence to these stories with his warnings, "When any practice on your part [as "shepherds"] brings degradation or question in the minds of the sheepfold, you scatter God's people" (11/22/81).

Chapel Hill Harvester was also under pressure from its neighbors. Alpha continued to engender controversy as it established small discipleship groups in local high schools and colleges. The "Alpha

Imperative" article had opened a Pandora's box of complaints from parents, teachers, ministers, and governmental officials (Thomas, 1980). In response, it appears that the church leadership began to de-emphasize Alpha's prominence somewhat to reduce this adverse criticism.[149]

During this time the eyes of the country were focused on Atlanta and the tragic disappearance and deaths of many young black children. Earl Paulk thrust himself into the situation, volunteering the use of the church's phone lines, counselors, and his TV air time to help remedy this situation. He became an immediate celebrity by claiming that he had been contacted by the killer. Following this announcement, the final victim was discovered near the church. Numerous national news agencies interviewed Paulk. He appeared on the NBC nightly news and his picture was on the front page of the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper (Willis, 1981). Many Atlanta residents and leaders expressed skepticism at Paulk's motives, seeing it as a cheap publicity stunt in poor taste.[150] Whatever Paulk's motives, however, his involvement in this incident, along with his reputation from the Hemphill affair and the excesses of Alpha, afforded him little respect in the city.

To add to these publicity woes, the community in which the church was located continued to shift from white to black. The area in general had serious problems. It suffered from an image problem as an unstable, risky neighborhood. Major chain department stores were threatening to leave the area's foremost mall. This southern portion of Dekalb County appeared to be on the verge of collapse, and the church sat on 74 acres right in the middle of it.

On top of all these contextual, identity, and authority issues, Earl Paulk was plagued by personal problems; He developed kidney stones. His frequent painful attacks seemed to convince him that he was at the end of his life. He often commented that his time was short, "I had to say certain things...in case I

---

[149] Evidence of this can be seen in the decreasing space given to Alpha coverage in the church newspaper. Throughout 1980 the *Harvest Time* allotted two pages each month for Alpha news. The year following the critical article, coverage amounted to less than 1 page (.96) each month. Likewise, by November 1981, this section of the paper was entitled "Youth News" rather than its previous "Alpha" banner.

[150] The church's newspaper reported this negative assessment of Paulk's actions, "some say we are just seeking publicity" (March/April, 1981). Several interviews with Atlanta residents and public leaders also confirmed this perception. Paulk's biography devotes three pages to the incident (Weeks, 1986: 312-314). The newspaper picture was even interpreted by Paulk as having spiritual significance for the congregation. He reported in the Sunday evening service following the article (Willis, 1981) that 1 and ½ years ago a choir member had prophesied that when Paulk's picture would appear on the front page of the newspaper, then "that's when God is going to send a great revival...."

was absent" (2/21/82) and "We are in the closing, not days or years, but hours" (6/13/82). His sense of impending personal demise gave an even greater urgency to his message. Under the pressure of all of these situations, Paulk had become overwhelmed, disillusioned, and desperate. On several occasions, he even discussed quitting the ministry with his staff.

The scenario in 1981, then, was one of overwhelming disorder, dire immediate needs, and yet jubilant excitement. The church was being held together by its chaos, its self-defensiveness, and a mild feeling of paranoia. In the face of both internal and external pressure the congregation had adopted an embattled "foxhole" survivalist posture. Its fervent assertion of the cosmic significance of the God-given prosperity reinforced that attitude. The variously-defined "refuge" motif contributed to an "underdog" image as well. This defensiveness, however, fell short as a stable identity around which to unify the congregation or propel it to action. Organizational constraints had to be imposed upon this chaos. Likewise, out of this unsettledness an identity for the congregation had to be constructed if it was to maintain and sustain the membership growth. The place to begin was with the organization itself.

ORGANIZING THE ORGANIZATION

Amid the chaos, in rode a knight in a three piece business suit to rescue the church. Actually this administrative whiz had been a church member since 1973. Bob Crutchfield, introduced in previous chapters, was a close friend of Earl Paulk's, a well-respected deacon and elder, a successful real estate salesman, and, most important for the task at hand, the holder of a degree in business management. Near the end of 1980, Earl Paulk asked Bob to become the church's administrator. Bob strenuously declined, but did accept a six month consultation contract which soon was extended another six months. Then, on August 23rd 1981, a "word from the Lord" was given to Bob.

And the Lord says, 'Son I've called you to be the one to line out where [to plant the seed], and how to do it, and I've called you even to make straight paths for my people, saith the Lord. I've called you to go before my people and make ways and make plans and make means and make methods.'

Paulk interpreted this "word" to mean that, "God called out an administrator" (8/23/81). Bob, ignoring his previous hesitancy, responded to this divine message by accepting the formal position of Church Administrator. Almost immediately he began to "make straight paths for the people." He

purchased a computer system. He arranged for the installation of more phone lines. He developed a mailroom, proper accounting procedures, and a computerized membership mailing list. He established a rational and effective division of labor among staff members. Organizational charts were constructed, job descriptions were written, and an administrative chain of command was instituted for the thirteen pastors, forty full-time staff members, and hundreds of volunteers. He single-handedly converted the "mom and pop" store into an effective family business.

With the organizational structures in place, Bob turned to formalizing the activities of the various ministries around one central goal statement. During a January 1982 retreat held in a downtown Atlanta hotel, Bob, Earl, and the remaining staff developed a concise statement of the church's identity and purpose. Interestingly, the following statement was shaped by a joint, egalitarian sharing of ideas and motives, guided by Bob Crutchfield's managerial expertise.

It is the goal of Chapel Hill Harvester church to communicate and demonstrate the Gospel of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, sharing witness with the church universal, as well as to all nations and peoples.

It was this statement of purpose which provided a positive concrete mooring for the church's identity. Chapel Hill Harvester now possessed a constructive image, which offered well-defined ideological boundaries and lent itself to motivational implementation. As Paulk commented when the leadership discussed this statement with the congregation, "If you ever want to be successful, you must have clear, well-defined goals" (1/24/82). Not only did this statement center around Paulk's newly-adopted theme of the Kingdom, but it provided the church with a sense of direction -- to communicate and demonstrate, to preach and do. Noticeably absent, however, were both the "harvester" evangelistic identity and the "refuge" motif. The church had ascended to a new spiritual dimension, to the "Kingdom Dimension," as it was often referred (See Appendix B-33 for Paulk's references to a "higher dimension.")

Spiritualizing the Organization

Almost immediately Earl Paulk set out to create a spiritualized version of both this newly formed

mission statement and the church administrative structures.[151] He began by re-interpreting his portrayal of the 1960 vision to include the dual emphasis of "communicating and demonstrating" the kingdom message.[152] Then, he reminded the congregation that Biblical delegated authority flowed from the top down through the five-fold ministry of prophet, apostle, pastor, teacher, and evangelist. To these five positions Paulk added the multiple 'gifts of helps' (which included administration, necessary support personnel, and clerical staff).[153] He grounded this divine authority structure in the Bible, the writings of others such as Hamon (1981), and his own spiritual insight.[154]

Earl Paulk clearly specified that those who occupied positions of "helps" were "appointed over the business, not over the spiritual life" of the congregation (9/12/82). "Offices," he said, "take care of business; callings take care of spiritual leadership" (9/12/82). Bob Crutchfield also confirmed this formula in one of his Sunday school lessons, positing "an authoritative chain...from Christ, as head of Church, to the minister, as head of local body, to elders, and then to husbands (8/17/83)." As administrator, he adamantly refused a spiritual position in the church. "I didn't want to be a second (spiritual) head," he passionately maintained. Therefore, Earl Paulk's spiritualized administrative structures within the church

---

[151] He did this in one particular sermon I listened to entitled, "God's order and design" (9/12/82). God's order was clearly not a democratic order. Paulk commented in this sermon, "There are churches in disarray today because they think [the church] is a democratic institution."

[152] As has been seen, Paulk's "vision" was a multivalent symbol, mutating and encompassing every change which the congregation experienced. The linking of the demonstration of the Kingdom with his Phoenix vision was another example of the ever-adapting visionary revelation Paulk had. This connection proved to be a powerful congregational symbol, far more than the previous visionary developments. For the first time the "vision" of the church took on an outward thrust, actualizing the kingdom in the world. Previously, the vision had been interpreted as harvesting souls and as a refuge for the outcast (socially, spiritually, age-wise, and racially). Now, however, the kingdom vision was one of demonstration, one of worldly activity -- a living out of ones Christian commitment. This connection was made, rhetorically, in several of Paulk's sermons in the previous period. Though it was during this historical period that it captured the imagination of the congregation and became infused into the culture of the church. From this point onward, Paulk's use of "vision" in sermons, meaning this specific "kingdom vision," climbed consistently throughout the history of the church. [See Appendix B for his use of "the vision."]

[153] Paulk was not alone in explicating a list of secondary spiritual gifts. Guyton's (1988:91-92) summary of the writings of various Pentecostal writers on this subject and found one author, Peter Wagner, listed 27 such gifts.

[154] Hamon visited the church during the summer of 1981 and spent several days preaching, teaching and prophesying over the leadership. Weeks (1986: 315-319) discusses this event and records in full the "thrilling and timely" prophecy given to Paulk by this "anointed prophet of God."

effectively created a wall of separation between these bureaucratic positions and "called" ministry -- a separation that was confirmed by the staff. Yet this approach established a divide between, rather than unifying, the business of running the organization and its spiritual, visionary direction and leadership.

Paulk reinforced this split in his selection of ministerial personnel from within this spiritual context. He asserted, "I'm looking for spiritual leaders, my first calling is to develop ministers. It's my job to multiply my ministry" (3/1/81). The criteria for ministerial appointments, as described by several staff persons, also included one's relationship to Earl, a person's trustworthiness, and a member's giving record more than it did ministerial expertise. As the membership grew, so too did the pastoral division of labor and the complexity of the organizational bureaucracy. This increasing complexification added new levels of leadership to the church structure, giving it greater effectiveness. Yet, the organizational structures, guided by rational business principles, were based on roles, expertise, and completion of assignments, not on spiritual discernment. Within this situation Earl Paulk was able to exercise less actual spiritual authority in day to day activities. This situation required Paulk to exhibit an ever increasing overt authority over the organization, its pastors, and staff members in order to retain his sense of power, even though spiritually he had become firmly ensconced as the central authority.[155]

---

[155] Schaller (1992) discusses the relationship between the growth of a congregation and its system of leadership. He describes seven patterns of governance, with certain variations, related to the size of a church. Essentially, he argues that once a church grows beyond 2700 members it becomes less dependent on lay leadership, with organizational power concentrated in those full-time staff possessing the most information and expertise. Paulk's spiritual authority over these core congregational members was inadequate and inappropriate in managing them as employees in this developing bureaucratic organization. The various grounds of his congregation authority, however, were incompatible with the demands of being a manager. Bob Crutchfield, on the other hand, did possess the managerial skills to control the organization effectively. Paulk's temperament and inclination for singular church leadership, however, made the possibility of a cooperative dual leadership situation unlikely. As will be seen, the competing models of authority became a source of continual tension for the organization. The only feasible option open to Paulk, as he framed it, was to force his spiritual authority upon the church structures with an ever-increasing level of severity.

As is already clear from the church's history, Paulk hated bureaucratic denominations. He abhorred anything that even implied a system or organizational structure.[156] Earl refused to let his staff discuss "budgets," institute a system of pledging for the offering, or present studies of the feasibility of major expenditures. These all limited the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work in the church.[157] In this spiritually-grounded system, God would check any misdirection or excess (10/11/81).

God will employ a system of checks and balances, with Word of God to guide...and the Holy Spirit...the deacons...and the elders who sit in spiritual judgment.... God never works through a committee. God has got a system of checks and balances, and you don't need to worry about that darling. Let God do the checks and balances for us!

Ironically, these very organizational qualities he railed against were exactly the institutional controls which allowed him to be more effective and the church to expand further. Even as the church structures became increasingly organized, Paulk adamantly preached to the contrary, "We are not built out of traditions, we are not built out of hierarchies" (11/6/83). Visiting ministers further reinforced this perspective in their comments, such as the following declaration. "This is not a church with a system. This is the most disorganized church in the whole world. It has no system and no pattern, and that’s why

[156] In discussing this characteristic Weber wrote, "In radical contrast to bureaucratic organization, charisma knows no formal and regulated appointment or dismissal, no career, advancement or salary, no supervisory or appeals body, no local or purely technical jurisdiction, and no permanent institutions in the manner of bureaucratic agencies" (1968:1112). John Bridges, Paulk’s good friend, founding member and later administrator, commented how he attempted to maintain good business practices and yet not speak of them, "We had no pledge system, no budget. Bishop Paulk didn’t like the word budget so my euphemism was ‘planned expenses.’ We don’t have pledges...though we ‘take purposes’ of intended giving."

[157] These arrangements may have limited the freedom of the Spirit, but they most certainly constrained the authority of a charismatic prophet whose legitimacy resided in his spiritual vision. As Weber (1968:1113) stated,"...charismatic domination is also the opposite of bureaucracy...." Swatos (1981), Johnson (1992), and others also have noted the inherent incomparability of "genuine" charisma and rational bureaucratic structures. An interesting paradox arises for charismatic leaders in this circumstance. The extraordinary nature of their charisma increases as their movement grows, while at the same time, this growth necessitates the creation of structures to manage this growth whose functioning is dependent upon other types of power arrangements. This requires the charismatic leader who wants to maintain his or her leadership to intentionally enhance the charisma "to accommodate growth and to facilitate the objectives of the movement" (Johnson, 1992: S4). Johnson (1992) and Wallis (1982) offer excellent examples of how this has been attempted in other religious movements. How Paulk attempts this remains to be seen in the following narrative.

I come here" (2/6/83).

Re-Forming Ministry

Once begun, this tendency toward organization continued unabated with the various social ministries of the church being consolidated and professionalized. Three factors contributed to this development. First, Bob's administrative plan organized these services within a legally incorporated framework, the "Harvester Human Services." Following this, each ministry's statement of purpose was rewritten to conform to the overall thrust of "communicating and demonstrating the Kingdom." Third, Earl Paulk was identified as the titular head of every ministry according to his stated position as spiritual leader. This designation of Earl Paulk as singular authority of all aspects of the church led to several petty conflicts. One such incident was reflected in Don Paulk's monthly editorial in the church newspaper. He addressed the rumors of speculation as to why Earl Paulk was not listed as the senior editor. Don assured his readership, "This is not a subtle form of rebellion against spiritual authority." Thereafter, Earl was listed as editor-in-chief although he had no part in the paper's publication (*Harvest Time*, 2/81). To avoid further confusion, Earl Paulk clarified the full ramifications of this centralizing policy in one sermon (6/13/82).

Every ministry of this church will be brought totally and completely under the total and complete control of this elder board and presbytery. There will be nobody as leaders of ministries unless they are submitted to this local church.

Many of these ministries offered by the church in reality had their origin in the independent, entrepreneurial actions of visionary lay members.[158] Paulk embraced these diverse ministries and consolidated them into his vision of the Kingdom, although seldom providing them with financial support.

---

[158] In this way the church leadership was able to incorporate highly motivated lay volunteers into its structure while not involving them in the administration of the church itself nor in the decisions surrounding the distribution of resources. This arrangement allowed the church both to encourage lay involvement and to provide places for these persons to minister and serve others, all at a minimal cost in money and training time for the organization. As many as ten percent of 1991 survey respondents reported this was the foremost attraction of the church for them at present. Three quarters of respondents stated they were involved in church ministries at least once a month with a third active once a week or more often.

The leadership incorporated these social ministries fully into the church's ideological and organizational framework without including them into its budgetary structure. Much as a mall owner would rent space for a small shop or boutique, without other financial obligations, the leadership of Chapel Hill Harvester formed an umbrella corporate structure under which these franchises were housed. In case after case, when a ministry's visionary director left, died, or changed interests the ministry often disappeared.[159]

This system of embracing the visions of leaders of diverse ministries is one of the most successful aspects of Chapel Hill Harvester Church. The church's identity of "demonstrating the Kingdom" offered these lay ministers the rhetorical flexibility for them to serve where they saw a need. Not only did Paulk preach both a material and ministerial entrepreneurial message, but he also provided the mall-like structure under which to actualize it. Therefore, the church's structural configuration gave this committed laity a place in which to provide their mission service (Wuthnow, 1991). This dynamic allowed for the incorporation of new ministries as the needs of the congregation and local community shifted, with little additional burden to the church as a whole. Chapel Hill Harvester benefitted from the public relations aspect of having many diverse successful operations under its ministerial umbrella. In return, countless members were able to serve God in an area that best suited them as well as thousands of nonmembers were offered assistance through these ministries.

Ordering the Media

[159] The ministry to homosexual Christians is an excellent case in point. In the early eighties, a group of gay men were attempting to overcome and alter their sexual orientation while at the church. Earl invited them to function as a ministry of the church. They were given a space to meet and pastoral guidance, but no tangible monetary support. The church's ministry to homosexuals flourished for almost ten years under the volunteer leadership of two men who had "left the lifestyle" and their wives. However, when first one and then the other couple left the church, the ministry faltered and died. See Thumma (1987) for details of this ministry. Another example of this relationship between the church and its "high profile" ministries can be seen in the "house of new life." This communal living ministry for unwed young women and adoption agency ceased to exist in the mid eighties when its founding couple moved, although the ministry continued to live on paper for several more years.

The church's diverse media resources were also touched by this emphasis toward organization. The eventual result was a professionalization of the media services, increasing their quality and effectiveness. The church newspaper, the *Harvest Time*, is a perfect example of this. It began in March 1980 with the printing of a few thousand copies. Most of its articles were written, quite poorly, by associate pastors. After the institution of the computer database system, however, the paper's circulation rose dramatically to 10,000 in 1982, 18,000 by 1983, and 23,000 by mid 1984. As circulation grew, writers, graphics artists, and computer specialists were employed in order to produce a quality product. Articles were no longer written by the ministerial staff, except for the founding pastors. The paper began to resemble an actual newspaper rather than a hastily assembled church newsletter.[160]

A similar push to professionalize the television ministry helped increase its scope rapidly as well. In mid 1980 the church's program could be seen on two minor local networks in Atlanta and three other Southern cities. Throughout this period, the church steadily increased its monetary allocations for the television ministry. By 1982, after hiring professional agents, the broadcast expanded to the popular Christian Broadcast Network (CBN). The television crew soon included better trained, full-time staff whose job it was to record, produce, and market the church's several, uniquely formatted, programs. The additional program exposure generated greater contributions from the television shows themselves. In February 1982 the program received the highest rating of any religious program in Atlanta. By the end of 1984, Earl Paulk and the church could be seen each day nationally on the PTL network, weekly in four Central American countries as well as on several Atlanta stations and the local cable network.

In 1983 the church also began operation of a publishing house, K Dimension Publishers. In the first year of operation, the publishing company printed ten small pamphlets and a book, *The Wounded Body of Christ* all taken directly from Paulk's sermons. Two more books based on his sermons, *The Ultimate Kingdom* and *Satan Unmasked*, were published in 1984. Concurrent with these published works, the church aggressively marketed cassette tapes of sermons through its newspaper and television media. In all, during this period the church not only made media evangelism of the Kingdom message a

---

[160] The clearest indication of both this professionalization and the impact of the increasing division of labor within the growing organization can be seen the authorship of the news articles. Articles authored by the associate pastors decreased from just over four articles per issue in 1980 to less than one per issue by 1984, to none after 1987. See Appendix C-3 and C-4 for graphs of these patterns.

top priority, but also professionalized it toward greater effectiveness.[161]

Bringing Form to Worship

The church's worship style and format were not immune from the organizational impulse either. As the church and its television ministry grew, a greater number of full-time music and worship staff persons became involved in the Sunday morning services. Clariece Paulk, as ministerial head of the worship and arts department, began to hire and assemble numerous musicians, singers, and dancers, almost always from the ranks of Alpha. She instituted an orchestra, a dance troupe, drama groups, and several singing groups. At the same time, a number of well-known Christian singers, such as Dottie Rambo, Reba and Donnie McGuire, and Sharlee Lucas, made Chapel Hill Harvester their home base. Given this abundance of talent, special performances increased, as did the number and quality of church plays, dramas, and musicals. With these resources, staging the worship service itself became a major production, taking on a life of its own.[162]

[161] This aggressive marketing of Paulk and his Kingdom message effectively provided the church membership with substitutionary means of involvement with the founder and spiritual leader in order to compensate for the fact that as the church grew Paulk was unable to engage in face-to-face interactions (Johnson, 1992: S4).

[162] This professionalization of worship is a distinct characteristic of both televangelists and megachurches. Clariece often argued that in an effort to attract and entertain an audience raised on television, movies, and concerts the artistic presentation of the gospel of Jesus must be of the highest quality. A symbolic representation of the increasing importance of the professional worship performance can be seen in the configuration of worship area. With each move to a new building, the "front stage" increased in distance from the front row of members, in height from the sanctuary floor, and in total floor space. Upon this ever-enlarging worship arena, sat greater numbers of pastors, singers, musicians, and performers.

Soon the services began to reflect both congregational and performance diversity. Much of this was intentional. Clariece constantly reinforced the idea that "new doesn't mean bad" (11/11/81), arguing that people do not know what music they like innately, rather they have to be taught to like all forms of music (Thigpen, 1990b; Weeks, 1986). Although attempting to diversify worship styles to satisfy everyone's music tastes, Clariece remained predominantly within a Caucasian Christian tradition. A service might include an orchestral prelude by Bach, several charismatic praise choruses one of which would be choreographed for interpretative dancers, an up-beat rendition of a familiar gospel hymn, and then conclude with Handel's "hallelujah chorus." This eclectic, yet innovative, mix of styles was very attractive to new members.[163] Paulk often supported this emphasis, preaching that "forms of worship separate Christian people....You can not put God in a form.... We want unity of faith not unity of form!" (11/22/81).

The professionalization of the worship arts, requiring a more organized and planned time frame, helped introduce more order and routine into the Sunday morning service. The expressive portions of worship, typically unpredictably spontaneous and difficult to control, soon decreased as they became more structured and domesticated. Judging from the taped services, there was less exercise of members' spiritual gifts, including prophecies, tongues, and healings. These fewer periods of "spontaneous" charismatic praise were scheduled before the offering, after a rousing song, or at the end of the service when scheduling was inconsequential. Often Paulk, or one of the worship leaders, would introduce spiritually expressive time with the injunction to "Stand up and praise God! " This orchestrated praise period would be moderated by the rise and falls of Clariece's music and eventually would be brought to an end as her music decreased in volume. Structural limits were also imposed upon the formerly central practice of being anointed with oil while praying at the altar. Pastors began to roam through the audience with oil in hand, thus being able to end the ritual on cue (10/11/81). By 1984 the practice was discarded entirely.

The content of Paulk's preaching also began to de-emphasize "the Spirit." Although his reference to the spiritual gifts declined only slightly from the previous period of church history, his references to spirit

---

[163] Of those who responded to the 1991 survey, 15 percent reported that the arts, drama and worship format was what initially attracted them to the church.

baptism, the Holy Spirit, and spiritual authority all dropped significantly.[164] Paulk's own expressions of praise declined dramatically from almost 70 times per sermon in the previous historic period to 37 times per sermon in this period, and by the 1985 to 1987 period these expressions of praise occurred on average 8.8 times per sermon (See Appendix B-6). This departure from overt expressiveness was reflected even in the church newspaper. The number of photos showing persons engaged in expressive worship decreased from around three per issue in 1980, to 1.5 in 1984, to none after 1987 (See Appendix C-1).

This routinization of spiritual expressiveness was as intentional as it was due to a natural maturation of the fervor. Every effort was made to organize the service. The church had become too large to handle the free expression of the Spirit. Free expressions were fine if they were constrained to a scheduled worship moment or were contained by one's pew. Competing voices of spiritual authority, such as in the form of "words of prophecy," were progressively stifled by Paulk and the leadership. As Paulk taught a group of pastors and laity at a 1980's conference on how to create a successful youth ministry, "The ‘One Voice’ principle is of having one spokesperson rather than many revelations or voices running parallel.... God speaks through one pastor. I do most of the preaching, so most of the revelation would come through me. It’s one spirit, one voice." A former pastor reflected on this process of creating "one voice" by eliminating unauthorized prophesies.

Wayne Wilson used to be our big prophesier. Paulk made one statement that brought that to a halt. He said, `Prophecy is only necessary if the preacher has not heard from God or if he did not deliver the full gospel message in a place.'

As the church attracted a more up-town, middle class clientele, the worship styles were intentionally altered to appeal to this respectable audience. Likewise, the television viewing audience tuned in each week to hear Paulk’s sermons and the church’s music, not long period of praise or speaking in tongues. Rather than attempting to edit the television broadcast tape, the worship leaders

---

[164] Paulk’s comments about the spiritual gifts declined from 5.6 in 1978-80 to 5.0 per sermon during this period (see Appendix B-14). His references to the other indicators of spirituality decreased dramatically: "spirit baptism" from 2.8 times per sermon in 1978-80 to .8 per sermon in 1981-84; the "Holy Spirit" from 24.1/sermon to 14.0/sermon; and "spiritual authority" from an average of 26.3 times per sermon to 15.6 times per sermon (see Appendix B13, B-3, B-7).

just edited the expressive praise and Gifts of the Spirit out of the central periods of the service format. Nevertheless, at this point in time the charismatic expressiveness had not entirely disappeared, it had just been given a structure into which it had to conform.

Building Order

A final structural organization effort, that of ordering the building program, dominated extensive amounts of congregational energy, finances, and emotions during this period. Somehow the leadership had to provide worship space for the multitudes coming to the church. First, they enlarged the existing sanctuary until it held approximately 750 people. This temporary solution gave them adequate space if three worship services were held each week. Earl Paulk, however, fervently disliked multiple services. As a solution, elaborate plans were proposed for a huge 5000 seat church and ministry complex.

The decisions made surrounding this building project exemplify the considerable institutional tension present between the church's spiritually visionary leadership and its rational administration. This tension was embodied in the persons of Earl Paulk, as God's spokesman, and Bob Crutchfield as practical businessman. Paulk, in his role as visionary spiritual leader, often described the divine origins of the proposed worship complex, "God said 'Build a Church' and gave us blueprints" (10/11/81). Benson Idahosa, a visiting minister from Nigeria, came and prophetically announced to the congregation that "It is done!" [the building of the new sanctuary in the eyes of God] and would be inhabited within three years time.[165] With this assurance Paulk asserted, "What has been done in the mind of God is now that much closer to reality" (*Harvest Time*, 11/81).

Nevertheless, over the next few months Bob, as the responsible administrator, reported to the presbytery that the planned sanctuary appeared destined to fail for lack of funds. In one heated moment

---

[165] Benson Idahosa is the senior minister of an independent megachurch in Benin City, Nigeria. His church, Miracle Center, seats over 6000, while the total weekly attendance of the more than 30 satellite branch congregations throughout the city and countryside totaled over 10,000 in 1983 (Vaughan, 1984: 95). In 1981 he was consecrated as Bishop of the Church of God Mission International. Idahosa has the title of Archbishop with at least a dozen bishops under his authority, representing well over 1000 separate churches throughout the African continent. Idahosa is well-known and much sought after as a speaker in the United States and in Europe. He is also a popular and powerful television preacher in Africa. He became a member of the international network of religious leaders gathered around John Mears, The International Communion of Charismatic Congregations (ICCC), of which Paulk also became a member. See Garlock (1981), Vaughan (1984), and Poewe (1988) for a fuller description of Idahosa's ministry and ties with the Charismatic movement in the United States.

Earl rebuffed his administrator, "You may be right [that we can't afford this] but I'm your pastor and I tell you this is the building that God has told me to build!" Then, in April of 1982, after paying the architectural firm $380,000 for the plans to this building, Paulk scrapped them and confessed (Sheaf, 3:4),

> It appears now that the Pastors, Elders and Deacons have felt led to provide an interim building that can be built in 4 or 5 months to house 2500 people.... No, this will not hinder our building of the more permanent sanctuary.

Pastor Dan Rhodes designed this temporary building, variously dubbed "the barn," "the airplane hanger," and "the largest TV studio in Atlanta," with a tentative completion of December 1983 (*Harvest Time*, Spring 1983). Building funds came slower than necessary; so in May 1983 Earl Paulk decided to "create the need" for people to give. He rented a huge circus tent and moved the entire church into it. According to Bob, Earl felt that the level of discomfort in the tent would increase giving. Again the administrator voiced his dissent.

Earl's action backfired, numerous members left during the "wilderness experience" of the tent days. One member confessed, "My parents left because when Paulk went into the tent he did it by fiat. My mother is elderly, she couldn't handle the heat." Another admitted he came as late as possible and left as soon as the service ended. Several church leaders estimated that the membership decreased by over 800 after that first summer and then winter season. Paulk commented on this once the congregation occupied its new sanctuary, "In the midst of this [tent period] many forsook us, leaders left.... All this leaving is not over but God will find himself a people" (9/2/84). At the same time, the unorthodox sight of the huge tent attracted new members, at least 2000 persons replenished those who left during this time. When the tent was finally folded up, church membership reported a net gain of over a thousand.

The "tent cathedral," which became Chapel Hill Harvester's sanctuary for fifteen months through intense heat and freezing cold, was a 220 by 110 foot, blue and white canvas circus "big top" set on bare paving. It had inadequate heating and no air conditioning; however, it did possess a state-of-the-art lighting and sound system for television production. The canvas sanctuary held over 2500 people, seated on metal folding chairs (*Harvest Time*, December 1983). A two foot high raised platform for pastors, worship staff, singers, and musicians stretched across the front of the tent. This front area was framed in

pillared and scrolled white woodwork, with a sky blue backdrop, and many potted plants. The only symbols present were two large stars painted on the blue backdrop. It was reminiscent of the studio decor of many of the televangelists and had been specifically designed as a video background for the broadcast services.

The tent itself, as well as this "wilderness" experience, became powerful intrinsic symbols for the congregation. The tent echoed an older Pentecostal tradition of revivals, healing services, and camp meetings. Earl Paulk reflected that it, too, reminded him of his adolescent experience in the tent sanctuary following the destruction of his father's church (*Harvest Time*, December 1983). This period of time was spoken of in language reminiscent of the Israelite's wilderness journey toward the promised land. More than one person reflected about this time, "God didn't allow a single person to die while we were in the tent." Those members who endured worship in the tent spoke of their experiences as a period of purging and refining. It was interpreted as a sacred time before the Lord. "To all that have endured this tent, we say to you that you are more mature Christians," Paulk commented in the newspaper (*Harvest Time*, December 1983).

Finally, three years and 15 days after Benson Idahosa prophesied the congregation would be worshiping in a new facility, services were held for the first time in the "K (Kingdom)-Center." Crews of volunteers from the membership worked nearly around the clock for several months in order to make the prophesied three year deadline. Little was said about this being an entirely different facility from the one about which Idahosa had prophesied. Paulk did address this fact briefly during the sermon that first Sunday, putting the blame not on God, Benson Idahosa, or his own spiritual insight, but on the disobedience of the congregation (9/2/84).

God gave us...we started out with a very sophisticated plan, called a permanent worship center. As it turned out we were not ready as a people to accomplish that, it was not that God had not promised it to us.... Our plans again were thwarted. God said, ’Build a church. The evidence was that there was a lack of maturity among God’s people.... It seemed to many that we could not afford it, we could have....

Earl also registered his disappointment with the K-Center once during that service, "God is not interested in great cathedrals, He is interested in a great people.... God is transforming a barn into a workshop for the Kingdom.... This is not what I'd call a tremendous cathedral" (9/2/84). The K Center was

continually described as a temporary facility, with the cathedral remaining in the wings for a more obedient people and a more receptive community. "God's holding our cathedral building until it's something the world will marvel at," Earl explained (5/13/84).

The K Center architecturally was nothing at which one would marvel. Its flat, bare concrete floors, plywood covered cinder block walls, and black painted foam insulated ceilings indicated a hastily assembled structure. Powerful lights, exposed ductwork, large speakers, and microphones all hung chaotically from the ceiling. The congregation, perched on uncomfortable metal folding chairs, now had to raise their eyes upward to the four foot high platform occupied by ministers and worship participants. Again, the backdrop for the worship performance, thanks to the television viewing audience, was composed of pale blue walls, white pillars, green plants, and no overt Christian symbols. This was a multi-purpose, functional meeting space designed as a television and performance arts studio. There were no overt distractions which might draw the attention of the worshiper or viewer from their primary focus of Paulk, the choirs, and an experience of collective worship.[166] The only real difference between this building and the tent was the improved climate control. Soon, a balcony was added to this sanctuary, bringing its total seating capacity to approximately 2700.[167]

ORGANIZING THE PEOPLE

Once the church had organized its facilities and its leadership structure, the potential for growth increased. The bureaucratic methods and business procedures instituted by Bob Crutchfield enabled the church to cope with the multitudes who continued to arrive. Paulk interpreted these organizational efforts from a spiritual perspective, "It's of the Lord that we should grow! We have room to grow" (9/2/84)! With the organization of the church structures well underway, the focus then became how to order this growing

---

[166] Interesting, the lighting was such that the entire congregation was illuminated as brightly as the stage area. Therefore, when the balcony-affixed cameras panned the audience the television viewer was able to see the faces of all the multi-racial worshipers. These faces became the symbols of the church rather than crosses, candles, and traditional religious trappings.

[167] Many megachurches share this common architectural design, or lack of it, and history of progressing rapidly from a very small sanctuary, to a tent, shopping center, or other temporary space, and then settling into a plain, functional yet large meeting hall permanently or until their economic status can catch up with their tremendous growth in membership. The final chapter of this work will more directly address the relationship between architecture, religious symbolism, and the theological message of several distinct categories of megachurches.

membership. This was no easy task, however.

A majority of the estimated 3500 new persons who came to the church during this period of the church's history were young, well educated, racially and religiously diverse, urban or suburban born, and upwardly mobile.[168] The average age of these new members was 30 years old, with somewhat more females joining than males. About 37 percent were born outside the Southern region. Nearly half of the new members were African American, which brought the 1984 black presence in the entire church to about 30 percent. Among the new white members almost 17 percent were Catholics, with 14 percent coming from nondenominational congregations. One third of those joining were new Christians or had been saved within the previous two years. A majority of this group, by 1991, had more education than their parents and were employed in higher status jobs [See Table 3 for greater details on the demographics of this subpopulation].

Shepherding the Flock

[168] Again, this descriptive data was collected from those who came during this time and completing the survey in 1991. The assessment of members I interviewed confirmed the general accuracy of this membership portrait. My observations of the gatherings of new members from the video taped services also seem to indicate that this data is mostly accurate.

A first step toward organizing this diverse and rapidly expanding congregation was to institute a shepherding program and a system of small group meetings in August 1982. With Alpha's discipleship groups as a model, the church organized a number of Home Fellowships. They became somewhat successful, being attended by several hundred people each month. These home fellowships were loosely organized by geographic areas and met once a month in the homes of the group's leader, often a church deacon. This structure was very similar to the "cell-groups" described by Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the largest church in the world.[169]

According to numerous pastors and lay leaders, Earl Paulk was never completely comfortable with this form of organization out of concern that they might foster competing loyalties

TABLE 3

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1981 and 1984			
Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Total Number	78	71	158
Mean Age in 1991	37.2	39.5	38.5

[169] The model of Cho's highly successful church, described in his widely distributed books (Cho, 1979,1981) has been copied by many megachurch pastors. Paulk even sent two associate ministers to Korea in August 1988 to examine firsthand how Cho's church operated. The idea of cell-groups, small home-based fellowship meetings contained within a larger church structure, has gained considerable popularity in the contemporary Christian community among both liberal and conservative denominations. Robert Wuthnow (1994a,b) recently found in a national survey that 40 percent of Americans participated in small-groups. His books attempt to analyze the phenomenon of small groups fellowships from a sociological and cultural perspective. Another exceptional book on cell-groups presents a more practical, detailed, and comprehensive discussion of cell-groups and house churches (Hadaway, DuBose & Wright, 1987).

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1981 and 1984			
Mean Age at joining	28.6	30.9	29.9
Gender: Female	60.3	73.2	65.8
Marital Status:			
Married	66.7	57.7	63.2
Divorced	10.3	15.5	12.3
Never Married	20.5	22.5	20.9
Education:College degree or more	53.2	53.0	51.6
Income: +$30,000	60.0	72.5	66.0
Occupation:			
Clerical	17.1	7.7	12.2
Service	19.7	18.5	19.0

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1981 and 1984			
Managerial	9.2	21.5	15.0
Professional	10.5	6.2	8.2
Self-Employed	13.2	10.8	12.2
Southern Birthplace	61.5	66.2	63.3
Community of Birth			
Rural/town/city	39.5	49.3	43.7
Urban/suburban	60.5	50.7	56.3
Mean Childhood Moves	3.0	2.3	2.7
Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Hours at Church/ Week:			

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1981 and 1984			
0-3 hours	11.8	17.9	15.9
4-6 hours	32.9	40.3	35.8
7-10 hours	28.9	28.4	27.8
11 or more	26.3	13.4	20.5
New Christian	26.9	40.8	32.3
Mean # CHHC Friends	4.1	3.1	3.5
Giving: 10 % or More	93.4	87.6	91.5
Previous Denomination:			
Liberal/Moderate	21.8	11.3	15.8
Conservative	28.2	53.5	39.9
Pentecostal	9.0	14.1	10.8

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1981 and 1984			
Catholic	16.7	7.0	12.0
Charismatic/Nondenom	14.1	5.6	9.5
Other	3.8	2.8	5.7
None	6.4	5.6	6.3
Live in Church Zipcode	23.1	26.8	24.1
Mean Paulk Books Read	5.2	4.7	4.9

on the part of the membership. Earl's discussion of these home fellowship groups in the newspaper describes them more as a method of control than a place for fellowship (*Harvest Time*, September 1982). He saw them as functioning to ensure members' accountability to and connection with a pastor or deacon. His intent was for the groups to reflect on and "share basically what we have shared in the presbytery." He saw them as a conduit to impart the message of the kingdom once again, although at a more grass roots level of ministry and from another person in authority. Pastor Lynn Mays addressed the program's function in a 1982 sermon, it was to "protect, care, provide [for members] ...to direct their lives...and if they are submissive to the spiritual authorities that God has set over them, then you are going to be whole, lights in the world and salt to the earth" (1/24/82). In a videotaped "how to" presentation for a church conference that year, these groups were described further as a way for members "to plug in with ministries," "have deeper spiritual fellowship," and "talk about what we hear from the pulpit." In reality, according to interviews and later observations, covenant communities, as they came to be known, always functioned as times of fellowship, personal sharing, and prayer. This is very similar to what Wuthnow summarized from the data his team of researchers collected (Wuthnow, 1994b). Seldom did the discussion revolve around Paulk's sermon or the church's teachings.

Another organizational activity instituted during this time was the "new members banquet" held every month or so. These pot-luck suppers, with skits, introduction of pastors, special music, and a brief talk by Earl, helped integrate members into the church family. A home fellowship deacon headed each table of newcomers. While everyone ate, the deacon described the various ministerial options for church service and at the same time actively recruited volunteers.[170]

---

[170] Paulk and the leadership were very aware that they needed to involve new members in the life of the church if they were to retain them. This not only included in the needs-based ministries such as Overcomers but also in the community service ministries. Commitment was greatly enhanced if members contributed to the life of the congregation and its ministries (Kanter, 1972). Perhaps this helps account for such a large percentage of highly involved and committed respondents to the 1991 survey. Those who have remained at the church throughout the years are the members who are also the most connected to the ministry. Paulk was often fond of saying that if you were not prepared to work for the kingdom you would be more comfortable elsewhere. Consequentially the longer someone remained at the church the more likely it was for that person to be highly involved. The data from those who joined the church during its two most recent historical periods shows considerably less involvement in church ministries and congregational life in general.

The opportunities for social involvement, recreation, and service multiplied rapidly during this time. All members were strongly encouraged to become active in "kingdom ministry," although not everyone did. Nevertheless, Paulk continually encouraged active involvement, "God wants busy people...everybody's got a job to do. We don't want any observers, we want participants" (10/11/81).[171] By the end of this historical period more than a dozen community service ministries were sheltered under the church's umbrella, including a prison ministry, a group that attempted to change the sexual orientation of homosexuals, an adoption agency, a home for unwed mothers, a medical ministry, several geriatric ministries, and counseling services. Many interest-based organizations sprang up as well and soon occupied members' time and energies. Those persons interested in sports, arts and crafts, weight-reduction, dance, music, and sign language all had their own activity groups.[172] Likewise, the church ministries depended upon volunteer labor and needed hundreds of participants. There were church-related volunteer opportunities in the education program, arts and drama, media production, grounds keeping, building maintenance, ushering, hostessing, and parking lot attending. Each of these congregational tasks formed their own clique of members. Regardless of the type of group, parking-lot attendants, bookstore and tape ministry workers, prayer warriors, and letter stuffers all found an organizational place and a cluster of persons who week after week grew into a separate, intimate support fellowship within the larger congregation. These criss-crossing, interconnected webs of small group involvement created a powerful network of relationships and mutual accountability, at least for those willing to become involved.[173]

---

[171] Much has been said recently about the control of "free riders" for a successful religious organization (Iannaccone, 1992; Stonebraker, 1993). This is a serious problem for very large churches where the potential pool of free riders is great and the tendency in large groups is to let someone else, the "expert", do the work. Paulk constantly argued against this, ever reminding members that idle hands were the devil's tools. The ideological impetus of "demonstrating the Kingdom" both kept members busy and helped to socializes them into a "Kingdom Christian" identity, but it also may have reduced the number of "free riders" given the strong social norms against it.

[172] The plethora of service, entertainment, and interest opportunities available at this megachurch is quite common among megachurches. This is one of the reasons Lyle Schaller has labeled these very large churches "seven-day-a-week" churches (1992). It must be stressed that the multiple ministries and activity groups were not created intentionally by the church leadership, but rather rose out of grassroots needs and interests of the membership at Chapel Hill Harvester Church.

[173] Almost 65 percent of 1991 survey respondents reported that they knew more people at this church than they did at previous church they had attended. Likewise, over 80 percent agreed with the statements that they felt cared about at the church and not like "just another number."

Other efforts were instituted which not only encouraged interaction and service but also facilitated self-improvement and mutual economic cooperation. The church published a "Christian Yellow pages," a business directory of services offered by members of the congregation. The *Harvest Time* sold advertising space to members' businesses. The church sponsored adult education classes on many personal enrichment topics from computer literacy, professional writing techniques, and management techniques to reading literacy, remedial math, and communication skills. Several businessmen even began a men's breakfast group which was essentially their version of the Full Gospel Business Mens Association.

In support of these self-improvement opportunities, Paulk's preaching promoted a success-oriented, self-reliant, entrepreneurial, rags to riches, Protestant work ethic. This idea resonated with the upwardly mobile congregation largely composed of managers, service professionals, and independent business persons.[174] In his sermons Earl often suggested business strategies, "Get an unique, original idea that can change your world.... Find a need and get an idea to solve that need" (10/11/81). Like every aspect of the church, business success was spiritualized, and contained a catch. If one's God-given idea was successful, the church should also share in one's good fortune. "God says to you, 'I'll open your mind of imagination to new dimensions in your work...and if God gave you a little prosperity for God's sake use every dime of it for the Kingdom of God," Paulk would counsel the congregation (10/10/82).[175]

---

[174] There was always a large number of self-employed persons in the congregation who joined throughout the church's history according to the 1991 survey data (17.9 % from 78-80, 12.2 % from 81-84, 14.4 % from 1985-87, and 16.8 % from 1988-90). Of the total questionnaire data, 13.9 percent reported they were self-employed in 1991. This compares to the 1990 census data figure of 7.1 percent for the United States population.

[175] This message was not lost on members. A majority of respondents (52%) to the 1991 survey agreed that success in business was a sign of being in a right relationship and in covenant with God. Sixty-four percent agreed that hard work would always be rewarded by God. A full 89 percent affirmed that the best thing about being rich would be that they could give more to God's work through the church.

Alpha, too, required a new level of organization during this period. Many of the original Alpha youth began to graduate from high school and get married or go to college. The church was faced with a crucial task, either create structures to grow with these members or lose many of those who had made the congregation so successful just a few years prior. In response, the leadership created two new levels of fellowship ministries, "Hebron" for adult singles and "Gameo" for newly married couples. The church also began a preschool in the Fall of 1984 for the Alpha offspring. Alpha even developed its own quasi-fraternity and sorority groups (AXP) on certain college campuses. Despite their best efforts, however, many Alpha members continued to leave the group for college.[176] This became a point of contention for Earl Paulk. Not only would college attendance diminish the church numbers but he was personally aware of the secularizing effects of higher education. "God did not send 100's of young people here just to go back into colleges and universities", he lamented (10/10/82). As an alternative, he and the church leadership began to investigate the possibility of founding their own institute of higher learning, a Bible college.

This period of time also marked by attempts to organize the church's television viewers. Persons who contacted the church as a result of the TV ministry were given an opportunity to join what was originally called the "Harvest Club." After the establishment of the church's "kingdom" identity, the title was changed to "Partners for the Kingdom" (PFK). Like similar efforts by Bakker and Falwell, a "partner" would receive the church newspaper, a copy of Paulk's books, announcements of conferences, and a Kingdom lapel pin. In return, the partner "covenanted" to send ten dollars a month and pray for the ministry ten minutes a day. This PFK covenant commitment to "become involved in the greatest movement on earth that will literally bring Jesus Christ back" (as a 2/5/84 brochure claimed) actually resulted in bringing extensive amounts of money and many new members into the church.[177]

---

[176] Many of those I interviewed told of being counseled to postpone college or to attend a local school. Quite a few of these persons regretted their obedience to this counsel, accepting what they later felt was an inferior educational opportunity. Only 14 % of the total 1991 survey respondents went to the local public school, Georgia State University, whereas of those who joined between 1978 and 1984 over 22 % attended this university. Likewise, 8.3 % of all respondents attended the local community college, DeKalb College, but 13.3 % of persons coming during the height of the Alpha years (78-84). These two schools were considered "acceptable" options due to their close proximity to the church.

[177] Although the television ministry brought in thousands of dollars, PFK records since 1984 show that the television ministry never received as much as it spent on air time, production costs, and additional expenses. PFK yearly revenue in 1984 totaled $140,000 and by 1990, the last complete year for which I

A Kingdom Christian at All Times

The efforts undertaken to organize the congregation extended even into members' daily lives. Early in 1982 Paulk preached a series of sermons, entitled the "Death of a Layman." In these sermons he declared that in respect to the church's ministry the separation between professional clergy and the laity would be erased (1/24/82).

There is no such animal as a Layman.... God has called each of us to minister. He imbues us with power by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Each person is of vital importance to the Kingdom of God. We want each person to be involved in our church. If we understand the work of the kingdom of God there will be no need for an enlargement of what we call a 'paid church staff.' The body is to do the ministry.... The living out of the Gospel is...turning it into activity, doing something.... It is the death of the layman. I'm a member of the body of Christ to minister.

Upon reflection, numerous members commented that this sermon series propelled them to become involved in the church in ways they never before had. Intriguingly, this message of personal empowerment coincided with Paulk's period of greatest insistence on an hierarchical, elitist leadership arrangement. Perhaps his encouragement of the laity's ability to activate their personal ministry was offered as compensation to offset the lack of tangible channels of power within the organization. This message also may have been motivated as an attempt to hold down his staff operating costs by facilitating a volunteer labor force (Schaller, 1992:104-114). As a part of this effort the church began to offer more Sunday school classes for adults, a lay institute in biblical training, and a leadership development course called the "Timothy Program" for the male young adult Alpha elder disciples.

As can be seen from the above quote, Paulk interpreted this lay empowerment as an aspect of "kingdom living." He characterized the church's official purpose of "communicating and demonstrating the gospel of the Kingdom" as central to each member's daily life. He encouraged the congregation in one

---

have data, the year's PFK income had risen to 656,000 dollars. And while only 5 persons out of 694 who completed the 1991 survey specifically said television first attracted them, many persons I talked to throughout the years commented that their first exposure to the church was by way of the television broadcast.

sermon, "Every waking hour, [ask yourself] how does this [action] address my kingdom responsibilities" (3/6/83). This message did become integrated into members' lives. It became their Christian vocation, as one person explained, "I don't want my Christian life and my regular life to be independent. I want them to be interwoven." Yet, even this philosophy of living, this spiritual vocation, needed structure to sustain its continued existence.

This discipline of Kingdom living was supported by both rhetorical and institutional "plausibility structures" within the context of the church (Berger, 1967). The church sponsored activities helped organize members lives around this daily Kingdom commitment. Paulk also began to preach other ideas which ideologically helped to strengthen this lifestyle. Commitment to the Kingdom, and specifically to Chapel Hill Harvester Church, was envisioned as essential to one's covenant with God. This covenant also entailed complete obedience to one's direct spiritual authority, through a system of "covering" by "headship."[178]

Our Christian Dues

In an effort to organize the spiritual lives of members, Paulk developed his idea of "covenant," defined simply as "...if we perform our part, God will do his part" *(Sheaf*, 10/81). Many times the discussion of the "covenant" by both leadership and members sounded like a contractual arrangement with a capricious tyrant rather than a pledge made to a merciful God. The congregation's "part" of the agreement was not always straightforward. The congregation's duty was to obey -- whatever the demand. The specific requirements, however, often shifted in relation to the demands of the institution.[179] At first, a member's covenant with God explicitly included tithing (giving ten percent of one's income) plus a double tithe (20%) on each tenth Sunday, wearing a pin symbolizing the Kingdom, and fasting on every Friday. Implicitly, this also included the need for salvation, church attendance,

---

[178] These ideas of submission to one's spiritual elder, "head," or appointed authority was a very common characteristic among Charismatic Christians. It is derived from Psalms 91, "He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shalt thou trust." As was seen above, it was a central feature of the Christian Growth Ministries discipleship model. Also see Poloma (1982:149-151), McGuire (1982:194-196) and Neitz (1987:157ff)

[179] There is an interesting congruence between Paulk's use of the concept of submission and his pleas for money for building projects (see Appendix B-24 and B-34 graphs).

obedience to a spiritual "head," and submission to an assigned shepherd. The burdens of this covenant were strenuous and, as with the entire Discipleship/ Shepherding movement, bred many stories of abuse by the spiritual authorities. One male member recalled that during this period, "You had to get permission to go to the bathroom." Not surprising, during this period, Paulk's references in his sermons to obedience was the highest of any time period in church history (See Appendix B-23). Likewise, Paulk's demand for unity, spiritual submission, and discipline were all quite prominent in his preaching (See Appendix B-22, B-24, and B-25).

Commitment to this covenantal arrangement was seen as a requirement for "true" church membership status, if not literal membership in the church. It also became a prerequisite condition in order for God to operate in one's life. Paulk preached,

"Without commitment there is no direction [in life]...and it begins by your submitting yourself to this church" (2/22/81).

"God says to us, 'I have done something special for you.' Now he requires from us.... God's move is limited by our obedience in unity" (8/23/81).

"God only works through his covenant.... Outside of covenant you have no power, no authority, no rights with God" (10/14/84).

Submission was not limited to one's spiritual elder, "head," or "shepherd." A member was to submit to anyone who "had a claim to your kindness, service, or loyalty" (9/12/82). In a sermon from 1982, Paulk listed those to whom one should submit as including God, the Word of God, in one's family -- the husband or father, the church, the neighbor if in a time of need, the Christian community at large, and finally, the civil authorities (9/12/82). He made submission to "those over you" a requirement of Christ's return and a prerequisite for the establishment of the Kingdom. "Christ will not come until the church is under submission...", he preached (9/12/82). Submission was also envisioned as the path to higher spiritual truth. "Honey, until you get to that place [submission to authorities] you need never expect to understand the spiritual relationships of God" (9/12/82).

Our Christian Rewards

This covenant with God was not one-sided, however. If a person kept the covenant, variously defined, the rewards of a "kingdom Christian in good standing" were numerous. In differing contexts, God's covenantal blessings included monetary success, healthy relationships, obedient children, developing large breasts, a peaceful home, good jobs, and a host of other tangible rewards. Another compensation for keeping the covenant had a spiritual dimension, that of being provided with a "spiritual covering."[180] "Covering" consisted of the spiritual, and occasionally fleshly, protection that the church and a person's spiritual authority could provide. Complete covering, or protection, was only guaranteed only if the member was in fully in covenant and totally obedient to his or her authority. "There are no accidents in your life" (10/14/84), Paulk would preach. Thus, since, "You have able leadership here, spiritual giants. You are not left uncovered." (5/15/83). This spiritual insurance policy covered persons from their own misfortune and the wiles of the devil (Silk, 1992). One member described it functioning "like an umbrella" (Silk, 1992).[181] This protection was specifically offered in response to the threat of the AIDS virus (*Harvest Time* 7:10, 1985). The leadership even went so far as to issue "spiritual security cards" to members in good standing for them to carry in their wallets. It also protected them, spiritually, from the errors in judgement committed by those in authority over them. "You say, 'Pastor I'm so afraid I may call for an elder that is out of step with God.' You don't have to worry about that. God will honor your faith...your submission" (9/12/82). A member's duty to his or her spiritual authority was obedience, nothing more or less. If you thought your "covering," your spiritual authority, was in error it was not your

---

[180] The concept of covering was used both as a verb and a noun. One could speak of being covered by one's spiritual authority. This act of covering would then protect the person. This spiritual leader would often be referred to as one's covering. Therefore, the word covering became, on the one hand, synonymous with the idea of spiritual authority. On the other hand, it also contained the ideal implication of unquestioning submission to that authority.

[181] This structure of covering was utilized by many members of the congregation. Indication of this can be seen from the 1991 questionnaire data. Ninety percent of respondents confirmed that they always try to follow their pastor's advice. This advice was sought quite often as well, nearly three quarters of the respondents had gone to their deacon or area pastor for help with everyday problems of life, on an average of 6 times since joining the church. Likewise, 60 percent had gone to those "over them in the Lord" for help with spiritual issues, on an average of 5 times per person. Faith in this system of covering and spiritual direction was based on one's willingness to be obedient and one's trust in those in authority. The survey found that 97% of those responding agreed that "obedience and respect for authority are important things to teach our children" and 77% agreed that their pastor could discern whether a "received word for God" was really from God, with only 4.5 % disagreeing.

duty to correct that authority, just to obey. The leadership suggested that God, or that person's elder, would provide correction either in the present or on judgement day. Therefore, if members obeyed the directive of their spiritual authority, their covering, to do something wrong, they would not be held accountable for their misdeed, rather their spiritual covering would be responsible for the incorrect counsel. Duane Swilley taught a version of this to a group of visiting clergy and lay persons during a mid eighties church conference, "If you trust that the Lord is speaking to me, even if I might miss it and you're obedient and obey the spiritual principle -- God will bless you" ("Alpha, How to" conference).

As potentially destructive as this formula appeared, and indeed was at times, many interviewees expressed the freeing effects of obedience to a spiritual authority, "covering by their headship." This spiritual assurance, however ephemeral or intangible, guaranteed those persons who were in a covenantal relationship with God that no significant harm would befall them. This gave many insecure members the confidence to accomplish previously unattainable goals. Members told of having the courage to launch out on new careers, get advanced educational degrees, start new businesses, leave abusive spouses, relocate, and witness to relatives, friends, and neighbors. Within this sheltering ideological framework, while surrounded by the structures and fellowship of the congregation, members felt psychologically and spiritually supported to risk and attempt that which they previously had only dreamed. This security proved to be very empowering for many of those within this covenantal scheme, specifically, for those whose risks and ventures ended successfully.[182]

This idea of covering, at the same time, had a dark side for those members less fortunate. Those who were not willing to obey their covering and acted independently were seen as having "rebellious spirits" (Silk, 1992). If one's efforts under covering failed, the system could function as "a millstone around my neck," in the words of one member. Lack of success, ill health, misfortune, or other adversities could be interpreted as due to the individual's inadequate commitment to the covenant, or subtle disobedience of one's covering. A perfectionistic attempt to satisfy completely the covenantal demands led to stories by interviewees of emotional stress, feelings of defeat, depression, suicidal

---

[182] Nancy Ammerman (1987) describes a similar situation in her study of fundamentalist Christians who drew on "God's power" to take risks and achieve surprising accomplishments. Some support of this idea as empowering can be seen in the 1991 survey findings. Thirty-six percent of the total respondents reported having begun an educational program since coming to the church. Nearly 50 percent of respondents claimed to have sought and gotten a better job since they joined the church.

ideation, and illness. One woman recalled the horror of having her child lying injured in the hospital and realizing that she was several weeks delinquent on her tithes, therefore not under full covenantal covering. Her neglect had allowed for the possibility of her daughter being injured. Another woman reported, "You're almost fearful. If you do not tithe, you're not covered. Something bad will happen to you or your children" (Silk, 1992).

This formula for rewarding covenantal obedience was active not only at the individual level but also at the corporate congregational level. The frustrated building project offers ample evidence of this. The church's inability to construct the six million dollar worship center was seen as disobedience on the part of the membership, rather than due to fiscal impossibility, poor planning, or an unrealistic dream. Postponements in completion of the K Center were similarly interpreted. Paulk remarked, "God is weary with our proudness.... He put you in this tent to break your proudness.... He couldn't put you in a cathedral to start with, you would be so proud the Kingdom of God wouldn't have a chance" (3/4/84). In fact, every prophecy made by Earl Paulk was contingent upon the obedience of the membership, since God only acted through the obedience of the people.[183]

Throughout this historical period, the leadership implemented a system of oversight or shepherding in cell-groups to order the community. Concrete efforts to empower the laity in their personal religious growth further shaped the lives of individual members. The concept of covenantal obedience to spiritual headship was employed to extend this ordering even to members' everyday and innermost spiritual existence. As these structures began to be internalized, the congregation in general grew more compliant and accepting of Paulk's authority. By the end of 1984, the congregation was so ordered and disciplined that the need for references to obedience, submission, and spiritual authority began to decline for a while. They had become, as the church leadership described them, a "Mighty Spiritual Army."

ORGANIZING THE THEOLOGY

In the midst of these organizational efforts, a concurrent effort was taking place to delineate the church's and Paulk's theology. The Kingdom goal statement, produced at the leadership retreat,

---

[183] A similar system of legitimating failure can be seen in McGuire's discussion of a lack of healing among Catholic Charismatics (1982:159-161).

provided a centering of the theological formation. This statement of identity offered an ideological base upon which to rest Earl's already-developing Kingdom theology. The verbal proclamation, however, was insufficient in itself to incite the imagination and energy needed for the congregation to adopt it as its own. The written words forged the ideological path, but it took a series of mystical revelations by Earl to bring the kingdom vision to life.

These revelatory experiences took place simultaneously with Paulk's most severe kidney stone attacks. Several persons in leadership, including Earl Paulk, sensed that there was a relationship between the pain and the visions. Earl implied they were his Pauline "thorn in the flesh" on a number of occasions. In one of his earliest published pamphlets ("Set for the Defense of the Gospel," no date:2,16-17) he wrote,

> Others have said that I should make plans to alleviate the physical pain I often suffer by having surgery, but still others tell me that they want to have faith in my behalf and they ask me to allow God to do His work. Paul said that God allowed his warfare to take place for a reason. When I have prayed about my own physical affliction, I have come to the conclusion that God knows I am His, and He has a reason for my pain as He did for Paul’s. I am sure someone probably told Paul to have surgery, while others told him that surgery wasn’t necessary.

He also reflected on this in a sermon where he dramatically related his first revelation to the congregation (2/21/82).

> The higher the revelation, the deeper the thorn. [I had] dreams before I woke up...under an attack [of the kidney stones]. [I] woke up sweating, [with] tears...because of the vision the Lord gave me.

These revelations marked a significant moment in the church's theological development. No longer was Paulk’s theology simply the construction of an educated and spiritual minister. Earl Paulk now related, in amazing detail, visions of the "heavenlies" and God's specific directions for this church. Earl spoke of this transformative moment as changing "my life and the direction of my ministry" (Paulk, 1986:ix). He capitalized on the extraordinary nature of his teaching by claiming that, "God is bringing a level of revelation to the earth, never heretofore known.... Eternal truths are given by revelation ALONE!" (10/10/82). One long-time female member from the Hemphill days recalled her impressions of these

revelations,

> There was a Sunday where life changed...after he had his visitation from the Lord. Things were different. It was so awesome, the depth of the teaching, the depth of understanding of scripture, the enlightenment.

Clariece summarized this as a shift to a different dimension of spiritual reality (*Harvest Time* August,1982).

> We have always been a word-centered church with strong dynamic teaching and preaching but this is something different.... Pastor Paulk was caught up in the Spirit in much the same manner as was John the Revelator on the Isle of Patmos and he saw the very same things that the Apostle John saw many years ago.

Not only were these messages of divine origin, but they were imbued with power and mystery. They captured the attention of the congregation. One pastor reflected about the power they had on the church, "I think it took a particularly strong experience (these visions) to motivate us into moving in the direction that he felt God would be pleased with." A core African American member remarked, "It was these spectacular visions that got my attention, before that I didn't care for his preaching on the Kingdom."

This extraordinary situation created a powerful mechanism of influence for Paulk and the leadership. Members hung on Earl's every word, waiting for a "fresh revelation from God." As each new revelation came, additions were made to the developing understanding of Kingdom theology. Even Bob Crutchfield, the pragmatic administrator confirmed this dynamic in a Wednesday evening sermon (8/17/83).

> We are dependent on the day to day revelation, not on revelation that is from last year or yesterday or even from this morning, but we are depending on the immediate direction of God for this very moment and this hour.

Members scrambled to record every new statement from God. Several members proudly displayed their reams of notes taken during this period. Another member had transcribed, typed, and

bound every prophecy that was given from the pulpit from 1981 to 1984. These revelatory episodes contributed to the congregation's sense of its spiritual superiority.[184] This was THE church where God was speaking![185]

In actuality, the content of these spectacular revelations had very little to add to the developing Kingdom emphasis. Rather they were symbolic and impressionistic descriptions of heaven, Christ's throne room, judgment day, the Book of Revelation, and the nation of Israel. Nevertheless, Paulk capitalized on the force of these mystical revelations to empower his entire kingdom message. He drew many connections between these visions and the Kingdom Theology that he had begun preaching as early as 1978 (Weeks, 1986:305-310). These teachings on the kingdom, derived as they were from mystical revelations, took on greater importance than the mere cognitive categories of theology or doctrines. As Paulk explained, "I will transcend any theories or doctrines and give you TRUTH" (11/6/83). These experiential-based supernatural revelations facilitated the congregation's embrace of Paulk's kingdom ideology.

---

[184] McGuire (1982:103-105) discusses the social functions of prophecy in terms similar to what I found in relation to Paulk's mystical visions. She suggests that prophecy functioned for the Catholic Charismatics she studied as promoting, among other things, a sense of mystery and an immediacy of God. In addition, the prophetic milieu "enhances unity, the feeling of being 'chosen,' and it promotes stratification and reinforces lines of authority" (1982:104).

[185] The characterization of this church as the place where God was immediately present and where revelatory messages were preached was initially very attractive for the people who joined during this time and completed the 1991 survey. Approximately twenty percent found these features attractive both then and in 1991. These percentages were 5 to 10 percent higher than those of respondents from any other time period. Paulk emphasized this by suggesting in sermons that they were moving to a higher dimension, see Appendix B-33.

Divine revelations must be recorded; thus, the next logical step for the church was to codify and record Paulk's every word. Much of the impetus for establishing a publishing company resulted directly from this need. Within two years time the most important book in the church's history, *Ultimate Kingdom*, was published.[186] The task of translating these revelations into printed form fell to Tricia Weeks. As a former high school English teacher she was employed as a staff writer for the church newspaper. Tricia had come to the church during the Alpha days and was soon asked to join the staff. Her job as editorial assistant for Paulk's books included transcribing his sermons on a particular subject, rewriting awkwardly spoken phrases into grammatically correct written English form, editing the manuscripts, and drafting transitional sentences to improve the flow of ideas. Earl, then, would approve the rough draft of the text before it was delivered to the church's publishing department where the kingdom ideas would be printed in book form.[187] All this would be accomplished in the most rapid manner possible, after all these were fresh revelations and needed to be distributed into the waiting hands of eager members immediately.

Kingdom Ideas

By the end of this period of church history, kingdom had become synonymous with Chapel Hill Harvester church. During this time the concept was on every member's lips, found in every publication, and was addressed in almost every sermon.[188] The idea of the kingdom had become the church's totem, its mascot, and its identity. Paulk's Kingdom Theology was composed of doctrines from various sources, creatively and syncretically blended into a more or less consistent whole. Each of these doctrines were infused with spiritual power and ultimate significance as they were linked to the new revelations. This

---

[186] This book was very significant to those who came during this period, 28.9% of them reported this was their favorite book of Paulk's. Overall, church members who had a preference ranked this book as their favorite (19%), followed by *Sex is God's Idea* (18%), and then Earl's biography (16.5%). Paulk's *Ultimate Kingdom* was also significant to the life of the church for the animosity it engendered in the larger Charismatic world (see the following chapter).

[187] This manner of reproducing Paulk's sermons quickly into written form without critical editorial review created many, perhaps unnecessary, problems for him and the church over the following years. Barron notes these problems and Paulk's disavowal of the obvious message of the written text (1992:119,120,197 n12,206 n34).

[188] Paulk's references to Kingdom in his preaching were the highest of any time period in the church's history (30.4/sermon, see Appendix B-8). In terms of sermon titles, only 9 Sunday morning or evening sermons in previous church period had "kingdom" in the title. From 1981 to 1984, however, 25 sermon titles included the word Kingdom. During the next period of history (85-87), just seven sermons contained a specific reference to the Kingdom.

brief description of the kingdom doctrines centers around Paulk's theology as it was preached to the congregation. In other words, the focus of this discussion is those ideas which had a distinctive and lasting effect on the dynamics of the church.[189]

Foremost among these ideas was that the kingdom was built by trust in one's spiritual leadership. It was tied not only to a personal trust in Earl Paulk, but also a willingness to be in submission to all church elders, one's assigned pastor and deacon, and, if a woman, to the man over her in the Lord (3/6/83,8/17/83). Paulk constantly reminded the membership, "Never forget!! The Kingdom is built on trust!!" (*Harvest Time* April, 1982; also sermons 2/25/79, 10/14/79).

Another facet of the Kingdom message was that Paulk's revelations offered new insight to the Bible. Specifically, from his visions recorded in the *Ultimate Kingdom*, he offered the congregation a fresh understanding of the book of Revelation. This included not only a de-emphasis of rapture-oriented, end-times escapism, and premillennialism, but also a message of the "here and nowness" of Christ's Kingdom and an elevation of the importance of "spiritual Israel" (the Christian Church) over "natural Israel."[190] The important congregational component of these new revelations was not that the membership adopted these ideas, but that because of this revelation Paulk came to be seen as a prophet, mystic, and spiritual giant in the lineage of Paul the Apostle.

A third related area of Paulk's teaching was the injunction to live as if the Kingdom was a present reality. "We are visibly seeing the Kingdom of God come to pass right before our very eyes," as one writer proclaimed in the church's bulletin (*Sheaf*, 1982,2:12). Beyond this recognition of the Kingdom, members were challenged to strive for unity, obedience, and daily acts of love and faith to actualize this reality. This idea was continually reinforced in sermons and writings with comments such as, "Our focus is the

---

[189] If one is interested in the specific theological details of Paulk's very informal and unsystematic theological formulations, several books and articles exist which attempt either to explain or refute it. Bruce Barron's book, *Heaven on Earth* (1992), is the best and most even-handed portrayal of Paulk's theology there is. The other articles and book discussions will be addressed in the following chapter.

[190] Paulk's interpretation of Revelation can be found in his book *Ultimate Kingdom* and in the sermons 2/21/82,6/13/82, and 7/11/82. His preaching on spiritual and natural Israel also comes from *Ultimate Kingdom* (1986, 53-54,182) and sermons 12/5/82, 7/7/85, and 8/22/85. Sermons focused on the Kingdom as "here and now" include 2/25/79, 1/20/80, and 6/13/82, also see *The Sheaf,* January 9, 1983. On his deemphasis of the rapture, see sermons 10/24/82 and 8/28/83 and *The Wounded Body of Christ,* pages 103-104, 107-108. Paulk received criticism for each of these ideas, as will be seen in the next period of the church's history.

establishment of God's Kingdom on this earth" (*Sheaf*, 1982,3:1) and "Just how close at hand is [the Kingdom of God]? That depends on US! and when I say US, I mean our local congregation" (Sheaf, 1983,1:9). Paulk taught that the Church's maturation as the Bride of Christ was causally linked to a complete restoration of God's Kingdom, much as Bill Hamon did in his book, *The Eternal Church* published two years prior. Parallel to the Latter Rain teaching, Earl argued that the final maturation of the church would come when Christians conquered death. As he explained during a sermon in 1983, "Christ cannot come again until we have subdued all things including the last enemy which is death" (3/6/83).

It was not specifically these kingdom teachings, the actual ideas, which profoundly affected the membership. Rather, they gained significance as they merged and influenced the social dynamics of the congregation. It was the effect of these ideas on the social structure which gave them their power. These doctrines created an aura of importance around the church and its activities. These ideas were the revelatory experiences of a great prophet of God, who was also their pastor. This theology characterized the activities of the congregation as having universal significance. It provided a clear, concise identity for the congregation to rally around. The theology also created an external enemy, the negative assessment of many in the Evangelical and Classical Pentecostal world, which unified the church further as will be seen in the next chapter. Finally, it provided members with an opportunity to express absolute trust in Paulk’s spiritual insight. A few members questioned his de-emphasis of the rapture, but on the whole, many overt acts by Paulk, such as televising the service, moving to the tent, and ordaining a woman, generated far greater congregational concern. Yet, these theological changes had a greater and more lasting effect, than those other events, as they merged with and legitimated the church’s social dynamics.

Dualism but not Dualism

One Kingdom principle which played a significant role in church life was never developed specifically in written form. It was Paulk's re-formulation of his dualism as "the mind of the Spirit versus the mind of reason." He made this distinction clear in one sermon, "One of the words God has warned us about is a mixture of flesh and Spirit, of mind of wisdom and the things of God.... God does not want your intellect, he wants your obedience!" (2/5/84). His kingdom focus was not directly responsible for the

radical split between the rational and the spiritual. As has been seen, this emphasis was present in Paulk's teachings for many years (See Appendix B-17). Yet Kingdom Theology intensified this dualist emphasis. Since the kingdom was discerned and actualized only by the Spirit, by obedience to a spiritual authority, this realm was given even greater prominence. Bob Crutchfield's brother, Kim, became the favorite target of Paulk's dualistic tirades. As the pastor in charge of the church's education program, Kim was thoughtful, academically-inclined, and had enrolled recently in a local seminary. During presbytery meetings, Kim frequently would raise theological concerns or questions about a particular "spiritually-discerned" proposition. Earl, and especially Lynn Mays, would rebuff him for having a "spirit of rationality." In one sermon Earl rebuked Kim's questioning, in his analogically backhanded manner, "We have become so natural minded that we are no spiritually good.... We can not be led by intellect or by patterns of the past" (6/13/82). On another occasion Lynn, in her "Life and Growth in the Spirit" service, called Kim forward and attempted to cast out his "demon of intellectualism."

Kim became an example for others who might be inclined to challenge Paulk's doctrines intellectually by means of Biblical interpretation, much as Duane had become in relation to obeying Paulk's authority surrounding Alpha. Paulk made it clear what the standard of truth was in the church (10/7/84).

Authority is in revelation and **NOT** in interpretation!.... One can say 'I read the same Bible as you, and I am a priest unto myself; I don't need anybody else to give me insight.' Then you have no need of the five-fold ministry that Christ honors...because all of us can interpret and become our own spiritual king.... Authority does not rest in interpretation, it rests in revelation!

Earl Paulk's Kingdom Theology, when taken to its logical conclusion, re-conceptualized and bridged this dualistic split by spiritualizing all of life. A kingdom Christian was to live as if the kingdom was a present reality at all times. Therefore, Christians were called to be "salt and light" in the world at every moment. Members were to act as if the kingdom was "here and now." The result then, as Paulk commented in a sermon in 1982, was that "the separation between our world and the other is so narrow" (10/10/82). If one was "spiritually" a kingdom-dweller, then all actions, all reality, was encompassed in kingdom living (3/6/83).

You will still have a flesh life...but even the flesh life will fall into line and will become an

enhancement to what God has called us to.... Even eating will take on a new dimension...(and) relationships in the human state, so that we might know the heavenly understanding. It's a dimension, my dear, that is so much of God that it is a new day once we are able to understand it. Put that down as prophecy and you'll come back and read it in 10 years and say, 'Pastor knew something I didn't know!'

Paulk's teaching of a "this-worldly" spiritual asceticism empowered the congregation to become "salt and light" to the world. They attempted to "demonstrate" the kingdom everyday in their jobs, their mission activities, their families, and their relationships. No longer did they sit around and wait to be raptured. Rather they got their hands dirty in the world by demonstrating God's Kingdom in everyday life, actively striving to subdue the kingdoms of "this world." Paulk preached, "You became nothing more than a tool in the hand of almighty God to make it [the kingdom] come to pass" (6/13/82). This ideological framework was transformative for members, except when it was applied to certain relationships in the Kingdom.

Kingdom Relationships

The doctrine of "Kingdom relationships" was never overtly taught to all members. Even in its latent form, however, it played a powerful role in the congregation then and especially in the future. Because of the repercussions later in the church's history, it is necessary to introduce this doctrine in its historical and ideological context. In its most general understanding, a kingdom relationship was any relationship based in ultimate trust and vulnerability. Within the earthly marriage covenant these relationships included commitment to the marriage covenant, faith in ones partner, and a lack of possessiveness. As Earl explained (10/7/84),

[To save your marriage, you must affirm] 'Come hell or high water we'll never separate.' Then God will begin to work out in that covenant every problem you've got.... Homes are falling apart because you are looking for answers outside of that covenant and sometimes that may be necessary, but never without the voice of God giving you release. If there needs to be other feeders coming into that relationship, it will always be under headship.

At the same time, living in a "spiritual, kingdom dimension" meant that all relationships (marriage

or otherwise) were to adopt the pattern of "heavenly relationships." The pattern for such relationships was taken from Matthew 22:30, "They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (RSV). Paulk explained what this meant in the church's newspaper (*Harvest Time,* August 1984).

In the heavenly realm of positive living, there will be neither marriage nor giving in marriage. Of course that does not mean that we ought not to get married, or that we should live a life of free love. Positive living means moving away from a possessiveness that prevents God's kingdom from developing in us.

In each of Paulk's public discussions of Kingdom relationships the overt message of these comments left the uninitiated puzzled and confused. These comments always contained phrases that implied a hidden meaning or an unspoken deeper truth (5/15/83).

Who of us can stand up and say, `Every relationship I am involved in is of the Lord?' God gave me a tremendous warning about relationships under the title of Kingdom that has no Kingdom at all about it...that have been built on misplaced trust.

His commentary on Jesus' encounter with the woman accused of adultery offers a fine example of undertones and veiled meanings surrounding these Kingdom relationship comments. The Revised Standard Version of that New Testament passage reads, "You have heard that it was said,'you shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Paulk's reflection on this scripture passage represents quite an interpretative twist on its traditional meaning. His comment clearly seems to state that nonspousal sexual relationships are not adulterous as long as neither party has lust in their heart. Paulk wrote, "Thou shalt not commit adultery...and Jesus replied, 'I believe that, too, but let me carry you to a heavenly dimension. If you don't lust in your heart, you cannot commit adultery'" (*Harvest Time*, August 1984).[191]

---

[191]The stories told by countless female members in 1991 and 1992 (some privately to me and others publicly in the secular media) support the existence and content of these informal teachings on Kingdom relationships. Many members and former members described these ideas as extremely destructive to them, especially when combined with the system of spiritual authority and covering already existent in the church. Earl Paulk, and other church leaders, have adamantly denied any such doctrine or practice. Yet, at the same time, Don Paulk confessed to his own adulterous affair with a church member. He also

Such "higher truth" was very seldom preached overtly from the pulpit, rather it was reserved for individual sessions with certain select "trustworthy" members. Earl asserted as much in one sermon (5/15/83).[192]

There are some (of you) that are not worthy of Kingdom living.... You talk about Kingdom living and Kingdom relationships, when you place that in hands, it must be trustworthy hands. The vulnerability that God would allow you must be a vulnerability of trust, or the Kingdom of God has no chance at all but to spoil.

When Earl Paulk did speak publicly on this subject it was in his characteristically veiled and metaphorical style. A member who was not aware of the full implication of Kingdom relationship teachings was asked what she thought several of the above statements had meant when she heard them in a sermon. She responded that she always assumed they were "not meant for her," so she overlooked them. A pastor commented similarly, "When we didn't know what Earl Paulk was talking about we just trusted him implicitly. We assumed it wasn't meant for us.... Or it was another revelation...and was over my head, beyond my comprehension."

Both of these members' reflections accurately describe the reality, Paulk's statements were "not meant for them." The few overt public references to kingdom relationships were, in all likelihood, only meant to be understood by the participants of two specific situations described as having taken place

---

admitted to me that "There were abuses...and the situation is always that you hear more about the abuses than you hear about the good." The church leadership publicly admitted that Duane Swilley also was involved in at least one extramarital sexual encounter during this time. Stories circulated for years throughout the corridors of the church which implicated Earl, Don, Duane, numerous other pastors, and even family members in this behavior that many have said included over 50 female members. Comments implying the existence of this doctrine were made by Earl even in my presence. He often joked with others in leadership about keeping the garage door closed "so no one knew whose car was parked in your driveway." These stories, along with the many confessions to newspaper and television reporters and myself in interviews, do not substantiate the doctrine with physical proof, but they do lend considerable credence to its existence. Whether true or not, however, the allegations surrounding these ideas created very real and critical repercussions both for Paulk and for the church in the early 1990's.

[192]One woman, echoing the stories of many, tearfully related how she was instructed openly concerning this doctrine. "Well before I was married, this floor plan was presented to me by one of the pastors: `I am your spiritual authority; therefore, what goes on between me and you, I have to answer for (the act before God).' He was trying to justify the fact that he, a married pastor, could have sex with a younger member and that person would be "covered." I was told I would not have sinned; I would not be responsible for it, because he was my spiritual authority. They were going to have to answer to God for it, not me. I would be covered."

behind closed doors. During this period of the church's history, Duane Swilley was involved, by his and the church's own admission, in at least one sexual indiscretion with an Alpha member. His brother and Alpha's drummer, Mark, apparently had also been approached with the "unveiled meaning" of these relationships as well. Mark rejected these teachings and, according to numerous sources, publicly voiced his moral indignation by bringing charges against Earl to the church board and presbytery. His accusations were rebuffed by Paulk as unfounded. Paulk then insinuated that Mark had serious mental problems and chemical dependency issues. Not long after this incident Earl Paulk preached his most blatant sermon on Kingdom relationships entitled "The Spoiling of the Kingdom." In it, he referred allegorically to a "Judas" in the congregation's midst. About this Judas he said,

Satan entered into his heart and he began to criticize leadership, to find fault, he became critical, he began to uncover the Lord, to uncover his `secret place of prayer.' He began to uncover the inner working of the group because there is a spirit of betrayal within him (5/15/83).

This sermon was not meant for the entire congregation, but rather for those involved in these situations. Paulk admitted as much in the sermon, "I can talk to two or three thousand people here, but now I'm talking to you as an individual" (5/15/83).

Confirmation of the Kingdom

Another significant facet of Paulk's Kingdom Theology was his idea of the "two witnesses." This idea, too, had profound consequences for the culture of the congregation. The "two witnesses" idea came from certain Old Testament passages (such as Numbers 35:30 and Deuteronomy 17:6) which Paulk interpreted as meaning, "a just God will never bring judgment upon the world until the mouths of two witnesses have established it" (*Harvest Time*, May 1982). He employed this "two witnesses" motif as a method of confirming and supporting for his message in the eyes of both his congregation and the larger Christian world. In other words, his revelations and theological concepts were correct if they were confirmed by two equally anointed prophetic leaders. As a result, this period of church history was marked by more guest speakers than any other time in the church's history.[193] Many of these guests

[193] These guest speakers including famous Pentecostal and Charismatic celebrities such as T. L. Osborn, James Robison, Carlton Pearson, Luther Blackwell, David DuPlessis, Anne Gimenez, Tommy Reid, and

became regular visitors such as Iverna Tompkins (a noted evangelist who made the church her home base), her brother and theologian Judson Cornwall, Bishop Benson Idahosa from Nigeria, Bishop Robert McAlister from Brazil [194], Bill Hamon, and Bishop John Meares.[195]

Many of these guests preached a message similar to Paulk's, reinforcing in the minds of members that what they were learning had a wider acceptance than it actually did. In discussing his motives for inviting others to the church, Paulk said, "I bring people like these in because I believe it is expedient for this body to be exposed to other ministries" (10/7/84). One prominent member reflected on the outcome of these voices of confirmation.

> We could hear ourselves coming around the corner. [These guest speakers] kept strengthening the message and the circle kept getting more and more closed. The more people you would talk to, and you developed your own special language, and they all kept saying the same things.

Bob Crutchfield commented in a Sunday evening message on his willingness to follow any idea from Paulk as long as other church leaders were also moving in that direction (8/17/83).

> I don't have any problem with the things we do, when God speaks with strange ways. I really have no problem with it because if it is the voice of God I know other people are hearing it and they are beginning to move in that area too.... It is just a matter of finding them.

Along with the confirmation of the Kingdom message, these speakers functioned as cheerleaders in support of the activities of the congregation. They intensified the members' feelings of specialness,

---

Bob Weiner. Many of these speakers were not in full agreement with Paulk's theology on every aspect, but there was significant overlap. The messages preached by these celebrities sounded to most congregational members as an unqualified endorsement of the church's message.

[194] Bishop Robert McAlister, who grew up in Canada, was an international traveling evangelist from 1952 to 1960. Since then he established a sizable congregation, New Life Church, in Rio de Janeiro. McAlister, along with Mears and Idahosa, formed the International Communion of Charismatic Congregations in 1982 and promptly invited Paulk to join them. He was also very active in numerous ecumenical organizations.

[195] The average number of Sunday morning and evening sermons Paulk preached during this historical time period dropped to 34.9 per year. This is compared to an average of 44.8 sermons per year between 1978 and 1980, 37 per year during 1985-87, and 43.5 sermons per year from 1988 to 1990.

while they encouraged the congregation to be faithful and obedient in attendance and giving.

"God sent me here from Benin City, Nigeria to tell Chapel Hill Harvester Church to stop moving back!" (Benson Idahosa).

"If I lived in this city this is the church I would be a member of" (Meares).

"This is one of my favorite spots in the whole world.... Never take it for granted. Always be grateful for what God is doing in your midst here.... Get up off your duff!" (Luther Blackwell).

"Don't ever come back here till your tithe is paid up!" (Meares).

"It's time now for you to go into a new land, a new dimension...Don't try to figure it out, or rationalize it or attempt to improve upon MY direction...God has ordered us NOT to be typical" (Tompkins).

Throughout this historical period, then, Paulk's Kingdom Theology gained organization and ideological reinforcement. By giving it written form and not just oral pronouncement, Paulk was able to preserve, distribute, and confirm his perspective. Members could read and refer to passages from their favorite book of his. The written volumes, much like the television program, became a powerful objective reality in reinforcing the significance of his message.

At the same time, however, this push to codify and publish created problems of its own for Paulk. The church, at his insistence, always prided itself on being guided by the Spirit of God. As the senior minister said, "We have no discipline book, we have no guidebook other than what the Holy Spirit will give us" (2/22/81). However, once his beliefs and revelations from God were inscribed on paper, tradition was created; a system of orthodoxy was established. Classes studied Paulk's books and memorized his sayings. The routinization of his theology challenged Paulk's prophetic status. Students of his written word suddenly were able to remind him of previous prophecies he had made. Tensions also arose in regard to the church's openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit. These printed sermons further allowed for more intense scrutiny by the theologically inclined.

Paulk's written statements had originally been delivered as "revelations from God." In the minds of some members they were sacred texts. These extra-canonical writings, however, raised in the

minds of other members, concerns about violations of a closed canon of Scripture. In response Earl argued, "The canon is a complete and total revelation. It is closed, but it is but a trajectory, a beginning that we go back to and use as a judgement of revelation today" (10/7/84). By introducing the idea of progressive "revelation" or "illumination" of the existing text, he was able to assert, "The Spirit of the Lord said to me..." and yet affirm, "We do what the word of God says.... God's new revelation, actually the revelation is new, is an extension of the old or His 'extended revelation'...all of it stands true to the word of God" (3/6/83). He also used this approach to avoid inconsistencies within his writings. His current thinking, he argued, had progressed beyond his previous position.

ORGANIZING PAULK'S IDENTITY

In conjunction with the other organizational efforts, and partially as a result of them, Earl Paulk was faced with the task of organizing and solidifying his own identity in the increasing more complex congregational context. With the division of labor, more staff vied for power. Deacons and shepherding pastors replaced him as the spiritual advisor for many individual members. A business-wise administrator had considerable control over the church's day to day activities. Finally, Paulk's grand plans for a new church building were continually being frustrated. In the midst of these challenges, Earl Paulk needed to rework the ground of his authority and image. He did this by appealing to his multiple roles as the founder of the church, as the presbytery's spiritual father, as the church's prophetic leader, and as the holder of the institutionalized office of Bishop.

Founder

One category of authority brought into existence during this period was undeniable, that was Paulk's role as founding pastor. By early 1981, the title began to appear in reference to him, Don, and Clariece (*Harvest Time, February, 1981*). This label was used on the television program, in the church newspaper, and in his books and pamphlets. Symbolically, the central focus of the ministry was directed at these three founders, to the diminishing of the other pastors and significant historical members of the congregation.[196] An indication of his symbolic focus on Paulk as founder can be seen in the number of

[196] The designation of these three persons as "founders" likewise excluded Earl's wife Norma, his sister and her husband as founders, along with the several other key "founding members" including the Paulk

his photos that appeared in the church newspaper. Pictures of him in the paper increased from 2.3 per issue in 1980 to a high of 7.5 per issue in 1983 (See the graph in Appendix C-2).[197]

With the identity as founder Paulk made it clear to the congregation exactly whose church this was. He was fond of saying "You didn't hire me and you can't fire me" to reinforce that fact. Much like an entrepreneurial founder of a family business, this enterprise was his, built on his vision (Bork, 1986). At the same time, however, this use of founder as a legitimation of his status indicated a broadening of his tenuous, charismatically-based authority. To buttress the instability of his personal charisma, Paulk began to appeal to a more traditionally-based, and unchangeable criterion for legitimation of his authority.

Presbytery Father

Earl Paulk's image as the congregational father of a "spiritual family" deteriorated as the Alpha youth matured into adulthood. The congregation's increasing size and diversity, likewise, diminished this ground of Earl's authority. Only occasionally did this familial identity appear in sermon rhetoric.[198] More often, however, his familial influence came to be directed at the smaller, although growing, cadre of full-time staff and presbytery members, many of whom were related to Earl in some way. In this size of a group, with its intimate spiritual and actual blood ties, the familial ground of his authority still held firm. One family member by marriage reflected on this familial identity. "It comes down basically to the family roles...if [Earl] chooses to define the situation otherwise then I let him do that. I assume the family tie, and respond to him that way." Yet this identity also carried with it seeds of dissent. According to numerous members, tensions within the church leadership dynamics were rampant between Earl's, somewhat contentious, natural family and his, often more obedient, spiritual family. One staff member

---

siblings. In fact this description of Clariece as a founder is historically inaccurate. She did not join the church until after it was officially founded.

[197] Johnson (1992:s4) notes that Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh used photo opportunities and prominently displayed pictures to portray himself as symbolically "'present' everywhere in the movement." This began to happen at a time when the ashram grew so large that Bhagwan could not actually interact with all his followers. The parallels between this and Paulk's use of the newspaper, his books, tapes, TV broadcasts, and sermons are quite striking. Indirectly, Paulk became more available to members, as he continually grew more detached from the membership personally.

[198] In fact, Paulk's use of familial language in his sermons was lower during this time period than almost any other time in the church's history (See the graph of Paulk's use of the word "family" in Appendix B-10).

commented, "Maybe some can go in [to Bishop's office] who are not pastors and have more access because of the family closeness." Another staff member described the situation as Paulk having a "mote" surrounding him that was "full of sharks."

Quite a few persons described Lynn Mays as the "spiritual mother" both of the congregation and the staff. She discussed this role in an interview, "I think it brings a mother-father, a more family orientation to the church when you have a mother figure in the church and a father figure in the church." She further made her presence felt both as a pastor and the church's spiritual discerner. She supported and affirmed, through spiritual confirmation, Earl's directions for the church. Therefore, although the familial image of Paulk had decreased within the general congregation, this period was marked by a strengthened of the power of the image within the upper echelon of church leadership, reinforced by Lynn's discerning voice.

Prophet

For the bulk of the congregation, the familial image void was filled by Paulk's powerful image as prophet. His embrace of this identity was ideologically slippery, however. As seen previously, Paulk often commented that he was speaking prophetically. In these situations he indirectly implied that he was a prophet of God. Yet, Paulk often preached that if one claimed to be a prophet, then that person probably was a false prophet. A true prophet of God would be recognized as such by the people. Prophets did not have to engage in self-promotion. Therefore, Earl walked a fine line, often even in the same sermon, between denying that he claimed to be a prophet and still speaking prophetically. This can be seen in quotes from several sermons.

"That which is driven by the flesh, carnality and bigotry and lack of submission to God’s authority will be shaken loose and that’s a prophecy" (6/13/82).

"I speak to you this morning, without apology, as a prophet!" (11/6/83).

"I speak as a prophet.... I know what some minds are thinking here, you think Brother Paulk equates himself with the great prophets.... It's not Earl Paulk but it’s the power of God's prophetic voice in this pulpit" (5/13/84).

Let me get this clear and put it on tape now and forever, if anybody ever said that I said I was a prophet, he's a liar...or I said I was an apostle, he was a liar.... I said I'm a called man of God to preach the Gospel. The labeling belongs to somebody else and not to me. [But later in the same sermon, he asserted,] Honey, I give you a prophecy by command of Almighty God.... I speak as a prophet (10/7/84).

Another difficulty arose with Paulk's acceptance of the prophetic identity. A prophet could be judged by his prophecies. With the increased recording of his words, Earl appeared to carefully word his prophetic statements in vague and indefinite terms, so they would be easily adaptable to any outcome. For instance, in January 1982, Paulk predicted that a number of specific items would be addressed in the church during that year. This prophecy fell short in several areas. Therefore, he began 1983 with more general comments, "Last year God gave me some very specific areas to address, but this year it seems that He is saying that He will not be as specific" (*Harvest* Time, Winter 1983).[199] Bob Crutchfield's awareness of this was indirectly instrumental in his eventual departure. After all, Earl had stated bluntly to him that God had given specific plans for a 6 million dollar church. When this "word" did not come true, Bob began to question Earl's prophetic stature.

If he said something that was going to be and it happened, he took the credit for being the one who said it, a great prophet. If he said something that didn't come to pass, there was two reasons...either Satan was warring against us or we didn't try hard enough and the people were responsible. It would never be because of false prophecy. Generally, it was because the people weren't responsive.

---

[199] Paulk was not the only prophet who refrained from making specific prophetic pronouncements. See, for instance, the debate over at first too specific and later too vague prophecies of the "Kansas City Prophets" (Maudlin, 1991). McGuire notes the intentional vagueness of prophetic utterances in the group she studied (1982: 103, 177).

As mentioned previously, a prophet not only had to prophesy correctly but also had to produce results -- since the proof of the prophet was his success.[200] For instance, in one sermon, Paulk mentioned the prophetic nature of his ministry, while stressing the size of the church and its growth many times over. In this sermon he stated, "We continue to grow... and the power of God continues to move in this place" (5/13/84). He often taught, "You will know prophetic voices by their fruit. Look at their ministries and see what they produce" (10/7/84). With the need to deliver results, or at least create the perception of success, Earl's prophetic identification remained a potential problem and an unstable self-image. He often implied that he had foretold the congregation of events they were experiencing without actually "prophesying. In one sermon in 1982 he commented to the congregation, "If you go back and listen to the tapes I said there would be more battles" (2/21/82). Yet Paulk's lack of success in the building projects eroded the power of this identity. Although grounding his authority in the identity of a prophet offered both spiritually revelatory status and the top hierarchical position, this prophetic identity -- wed as it was to congregational circumstances -- remained tenuous. Negotiations over his prophetic authority and judgement constantly arose among the clergy and staff. While relying almost solely on his prophetic status, Earl Paulk reached a point in the summer of 1982 where he wanted to quit the ministry because it was not "producing." Weeks recorded his feelings (1986:322-23).

When God's direction seemed most clear, people would get distracted by some minor skirmish which would blow up to major proportions.... Financial giving was sporadic.... Leadership battles raged continuously. Some people asked, 'Does God only speak to Moses?' Every ministry decision resulted in a leadership tug-of-war to decide who was in control.

Bishop

In the midst of this despair over his prophetic authority, an event took place which offered Paulk a new ground for his religious legitimacy. His tenuous and fragile charismatic authority became organized

[200] Weber (1968: 1114) writes, "The charismatic hero derives his authority not from an established order and enactments.... He gains and retains it solely by proving his powers in practice. He must work miracles, if he wants to be a prophet." Paulk's realization of this can be seen in his use of success and prosperity themes in sermon. Although not the highest in the church's history, they did steadily increase each year during this period. Even more telling was Paulk's continual description of the church as an "anointed move of God." Prior to 1981 the church was almost never thought of in those terms, yet during this period Paulk used the idea on average 3.1 times per sermon (See Appendix B-28).

into an ecclesiastical office; he became a Bishop. One pastor related his interpretation of this scenario.

Paulk was at the end of the road and threatened to leave the church.... He was thinking about getting out. In his mind there was a lot of discord in the staff. I think it had to do with the building... Paulk went to McAlister and vented frustration to him.... That's when McAlister said, `You're going to be consecrated as a bishop.'

His appointment as bishop became a concrete representation of his power and place in the larger church community. This consecration raised the scope of Earl's ministry to a new level. It was "a revelation that was to be an impetus and a new dimension for my ministry," he wrote in the church's bulletin (*Sheaf* 1982,4:9). Robert McAlister, John Meares, and Benson Idahosa were in the process of forming an international organization called the International Communion of Charismatic Congregations (ICCC). After consecrating Paulk as a bishop, they invited him into this organization. Essentially, the ICCC was a loose relational network between these several men (others were added and dropped over the years), which functioned as legitimation for and ground of their status as Bishops. This umbrella coalition granted them international status due both to the ICCC's membership in the World Council of Churches and to the perception of a network of international support, affiliation, and influence.

Whether Paulk was desirous of this ordination or not is unknown; however, he did accept it and even became the group's ruling bishop for most of the eighties. With this new identity came added responsibilities to the larger church world. He began traveling extensively, not only to speaking engagements throughout the United States but also to Nigeria, Brazil, and Central America. It was also during this time that the leadership began to receive requests from other churches wanting to submit to Earl Paulk's guidance and direction. Paulk proudly related this fact to the congregation, "In the past weeks pastors are coming and saying, 'we realize that God is doing something here and we want to be a part of it...we need support, help, and direction'" (10/10/82). This external acceptance granted both Paulk and indirectly the congregation a new sense of significance and spiritual purpose, as can be seen in this quote from the church's bulletin (*Sheaf*, 1982 3:11).

We are no longer simply a local church. We are not "our own" anymore and as workers in and for the Kingdom of God, we have no right to ourselves any longer.... God has ordained Chapel Hill as a 'lead domino', a 'forerunner', and we must not lose sight of this most high calling.

By 1984 these loose relationships were organized formally into the "Network of Kingdom Churches" (NKC). One Sunday evening Bob Crutchfield described exactly what this structure would entail, "A network, not out of organization, not out of structure, or out of things that are seen, but out of love," (8/17/83). The official NKC brochure described the entity in the following manner.

The Network of Kingdom Churches is neither denominationally nor financially or legally binding. Churches are joined in spiritual bonds of fellowship and purpose to communicate and demonstrate the gospel of the Kingdom. The NKC provides a channel of ministry to build strong leaders in growing churches. Pastors are given the opportunity to share ideas, needs, issues and workable solutions. The network also offers spiritual covering and exhortation from God by called apostles and prophets.

A network of churches was developed which linked those congregations who shared a commitment to the Kingdom message and desired to be a part of Paulk's sphere of influence. This network was not envisioned as a new denomination, but rather as an informal sharing of resources, education, and information. Officially, these network churches had no financial or legal ties to Chapel Hill Harvester. Paulk encouraged the ministers of these churches, which were almost always independent and smaller in size and stature, to look to him as their spiritual mentor and authority. He offered "to serve as the spiritual covering for their ministries" (Network of Kingdom Churches brochure). In return, Paulk provided these ministries with access to the church's instructional resources, on the job training, and a quasi-denominational support system. One such networking pastor described his relationship with Earl Paulk.

Before we were pastors of a church you taught us practical Christianity.... When we became pastors you became our covering. A year later we merged with another church and you became our counselor.... When the merger went sour you became a big brother and peacemaker and showed us the best and godly way to deal with it.... We are the shepherd's sheep dogs.

The development of this network came at the same time as many other large megachurch pastors were constructing similar relational ties with the smaller churches that gathered around them. In the seventies, for instance, the Christian Growth Ministries group organized a network of shepherding

churches. Other similar groups included the International Convention of Faith Ministries and the Liberty Fellowship Strang, 1988:639). In addition, several similar nondenominational networks of national campus groups, such as Maranatha Christian Ministries, People of Destiny International, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Youth with a Mission came into existence during this time (Hocken, 1988:141-144). In 1979, a umbrella group consisting of leaders of various networks, National Leadership Conference, was formed. This group, like the others, was clear that it was not a denomination. Rather it was envisioned as a "fellowship of charismatic leaders with common convictions and a similarity of vision" and represented a "desire for unity in the body of Christ and a willingness to fellowship with all in whom they recognize the work of the Spirit" (Hocken, 1988: 141). By the eighties, the number of loosely affiliated groupings of churches had rapidly increased. Some of these were focused around individual megachurch pastors, such as Paulk's Network of Kingdom Churches, Larry Lea's Church on the Rock North America, John Wimber's Vineyard Fellowships, and Chuck Smith's Fellowship of Calvary Chapels. Other well-respected ministers realized the need the leadership of the heads of these networks, much as the National Leadership Conference did, and organized overarching fellowships of these ministry leaders. Oral Robert's Charismatic Bible Ministries and the International Communion of Charismatic Congregations are examples of these. Many of the various networks, especially the larger ones like the Vineyard Fellowship or the Calvary Chapels network are composed of both small individual congregations and megachurches with their own network of churches (Brasher, 1992).[201]

Chapel Hill Harvester Church's network achieved considerable success, although it paled in comparison to the Vineyard and Calvary efforts (Parrott and Perrin, 1991). Nevertheless it grew rapidly, as Paulk instructed his congregation, "At the rate of almost one a day, churches are being added to our fellowship" (9/2/84). By 1990, church leaders claimed that the Network of Kingdom Churches included over 140 churches in "26 states and over 10 foreign countries" (World Congress guidebook, 1990).

In the midst of this transition to a national and international ministry, however, certain members

---

[201] The details of each of these various networks cannot be offered here. A further discussion of this phenomenon and its sociological and religious implications will be taken up briefly in the concluding chapter. For more information about these networks see Hocken (1988), Strang, (1988), Parrott & Perrin (1991), Miller & Kennedy (1991), Brasher (1992), and the church leaders themselves. Much more scholarly attention needs to be directed toward an investigation of this significant development in religious organization.

felt that Paulk was relinquishing his pastoral role and becoming too focused outside the congregation. Perhaps he felt some of this tension himself. He appeared to both embrace the role and also distance himself from it. He commented, "Bishop is an office, it is not a calling. It was imposed upon me and I'm very uncomfortable with it then and now and always will be..." (10/7/84). At the same time, his identity as a Bishop offered him both the institutional grounding and a powerful status that the identity of pastor just did not contain. One member reflected, "I think when he became a prophet and a bishop that was a cloaking that other people might have thought was an authoritarian period of time."

Occupying the office of Bishop changed how Earl wanted to be treated and how he was perceived by the congregation. Respect was due the office, regardless of who occupied the position.[202] Since religious authority resided in the title, Earl did not have to constantly "prove" his prophetic status, nor be continually successful. He did not need constant personal contact with the congregation to solidify his authority. Earl Paulk's spiritual authority was even enhanced by his aloof, distanced posture toward the congregation.[203] Newer members were never offered the chance to meet him as an ordinary human being. A long-time member noted perceptively, "Bishop Paulk became a figurehead for the new folks.... It's like he's unapproachable." One Alpha member recalled that Earl stopped being her "uncle" when he became a bishop.

When Bishop Paulk became a bishop...it wasn't long after that till Duane told us that we needed to start referring to him as Bishop.... We needed to start to respect this recognition. It was a big emphasis.... It was important for other people to see that we respected him and called him Bishop.

Multiple Bases of Authority

---

[202] Weber discussed this "office charisma" as one of the possible methods of routinizing personal charisma. He notes that the "charisma of office" can be the bearer of genuine charisma as in the early Christian church's Roman bishops (1968:1139-1140). However, like most social phenomena in Weber's framework, it succumbs to the rationalizing effects of bureaucracy (1968:1140).

[203] Both Johnson (1992) and Wallis (1982) make the point that the personal charisma of certain religious figures are enhanced by their infrequent contact with the general membership. Absence of the leader increased the followers' devotion by adding a component of "mystery" to the person as well as intensifying the "charismatic radiance" when one did get a glimpse of the leader.

The process of re-organizing Paulk's identity resulted in the development of multiple bases upon which to ground his authority and power.[204] This was especially true and necessary as the congregation developed into multiple subgroups and the organizational labor was divided and complexified. Each expression of Paulk's power was conditioned by the situational context, one's relationship to him, one's position inside or outside of the organization, and one's willingness to recognize a particular ground of that authority. The title of bishop provided an over-arching ecclesiastical institutional ground for his power inside, but specifically outside the congregation. As a bishop, (even without significant institutional legitimation of a denomination) he was automatically due the respect given to any important religious leader. This is the role he took continually in interactions with me.

As a prophetic preacher, Earl wielded some power within the Charismatic community at large, but more specifically this identity functioned well for those frequent attenders and committed members of the congregation who were acquainted with his successful prophetic "track-record." This was especially true for those who had lived through seeing Paulk's prophesies come true. One such member commented "The Bishop's prophetic voice makes one feel as though the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to you through him." For the less-committed, or less-convinced, member, Earl's place as founding pastor identified him as the respected catalyst for this hugely successful ministry. As one marginal member explained in an interview, "You have to respect someone who put together something this large and successful." Finally, his identity as head of the spiritual church family operated most effectively in the intimate, familial ranks of the highly committed staff and presbytery. Echoing the sentiment of many of the staff, one long time church worker exclaimed, "Bishop Paulk is more of a father to me, than my own father."

Each facet of Earl's authority was relationally based -- established and maintained in interaction with those around him. This required care not only in emphasizing the appropriate aspect of his identity but also in exercising his authority. The closer one was to Earl the more active the negotiation of this power. Don proved to be his most difficult person over which to establish a sense of authority. Earl Paulk reflected on this in a sermon, "All bondage is caused because of jealousy between brothers" (3/7/82). This was around the time Don retreated from church activities to a local monastery for rest after suffering from fits of depression. Later, a visiting pastor, hoping to help this situation, prophesied over Don, "[God

[204] For a discussion of the possible mixing of different types, and bases of authority legitimation, within one organization, see Swatos (1981:124) and Weber (1968: 262-266).

said], 'I have not made you like him [Earl] or her [Clariece], but I have made you to be who I want you to be....I'm removing the word inferior from your vocabulary" (10/9/83). Yet Don ardently refused for a long time to address Earl as 'Bishop.' Eventually he did resign himself to his position in relationship to his brother. He confessed in an interview, "I've sort of played second fiddle to Earl, but that's OK."

With the presbytery, Earl was a heavy-handed spiritual and familial authority figure. He demanded complete unity and obedience from his staff. Yet, they were also aware of his faults and mistakes. Earl's efforts to maintain his control over his staff often resulted in his actions becoming abusive manipulations and verbal threats, rather than employing his more public identity. He exhibited much the same forceful temper as he had with Duane. Countless stories were related to me regarding this period of church history, where Paulk would criticize, berate, lecture, and verbally thrash church leaders into obedience. More than a few staff commented that a simple question asked at an inappropriate moment causing Earl to "lose face" would result in the offender being "blasting behind closed doors or worse, being shamed in public."

To the congregation, Earl emphasized his divine leadership, either in his role as founding pastor, prophet, or bishop. He challenged members to respond to his authority with obedience or leave and find another church, "When God is doing something, keep out of his business.... All we have to do is to reach a place of total obedience" (2/5/84). "God has called me to head a project here upon the earth, you came to this place, you came to be a follower of ME!... God has put in this body whom he wants in this body...and you better leave him alone. If you don't like it you better find yourself another place to worship," he instructed the congregation (6/13/82). Toward those outside the congregation who did not respect his authority, he indirectly threatened divine retribution. He often warned, "Those who lift a hand against us, God will smite" (6/13/82) and "God will begin to rebuke those who are devourers of His kingdom work...in His own way and His own time" (10/10/82)[205]

These multiple bases of authority and the various ways he exercised this multi-faceted identity provided Paulk with considerable power, but also with many moments of confusion when contextual

---

[205] Wallis (1982:36-38) speaks of the "milieu control" used by Berg as including isolating himself, requiring complete devotion and full commitment of his staff, and limiting selective access to himself. In a more radical way, Jim Jones transportation of a large part of his following to the jungle of Guyana can be seen as an extreme form of this control (Weightman, 1983).

spheres overlapped, such as in the case of staff members who were related to him. One such person recalled,

There was a lot of tension and a lot of confusion. It boiled down to people and relationships. What hat are you wearing today...and are you going to wear the same hat all through our conversation? The switching was sometimes only known to the two people involved.... Organizationally I think it caused a lot of dysfunction.

ORGANIZING THE CONGREGATION'S IDENTITY

These multiple organizational efforts began to solidify one further area of congregational life -- that of the church's identity. The mission statement provided a firm identification around which to construct boundaries, walls, and a sense of self. But the process was not as simple as a wholehearted adoption of the kingdom identity. Numerous attempts were made to clarify and organize the church's sense of itself in relation to other ministries, the city, and the larger world. Following the unsettling Alpha explosion, the church's former sense of itself could no longer order the congregation as a whole. Jointly both members and the leadership struggled to find an identity which would unite the church. Part of this search for a suitable identity included a natural re-introduction of old images of the church from past days. It also involved the construction of new, innovative ideas from available symbols, cultural images, and biblical metaphors that had recently been introduced in Paulk's Kingdom Theology. The leadership offered numerous presentations of the congregational self -- some of which resonated with the members and remained, others worked but were grown out of, and a few never fit the congregation at all and were discarded.

An Atypical Local Church

In its own eyes, the church always thought of itself as distinctly different from other congregations. When Iverna Tompkins arrived and joined the church, she not only confirmed this identification, she increased the sense of singularity. She explicitly labeled the church as the "lead domino" and on the "cutting edge" of what God was doing in the world. Other pastors who visited also

confirmed this perception. Paulk then echoed this language in countless sermons such as, "God was not playing games when he said, 'I call you out to be a foretaste or a lead domino'" (10/10/82), and "God's giving us new words 'be innovative', 'a foretaste', 'lead domino', and now 'a showplace.' People can come and see us. People, do it so others can see how to do it!" (10/11/81). Church members soon began to believe and act upon this identity. Over the years I heard many members claim, as one did in the questionnaire, "There is no place on earth like Chapel Hill Harvester."

Another facet of the church's sense of its own uniqueness stemmed from Earl's personal identity. Not only was this church the "home of a Bishop," but it contained a "Prophet of God." Paulk's prophetic persona set this "prophetic and anointed" religious community apart from mundane, "unenlightened" congregations. This prophetic status was a powerful draw for new members. One person affirmed, "Through the prophetic word of Bishop Paulk, I have received hope that Christ's church is not dead, but can become the most positively powerful force on this planet." This prophetic ministry was perceived as dynamic and always striving for "new and higher dimensions" of spiritual reality.[206] As Don Paulk reflected, "Once you have tasted of things on a higher dimension, you are never quite content to return to a lower level" (*Sheaf*, 1982 2:8).

With an increasingly diverse population being drawn to the church, another facet of the congregation's "atypical" identity came into being. Echoing the refuge motif, Paulk relished the considerable diversity of the membership. He described this diversity as the direct result of God having gathering "lost sheep into the fold." His language was reminiscent of the Old Testament descriptions of the Israelites. Paulk and other speakers often spoke of the congregation as "a new people," "a chosen people," and "a people who were not a people" The congregation soon became proud of its image of diversity. This powerful image was often used in the church's public relations events. For instance, Pastors Lynn Mays and Kirby Clements (representing the only female and African American on the presbytery at the time) were often sent to local speaking engagements.

---

[206] During this time, Paulk described the ministry as moving to a higher dimension 4 times per sermon, while he spoke of the church being an "anointed ministry 3.1 times per sermon (See Appendix B-28 and B-33).

Differences among members were said to be unimportant, whether class, racial, regional, or denominational distinctions. As Earl Paulk noted in one sermon, "Nobody asks what denomination you were raised up in because its not important" (11/22/81). The kingdom symbol, the rainbow, took on new significance in relation to Paulk's comments such as, "I saw black faces, red faces, white faces, every kind.... God said 'There's the rainbow'" (2/21/82). Members also found the racial and social diversity appealing, as one commented, "[The church] reaches out to everyone no matter the race, creed or standing. Everyone is equal."[207]

First among many Brethren

All of these internal images of the congregation began to solidify in its relationship to other Christian ministries. With the church's diversity and successful independence on the rise, Paulk's comments, both positive and negative, about other religious groups increased to its highest level ever (8.4/sermon, see Appendix B-20). When speaking to his own members he drew strong distinctions between Chapel Hill and other religious groups. "I don't believe there is an assembly of people in Atlanta, and I don't know if there is in the South, where there is such a combination of people as we find here" (11/22/81). On another occasion he commented, "What you have got to understand is that you are not joining or being a part of a normal, ordinary church by the side of the road, but a divine calling by the Almighty God who has put his finger here" (6/13/82). The membership concurred with his assessment, as the words of one member show.

Chapel Hill makes a lot of churches look boring. I like its interracial and international character. Other churches can get too homogeneous. They are afraid to try new things.... We blend lots of the best things of various churches in one place.

Paulk's public rhetoric in speeches and books was conciliatory and embraced ecumenicism. His book, *The Wounded Body of Christ*, centrally argued for unity within the Christian Church. He often participated in speaking engagements with local religious leaders. He spoke of Chapel Hill Harvester as

---

[207] Approximately ten percent of 1991 survey respondents who joined during this time said racial diversity was the central attraction to the church and its greatest asset. For the total survey population, the importance of congregational diversity was mentioned nearly 100 times in open-ended comments.

a "bridge ministry" (10/10/82). Earl became involved in several Roman Catholic/ Pentecostal interfaith dialogues. He even sent Kim Crutchfield to the World Council of Churches in 1983 and 1984 as the representative of the ICCC. In a further gesture of reconciliation with the larger Christian world, Paulk encouraged the use of the clerical collar and vestments for his presbytery. "It will unite the family of God," he suggested (8/23/81). Actually it had the opposite effect for those in conservative Christian denominations, as Paulk's biography attests, "God spoke to Earl, 'Wear a clerical collar to confront conservative prejudices toward the ecclesiastical branch of the church'.... Inevitably, the collars caused fundamentalists' blood to boil!" (Weeks, 1986:320).

With Iverna Tompkin's and others insistence that Chapel Hill Harvester was a "cutting edge" ministry, the church began to believe it was superior to other groups. Earl Paulk refused to participate in a high profile, satellite-relayed world communion service when he was not included in the organizing committee. Likewise, no representative of the church attended the 1980 Washington for Jesus rally. The leadership held conferences, conducted workshops, and distributed tapes and books to instruct other clergy in the superior message of the kingdom. The donning of clerical garb was seen as symbolically separated them from his former Classical Pentecostal tradition. In one sermon Paulk discussed this,"God said, `Put on a clerical shirt.... I'm going to show the world out of which you came and preached and was their spokesperson, I'm going to show them that is not where my power resides'" (10/10/82). It was around this time that Paulk began to make a theological distinction between the "True Church" and the "Harlot Church" in his preaching. "There is a harlot church in the world today, but God has begun to create his true church" (9/12/82). Essentially, the harlot church was one which did not accept the kingdom message. As he instructed the congregation in a 1984 sermon, "God must circumvent what we call the 'relative church' and begin to preach the kingdom from a higher dimension. The church has to grow up!" (10/7/84).

Atlanta: Spiritual Capital of the World

Another attempt at organizing the church's identity arose in relation to Atlanta and its Southern heritage. Paulk's relationship with the immediate context of Atlanta, its leadership and residents was always tenuous. His reputation in the city would be forever colored by the Hemphill incident. Alpha's antics and his alleged negotiations with the murderer of the African American children further diminished

his status in the city. Both he and the church had been maligned in the newspapers, in area churches, and in the community's gossip. At the same time, the congregation was becoming decidedly less "Southern" as the church attracted more highly mobile persons from outside the region. The church was losing its moorings to its "place," to its Southern context. In response, Earl attempted to reforge, symbolically, his ties to the city and its "New South" identity.

In a 1982 sermon entitled "Will Atlanta Burn Again?" Paulk began to reconstruct the church's Atlanta heritage. Drawing on Atlanta's history in the War between the States and its symbol of the phoenix on the city's seal (see Figure 1), Paulk attempted to tie his history to that of the city. He preached, "This ministry was started out of a devastation, a heartbreak, and like a phoenix rising out of the ashes, God says I can build out of brokenness." He noted recent prophecies by Bill Hamon and Iverna Tompkins which claimed that Atlanta would be both a "city of destiny" and a "center of spiritual activity." Lynn Mays had even been given a vision in which the city would be "burning with the flames of the Holy Ghost" during a tremendous spiritual revival. Paulk asserted that God, "is giving the city of Atlanta a choice...either to burn with the holocaust of nuclear warfare or a Holy Ghost revival and burn with the consuming fire of God" (1/10/82).

After this sermon the church publications began using silhouettes of the skyline of the city to advertise its television programs (see Figures 2 and 3). Following this, an image of a phoenix rising over a red-hued city skyline was employed in the announcement of the church's first national conference called "Atlanta 82" (see figure 4 and 4b). This name for the annual conference was employed through 1988. In addition to these images in the church and city newspapers, Paulk made numerous references in sermons and conference talks to the church's ministry and relationship to the city. Many of his prophetic pronouncements portrayed him in a savior role to the city. Reminiscent of Jesus' prayer over Jerusalem, he cried "Oh Atlanta, Atlanta..." during one television broadcast. While denigrating those who persecuted him unjustly, he also portrayed himself as the city's suffering savior.

None of these symbols or references were explicitly interpreted as having any overt religious connotation. It is apparent that these images were not meant to function as personal religious images. Rather, as corporate symbols, they implied an implicit bond between the church and Atlanta's prosperity, between Paulk and the city fathers. In 1982, Atlanta was ranked as the number one place to live in the United States. From 1980 to 1986 Atlanta was the third fastest

growing metro area in the nation (Helyar, 1988:1). At the same time, Chapel Hill Harvester was among the fastest growing churches in the country. The phoenix image became the church's symbolic connection to the city, even as it recalled Earl Paulk's own past defeats and his rise to the present glorious state. It tied the congregation to the city's history as well. Like the "gem of the New South," Chapel Hill Harvester could now boast about having a progressivist racial stance, being accepting of nonsoutherners, and de-emphasizing the Civil War, parochialism, and Southern traditionalism.

As the church gained the acceptance of the city's elite, the image was less necessary. Once the church had become home to many registered voters, it grew more popular with politicians. The church's Sunday service became the stomping ground for local and state politicians. In late 1981 a DeKalb county commissioner, Manuel Maloof conversed with Paulk. A year later Senator Wyche Fowler met with him. In 1984 he met with Senator Sam Nunn and House Representative Eliot Levitas. By the end of that year, Earl had been invited to Washington D.C. for President Reagan's prayer breakfast.

The symbol also could be seen as functioning as an expression of the church itself. The phoenix myth embodied the church's history, goals, and ideals. It also functioned to order and symbolize the progress the church had made out of the chaos of Alpha. This idea offered the congregation a way to think about the difficult years they had just come through. Chapel Hill Harvester had become the beautiful phoenix. Likewise, the symbol never really captured the imagination of the congregation, possible because over half of them were nonGeorgians. By early 1985, the symbol's usefulness as a transitional public relations link to the city and as a way to make sense of the change the church had recently undergone was spent.[208]

A Demonstration of the Kingdom

The most significant and core identity of the church, as the "Demonstration of the Kingdom Vision," came into existence during this time directly in relation to Paulk's Kingdom theology. The kingdom of which Paulk so often spoke was not only God's future paradise. It was also being actualized in this specific congregation of Chapel Hill Harvester Church. This "demonstration of the kingdom vision"

---

[208] For a more complete analysis of the church's ties to the Old and New South rhetoric and symbols of Atlanta see Thumma (1995). When I discussed this symbol, which was used in the newspaper over 30 times from 1982 to 1985 and was mentioned dozens of times in sermons, with members in 1990 and 1991 only one person out of 24 remembered its existence.

became synonymous with the church of "kingdom people." As stated above, the church leadership made every effort to incorporate the idea of the kingdom into the collective life of the congregation, from "Kingdom choirs" and "Kingdom Singers" to "Kingdom Publishers" and "Kingdom Cleaners." On the "Day of Obedience," Earl Paulk further reinforced this identity with the introduction of a tangible image of this Kingdom reality (8/23/81).

When God started working this in our minds, I think it was Sister Lynn. She's got rainbows on everything she wears. That was somewhat of an evidence that God was leading us in that direction. It's just a little symbol - stick it on your car.... If you want to be part of God's promise around here, you get a little rainbow pin and wear it as an evidence of the fact that you are a people of promise.

This representation, in the form of a large white K encircled by a multicolored rainbow, became the tangible symbolic expression of both the divine Kingdom vision and the church itself.[209] Soon lapel pins, license plates, key chains, pens, and jewelry bearing this insignia were everywhere. These totems of "the K Church" functioned to identify and define the congregation, both for its members and also for the entire city. My first contact with the church came in 1983 when I saw a kingdom license plate and began to question friends and neighbors what it meant. This image became a powerful symbol within the congregation.[210] Not only did Paulk's theology and the congregational culture become dominated by the idea of the kingdom, but members' relationship with God also became embodied in the rainbow and K symbol.

The reality of this kingdom identity operated at a deeper level than just the names of church

---

[209] This is exactly the point Durkheim (1973) makes in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* in relation to a particular group's totemic object as symbolizing both the sacred and that group's social existence. This emblem, which arises out of group interaction, does more than just symbolize the group and its sense of the divine, it is actually constitutive of the sense of social collectiveness, in other words it creates social solidarity.

[210] When I first began studying the church in 1985, I recorded in my field notes that nearly 75 percent of the cars in the parking lot on Sunday morning displayed K plates. These obvious "signs of the kingdom" decreased in usage during the many years spent at the church, perhaps partly in response to Paulk's deemphasis of the kingdom message as will be seen in the following chapter. The sign of the rainbow encircling the K did not disappear completely however. Five and six years later while conducting formal interviews I saw the emblem on wall hangings, notebooks, and other items as I sat in the homes of those being interviewed. Then, in 1992 Paulk and the church leadership reissued various items printed with the symbol, including license plates in an effort to revive the power of the image and the congregational unity it engendered.

ministries, lapel pins, and license plates. Chapel Hill Harvester members were more than just part of a "kingdom church." This identity resided within each individual "kingdom person." It began to shape their daily lives as they lived by "kingdom principles." It became constitutive of who they were as Christians and persons.

The "K Center," as the most recent sanctuary was called, contained no traditional Christian symbols, only one large replica of the "rainbow and K" image on the side of the building. This absence of symbols paralleled their assertion that the Kingdom was to be identified with gathered community. Like the congregation, the kingdom was all encompassing, diverse, spiritual, experiential, and dynamic. It was demonstrated both in collective worship and also in the daily living of each member. The large symbol on the building was a marker of where the "Kingdom Christians" met; the pin and license were reminders of who they were.

Likewise, kingdom rituals involved not traditional churchly rites but individual acts of obedience (fasting, tithing, the "day of obedience," and "silver and gold day"), everyday personal sacrifice (work days at the church, yard and bake sales, living near the church, and volunteer activities), and the demonstration of a member's commitment to life in the kingdom dimension (attendance at several services each week, participation in ministries, involvement in a covenant community, helping others, and wearing the K pin).[211] This kingdom identity had an explicit outward thrust, actualizing the kingdom in the world. The kingdom vision was one of demonstration, one of this-worldly activity -- a living out of one's Christian commitment.

---

[211] Kingdom living involved a radical lifestyle commitment. Although it is true that the 1991 questionnaire was heavily weighted toward those members who were the most committed, members' level of involvement even among the least committed was amazing. 94 percent of the respondents attended at least once a week and over 80 percent claimed to give 10 percent or more of their income to the church. Respondents spent an average of 9.6 hours per week at the church, in worship services, social, and service activities. Three quarters of all respondents said their faith was of central importance in their lives, read their Bible more than once a week, prayed everyday, and participated in the church's ministries at least a few times each month. Over 50 percent lived within 15 minutes drive of the church and had 3 or more of their closest, nonrelated, friends at the church.

Daily kingdom living by members superimposed a spiritual reality onto every activity. Not only was there a Kingdom dimension to eating, working, and relationships but even to what one wore, "kingdom fashions." In 1984, Earl Paulk advocated a unique kingdom dress style for the women of the church. As he explained in one sermon, "You are not to walk according to the fashions of the world. How much money could be channeled into kingdom work if we got control over fashions alone" (10/7/84). Many of these kingdom fashions were designed, manufactured, and sold by members of the congregation at local stores and later in the church's gift shop. Other members constructed a similar look out of store-bought clothing. This style had a distinctively "Old South" feminine look to it. The dress style, with a long flowing skirt, padded shoulders, low neckline, ample ruffles, and a tight bodice, was reminiscent of a stereotypical "Southern Belle."[212] Occasionally, younger members wore their skirts shorter, but still in the same general style. This style was adopted by many of the influential white, and some black, female church members.

More than any of the other congregational images, the Kingdom identity functioned to unify and solidify the congregational community after a very unsettled period of its history. It soon encompassed not only the older images of "refuge" and "the Harvester vision" but also the more recent diverse portrayals of the congregation. Interestingly, the kingdom identity caught the attention of the membership only after the church context paralleled such a grand concept. Only after the rapid growth and phenomenal success, the positive attention from outside ministries, and the establishment of a Bishopric, did the congregation began to perceive of itself as embodying the "Ultimate Kingdom." The identity, which Paulk had been preaching since 1978, finally "fit" and made sense of their situation. They were indeed a kingdom, with a king, and a mighty army of members ready to conquer the world for Christ.

This period of the church's history then was marked by numerous efforts at recovering from the chaotic devastation of the Alpha earthquake. In doing so, the church became more of a bureaucratic organization. As the 1981-84 period ended Chapel Hill Harvester functioned in many respects as a

---

[212] An article in *the Harvest Time* (May, 1985 7:4) described a kingdom fashion show around this time. "Recently Bishop Paulk addressed the world of fashion. It is obvious that many of the fashions today are influenced by homosexual designers. Many of their "creations" seem to minimize the femininity of women and the masculinity of men. As a result, the ladies of Chapel Hill presented a fashion show that demonstrated how there can be creativity and innovation in dress which is modest and functional, yet allows woman to be the pleasure of man as God created her to be."

business with a successful product. Not only were all the structures of the church, including the ministries, worship forms, and building programs, more organized, but the people, too, were given a place in the institution. They were ordered in a hierarchy of spiritual headship, protected by covering, guided by a covenant and rewarded with blessings if obedient. Likewise, Paulk's ideas of life in the kingdom were formed into a more or less coherent Kingdom theology during this time, as was his identity in relation to that theology. He was now seen as founder, father of the presbytery, prophetic leader, and bishop of the kingdom. In this institutional push for order even the congregation's own identity became organized primarily around the Kingdom vision. Therefore, by the end of this period of the church history, Earl Paulk was able to claim,"We are structured for the Kingdom" (10/7/84). Both he and the membership now understood their identity. They all had their place in the organization. They all knew the purpose of their community. By a divine visionary revelation, they knew that the church existed to communicate and demonstrate the Kingdom of God on earth. This demonstration extended beyond the congregation to the city, beyond the city to the nation, and now beyond the nation to the world. In late 1984, Iverna Tompkins confirmed the direction the church was headed. "Chapel Hill is a bridge to the church world. So, Hello World! Here We Come!" What remained to be seen was how the world and the larger Christian community would greet Chapel Hill Harvester Church.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE TESTING OF THE KINGDOM (1985-1987)

I believe that the Church is entering now into the trials of new spiritual Israel because judgment begins in the house of God. The Holy Spirit has shown me that testings bring maturity. I believe that before we can become the witness God has called us to be, we must undergo a time of great testing. Some will fall away during trials and testings, but God will allow the unmasking of Satan by spiritual discernment which will produce a victorious people.

(Paulk, *Ultimate Kingdom*, 1984:231-32)

"We are being led by the very hand of God. The cloud of God is moving and Chapel Hill has determined to move with the cloud."

(Quote by an associate pastor)

As the Israelite people were led by the cloud and pillar of fire through their testing in the wilderness, so too did Chapel Hill Harvester members perceive themselves being guided through their time of trial. Although both Earl Paulk and many members felt personally under trial during the tent days, this coming "time of great testing" was destined to be one of a corporate purification of the church's kingdom identity. As Paulk and others interpreted these purifying fires, they were of God's doing -- both as judgment and as a maturation process. These attacks originated not only from outside the church but also from within.

The challenges faced by any group tend to either solidify it or destroy it. As has been seen, Chapel Hill Harvester continually had its share of real and imagined antagonists which contributed to a strong "us-them" mentality. This period of church history, however, is distinctive and significant for the intense trials that the kingdom message, Paulk's theology, and certain of its doctrines suffered at a national level. Previously, it had been the church, its minister, and ministries under attack in a general manner and from a localized audience. The defense of the ministry by Paulk and the church's members was effective in countering this negative publicity when the attacks were locally based. With word of mouth advertising through the social networks of members, the church continued grow at an amazing rate. When the church's adversaries, both internal and external, focused on the credibility of the kingdom message, especially at a national level, the potential for damage to Paulk's reputation as a

religious leader was much greater. That this "testing" came at a point just as Paulk began to exert a national and international presence, created an even greater problem for him directly. These attacks on Kingdom Theology had considerable indirect effect on the church as it felt the repercussions of Paulk's attempts to combat his critics.

Most megachurches exist on their reputation. More specifically, most of them rest on the reputation of their senior ministers. This is, in a manner of speaking, their most important product line. Paulk had to respond vigorously to these charges to protect his name. In an effort to prove that he was not a heretic, his written, publicly expressed theology went through a process of refinement and accommodation. This national attention forged a permanent bond between Paulk and Kingdom Theology. Paulk was "the kingdom theologian" in the minds of members of national Charismatic, Pentecostal, and Evangelical circles. His notoriety, and indirectly the congregation's, was tied to that identity. Partly as a result, members came to embrace to an even greater extent, the kingdom message as the central and core identity of the church. Those members who disagreed left, like so much dross in the refining process. Those who remained were envisioned as "pure" kingdom Christians. This entire period of time, then, is one of the reinforcement of the kingdom identity through the mechanism of attacks from without and within.

The internal trials or "judgment which begins at home" took place from late 1984 to mid 1986. These various challenges included the defections of prominent leaders, deaths of committed covenant members, and the difficulties that the processes necessary to preserve Paulk's kingdom message were causing. Each of these threatened to erode Earl Paulk's identity and the authority he had over the leadership and core members, as well as undermine his kingdom message. In response he engaged in an intensive public relations campaign within the congregation to shore up any possible damage done to his charismatic leadership. These internal trials not only solidified his power in the congregation but they in turn strengthened members' commitment to a kingdom reality.

In the midst of the internal challenges, a battle cry sounded from outside the church walls by certain Evangelical and Pentecostal theologians against the kingdom message. Paulk met this testing head on with a forceful counterattack. The result of this fiery trial was the careful refinement of Paulk's external presentation of his Kingdom Theology. This external challenge solidified the church's resolve to proclaim the kingdom message even as it carved a niche for Paulk in the larger Christian world.

INTERNAL CHALLENGES

The year 1984 ended with the foreshadowing of a coming controversy. Earl's sermons from that period reflected a situation where certain vocal leaders were expressing concerns that the Kingdom message was being over-emphasized to the neglect of basic Christian doctrines. In October of that year Paulk chided the congregation sarcastically, "Have we not heard recently, `Be careful that you don't preach the Kingdom so much that you lose the King'.... That's exactly what Satan wants to be said" (10/7/84). During that same time, Joan Paulk, Earl's sister, was gravely ill. She had been diagnosed with cancer in 1982 and had spent the last several years fighting a losing battle even after countless congregational prayers and prophecies of recovery. Alpha too could have been considered terminally ill; its members were growing up and becoming less committed. Many slipped away into other churches or into non-activity. A newer generation of youth, excluded from the group's, now older and more experienced, leadership felt no ownership of Alpha. Alpha had become one of many adult led activities begging for youth involvement. The more the leadership attempted with programmatic techniques to rekindle the "magic" of the early Alpha, the less spontaneous and appealing it was. Finally in 1986 it died a humiliating death.

Amid these difficulties several key members chose to leave the church. These defections were followed by the traumatic deaths of a few highly committed and covenantally-protected parishioners. At the same time, due in part to the structural and situational necessities of maintaining and preserving the massive organization, Paulk's charismatically legitimated leadership gradually weakened. His handling of each of these challenges shaped a pattern of response that was momentarily effective but had devastating long-term consequences for the congregation.

Disappearance of the Dissenters

Direct challenges to Earl Paulk's leadership were very rare by this time in the church's history. If a member at any level in the church hierarchy disagreed significantly with Paulk, most often he or she just left and was never heard from again. Paulk encouraged such defections, "[If you do not agree with our mission] I want to be kind to you and tell you to find another place, cause you are not going to be at home here.... We don't need you around here" (6/13/82). When those who challenged Paulk's vision by their leaving were prominent, respected, and well-loved members the situation became uncomfortable. It

required Paulk to engage in ideological negotiation in order to overcome this implicit threat to his authority.

Iverna Tompkins, a nationally known female traveling evangelist, was the first of these prominent and outspoken members to depart. Iverna had always been a strong supporter of Earl's but her institutionally independent position in the church also allowed her the structural freedom to be a critical voice when necessary. The multiple perspectives she encountered during her frequent travels gave her a more objective stance. As a result she was less affected by the totalizing impulse of the kingdom world view. When she left angry and without explanation in the summer of 1984, her departure raised questions in the minds of many core members. She did not publicly visit the church for six years, even though many of her relatives were members.[213]

Paulk responded in two ways to her defection. First, he planted doubts and questions among the congregation regarding her character, even implying (I was later told) that she was a lesbian. Then, responding to the possible criticism that female leadership was unwelcome at the church, he reaffirmed his commitment to women in ministry. In his book *Satan Unmasked*, written during this time, Paulk portrays himself as an ardent supporter of women's ministries (1984b:277-298). Toward the end of this book he warned, "A woman's conference can only be blessed by God when it directs women's ministries into the heart, core, and central life of God's church. If any ministry becomes an appendage, that ministry is not of God" (1984b: 294, also see select Paulk's sermons from 1/22/84 to 8/12/84). This remark was no doubt an off-handed rebuke of Iverna, but it also set the standard for all other female-led activities. They must be organized by, under the control of, and in unity with the predominantly male church leadership.

The next defection which rocked the membership was a withdrawal of allegiance rather than a physical departure. Kim Crutchfield, during his long tenure as one of the church's earliest associate ministers, had been responsible for organizing and teaching most the church's adult educational

---

[213] Judging from interviews, Iverna left because Earl was upset with her when she snubbed him during a women's conference she hosted at the church. She was also concerned that he was over-emphasizing the kingdom message. Finally, she was a very independent, forceful, and self-assertive woman, quite unlike the ideal female subservience model prevalent at the church. Iverna had preached 9 Sunday evening sermons in 1983. In 1984, she preached only two, the last of which was 3/4/84. Her conference at the church was held 6/3/84.

programs, writing articles on Christian social action, responding to many of Paulk's correspondences, and representing the ICCC before the World Council of Churches, all while pursuing a Master of Divinity degree at a local Presbyterian seminary. His extra-church intellectual support group offered Kim an independent perspective from which he too could raise criticisms about church policies. By 1982 the tension between his "rational" nonconformist approach and the "spiritual" obedience required of the presbytery became quite intense. Kim transferred to Princeton Seminary in New Jersey to continue his education. It was his unstated intention not to return to Chapel Hill Harvester Church. His move saddened many people, including his brother Bob, but almost no one interpreted his departure as a critique of the church.

In early 1985, however, an incident occurred which caused everyone involved to reinterpret Kim's stance toward the church in a negative light. During a discussion with a visiting church couple interested in Princeton, Kim commented that Earl's authoritarian stifling of disagreement bordered on "Gestapo" tactics. When the woman who had been involved in this conversation returned, she reported to Paulk that Kim had described the church as "Nazis with a Gestapo operation."

Earl reacted violently, immediately drafting a venomous letter threatening to block Kim's ordination in the United Methodist Church. In a subsequent vote by the leadership on whether the letter should be sent, Bob was the only person who came to his brother's defense. Bob argued that they needed to find out directly what Kim said before they did anything so drastic. A week later Earl talked to Kim, clarified the misunderstanding and never sent the letter. Yet the damage was done. Paulk never restored Kim's image in the minds of the leadership and core membership. Kim's name became synonymous with the "rational spirit" who in its spiritual disobedience attempted to discredit the "Prophet of God."

Paulk's handling of this incident sealed the defection of one of the most important congregational members, its administrator. For several months Bob Crutchfield had been carrying on a private debate with Paulk about the direction and leadership of the church. Bob's understanding of sound business principles had always provided him with a perspective from which to offer a dissenting opinion. His intimate friendship with Paulk gave him the freedom to voice these thoughts in public and private. Earl's treatment of Kim, however, confirmed Bob's suspicion that the system of leadership had become, in his words, "dysfunctional." He told Paulk he planned to resign as church elder and administrator. Earl

attempted to rectify the situation in several sermons, "Brother Bob, God knows what his intentions are for you. There is no mistake in what God has called you to be" (3/10/85). Then, in April 1985, a major confrontation took place between Earl and Bob in a presbytery meeting, creating an unmendable rift between the two. Bob officially resigned August 28th, 1985.

The general congregation, for whom the church was "just a place to worship each Sunday," never perceived the tumultuous significance of this event. For the leadership staff and presbytery, however, it was the final showdown of whether Earl could be challenged and corrected. Many of them commented in interviews that this incident with Bob Crutchfield marked the point where all serious internal dissent disappeared. No one remained on the presbytery with whom Earl had to compete for authority. Kim had left, Iverna had departed, and now Bob was gone; all the perceived challengers to his authority had exited.

Like the correction of Duane during the Alpha period, these events offered a poignant lesson for those still in leadership. One pastor's reflection on this echoed the feelings expressed by numerous members of the presbytery.[214]

Bob was really the leader of a whole group of dissenters. He saw himself on a peer level with the Bishop, where he could challenge Earl as an Elder in the church and as the administrator. He thought he could say things like, `I don't think we should go that way you [Earl] propose.' Well, he did that and basically what happened was that he was "black-balled." He was constantly seen as a "dissenting voice".... And now it's all substantiated by the fact that Bob said, `We'll never make it, we'll never fill the K center.' So now, that's written off as it proved one can't dissent. Where that leaves the rest of us on the presbytery is, "Man if I give a dissenting voice, I'll be dubbed a `Bob' or a `Kim' and immediately what happened to them will happen to me." Therefore, whether anyone would admit it or not, there's this great fear thing going on. If someone decides to give a dissenting voice, you know that there are certain people around the Bishop, natural and spiritual family, who will automatically discern you as a "critical

---

[214] Johnson (1992:s6) notes that those around Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, follower and outsider alike, gave him "respectful, even adulatory, respect" in their interactions with him. If members did disagree they would do it in "the most agreeable manner possible." The same was true of Paulk, especially after he was made a bishop and began wearing the clerical collar. I observed meetings with city officials, mayors, governors, and even presidential candidates who fawned over Paulk even after he openly admitted that he disagreed with their policies or political stance on certain issues.

person." Once the word is put out on you, you're as good as gone. So survival says, "Don't say anything if you want to be part of this presbytery."

The loss of this Elder, administrator, and well-respected member could have been a significant blow to Paulk's legitimacy as a leader. He immediately began, however, to interpret the loss of the church administrator as an intentional direction given by God. In order to control the potentially destructive effects of these defectors' stories on their close friends in the congregation, the congregation was encouraged to sever all ties with the errant members.[215] Several members reported that Paulk told them, "If anybody leaves this church they are in danger of damnation and if you fellowship with these people who have left, you're in danger of damnation too." This development further closed off faithful members from encountering a dissenting opinion. The ideological wall around the congregation became more impenetrable. An implicit connection was made between one's salvation, being part of God's Kingdom, and membership in Chapel Hill Harvester Church. This merging proved to be a powerful motivation to avoid former members, as one member reflected.

I had close personal relationships that I basically lost with Bob and Kim, because of the innuendos. You don't think intellectually, ‘I'd go to hell,’ but emotionally, you are almost afraid to maintain those ties. It is so subtle.

Cracks In Covering

Unlike these previous incidents which involved core leaders and members, a second challenge to the Kingdom message happened right before the eyes of the entire congregation. A series of deaths of committed members took place which raised questions in many members' minds about the effectiveness of the Kingdom covenantal security model which Earl Paulk preached. This implicit threat to the kingdom message was especially crucial since the guarantee of members' physical and spiritual security under "a spiritual covering" was one of the few tangible "rewards" of the intense commitment required to be a member of the Kingdom.

[215] This same pattern of encouraging existing members to avoid contact with errant members can be see in many of the discussions of New Religious Movements, such as Jacobs (1989:50), Wright (1987), Lewis & Bromley (1987), and Lewis (1986).

The greatest single challenge to this doctrine came from within Earl's own family. His sister, Joan Paulk Harris, was dying of cancer, yet her character and Christian lifestyle were blameless. She was obedient to spiritual authority, tithed, worked at the church, was in covenant, and was related to the prophetic Bishop. By upholding her part of the contract she was supposedly protected by the covenant and covered against Satan's attacks by her pastoral authority -- Earl Paulk himself. The kingdom benefit Earl offered to the congregation as the reward of total obedience, sacrificial giving, and complete commitment was being denied to his own sister. He and the church prayed fervently for her healing. Words of prophecy proclaimed Joan's total recovery. Her healing never came, however. She died on Pentecost Sunday, May 26, 1985.

This death devastated the membership. Countless persons had invested considerable energy into prayers for her recovery. Even five years later in interviews, several members still wondered aloud how such a thing could happen to one so well "covered." Joan's death caused intense suffering for Earl personally, according to many members, feelings they said he readily displayed to the congregation. Likewise, during this time Earl's father, after being forced to retire from the Church of God, became despondent, listless, and seemed to lose his will to live. His mother also began to show signs of Alzheimer disease. The combination of these tragedies perhaps even shook Earl's faith in the doctrines he preached.

Regardless of his own possible doubts, upon his sister's death Earl began to manufacture a scheme by which this loss and challenge to the doctrine of covenantal covering could be handled. He interpreted Joan's death as instrumental in God's plan, and indirectly due to the disobedience of members in the congregation. Her death on Pentecost Sunday was offered as evidence of this fact. In so doing, he was able to counter the direct challenge of this event to the doctrine of covenant and the rewards of kingdom living. He employed this interpretation as he preached her "Homegoing." Earl explained cryptically that Joan's death was being used by God to convey a message to the church. Her battle with cancer had spiritual significance. "God strategically used her.... Her death was not in vain. I said Joan would either die on Pentecost Sunday or she would get well. It meant more than just the disease" (5/28/85). When these ideas were set in the context of a sermon Paulk preached a few months earlier (10/7/84), God's message to the church became evident. Joan's cancer cells were symbolic of the rebellious cells in the congregation's body, cells such as Iverna, Kim, and Bob. In this way, Earl Paulk

was able both to further denigrate those who had challenged his authority and provide an explanation for the suffering and death of his sister (10/7/84).[216]

Rebellious cells attack the weak parts of the body, little ones that can be offended.... Honey, I'll give you a prophecy...every rogue cell in the body of Christ is going to be devoured. God said, "I've taken you to a cancerous body - learn, Oh son of man and I will teach you something, until my body learns how to deal with cancerous cells, how it knows how to discern then, how it should respond to headship, there will be absolutely no Kingdom manifestation...no healing.

If the doctrines of covenant and covering survived mostly intact after Joan's death because of Paulk's spiritual interpretation, they did not fair as well after four further deaths of members significant to the church. In August 1985, Rudy Price, a vibrant core member who headed the successful prison ministry, was killed unexpectedly in a disastrous passenger plane crash. A few months later a black pastor from a sister church in Oregon, John Garlington, died not long after having delivered a significant prophecy about Bishop Paulk. This was followed by the death, also to cancer, of the mother of a core Alpha youth leader. Finally, in August 1986, the ten year old child of faithful committed members died of leukemia. Don recalled the anxiety-ridden circumstances surrounding her death (*Harvest Time*, 1986 8:4).

We all prayed. We claimed. We spoke the words. We sought God's will. We begged. We cried. We fasted. We promised. We adjured. We loosed. We bound.... All we knew to do, we did. Is there more we could have done? If we had known we would have done it.

Clearly, these consecutive losses shook members' faith in the doctrines meant to protect them. No one mentioned these persons when discussing the history of the church until I asked specifically about them, then members seemed very reluctant to talk. When pressed most of the members expressed bewilderment over the events. At a loss for words, they often claimed it was a "mystery."

---

[216] For a more complete account of Joan Paulk Harris' death and its impact on the church see Paulk's biography (Weeks, 1986: 365-66, 368, 370, and 372-73) and his book, *Held in the Heavens Until* (1985:1-23).

Earl Paulk acted swiftly to diminish the anomie, the meaninglessness, caused by these circumstances. First, unlike his approach with Joan's death where God and the church were responsible, he now identified Satan as the cause of all their deaths. Then, Paulk directly challenged members' unspoken fear of the ineffectualness of covenant. Not long after the last of these deaths, he scoffed, "Satan must have thought he had destroyed our faith in 'covenant' and 'community' in this challenge" (*Harvest Time*, 1986 8:2). To bolster the faith of any wavering member, the doctrines of covenant and covering were elevated to an even more central place in the life of the church and in Paulk's sermons.[217] In an effort to justify suffering within the covenant doctrine, he employed the story of Job. Earl argued that God "lowered the [covenantal] hedge" around "special ones who are precious to God" allowing Satan to attack them. Taking them out from under covenantal protection was God's doing, but the actual deaths were due to Satan.[218] Earl Paulk portrayed these deceased members as martyrs of the kingdom cause. The memory of their sacrifice became a rallying point for a call to greater unity, commitment, and perseverance, as he noted in the church newspaper. (*Harvest Time* 1986, 9:2-3; also see *Thrust in the Sickle and Reap*, 1986:71 and *Held in the Heavens Until*, 1985:22-23).

The battle isn't over. Let's get angry enough to fight until we win.... God trusted Amanda, just as He trusted Joan, Rudy, and Jean to press us, to make us know that much is required.... We hear the message of these lives, Lord.... Indeed the Kingdom is costly, but counting the costs, we willingly give our very best.

Conflicts over Charisma

A third internal challenge, simultaneously being felt throughout the congregation, threatened Paulk's identity as charismatic leader and kingdom prophet. This taxing internal situation encompassed three distinct developments within the congregational context. First, as the congregation grew ever larger, the organizational necessities continually hindered the free reign of Paulk's spiritual authority.

---

[217] See in particular the *Harvest Time* articles devoted to these doctrines (11/85, 12/85, & 8/86).

[218] See Paulk's teaching on his use of covenant protection as a "hedge" around Christians in the church's renamed newspaper, *Thy Kingdom Come* (1987 8:5-8).

Committees, paperwork, and "standard operating procedures" weighed heavily upon his prophetic mantle. Second, as the congregation aged they advanced in socioeconomic status. In response, the worship became more polished, structured, and dignified in order to both shape and appeal to the maturing upper middle class tastes of members. This change, however, threatened to produce a situation where worship would be just "form," without spiritual "power." Third, as Earl Paulk approached the age of sixty and with the birth of his grandchildren and Alpha members' offspring, his attention turned toward the next generation of church leadership and the indoctrination of the youth. In essence, this process of establishing mechanisms by which the church could outlive its founder, in other words its routinization as an institution, began to limit the viability of Earl Paulk's charismatic leadership in the present.[219]

Organizational Necessities

As before, the very structures that supported and organized the church enabling it to be so successful were also those which diminished its potential to be "led by the Spirit." As tasks, duties, and responsibilities were assigned to the 18 (by 1987, 21) associate pastors and hundreds of staff and volunteers, Earl had less direct control of individual decisions. He could dictate a direction or principle, but its implementation was out of his hands. The church ran itself. Committees took care of facility

[219] Wallis (1982b, 1984) described a framework of four possible ways the founder of a new religion could respond to the process of routinization in the organization. These four include encouraging routinization, acquiescing to it, resisting it, and being displaced by the process of routinization. Johnson (1992) built on and elaborated this frame as four "modes of interaction between founder and staff concerning the process of routinization" (1992:s8). He argues that in two of the cases (encouragement & resistance) the will of the leader prevails and in two (acquiescence & displacement) the will of the staff triumphs; In two the leader and staff cooperate and in two their interests are at odds. Johnson's addition to this theory of the development of new religions provides a necessary nuance by highlighting the dynamics between leader and staff in relation to routinization. However, he leaves out a crucial component of the routinization process, that is the realization that the structural and organizational components of the routinization process have a somewhat independent reality of their own which also acts upon the leader and his or her staff. As can be seen in this church's narrative, Paulk encouraged the rational organization of the church in order to grow and get his theology to the world. He also willingly, at times, stepped aside to accommodate to these routinizing features, such as in concessions made to the television ministry or to rework his theology. At the same time, he verbally and organizationally fought the process of routinization, desperately trying to keep the upper hand and maintain his authority over all aspects of the organization. Yet, the very processes and structures created to enable routinization of the message began to displace Paulk as the singular charismatic leader. This dynamic did not require a radical act of expulsion by the staff, as Wallis and Johnson suggest. The erosion of the routinization process accomplished the undermining of a founder's position just as effectively as a staff coup would,although not as quickly.

maintenance, new member registration and follow up, school curriculum development, counseling appointments, and minor financial expenditures. As the years went by, long-time staff developed ways of doing things, proper channels through which "things got done." Yet these bureaucratic channels often hindered the implementation of new ideas conceived by Paulk. He voiced his frustration in a 1985 sermon (6/23/85).

What has kept the Kingdom from coming? Not building on ongoing revelation of truth.... Man's tendency to rely on tradition and make it into doctrine.... When somebody has an idea...the next thing we do is set up a committee to tell them they can't do it.

Rational accounting practices, established by Bob, to keep track of the 5 1/2 to 6 1/2 million yearly budget irritated Earl (See Appendix D for a graph of the church's income and expenditures). His mind set still functioned with a "mom and pop" family business perspective where he had discretionary use of the "cash register." Daily requests for receipts, purchase orders, and travel vouchers served as continual reminders to Paulk and the staff that someone else had (at least partial) power over the purse strings. Before he left, Bob Crutchfield often reminded the presbytery of their need for compliance to the rules of fiscal accountability. This tension arose most poignantly between Bob's control of the predictable budgetary expenses and Paulk's access to unlimited financial resources to accomplish the ministry of a visionary spiritual leader. Paulk’s frustration could be seen clearly in comments such as the following from a 1985 sermon (6/23/85).

We have got to turn away from managers in churches to people of vision. Managers work within resources, visionary people know their source is God. The problem with any church like this is never financial, but the lack of communicating a need and opening the windows of heaven.

Earl vehemently complained about the rational requirements of perpetuating a huge corporation. In another sermon he railed perhaps against administrator Crutchfield’s tactics, "The mind of reason has no ability to submit to what God is saying and it doesn't even recognize apostles and prophets. Their mind is their god." (2/2/86). Upon Bob's departure in mid 1985, the church was financially sound. The leadership chose not to hire a new administrator to replace him. Perhaps this was an attempt by Earl to recover the financial and institutional control which had slipped from his grasp. The church operated for

18 months without a financial manager. During that time Paulk made countless remarks in sermons denigrating both the managerial practices and character of his former friend and administrator (See 6/23/85, 7/14/85, 10/13/85, and 2/2/86).

This lack of an administrator offered Paulk only a temporary reprieve from the pressure of a bureaucratic authority. When John Bridges, a founding core member and elder, was appointed as administrator in February 1987 he discovered the church finances in shambles. He reflected on the situation, "Nobody will tell you this but they were too easy with money...too easy with the approval of expenditures." Many of the accounting practices had been abandoned in favor of "life and growth in the Spirit." The church took in almost 14 million during that two year period and, although it had few major expenditures, accumulated only a few hundred thousand in reserve. John quickly acted to remedy the situation, reestablishing proper financial procedures. He installed his own system of fiscal reporting and, as a trained accountant, imposed even stricter controls on day to day expenditures than Bob had. He elaborated his stance, "I am tough on finances...controlling the day-to-day smaller expenses...but the big building program put us in a different kind of financial crisis." Unlike Bob Crutchfield, John Bridges did not have the personal capital or social influence to present an alternative authoritative voice. He was a financial technician and a whiz with balancing budgets but he was never one to question major expenditures based on visionary directives.

Paulk had succeeded partially in removing what he perceived to be the cause of his tension with the church structures, Bob's "rational" and challenging perspective. In reality the institutional forms, roles, and procedures which had begun to limit his visionary freedom remained in place. The outcome of Paulk's action to deny that such a reality existed led to disastrous decisions later based solely on his charismatic authority and spiritual vision, as he ignored the church's organizational and financial necessities.

Orderly Respectable Worship

During the period without an administrator, one ministry, the Worship and Arts department, was the recipient of considerable funding. In 1985 Clariece Paulk hosted the church's first conference dedicated to the arts. Visiting church leaders were introduced to "higher" forms of worship and praise to God through performances by a large orchestra, an original ballet, a dramatic portrayal of Paulk's

theology in the play, "The Bride," and an art show of sculpture and paintings,. These diverse professional artistic expressions had their origin in Clariece's dreams years earlier (*Harvest Time* May 1985). Now, with the necessary fiscal resources, they became a reality. These worship performances became a school for middle class tastes and aesthetic virtues. At the same time, they were seen as attractive evangelism tools for the upper middle class white television viewers from the northern suburbs of Atlanta.

With each new performance introduced to the service, the structure of worship became more rigidly controlled by the leadership. Ritualized components such as a prelude, choral response, and benediction were added to the service. During some of my earliest visits from 1985 to 1987 I was struck by the "planned and orchestrated" feeling of the worship. Clariece, via a telephone on the stage, directed a host of stage hands with head sets either seated at a sound console, wandering with portable TV cameras, or cuing dancers, singers and other performers waiting backstage.

This increasingly professionalized worship, along with size of the congregation, the necessities of television production, and Earl Paulk's control over prophetic utterances by the laity, greatly reduced spontaneous spiritual expressivism in worship. Members were observed raising their hands only when church leadership did. Except for an occasional praise chorus, it was very difficult to discern if Chapel Hill Harvester was a charismatic congregation at all.[220] If anyone spoke (in tongues or gave a prophecy) out of schedule, several ushers immediately materialized to stifle or remove the offending person from the congregation. Earl Paulk's exclamations of praise during sermons decreased to less than 10 per sermon (See Appendix B-6). His references to the Holy Spirit, spirituality, spiritual authority, discernment, and spirit baptism declined significantly or were at some of their lowest levels of usage as well (See Appendix B-3, B-5, B-7, B-15, and B-13).[221] As the service domesticated, members' encounters with the Holy Spirit were tamed and made respectable. Yet it had been this vibrant experiential dimension of worship which predominantly fueled the acceptance of Paulk's spiritual authority. As this expressiveness ebbed, so to

---

[220] Bruce Barron, during his visit to Chapel Hill Harvester Church while writing his book about Paulk, questioned Tricia Weeks regarding whether this was a Charismatic Church. The week he attended a worship service there were no demonstrative gifts of the Spirit in evidence.

[221] The church newspaper even can be seen as reflecting this spiritual domestication. During this period there were almost no pictures in the newspaper of overt expressions of hand-raised, Charismatic praise. The 1985 average was somewhat inflated by one issue devoted to recounting a pictorial history of the church (See Appendix C-2).

did the image of Earl as a prophetic spiritual leader.

Another aspect of this more formal atmosphere could be seen in the distancing of the clergy from "ordinary" members.[222] For some time, general members had been excluded from informal face-to-face contact with Bishop Paulk. As a bishop, Earl was perceived by many as an important person with many duties, thus his aloofness fit his role. They accepted his inaccessibility as natural and expected. Long-time core members, however, continued to complain about the lack of interaction with him as their Pastor. This perception of Paulk as their pastor occasionally conflicted with his identity as a prophet. Paulk responded to this group in a decidedly nonpastoral manner, "I've heard,`We are tired of hearing a prophet in the pulpit, what we want is a pastor,' but most of those folks have left!" (4/20/86).

At the same time the numerous associate ministers, most of whom had no formal training as clergy, began to model themselves after their spiritual mentor, Bishop Paulk. They, too, distanced themselves from the membership before and after the services, restricting contact for the most part to formal, previously scheduled meeting times. The growth of the church increased the need for interaction between leadership and laity. A strong sense of connection was vital and necessary. In reality, the opposite took place. This period, then, marked the beginning of what became the most common complaint heard from members -- that of too little direct pastoral support or attention. At the same time, however, this increasing clergy isolation encouraged the development of greater mutual lay support and interaction. It indirectly facilitated perhaps the greatest strength of the church, its empowered and interconnected lay networks.

Planting for the Next Generation

The other congregational change taking place during this period which adversely affected Earl Paulk's charismatically-grounded, spiritual leadership was that of indoctrinating the next generation, or as

[222] Johnson (1992:s5) suggests that the creation of "two worlds," one of the followers and another of the founder and core staff, is an "unavoidable by-product" of growth. I would agree that due to specialized duties and complex tasks required to manage a large organization isolation and separation occurs. However, the implication of this section is that the church’s associate ministers and core staff intentionally chose to withdraw from casual contact with the membership in order to increase their own sense of authority, following the example of their mentor Earl Paulk. The only ministers observed deviating from this pattern were the ones who had their own successful, and separate, churches prior to joining the presbytery of Chapel Hill Harvester Church.

the church spoke of it -- "planting the seed in our youth." With the Alpha youth beginning to birth a new generation, the church faced the task of replicating its vision in these children. Paulk often stated, "The Kingdom of God cannot and will never become a reality until something happens that causes us to transfer our spirits to our children" (6/23/85).

The primary effort in this regard was the development of an extensive educational program. Harvester Academy, a kindergarten through sixth grade church school, began in the Fall of 1984. This program grew by one grade a year. By 1987, it extended through ninth grade with over 300 enrolled. Logistically, the school was unable to nurture all the children of the congregation, rather it catered overwhelmingly to the offspring of the presbytery and staff.[223] In order to train new ministers and lay leaders, a Bible school, the Earl Paulk Institute, began in earnest. Likewise, greater attention was focused upon the church's adult continuing education program called the "School of Life Skills."

Another channel which demonstrated the church's educational emphasis was rhetorical. Paulk's 1985 sermon references to the family and training one's children were more frequent than at any other one year point in the church's history. A ballet, entitled "Seed Power," was inspired by these sermons. The performance depicted "the heavenly struggle between demons and angels to influence the minds of children of the Kingdom" (Weeks, 1986:363). Planting the knowledge of the kingdom in the offspring became a top priority for the congregation.

[223] It is interesting to note that around 1985 that in the local public schools near the church white students had become a minority. At its inception 75% of the enrollment at "Harvester Academy" was white. The racial balance may have played a small part in the school's origin. At the same time, however, the creation of church schools had become an accepted practice of many churches by the mid eighties. Countless Christian schools, sponsored by fundamentalist congregations, were begun out of a concern over the increasingly humanistic and secularized atmosphere in public schools. For a description of this tendency and dynamics within Christian schools see Wagner (1990), Rose (1988), Parsons (1987) and Peshkin (1986).

This overt multi-leveled educational emphasis, however, created situations which adversely affected Paulk's influence and authority. Each of the educational efforts drained off funds from the church's operating budget. Clergy and staff received a discount on their children's' tuition. This, coupled with several need-based scholarships, guaranteed that the school always cost far more than it generated. Likewise, the school removed the best and most energetic young evangelists from the public schools which were filled with potential recruits. Third, it required that Paulk's teaching not only be written and codified (which was already happening through the publishing company), but also studied and learned as established doctrine.[224]

Finally, the educational experience opened students to the possibility of critique, of hearing from other voices of authority. Several of the school's instructors had seminary degrees and extensive pastoral experience. Some taught their students to question, inquire, and challenge accepted wisdom. This independent standard planted the seed of critique in the minds of several students of the Institute who later became staff clergy.

One such event stood out in the minds of several of those interviewed. While preaching, Bishop Paulk had identified a Greek verb tense incorrectly. The Greek language class at the Institute discussed this incorrect identification. The instructor privately informed Paulk of the error so it could be corrected before the sermon was broadcast on television. Earl commented angrily a few days later in a presbytery meeting, "Look, I use some of these things for the sake of preaching, but you can kill people's respect for authority and promote death in the classroom if you want to." One former instructor reflected on this incident and what he learned about his classroom behavior, "It's difficult for me as a teacher to work with that attitude. What I have to do is really guard myself against becoming critical in a very negative sense or at any point I find myself opposing what I'm there to support." This incident and other similar ones emphasized the corrosive effects of education on the continued legitimacy of charismatic leader.

During this period, then, each of Bishop Paulk's attempts to ensure his legacy for the future, whether through education, a routinized worship format, or struggling with a mammoth corporate structure, actually resulted in creating a situation of less receptivity to his prophetic, spiritual authority. As

---

[224] An example of this could be seen in that theology students of Earl Paulk Institute had to memorize Paulk's interpretation of the Book of Revelation down to the most minute detail, including his rather idiosyncratic understanding of numerology and interpretation of the symbolism.

seen above, Paulk used multiple strategies to overcome these and the other internal challenges to the Kingdom message and his leadership. His innovative re-interpretation of misfortune as well as maligning and shunning of dissidents helped temper the blows to his authority and message. The season of testing continued, however, as the Evangelical and Pentecostal worlds began to respond to Paulk's Kingdom theology. It was not unforseen, as the following comment by Paulk shows, but it was quite damaging in its public presence and national scope (*Held in the Heavens Until* 1985a:139).

This is a prophecy: The Church is entering into new arenas of battle. There will be dimensions of warfare unlike anything we've known before. The warfare will not be widespread or widely known, but the battles will occur in strategic areas of ministry, particularly in the minds of influential leaders in the Church.

PROVOKING EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

In the seventies and eighties, the Classical Pentecostal denominations and a multitude of independent Charismatic congregations expanded at amazing rates (See Roozen, 1993). The Assemblies of God was one of the fastest growing denominations during these decades (Poloma, 1989). Likewise, independent Charismatic congregations dominated the list of the most rapidly expanding churches in the country (Vaughan, 1988; Roozen, 1993; Bradley et al., 1992). When the Church of God, Paulk's former denomination, celebrated its centennial in 1986 in Atlanta, its United States membership was 543,000, and worldwide 1.65 million (Church of God, 61st General Assembly). Overall, an estimated 10 to 15 percent of the American adult population were spirit-filled, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal believers (Smidt et al., 1994; Synan, 1991; Poloma, 1989; Kantzer, 1980).[225]

---

[225] The most comprehensive and representative survey of spirit-filled movements in the U.S. is the recent article by Smidt, et al. (1994). This article indicates that only 2.5 percent of Americans belong to historically "white" Classical Pentecostal denominations, another 1.1 percent are members of "black" Pentecostal groups, and 1.4 percent have membership in the non-denominational charismatic groups (1994:9). Officially, then, only five percent of the population are members of Pentecostal groups. If the defining characteristics of spirit-filled Christianity is expanded to those who speak in tongues at least occasionally, the percentage of the U.S. population rises to 8.7 percent. Finally, if one considers self-identification as a Pentecostal or Charismatic as the definitive characteristic, the figure increases still further to 12.1 percent (1994:9).

As these denominations and congregations climbed the socio-economic ladder, they moved "across the tracks" and into respectable uptown buildings. As they gained affluence, respect and cultural acceptance soon followed. [226] With the perception of a continued decline of the liberal and moderate Protestant denominations combined with the increasing expressivism of the American society in general, these spirit-oriented groups began to redefine the character of the "mainline" (Synan, 1991). Although the Charismatic Renewal movement had begun to wane by the 1980's, it nevertheless continued to exert considerable influence over believers in the United States. In 1986 and 1987 very large meetings of Charismatics attracted attention while focusing on unity and outreach (Duin, 1986b; Synan, 1991). John Wimber's teaching and success with the "signs and wonders" perspective was arousing considerable interest in the ranks of conservative Christians (Duin, 1986b; Pratt, 1991). Numerous church growth leaders talked of a "third wave" of spiritual influence in Christian history (Wagner, 1973, 1976; Kantzer, 1980; Duin, 1986a; Pratt, 1991; Smidt et al., 1994). This wave bespoke of the general defusion of charismatic beliefs, practices, and expressivism into traditionally anti-Pentecostal denominations such as the Southern Baptists and Church of Christ.[227] Finally, with the later scandals of Bakker and Swaggart, Oral Roberts' divine death threat, and Pat Robertson's unsuccessful attempt at the presidency, the attention of American was turned toward the Pentecostal world as never before, although not necessarily in a positive manner (Smith, 1992).[228]

Chapel Hill Harvester Church's relationship with this larger, increasingly affluent, Pentecostal world was never completely rosy, given Paulk's history with the Church of God. Between 1985 and 1987 several challenges from Pentecostal and Evangelical writers strained that relationship even further. Dave Hunt, a "cult" expert and author, launched the first assault by including Paulk in a list of Christian

---

[226] Researchers such as Roof and McKinney (1987), Wuthnow (1988), Poloma (1989), and Crews (1990) offer indication of this increasing affluence of spirit-filled believers.

[227] Smidt, et al. (1994) offer evidence of a sizable percentage of persons in non-Pentecostal denominations who speak in tongues (from 6 to 9 percent of those in Evangelical, Mainline, and Roman Catholic denominations) or identify themselves as Pentecostal or Charismatic (about 10 percent of those in these non-Pentecostal denominational families).

[228] With the greater cultural acceptance came more accommodation and syncretic blending of non-orthodox beliefs. This tendency, combined with fewer overt external enemies to the Pentecostal message, created the situation where internal "heresy" witch hunts became more frequent and increasingly important to the Pentecostal identity.

"seducers." Many others soon followed suit. Jimmy Swaggart was one of Paulk's more prominent attackers. His criticism launched an official Assemblies of God inquiry. Discussion of his theology, as presented in his books, newspaper, and television program, soon became a topic among the members of the Society for Pentecostal Studies and other guardians of Pentecostal orthodoxy. Finally, the Evangelical-oriented "cult" watchdog organization, Christian Research Institute, offered its own negative assessment of Paulk and Kingdom Theology. None of these attacks went unanswered by Earl and the church's leadership, for each one of them was an indictment against Paulk's authority within the congregation and in the larger Evangelical Protestant Christian world.

The Hunt for Seducers

The first blow at Paulk's theology came with the publication of the book, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Hunt, 1985). Its author, Dave Hunt (a conservative Christian "cult" expert and author) offered the first formal critique of Kingdom Theology. Hunt linked several well-known ministers of prosperity, positive confession, and Kingdom ideas to the "satanic" influences of the New Age movement. In broad inflammatory generalizations, he attacked this diverse group of Pentecostal Christian leaders (including Paulk, Copeland, Schuller, Cho and others) with the charge of "seducing" innocent believers into accepting a heretical and destructive version of the Gospel. This group of very successful and popular independent ministers were condemned for their teaching on "prosperity," their optimistic human-centered perspective, and their deemphasis of the Rapture. The book, which sold over seven hundred thousand copies, instantly stirred the conservative Christian world (Barron, 1992).

Hunt's book brought Paulk's theology to the attention of the Pentecostal and Evangelical Christian world, something he had long desired. With this exposure, however, came a critical scrutiny and an often negative assessment of his beliefs. Calls and letters poured into the church wanting Paulk's response to the charges. The church's television ministry was also threatened; attempts were made to remove it from the PTL network (*Harvest Time* December, 1985).

Paulk and church leaders immediately attempted to counter this negative publicity with an argument that Earl first verbalized during a TBN interview. Following this, the church newspaper, whose circulation now approached 35,000, printed a response to Hunt written by members of Tommy Reid's church (*Harvest Time* December, 1985). Reid was the senior minister of a very successful Assemblies of

God church and a good friend and ardent supporter of Paulk and Kingdom Theology. The next month's *Harvest Time* (January, 1986) featured more explanatory articles on the subject, including an extensive response to an inquiring letter from another well-known Assemblies pastor Karl Strader. In this reply, Paulk defended his ministry and theology, arguing that he had no connection with "New Age" thinking, that he was not a post-millenialist utopian visionary, that the establishment of God's kingdom did not rest on human action alone, and that he was not anti-Semitic. At the February 1986 "Ideas Exchange," an annual meeting of senior ministers of major churches held at Strader's Florida church to discuss strategies of ministry, Paulk addressed the group in defense of his orthodoxy. The April 1986 *Harvest Time* contained yet another article by Paulk responding to the charges. In this piece, entitled "The True Seduction of Christianity," Earl accused Hunt of "prophet-killing" while arguing that he had been quoted out of context.[229]

The Clash of Televangelists

---

[229] Also see Paulk's sermon "Let's talk about the Seduction of Christianity" (3/5/86). Throughout this time, the newspaper was filled with articles by Don, Earl, and Judson Cornwall which did not specifically address the accusations but indirectly clarified points of theological contention that had been raised by Hunt and others. See Don Paulk's article "World Systems will Fail" (*Harvest Time* July, 1986) and "On Earth as in Heaven" (*Harvest Time* December, 1986) or Earl's "Image of God versus 'little gods' Theory" (*Harvest Time* November, 1986).

Within a few months, another significant assault came from the well-known televangelist and Assemblies of God minister Jimmy Swaggart. In his magazine, *The Evangelist*, Swaggart wrote an article entitled "The Coming Kingdom" (September, 1986:1-12). He directly accused Paulk and others of heresy, according to Assembles of God standards.[230] His accusations against these "Kingdom agers" included: preaching the world would get better and better, denying the rapture and the second coming of Christ, holding an interpretative hermeneutic that destroyed a literal inerrant, authoritative view of the Bible, and diminishing the importance of the nation of Israel. Swaggart further argued that Earl Paulk specifically preached that the church would establish the Kingdom, that he had over-emphasized the godliness of humanity (i.e. that humans were "little gods" in *Satan Unmasked* 1984b:96-97), and that he denied the correctability of prophets and prophetic pronouncements by his comments in *The Wounded Body of Christ* (1983).[231]

Earl responded immediately to these attacks, especially given Swaggart's extensive media access and popularity. Paulk wrote him a letter defending his orthodoxy and asking for a face to face meeting. This meeting was scheduled for November 13, 1986. Earl arrived with two Assemblies of God ministers in tow, Tommy Reid and Quinten Edwards. Swaggart, too, had armed himself with three dozen persons, including pastors from the local area, teachers in his Bible school, and Dave Hunt. According to Paulk's later reports of the four hour meeting, it was cordial, mostly calm, and uneventful. Paulk refuted the charges, explained where Swaggart had misunderstood him, and pleaded for "unity among the brethren" (*Harvest Time* December, 1986). This encounter did not end the disagreement, however. Swaggart wrote Paulk following their meeting to explain that he remained unconvinced of Earl's orthodoxy and therefore would no longer "fellowship" with him. Copies of this letter were sent by Swaggart to numerous pastors in the Assemblies of God, Church of God, and Foursquare denominations.

---

[230] No doubt Swaggart's motives were to warn his viewers and supporters of this deception. It is interesting, however, that each of the preachers referred to in the article (Rex Humbard, Pat Robertson, Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, Robert Tilton, and Earl Paulk) had extensive, and competing, television ministries.

[231] The quote Swaggart referred to was, "There is no judging by elders of the voice of the prophet if he or she is God's called-out man or woman who speaks as a prophet. If he is called as a prophet, there is no need for judging or proof because his ministry must prove itself" (1983:31). This quote of Paulk's contains several very common ideas which have been identified in his sermons. This passage asserts that he, as the prophet in this ministry, was the sole authority. Likewise, it reinforces the connection between the success of the ministry as the evidence of his prophetic status.

While the external controversy raged, Paulk attempted to shelter the congregation from these challenges to his theology. When he referred to this criticism in his sermons, which was infrequent, Paulk spoke in veiled innuendos of "being under attack." One of the few times he addressed the external situation specifically from the pulpit was a Wednesday evening when only the most faithful core and committed members were present. In this sermon he introduced the topic with the statement, "I want to talk about something that has been on the lips of a lot of people. Around here it has not really been a big issue, but it has been in several places" (3/5/86). By carefully framing his discussion of the external attacks while inundating the congregation with his perspective, Paulk kept a majority of congregation ignorant of the events to which he referred.[232]

At the same time, members were overwhelmed with positive and affirmative portrayals of the ministry both from the pulpit and in the newspaper. Many supportive, nationally-known ministers were invited to preach at the church.[233] The *Harvest Time* staff published complimentary letters from Karl Strader and Jamie Buckingham, both respected Pentecostal leaders. Its pages overflowed with pictures of celebrities, both secular and religious, embracing Paulk. Articles highlighted his extensive global travels. Glowing letters in adulation of the ministry from television "partners" were published in a column labeled "Letters That Sing His Praise." Finally, early in 1987 an entire issue of the newspaper was dedicated to proclaiming the "Harvester Highlights" of previous years (*Thy Kingdom Come* January, 1987).[234] Everything was done to present a successful and respected public appearance to the general congregation and the Kingdom Partners.

The Scholarly Critique

In early 1987 several other voices critical of Paulk's theology could be heard from within the

---

[232] Not one person I interviewed, including clergy, knew the full extent, or theological details, of the external criticism raised during this time against Kingdom Theology and Earl Paulk.

[233] More famous guest speakers preached at Sunday morning worship services during the 1986-1987 period than at any other time in the church’s history.

[234] The name of the newspaper was changed in January, 1987 to *Thy Kingdom Come*. The reason given by Don Paulk was that the paper needed to reflect the Kingdom message. Given all the negative publicity, it may well have been changed to present a new image, to distance the publication from previous criticism, and to imply that even Jesus preached of the coming kingdom.

Pentecostal intellectual community. Hal Lindsey, the noted pre-millenialist author, challenged Paulk to discuss his view of the End Times on TBN. In August 1987, the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God adopted a "white paper" document which analyzed and condemned Paulk's Kingdom teachings as heretical. Its criticisms, well-substantiated from Paulk's books, were essentially the same ones that Hunt and Swaggart had found objectionable. This paper was distributed extensively throughout the denomination, was read at the Society for Pentecostal Studies meeting that year and later was published in the Society's journal.

Participants at this conference also heard another assessment of Paulk's theology. William Griffin, a pastor and leader in the Canadian Assemblies of God, had visited Chapel Hill Harvester Church and written his own analysis of Kingdom Theology. Griffin's concise summary of the controversy surrounding Paulk's theology was both accurate and minimally sympathetic. He identified the challenge of studying Paulk's writings, commenting that "studying Paulk tends to be a rather frustrating exercise.... You can't nail down what you can't hold on to" (1987:8). This difficulty was the result of Paulk's "elusive" openness to revision, "agreeing with the critic and going on to declare that he now has a new understanding" (1987:9). Griffin argued that Paulk's continual claim of being quoted out of context whenever contradictions in his work were identified made him nearly impossible to pin down. He suggested that Paulk's habit of formulating his books verbatim from extemporaneously preached sermons without the careful systematic screening of a theological astute proofreader accounted for much of the misunderstanding. In his paper, Griffin tempered several of the previous charges of heresy, commenting that Paulk had expressed orthodox interpretations of the questionable comments from the books during his face to face meeting with Earl. He concluded his paper, however, with several reservations about the legitimacy of Paulk's Kingdom Theology.[235]

In the Winter of 1987, the Christian Research Institute (CRI, a conservative national cult watchdog organization based in California and led by Walter Martin) delivered the final noteworthy

---

[235] As stated previously, Barron (1992) also noted the difficulty of coming to exact conclusions about Paulk's written theology, given his propensity to verbally revise any offending passage when confronted. Barron, likewise, blames the manner in which Paulk's books were and continued to be produced as the source of most of his theological difficulties (1992:116-125). Barron lays much of the blame of the misinterpretation of Paulk both on Paulk himself and on those who would attack him without at least having a face to face conversation with him as he and Griffin had (1992:183-184).

analysis of Paulk and Kingdom Theology in its well-respected journal (Bowman et al., 1988a:9-14; 1988b:15-20). These articles demonstrated Paulk's reliance on the Latter Rain and Christian Reconstructionist ideas. The articles also described the attempts Paulk had taken to dodge previous criticism. Finally, after reviewing the controversial Kingdom Theology doctrines, the authors concluded, that "Earl Paulk is in fact a false prophet whose teachings and ministry should be utterly rejected by the church" (Bowman et al., 1988b:20). The Christian Research Institute advised Chapel Hill Harvester members to leave the church at once. Other ministers preaching Kingdom Theology, such as Hamon and Reid, were declared heretical as well. Fortunately for the church, the *Christian Research Journal* had a small audience of mostly non-Charismatics. Less damage, therefore, was done to the church's reputation by this piece than the earlier ones. [236]

By late 1987 Earl Paulk published his own extensive defense against the various charges in a book entitled *That the World May Know: Clearing the Air after 'The Seduction of Christianity.'* In the book Paulk portrayed the "true seduction" of Christianity as being wrought by those who were "prophet killers." He repeated this defense in an article entitled "Paulk Answers" in a November, 1987 issue of *Thy Kingdom Come.* About this same time, another article in support of Kingdom theology and Paulk was published by *Ministries Today* magazine, a national Charismatic publication (Thigpen, 1988). The article entitled "What's the Fuss about Kingdom Theology?" was authored by a free-lance writer, a theology PhD candidate who happened to be a former member of the church. The article argued much as Paulk did, that he was misunderstood, quoted out of context, and accused by innuendo not facts. It went on to describe the successful ministerial fruit produced by the church. These aggressive counter-attacks, as well as time, did much to diminish the external conflict directed at the church. By mid 1988 the entire controversy was behind Paulk and the church.

The highly publicized escapades of Jim Bakker, Oral Roberts, and Pat Robertson may have contributed to the external Christian community's attention turning away from Paulk (Smith, 1992). Jim Bakker had been accused by Jimmy Swaggart and others of sexual misconduct. Bakker was found guilty of defrauding PTL contributors and was sentenced to 45 years in prison, which was later reduced to eight

---

[236] These CRI articles did prompt various Reconstructionist writers to write articles and books defending the orthodoxy of their theology while distinguishing it from Paulk's kingdom teachings (DeMar and Leithart, 1987; DeMar, 1988).

years. During this same time, Oral Roberts, in an effort to raise money for his failing medical school, had asserted that God would kill him if his supporters did not contribute eight million dollars. Finally, Pat Robertson, in the middle of his bid for the Presidency, claimed to have averted storms and other supernatural events by prayer. These several incidents redirected both the Christian community's and the nation's attention toward other more prominent Pentecostal fish to fry. Earl Paulk was off the hook.

Paulk quickly used the misfortune of these ministers in order to focus the attention of the congregation away from his own troubles. At the same time he was able to include himself in a group of ministers with considerably more national prominence than he had, all of which were under attack by Satan for their successful ministries. Throughout 1987, Earl Paulk commented extensively on these incidents, especially Jim Bakker's troubles. In a March 1987 sermon he claimed, (3/22/87)[237]

Because the sin was of such gravity it must be dealt with publicly. Now when we sin in public places, there is nothing to do but make an account for it. I do not care if it is Jim Bakker, Pat Robertson, or Earl Paulk. There is an accountability that the church has, not only just to itself but also to the world.... We have a responsibility to outsiders. The media is not our enemy. The media has a job to do and I think if the media was taken away from America, we would be in serious trouble.... The tragedy was not just the sin but the "covering over." There is absolutely no justification for this! We are supposed to cover our brother's sin, but confess our own. It must be confessed to the measure of the exposure.... Brethren judging brethren is not of God!.... If we don't judge ourselves, then we will be judged by the world.... Sometimes we ought to be judged by the world.

Paulk argued that these events demonstrated a wave of attacks by Satan against "holy men of God" (Paulk, 1987:1-3,96,121; Barron, 1992:118). At the same time he criticized other church leaders, specifically Swaggart, for capitalizing on this misfortune, "Again we see and hear other religious leaders using [these incidents] as a forum to take shots at a brother who has been victimized by Satan" (*Thy Kingdom Come* April, 1987).

By the time Paulk's next major book, *Spiritual Megatrends: Christianity in the 21st Century,* was

[237] The sentiment expressed in this quote takes on an ironic significance when the church's own alleged sex scandals come to light in the 1990's. During that time Paulk is accused by the news media of covering up their sins. In response, he countered that the news writers were being manipulated by satanic influences and that they should stay out of the church’s business.

released in 1988, he could confidently cast his own implied aspersions at those who had attacked him. In what seemed to be a clear reference to Dave Hunt, Paulk wrote (1988a:70),

Some self-proclaimed inspectors took out a magnifying glass and began accusing spiritual leaders of seduction.... They attacked Christian counseling as being grounded in sorcery -- though some of the attackers needed counseling desperately themselves.

About Swaggart, who had by then been caught in his own sexual indiscretion, Paulk could smugly report (1988a:218),

We have seen (those who believe that they are called to **purify** the church) manifested in top positions of major ministries who have recently fallen. They publicly stated judgments against others in the ministry and now they are being judged themselves by their own standards.

Finally, he strongly cautioned the team at Christian Research Institute, as well as the secular media in general, to keep their hands off prophetic ministries, and indirectly off Chapel Hill Harvester Church (1988a:86).

I believe that many critics of ministries, especially investigative reporters, are moving very close to blasphemy by calling ministries and messages from God to task. While they feel totally justified in their own minds, they are touching God's anointed messengers and His movement.... They cannot touch anointed things and live. Perhaps they will not die naturally, but spiritual death is far worse.

The other component of this time period that contributed to Earl Paulk’s boldness in relation to his accusers was that the church continued to be prosperous. How could a ministry that was so successful, so blessed by God, be in error. Chapel Hill Harvester was envisioned as a "great move of God." The confirmation of which was growth, racial diversity, a flourishing social ministry, and an ever broadening sphere of influence.

A SUCCESSFUL TOTAL KINGDOM

Even in the midst of both internal and external challenges the church thrived to such an extent

that it remained one of the fastest growing churches in the country. The congregation continued to rapidly expand, especially with African Americans members. By 1987 it had become one of the largest African American congregations in the city. The church's social ministry to its members and the local community, likewise, increased proportionally. At the same time, Paulk's and the church's relationship with Atlanta slowly improved, as did their involvement with certain factions of the Charismatic community, often through national and international television broadcasts.

Yet, even with this real and tangible growth, an effort was made by the leadership to augment the perception of the church's success. This was undertaken in order to counterbalance the damage done to Paulk's message and the church's identity. Paulk realized that a charismatic leader needed continually to deliver the goods (Weber, 1968:242). Thus, a media-enhanced, public relations effort was begun to accentuate the positive, vital aspects of this kingdom church. This manufactured picture of success was, at this point in time, only a slightly exaggerated reflection of the actual reality at the church. A total Christian Kingdom was being created in South DeKalb with the church as its center.[238] The leadership wanted to make sure everyone, both inside and outside its walls, knew it.

The church's sizable media resources of television, tapes, books, newspapers, and radio were employed to create an impressive, larger than life, image of the congregation's success. Members were fed a steady diet of positive and success-oriented press releases throughout this period. Seldom did members garner information either from internal or external sources unless it was channeled through the church leadership. The newspaper detailed Paulk's itinerary along with the travel schedule of several renowned singers from the church. Letters of praise and testimony from television viewers, PFK members, and pastors of networked churches filled the paper. Television productions not only were able to present Paulk's "side" of the theological battles, but also to portray the "good fruit" of the ministry. These televised programs added an objectified credence and legitimation to his message.

The media-enhanced public relations portrayals of success produced the intended result. Very few "ordinary" members ever actually saw the swirling storms around them. Like couch potatoes, glued

---

[238] This Kingdom was not exactly a "totalized institution" such as is discussed by Goffman (1961) or Wallace (1971). It was ideologically based, more voluntary, and less socially isolated and organizationally restricted. For those members who chose to make the church the center of their world (20% of all 1991 survey respondents - excluding employment hours- spent over 10 hours a week at the church), however, Chapel Hill Harvester Church often functioned as a totalized institution.

to their electronic source of information, their only real indication of a storm was the news bulletin which flashed across their screen. Most never experienced any of the controversy for themselves. In fact, a majority of members, when questioned about this time period, only had positive things to say about it. At the same time, however, an unintended consequence of this public relations media blitz was that it created the beginning of the separation of the church's actual reality from its ideal, and media-distorted, portrayal. This developing characteristic eventually became one of the most destructive aspects of the congregational system.

Signs of Success

The church's numerical growth was one of the clearest indicators of Paulk's charismatic success. Benson Idahosa, visiting from Nigeria, reinforced this reality as he implored the congregation, "When you stop growing, you start dying" (2/24/85). Growth in membership became the watchword of this period. Bishop Paulk's references to growth in sermons were higher during this period than any other except the Alpha days. He challenged members to engage in intense evangelism while prophetically announcing, "We are going to move from a 10,000 member parish to a 25,000 member parish..." (6/23/85). He even labeled 1987 as "The Year of Recruitment." By the end of 1987 the 2500 seat K Center was nearly filled at both Sunday Morning services. In the midst of this continued growth, discussions began concerning a permanent worship facility. Earl hinted at his personal inclination in 1986, "I don't know what God wants us to do but...Oral Roberts said a few weeks ago, 'There is not a Holy Spirit directed cathedral in the world.'"(2/2/86). Several months later he announced that God had told him to build a 7,777 seat neo-Gothic "Cathedral to the Holy Spirit." That settled the question of the next worship structure with no congregational discussion. From that point on, the resources of the church began to be directed toward the construction of a cathedral. It was several years, however, before the full implication of this building project was felt by the membership.

The majority of new members who contributed to this growth were young (with an average age of 31 years at joining), as were most established members at the time. The church capitalized on the "baby boomer" constituency to show its relevance to contemporary society. There were occasional references to the congregation's youthfulness and direct appeals made to "our generation", although not nearly as

much as other megachurches.[239]

Of the white members who joined during this time (based on their survey responses in 1991) 57 percent were female. Nearly sixty percent were married and had children, almost all of whom attended together as a family unit. Over a third grew up in Georgia, but almost half were from outside the South. They were well educated, far surpassing the educational levels of their parents. Nevertheless a third of the fathers were managers and professionals, with 38 percent employed in service, technical, or laborer jobs. Many of their mothers also held either clerical (26 percent) or service (14 percent) positions. In 1991, these new members had jobs in service, clerical, managerial or sales fields, with 12.5 percent being self-employed (See Table 4).

Their religious background immediately prior to joining was mostly liberal/moderate (40 percent) or conservative Protestant (40 percent), although their previous church affiliation included a number of Pentecostal (16 percent) and nondenominational (11 percent) congregations as well. Twenty-seven percent of those who came during this time were relatively recent converts. They came from a considerable distance to attend the church (45 percent over 15 min. drive); however, almost a quarter lived within the church's zipcode area.

The African American members who came during this time, based on 1991 data from those who filled out the survey, were very similar in many ways to the whites. They, too, were young, well-educated, and grew up in similar regions of the country. They made slightly more

TABLE 4

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1985 and 1987

[239] For an example of Chapel Hill Harvester's references to the baby boomer generation see one of the associate pastors' Sunday evening sermon of 5/25/86. The "seeker" or "nontraditional" megachurches, such as Willow Creek, Saddleback, and Vineyard, emphasize their baby boomer constituency and values far more than did Chapel Hill Harvester Church, at least according to the research done by Miller (1993), Miller & Kennedy (1991) and Perrin (1989). Perhaps one of the reasons for Chapel Hill's diminished use of the boomer rhetoric, even though the congregation paralleled these other churches, was that Earl Paulk was somewhat older and also less involved in the youth movements of the 1960's. Likewise, there may be something about the Southern region which diminishes the importance of the boomer generation.

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1985 and 1987

Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Total Number	56	105	176
Mean Age in 1991	36.2	38.0	37.5
Mean Age at joining	30.2	32.0	31.5
Gender: Female	57.1	74.3	67.8
Marital Status:			
Married	58.9	49.5	51.1
Divorced	21.4	16.2	17.8
Never Married	19.6	25.7	24.7
Education:College degree or more	52.7	47.1	48.5
Income:	57.4	61.0	59.0

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1985 and 1987			
+$30,000			
Occupation:			
Clerical	19.6	14.1	15.6
Service	21.4	22.2	21.0
Managerial	17.9	14.1	15.0
Professional	3.6	4.0	3.6
Self-Employed	12.5	13.1	14.4
Southern Birthplace	55.4	54.3	55.1
Community of Birth			
Rural/town/city	53.6	43.7	47.4
Urban/suburban	46.4	56.3	52.6
Mean Childhood	3.5	2.0	2.6

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1985 and 1987			
Moves			
Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Hours at Church/ Week:			
0-3 hours	11.1	27.0	23.8
4-6 hours	18.5	41.0	31.6
7-10 hours	37.0	20.0	25.6
11 or more	32.3	12.0	19.0
New Christian	26.8	29.5	28.4
Mean # CHHC Friends	4.0	2.5	3.0
Giving: 10 % or More	94.4	75.5	82.7
Previous Denomination:			

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1985 and 1987			
Liberal/Moderate	26.8	16.2	18.8
Conservative	32.1	50.5	43.8
Pentecostal	16.1	17.1	16.5
Catholic	7.1	2.9	4.5
Charismatic/Nondenom	10.7	5.7	6.8
Other	1.8	4.8	5.7
None	5.4	2.9	4.0
Live in Church Zipcode	27.3	11.5	17.3
Mean Paulk Books Read	5.0	3.4	4.0

money than their white counterparts. Half were married and most spouses (80%) attended. These black members were employed in similar service, clerical, and managerial jobs or self-employed at about the same percentages as white members. They came to the church from some distance (60% drove over 15 minutes), with far fewer living in the immediate area of the church.

There were several distinct differences between the black and white persons who joined during this time. Seventy-five percent of the African Americans who joined were female. Many of the black members grew up in urban areas (42.7 percent), moved seldom, had more siblings, and less-educated parents. Their parents' religious traditions were predominantly Baptist (55 percent), Methodist (15 percent), and Pentecostal (10 percent), as were their own previous church affiliation. These members were attracted to the church for three primary reasons: the preaching (33 percent), the fellowship (15 percent) and the racial mix (15 percent).

The Power of Racial Diversity

The racial composition of the congregation at this time was almost exactly 50 percent black and 50 percent white, although this balance was not to last long. More than twice as many African Americans as whites were joining during this period. With this growing African American constituency, the church leadership intentionally began to promote an interracial, integrationist agenda. Paulk soon emphasized African American and civil rights themes and often commented on his connections with the King family. During one sermon he stated, "I had the privilege of being in (Martin Luther King's) presence several times in groups and many, many more times with Daddy King" (3/16/86). Prior to this period Paulk referred to racial issues far less than one time per sermon (.6), but from 1985 onward he spoke of race on the average of three times per sermon (See Appendix B-29). Racial issues, such as discrimination, inner city crime, drug abuse, unwed mothers, and gang violence among young black males, became significant concerns of the congregation. Efforts to address these issues formed one of this church's more distinctive features. At this time, almost no other megachurch had such a racially balanced congregation.[240] The worship service's music and character also began to reflect this ever-growing

[240] Then vice-president George Bush called the church the "most integrated church in America" (Hazard, 1988). Although this was probably not the case, the church certainly took advantage of the distinction. Among megachurches in the mid to late 1980's perhaps only as many as a half dozen had a substantial integration of races among their memberships, such as Frederick Price's Crenshaw Christian Center and

constituency. Soon music with pop, soul, and black gospel sounds began to be written and sung in services. The primary person responsible for this was Anthony Lockett, a former member of the African American singing group "Cameo." Likewise, the interaction between preacher and congregation started to reflect a call-response tradition, common to many African American religious traditions (Franklin, 1994).[241] Furthermore, the church had grown to be one of the larger religious gatherings of African Americans in the city, nearing four to five thousand black members.

Carlton Pearson's Higher Dimensions Evangelistic Center (Thigpen, 1990b).

[241] Franklin (1994:259) suggests, in direct reference to Chapel Hill Harvester Church, that "Even predominantly white congregations with a substantial black membership have been transformed by the infusion of this tradition's dynamism." He goes on to spell out the "constitutive practices" of black congregations as sensory worship, intimate prayer, cathartic shouting, triumphant singing, politically relevant religious education, and prophetic, imaginative preaching. The church exhibited many of these characteristics prior to its influx of African Americans due to its Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Southern influences. Each of these components helped create a church culture in which black members felt comfortable and at home, although this acceptance was aided by Paulk's and the church's intentional efforts at inclusion and integration (Thumma, 1991).

With that African American presence, Paulk and other church leaders, such as the black associate pastors Kirby Clements and James Powers, began to take a more active role in the city's African American community, to the dismay and protest of some prominent black pastors. Chapel Hill Harvester's choir performed at the annual "King Fest" celebrations for several years. Bishop Paulk was asked to write an "Ask the Bishop" column in a local black newspaper, *The Champion.* The church advertised its services in many of the newspapers targeted at Atlanta's African Americans, often with the photos of the African American Kirby Clements and Pedro Torres, the Hispanic minister on staff. Several magazine articles praised the church's integrationist stance (Harris, 1987; Hazard, 1988). By 1987, the church's identity as an integrated congregation was so developed that Earl stated confidently in one sermon, "We are [Martin Luther King's] dream fulfilled" (8/2/87).[242]

Paulk almost never talked of the increase in African American members as due to the contextual changes taking place in the local community, as a result of the congregation's openness, or as a byproduct of the general appeal of the church, its ministry, or its spiritual worship. Rather he interpreted it as a direct spiritual blessing of his own racial stance and a fulfillment of the vision God had given him, as he suggested in several sermons (2/10/85, 10/12/86).

There is no people in Atlanta like the people you sit among--due to my faithfulness in the racial situation.... Absolute racial harmony, God says I will make you a standard. It was not accidental, it came by absolute commitment to what God had called us to.

We built in a subdivision 12 years ago, it was so lily white.... And I watched those people moving out and thought 'My God, where are they going to? why are they moving?' Pastor Don didn't move! I

---

[242] See the February 1986 *Harvest Time* (pages 6-7) for extensive comments by Earl Paulk about his relationship with Martin Luther King Junior. The church leadership worked hard at portraying its strong stance in civil rights issues. Paulk commented in 1987 (Harris, 1987:27) that blacks came to the church because they "saw we were real in dealing with the race issue." In a 1988 article (Hazard) he is referred to as "one of the white pastors who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the '60's" and as his "close friend." In 1990 a play was presented by the worship and arts department called "The March Goes On". In it, the lifelong relationship between two men, one white and one black, was traced. The characters lives loosely paralleled those of Earl Paulk and Martin King Jr. without actually stating the connection. However, the impression was clear and obvious to church members. This play insinuated that there was significant interaction while growing up and in later life between these two characters, which was false. The comments of church members later, both pro ("I didn't know Bishop Paulk knew MLK that well") and con ("I can't believe they would show Earl being with Martin Luther King that much, it didn't happen"), attest to the intended result.

didn't move! And Donnie Earl [Don's son] grew up and he didn't even know he was white.

Paulk's integrationist stance did have much in common with the message of King as well as with the Black community in general. The ideal of integration was very attractive for many of the lower middle class and older black members.[243] Nearly 15 percent of total 1991 survey black respondents reported that the racial diversity of the membership was initially the most attractive feature of the church. As one such African American member commented, "I was amazed, I was truly amazed.... I felt the Spirit here. It was a melting pot for the races...and the love expressed in this building was just amazing.... I came back."

At the same time, only three percent of white respondents in the 1991 survey identified the church’s racial diversity as being their initial attraction. The majority of this group were Charismatic Christians who had formerly belonged to mainline denominations. One such committed member explained her family's racial perspective, "While we lived in a neighborhood that was 80 percent black, the [United Methodist] church there was 100 percent white. We just didn't feel like that church reflected the community that we lived in." I must confess the church's racial diversity was one of my primary initial attractions to the church. Worshiping in this integrated congregation had a powerful spiritual and emotional appeal for me. Judging from my interviews and observations, however, only a minority of white members wholeheartedly embraced the biracial situation as the ideal expression of the faith, many accepted it as a good feature of the church, and a minority of members were quite uncomfortable with the diversity.

Several of these white members who did not embrace the church's racial diversity were interviewed both formally and informally over the years of the study. Some of these persons left the church as more blacks came, others isolated themselves from cross-racial interaction, and a few were outright hostile in their racial comments to me, although civil in their interactions with African American church members. One such member commented about several black members.

---

[243] See Thumma (1991) for a discussion of Paulk's use of King's integrationist theology and his rejection of James Cone’s and others' Black Theology. As will be seen later, Paulk completely rejected a black nationalist approach of black identity and a distinct heritage in favor of a "colorless" racial situation. See Franklin (1990) for a discussion of the popularity of the integrationist message among the lower middle class and middle class black communities.

I don't see why they need to flaunt it in front of our faces, wearing that shawl and those hats.... It's like the KKK. They are saying, `We are different. We are from Africa.'...[I guess I think this] cause I'm from South Georgia and a redneck.

Another questioned out loud to himself during an interview, "I don't understand why they don't want to worship with their own kind." This blatant racist attitude was quite uncommon judging from the time I spent at the church.

The white leadership also demonstrated some racial awkwardness, perhaps even prejudice, in their dealings with black members. White presbytery members often greeted African American members with comments such as "what's happening" or "gimme five" rather than a handshake. Several black members expressed anger at this treatment by the clergy. Earl Paulk's comments occasionally reflected a racial insensitivity as well, such as this comment from a 1981 Sunday evening sermon (3/15/81).

You know I can not tell you how much I thank God for our black members that are here. I found out tonight that nobody can welcome you like a black person. You have got to see them smile at you with them beautiful white teeth, when they say `Welcome home pastor.'

The makeup of the church staff also betrayed the presence of structural racism. Although the congregation contained several thousand African American members by this time, there were only two black pastors. Pastor Kirby, the older part-time dentist, had been a pastor since 1980. The other black minister, a younger, handsome, well-educated former social worker named James Powers, had been ordained recently. During this time very few paid staff positions were filled by African Americans, although many did volunteer as Sunday school and nursery workers, ushers and hostesses, parking lot attendants, and grounds keepers. The few blacks on staff were employed as musicians. This lack of black church leaders did not appear to disturb most African American members.[244] One committed

[244] Perhaps those who were upset were unwilling to discuss this complaint with me, a white researcher. The anonymous questionnaire results, however, did not identify any negative racial undercurrent either. Another possible reason for a lack of racial critique could be that those African Americans who might have had a problem with this issue either never came to the church or did not join if they had visited.

African American member explained his acceptance of the racial imbalance in leadership.[245]

In terms of what I see up front....I truly do believe that whoever God ordains to do certain things that's who should be up there. I don't feel race should be the motivator. It's wonderful when all racial and ethnic backgrounds are represented, but its not so much I think there needs to be a black, brown, red, yellow, or white person, but the fact that we all play a part. However the mixture falls is fine.

Even given this mixture of racial attitudes, cross-racial interaction during worship services appeared unrestrained and spontaneous. Never once in five years did I observe members of one race move or hesitate to sit next to someone of another race. Throughout the worship service, members carried on interracial conversations, offered each other mints, borrowed paper or pens, and shared Bibles. During times of praise black and white members could often be seen holding one another's hands, hugging, and praying over each other.

Outside of the worship setting, however, the informal interactions between persons of different races were very often segregated. Apart from the mutual focal point of worship, the segregationist upbringing of especially Southern members reasserted itself. Many members, black and white alike, openly admitted that their informal fellowship and social life, both at church and throughout the week, were divided along racial lines. One core African America member offered her assessment of the situation.

I watch, not so much the worship service, but when the service is over and I move out into the atrium and I see the whites heading this way and the blacks standing around over there. I see it not only in adults but I also see the kids do the same thing. That's not surprising. It's just that my first impression was `Wow, look how harmonious it is!' Then as I start to see it more I realize that it is still harmonious but it is not as mixed as I thought it necessarily was.

---

[245] Tricia Weeks, then public relations person for the church, explained this under-representation of blacks in leadership in very similar terms. She decried a quota system, arguing that the Holy Spirit selects the leadership. In an interview with me, Paulk further justified this leadership imbalance as due to the very rapid influx of blacks after many of the younger white males were already in leadership training. The potential black leaders had missed out on the first wave of new positions. He asserted that God called and anointed whom he willed, and few black leaders from within the church ranks were being called by God to fill leadership positions.

One aspect of modern African American life, the efforts to embrace an African or distinctively black heritage, was rejected explicitly by Paulk. He staunchly preached against this perspective, as he commented in one sermon, "I'm not against ethnic backgrounds...but I get a little sick when culture gets in the way of God" (10/12/86). He argued that unity in the church between the races was more important than racial distinctions. "We are neither black nor white, Jew nor Gentile. We are one in the Lord Jesus Christ" (10/12/86). Some vocal members, regardless of race, strongly disagreed with Paulk's stance on this issue, although I heard no one express this critical view until much later in the church's history.[246]

Paulk's and the church's stated acceptance of African Americans not only was a drawing card for new members, but the interracial quality of the congregation made it distinctive among both megachurches and most Protestant churches in general. At the same time, the veiled discrimination of blacks and the devaluation of African American heritage, no doubt, caused some black members to leave once they realized their implicitly subordinate position in the church hierarchy. From all indications, however, only a minority of African Americans left for this reason. The benefits of the church's racial stance far outweighed its liabilities.

Benefits of the Kingdom

With the church continuing to grow, more and more commitment was required on the part of the laity in order to keep the various ministries operational. A large core of very active volunteers rose to the challenge. To offset this expenditure of commitment, many benefits were available to the volunteers. Obviously many of these benefits of kingdom living existed prior to this period, but during this time they took on an increased significance due to the greater call for membership commitment.[247]

As was previously discussed, the doctrine of "covering" offered both a spiritual and physical

---

[246] This message was not completely persuasive, since only 14 persons (2.1 of the total 1991 survey respondents) stated their race was "Christian" or "did not matter." Among the 694 survey respondents, there were only 22 negative race comments and three quarters of these referred directly to Paulk's discouragement of black members' attempts to recover their black/African heritage.

[247] Earl Paulk often preached a message of social outreach, political activism, and personal vocational empowerment during this period of time and the following several years, as will be seen in the next chapter. Not only did his references to these ideas go up in sermons but so too did the number of church ministries oriented to these tasks (See Appendix B-30, B-31, and B-32 graphs). By the end of 1987 the church had well over 40 active weekly ministries.

sense of protection to members. In addition to this more tangible rewards of involvement included the intense relationships which were formed with fellow volunteers, daily interaction with important staff persons, and occasional, cherished conversations with the founding pastors and especially Earl Paulk himself. By this time Paulk and other favored clergy had distanced themselves from the ordinary membership, thus any chance encounter with them became quite special and charged with spiritual excitement. I witnessed, during this time and later, ordinarily highly professional business persons stand dumbfounded in awe while in the presence of Paulk. Other members commented on touching his mail, his address label, or the interview form letter I sent which was signed by him, as if these had the power to heal or gave them some bit of intimacy to this source of spiritual power.

Another tangible reward of the considerable commitment required came in the form of networks of intimate, emotionally rewarding friendships between large numbers of members. These relationships were not only rewarding in and of themselves but they also provided an outlet for the desire for service to the community. As one member suggested, "I don't just get fed here, but I get to feed others, to put my faith into practice." These social connections were further reinforced in the cell-groups and covenant communities, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

The diverse ministries, which increasing proportionately in relation to the expanding congregation, also offered concrete compensation for being an active member of the church. Participation in these "Overcomer" groups challenged members to grow and develop into more healthy human beings. Many of these groups were patterned after 12 step recovery programs. Almost all of them were lay-led, by persons who themselves were or had recovered from the group's difficulty. In most of these group there was an atmosphere of intimacy, vulnerability, and peer accountability. This mutual concern, likewise, spilled over into the covenant communities and nontherapy ministries. These groups, combined with the church's refuge motif, created the situation where many hurting persons could find deliverance and physical or emotional salvation. Nearly 25 percent of the 400 survey respondents who wrote open comments on the questionnaire stated that the church had saved their lives, had given their a sense of purpose and identity, and had healed them spiritually and physically. The gratitude for these blessings further solidified the intense commitment to the church many members felt and expressed.

Another benefit which arose during this time period was the increased opportunities to do business for the church, or in relation to its ministries. Several plans were devised which would create a

total community, a "city of hope," which would encircle the yet-to-be-built Cathedral. Lay business leaders in the congregation developed the idea of building numerous intentionally integrated church communities in the local area. These plans included various office parks, residential communities, sports complexes, shopping malls, and a complete reconstruction of the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed facilities would support the church's social ministries and recreational activities, provide something for everyone, and add to its appeal as a one-stop shopping center. As the first step in this vision, construction was begun on a small Christian shopping mall which would be attached to the existing K Center. This "mall" would contain a large atrium complete with fountain, street lamps, park benches, and plants, a "Chick-Fil-A" type snack bar, a bookstore, a craft shop, small kiosk carts of popcorn and other snacks, the church's tape ministry, a ministries' recruitment center, and new church offices. Many of these speculative ventures in the community also were begun during this time, some on former church property and others on newly purchased tracts of land. A system was established whereby church contractors could hire laborers and subcontractors through congregational networks. Many of the church's most affluent members risked considerable amounts of capital in this effort, in the middle of a debatably unstable area of the city. Their ties to the church, and their level of commitment, became not only personal but also financial. They had much to gain or lose resting to the success of the church.

Local, National, and International Exposure

Buoyed by the continued numeric success of his interracial and activist church, Paulk and the church leaders sought to spread the Kingdom gospel to the "uttermost parts of the world." These evangelistic efforts began first with his relationship to Atlanta, but soon extended via television deep into Central and South America. Paulk began to reconfigure the symbolic relationship with Atlanta of previous years. Before he saw himself as the city's prophetic voice crying out in the wilderness, now he saw himself as dwelling in the courts of leadership as its advisor and spiritual protector. He commented optimistically about the parallel futures of the city and Chapel Hill Harvester. The church and the city became indistinguishable in his portrayal of this relationship (2/10/85).

Atlanta will become the religious center of the world. Atlanta became the symbol of victory over defeat. The phoenix that rises out of the dust of defeat, that lifts its head in pride and says, 'we are able

to address our problems.... God is not done with Atlanta yet!' It is becoming one of the revival capitals of the world.

By mid 1987, Paulk spoke about this successful relationship, not in the future tense as he had in 1985, but in the present tense and with complete certainty. "Atlanta **IS** the spiritual capital of the world!" (8/2/87). In the church's newspaper and from the pulpit, he addressed legislative issues, encouraged member's involvement in political affairs, and offered a new vision of the church's role in the city. He spoke of the task of the "local church" as influencing and improving the entire metropolitan area. Paulk, boasting of his influence with city and state officials, opening his pulpit to would-be politicians during campaigns. The parade of vote-seeking candidates confirmed his political influence before the congregation. Likewise, the church began to gain the admiration of several religion professors and local seminary instructors. In fact, many of my earliest contacts with the church during this time resulted from the recommendations of my professors. Seminary classes visited the worship services, observed the many ministries, and were lectured by Paulk or his associates.

Even as Paulk suffered at the hands of critics, the church's Kingdom Partners, networking pastors, ICCC affiliates, and his friends in the Charismatic Community all rushed to his defense. As stated previously, many well-known ministers were guest preachers during this time. One such supporter, Bill Hamon prophesied during a sermon at the church that Chapel Hill Harvester would host a massive gathering of 25,000 persons from around the world in 1990 (10/27/85). Paulk enlisted the aid of the other ICCC bishops to make this prophesied "World Congress on the Kingdom of God" a reality.[248]

This period was marked by several other significant moments of involvement and recognition by the external Christian world as well. In 1985 he published two books that year which sold over 30,000 copies (1985b, 1985c). In May 1986 Paulk participated in a Vatican Conference on the Roman Catholic/

---

[248]This "congress" was envisioned as distinctive from their previous yearly conferences. This was to be a massive gathering with "earth-shattering" implications for the establishment of the Kingdom. The governing board read like a "who's who" of the Charismatic community. It was to be much like the two massive interdenominational gatherings of Charismatics held in New Orleans in 1986 and 1987 (Duin, 1986; Synan, 1987). At these meetings it was decided that a major conference would be held in 1990 in Indianapolis's Hoosier Dome called the Congress on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelism. This event took place just one month prior to Paulk's World Congress on the Kingdom of God and drew approximately 20,000 persons.

Pentecostal dialogue (Weeks,1986:379). A few months later Oral Roberts invited him to be on the 27 member board of the Charismatic Bible Ministries, an informal network of like-minded leaders of major ministries. In November 1986 he was elected to Board of Regents at Oral Roberts University. He had become the leading proponent of "Kingdom Now" theology, and was invited to numerous conferences to speak on the subject (Weeks, 1986:362). His theology resonated with the "Dominion" preaching of numerous other Christian leaders (Nation, 1990, Barron, 1992). Kingdom was rapidly becoming the watchword for several evangelists including Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, Robert Tilton, and Robert Schuller.[249] Each of these achievements provided a necessary counter balance to the criticism that had been raised.

[249] Robert Tilton held a televised "Satellite Seminary" in December 1984 on Dominion teaching which included these men. Robertson's book, *The Secret Kingdom,* also echos some of these dominionist and Kingdom themes. See Barron (1992) for details of Pat Robertson's use of these ideas and also for the connections between Paulk and Dominionist leaders.

During this time, the church was also able to claim considerable global exposure, especially in Central America. The newspaper was filled with articles which described a medical trip to Honduras in 1985. That same year, 175 pastors from countries in Africa and Latin America attended "Atlanta 85". The director of international outreach, Pedro Torres, conducted seminars in five Central and South American countries in 1985. By 1986 network churches were located in every Latin American nation, in several Caribbean islands, and in a number of African countries. In 1987 the church began to broadcast a television program in Costa Rica and hosted an international conference of 400 ministers from 15 nations. The church's rapid incursion into Central and South America parallels the Pentecostal explosion which was taking place in these countries during the 1980's.[250] By all appearances Chapel Hill Harvester had made great inroads into its Southern mission field.

Even with these considerable accomplishments and the church's success in general, Paulk, the leadership, and many of the core members wore the scars of this difficult period of trial and testing. The rest of the congregation, too, were left feeling a vague sense of persecution. The response of leadership and membership alike to these feelings helped to create a congregational dynamic that would have a lasting detrimental effect on the church in future years.

Suffering for the Kingdom's Sake

The feeling of being persecuted was nothing new to Chapel Hill Harvester members. At least since the Alpha days many in the church believed they were continually being unjustly condemned. Perhaps it was a perception Paulk had carried within him since the Hemphill incident. Paulk often intensified this feeling of persecution with statements that reflected his own sense of being rejected by the religious world, such as his comment in one sermon (11/22/87),

People are afraid to identify with this move of God. I talked, just last week, with two major world leaders in religion and said, 'why did you not include Chapel Hill?' Only to have them say, 'Well, we thought others might not join with us if we identified with you.

[250] For a discussion of this phenomenon see David Martin (1990), Margaret Poloma (1986), Stephen Glazier (1980) and Daniel Miller (1994). See Vaughan (1984) for a description of several of the Latin American megachurches.

This period of criticism had magnified the congregation's perception of themselves as outcasts, marginal, and also mavericks. Unlike previous times of persecution in its history, church members now had a solid, recognizable identity to rally around and protect -- Paulk's vision of the kingdom. The congregation now possessed a powerful ideal for which to suffer but also from which they could draw strength. This "Kingdom Now" theology[251] had become the symbol of what Paulk and the church stood for. It encompassed who they were as a congregation, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the world.

Paulk stood by his identity as the kingdom theologian, aided by the label of "Provoker," prophetically given to him by another minister. This image of provoker offered Paulk a way to interpret the attacks as being the result of his intentional efforts to present the Kingdom gospel. Rather than the criticism having been due to his lack of clarity, inadequate proofreading, or heretical theology, Paulk argued that the conflict was the result of his efforts at challenging existing theological categories, "stepping on sacred cows," and being the "provoker" he was prophesied to be (Barron, 1992:88). As he commented in one book, "I am called and committed to provoke the church toward maturity and unity" (1985a:6-7). His biography, appropriately titled *The Provoker*, described how this identity functioned (Weeks, 1986:381-82).

The Provoker stands between two kingdoms of God's people...knowing that not only has he heard God's voice and followed His directions, but also he has an eternal responsibility.... The Provoker will take risks that would cause others to tremble.

---

[251] "Kingdom Now" was the label several writers used to describe Paulk's theology. He never used this term but it became common to those outside of the church. It was this distinctive kingdom identity which gave both Paulk and the church its notoriety -- which included many magazine and journal articles, being featured on a Bill Moyers PBS documentary, and considerable television coverage.

There is some evidence that Paulk clearly intended to disrupt and challenge the status quo with his Kingdom Theology. For instance, in the introduction of *To Whom is God Betrothed* he suggested that his book on the role of Israel was, "written in obedience to God.... If my first considerations were my own welfare, my reputation, acceptance by my colleagues or my regard for any worldly kingdom, I would avoid the subject" (Paulk, 1985c). Yet, he quickly realized that similar comments he made in the first edition of *Ultimate Kingdom* (1984a:102-103; 207ff; 255-256) concerning the place of Israel were too provocative (Barron, 1992: 70-71,197). He removed them in the second edition and even got a well-known messianic Jew, Daniel Juster, to write the foreword.[252] Therefore, although he used the image of provoker as a way to explain the hostility especially to his congregation, he was also quick to revise and recant his former statements publicly if they were overly controversial.

The provoker image, however, was inadequate in deflecting all the controversy the church suffered. The leadership often resorted to assigning blame for their troubles elsewhere. On many occasions, blame was cast on the process of Paulk's book production itself. Both he and Tricia Weeks, his ghost writer, argued that the hastily produced books from transcribed tapes of sermons often were poorly proofread.[253] On other occasions it was "the world" in general that was cast as the enemy. Paulk's sermons during this time were full of negative references to the "world" expressed from within his dualist perception of reality.[254] Often these difficulties were also understood as an indication of Satan's efforts to thwart God's chosen mission, to evangelize the Kingdom message. Paulk suggested during one sermon,

---

[252] Numerous revisions of Paulk's language concerning Israel were changed, softened, or deleted for the second edition of *Ultimate Kingdom*, in specific compare the passages on pages 1984:102-03 & 1986:53-56, 1984:207-211 & 1986:144-146, and 1984:255-56 & 1986:182-83.

[253] Paulk offered this explanation to Bruce Barron on several occasions (1992:119-121,183, 194-195, 206-207). Barron granted Paulk considerable latitude with this excuse, especially after a church staff member responded to his suggestion of having outside theologians proofread his books with "I can hardly imagine Isaiah submitting his prophecies to 'respected theologians' for review" (1992:183-184). The reality was that Paulk had already made these claims for years in sermons to thousands of nontheologically astute Christians who looked to their pastor as a prophetic and trustworthy leader that should be obeyed. These more or less heretical doctrines had a reality in the congregation long before they were printed in books to be critiqued by theologians. It was at the level of the congregation where any damage due to these teachings would be done, and yet the only critic of Paulk's theology to address a remark to the congregation was the Christian Research Institute.

[254] Paulk's references to a negative "world" and a radical dualism in his sermons were the highest of any time judging from the tapes I examined from across the church's history -- 11.5 and 7.9 times per sermon respectively (See Appendix B-17 and B-19).

"Honey, the reason we have so much warfare is that the devil doesn't like what we are doing" (2/8/87).[255]

Even as the leadership presented these possible sources for their troubles, they intentionally shielded members from learning the actual sources of their persecution. They did not want the congregation to know the origins or the extent of the criticism. This lack of complete honesty on the part of the leadership left members with a vague awareness that they, too, were "despised and rejected of men." Members, without specific knowledge of the allegations, developed a somewhat paranoid mentality, realizing they were under attack but not knowing from where or whom. In turn, these vague feelings of persecution drew core and committed members closer to each other, and at the same time, further from outside balancing influences.

The congregational impression that they were constantly under attack both from Satan and "the World" drew the community together in a powerful manner. One member described it as a "foxhole mentality." Under pressure from the enemy, members were drawn together in solidarity. With an "enemy at the gate," the congregation's adherence to the Kingdom identity grew more intense. The kingdom became synonymous with the church and its leader. Within this identity members developed a clear sense of who they were and what they were about -- they were kingdom Christians and they were about the demonstration of the kingdom.

Along with assigning blame, church leaders used the persecution to emphasize further the congregation's uniqueness due to its Kingdom message. "We must be special, why else would Satan pick on us?" one member explained to me. In her biography, Weeks echoed this theme (1986:358).

Many critics wanted to write Earl off as a 'millennialist,' a 'manifest Sons of God,' or 'latter rain' theologian.... Earl told his congregation that one of the most effective ways that Satan 'kills the prophets' in the modern church is by propagating innuendoes, false accusations an attacks on the prophet's character. Many people outrightly rejected prophetic truth in fear of 'Jim Jones' types and demoralizing cults.

The church's unique effort at demonstrating the kingdom was interpreted as an "anointed move of God." Paulk often warned both critics and investigative reporters about, "touching God's anointed

---

[255] Earl Paulk's sermon references to Satan (11.33 times per sermon) were higher during this period than at any other time in the church's history except during the Alpha days (See Appendix B-4).

messengers and His movement....They can not touch anointed things and live" (1988a:86). This questionable doctrine was given credence and concrete expression within the congregation, in relation to two events that actually took place. On February 21, 1988 Paulk's nemesis, Swaggart was caught with a prostitute. He was censored by the Assemblies of God and eventually left the denomination. With his support dwindling, he was forced to abandon several television markets. Paulk quickly contracted for Swaggart's Central American television slots. A second confirmation of God's protection of "anointed ministers" came when Christian Research Institute leader Walter Martin suffered a heart attack and died in 1989 while on a visit to Atlanta. About this situation Paulk later wrote (1991:75),

> The consequences for getting the wrong signals can be quite serious. I was challenged by one noted critic only a few months before his death. He was writing some totally erroneous interpretations of my teaching, calling me a false prophet. Matters of life and death rest with God, and those who make judgments over ministries must be extremely careful with their words.

According to several staff members and ministers, these incidents were used explicitly by Paulk to bolster his spiritual power and charismatic identity as a "prophet of God."[256]

Such vivid demonstrations of the "cost" of criticism conveyed a profound message. Divine retribution was prophesied for those members who left the church on bad terms, such as Bob and Kim, or even for those who just left the church for another congregation (Paulk, 1984b:194-95). The promised adversity for disaffiliating with the church provided a strong and effective mechanism for the retention of those in leadership, core, and committed members. Many marginal members were not sufficiently persuaded by or committed to Paulk's authority to treat the threat as serious. But for those in leadership, the price of defection was costly, and most often a risk they were unwilling to take. They had heard Paulk's predictions of adversity. They had seen "God" protect his Kingdom message and his visionary messenger.[257]

---

[256] This doctrine of divine retribution for "touching the anointed move of God" functioned much as Paulk's prophecies did. If the threat (or prophecy) was vague and indefinite enough, any misfortune (or related incident) would fulfill the pronouncement. Those that did not come to pass were forgotten.

[257] The individual interviews and survey data confirm the limited obedience of many marginal members, especially in relation to tithing. Some persons interviewed said they did not believe Paulk's threats about leaving, as one commented, "He's just saying that cause he's desperate." At the same time, those most

committed to the church had a very difficult time removing themselves from the organization even after considerable abuse, as will be seen.

Another consequence of the church's reaction to its critics was that it even more strongly emphasized its demonstration as a "prototype of the Kingdom." After Paulk had been criticized for statements which implied they were "establishing the Kingdom," he was very careful to speak only of "manifesting the Kingdom."[258] This emphasis corresponded well with the "demonstration" aspect of the church's earliest kingdom identity as embodied in the 1981 mission statement. Rather than arguing that the church would bring in God's kingdom, or in a post-millenialist manner improve the world before Jesus returned, Paulk stated that the "matured church" would become the "standard" by which Christ would judge the world. He made this emphasis clear in one sermon, "I do not believe that the world will grow better and better till Jesus comes back and says you did it all. But I do believe that the church will become a more keen, definable standard by which God can judge the world" (2/2/86).

In relation to this rhetorical change, an increased effort was made to produce tangible evidences of the congregation's kingdom lifestyle, to become that standard. This local kingdom congregation was to lead by example, showing Christians and nonbelievers alike, what the ministries of a mature church should accomplish. Paulk stated in one sermon (3/10/85),

This church is called to be a prophetic church. Every ministry in this church is to be a prototype. If you only knew how important you are. I said, Oh God we can't make a mistake, there are too many people imitating us.

This need to be a demonstration of the Kingdom combined with the sense of specialness, uniqueness, created an implicit triumphalism in the congregation. Paulk's altar call for new members clearly implied this, "[Do you] want to plug into the most important thing taking place on this planet" (8/2/87).[259] In this regard, Paulk discussed the qualitative difference between "Salvation churches" and "Kingdom churches," with the former type portrayed as somehow inferior, inadequate, and less enlightened. On the other hand, Chapel Hill Harvester was a "Kingdom church" and as Paulk claimed in

---

[258] Compare the changes in the wording of this issue between the 1st and 2nd editions of *Ultimate Kingdom* 1984a:328,287,289,180 and 1986a:200, 203,205,120 respectively.

[259] Paulk would explicitly deny the validity of the term "triumphalism" in this context. He specifically preached in early 1989 (3/19) that they demonstrated "triumphant life" rather than "triumphalism" because their source was God rather than human initiative alone.

one sermon, "God has called this church to be a prototype for the world. That will be the church to watch in the next ten years" (10/13/85). The distinction, he argued in his book *Satan Unmasked*, was due to the Spirit's anointing, "[As a Kingdom church] we don't claim to be 'special.' We just claim to have a special God who grants us the anointing and power of the Holy Ghost so we that can do great things in the name of the Lord" (1984b:191).

This status as an anointed ministry, a kingdom church, meant it should only be judged by the fruit of its demonstration and its members' commitment. This created a situation in which many vibrant and effective programs were started. Membership in this context, was not verbal assent to doctrines or transfer of affiliational standing, but intense commitment, participation, giving, and involvement in demonstrating the Kingdom. As a consequence, church-wide commitment in several areas of personal and congregational life were considerably higher than the findings from similar church studies.

Members were strongly encouraged to demonstrate their commitment to the church's kingdom vision through their actions.[260] This in turn produced many ministerial successes, much "spiritual fruit." At the same time, Paulk asserted that, "Ministries are judged by their FRUIT" (*Harvest Time* April, 1986). He made this point clear in a later book, "The Church may not affect any circumstances surrounding you, but the Kingdom always changes things. Churches that preach and demonstrate kingdom authority will grow" (1991:33).

Chapel Hill Harvester effectively employed its media resources to publicize its fruitfulness not only to its members but also to the world. The newspaper, video portrayals shown on television and during the worship service, and Paulk's books and tapes all confirmed this message -- that this demonstration of the kingdom was unique, successful, divinely led, and blessed of God. This was asserted in the face of both the internal and external attacks. Aided by the media presentations, the church moved more or less smoothly through and beyond these challenges. As it continued to grow larger and more successful, its sense of its kingdom self-identity became wed to these media images as a confirmation of its fruitfulness. No member could be active in all the ministries, activities, or events; therefore, one had to rely on the reports to gain a clear picture of how the church was prospering. The kingdom, embodied in this

---

[260] Barron makes a point of noting Paulk's and the church's strong emphasis on orthopraxy over orthodoxy. He states, "Paulk wants Christians to *do* right.... The emphasis is on reaching and changing lives through active ministry...." (1992:121).

congregation, became even more so "built in trust," trust not just in a man but also in his media-enhanced presentation.

A ROSE IS A ROSE, IS A ROSE

Comments, doctrines, and definitions got Paulk into trouble. Denials, reinterpretations, and de-emphasizing these ideas got him out of trouble. After this period, Earl Paulk and the church leadership carefully guarded how and what they spoke. The message which issued from the pulpit was more closely screened, polished, and guarded. Paulk wanted to insure his flock had the correct impression of what he taught--and that what he taught was not too volatile. The articles in the newspaper, along with sermons in basic Christian doctrines, helped re-educate members in exactly what he meant when he had preached about "little gods," "establishing the Kingdom," "revelation," "having dominion," and the distinction between "natural and spiritual Israel." New members classes, sermons, and Sunday school classes all presented the "correct" understanding of Paulk's kingdom doctrines. That Paulk sought to redeem his teachings can be seen in one such sermon comment, "We are not going to determine [when Jesus comes back]. You haven't heard me at all if that's what you think. God's going to determine it....but how can God judge the world unless he has a standard" (10/12/86).

Yet even with these many efforts to redefine the words, their contextual reality and implicit message remained the same. As in the quote above, Paulk was careful not to say that the church would determine when Jesus returns. At the same time, however, his comment after the qualifier "but," essentially implied the identical idea -- God will not judge the world, and Christ will not return, until there is a standard by which to judge. The church must mature and become that standard. Until it grows up, Christ will not return. The implication is the same, but the words are less volatile.

In order to avoid any further conflict over the controversial terms, Paulk excised them from his books and public vocabulary. This is an interesting reversal of his argued use of the "provoker" image as justification of his controversial positions (Barron, 1992:116-117). A comparison of the first and second issues of *Ultimate Kingdom* (1984a/1986a) clearly identifies which words were most troublesome. Yet it is interesting to note that entire sections of this book were not rewritten to remove a disputed concept.

Rather only particular controversial key words or phrases were deleted.[261] Reference to Paulk's revisions concerning "natural Israel" and "establishing the Kingdom" have already been described above. Another specific word, "revelation," was often changed to "insight" (1986a:186), "understanding" (1987:93) or "precept" (1986a:203). When revelation was referred to, the text was altered to portray a status equal to the Bible.[262] Paulk and his publications staff deleted the phrase "manifest sons of God" several times simply because of the connection to the Pentecostal heresy identified by that name (1984a:146,180,183). "Dominion" was judged a sensitive term due to its possible misconstrual as militant activism and its implied relationship with the post-millennial Christian Reconstructionists. It was often replaced by the phrase "witness to God's standard" (1986a:202). The references to "conquering death", reminiscent of a Latter Rain doctrine, were tempered by giving them a symbolic interpretation (1984a:269-70 & 1986a:121,181). Paulk also removed any explicit anti-rapture language and overt derogatory remarks about premillenialists (1984a:177,179, 219,221,231, 235,250,252). Instead of attacking premillenialists, Earl began to emphasize his dissatisfaction with those who held an "escape mentality," who long for the rapture and do nothing about the conditions of the present world. Finally, after several comments at the Society for Pentecostal Studies meetings regarding Paulk's authoritarianism, Earl became sensitive to this issue as well. He often commented to the congregation as he did in one sermon, "I have no desire for anyone to obey me, nor any one of these pastors!" (12/14/87). Yet at other times he spoke of a "God totalitarianism" and called for complete obedience (8/2/87).

I call for total and complete consent of the presbytery... complete commitment...total and complete agreement in the mind of this church as one and if there is some disagreement then I would

---

[261] The implication of removing the words but not the idea from the paragraph or chapter is the same as Paulk's denial of authoritarianism, and his employ of concepts such as "team player" and mutual leadership, and yet leaving undisturbed the actual autocratic social dynamic. This situation is not unique to Paulk alone. Much of the Evangelical world, with its emphasis on the "Word" and maintaining its purity, is particularly susceptible to those who learn (perhaps by trial and error as Paulk did) to use "orthodox" language, but in fact create a dysfunctional and throughly unscriptural social dynamic that is all but overlooked by the doctrinal purity watchdogs. Such was the case with the dynamics surrounding the Shepherding movement, the Prosperity proponents, and the "signs and wonders" extremists. Many persons have been abused as a result of a theological blindness to this form of clergy power.

[262] In the first edition of *Ultimate Kingdom*, Paulk wrote "'Add to,' in this context, means to change the course of the prophecy as it has been given. 'Add to' does not mean that God is not speaking today by fresh or extended revelation" (1984a:261). In the revised version he replaced "fresh or extended revelation" with "unfolding revelation of his word. Fresh insights always complement the total Word of God" (1986:186).

suggest that you probably wouldn't be comfortable here...you are going to be much more comfortable in a little church by the side of the road, that is segregated and had its own little goals and its own little ideas.

These changes marked a rhetorical laundering, a house cleaning of "red flag" terms; however, they did not indicate any significant change in the reality of the church or Kingdom Theology in the minds of the congregation, as evidenced by the later questionnaire responses or interview comments. Rather Paulk was most interested in appearing orthodox to those who read his books. Those who listened to him in the pews already knew that he presented a Christian message. Many of them knew that Chapel Hill Harvester was helping to bring in the kingdom, that Paulk spoke in revelations at least equal to the Scripture, that they were the chosen generation that would not die, and that Paulk's word was to be obeyed explicitly. For his external audience, Paulk had applied some new makeup to the public face of Kingdom Theology. For the congregation, the message remained the same.

The congregation, however, did feel two other significant changes Paulk made in his kingdom rhetoric following this time of criticism. The first change was remarkable given the membership's intense embrace of the kingdom identity throughout this period. In the midst of the controversy over "Kingdom Now" theology, Paulk began to decrease significantly his use of kingdom language in sermons. His use of the term "Kingdom" fell to 17.5 times per sermon from 28.4 and 30.4 times per sermon in the two previous periods (See Appendix B-8). Whether conscious and intentional or not, Paulk's sermons, especially late in this period of church history, began a shift away from the congregation's central image of kingdom. When Kingdom Theology was discussed, its extra-ordinary, revelatory nature was downplayed. The uniqueness of the concept was diminished until it was seen as just another way to talk about being a committed Christian. Don argued along these lines in the newspaper's editorial, "The Kingdom of God is simply the rule of God in the universe. Others have added 'now' to it making it 'Kingdom Now' which apparently has other connotations that do not apply to what we are teaching" (*Thy Kingdom Come* January, 1988, also see Paulk, 1990a:230).

According to interviews and my observations, the kingdom symbol continued to function powerfully among the members. At the same time, Paulk and the leadership distanced themselves from it slightly. The kingdom idea first began to be replaced by an emphasis on the "local church" as a witness to the world, especially in Paulk's *The Local Church Says Hell No!*. Following this image the idea of the

"cathedral concept" began to be portrayed as the new identity of the church, as will be discussed in the next chapter. The term "Kingdom," like the other volatile terms, was being excised, or at least de-emphasized by Paulk, in order to avoid conflict and rejection by the Christian world -- although it was the core image of the congregation. This action on Paulk's part had serious ramifications later.

At the same time, Paulk's preaching became punctuated by a continual increase in his use of "vision" (See Appendix B-27). This "Vision" was tied to the kingdom, but it was also connected to other aspects of the congregation, including its integration, members' intense commitment, being a witness to the world in every area of life, a "City of Hope," and a refuge for the outcast of society. The entire history and multiple facets of the church formed the context for the ever-changing "vision." It became a symbol which was all-encompassing. Whereas it had originally been tied to a specific event, the Phoenix vision, it now incorporated all of the church's history and world view.

This rhetorical change had a profound effect on the congregation. Members expressed feeling unsure about what they believed, what the church leadership taught. Overall there was a general confusion and uncertainty about what "vision", "kingdom" and other key ideas meant. Many interpretations of these key terms became acceptable. The symbol itself became more significant and more powerful than its actual, biblically-derived meaning.

The church's history between late 1984 and early 1988, then, was dominated by two significant forces, the internal and external battles waged against Paulk and the counterbalancing positive, media enhanced, portrayals of the fruits of the ministry. Throughout this time, the success was real, the rewards still tangible, and the benefits of kingdom living continued to outweigh the cost of commitment. Paulk and the church leadership went to great lengths to make sure the multiple adverse pressures upon the kingdom message and its messenger did not have a detrimental effect upon the church membership. Their efforts to overcome these challenges and assure a positive perception of the church, however, unintentionally created several dynamics which would have serious repercussions for the church's future. The congregational culture which was produced included a defensive posture in relation to the outside world, an intensely committed membership, a desire to demonstrate their faith, and a refinement of the kingdom message and the church's "public face." Each of these dynamics, not entirely new to the church culture, were now solidly wedded to the church's central identity, its "vision of the kingdom." Following this period of trials, Paulk's original vision was fully merged and subsumed in his

portrayal of the kingdom. The kingdom vision encompassed the church, the membership, and Earl Paulk himself; it had truly become "Ultimate."

This is the moment in Chapel Hill Harvester's history into which I entered. The day I met Earl Paulk to gain official access to the church I was ushered through the new "mall" to his office of richly paneled walls, framed diplomas, thick carpeting, and massive desk surrounded by walls of books. This reality was in stark contrast to the concrete floors and metal folding chairs of the "airplane hanger" sanctuary that I had worshiped in the previous Sunday. My immediate impressions of the church characterized it as successful, progressive, and straightforward. But I also had a sense that the differences between the "front" and "back stages" might symbolize other less obvious tensions as well. Nevertheless, without the historical context, the church I saw was only a single frame edited from the entire moving picture. My first intention was to accept and describe this reality at face value, until the church's historical reality slapped me in the face and demanded my attention. The social dynamics in place as a result of the trial of this period formed the reality in which I was to spend the next four years. This was the church's world view into which I entered unaware, ill-equipped, and unprepared. The following chapter, then, parallels my primary sojourn at Chapel Hill Harvester.

CHAPTER NINE: THE TRIUMPHANT CHURCH (1988 - 1990)

The charismatic church cannot be content to live on the other side of the tracks any longer. We must move uptown, not in order to be somebody for fleshly glory, but in order to wield the influence of the Holy Spirit in the world.

(networking pastor)

Bishop Earl Paulk is a spiritual father in a dynamic city that exemplifies all the greatness and challenges of modern society. His understanding of the responsibility of the Church in creating solutions for their community problems is commendable. Bishop Paulk teaches that words must translate into action. The relevance of his gospel in the service of Christian people is a tremendous asset to the mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, and to the citizens of this great city.

(Maynard Jackson, former mayor of Atlanta)

Chapel Hill Harvester had survived the onslaught; victory was theirs. It was in this victorious frame of mind that Earl and the congregation turned their attention to the establishment of the kingdom. The past battles had left scars on the church but it also invigorated the vision of what this church would be and do in the world. This period of the church's history, then, is marked by an air of optimism and a fresh sense that this congregation was indeed "chosen of God" for a special task -- to demonstrate the kingdom. This demonstration resulted in outstanding accomplishments in every area of the church's ministry. It was indeed the "model" local church. Its congregation continued to grow and its multiracial membership was committed and energetic. The church had gained recognition locally for its many ministries and involvement in the community. Nationally, Paulk had become a renowned leader. Internationally, the ministry continued to reach further into Latin America through television. Chapel Hill Harvester Church had matured into a position of respectability and influence befitting of its status as one of the ten largest congregations in the country (Schaller, 1990). The church's reputation in these many areas was what initally attracted me to visit. It was into this triumphant milieu that I entered what was to be the zenith of Chapel Hill Harvester's ministry.

My initial impression, which stretched over several years of research, was of this megachurch as successful, powerful, and influential. Its ministries were flourishing, its members excited, and its future

looked bright. For most megachurches, this is the portrait that is often presented and observed. Seldom do observers track these large ministries from their modest beginnings. Nor do these congregations allow researchers to poke and prod for years. Their stories, if told at all, are not often described longitudinally, throughout their development. They are rather portrayed in a snapshot, a successful moment in time. This chapter is just such a depiction of Chapel Hill Harvester Church. Such a characterization is essential in order to understand the depth of idealism and hope for the future in the congregation at the time. It is also necessary in order to fully comprehend the intensity of the devastation caused by later events. This chapter then is a look at this church the way most causal observers would perceive it -- as the triumphant megachurch.

From 1988 to 1990, the atmosphere perceived by most congregational members, likewise, was one of triumphant, victorious enthusiasm, buoyed by continual praise and commendation. They continued to grow and were now engaged in building the largest church in the city -- The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. The congregation's memories of critique melted away with the barrage of complementary press and publications. The Atlanta newspaper printed several glowing articles during this time, as did the influential "Charisma" magazine. Framed copies of these articles and other awards decorated one large wall of the mall entrance into the sanctuary. A casual visitor could not help but notice the themes of power and victory in the songs, prayers, literature, and sermons. During this period, Paulk confidently asserted, "This is God's land, God's place..." (8/28/88). His references to "victory," "success," and "prosperity" in sermons were at their highest level ever with over eight references per sermon (See Appendix B-26). As the cathedral's steel frame towered above the parking lot, the church newspaper could proudly proclaim, "You are part of the most exciting endeavor on the face of the earth...the building of the Kingdom of God.... This house...shall become a focal point for the Kingdom of God" (November, 1988).

In case any visitor or member was unaware of these kingdom building activities elaborate self-promotional efforts were undertaken by the leadership. Each of Paulk's books written during this time highlighted the ministries in which Chapel Hill Harvester was engaged.[263] The newspaper was filled with

---

[263] This self-promotional aspect is especially apparent in Paulk's book *The Church: Trampled or Triumphant?* (1990a). See the sixteen pages of photographs inserted between pages 126 and 127 highlighting the church's various ministries.

documentation of the mission activities of the congregation -- for the congregation. A "year in review" video describing the church's accomplishments was shown the New Years Eve worship service in December 1989, and every year following through 1992. This was necessary because, as Paulk informed his staff, "you have to realize how uninformed our people are on what we do."

The rest of the world was also kept informed of the activities of the church. The construction of the 7,700 seat Cathedral of the Holy Spirit drew both local and national attention. Televised services often highlighted a particular ministry or the progress on the Cathedral. Tapes and videos of workshops on church organization and worship and arts were actively distributed. Pastors Conferences "showcased" the church's "state of the art" ministries and recent achievements. The church had become a resource for countless other congregations in the areas of youth ministry, community ministry, and Christian arts and drama.[264] City and state political leaders, members of the business community, and officials of the Atlanta Olympic Organizing Committee were invited to activities at the church. The total response to these public relations efforts was impressive. Affiliated networking pastors, religious leaders, business persons, and governmental officials of all levels paraded through the congregation, praising the church's efforts and encouraging members to do more. As one networking pastor exclaimed, "You are like Solomon's temple, the kings and queens come to see what is going on here."

A MEGACHURCH CONGREGATION

The most obvious thing "going on here" was the weekly worship service. Members and visitors packed the Sunday morning worship services, at 9 o'clock and 11 o'clock , twice filling the 3000 seat K Center auditorium. Committed worshipers again populated the sanctuary Sunday evening, Tuesday morning, and Wednesday evening. Traffic on the highways around the church often slowed and jammed,

---

[264] Stephen Warner provided one piece of evidence of this extensive influence. "Larry and Sue Redford" of the Mendocino California "Antioch Ranch," referred to in his book *New Wine in Old Wineskins* (Warner, 1988), had attended a 1991 music and arts conference at Chapel Hill Harvester church. About this conference Sue wrote in their newsletter, "We saw musicals, drama, dance, choirs, and videos demonstrating how they have been used in worship and evangelism. All that these people learn they teach to the young, preparing the next generation. It was delightful to roam the book and tape stores, and to touch the common heart of these people who have been hearing about Kingdom a lot longer that we have. They have so many avenues that reach into the inner city, everything from dance to dental care. I loved the bold honesty of Earl Paulk and Iverna Tompkins, and it was an encouragement to see so many people with a common vision for the arts."

even under the careful direction of hired police officers. A low frequency AM radio broadcast greeted arriving members with the orchestral strains of the extended prelude. Amid the constant construction of the cathedral and other projects, black and white members streamed into the church's open doors. Crowds of well-dressed teens gathered under the shade of young trees in the carefully landscaped grounds. It was obvious to anyone that something out of the ordinary was taking place here. This was not your normal church. As one person summarized his impressions,

Everything about this church is MEGA....the worship, the fact that blacks and whites are here together and they haven't been coerced or bused here, the theological unity.... This is one of the most exciting things that is happening on the face of this earth for God's kingdom.

Aside from the number of people, a striking feature of the church, as the above quote indicted, was the racial mix of those flocking to the service. An interracial gathering was an unexpected occurrence in South DeKalb County, in Atlanta, Georgia on a Sunday morning. On close inspection, however, the two morning services showed distinctively different racial patterns. These differences perhaps contributed to, or were created by, each of these services having their own unique atmosphere, demographic makeup, and worship style. During this period, the earlier service was approximately 50 percent African American and 50 percent white; while the later service's racial composition was closer to 75 percent black, 25 percent white.

The earlier service, possibly due to time constraints, proceeded more predictably, with songs or praise times often seeming to end abruptly.   The "order of worship" clearly moved this service along its unalterable timetable. Worship in this service was less emotional, more formal, stiff, and lacked any significant freedom of expression or spontaneity.   The service followed the more refined, professionalized, and domesticated pattern which had developed after the ecstasy Alpha and Tent days. Yet the feel of the service suggested that members were highly involved in spiritual expression taking place. They brought their Bibles and notebooks, intensely followed the sermon, and got caught up in prayer, praise and singing. Nevertheless, the spiritual expressivism often seemed to be confined.

The earlier service tended to draw families and older adults. Most members were formally attired, often with the men in suits and ties and the women in dresses. During the early morning time, the nursery and children's classrooms always burst at the seams. This gathering also appeared to attract the

more affluent white members, and many of the those, such as church staff, elders, and the spouses of pastors, for whom seats of honor were reserved up front. Almost always, this service ended exactly on time. Members filed orderly out of the sanctuary, picked up their children, and left, often without interacting with any other member, just as they had entered.

Those members who replaced this earlier congregation were of a distinctively different mind set. Perhaps this difference was due to it being later in the morning, or that these folks had congregated in large groups waiting for the previous service to end. Perhaps race was a factor, or even that this group was distinctively lower middle class, as well as being predominately younger singles and couples. These members arrived in the sanctuary ready for a "worship experience." They were talkative, more sociable, and quite noisy. Conversations continued into the sanctuary and through the musical prelude. This group exhibited a diversity of clothing styles from formal and quite fashionable to casual and informal. Once worship began in earnest, the order of worship conformed to fit the mood of this crowd, and the Holy Spirit's leading. Prayers, singing, and praise times were all more lively and extensive in this later service. Although the same hymns or choruses were often sung in both services, inevitably those of the later gathering became more expressive, sung in a distinctively "black church" style. This service always showed more signs of the "Spirit's presence" including raised hands, swaying bodies, singing in tongues, and, occasionally, altar calls for healing and laying on of hands.

This service never ended on time, if there even was a prescribed ending time. Services would often last till 1:30 or 2:00 in the afternoon. However, for this half of the congregation "church" continued beyond the limits of the service. Hundreds of members milled around the mall. A buffet lunch was served in the atrium area and many members used this opportunity to fellowship and dine with friends, deacons, or first timers. This casual lunch hour was quite reminiscent of the socials and Sunday lunches described in studies of African American churches (Williams, 1974; Franklin, 1994).

The official components of worship were almost always identical in the two services. A period of prayer and discussion of church concerns would be led by Kirby Clements, the Black pastor with the longest tenure. His passionate, emotional prayers often naturally flowed into long stretches of congregational praise and singing.[265] Many members spoke of this prayer and praise time as that part of

---

[265] These prayers were often works of verbal art, awe-inspiring and personal appeals to Jesus as a friend and comforter. They exhibited all the characteristics of "intimate prayer" of the black church tradition

the service where they most often "felt the spirit." These highly charged spiritual portions of the service were usually followed by an equally impassioned appeal for funds, made by Earl Paulk himself.[266] On the other hand, church announcements delivered by either Don Paulk or one of the many associate ministers were generally stiff, uninteresting, and formed a transition from collecting the offering into special musical performances.

As throughout the church's history, Clariece Paulk had tight reins on the worship format. She interjected numerous displays of arts and drama into the service.[267] Often liturgical dancers, who were mostly young white women clothed in flowing gowns with ruffled pettie pants underneath,[268] expressively interpreted a song being sung by the six to eight member Kingdom Singers. During praise numbers the tambourine choir would dance up and down the aisle "praising God with timbrels." Occasionally, a skit or pantomime would be performed in an attempt to portray a biblical truth. Music, whether sung by the

---

(Franklin, 1994).

[266] Paulk continually commented that he disliked asking for money. He maintained from early in his ministry that if the congregation was open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the money would come. As the financial pressures of the Cathedral's construction mounted, however, Paulk increasingly petitioned the congregation for money. His appeals not only became more frequent, with the collection of the "tithe" early in the service and a gathering of one's "offerings" to God taking place at the end of the sermon, but also more passionate and later even bordering on desperate. The graph of Paulk's references to giving money in Appendix B vividly show this trend.

[267] Clariece, in her efforts to diversify the liturgical and musical styles of the congregation, provided an important function for those members advancing up the socio-economic ladder. Through this worship format and the church's many musical programs, members were introduced to new artistic forms and aesthetic values congruent with their higher economic status. For some, the worship service was the first time they heard and appreciated classical music. Others had their first taste of Jazz, Swing, or Big Band music at the church sponsored concerts. Members were treated to plays, musicals, and even operas, all written and preformed by church artists. Fashion shows and art exhibitions were also held in the mall atrium. Each of these events contributed to the enculturation of members into middle class tastes in music, aesthetics, and drama. The congregation became, as Steven Tipton suggested to me in a conversation, a "school for middle class values and bourgeois tastes." Of those I interviewed, only a third had ever experienced these diverse art forms, and almost no one had encountered them in a church. Most reported that they never would have intentionally attended a secular play , musical, or opera. Sitting in church, they had no choice. They were exposed to these diverse styles in the context of a spiritual worship service. After enough exposure , several members confided that they had grown to enjoy "that music without words that Clariece always plays."

[268] These under garments were a compromise to the persons in the congregation who felt that the dancers might unintentionally distract from worship if their costumes were too revealing. The ruffled petty pants added a distinctively "old south" flavor to the attempted "high culture" artistry of the dancers. This was one of the many occasions where the lack of cultural refinement of the upwardly mobile Charismatics and Pentecostals intruded upon their efforts to attain upper class values.

choir, the congregation, or the various singing groups, accounted for at least a third of the service.[269] With no songbooks or lyrics projected overhead, first timers were often befuddled by the music, but the songs were learned quickly given the considerable repetition of their simple words and melodies. As the percentage of African Americans continued to increase, so too did the number of songs with a contemporary black gospel sound. Clariece, however, continued in both services to mix musical styles. Nearly every service contained a traditional hymn, an orchestrated symphonic piece of classical music, and songs by popular artists such as Reba Rambo and Donnie McGuire, along with the more Black gospel music. Much of this music, of whatever style, was written by church members and reflected kingdom themes and Paulk's teachings. Even the more formal musical numbers performed on the stage often spontaneously evoked congregational participation as members lapsed into singing along softly or were carried away in praise by the music. These performances, especially for those in the later service, were not just spectator events.

Paulk's sermons remained characteristic of earlier times in the church's history. They were delivered forcefully as he casually walked back and forth across the worship stage, or even wandered down the steps to the level of the congregation. He almost never referred to his notes or the Bible which rested upon the clear plexiglass lectern. He often gestured to the associate pastors seated to his left or the core leadership to his right. Occasionally he would comment about the large multiracial choir or orchestra members behind him. Many times he would call out for responses from the congregation, with phrases such as "say Amen" or "say it with me, 'Our God is Great!'." Once in a while he would even address the television cameras with an appeal to those "of our congregation worshiping at home," although this was very seldom done.

Paulk powerfully exhorted members to live out their Christian commitment in service both to the church and to others during every moment of their lives. His sermons were often based on the scripture passages read that morning. Verse by verse, he would explain how members were to apply these truths to their everyday lives. He communicated a clear message that being a Kingdom Christian was, in the words of one member, "a lifestyle. It's the way you live. It is the attitude you have at work, at home, everywhere."

---

[269] This heavy reliance on music in worship is a common characteristic in many megachurches (Miller & Kennedy, 1991; Brasher, 1991; Balmer, 1989)

Practical advice on finding purpose in life and improving oneself stood out as obvious features of Paulk's sermons during this time.[270] He often encouraged members to find their God-given identity, as he said in one sermon, "God gives to us our own identity, not just a name, but our personhood.... In this complicated world we have lost our identity, lost our plan given by God (8/27/89). He emphasized this idea even more strongly later in the same sermon, "That's what Christianity is about -- to bring you a purpose, self-worth, and responsibility" (8/27/89). Once a person realized his or her purpose, Paulk preached they were to excel in it. After all, he said, "You are on a divine mission of God... Success in the secular world is determined by your wealth and achievements, but Biblical success is fulfilling God's will for you" (2/7/88). Vocational improvement was paramount for kingdom living, as Paulk preached, "Demonstrate the Kingdom in the marketplace. Employer, do it with compassion. Employee, do it the best you can." In conjunction with a series of sermons in 1990 on self-improvement called "Push for Greatness," the leadership printed bumper stickers and other motivational paraphernalia. In these sermons, Paulk implored the congregation to push for greatness at their work, "If you are a typist, you can become a great typist! (11/18/90). Many members specifically commented on how powerful this was for them to hear, as did one young white woman,

It wasn't until I came here that I understood the call on my life.... Had it not been for Chapel Hill Harvester saying God has a purpose for you, then I'd still be stuck.... I would not have been able to let go and find out what God called me to do.

---

[270] During the previous period these practical sermons focused more on finding a purpose, an identity. During this time more emphasis was placed on developing vocational goals, career strategies, and even motivation for advancement. Paulk's number of references to these themes finding a purpose and then developing it averaged nearly ten times per sermon from 1985 to 1990 (See Appendix B-30). Perhaps, part of this frequency was due to him wanting to assist the maturing Alpha members as they established their careers. He may also have perceived, somewhat incorrectly according to the survey data, that the increase of African American members had brought more unemployed or under employed persons into congregation. Whatever the reason for his actions, the practicality of his message was much appreciated and well-received by many members. His message may have encouraged the congregation to better themselves no matter what their present position. Over a third of the 1991 survey respondents reported having begun educational program since coming to the church and nearly fifty percent said they had gotten a better job since becoming a church member. Likewise, nearly 10 percent of respondents commented in open-ended questions that the church had helped them to find their purpose and inspired them to be and do their best. Obviously these figures do not demonstrate any causal relationship, however, they do indicate that the congregation was upwardly mobile. Paulk's sermons meshed well with the general outlook of someone who desired to advance socio-economically. The perception of members, therefore, was that he spoke to them, in a practical way, addressing their needs, desires, and dreams.

An African American man who had avoided coming to the church because he thought it was "strange" and he "didn't want to sit under a white man" related that "the first time I heard [Paulk] I was awestruck and overwhelmed. He said so much in that first service that I could take outside of the church and use in my everyday life. I said this man knows God." One white female nurse, who had been an Alpha youth, suggested that Paulk's injunction to life a kingdom lifestyle changed how she related to the "world," not just in her caring attitude but also in her vocational goals and self-presentation.[271]

Being around the church has taught me how [to interview successfully and to dress well]. When you asked about being a nurse [from a kingdom perspective], its made me different personally, but also in my profession. Once we grew out of [Alpha]... we said, 'Okay, let's take a look at some other areas in our lives. All of a sudden I did care about being excellent in my job, I longed to go to continuing education, I longed to be up on the latest techniques. Professionally, yes, but straight to the core, because we do need to excel in what we do. You're representing the character of God. Professionally you have an obligation to be on top of this for your patients, but ever far-reaching spiritually, you have an obligation to God. You have got to be the best you can be.

Another middle aged white contractor reflected on the changes he made while under Paulk's teaching, again personally but also vocationally.

Here is a man teaching such practical things.... It just changed my life. I build houses and I left a big company last year to build and sell my own homes. In my everyday life...it changed just how far I push somebody before I sell a house, whether I give earnest money back.... I work with construction guys also who are as rough as they come and I think all the time that Jesus was a carpenter and he must've been around these guys. It radically altered my way of thinking about them and about my work. After all, you are not working for people, you are working for Jesus.

---

[271] The church, and specifically Paulk's message, schooled these up and coming middle class employees, employers, and entrepreneurs not just about what music or artistic forms to appreciate but also how to conform their vocational moods and motives to industry expectations. Members were taught from the pulpit and in interaction with other successful congregational business persons a proper presentation of self. They were also educated in the attitudes and virtues which supported this self-image. As one female member succinctly put it, "They are my model for life!"

Members did not just listen to these practical parts of the sermon, whatever Paulk said garnered their rapt attention. Many took notes, wrote out his comments verbatim, and studied the scriptural references he provided. For a great number of members, his sermons were the reason they were at the church. Nearly a quarter of those responding to the 1991 survey noted that what first attracted them and continued to keep them at the church was Paulk's preaching. Listening to him was, in the words of an older African American member, "like listening to prophets of old, he speaks with such conviction." Another young white woman related, "I had never heard any preacher make such a strong declaration - that he was speaking for God - with such confidence. I needed to test it...and I could not refute what I was seeing and hearing.... Look at the fruit; He must be speaking for God." This was a commonly heard equation -- the church's fruit confirming the truthfulness of Paulk's message. As a middle aged white man suggested, "When the Bishop says he is speaking for God, I don't have any problem with that...particularly because he has the fruit to back it up."

In general, during this time the congregation's perception of Paulk was "larger than life." In the minds of those interviewed he was almost idolized as a "celebrity" and seemed "godlike." An older white man related to me the awe of coming into contact with Bishop Paulk, "He put his hand on my shoulder, I was so touched that was the first time I was ever in the same room with him...." One African American man reflected, "When I first heard Bishop Paulk -- we all have our ideas of what God is like -- well when I heard him, he was a visible demonstration to me as to what I thought God would be like. He was a practical man, not so ethereal up in the sky...he demonstrated to me what I think the kingdom of God, what God, was like." Another young Hispanic woman spoke of framing the cover letter from Paulk which introduced my research to the randomly chosen interviewees. In another incident, when one of the volunteer workers affixing labels to the church newspaper came across Earl Paulk's address, this middle aged white homemaker said she felt as if she "had won the lottery." A second volunteer suggested, "Maybe I should put it [the label] on my hip and let it cure my arthritis."

According to one pastor, the leadership intentionally tried to downplay the membership's adoration of Earl throughout this period. Paulk even contributed to this effort by stating in a sermon, "I am very unimportant, I am but a mouthpiece... I am just a man, a tool of God...each of you could be up here instead of me" (9/13/89). These efforts were contradicted, however, whenever he spoke of his prophetic

role. "God called me as a prophet...and one prophet of God can change the whole world (10/9/88). This general congregational perception of Paulk worked in his favor, however, in the church's attempt to "change the whole world," or as was said elsewhere "demonstrate the kingdom."

THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE VISION

A second aspect of the congregation's life immediately evident to any observer was its amazing array of ministries and mission activities. As stated previously, Paulk shifted from communicating the kingdom message to demonstrating it after being critically attacked. Paulk reflected on this shift in his book, *The Local Church Says Hell, No!* (1991:121-22).

I have been called a heretic, a false prophet and a cult teacher because of (the Kingdom) message.... For several years, all my energy in ministry was directed toward communicating that message.... Now God has placed me in a posture of Kingdom demonstration that is the focus of my ministry today.

This impetus to demonstrate the Kingdom had been vibrant among congregational members since early in the church's history. It had not, however, been Paulk's primary emphasis. Much of this mission had taken place at the individual level and interpersonally from one member to another in need. These efforts often came as a result of the small quasi-independent ministries contained under the church's organizational umbrella. During this time period, however, Paulk brought together all the ministerial efforts of the congregation as an "official" demonstration of this kingdom church. These efforts were incorporated into Paulk's ever-expanding "vision" for the church.[272] In an interpretative twist, the "vision" became the embodiment, as well as the origin, of the congregation's diverse expressions of ministry. The "vision" was described as the wellspring from which these missions erupted, rather than as the rainbarrel into which they were collected. The "vision" that Paulk had been given of and for this church, in its plainest conception, was to be a witness for God, not specifically through the salvation message, but by showing what this church could accomplish locally in the immediate community,

---

[272] Paulk's references to the "vision" of the church climbed steadily throughout this period, until they reached an average of 13 times per sermon in the year 1990 (See Appendix B-27).

governmentally at all levels, as well as nationally and globally in the religious world.[273] As he said during an interview in the *Atlanta Tribune* (June 1988:27),

We are a ministry that is projected as a model local church, which brings the Gospel to bear upon the social issues and the secular world 'round about us in such a way that it becomes prophetic in society. We are going to make a difference in the world.

Paulk's preaching coincided with a general cultural perception of the "Church" and all of organized religion as having no relevance in modern life. He echoed this opinion that "traditional churches" had lost their power to influence the world. Paulk intentionally argued that this was because these churches had lost their spiritual roots and independent prophetic voice (1990a, 1991). As the church newspaper reported, "In our world today...often the church is pictured as a useless appendage on our society. But the fact is, it serves a valid function in a secular world" (*Thy Kingdom Come* February, 1988). He wanted to prove that one "local church," when prophetically empowered by the Holy Spirit, could make a difference in the world. As he said during one television broadcast on TBN (4/29/91),

The world stands looking one more time and says, 'Is the church for real?' The time is come that we need to talk about the local church. The local church is that foundation that digs in and stays.... We have got to show that the church operates by different principles that the world. Let me give you a prophecy, by the Twenty-first century the world will be coming to the church to find solutions, even how to govern people.

---

[273] As was seen throughout the church's history, Paulk often incorporated a new context-driven ministerial shift into his vision of the church, such as a move from a church of refuge for only outcast Christians, to include unwanted Charismatics, and unwanted teenagers, and unwanted African Americans. Now with his own intentional embrace of demonstrating the Kingdom, perhaps Paulk realized this was the way to unify into his kingdom theological perspective both the foundational story of the Phoenix vision and the many active ministries begun by the congregation. "Vision," as it came to be used during this period, represented exactly that reality. In essence, it implied that Paulk's vision had been a supernatural glimpse of what the church was to become and he had over the years progressively unveiled this revelation to the congregation in order for them to embody it. In its broadest understanding, the "vision" referred to everything at the church. In its simplest formula, it meant actively living out one's Christian convictions -- personally and congregationally. By consolidating the entire ministry into his vision Paulk gave the congregation an "official" place, and an active role, in what was previously his alone. It was no longer just his vision that they followed, but it was also their vision that they were actively demonstrating. This was both an empowering and perilous move by Earl Paulk, as will be seen in the following chapter.

At the same time, however, the "world" had begun to accept and embrace a "polished and refined" Paulk and Chapel Hill Harvester Church. This established a platform of recognition from which Paulk could operate, without which he would have remained an odd prophet "crying in the wilderness." His willingness to act in and with the "world" can be seen clearly in his sermons from this period. Reference to the "world" in a negative context were the lowest since before the Alpha period (6.5 per sermon, see Appendix B-19). Likewise, his comments about Satan became almost nonexistent after the last of the attacks in early 1988. References to dualism (5 per sermon, see Appendix B-17) and a condemnation of other religious expressions (2.7 per sermon, see Appendix B-20) were at their lowest point since the church had experienced its growth. Paulk would now welcome a "world" that had made a place for him.

A Local Demonstration

Chapel Hill Harvester Church had always thought of itself as a local church rather than a television or evangelistic, "sending" ministry; however, it was a new rhetorical emphasis for the leadership to speak of their ministries as "demonstrating what a Local Church could accomplish." Even more than before, the church's attention was directed at effecting change in the immediate community. The goal was to provide stability and leadership to an area the presbytery perceived as still suffering from racial transition, a deteriorating economic base, and a poor self-image as a community.

The contextual reality of the community was actually somewhat different. This perception of deterioration had been accurate for much of the decade of the eighties. By 1988, however, a middle class stability was settling over the area. The 1990 census showed that the immediate area around the church had become racially dominated by a diversity of lower to upper middle class African Americans determined to make this part of South DeKalb a black suburban Mecca.[274]

---

[274] The 1990 census data for the zipcode in which the church resides showed the racial makeup of residents to be 88% black, 11% white, and 1% other. Fifty-two percent of residents were female (52.3%). The church’s neighbors had a median age of 30.6 years with 69% over 18 years. Eighty percent of households were families with 68% of those being headed by married couples and 26% by females, with an average family of 3.1 persons. The median household income was $37, 552. The median home price was $85,000. One article in the Atlanta Journal & Constitution showed home prices having increased in the general area by an average of 8 percent from 1989 to 1991 (November 24, 1991). By 1990 several high priced subdivisions were being built with homes priced from 120 to 150 thousand dollars, including one complex near the church where Earl and Don Paulk resided (Smith, 1993). Within

a few miles of the church, Sandstone Shores, a very exclusive residential community of some of the Atlanta's wealthiest African Americans, had been developed. Bank presidents, successful entrepreneurs, and media celebrities populated these homes costing over a half million dollars. These homes, located in the northern part of the city would have been worth well over two million dollars (Smith, 1996). By 1996, South DeKalb contained the "second most affluent African-American community in the nation" (Smith, 1996).

This shift to a dominant African American middle class paralleled what was taking place in the congregation as well.[275] An ever increasing percentage of the congregation was African American, until by 1990 they totaled nearly 75 percent . Two-thirds of those who joined during this time, and completed the 1991 survey, were black, a quarter were white, and about seven percent were of other races. Fifty percent of the white new members, however, came in 1988. By 1990 no more than one in ten new members were white. The African Americans who became members at this time were solidly middle class and well educated (See Table 5 for a summary of the demographics of those who came during this time and responded to the 1991 survey). As was previously reported, some members found this interracial congregation quite appealing. One member reported during this time,

I always remember what the Bishop says, 'that if you can't live with different kinds of people here on earth, then there is no place for you in heaven.' It is so wonderful... seeing all these different kinds of people together praising God. I feel it is a more true picture of what the gospel is really saying.

Whether the church functioned with an accurate portrayal of its community or not, it saw itself through Paulk's eyes as the protector, defender, and stabilizer of the area.[276] By the end of 1987 the church claimed to have gotten one of the main thoroughfares in that part of the county

TABLE 5

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1988 and 1990			
Characteristics	**White**	**African**	**Total**

[275] This is not to say that the two phenomena were related. That relationship cannot be established. In fact, the 1991 survey data indicates that black respondents coming from 1988 to 1991 did not live in the immediate vicinity of the church, and in fact drove a further distance to attend than did the whites joining during that same period.

[276] For a portrayal of the church's activities in the community see Paulk's *Spiritual Megatrends* 1988a:100-102.

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1988 and 1990			
		American	
Total Number	40	90	140
Mean Age in 1991	36.2	37.4	37.0
Mean Age at joining	33.0	34.5	34.0
Gender: Female	52.5	77.8	68.6
Marital Status:			
Married	55.0	46.7	49.6
Divorced	10.0	18.9	16.1
Never Married	22.5	28.9	26.3
Education:College degree or more	68.4	48.9	54.9
Income: +$30,000	60.5	48.9	54.5

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1988 and 1990			
Occupation:			
Clerical	24.2	18.2	15.3
Service	21.2	15.9	17.5
Managerial	9.1	5.7	10.2
Professional	9.1	13.6	10.9
Self-Employed	3.0	15.9	16.8
Southern Birthplace	62.5	56.7	56.4
Community of Birth			
Rural/town/city	50.0	38.2	42.0
Urban/suburban	50.0	61.8	58.0
Mean Childhood Moves	3.0	2.3	2.5

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1988 and 1990			
Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Hours at Church/ Week:			
0-3 hours	12.5	19.8	19.4
4-6 hours	32.5	44.2	39.6
7-10 hours	32.5	24.4	26.1
11 or more	22.5	11.6	14.9
New Christian	17.5	25.6	23.6
Mean # CHHC Friends	2.7	2.4	2.4
Giving: 10 % or More	80.0	73.9	76.5
Previous Denomination:			
	27.5	10.0	14.3

Demographics For Members Joining Between 1988 and 1990			
Liberal/Moderate			
Conservative	30.0	50.0	42.9
Pentecostal	7.5	8.9	10.0
Catholic	5.0	4.4	5.7
Charismatic/Nondenom	25.0	12.2	15.7
Other	0.0	5.6	4.3
None	5.0	8.9	7.1
Live in Church Zipcode	30.0	10.2	15.9
Mean Paulk Books Read	3.6	2.0	2.6

widened to a four lane divided "parkway" complete with mass transit service. During this current period, the church helped maintain a nearby strip mall with its patronage. Several members rented space there for their shops and small businesses. Members also successfully pressured several local service stations to stop selling pornography. When rumors circulated throughout the area that major department stores, including J.C.Penney and Rich's, were going to leave the area's only major shopping center, South Dekalb Mall, Paulk and the church's membership helped convince the stores to stay.[277]

Paulk encouraged his membership to consider South DeKalb as the focal point of Atlanta, suggesting that they relocate closer to the church, spend their money in area stores, and support local restaurants and entertainment clubs. "Do not make Downtown the center, make this church the center.... What God is about to do here is an awesome thing," he informed them (9/4/88). His unspoken goal probably included maintaining a significant white presence, thereby hoping to attract greater county resources, business developments, and social support services into what he hoped would become a unique middle class, integrated community. The church undertook a community-wide survey in its "Action Van" to discover the pressing issues and concerns of its neighbors. As a further effort, the church sponsored town hall meetings with local politicians, and attempted to get their members elected to local posts. Paulk often praised the congregation for the changes they had effected in the area, saying, "A miracle is taking place in South DeKalb and people don't even know it" (9/18/88).

It is questionable what influence the church had on its immediate community. Given that the demographics of the neighborhood were shifting toward a stabilized, affluent, middle class population, much of what the church claimed to have accomplished no doubt would have happened naturally. Nevertheless, the perception within the church, and to some extent in the community, was that the church had made a difference.[278] One of the many comments heard in this regard came from a local doctor with

---

[277] The church's various choral groups were regularly featured at Mall events. In recognition of Paulk's support of the Mall and his social standing in the area, the cover of South DeKalb’s 1990 Christmas advertisement featured "South DeKalb community's own Bishop Earl Paulk" with his wife and two grandchildren in a festive holiday pose.

[278] In the 1991 survey 93.4 percent of respondents agreed that the church had people who could get things done in the city. Information from interviews with local business leaders, county officials, and the impression given by local county publications featuring Paulk's "Ask the Bishop" advice columns or reports of church activities confirmed that many persons outside the church also perceived both Paulk and the church as valuable to the community (Lee & Worthy, 1989; Maxwell, 1992; Dwiggins, 1995).

minimal connection to the church. He claimed, "This church was the stabilizing force in the community. This part of the county is in better shape than it ever was. I'm glad my business is here." The construction of their massive Cathedral on the property was a clear symbolic representation of the church's place in and impact upon this community. All these accomplishments, then, added to the church's laurels and its kingdom demonstration in the local area.

Church members also carried their kingdom Christian demonstration beyond the congregation's immediate area by their joint actions in covenant communities. Prior to 1988, the covenant community cell-groups were active in the congregation in an informal, unstructured manner, focused primarily around fellowship. That year, however, the church's leadership reconfigured the system of accountability for pastors, deacons, covenant community leaders, and caregivers.[279] The entire church membership was assigned to one of twelve "pastoral groups." Each group, encompassing the area of thirty degrees of a circle radiating out in pie shaped wedges from the church as center point, was led by an associate pastor. Each pastoral group was further subdivided by geographic and political boundaries into smaller fellowship, or covenant communities, led by deacons, covenant community leaders, and caregivers. At its high point, between 1989 and 1990, over 120 groups operated with approximately 1500 to 2000 adults involved. These groups were either demographically very diverse or homogeneous depending on the local area represented.

The covenant communities provided considerable interpersonal support and mutual ministry necessary in a very large church. These groups offered an opportunity, especially for women, for involvement in nonadministrative levels of leadership in the church. This was crucial at a time when the church organization was professionally staffed. Covenant community members gathered once a month to share their troubles and joys, to pray and study the Bible, and to embrace while fellowshipping over coffee and snacks. In addition to this, many of the larger "pastoral groups" held monthly special activities for the smaller clusters to come together and interact with each other.

As an aside, in addition to the covenant community support of the membership, the church maintained countless social, educational, therapeutic, fellowship, recreational, and service related groups

[279]This structure was adopted from Reverend Cho's church in Korea. Two of the church's pastors visited Cho in early 1988 to learn first-hand how he managed his several thousand cell-groups. See Hadaway, DuBose,and Wright (1987) for a description of this system.

for the benefit of its own congregation. These groups were often open to the public as additional ministry, and perhaps as an avenue into the congregation. Many of these internal ministries, as well as the church's formal missions, such as Overcomers, The House of New Life, the ministry to homosexuals, and the medical ministry, have been discussed elsewhere and will be summarized in the final chapter. Interestingly, these more inward-focused ministries were seldom given priority when the "demonstration of the kingdom" was discussed.

Beyond this interpersonal support, a majority of these covenant communities undertook local social action and community service projects. The covenant community in which I participated was representative of the activities of many other ones. Members regularly volunteered to clean and repair homes of elderly persons. They policed trash from local parks. They even organized a extensive ministry to a local nursing home and public housing retirement center. Covenant community members would visit residents, host birthday parties and Bible studies, take residents grocery shopping each month, and spend hours in conversation. The combined ministerial efforts of this and the other covenant communities perhaps had a greater cumulative effect on the city than did the church officially. A staggering amount of community service took place informally through these groups, although it went virtually unrecognized by the public or by the church's leadership.

This opportunity for community service, as well as involvement in official church ministries was mentioned by many members as very important to them.[280] One member stated during a covenant community meeting, "After I had been here a while, I realized that I was mature enough in the Lord to see not what I could get out of church, but what I could contribute to it." Another commented, "Bishop Paulk has a way of making people want to be involved in ministry. A third added, "Everybody is not a teacher, not an evangelist, but all of us are ministers in our own way." In an interview one middle aged white male explained his involvement in service, "At the church I was given a place to practice my calling, to get my feet wet." Another young black male described his participation in the church's food and clothing ministry,

The promise of God to a Christian isn't to make your life easier, it is to make your life meaningful. Being involved in these ministries gives your life meaning and purpose. You have to plug in and minister

---

[280] Nearly 75 percent of the respondents in the 1991 survey reported being involved in the ministries of the church at least once a month.

to others.

One of the church's official missions within the city, and certainly the best publicized of its ministerial efforts, began in March 1989 to one of Atlanta's most crime infested housing projects, Bankhead Heights. This community received considerable publicity when its level of violence escalated to the point where public utility repair persons and mail carriers refused to enter the area (Lee & Worthy, 1989). The church seized the opportunity to show what a difference it could make. After receiving official approval and the use of a housing unit in the complex, Paulk committed 250 members to the task of "demonstrating quality living" to the residents. The church organized and implemented health fairs, talent shows, musical performances, worship services, nutrition classes, Boy and Girl scout troops, and classes on sewing, makeup application, and cooking, as well as literacy and tutoring services. For over a year this effort was a top priority of many volunteers. One of those volunteers reflected on his reasons for being there, "This ministry here has forced me to look at reality. You are here for a purpose. God has given you something to do -- it's his plan for your life, so what are you going to do with it right now?" The congregation's work in this housing complex, in conjunction with increased efforts by the police and the Atlanta Housing Authority, had the effect of reducing crime dramatically in that housing project. The church received several commendations for its work including being named a "point of light" by President George Bush. Paulk often discussed on television the accolades the church received from this project (4/29/91).

I was with President Bush a few years ago and he said now I want examples of how the private sector can be involved in public housing. So we accepted it and God has helped us.... HUD is using that all over the country as being the prototype. Jack Kemp's office says this is the way it should be done. So we are reaching people in the inner city. God spoke into my heart --- as the church goes, so shall the cities.

A Demonstration to Government

Another ministry active during this period was described as having a "proper influence over government." The church's efforts in this regard primarily included reminding politicians of their large

voting bloc while cultivating friendships with particular officials in power, and informing members of political issues while encouraging them to vote. By 1988 Earl Paulk and the church were often courted by politicians, governmental officials, and anyone dependent upon the support of a voting public. Paulk was well aware of the perceived power he had as the senior minister of such a large voting constituency. He wrote, "The Church needs to have political influence without apology....these candidates (Jessie Jackson and Pat Robertson both of whom attended a service during the 1988 primaries) considered the church an important constituency" (1990a:122). In sermons and books, he bragged about his influence with politicians, saying, "I could get [a city official] elected....I called one person in Apping county and said get [a county official] elected and he won the county" (9/20/90) and "I received a note recently from a state senator who thanked me and my congregation for making the difference in passing a school bond referendum in our county" (1990a:72). On the other hand, when he wanted a county official to bend a rule in his favor, he warned, "I'd hate to go tell my 10,000 members and my TV audience that we have a police state in DeKalb County" (10/13/91).

Often he made reference in sermons to his association with governmental officials at all levels, including the Governor, the mayor of Atlanta, state senators, and county officials. His picture taken while in a meeting with former President George Bush was prominently displayed in the mall area and published in the newspaper and books. Several county commissioners frequented the church, one of which commented during a staff meeting, "Nothing is impossible after I've been here to worship." He often spoke of delivering prayers at the opening of the state legislative sessions. Paulk would welcome any politician to the worship service, announce their visit, and often allow them a few minutes to address the congregation. One trusted associate of the Georgia's governor was a close friend and networking pastor of the church. Governors Zell Miller and Joe Frank Harris, former mayor and Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young, and former mayor Maynard Jackson all visited the church on occasion. Jackson even wrote a glowing endorsement for one of Paulk's books (1991). Paulk commented on his "pull" with these civic and political leaders in a TBN interview (4/29/91).

Maynard Jackson and Andy Young, very intimate and close friends of mine, and they sit and say, 'tell me preacher, how can we do this or that.' ....The politicians come to see us now to get a word from God and that is the way it is supposed to be.

The church leadership also made every effort to keep members informed of political issues. Paulk did this extensively from the pulpit, averaging over ten political comments per sermon between 1986 and 1988. After the 1988 election these references dropped to around 4.0 per sermon from 1989 to 1992 (See Appendix B-32). The membership understood Paulk's intended lesson in all these comments. One of them asserted, "Part of being a good Christian is being aware of what's happening politically in the world and our community."

Another way the church facilitated this influence of government was through its system of covenant communities. Although the purpose of these covenant communities was not specifically political, many of the pastoral groups had "political involvement committees" whose members stayed informed (often called "shadowing government") of pending bills, new legislative decisions, and the voting records of legislators at all levels. The area pastor, or selected deacons, were charged with the task of knowing the voting precincts, state districts, and the local jurisdictions of their members. Several covenant communities planned and sponsored community action projects, information disseminating seminars, and public meetings on political issues, as well as hosted candidate debates.[281]

After having been accused by critics of a post-millenialist, Reconstructionist "take over" mentality in regard to the State, Paulk made certain to avoid any statements which implied the church would usurp governmental authority. He walked a fine line between demanding the church have some influence in political affairs and avoiding any blanket identification with any particular politician or political party. Don Paulk made this position clear in one of the newspaper's editorials (*Harvest Time* August/September, 1988)

What most politicians really want is free reign...they call it 'separation of church and state.' In actuality they are telling the church to shut up and let them run the country without the imposition of the

---

[281] Several questions in the 1991 survey examined the church's influence on the political activities of its members. Approximately fifty-three percent of respondents agreed that they had become more politically active since coming to Chapel Hill Harvester Church. Thirty-five percent noted that their political activities had not increased. Only half of those whose activities had increased explained how they were more active. Of this group of members, 34.2 percent said they were "more aware of politics," 26.7 percent reported voting regularly, 28.6 percent listed multiple activities such as voting, signing petitions and being more aware and finally, 10.5 percent stated they had become involved in activities such as working for politicians, writing legislators, and one had even run for office. White respondents (62.1 percent) were significantly more likely to say their political activities had increased than were African American members (47.4 percent).

church's conscience.... We must remember that we are Samuel, not Saul. Where we as the church made our mistake was in identifying ourselves with politicians and political parties. By doing that, we could no longer remain objective.

The leadership made it absolutely clear that Paulk did not endorse any of the visiting politicians or tell the congregation how they should vote (1990a:72,122). He wrote that such blatant endorsement was unnecessary in his congregation, "When Christians know kingdom principles, a pastor doesn't need to promote a certain issue or endorse a particular candidate....They vote for those who would represent them responsibly" (1990a:72).[282]

Of course, individually, Christians were to influence the various levels of government through their votes and prayers. They were to obey government in all matters except those which denied the freedom of the individual to worship. The church corporately, however, was to provide a moral conscience for society, offer an alternative Christian witness, and exert a spiritual influence through prayer and protest. As Paulk stated in one sermon, "Civil government is called of God, but it is not called to set the moral principles of the nation. God puts that in the family and the individual and the church" (10/9/88).[283]

Finally, Paulk deduced from several scriptural passages the idea that each city had "spiritual elders" among its resident church leaders who were to have the responsibility for spiritually protecting and morally guiding the city. He wrote in *The Local Church Says Hell No!*, "Every local church is responsible for the city where God has placed them" (1991:92). In the case of Atlanta, he saw himself, along with several other ministers, in that role. "My battlefield primarily has been designated by the Lord to be the city of Atlanta," he explained in his writings, "I know God has called me to make ministry work here in the city of Atlanta first" (1991:96-97). In this manner Paulk shed his self-perception as the city's "suffering

[282] Sixty percent of members responding to the 1991 survey agreed that it was best to vote for a Christian politician. Black respondents were significantly less likely than whites to agree with this statement.

[283] Paulk elaborated on his view of Church/State relations in a series of sermons called "To Kill an Eagle," and a short article entitled "The meaning of freedom: The role of church and government in a world of social evolution." In this latter piece he argued that the state was responsible for insuring the freedom of the church, protecting the rights of individuals, and providing defense, order, and social control. Conversely, the church must obey and prayerfully uphold a "righteous" government, offer moral guidance to society, function as a counter-cultural witness of societal standards, and help individuals direct the state toward "the good." This article was sent to mayors of numerous major cities, several state governors, and leaders of certain countries including South Africa and Costa Rica.

savior" of previous years and assumed the mantle of Atlanta's judge and prophetic voice. As he commented in a sermon, "God is bringing some spiritual structure to this city" (9/4/88).

Whether the church wielded any actual political power is impossible to determine. In certain minor issues, or in accomplishing local political goals, perhaps they did have some influence. In relation to larger, morally significant, issues such as the vote on a state lottery, it was clear the church's pull did not make any difference. Likewise, they were unable to get one of their members elected to a local post in 1988. A more important aspect of the church's courting of and acceptance by governmental leaders, however, was the perception of success and power it offered the church. One member reflected, "That's what the church is about -- influencing governments and the whole world, so when we achieve that then God is working through us." Paulk also used his relationships with politicians to validate and assure his own position of power in the congregation and in the larger religious community. The words of another member summarize this perception, "It makes me proud to think of Bishop Paulk's influence on the candidates who come to our church."

A National Demonstration

Ironically, as a result of its hostile critics of the previous period, Chapel Hill Harvester's reputation grew throughout the conservative Christian community in the United States. The "Network of Kingdom Churches" increased more rapidly during this period than at any other time. By mid 1989, under the leadership of associate pastor Kirby Clements, the network grew to 133 churches in 31 states, with a few dozen congregations in fifteen other countries (*Thy Kingdom Come* May/June, 1989). States with the largest number of networking churches were California, Florida, Ohio, and Georgia, in total representing 52 congregations.

During this time, the church's exposure on television was, likewise, at its greatest level ever. The church's program could be seen on TBN in over 40 markets, on PTL's "Inspiration" network in 38 areas, and on 22 other stations throughout the country. A team of media consultants was hired to purchase more air time on several major stations. The director of "Partners for the Kingdom" (PFK) relayed this consulting group's findings to a meeting of staff. "They are convinced that we are the dark horse," he reported, "because we focus on the congregation.... They call us soft-sell, the best kept secret in America." While this may have been the case, PFK television donations continued to increase throughout

these years, climbing from an average of $37,781 per month in 1987 to an all time high of $54,660 per month in 1990 (See Appendix D). Each month two to four hundred new persons wrote to the ministry and about half those persons sent monetary gifts.

This revenue and national exposure did not come cheaply, however. The costs of materials, labor, and postage associated with this ministry burdened the church budget by approximately 10,000 dollars a month in 1988. Television air time costs during the 1988 - 1990 period totaled over half a million dollars a year. In 1988 the total radio and television media production ministry, including salaries, supplies and air time, operated with a deficit of almost 300,000 dollars. During the first six months of 1990 PFK offerings totaled 270,000, while the air time expenses alone cost almost 300,000 dollars. The church's national publicity and exposure may have increased its spiritual influence and stature, but it was also a heavy burden for the congregation to bear.

Church sponsored conferences were another effort at national religious influence. The "Atlanta 88" conference drew 533 persons from around the country, but it also cost the church $11,000 more than it made. During these three years Chapel Hill Harvester sponsored several "worship and arts" workshops, two "international pastors Institutes" and the "networking pastors conference." The church was also represented by Bishop Paulk in the 1988 Washington for Jesus rally (*Thy Kingdom Come* May/June 1988).

Another avenue by which Earl Paulk enhanced his reputation throughout the country was in accepting speaking engagements at other churches, conferences, and larger ministry meetings such as Charismatic Bible Ministries and the Network of Christian Ministries. These events took him away from the church at a time when his presence was needed to generate the necessary high-income giving to support the financing of the Cathedral building project. He complained in one meeting, "We lose five to twenty thousand dollars in offering each week if we have a guest speaker" (11/89 staff meeting).

A Demonstration to the World

The final, and most expansive, arena of demonstration was to the entire world. The church described its mission as having a global influence. As Paulk said, "We at Chapel Hill are in the unique position of experimenting at the local level with solutions with may well reverberate globally" (*Thy Kingdom Come* May/June, 1988). His involvement in the International Communion of Charismatic

Congregations (ICCC) provided him with adequate rhetoric material to claim a world-wide influence. He traveled to Brazil, Nigeria, and Europe on ICCC business. His staff ministered in South Africa, the Philippines, Korea, the Caribbean Islands, and throughout South and Central American countries (*Thy Kingdom Come* May/June, 1988). At the same time, the church sponsored a yearly "International Institute" for pastors from around the world. Many of the 30 to 50 participants each year, however, had to be subsidized in order to attend.

Earl Paulk constantly reminded the congregation, networking pastors, and the television audience of these trips, and the church's responsibility to the entire world. "Are you so involved with your own little "ark" that you forget the world's "ark?," he questioned the membership one Sunday (9/18/88). Church materials were crowded with letters and reports from pastors in various Latin American countries thanking him for the television ministry. In 1988 the church's program was broadcast in Costa Rica. By the following year, after filling Jimmy Swaggart's abandoned slots in programming, Earl Paulk could be seen weekly in nine Central and South American countries, in several Caribbean Islands, and in South Africa. Much of this global influence was reported by the leadership via television clips and verbal accounts. Few "ordinary" members had an opportunity to visit and witness firsthand the church's actual influence in these countries. Therefore, these global missions offered the greatest perception of expansive influence with the least chance of actual confirmation.[284]

As a demonstration to the world, Chapel Hill Harvester Church decided to host a "World Congress on the Kingdom of God" in the Fall of 1990. This event, it was prophesied, would draw 25,000 thousand people from around the world (Weeks, 1986:378). The "World Congress," which was to be held in the finished 7700 seat Cathedral, would showcase this local church's fulfilled vision of demonstrating the kingdom to the world. Paulk boldly made declarations regarding this conference that put both his and the church’s reputation on the line (*The Atlanta Tribune* June,1988:27).

---

[284] This difficulty of verifying global ministry was crucial to the departure of several significant members of the congregation. Two influential figures in the church remembered one particular mission trip to Costa Rica in 1989 as the point where "their eyes were opened" to see the discrepancy between what the church leadership portrayed itself as doing and what it actually did. One of these, a former minister who was in charge of the International ministries at the time, commented in this regard, "Whatever you hear is happening in Latin American is exaggerated 100 times above what is really going on." This trip demonstrated for these members how the leadership exploited its "global mission." Actual photographs and video taped scenes were later spliced into an "official version" of what took place in order to gain funds and to give the perception of significant influence and ministry which did not exist.

If we pull it off [the conference] we have made a statement that the local church is not some little blah, four-walled building sitting by the side of the road, but it is in fact a prophetic voice of God that sets a standard for man and finds evil in the world and addresses it.

Promotion for this world-wide congress dominated the church's various media throughout this period. The newspaper ran biographies of the famous religious celebrities invited. The television program recruited participants and solicited donations. Covenant communities "adopted" countries in preparation for the event -- learned about them, prayed for them, and printed information about them in the newspaper. Many of the church's activities for over a year pointed expectantly toward this climatic, earth-transforming symposium. The reality of the actual event, however, fell far below these grand expectations. The repercussions of this sizable disappointment will be addressed in the following chapter.

Until that event, and even after it for quite some time, the overwhelming amount of ministry and diverse activities taking place at Chapel Hill Harvester Church awed both outsider and member alike. Just like numerical growth, continuous "seven-day-a-week" activity was interpreted as an indication of spiritual power. Many members recounted their feelings regarding the church’s Christian witness through these ministries. "You see your tithes and offerings at work and it’s a good feeling to know it," said one man. Another male member recalled his attraction to the church, "The main thing that impressed me about this ministry was that I finally got a chance to see God work physically." Finally, a highly committed woman summarized what this demonstration of the vision meant to her, "It’s not just the Gospel. It’s not just the Word. It is the demonstration! People can see the demonstration and they can say, ‘This is the Kingdom that won’t fall’."

THE CENTER OF A CITY OF HOPE

One other activity taking place at the church was too obvious to miss -- the construction of the steel and concrete monstrous structure overshadowing the K center and mall. Although it rose upward from one of the lowest elevations on church property, the cathedral framework, and later the church itself, was of gigantic proportions and dwarfed all other buildings in the community. One member reflected on this imposing edifice and its implications for the congregation.

I see the cathedral as something so awesome that it's almost frightening because now people know about us and some people think we are crazy. Now that we are building this huge church, we're so visible to the world. We are really going to have to be right in our spirits. People are going to be looking at us. They'll say, 'Okay, you're up in that huge cathedral. What are you all about?' We'll have to really be strong to know what we're doing and know where we're going, because the spotlight's on us.

The construction of the cathedral formally began on a cold Easter morning in April, 1988. Church members gathered to break ground for what was then called "The Worship Cathedral." To prepare the congregation for the magnitude of this undertaking, the February, 1988 issue of *Thy Kingdom Come* printed an artist's rendering of the interior of the 7700 seat sanctuary with the caption "catch the vision." Throughout much of 1988, however, the congregation was occupied with other events and activities; they had not caught the cathedral vision. By mid 1989, as the date for the World Congress approached, the cathedral became the foremost priority of the leadership. After the World Congress, the church's attention, energy, but especially income, was increasingly funneled toward finishing the building. In this process the cathedral began to occupy an increasingly prominent place in the congregational culture. A new symbol, a pin in the shape of the cathedral's spire, replaced the former "K pin." Church activities and ministries were given new names, such as "the Cathedral Orchestra," *The Cathedral Chronicle*, and "The Cathedral Singers and Dancers." The idea of the cathedral, and all it symbolized, rapidly subsumed every other ideological focus of the church, parallel to the effect its construction was having on the monetary resources.

Paulk preached a sermon in June 1989 which described his ideological interpretation of the new worship sanctuary. He spoke of this theologically as the "Cathedral Concept," an idea later developed in an article "Why a Cathedral in the 21st Century? (1990c).[285] Paulk described the cathedral as evidence of the Kingdom of God on earth. He stated in the newly renamed church newspaper, "We are facilitating the vision the Lord has given us. It is a vision which calls for us to be a center on earth for the

---

[285] My exposition of the "Cathedral Concept" is also informed by an article entitled "A Charismatic Cathedral?" by David Baird, a networking pastor from Virginia, which was included in the World Congress information packet. Paulk's article "Why a Cathedral in the 21st Century?" was also published in this information packet.

communication and demonstration of the message of the Kingdom of God" (*Thy Kingdom Come* May/June,1988). By shifting his preaching rhetoric, and hopefully the church's identity, toward this cathedral idea, Paulk continued his move, begun in the previous time period, away from a heavy reliance on the "Kingdom" image which had created so many problems for him. Several pastors and members sensed this intentional shift in focus and commented on it. One former minister reported,

Bishop tried to back off from the emphasis on the kingdom, but a lot of people haven't let him. He has wanted to be more sophisticated than "kingdom." He has a new vision of himself, ever since the 'Cathedral Concept' and the idea of using high liturgy.

The "Cathedral Concept" encapsulated several existing themes of congregational authority and identity. The building was meant to symbolize that this was the "seat of the office of the bishop" (Baird, 1990:4/36). The cathedral was also seen as functioning as a "resource center for the peoples of the world," and a "place of restoration and refuge for hurting people" (*Thy Kingdom Come* May/June, 1988). The "Cathedral Concept" also symbolized the uniting of religious traditions. As Paulk emphatically declared in the church newspaper, "The Cathedral is the first Charismatic cathedral in the world, blending liturgical tradition with the power of the Spirit" (*The Cathedral Chronicle* Fall, 1990).

Perhaps most importantly for Paulk personally as he rapidly approached his 65th birthday, the cathedral, both the building and the symbolic idea of it, offered a powerful and lasting legacy for his children and their childrens' children. The words of his daughter Beth echoed this sentiment, "We are preparing a place of worship for our children and even our grandchildren" (*The Cathedral Chronicle* May, 1990). This inheritance aspect of the cathedral was rather appealing for many of the committed members as well. Several members described their involvement in terms of constructing a lasting legacy. One elderly grandmother told me, "I'm helping to build this as a present to my grandkids."

The presence of this impressive structure, whose steeple would rise majestically 245 feet into the air, was likewise a concrete symbol of permanence and rootedness on numerous levels. First, it clearly marked a commitment to the local community. After all Paulk insisted, "The local church is that foundation that digs in and stays" (4/29/91). The cathedral was an obvious indication that Chapel Hill Harvester Church was not moving anywhere. Likewise, the church's willingness to construct a multi-million dollar sanctuary in the middle of an undervalued and often neglected area of the county was intended as a powerful message to DeKalb officials. Paulk certainly wanted county leaders to know this

was an area ripe for development. Further, the cathedral could be seen as a reflection of Chapel Hill Harvester's eschatological theology, by concretely representing their indifference to end-times escapism. This congregation was not planning on being raptured any time soon. This structure denoted the permanency, maturity, and importance of the church in "this world" (Baird, 1990:4/35). As mentioned above, the cathedral could also be understood as a monument of personal commitment and rootedness. It was a grounding for highly mobile persons, a place where they could look in order to see the tangible, and permanent, fruit of their labors. It would be a Mecca to which their future, equally mobile, generations could return and view the evidence of progenitors spiritual dedication, perhaps even their remains since an elaborate cathedral cemetery was also planned.

Most importantly, the cathedral represented the continued commitment of the congregation to demonstrate the Kingdom. Now, however, this local demonstration was conceived of in terms more congruent to the reality of a "cathedral." Paulk looked to the medieval age where cathedrals were the central focal point of the life of a village, not just because of their placement but also in terms of societal power and influence. Baird (1990:4/35) made this point in his article about the cathedral.

The cathedrals of old were built in an era when the church had a strong voice in society. These edifices were the primary landmarks of a city....[This] cathedral states that the church will no longer maintain societal irrelevancy.

The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit at Chapel Hill, as it came to be called, was fully intended to symbolize the role Paulk longed for the church to have in the world. The church ought to once again become the center of society. As a demonstration of that desire, this church was to become the center of this community, the heart of the "City of Hope."

Paulk and other congregational members including several developers and real estate speculators drew plans for an elaborate community with the cathedral at its center. As stated in the church's newspaper this goal was (*The Cathedral* Chronicle, 1990:9),

To create and maintain a community surrounding the Cathedral in which there will be creativity and productivity in an environment of health, peace, and harmony. It will demonstrate that people can come together in covenant under a government of God to build a quality life that transcends racial, socio-economic, political and even religious boundaries.

They based the design of this "City of Hope" on an idealized and nostalgic model of small town life. Within this model of community, Paulk echoed the contemporary cultural values of "finding one's roots" and recovering "traditional values." This effort was also envisioned as a reclamation of Caucasian, Anglo-Saxon, and European traditions and heritage. In his article, "Why a Cathedral in the 21st Century," Paulk made this point poignantly.

But why a cathedral concept that stretches back several centuries transplanted into a satellite/ micro-chip world? Perhaps it's because we've ignored something intrinsic as we learned to use the latest technical hardware. Perhaps it has to do with a longing to re-establish traditional values based on life-long commitment that modern living has seemingly scorned. People feel homesick for the kind of stability they knew in the old neighborhoods and the villages of storybook folklore.... Old fashioned ideas of community have touch a nerve among a generation of families who have acquiesced to corporate transfers, displaced relatives, and commuter careers as commonplace. Maybe roots do matter after all.

The plans for this "city" included numerous residential subdivisions, the church's school and child care facilities, recreational areas, business park complexes, the mall, and a "Cathedral village" offering artistic attractions, all within walking distance of the centrally-located cathedral.[286] A "city council" was formed by business and church leaders to bring this dream to fruition. Six neighborhoods were built as models of the reclaimed "small town" ideal. For those willing or fortunate enough to live there, these intentionally economically and racially diverse communities embodied, at least on the surface, a modern appropriation of, "solid values and a wholesome lifestyle. Yes, it's old-fashioned, yet [it is also] throughly modern at the same time" (Paulk, 1990).[287]

When pressed, members often talked of the cathedral and this surrounding "city of hope" with great expectations, perhaps unrealistically high expectations. Several members spoke of the housing projects as re-establishing a significant white presence in the area, a presence that would attract other

---

[286] See the Fall 1990 issue of *The Cathedral Chronicle* for complete details of this planned city.

[287] The intentional quest for this small town localism parallels what Stephen Warner (1989) described as "elective parochialism."

persons of the white race to this now African American dominated portion of the county. Other members, such as these two, described the cathedral as God's reward to the congregation for faithful service.

I know we are going to move into a new level of ministry when we move into the cathedral...but it has nothing to do with the building at all. It comes from the obedience of the people that got us to that point. God is going to manifest his glory in that place like we've never seen.

It's more than a building; it is a promise to us from God. It may help those in the community to finally accept us as a real church -- and not a cult. We've been very faithful and God's seeing to it that we don't have to sit in metal chairs any more.

Finally, many members spoke with great expectations about the coming spiritual revival and growth which would take place once they occupied the new structure. One such member stated with assurance, "Once we get in the cathedral we will triple in size. People will come just to see what we are doing." Another member confidently exclaimed, "I'm expecting great things when we go into the Cathedral - the presence of God is already there." These members' opinions were not generated, however, out of their own wishful thinking. Rather these seeds of spiritual anticipation had been planted by Paulk and the church leadership in order to motivate members to remain committed and giving to this great undertaking of demonstrating God's kingdom in South DeKalb County.

A CLOUD ON THE HORIZON?

The difficult question surrounding the Cathedral was how to pay for it. The initial estimated cost of the building was nine million. In actuality, the funding, provided by a lending agency in the form of five separate bonds, amounted to a total of over twenty million of which some had been redirected to other church renovation projects. Early in the planning stages of the construction effort, the leadership contracted with a church fund raising firm to receive a stewardship proposal. Paulk, who historically disliked offering pledges and giving campaigns, rejected this proposal in favor of raising the money to pay off the bonds by preaching about the scriptural injunction to tithe and give offerings. As a consequence, his appeals for money during services rose to an all-time high for any historical period, with an average of 14 references per sermon in 1990 (See Appendix B-34). The congregation responded to his pleas by

increasing their tithes and offerings in 1990 by 38.7 percent over the previous year, even though 1990 was marked by a significant national economic depression (See Appendix D). Even with this additional giving, the financing of the Cathedral remained a major concern, especially in light of the rising interest and bond payments on the 20 million total indebtedness.

In addition to sacrificial giving, members also worked in "cathedral guilds," volunteered their Saturdays for "cathedral clean-ups," and participated in prayer services to hasten the completion of this "gift from God." Nevertheless, the distinct impression of many members with whom I spoke was that the cathedral seemed a distant and unattainable goal, even "a burden" in the words of one of them. Not one interviewee ever discussed the cathedral spontaneously with me. I always had to initiate discussion of the topic. A gulf clearly separated the people from this project; a gulf which became mired with red Georgian clay and eventually bogged the congregation down in the coming years.

Even with the validation of so many triumphant ministries, the congregation was beginning to suffer from the burden of being a prototype of the kingdom. These ministries combined with the enormous costs of the construction of the new sanctuary weighed heavily upon the shoulders of the committed members. One core member confessed to the pressure he felt.

The people who have been here for a long time are really tired. Our church has been through hell in the last five years and it has been consistent, one thing after another. It has been one long financial crisis and various attacks, and a whole lot of confrontation and change, plus four buildings in eight years, and innumerable changes in structure, innumerable changes in the program. A lot of the people, long term members, are tired.

I am tired....

The necessity of this intense demonstration of the kingdom and the rapid construction of the new building was only partially driven by Paulk's Kingdom Theology. These various activities were also the result of his persistent need to legitimate his charismatically-based authority, to prove his prophetic anointing. All the congregation's media resources were harnessed in the effort to continually portray Paulk and the church's ministries as ever-increasingly more successful, more innovative, and more expansive. In the previous period of church history, the leadership had used various media presentations of the existing ministerial efforts to combat their external enemies. During this period,

under the pressure of the cathedral construction and as a demonstration for the "World Congress," the television broadcasts, video presentations in services, books, pamphlets, tapes, and testimonials from clergy tended to suggest and insinuate enormous harvests of ministerial fruit. The church's successes were displayed as larger than life, while its weaknesses, tensions, and failures were intentionally ignored. This manufactured image of what was taking place at Chapel Hill Harvester church began to outpace and distort the actual vital and significant ministry of the congregation.[288]

Yet because this ministerial reality was so expansive, almost no one noticed or questioned the entirely positive image being created. The horizons of the church's actual endeavors were beyond the comprehension of any one member. Likewise, neither the leadership nor the membership wanted to doubt the glorious perception of the church that was being presented. There was no need to inquire further into exactly what was being accomplished; after all, the "kingdom was built in trust." Members had complete faith in Paulk and the leadership that they were doing "God's work for the whole world." As Paulk often reminded the congregation, "What we are doing here is eternal work. It will be a resource for the entire world" (4/15/90). One older white man, who gave his wife's entire salary for two years to the church, responded, "I trust our leadership. God is constantly checking our pastors and God will speak to Bishop in a heart beat.... We are not here to get comfortable in these pews, we are here to do something for God." Another member, a middle aged black woman confessed, "I'm going to trust what God's told him. He's just told me too many things that I questioned and then it turned out that he was right.... I'm going to follow him on the Cathedral too." Just like these persons, the core and committed members responded in faith and trust, but this trust, this faith, also included an unspoken expectation that their commitment and sacrifice would bear fruit.

---

[288] William Swatos (1981) notes the possibility of this situation in his discussion of the modern disenchantment of charisma. In this article he describes, following others, the modern context as one in which a powerful leader is able to manufacture "pseudocharisma" by his or her use of technology and control of the media. He and other social commentators have suggested that the "handlers" of political candidates create charisma daily, and that the possibility of creating a false charisma actually diminishes the likelihood of an authentic charismatic leader in the modern world. This is probably accurate for a large scale society, but it does not negate charismatic leadership in smaller contexts such as in the earlier days of this church.

During this three year period a visitor seeking a church, a curious minister, or an inquisitive academic such as myself would have seen and experienced this powerful, successful, vital ministry much as it was described in this chapter.[289] Judging from other researchers' and my own observations of many megachurches around the country, this was an accurate representation of the phenomenon. Most assuredly this was one of the top megachurches in the country. As a congregation they were full of hope, with great expectations for the future. They would admit they were in the midst of a momentary financial crunch, but so too was the entire country. There may have been hints of other subtle problems as well, but the overall attitude was "onward and upward." The demonstration of this kingdom vision was for most core and committed members the most important aspect of their lives. It was a vision that had shaped not just their spiritual lives but their entire lives every hour of the day. The kingdom message had become a lifestyle embraced wholeheartedly by at least half the congregation. Members were totally committed to this vision, the sacrifice it required, and the rewards it offered. One member succinctly summarized this situation, "God has called us to be a megachurch, maybe not a big church, but a megachurch in terms of its ministries. This required hard work, but we have continually grown to have an impact not only in the States but around the world." The question that remained was would this commitment to the vision survive when more sacrifice was required, no rewards were forthcoming, and trust in Earl Paulk and the church leadership was broken.

[289] If I had only spent three years in the field as I had wanted and planned to do, the time period covered by this chapter would have been the subject of this book. I had intended to conclude my observations and interviews at the end of the World Congress meetings. This data was then to have been presented as a snapshot of a successful megachurch, duly analyzed and dissected with appropriate sociological theories. Fortunately, my interviewing and field observations were hindered by my child care duties to my infant daughter or else I would have missed the following fascinating, although painful, period of the church's history.

CHAPTER TEN: THE SPOILING OF THE KINGDOM (1991-)

We are moving into a new dimension.... I said, but none of you will remember this, that there would be a letdown when we move into the Cathedral. Don't jump to any conclusions from the bad reports of money and our enemies today, but give it a little space and we'll see what happens. Wait and we will pull this out of the fire yet again.

(Earl Paulk, 10/16/91)

Misplaced trust spoils the Kingdom. The secrets of the Kingdom cannot be put in unworthy hands.... The vulnerability that God would allow you must be a "vulnerability of trust," or the Kingdom of God has no chance at all but to spoil.

(Earl Paulk, 5/15/83)

We will follow authority because there is effectiveness in ministry. When effectiveness in ministry is lost with it also goes a corrupt ministry that will end in bankruptcy or a gradual diminishing from lack of support.

(Earl Paulk, 2/20/77)

The World Congress on the Kingdom of God came and went without the "world" noticing. Soon the congregation would move into one of the largest sanctuaries in the country; although this too would attract only minimal attention. Several months later, few people would see President George Bush presenting a "point of light" award to the congregation. And yet, less than a year after these events, media cameras would be poised waiting to capture Earl Paulk's every word. Reporters would hound the presbytery, staff, and members for their comments on the most recent church events. Talk radio shows would dedicate their programs to mindless discussions of the church's leadership. News of Chapel Hill Harvester would be displayed in dozens of articles by local and national newspapers and magazines. The church's name would be mentioned on all the television networks in the city for many days running. What was it that would spark this interest, this much sought after prominence in the eyes of the city? The events which finally gained the church the notoriety it had long sought were allegations of sexual scandal

and stories of abuse of authority by the presbytery. These assertions rocked the congregation and eventually led to a church one fifth its former size. Its ministries were all but destroyed. Only the 7700 seat "Cathedral to the Holy Spirit" would remain, a nearly empty symbol of what the Kingdom could have been.

These stories of scandals and abuse did not, however, cause this dramatic turn of events for the triumphant church of the previous chapter by themselves alone. Rather these allegations were only one piece of a complex unfolding of dynamics which resulted in the near downfall of this megachurch. Recent ministry failures such as the World Congress and the difficulty of completing the Cathedral had begun to undermine the image of Earl Paulk as a successful and prophetic charismatic leader. Paulk's age, his impaired health, and the constant pleas for money derailed his appealing practical sermons. The congregation's ever changing membership and the difficulty of incorporating newer members into the existing structures resulted in many who had become spectators and minimally committed attenders. Relational networks of existing core and committed members were severely disturbed after efforts were undertaken to restructure the covenant community groups. This action in turn disrupted many of these groups' informal ministries which members had come to cherish as their service outlet to the community. At a time when a sense of stability and continuity was needed to weather this storm, the move into the cavernous cathedral destroyed even the comfort of "having one's place" in worship. Paulk's recent deemphasis of his kingdom message in favor of the "Cathedral concept," likewise, gave members little familiar ideology to which to cling. Most certainly, trust in "the church family," and especially the fatherly figure of Earl Paulk, was shaken by the insinuations of sexual misconduct.

More serious damage, however, was done to this level of trust by the actions of Paulk and church leadership themselves in response to these events. In the eyes of many ordinary members, these leaders acted in a desperate, irresponsible, and vindictive manner. Finally, many were willing to overlook all of these difficulties in order to remain faithful to Earl Paulk's Kingdom vision. In a bold attempt to reduce the damage his faltering image might have on the "vision," Paulk separated himself from this central, powerful congregational ideal. He argued that the vision belonged to the congregation -- it was theirs and they should not abandon it. This message was taken to heart. Members took ownership of this ideal, extracted it from its ties both to Paulk and the church, and left with the "vision" intact as their personal possession.

This church was founded on a vision. It was this vision, in its many mutations and alterations, that members embraced and which unified them. However, this vision was Earl Paulk's possession; God had spoken it directly to him. Every sermon, media resource, and church structure reminded the congregation of this reality. Acceptance of this vision included a commitment to Paulk. The kingdom was, after all, built on trust in him. In order to ensure that linkage remained intact, however, Paulk had to prove trustworthy as a father figure, as a prophet, and as a spiritual leader - he had to produce. But production was down and the rewards of the Kingdom were waning. Then, just when the connection between Paulk and the vision was strained, he intentionally distanced himself from it. From that point on it was only a matter of time until the Kingdom came completely undone. This chapter is the story of that undoing.

THE FORCES OF EROSION

Much like Chapel Hill Harvester's spectacular growth in the late seventies, the stage for its near collapse was set years before the rapid drop in membership became a reality. Several preexisting dynamics stressed the congregational milieu to such an extent that they allowed more destructive allegations to surface. These factors which began to undermine the "triumphant local church" included a disappointing World Congress conference, the pressure of not being able to raise sufficient funds to complete the Cathedral, the ever-increasing new membership demands on the organization, and the reconfiguration of the congregational covenant communities. Each of these situations began to erode the soil of trust from under the foundation of the Kingdom. As a result cracks began to develop in the idealized identities of the church and its trustworthy charismatic leader Earl Paulk.

The World Congress

The late fall 1990 conference, billed as the "World Congress on the Kingdom of God," was to be a spectacular three day event with over fifty speakers of notoriety from the Charismatic world.[290] Bill

---

[290] The guest list was a virtual "Whos Who" of Charismatic leaders including Oral Roberts, his son Richard, Dick Iverson, Bill Hamon, Ern Baxter, Bob Weiner, Dennis Peacock, Malcolm Smith, Anne Gimenez, Paul Paino, and Charles Simpson. A spokesperson for President Bush, Leigh Ann Metzger who also happened to have been an Alpha participant as a youth, the Georgia governor, Atlanta's mayor, and the County's CEO were on hand and addressed the audience. The conference was simultaneously translated into four languages to the participants from other countries. A 200+ page informative syllabus

Hamon had prophesied that it would draw 25,000 people. The church leadership poured thousands of dollars into advertising and honorariums for speakers and foreign guests. The anticipation and expectation surrounding this event was enormous. The reality was strikingly dismal. The conference drew only approximately 450 paid registrations with the remainder of the 3000 nightly attendance being church members. Instead of the awaited delegates from a hundred countries, at most seventy were represented and many of these were subsidized. None of the press corp, not even the religious press, covered the event. In the end, the church "lost face," and a large amount of money, due to the conference.

Like many of the activities at the church by this point in its history, the anticipation of the event far exceeded the reality of the situation. Staff had to over-promote an event making it seem greater than previous undertakings to maintain Paulk's image as a successful leader. This strategy worked well if the event took place in Central America in a ministry to which few members had immediate access. This event, unlike the other inflated realities of the church's life, took place in the sanctuary in full view of the membership. No one left the church because of the discouraging reality of the World Congress. The disillusionment of the event, however, allowed doubts to creep into the minds of several members with whom I spoke. One such member reflected this attitude, "You know I realized then that we were not all that we were cracked up to be."

Paulk and the leadership were also clearly upset by the outcome of the World Congress. This disappointment was evidenced more by what was not said after the conference. The event was never discussed in my presence in staff meetings. Nor did the leadership at any time revel in the "successes" of the World Congress as they would have had it been an actual success. Earl mentioned it publicly only once, the following Sunday. In a passing remark, by which he no doubt intended to redirect the congregation toward new goals, Paulk suggested, "the World Congress has been an example of what has been accomplished, BUT God has much more for us..." (11/18/90). The message conveyed by Earl and the leadership was that this event was best put behind them and forgotten. Yet this undeniable failure of the Congress to fulfill its expectations had been witnessed by all and was not easily forgotten.

---

was produced. And many musical groups, dance troupes and videos entertained the participants.

Bearing the Cross of a Cathedral

The World Congress contributed to a second unfulfilled expectation, that of the unfinished Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. Like the conference itself, this deficiency in Paulk's prophetic ability cast an undeniably large shadow on the glory of the Kingdom. After the considerable publicity which boasted that the World Congress would be held in the brand-new cathedral, conferees had to gather in the stark cinder block and concrete "airplane hanger" K Center. Prior to the event Earl had goaded the congregation into increased giving by stating that God had told him that the cathedral would have to be completed in time for the Congress. Yet, the incomplete cathedral stood humiliatingly just a few feet outside his office window. In the newspaper published for the conference, Paulk justified the unfinished building as God's punishment of the congregation for its pride and self-reliance. He commented, "We wanted to have [the cathedral] ready so badly to let you be the first to enjoy it with us. But God taught us another valuable lesson [in humility]."

The disappointment and shame of not finishing the Cathedral for the World Congress was no doubt experienced at some level by the entire congregation. Several of the members expressed to me their embarrassment at having to "host the world" in the K Center. Others voiced their frustration at working so hard to raise the money to complete the cathedral, only to have it stand empty during the conference.

The push to finish the new sanctuary did not end with the World Congress. Instead the completion of the building became the central focus of the entire church. Building costs continued to escalate. Overruns and additions demanded more loans. Mounting interest payments on these bonds weighed heavily on the congregation's shoulders.[291] By 1990, the administrator had begun to juggle which bills to pay from the resources for that week. The bond payments were often postponed several weeks, only to be caught up after a particularly abundant offering. Several incidental staff members were dismissed in cost-cutting measures. A call for "double tithing" was issued by Paulk (3/17/91). The tithing histories of members were analyzed. Letters were sent to those faithful in giving as well as to

---

[291]The interest and bond payments began to take an ever-increasing bite out of the church's operating capital. In 1988, this expenditure represented 14.5 percent of the total 7.2 million dollar revenue (or approximately one million). Two years later, by 1990, the bond payment with interest amounted to 21 percent of the 10.5 million dollar income (or almost 2.25 million dollars). See Appendix D for a graph of the income in relation to the interest being paid on the bonds.

those who had not contributed or who were giving less than previously. Every attempt was undertaken to find formulas and gimmicks to increase giving. Worship services came to be judged on how plentiful the offering had been. In the midst of this effort, some staff members became quite apprehensive, as one related, "I'm very concerned with this cathedral situation. I think it's kind of like the crowning accomplishment of the ministry. My fear is it may crown his [ministry] and kill ours!"

This emphasis on giving which had irritated members throughout the previous historical period, was now after several years beginning to both upset and tax them. By mid 1991 quite a few committed and moderate members complained in interviews about this constant emphasis on giving.[292] While donating 15 to 30 percent of their income, many expressed feelings of guilt over not giving enough such as one long time member, "I have been giving ten years and can't give any more. I don't want the guilt any longer." He did keep giving for another year, however. One tithing couple related their feelings in response to these high pressure tactics.

The big thing was that we couldn't even go on vacation without being consumed with guilt...or every time we bought an article of clothing. Our pastor said, `But (Bishop's) not talking to you [when he pleads for more money]' And even though we heard him say that we can't feel like that because we are so consumed by guilt. It's hard to live with.

Several people expressed their harbored thoughts of ill-will toward those less-responsive members who were not "giving their fair share." One female member commented, "If everybody just tithed, then we wouldn't have to hear this week after week!" Marginal members also complained that Paulk was preaching too much about money. One such member explained, "I don't really receive a lot from the Bishop in worship anymore." A few of these members even left because of the emphasis on giving. The senior minister, in an effort to reduce the number of free-riders in the congregation, actually encouraged their departure. He often rebuked disgruntled members as he did in one sermon (3/17/91),

God is going to test you [with double tithing] for double obedience and if some folks start

---

[292] In response to an open-ended question about the church's weaknesses from the 1991 questionnaire over ten percent (74 people out of 694) mentioned the financial problems. Over six percent of respondents suggested that the membership's level of accountability and commitment were the church's greatest weakness.

grumbling and complaining.... Take your little dollar and find you a little place...by the side of the road where you can have control and forget about prophetic ministry.

Other members implied the church was more concerned about their wallets than their souls. One infrequent attender commented, "I got a letter from the Bishop. It says that we miss you being here, and with the church being so large, we know you aren't paying tithe.... Isn't that a good way to know that I'm not there!" For many of these people the cost of being a member was beginning to outweigh, or at least put strains on, the benefits of belonging. A deacon reflected perceptively on the tensions felt by those in his care.

There is this great inner conflict that our people are suffering under, and I'm telling you, they are not going to put up with it for long. This is a voluntary situation; They don't have to go to church here. Some people feel like they **have to** because of their spiritual authority, and if they leave they will be forsaking their covenant with God, so they are stuck in this church. They are just going to have to do it, have to pay the price, or they're going to go to hell. Soon they might realize this is hell and leave.

Nevertheless, as long as Paulk framed the difficulty in spiritual terms, the leadership generally trusted him to "pull us out of the fire yet again." Earl was fond of saying, as he did in one staff meeting, "Finances are a spiritual problem, not an organizational problem." He preached sacrificial giving and the core and committed members gave sacrificially. For the most part the congregation as a whole had complete faith in Paulk and felt certain they would overcome this momentary financial hindrance.[293] One committed member reflected on her ambivalent, but optimistic, feelings about the money situation.

The cathedral is pressing us. It gets frustrating to hear Bishop Paulk get very angry (and I would be too being in his position with all the pressure) having to come back Sunday after Sunday and be upset

[293] Paulk responded to the critical comments that "all he preaches anymore is about money." First, he decreased the number of times he referred to giving, from a high average of 9.3 references per sermon in the 1988-90 period to a moderate 6.8/sermon in 1991-92 (See Appendix B-34). In addition, he often remarked as he was taking offering that he hated being a "fund raiser." He invited other ministers such as Benson Idahosa, John Avanzini and Bill Swad to raise funds for him. The latter two are well-known preachers of prosperity who publish books of strategies for how to achieve wealth. In these talks, it was essentially promised that money given to the church would "return 100 fold." This strategy backfired on Paulk, however. As time passed this promised prosperity and the rewards of giving a "double tithe" did not materialize. This disappointment again offered a challenge to Paulk's authority and prophetic insight.

with the people when we as individuals are giving a lot. It does get tiring sometimes, but that's okay. It's got to be done. All this will be over soon.

Even with this generally optimistic congregational mind set, the financial burden of the cathedral began to take its toll on members' perception of Paulk's divine leadership. Although only a small percentage of members were overtly outspoken in their challenges before 1992, the undercurrents were beginning to tug at the foundation of the kingdom.[294] The reflections of a committed member during this time hint at her uneasiness about openly criticizing church leaders.

Some people aren't accountable. I've thought maybe we shouldn't have done this or that, but I figured that the leadership was responsible and if not, well they are going to answer to God. I'm doing my part....ah, (pause) sometimes I think that we should make the leadership more accountable.

The beginnings of this erosion of complete trust can be seen in the mid 1991 remarks of a committed white member who had given 15 percent of her income the previous year.

If I were staying [she was being relocated by her employer] I would want to question leadership, `Why are we building so fast? Why not take our time?' If God said it, that's fine, but I question if God said it because the cathedral has caused a lot of suffering of the people.

Who Are These Spectators?

Another factor which began to burden the already stressed foundations of the kingdom was its changing congregational composition. The membership had begun to shift dramatically over the previous three or four years. The most obvious component of that change was racially, toward a predominantly African American congregation.[295] A much more troublesome characteristic for the

---

[294] In the 1991 survey question about the church's weaknesses only three percent of respondents noted the need for better organization and administrative accountability at the church. When respondents were offered a neutral open-ended context in which to comment on the church less than five percent remarked that they were frustrated or concerned with the present congregational situation and none of these persons blamed the leadership.

[295] Given that the congregation was now over 75 percent African American, with blacks making up nearly 90 percent of first timers and new converts during 1990 to 1992, the worship format continued to adopt more black music sounds of R&B, Gospel, and Soul. The worship atmosphere in both services had a

organization, however, was the continuing flood of new, less committed members regardless of race.[296] This increasing number of marginal members generally exhibited traits which severely jeopardized the vitality of the organization.

---

distinctive black "feel" to it, which possibly alienated the remaining white members further. Swaying with the beat of the music, a talent which, it was observed, many of the older white men had not mastered, was rapidly becoming the congregational norm. Paulk increased his references to race to its highest level ever (5.2/sermon, see Appendix B-29). He also began to praise the "diversity" of the congregation in sermons (2.3/sermon, twice as high as any other period). Yet, arguably the congregation was less diverse than it had been in the past.

[296] Certainly the lower level of commitment was in part due to these members having spent less time at the church. Not all those who joined during this time were minimally committed, but a large majority of them were. A comparison of the white and African American members who joined during this period and responded to the survey shows the recent African American members were considerably less involved than the 1988 to 1991 group as a whole. Given that they comprised a majority of the new members, the race of the more recent members could have had a considerable impact on the congregational situation.

Since 1988, but especially between Fall 1990 and the opening of the Cathedral in October 1991, countless "first timers" and new members filled the congregational ranks each Sunday. By 1991, I estimated that as much as fifty percent of the congregation could be categorized as marginal members.[297] Perhaps this percentage had remained constant over the church's history; however, it was a much more noticeable burden when it represented many thousand rather than a few hundred persons. Judging from my interviews and observations, a majority of these marginal members had come within the previous four years. Most of the less committed long time members had been weeded out prior to 1988 by numerous periods of crisis and testing (whether by the shift to spiritualism in the late 70's, the Alpha explosion at the turn of the decade, the tent year in 1983-84, the influx of African Americans by 1985, or by the internal and external criticism of the mid 1980's). The recent past, however, had been characterized by a relatively calm, triumphant period which was attractive to many new members -- folks who had come to worship in the "triumphant church" they saw advertised on television. They came because Chapel Hill Harvester Church was a big, successful church; they had not sacrificed to help create this big, successful church. Many of this group then could best be described as spectators rather than committed participants in the demonstration of the Kingdom.

In general, those who joined the church between 1988 and 1991(nearly a third of the total respondents) and filled out the questionnaire were substantially different from the other respondents. On average this group spent fewer hours at church, participated less in service ministry activities, had fewer friends and family at the church, and lived further away from the church. As a group, these members scored lower on questions of key kingdom doctrines, knew less of the church's history, and had read fewer of Paulk's books. These more recent members also reaped fewer benefits of the church, according to the survey findings. They reported having fewer counseling sessions with pastors, participated more infrequently in the "Overcomers" and social ministries. At the same time, however, these folks were approximately the same age as the earlier members, which meant they would have joined the church later in life than other members. Their levels of education were comparable to

---

[297] See the discussion of membership categories in chapter one. For the most part, these approximately 5000 "marginal" members would have been heartily embraced in most churches where a less intense level of commitment was required. At Chapel Hill Harvester Church they were viewed as free-riders and dead weight.

members joining prior to 1988. These more recent members made less money and gave a smaller percentage of it to the church. Over thirty percent reported that they were originally attracted to and presently found the preaching and worship service to be the most attractive feature of the church. Another twenty percent named Earl Paulk as the church's most attractive feature. The relationship to the church, for many of these members, could be characterized best, in the words of one of them, as "a fine place to worship" (See Table 6 for a summary of those coming in 1991; Table 5 for those who joined from 1988 to 1990). Not only were these newer members less committed, minimally involved, and receiving fewer benefits of belonging, but less effort was being made to incorporate them into the church structures. The formal and informal leadership structures were firmly in place, with all the slots filled. Because much of the church's attention had been directed toward the World Congress and the cathedral, new ministry opportunities were scarce, as were openings on pastors' visitation calendars. As will be discussed below, a restructuring of covenant communities likewise hindered the incorporation of these persons into the congregation through fellowship networks. Even volunteer positions were at a minimum because of the church's large professionalized staff. If these new members wanted to become "real committed members" of the church, it would take a serious effort on

TABLE 6

Demographics For Members Joining in 1991			
Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Total Number	19**	44	74
Mean Age in 1991	39.7	37.3	38.0
Mean Age at joining	*	*	*
Gender: Female	57.9	68.2	64.8
Marital Status:			
Married	57.9	47.7	50.7
Divorced	10.5	9.1	11.3
Never Married	21.1	27.3	25.4
Education:College degree or more	47.4	55.8	55.1

Demographics For Members Joining in 1991			
Income: +$30,000	50.0	46.5	48.5
Occupation:			
Clerical	21.1	30.2	26.1
Service	10.5	11.6	11.6
Managerial	10.5	9.3	11.6
Professional	10.5	7.0	7.2
Self-Employed	10.5	4.7	7.2
Southern Birthplace	63.2	31.8	37.8
Community of Birth			
Rural/town/city	42.1	34.1	37.1
Urban/suburban	57.9	65.9	62.9

Demographics For Members Joining in 1991			
Mean Childhood Moves	2.6	2.4	2.4
Characteristics	**White**	**African American**	**Total**
Hours at Church/ Week:			
0-3 hours	10.5	26.2	19.4
4-6 hours	36.8	47.6	44.4
7-10 hours	47.4	14.3	25.0
11 or more	5.3	11.9	11.2
New Christian	10.5	29.5	25.7
Mean # CHHC Friends	1.7	1.5	1.5
Giving: 10 % or More	89.5	70.5	77.1

Demographics For Members Joining in 1991			
Previous Denomination:			
Liberal/Moderate	15.8	6.8	8.1
Conservative	21.1	38.6	31.1
Pentecostal	21.1	25.0	23.0
Catholic	5.3	6.8	5.4
Charismatic/Nondenom	31.6	15.9	18.9
Other	0.0	2.3	6.8
None	5.3	4.5	6.8
Live in Church Zipcode	5.6	11.4	8.2
Mean Paulk Books Read	4.3	1.5	2.9

their part because the church was not reaching out to them.[298]

The church leadership often discussed the shifting congregational configuration privately in ministry meetings. During these discussions race, rather than level of commitment or new member incorporation, was the focus of the discussion. The leadership blamed this sense of diminished commitment on race rather than on the fact that new members of all races were being neglected. The characterization of new members often expressed by clergy and staff in presbytery meetings was that they were predominantly single mothers, lived in nearby communities, and had very little income. This was not an accurate description, however, judging from my observations, interviews, and the survey results. Many new members were indeed single mothers, but they often drove 20 minutes or more to come to church, were well educated, and made a considerable amount of money. One of the main reasons for this misperception was that leadership had very little contact or interaction with these newer members.

The solution the leadership arrived at was also racially-based. They decided to sponsor events aimed at attracting white suburbanites from the northern part of the city. Several major arts performances were presented in 1991 including an original ballet, a "DeKalb International Choral Festival" with Robert Shaw, and a piano concert cosponsored by an Atlanta piano gallery. The church presented several major dramas, festivals, and celebrations open to the public. They hosted an environmental conference with Jacques Cousteau's son as the keynote speaker. The church even gave lessons, using a dramatic and humorous video shown during worship services, on how to witness in a inoffensive manner. These videos stressed a soft-sell approach of telling friends what the church was doing. The focus of these lessons was to promote outreach to wealthy white persons, judging from the Caucasian actors, their stories of successful evangelism, and those activities used to describe the church. The idea was that if the church could entice whites with money into becoming members the commitment problems would cease.

[298] It is interesting that both the 1991 survey and my interviews included many comments from both older and more recent members about the church needing to "close the backdoor" and make a better effort at retaining and incorporating the newer members into the life of congregation. Nearly ten percent of the survey respondents cited these areas as the church's top weaknesses. Paulk's sermon references to self-improvement and strengthening ones individual vocation dropped dramatically during this time from nearly 10 references per sermon to just over two.

Breaking The Ties That Bind

Another important factor, an organizational decision to restructure the covenant community groups, contributed drastically to the weakening of the congregational fabric of relational unity. This decision was made by Earl Paulk, against the advice of several members of the presbytery, immediately following the World Congress meetings. Discarding the existing geographic-based divisions, Paulk opted for a reassignment of all church members into new covenant communities based on a random selection. Members were also arbitrarily assigned to one of the fourteen new pastoral groups. It was entirely possible for each member to get a new area pastor, a new deacon, and a new covenant community with a new leader -- none of which might live in that member's immediate locale.

In a meeting to inform church staff of these changes, Paulk presented his rationale for the change as based on race. He stated that the membership of Chapel Hill Harvester are "one in Christ"...and they should not be divided by culture.... We cannot allow a resegregation of the congregation" (12/14/90). Many of the neighborhood fellowship groups, reflecting their local racial context, were racially unbalanced. "Some groups are 97 percent black," Earl noted during this explanation. He went on to argue, "How can we say that this is an expression of Chapel Hill?.... Each of these covenant communities must be reflective of the whole of the church" (12/14/90).

Another less obvious reason for the shuffling was also apparent in Paulk's comments. He saw this action as a way to ensure the allegiance of the membership, to allow them only one consistent pastoral authority figure. To that end he counseled, "There are some cliquish groups that need to be broken up.... I want [the people] to know I am their pastor" (12/14/90). This motive was confirmed by several former pastors as what they perceived to be Paulk's primary reason for the change.[299]

These new groups were called "connection groups," implying their intent was to foster new connections within the congregation. Ironically, the new arrangement attempted to "connect" group leader with members scattered throughout the city, some as far as 35 minutes away. One deacon who was also a connection group leader commented about this reshuffling, "I have people in my deacon

[299] This radical reshuffling as an effort to diminish friendship ties and disrupt members' loyalties to other church leaders would fit a common pattern among many charismatic leaders. These leaders, in an attempt to ensure that all lines of authority and loyalty were directly to them, often intentionally created chaotic events and disturbed the social milieu (Wallis, 1982:37; Johnson, 1991).

group from all over the city and it is impossible to get them all together. There are hundreds of people out there who are very frustrated with this."

Interestingly, another form of connection group arose in addition to the randomly fabricated ones. These groups functioned more like "lifestyle enclaves" (Bellah, et al., 1985:71-75). They gathered together, as Paulk said, "people who have common interests and need to be together to facilitate tasks" within the larger church (12/14/90). Clusters of members formed around common interests (such as the ecological and political action groups), careers (including groups for lawyers, doctors, and pilots), and ministerial gifts (like the connection groups for parking lot attendants, church school workers, and choir members). This type of connection group replaced the geographic and neighborhood-based racial segregation with a clustering based on individual interest, which indirectly resulted in a segregation by economic class and status.

The entire revised fellowship system was a dismal failure. I spoke with many members who had no idea who their deacon was, had never met their area pastor, and flatly refused to drive across town to attend a "connection" group. Unlike the former arrangement where nearly two thousand participated, these connection groups drew at most several hundred.[300] The rearrangement of social ties and pastoral and deaconal assignments infuriated long-time members. One reflected, "It's become over-organized. I liked the voluntary aspect of the covenant community groups versus now being assigned to a group and you have to go; it's mandatory service." Another member suggested,

> We've lost something. I used to always say, 'You don't get lost [in this big church] because you know where your local group meets and you have real contact with your area pastor.' But I think connection groups have changed all that... It has for me.

I heard reports of a few committed and core members even dropping out of active church participation because the intentional severing of fellowship and ministerial ties they had worked so hard to create. Paulk's disruption and remolding of the established groups into artificially created categories was disastrous. At a time when intimacy and fellowship were necessary to endure the shaking of the congregation's foundation, the networks promoting it closeness and camaraderie were destroyed. It is

[300] The number of covenant communities dropped from approximately 125 during the 1988 to 1990 period, to 62 in July of 1991, to 46 in July of 1992.

impossible to estimate the amount of damage this restructuring did to the congregation. The words of one passionate woman summarize the possible effects of this situation.

> I heard Bishop Paulk say once that in his experience as a long-time pastor unless people have real fellowship and real friends in a church, they will leave eventually. You need that to help edify and build you up and you build them up. We need interaction with one another and we're not getting it now!

A TENUOUS ENVIRONMENT

By the beginning of 1991 the kingdom suddenly did not look as successful as it had been portrayed. There was quite a bit less about which to be triumphant. The World Congress fell far below expectations. The Cathedral stood empty and unoccupied. The church was many million dollars in debt, and yet Earl Paulk continued to plead for money six to ten times a sermon. New members joined and fell away; those that remained were minimally committed. The fellowship bonds holding long time members together had been severed abruptly by Paulk. This in turn dismantled many of the informal ministries instituted by the laity.

As one who desired to be judged by his fruit, Earl Paulk had found this recent harvest rather meager. More significantly, the membership also noticed his lack of accomplishments. These multiple difficulties demonstrated to them that the church might not always be victorious. Earl Paulk might not even be the successful prophetic leader they thought him to be. These several troublesome situations had shaped an atmosphere whereby Paulk and the church itself began to appear flawed and fallible. This environment of doubt created the possibility for valid criticism of Paulk's decisions. His authority could be questioned as the incongruities between prophesied expectations and disappointing realities became so blatant. These discrepancies had created a crack in the ideal image of Earl Paulk and of Chapel Hill Harvester Church.

By themselves alone, these monetary and organizational problems might have been resolved without further diminishing Paulk's charismatic persona. These issues, however, did not end the parade of troubles to be faced by the congregation. Before the leadership even had a chance to address the mild disenchantment in the milieu, a few highly influential and well respected members left the church for a variety of reasons. These defections magnified the congregation's doubt. Their departure caused an immediate and intense response by the church leadership. It was Paulk's impassioned, and often

vehement, response toward one defector in particular which prompted further speculation about what was taking place. The leadership's dire warnings of fraternization with former members raised many inquiries, which in turn created more problems.[301] The leadership's attempts to patch these flaws were counter productive, showing them to be desperate and not in control. Soon, the gaping holes in the church's identity and Earl Paulk's image allowed multitudes of increasingly disgruntled members an avenue of easy exit.

[301] Evidence of the extent of these warnings and references to the trouble taking place around the leadership can be found in the number of references in Paulk's sermons to congregational strife during this time. His average number of references jumped from two per sermon in the previous period to almost 12 per sermon in this historical period (see Appendix B-36 tables).

The manner in which this process unfolded before my eyes was perhaps the most fascinating social interaction I ever observed. For every action taken by disgruntled members, the church leadership responded with their own counterattack in order to shore up the rapidly deteriorating perception of success and Paulk's personal authority. Because of the interactive, chaotic, and highly engaging character of this brief yet crucial period in the church's history, I have attempted to describe the events chronologically when possible. This style of portrayal, although less conducive to theoretical analysis, hopefully captures the fervent social dynamics of the events. This story offers a glimpse at the seldom observed process of the deconstruction of the authority of a charismatic leader.[302] This undermining of Earl Paulk's charisma continued, then, with an indirect personal challenge presented by the defection of several key members.

THE JUDAS SPIRITS

By the middle of 1991 I had the sense that a mild disillusionment was developing among staff members. Throughout the year I had questioned Tricia Weeks, my assigned "contact person," regarding several missing pieces of church history to no avail. Then, during an interview in July, she finally provided me with "forbidden" information about Alpha and several members who left over the past ten years. This was the first time in three years of questioning that I heard an unflattering version of the church's history.[303] From this moment on, I had the distinct impression that Tricia was losing her undying commitment to the church. What I did not know was that at this time she and Earl Paulk were embroiled in a severe disagreement over whether she or the youngest daughter of the administrator should be the

---

[302] A number of scholarly works indirectly address the dynamics of religious figures losing their charisma., mostly in relation to the structural dynamics of the routinization process. Certainly Weber (1968) addressed this issue in his discussion of precariousness of pure charisma. Likewise, both Johnson (1992) and Wallis (1982, 1993) address a founder's response to the routinizing processes within a religious movement. Mickler (1986) describes the charismatic leadership of the Unification church and how Rev. Moon dealt with the considerable difficulties which befell his religious organization. Timothy Miller (1991), in his edited work *When Prophets Die*, gathers together several articles which also address this dynamic. None of these works, however, present an eyewitness account of the process of the delegitimation of a leader's charismatic authority.

[303] Another core staff person involved in the financial affairs of the church commented, "There are some things under the surface that you would never see because we deliberately hid things. When we had conferences...we were told not to say negative things. We're not supposed to disclose the dirty laundry, because it is really an image issue more than honesty."

church's public relations person. This conflict ended when Paulk informed her that the public relations post had never been assigned to her nor was it to be her job at the church. She interpreted this decision as an indication of the impervious organizational nepotism in place, as well as a personal rebuff after her years of committed service to the church.[304]

Tricia was not the only person from whom I sensed a change. In conversations during the mid summer several staff persons referred to the church leadership as "they," instead of "we," a distancing reference which took me by surprise.[305] I also began to notice that weekly lunchtime staff meetings were becoming less well attended. These subtle developments hinted that the staff was not immune to the currents of frustration being felt by the membership in general.

---

[304] Another dynamic in their relationship I was unaware of at the time was that Tricia Weeks claimed to have had an affair with Paulk several years earlier. He, on the other hand, claimed she had come on to him and that he had rebuffed her advances.

[305] Also around this time, a close relationship between myself and one of the younger pastors, Barry Smith began to develop. This pastor, who was a central Alpha leader, had recently enrolled in seminary. This exposure to new ideas and critical thinking processes encouraged him to challenge the church's accepted norms. In many of our discussions he related his dissatisfaction with Paulk's suppression of dissent among the clergy. He commented, "I feel as a part of the presbytery I know I have a right and a responsibility to say something...Then I weigh that against, 'Would I even be listened to?' No! A lot of anger has built up because I can't say what I want to say, and I feel like I need to say under God." These verbalized concerns marked the beginning of the end for him. Although he vacillated for many months over leaving, actually Barry Smith began to separate ideologically prior to or during our early conversations.

Tricia Weeks level of commitment did not improve during the summer. She began attending worship services with less frequency.[306] Finally, at the end of August, she resigned her position and officially left the church. Her departure was announced in a presbytery meeting a few days later. During this meeting it was reported to me that Earl Paulk insinuated Tricia left after he rebuffed her sexual advances. He portrayed her as a "spurned woman with a fatal attraction." Publicly, he explained to the staff in very vague terms that she left over an employment disagreement. Several members of the press, however, were told that she was on a sabbatical.

Tricia Weeks had many dear friends on staff, was a valued employee, and had been the public face of the church for several years to reporters, researchers, and visiting dignitaries. She typified a whole cluster of core and committed, middle-aged and middle class white members who had come during and just after the Alpha explosion. Like many of them, she had switched from a mainline denomination in search of deeper spiritual experiences and solid biblical teaching. She believed in the vision of the ministry and had sacrificed much of her personal career in service to the Kingdom. In some sense she symbolized for many of her peers both complete commitment to the ministry and the rewards which this brought. She was a longtime staff member. She had a reserved front row seat in the sanctuary. And, she had access to and intimate knowledge of Bishop Paulk. After all, she had written his biography.

Almost immediately staff members' questions and wonderings were answered by allegations and rumors, fueled in part by Paulk's comments in the presbytery meeting. Soon this woman who had been so central to the congregation was being described from the pulpit as an enemy of the church. Although she was never named by Paulk during this time, given his analogical pattern of preaching, anyone who was aware of her departure knew exactly to whom Earl Paulk was referring. Tricia was characterized in the familiar terms he had used for years in describing his "Hemphill Incident." She was "a woman scorned" who had betrayed his trust and attempted to control and take over his ministry. Like the

---

[306] Weeks' departure from Chapel Hill Harvester, as well as the defection of Rev. Smith and others, for the most part follows the broad stages of deconversion from a new religion described in Jacobs (1989). These members' disaffiliations do not exemplify all the steps that Jacobs discusses under each stage. Clearly, however, Weeks severs her ties to the church (Jacobs' stage 1) long before she is able to cut off her emotional connection to Earl Paulk (Jacobs' stage 2). It was a number of years, however, before she was able to separate fully from the church's social reality (Jacobs' stage 3). This same pattern is generally true for all of those former members with whom I spoke. In fact the same pattern of disengagement was true for my own disconnection from the church.

previous incident, Earl Paulk shrouded this situation in uncertainty and innuendos. Unlike the 1960 event, however, this was not ancient history; furthermore many people in the church knew Tricia's phone number. Countless members called "to forgive and restore" their friend and to plead with her to stop "attacking the Bishop." For their efforts they heard a surprising new tale from the former public relations person. To anyone who called and asked, she exclaimed, "My word to them about Chapel Hill was RUN!"[307]

[307] From my interviews with numerous former members, far more members called the recently departed wanting to know why they left than were called by these few ex-members. In fact, Tricia reported on several occasions that she just "wanted to be left alone." She stated, "I don't want to take the story anywhere" and commented that the only reason she talked to me was because of our lengthy relationship. She had no intention of exposing the church's affairs, and did not tell her story publicly until the church served her with a lawsuit over a year later.

In an interview a month after leaving, Tricia attributed much of her decision to depart to the personal toll her public relations job had taken. She explained that the dissonance between knowing the reality of the church's internal dynamics and having to uphold the surface perception of the ideal tore her apart inside. She told of her dissatisfaction with the church portraying itself as "the model and standard" for other churches to copy. She related that about a year previous she identified this source of psychological tension.[308] She described this moment as, "I had never heard [our identity] verbalized exactly like that before [that we were the example of what a local church should be]...and to hear it just made me sick to my stomach." More than anyone else Tricia was directly involved in, as she said, "making a bad situation look good." Exhausted by a dynamic which required ever-intensifying efforts to maintain the idealized image, she abandoned the task. In explaining this tension she stated, "I could not reconcile internally saying that this ministry was exemplary.... I functioned as a protector and rescuer of him on so many occasions...now I don't want to answer questions for this ministry any longer." In this sense, she epitomized the then unspoken and unrecognized tension within the entire congregation -- the struggle to live up to an image that had expanded beyond the reality just to maintain a successful identity. Her actions foreshadowed what was to take place later. Perhaps more importantly, her departure presented yet another challenge to Paulk's basis of authority as she blazed the trail for others to follow.

On this and other occasions, Tricia Weeks began to disclose what seemed to be an almost unbelievable dimension of the church. She spoke of a "relaxed moral code" including a long standing pattern of sexual misconduct by several members of the clergy.[309] Tricia also verified stories of clergy sanctioned abortions and countless adulterous relationships among church leadership which led to

---

[308] No doubt her extramarital relationship with Paulk, although it had happened several years earlier, also colored her portrayal of the idealized version of the church.

[309] This pattern of charismatic leaders and founders of new religious movements indulging "the darker desires of their subconscious" (Wallis, 1993:177) is quite common. Wallis (1993, 1986, 1982) among others, suggests that "charismatic leaders may be able to render followers exclusively dependent upon them, eliminating constrains or inhibitions upon their whims, leading to the possible emergence of unconventional sexual practices and violence" (1993:177). Perhaps this situation is more widespread that just a few isolated new religions given the recent rash of books and articles about clergy sexual abuse (Fortune, 1989; Pellauer, 1987; Jordan-Lake, 1991) Several surveys report suggest as many as 10 to 15 percent of clergy are guilty of sexual malfeasance (Jordan-Lake, 1991). Ronald Enroth (1992) has written extensively on the forms of abuse some churches or their pastors can inflict on members.

divorces and re-marriages.[310] She confirmed the existence of the informal doctrine of "Kingdom Relationships," as discussed in chapter six. Almost a year later, in the Fall of 1992, she finally disclosed her own alleged adulterous "kingdom relationship" with Earl Paulk that had extended from February 1986 to September 1988.

These revelations so radically contradicted my general perceptions of the church that for a month or more I doubted their authenticity. Yet this "forbidden knowledge" began to bring coherence to many of the puzzling social dynamics, insider jokes, and rumors I had heard the previous three years.[311] Soon, I began to hear similar allegations in private from long departed former members as well as current victims of the abuse. None of this information became public knowledge to members for several months. Most members remained completely perplexed as to why Tricia left, why she was attacking the church, and why Bishop Paulk responded to this so vehemently. For those few who did learn of her "forbidden" knowledge, it explained both her desire to leave and Earl Paulk's aggressive accusatory response to her departure.

---

[310] I had heard accounts of pastors' marital difficulties and illicit propositions of female staff persons in the preceding weeks from several women, see my discussion of this in chapter one.

[311] For instance, I continually wondered why Paulk surrounded himself with women. These few women had unrestricted access to him and seemed to wield considerable power in the organization. Other times staff members joked about keeping their garage doors closed so no one could tell whose car was at their houses. I had often heard rumors from many people that Don Paulk had affairs with women who were later forced out of their staff position once the relationship ended. At one point I was completely baffled by a specific comment of Earl Paulk's about illicit relationships until the confessions by Tricia Weeks and others framed a context in which to make sense of it. His comment was, "It's your will to do it [have an affair]....You have to realize that you are a part of it too. You will to make a choice. So you have to face the responsibility of choice. Many just attempt to accuse other people....You should just get closed-mouthed about it since you were an active part of it anyway."

Not long after Tricia Weeks left, an older core couple exited the church suddenly. The husband of this couple had begun the ministry to homosexuals while he attempted to "leave the lifestyle" himself (Thumma, 1987). His wife of ten years was the director of the drama department and wrote many of the church's plays. They were both well liked and highly committed members of the congregation. They, too, left without any explanation; they just stopped coming. After their friends began to inquire about their departure, this couple attributed their departure to a dispute with Clariece Paulk over decisions in the Worship and Arts program. They had also just heard the story of the sexual exploitation of a close female friend by one of the church's ministers. This couple was considerably less central, as well as symbolically less significant, to the functioning of the church than was Tricia Weeks, but their exodus amplified the general sense that something was seriously wrong at the church.[312]

Within a month of these departures a few younger women also left the church suddenly. The most influential of those to leave was Laura Gunter. Joining the Alpha movement as a young impressionable teen, Laura rapidly advanced to the leadership rank of an Alpha elder disciple. Later she moved into church staff positions, and eventually was selected as a covenant community leader and deaconess. According to Pastor Lynn Mays she was being "groomed to be a pastor." Laura was the only female, non-family member, from the ranks of the Alpha elder disciples to be on the pastoral track.

In the eyes of many of her peers (all of whom were former leaders in Alpha and now staunch congregational members) as well as the youth of the church with whom she was working, Laura was a "rescued orphan" who had been adopted by the church. In 1979 after a severe family crisis, Pastor Duane had "assumed a father role" in her life and often referred to her as a "spiritual daughter." Her friends saw her, in the words of one of them, as "the virgin child of Chapel Hill Harvester." Her purity of cause and commitment to the church were above reproach.

After an October 24th meeting with pastors Lynn Mays and Duane Swilley, she abruptly quit the church and completely dropped out of sight for several months with no explanation. Her departure

---

[312] Wright (1987:67ff.) proposes that there are three types of departures from an intense religious commitment: covert, overt, and declarative. He found that those who participated longer in a group usually chose the later two strategies of leaving. Those leaving Chapel Hill Harvester during this time exemplify the covert style of leaving unannounced, without fanfare, and with the intent not to create a scene. Rather, as will be seen, it was Paulk and the leadership which brought these members' departures into the open.

caused considerable puzzlement and concern among her friends. Although she had struggled with her emotions surrounding this decision for months, she told only her family why she left the church and went into seclusion. According to her later publicly disclosed comments, Laura had been sexually molested by Pastor Swilley six years earlier while in counseling with him to deal with her mother who lay dying of cancer. Pastor Duane had told her these acts would develop a deeper level of trust in her. He explained that most members and leadership could not understand this "higher truth," these "Kingdom relationships." He informed her that both his wife Sunny and "Uncle Earl...were aware of it and approved of it." Above all, Duane told her to "tell no one." For several years she did just that, because, as she explained, "We were taught that spiritual authority was to never be violated." Yet after considerable soul-searching and reading about abusive relationships following the departure of Tricia and the other couple, Laura came to understand what happened to her was "sin and abuse." Her trust in the system and its pastors had been eroded; she could no longer believe that these incidents were "spiritual" and proper.

Almost immediately following the October meeting rumors began to circulate that Laura was "full of spirits" and had challenged the authority of the presbytery. One couple, who were ardent church supporters and heavy contributors as well as being Laura's best friends, was summoned to a damage control meeting with Lynn and Duane the following morning. While weeping, Duane confessed to having fondled Laura several years earlier and for that he begged their forgiveness. At the same time he commented that he could not understand why Laura presently was acting as she did. Lynn speculated that she was under the control of an evil spirit. They downplayed the incident of abuse to such a degree that the couple left the meeting trusting church leadership and denying their friend.[313] At this time very few members knew Laura's story, yet her rapid exit on top of the several others continued to raise questions in the minds of members.

---

[313] About four months later, Laura Gunter broke her self-imposed silence and visited a few of her closest friends who were also core members and valued staff persons. She explained in detail her relationship with Duane and how she had concluded that it was sinful and abusive. This disclosure prompted several other women to reflect on their interactions with Duane Swilley. One of these women commented, "We realized that it happened to all of us. Laura broke the 'no-talk rule' and it freed us to admit it to ourselves and others, that we were not alone and it wasn't an isolated incident." Another woman reflected, "I could accept the slips, but now I knew this was a lifestyle....They were raping and pillaging the sheep. They became devils to me." The confession and transmission of such stories began to circulate among the staff women, core, and committed members.

The departures of these several persons did represent a significant loss, both actual and symbolic, to the congregation. In staff meetings following these events Paulk attempted to downplay the damage. Historically, other key persons had left and the church survived. Presently, however, Chapel Hill Harvester was at a point unlike any other in its history. The offerings consistently fell below budget. The Cathedral, still far from completion, was scheduled to be occupied in a few weeks. The pressure on Earl Paulk continued to mount. The church's immune system, as well as Paulk's authority, were being seriously weakened by the stresses of these events. Paulk counseled the congregation in one sermon on how he hoped they would respond to this situation, "Difficulties do not always call for introspection...like it might be something we have done wrong.... That is not necessarily true; this present distress is only for a moment" (9/11/91).

What caused considerable speculation within the congregation, however, were less the losses of key persons than Paulk's intense reactions to and veiled warnings about these former members. In meetings and in Sunday sermons Paulk often implied these former members had set out to destroy the church. He would comment, "When folks have axes to grind they never attack in those areas, they attack elsewhere.... We must be protected from the evil tongue" (9/18/91). Paulk maligned these persons' character and warned his congregation to avoid any association with them, commenting in one sermon (9/22/91),

> Don't desire to be with scorners in a social setting.... You are not to keep company with the sexually immoral people...in your fellowship...not even to eat with that person, don't fellowship, or even socialize.... Put away that wicked person, one among you.

Paulk's accusations, however, sparked many questions in the minds of core members. How could these persons they respected, trusted, and loved have become "wicked," "controlling spirits," and "bent on the destruction of the church" immediately following their departure? Why were their friends, and former central figures the congregation, now being indicted with "unjustly touching an anointed ministry" and sentenced with the guarantee that "...their self-destruction will not be far away" (9/18/91). Much of the congregation was in a quandary. In an effort to resolve this perplexity and restore trust, the leadership went on the offensive.

THE COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

Even with this turmoil, the main event occupying the minds of most members was the move to the cathedral. Utilizing this moment of transition to a new sanctuary, Paulk and the leadership embraced the position of making a "new beginning." They determined to defend the church by accentuating the positive. Every effort was made to portray a revitalized congregational reality. The leadership began to develop, as Paulk said in one meeting, a "new image projection" (10/2/91). Apparently they hoped to counter the growing uneasiness by overwhelming the membership with a new evidence of success. What this evidence turned out to be, however, was a recombination of several well-worn themes from the past. Paulk and the church leadership relied on the ideology which had worked previously. Each of the themes of success, satanic attacks, prophetic spiritual leadership, and trust in Earl Paulk as the father figure were used to demonstrate the legitimacy of the church's new image. These efforts did not restore the membership's full confidence in Earl Paulk, especially after his health seemed to be failing. In a desperate move to bolster the congregation's commitment, he had to resort to a more serious tactic, that of portraying "the vision" as more important than and independent of him as its communicator.

The Success of a Full Cathedral

From early in the church's history success had been cast as the proof of God's anointing upon the ministry. Throughout the Summer and early Fall new members poured into the church. Both services in the K center were packed even through the normally lean vacation months. Likewise, the move to the cathedral was envisioned as the successful progression to a higher spiritual dimension. "We are going to a new dimension, not just going to a bigger building" (10/2/91). The countdown to the move whipped members into a frenzy of expectation. The rewards of the new dimension, it was said, would far outweigh the momentary troubles. "Words of prophecy" were given that the new sanctuary would be a "special dwelling place of the Holy Spirit." The spiritual anointing on the building would be so strong, the leadership proclaimed, that miracles and healings would happen spontaneously. Members were assured the church's monetary problems would disappear with the generous offerings from the huge flood of new members attracted to the cathedral. This success would make everything right again.

Yet as Earl Paulk commented a few days prior to moving into the cathedral, "This excitement of change is being overshadowed by threats" (10/2/91). This "birthing" of a new dimension would be

accompanied by "the pains of labor and delivery," Don Paulk instructed, "No birthing takes place without pain" (10/2/91). Even the church's success was cast as being responsible for the church's troubles. Earl spoke of the "peril of success." The lone successful "bird," he commented, "always becomes the one to be shot off the wire" (10/2/91). Pushing his point further, he questioned, "Do you hear about some little church in Stockbridge? No, but we sneeze and break wind and you read about it in the paper." He argued that the church's growth, likewise, was responsible for the recent defections, "Some people can not handle growth....It's too much responsibility for them" (10/2/91).

On October 6, 1991 this new dimension was brought into existence in all its glory. The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit became the tangible expression of the church's success. It was the pinnacle of Earl Paulk's ministry. Regular and infrequent attenders alike flocked to the church for this momentous service. Thousands streamed into the massive 150,000 square foot neo-Gothic brick and concrete structure, complete with a large "rose window" and a spire rising several hundred feet into the air. Worshipers were also greeted by the signs of incompletion - muddy landscape and dirty pieces of carpet functioning as welcome mats. Walls of unpainted sheetrock and exposed iron beams with halls littered with wire and construction scraps adorned the interior of the structure. The rear of the cathedral existed only as a skeleton-like frame, giving the building the feel of a one-sided prop from a movie set. These distractions, however, were perceived by most members as nothing more than signs of a successful work in progress.

In sharp contrast to the littered construction debris, members, upon passing through the inner doors into the expansive sanctuary with its two balconies overhead, were awe-struck by an atmosphere which exuded a rich, opulent, and almost regal, quality. The plush carpet of deep maroon, walnut stained pews, gold painted iron rails, and marble altar together combined to create an impressive image. The ornate cathedral arches on the wall behind the massive wooden pulpit, the dozens of chairs filled with presbytery on the high platform, and the extensive orchestra and 200 member robed choir all provided a beautiful backdrop for the watchful eye of the television cameras, now unobtrusively located in the rear of the sanctuary. The front wall adorned with organ pipes and beautiful cloth banners embroidered with diverse Christian symbols drew one's gaze skyward. Nearly 100 feet above the floor, three of the ten planned paintings hid a huge bank of lights and speakers. There was no doubt about it, this was the sanctuary of a "successful" church. It was a church which, in the words of one member, "rivals many of the great Cathedrals in Europe."

By service time that first Sunday the 7700 seats were full. The aisles were packed with standing worshipers and many hundred late-comers had to be turned away. The service was a triumphant celebration of thirty years of independent ministry. Earl Paulk proudly proclaimed, "This is a long way from a desert place in Phoenix to this great cathedral!... This is a place of destiny." His sermon, entitled "Whosoever will," described the church's fulfillment of the kingdom vision. It had become a community of refuge and diversity, embracing people of every nationality, race, income bracket, and denomination. Paulk concluded this sermon by dramatically retelling the story of his Phoenix vision. He wept as he described his sense of the fulfillment of that vision in this structure and congregation.

Like Solomon with his renowned temple, Earl Paulk and the cathedral congregation were ready to entertain a visit by a symbolic Queen of Sheba. At this triumphant moment in the church's history, a drama "When Sheba Comes" was performed the following week in the new building.[314] This, too, was a spectacular performance with lavish costumes and props as it portrayed a triumphant church to which the "world" would be drawn.

The following Sunday was the annual celebration of "harvest" homecoming. The revelry of success continued. On this occasion the church was packed, although not overflowing. The service again was one of celebration and triumphant reflection on the history of the ministry. Many well-known ministers, county officials, and business leaders were invited to the service and several spoke words of congratulations. Hundreds of visitors from networking churches also attended. In order to emphasize its successful status a four page bulletin was distributed to the congregation. This bulletin described every achievement of the previous year, including the addition of 1484 new members, 136 infants, and seventeen networking churches into the congregational fold.

This dramatic success, however, was inadequate in reversing the difficult situation in which the church found itself. In fact, the cathedral success compounded the difficulties more than it alleviated them. The glorious "Harvest Sunday" service produced only $108,000 in offering, nearly 100,000 dollars below the expected figure. The church was at this point two months behind on its loan payments. Cold

---

[314] Ironically, this play was written by one of the women who had departed a few weeks earlier. One of these former members commented on the day of the play, "There they are standing up and saying that we are the example of what a local church should be...and it is the greatest lie of all! That is the issue for me. You shouldn't say 'come and see' and then 'when Sheba comes' you are not going to let Sheba get too close."

weather was coming and the building was still incomplete. Paulk had often pleaded, said one member, "'If you can just sacrifice until we get in things will be okay,' and now we are in and he is still saying 'you know it costs us money to run this place.'" In fact the cost of holding services in the cathedral exceeded expectations. All the many promises of spiritual vitality, healing, and an inpouring of new members did not materialize either. In addition, many long time members had difficulty with the adjustment to the expansive auditorium. One older white woman exclaimed, "it is just so massive; I get lost in it." Another long time black female member in her seventies complained, "Everybody had their seat at the K center. Nobody has 'a place' in the cathedral." At a time when many members needed consistency and stability, the move further dislocated them and added to their anxiety and level of stress. Finally, attendance in the cathedral, never again close to that of the first two weeks, was evident to all in attendance. Neither the pews nor the prophecies of healings, prosperity and spiritual awakening were being filled.

In the midst of this inability to ensure continual success in order to legitimate his charisma, Earl Paulk began an effort to base his authority in the past successes of the church. He often reminded the congregation of the church's history, where they had come from. During this period Paulk's sermon references to the church's history were three times those of any other time (an average of 3.3 per sermon). Likewise, he used his status as "founder" more frequently in sermons than at any other historical period (.3 per sermon). Essentially, this effort implied that if Paulk's present success were inadequate to ground his authority as leader, then members were to also take into account his past accomplishments as a basis for putting their trust in him.

Satan Attacks Success

An emphasis on these successes, either past or present, did not eliminate Earl Paulk's problems; however, they did offer him a rhetorical outlet to explain the continuing trouble. During an October staff meeting, he reasoned that the "Harvest Sunday" offering was modest because the church's successes were being attacked by Satan (10/16/91). "The Devil hit me with what he knew would defeat me," he stated. Like earlier in his history, Paulk emphasized a dualist perception of reality, casting Satan as the enemy, in order to rally and unify the congregation.

The Devil, and more importantly his minion -- those "bitter people who will stop at nothing...to destroy the vision," were directly responsible for the adversity which spoiled their success, according to

Paulk.[315] "There have been satanic forces released in the last few months," he explained in a large meeting of church leadership and then continued, "If I were Satan I would war against us" (10/26/91). "We are being attacked by people...but Satan can not have [this ministry]," commented another leader (10/16/91). Further, Paulk cautioned members to avoid any interaction with these "satanic forces." He admonished the congregation, "If you give an ear or fellowship with them, you are helping to destroy this ministry" (10/16/91) and "Even by rubbing shoulders with them you could be guilty" (10/26/91). Finally, Paulk punctuated his warnings with threats of spiritual destruction, "We'll be attacked by people, but vengeance is mine saith the Lord. You can touch men, but don't touch the anointed things of God, and this (ministry) is an anointed thing of God" (10/16/91). This offensive tactic not only provided a common enemy against which the congregation could rally but it also acted as a strong motivation for members to avoid those who left. By keeping members from any involvement with these wayward folks, the leadership hoped to minimize the damage done by their "gossiping." The warnings functioned as spiritual intimidation with threats of divine punishment for those who disobeyed.[316]

I Told You So...

Another tack Paulk and the presbytery took to protect the church was to revitalize Earl Paulk's image as a spiritual prophet. References to him as spiritual leader by others increased, as did his own, all couched in a spiritualized portrayal of the church's present trouble. "We can't just move out of the rational mind, but we have to look beyond it in our spiritual mind to see the solution to these problems," Don Paulk advised (10/30/91). The problems were the tangible evidence of heavenly warfare between

---

[315] Satan was identified as and talked about almost entirely as personified in those members who left. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that Paulk's references to Satan in his sermons actually dropped during this time but his comments about congregational strife jumped dramatically (see Appendix B-4).

[316] These warnings were effective only for some people. Occasionally several of Tricia Weeks' friends inquired as to how she was doing, stated that they missed her, and asked me to pass along their greetings. A few of them stated that they were unwilling to call her due to the sanctions if anyone found out. Many members, however, contacted her, at first, in an attempt to correct her errant ways and later to hear what she had to say. Paulk's warnings about "touching the anointed move of God," however, had a powerful effect on most of the core and committed members judging from their comments. Several of the recently departed members shared that they were concerned about their own and my safety. Tricia even cautioned me, "If I were you I would be very careful." Even after members left the church, there seemed to be an unspoken fear that divine retribution would befall them for speaking evil of Paulk's anointed ministry. Many attributed their random misfortune, no matter how insignificant, to God's displeasure of their leaving the church.

the forces of good and evil. As Earl Paulk commented, "Every time I have begun to preach on the 'secret places of God' I've done hand to hand combat with satanic forces.... When we enter into the realm of challenging his authority in this world then he gets active" (11/18/91). The solution, therefore, was spiritual as well, as Earl directed the congregation, "We need to pray to release the necessary resources to meet our needs and bind subtle spirits of gossip and idle talk" (10/26/91). He explained, "When we bring the powers of the next [spiritual] realm into this one, then we will not be subject to the authority of Satan" (10/16/91). Consequently, several prayer services were organized during the weekends. A 24 hour a day prayer vigil was also instituted and continued for nearly a year.

Paulk's prophetic status was constantly affirmed before the membership both by himself -- "I really am a prophet" -- and by other presbytery members -- "He is a man of God." During this period Earl Paulk also often reminded the congregation of his prophecies regarding their current difficulties. "None of you will remember this," he stated, "[I said] there will be a letdown when we move into the cathedral" (10/16/91). He claimed he had foreseen the allegations as well, "For three years I warned you, 'Watch because savage wolves would come among you'" (10/20/91). When Earl prophesied, "People are going to fill your ears with junk...but do not grow weary in your mission," he prepared the congregation to treat the future allegations as unfounded lies. He further prophesied doom to those who came against him, "There will be consequences coming from the heavenly realm, if I am a man of God" (10/26/91).

These comments, however, did little to counter the difficulties facing the church and Paulk's authority. Too many claims had been made by Paulk about the cathedral which were not fulfilled. Very few members commented on these failed prophesies at the time, but the situation was such that neither did members embrace a prophetic Paulk to the exclusion of what was taking place around them. With his prophetic identity in jeopardy, Earl Paulk fell back on an even earlier and more basic ground of his position, that of being the family patriarch and a fallen, frail human being who possessed a call by God.

We Are All Family

Another effort undertaken to counter these difficulties was to remind members of their connections to the church as a surrogate family. For many of the Alpha movement the family identity had been a potent emotional tie and reward of being part of the Kingdom. The image of the church as a family, however, had diminished considerably over the past ten years. The distinction of Paulk as the head of the family now functioned to solidify only his spiritual and actual family. Nevertheless, Earl Paulk reintroduced this image in an attempt to create congregational unity and ground his faltering level of trust with members. One of the ways he attempted to restore this trust was by exhibiting his own vulnerability to the church. He further used these images of his humanity to emphasize the fact that physically he was a "frail" human being. What gave him his authority was the divine anointing and mission which had been laid upon him by the Holy Spirit. Members, therefore, were encouraged to ignore his personal failures for the sake of the anointing he had been given.[317]

Earl Paulk used this approach first on those with whom he had the closest relationships. During staff meetings he began to confide his "secrets" to his core staff members. Don Paulk echoed this theme of familial closeness stating that it transcended employer/employee relations. "You are important, more than a staff. You are the heart, a real part of this ministry." Don commented (10/30/91). On another occasion Earl Paulk mentioned that his openness with others had created many of the current problems, saying "We run risks with those we love." In one staff meeting, prior to describing aspects of his 1960 affair, he disclosed, "I have never shared this with anyone but my family."

An aspect of this "secret-telling" or familial vulnerability with members included having the presbytery confess their human frailties. Several pastors testified in public of their personal problems including divorces and ministerial failures. Don even reminded the congregation at one point, "[This ministry] was raised on human frailty and failure" (10/30/91). Earl admitted, "We are real.... We know we have people who make mistakes.... We are sinners; we all make mistakes" (10/2/91). Don Paulk described this condition during an interview, "To me your human frailty endears you to me, rather than [the attitude of] 'I can't accept your humanity. I can't accept your flesh. All I want from you is perfection.'

[317] Indication of the diminishing personal connection Paulk had with church members can be seen in the reduction of his reliance on familial and relational references in sermons. His paternalistic comments decreased to their lowest point since the 1974-75 period (4.8/sermon, see Appendix B-21) and references to love, family, and relationships were very low as well. See the sermon content analysis tables in Appendix B-9, B-10, and B-12.

And that's not what God wants from us."

This rhetoric did shape how many core members discussed what was taking place at the church. One such person explained in relation to the leadership, "I want people to accept my humanness so I accept theirs." Another core member and staff person commented, "What people do in their own lives is their business.... It doesn't have anything to do with the ministry." A third church leader shared, "The more I have gotten to know the man, the more I respect his character and his integrity.... It has caused my respect for him to grow." Besides helping to create an atmosphere of intimacy, mutual sharing, and admissions of weaknesses, these efforts prepared the congregation for possible revelations of misconduct by their leadership. The leadership attempted to portray themselves as no different than any other ministry or big business. As Don commented in an interview, I don't care where you go, here, First Baptist, IBM, or General Motors. You have got human problems; you've got human frailty." Don foreshadowed future events when he commented in one October meeting, "[Before these troubles end] you are going to see flesh and see passion" (10/30/91).

Even in the midst of these admissions of human imperfection, however, the vision was declared to be of divine origin and essential for the congregation. "I don't know of a perfect church on earth... We are a church anointed of God to a mission!.... It's our vision, our calling of God," Paulk proclaimed to approximately 2000 core members and leaders (10/26/91). Don counseled, "[God] would not have given us the vision if he would not have given us the resources and ability to finish it" (10/30/91). The leadership implored the congregation in services to hold on to this mission, "You are a part of something bigger than all of us!...This is a resource center. We have the opportunity to speak into the lives of leaders of many countries" (10/20/91).

Paulk preached many sermons which combined these two themes of human fallenness and a divine anointing. He often rehearsed the stories of the Biblical characters Samson, David, and Joseph much as he had in the earliest days of the church in Inman Park. Each of these personalities were described as weak in the flesh but mighty in obedience to their calling. Paulk explained about Samson, "He was still blessed in his spirit even though he was compromised in his flesh.... He compromised his flesh but his anointing remained!" (9/22/91). Of David he taught, "David had messed up but he still hadn't lost his anointing" (9/22/91). "God-called leaders are still flesh," Paulk reminded the church (10/20/91). On the other hand, Earl Paulk also warned the congregation of the wicked women who tempted these

men of God. Delilah and Jezebel were described as "controlling women" with "takeover spirits" (9/22/91). The comparisons to current situations were not lost on the listening audience. In case they missed the reference, however, Don Paulk clarified it during a passionate outburst to several staff, "You got Delilah, Jezebel, Salome, and you got Tricia Weeks."

These various strategies were meant to increase intimacy and thereby instill a greater level of trust among the members. The implication of the familial closeness based on secret-telling, veiled admissions of imperfection, and complete dedication to the anointed leader with a vision was to increase the congregation's trust of Paulk. Since the kingdom was built in trust, honest admissions by leadership supposedly increased this sense of confidence. After all, Earl explained, "Nobody has ever said this church is perfect... [You should] trust leadership for the right reasons" (10/9/91). He warned the congregation that certain former members would attempt to steal the confidence members had in the leadership with their rumors. He explained in one sermon, "Those over you in the Lord, they will hear from God for you. [Others] will come and destroy the trust of you in your shepherd. (10/20/91).

The challenge before members, first implicitly and later explicitly in the lyrics of a often-sung hymn from this time, was "Whose report will you believe?" -- In whom would they put their trust? Paulk asserted publicly over and over what he privately told me, "I believe in what I am doing, I am sincere." To demonstrate his trustworthiness and prove his innocence to the staff and core members, he and Don joked about the accusations themselves. Earl jested, "This week some ladies on staff came up to me and said, 'Please harass me.' Why there was even talk about the size of Don's organ, Clariece talks about the size of her organ all the time" (10/16/91). His brother challenged the truthfulness of the rumors, "If ever the accusations about me [sleeping with many women] were true, I'd be proud in my spirit" (10/30/91). Finally, both Earl and Don Paulk often presented their version of the "real" reasons certain people left, either threatening to or actually disclosing what they felt were these persons' hidden motives. Don Paulk described the situation in an interview.

They are trying to destroy the church. I can go down a list of everyone of these people and tell you what their hidden agenda is because I know what they are.... And if they keep on pressing I'm going to reveal their hidden agenda and it is going to be nasty.... If there is one thing this church has stood for it is mercy.

This challenge to the congregation and staff to choose between trust in its leadership and trust in the former members was a successful strategy at the early stages in the unfolding drama. As more and more members joined the ranks of the departed, however, the decision to accept Earl Paulk's version of what was happening became more difficult. For the moment, however, Earl Paulk was still seen as the leader of a successful church, a prophet, and a loving father and friend who was being attacked by Satan.

SICK WITH DESPERATION

In the midst of these events, Earl Paulk began to resemble the "frail human being" he portrayed. He showed signs of intense strain, appearing distracted, preoccupied, and anxious. His face, which seemed to age overnight, looked worn and haggard. Given the pressure of the situation, his countenance was not too surprising. His demeanor, however, was certainly not the appropriate persona for a powerful charismatic leader. I began to hear whispers of worry from the staff about the Bishop's health. One secretary even suggested that Earl Paulk had "the look of a desperate man."

The full extent of Earl Paulk's desperation was soon revealed. He called an impromptu leadership meeting the last Sunday evening in October during a World Series game in which the Atlanta Braves were attempting to win the 1991 World Series. Attendance at this meeting, rather than watching the game, required great sacrifice on the part of the leadership and this researcher. At this meeting Paulk sketched the church's predicament in vivid detail for the approximately 2000 church leaders and core members present. He reported that the offerings had been $50-60,000 dollars below budget for the last several weeks. Paulk argued that the church had pared the staff excesses to a minimum and that to reduce the budget further would hinder "ministry." His only solution was to raise revenue. In that regard he challenged this group of members who were giving well over ten percent of their income to "truly sacrifice" using as examples going without meals and losing their homes. As a final incentive to give, he warned those business leaders whose financial futures were tied to the success of the church, "Unless we recover quickly we will have to do some drastic things." Paulk grimly explained this might entail the lending agency taking over their finances.

They would control the money and then the vision of God, or we could declare bankruptcy. I would rather do this than let them control what happens here.... But if we declare bankruptcy, some of you who are in business for yourselves would get hurt too.

Gone was the strong, self-confident charismatic leader. Paulk had resorted to pleading and blackmail to cajole these members into giving more money. As Don admitted a few days later, "We are broken vessels." In this meeting, the core membership had seen a desperate Earl Paulk, and from that point on many began to perceive him in a different light. The atmosphere of blind faith and complete trust began to dissipate.

Another incident immediately followed this meeting further eroded the congregation's confidence in the strength of their senior minister. Two days later, a successful businessman and the church's largest giver, told Earl Paulk of his desire to leave the church. This was an extremely troubling situation since the man had given the church a third of his income, over 100,000 dollars, the previous year. The following day Paulk called him at home and asked for a ride to the doctor. While with the physician, Earl Paulk was diagnosed with extreme hypertension and was put on two weeks bed rest. On the way home, Earl asked this business leader to address the staff at the weekly meeting that day, telling him to "just say what was on his heart." [318] At that lunch meeting, the man graphically portrayed Bishop Paulk's condition. He pleaded with the staff to shoulder more responsibility and not burden their leader with trivial problems. "We need to re-distribute the weight...to protect him, insulate him," he encouraged, "This might be God, we need to keep open to hear from God." Surprisingly his lunch visit was the final time this businessman attended any church function. Once again a significant core member departed with hardly a word of warning. The blow his leaving had to the budget and the morale of the core members was considerable.

Earl Paulk's mandated bed rest kept him temporarily absent from the day-to-day activities of the church. His absence caused many of the staff to express great concern over Bishop Paulk's health and his future role at the church. Several pastors worried that the church might not survive without the senior minister at the helm. Don added to this fear in his description of Earl's possible role after coming back to the church, "Before Bishop was the sail, catching the wind and keeping the whole church moving. Now he is to be the rudder, directing it but it is also moving by itself with momentum" (11/15/91). Earl Paulk

---

[318] As an example of how far trust in Paulk had deteriorated by this point among the staff, there was considerable debate among active and former members whether Earl Paulk was actually ill or just using his weakness to rally sympathy and create unity in the congregation and of course to pressure this crucial member into staying.

himself greatly intensified this concern with his initial comment to the staff after he was back, "I don't mind dying if the church wins" (11/15/91).

Those with whom I spoke among the general church membership were even more apprehensive about the Bishop's illness. One moderate member reflected, "We were there the Sunday when it seemed like the Bishop was preaching with his last breath, we where so worried." Others told me they were in prayer constantly about Earl Paulk's health, as one core member exclaimed, "We are not ready to make it on our own [as a church]." Although this illness may have created some congregational unity through compassion, it also severely shook the membership's perception of Earl Paulk as a strong, vital leader.

With the advent season approaching, Paulk and the leadership continued to stress the dangerous situation in which the church had found itself. This was done, perhaps, in an effort to goad members onto greater giving, but instead it generated even more anxiety among the membership. One December morning while the offering was being taken, Earl flatly declared,"The ministry is in jeopardy, I'm not sure we are going to make it" (12/1/91). He used the context of "World AIDS Day" (12/1/91) to preach extensively on "survival in the midst of trouble,"-- a message at least as relevant to the congregation as it was to the persons with AIDS in the audience. This sermon characterized the anxious atmosphere of the leadership. He proclaimed, "God is concerned about our survival.... God doesn't want us to lose this ministry" (12/1/91). The hopefulness of God being on their side was overshadowed by the sense of impending doom and the difficult circumstances. Bishop Paulk even admitted that sleep gave him no reprieve from the troubles, "I was having some bad nightmares about an empty cathedral and my wife put some pictures of the first Sunday in the cathedral by my bed" (12/1/91). Paulk continued by describing his desperate frame of mind,"...everything round about seemed to say 'you'll not be able to succeed' and you look around and say, 'Is there an answer, a way out, a way to go?'" (12/1/91). Over and over he acknowledged his own weakness (12/1/91).

Seeking God's will for this ministry... [has] become a tremendous burden and a tremendous internal task. What are you going to do when everything around you says, 'we are not going to make it'? And I am talking to Chapel Hill, to the people I love. Is it a lack of commitment or is it economic depression? How do we make it through these rough seas.... We are in a place of false brethren, in a place of accusation...in a place of survival.

As a antidote for both his and the congregation's severely weakened spirits, Paulk prescribed a revitalized awareness of the church's kingdom vision.[319] He commented in one sermon, "We are not just another little church by the side of the road, we are called of God to demonstrate the Kingdom" (12/1/91). He implored the membership to hold to this vision, "believing that God has victory in his camp."

STAY FOR THE VISION!

[319] This was an interesting rhetorical feat since Earl Paulk had for some time been de-emphasizing the kingdom in favor of the "Cathedral Concept." See his number of references to kingdom (Appendix B-8). Instead what he did was to incorporate the kingdom idea into the vision of the church (Appendix B-27). A combination of his references to kingdom and vision equal or exceed his use of these term in preceding periods of the church's history.

During the late 1980's Earl Paulk had invited the congregation to share his vision in an effort to incorporate the diverse ministries under one unified demonstration of a triumphant church. His sharing of "the vision" changed how it began to be perceived -- from something Earl Paulk owned and the congregation followed, to an internalized reality each member possessed and could actively demonstrate. This shift in Paulk's rhetoric diminished his singular ownership of "the vision" even as it both empowered members' individual ministerial efforts and centralized these into one demonstration of the Kingdom. The move could be perceived in Paulk's statement, "The kingdom of God is within you; That's where it is! We become Christ to the world and because we live out kingdom principles.... It's a mentality" (4/19/91). Now, many trials and his illness later, Paulk resumed this divestiture of "the vision" as his personal property. With his prophetic authority and the power of his personal charisma began to wane, he intentionally continued this distancing of himself from the reality of the vision. The people were to obey and follow, not him per se, but an objectified and independent "vision."[320] This shift can be seen clearly in his comment, "We are just fallible humans, but the vision is what's important! (1/28/91).

Paulk's message of staying for "the vision" was readily accepted by most members. It allowed them to overlook Paulk's failures and their eroding trust in him even as they concentrated on saving "the vision." Those core and committed members I interviewed expressed considerable commitment to "the vision." As one member said, "The vision is just too important to abandon. We can't throw it away and begin again!" Another staff member explained, "I believe in the vision, that's why I've stayed." They almost never expressed disappointment in the vision. If the vision was criticized, it was not the vision itself members critiqued but the church's recent embodiment of it. These members would then express the need to return to the original "vision" of the church. One staff person verbalized this desire.

A number of us are feeling the same way, that things need to be changed. We need to get back to 'ministry'. Even Bishop's daughter has started to feel this way, and there are some other ministers, the

---

[320] Evidence of this change can be garnered from the content analysis of Paulk's sermons. During this period Paulk's references to obedience, submission, congregational unity, and the anointing of his ministry all decrease (See Appendix B-23, B-24, B-25, B-28). At the same time his references to "the vision" were at the highest point ever, an average of 13.4 times per sermon (Appendix B-27). In addition his emphasis of individual discipline and the church's and members' social ministries were climbing (See Appendix B-22 and B-31).

young folk my age, who are coming to this same awareness. There is a whole generation who have picked up on the original vision and are trying to return to it. There is an interesting revival...about to take place.

Conversely, members were on occasion highly critical of the leadership. They spoke of their dissatisfaction with the "leadership" in the handling of the cathedral building project, the restructuring of covenant communities, and their treatment of new members. Most members were silent regarding any possible negative opinions of Earl Paulk. During this time, however, I began to hear members verbally separate themselves from their spiritual leader. The comments of one staff member reflect this detachment from Paulk.

I am here working for God. I love Bishop Paulk and respect him more highly than any man in the world, but I'm not working for him. I am working for God and [Paulk] is an instrument that God uses to help me. If Bishop Paulk were gone tomorrow, I'm still working for God.

Other core and committed members started to express doubts about Paulk's authority. One member suggested,

When I hear something I don't just jump on it. I have to pray and get a confirmation. I have to feel like this is what the Lord is telling me to do. Not that I don't trust the Bishop, but I seek God myself too.

Those members who had invested their lives in this ministry were intent on making the "vision" work. "Whatever it takes to stay in this vision and to make it work we are willing to do," as one said. All that was required was a reclamation of the original goal. "We need to get back to where people need people again rather than to where people need buildings or people need projects...," claimed a core member. Another core member claimed if they just worked harder all would be well because, "The problems here are not so bad that they can't be fixed if we just work at them from the inside." One committed member summarized his feelings in this manner.

I have tried to push myself to leave on occasion not out of anger but out of financial necessity. I've just never been able to do it because there is still a commitment, a spiritual commitment to the vision -

- a call to be here.

Many church leaders testified in public of their commitment to the work they had begun. A young pastor who had risen through the Alpha ranks stated, "I was in this thing since I was 17, and I want to see it go until I die, and see it continually, progressively grow." A prosperous businessman and core member admonished the congregation, "Don't lose your investment. I've been through too many battles to leave just because some say [the church] is too big." Another successful business leader and a deacon expressed his commitment in a similar fashion.

A person called me to tell me to call another person to find out what was really going on at Chapel Hill Harvester...but this is just like a business, there are good times and bad. I'll just feed on the fruits. There is too much good still. I've come too far to start over.

Every single staff and core member I interviewed from November 1991 through January 1992 explicitly denied any inclination to "abandon ship." One core member told me emphatically, "I don't think leaving is the answer." "It has never crossed my mind to want to leave," another church leader asserted but then quickly added, "but it does make you weary." This comment hinted at latent uncertainty beneath a staunchly supportive veneer. Many of the core and committed members began to discuss their alternative reasons for staying. One said, "It would be hard to pull us away from here because we are getting the teaching and so many things available to you that other churches can't possible offer." Another asserted, "I think it is a ministry that is worth saving, just because of the people here. The staff and core persons with prominent roles in the church were repeatedly warned by Paulk not to copy the actions of those who had declared, "'Bishop, preacher, brother Paulk, I'm with you forever' while they sat on the front row...then they disappear and attack!" (12/21/91). None of these members with whom I spoke wanted to be compared to the "quitters." One firmly asserted, "This is our church and if we see problems then we have to change it.... These other people aren't doing anything about it. They are just complaining and then leaving." Ironically, all but two of core personnel I formally interviewed during these months left the church within six months.

In random formal and informal interviews with the marginal members during this time none ever expressed a desire to leave the church. No one discussed the monetary issues or Earl Paulk's health

problems unless I introduced them. I got the distinct impression that those in this segment of the congregation were intentionally choosing not to think about the situation. They trusted the leadership, as one member stated, "to guide us through this valley." They had less commitment to the church, and as long as worship continued to be spiritual, entertaining, and of a high quality they were content. As one marginal member expressed in an interview, "I'm getting what I need out of the church.... With a church this size you can't expect everybody to be one hundred percent pure in motive."

THE NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Nineteen ninety-two became a symbolic marker of a change in strategy for the leadership in relation to the church's woes. Since neither attacking the enemy nor strengthening Paulk's image had diminished their troubles, the presbytery resolved "to will" their problems away. Following a "positive thinking" approach, the leadership proclaimed 1992 as the year of "positive action." Much like the visualization techniques of Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller, Paulk encouraged the membership to "see it [completion of the cathedral and payment of the half million dollar overdue debt] in your imagination. By the Spirit.... start to believe it." (1/19/92). He challenged them to reinterpret the past year, "Has this been a 'year of failure' or a 'year of testing'?" Once again he framed the entire situation as a spiritual problem with a spiritual solution, and the solution had been given to him in a revelation by God. There would be no more reduction of ministry, no dwelling on past, nor any "giving an ear to Satan's accusations." As the prophet and "oracle of God," Earl would "speak forth" this solution, and then it was up to the congregation to actualize it.[321] This divine strategy, given as a prophecy by Earl Paulk, greeted members in the final bulletin of 1991. It read,

And the Lord would say to us this morning that He's bringing us not just into positive thinking but into **positive action**.... I call this a year of **positive action** in the household--of **positive action** in your finances.... I will not leave you in a valley of indecisiveness, but I will bring you to the mountaintop where you will see clearly, you'll think clearly and you'll begin to act clearly. And when you turn back to the battle field you'll not listen to the voice of the enemy, you'll not listen to the voice of fear and to the voice of doubt, but you'll listen to the voice of victory. You **will** believe **MY** report.

[321] In the first Sunday sermon of new year Paulk made at least 16 references to speaking for God, hearing specifically from God, or reporting what "God says."

The following Sunday Earl presented the substance of this solution.[322] The first "positive action" was to increase giving by gathering new members and encouraging less committed members to tithe. Paulk commented that first Sunday, "You don't belong here if you can't look around and see faces you have brought" (1/5/92). To facilitate this effort the leadership distributed bumper stickers containing the motivational slogan "2000 in 92." Increasing tithing among the current membership was even more of a challenge. The years of financial crisis had tapped members dry. Paulk's only option to increase giving among long time members was to resort to desperate tactics. He employed harsh spiritual threats by explicitly tying giving to salvation. "I know what I've heard from God, tithing has to do with your salvation.... The tithe is not an option it has to do with heaven and hell," he commanded (1/5/92). Don Paulk repeatedly told the congregation that the clergy would not provide pastoral counseling unless a member was a tither, commenting that "up until now, we have been too nice" (1/19/92). Earl Paulk attempted to employ humor to soften these imperatives, "You women say, 'the way to my bedroom is through tithing at my church', now that would get some positive action around here" (1/12/92). Generally these threats had damaging repercussions. Many folks were fed up with hearing about money, especially once their salvation was linked to their giving.

A second "action" given by God was designed to pay off the previous year's outstanding debt. This three-fold effort encouraged members: to contribute their tax refunds; to surrender their seldom used family valuables during a "special treasures" day to coincide with St. Valentines day; and to purchase burial plots in the yet to be constructed "Cathedral Gardens" cemetery. This announcement generated an enormous negative reaction in both more and less involved members. Although a number of members pledged their income tax refunds and several hundred contributed "special treasures," the debt was not erased as had been promised. Several large givers confided to me that they found Earl's justification of these "unbiblical" ideas by claiming they were "God-given" to be abhorrent. As one member commented, "I never questioned that he heard from God before he said that about my taxes. Now I question

---

[322] The media productions of the church were used to their fullest extent to reinforce this message. Church bulletins printed portions of the sermon for several weeks. A tape of the service was offered to all members at no cost. In several services video highlights of this sermon were presented in a humorous upbeat manner and were viewed by the worshiping congregation on the Cathedral's five enormous screens.

everything!"

The third aspect of this plan was to increase the church's exposure in the city. As Paulk advised, "God wants us to be more visible in Atlanta" (1/12/92). With this, the leadership accepted the local CBS television affiliate's offer of a choice broadcast time. The commitment burdened the already strained budget even further. Jimmy Swaggert, one of Earl Paulk's most out-spoken critics, had previously occupied this time slot. This action gave members another leadership decision to question, as one said, "I want to know why we are going on TV more, when we can't even make our budget or finish the cathedral."

The final "positive action" involved an increased focus on ministry to congregational members, an attempt to increase the rewards of membership. Evening classes at the "school of life skills" were expanded and promoted vigorously. Sunday "Christian study hour" classes were extensively advertised. A monthly newsletter, the *Cathedral Headline*, was started to replace the defunct newspaper and soon filled with advertised events and opportunities for service and fellowship. The leadership also attempted to rejuvenate the failed "connection groups." In addition, efforts were made to revive the youth program. Earl Paulk's comments implied a desire to recreate an "Alpha-like" event. He spoke of a "a new generation" and the need to "turn to their energy...get them involved. After all this is their church too" (1/5/92). A singing group composed predominantly of African American youth was organized. In comments reminiscent of the Alpha band, Paulk stated, "I want a choir to set this city on fire" (1/5/92). He even prophesied a youth revival stating, "Before the year is out I'll have gang members bringing their guns down to the altar" (1/5/92). This positive action in general did address the concerns of those interested in reclaiming the original vision of "members serving members." This impetus also intensified the desire on the part of many to do something other than give money to help restore the vision. It was the only "positive action" that was not greeted by negative reactions from the congregation.

THE VISION IS YOURS -- DO SOMETHING TO SAVE IT

In his own attempt to save the vision, Earl Paulk objectified it, distanced himself from it, and offered it to members as their possession. By doing this, he opened the door to lay involvement, not just in various ministries as before, but in the leadership and managing of the church to overcome this crisis. Many members were quite disillusioned by the feeble attempts of the presbytery to end the troubles.

They wanted to lend a hand in order to save "the vision." Business leaders from the congregation began to petition Paulk with offers of problem analysis and organizational assistance. Capitalizing on this interest, the presbytery began to encourage congregational involvement in running the church. A slogan, "Every member a minister," captured this idea. Paulk preached of the blessings of active involvement in this work of God, comparing them to those who recently abandoned the vision. He instructed the congregation, "Nobody is leaving Chapel Hill except quitters.... God does not want complainers or murmurers, he wants doers" (1/5/92). A new volunteer recruitment effort called the "Night Shift" was started to channel "doers" into the slots vacated by dismissed staff persons.

As a part of this effort, Paulk attempted to alter his leadership style drastically. Uncharacteristically, he announced in a ministry meeting in mid January, "I don't want 'yes men'.... I don't want an atmosphere of intimidation. You can give input to anything you want to, you can even disagree with me theologically."[323] The administrative staff and leadership were asked for solutions. Beginning in February every pastor fasted for seven days. However, this participatory openness did not last. The church's administrator and longtime family friend, John Bridges, determined that "the one area we can cut expenses is staff." To that end he wrote Earl and Don with an offer to resign his position. This letter was viewed as a serious act of betrayal by one of the original charter members of the church, rather than what it was meant to be, John's effort at helping the church out of the financial crisis. Earl Paulk responded explosively in a staff meeting. He accused the entire staff of betraying him, exclaimed that he did not trust any of them, and announced that they all were officially laid off. None of those with whom I spoke took his statements seriously, excusing Paulk's outburst as the administrator did,

I believe he trusts me, what he may not trust is whether I will be here next week.... He is a man and he gets frustrated like everybody else and maybe says some things...he regrets, like to the staff last week...I didn't take offense from it.

Nevertheless, immediately after the meeting Pastors Lynn and Duane convened a presbytery

---

[323] This statement represents a considerable shift given the church administrator's 1991 comment in a public seminar on the church as corporation in which he stated, " When [our Bishop] feels like he's heard from God, and maybe in relation to finances, he lets us [the board] know and I guarantee you everyone on that board will fall right in line.... Call it a yes board, Okay! Call it a yes board, but that is the way we operate."

meeting to soften Earl's remarks. The message gleaned from this incident by many of the staff was that the church, their jobs, and their relationship with Earl Paulk were all in very serious trouble. Their actions could not remedy the situation, and if they tried they would be silenced and accused of treason as John Bridges had been. Although Earl later repeatedly explained in numerous meetings that he had overstated his feelings of distrust among the staff, a breach had developed in his relationships with staff. Even Don described the atmosphere as "you really reach a place where you don't know who to trust." The staff had quickly became disempowered and disconnected. They had seen Earl Paulk's closest friend try to do something and be severely reprimanded for it. In his act, they all had lost the reward which they had strived so hard to gain, Paulk's trust and love.

Among the laity, however, this feeling of empowerment to act individually on the vision would not be suppressed so easily. The February *Cathedral Headline* described an "epidemic of 'contagious enthusiasm' breaking out among the members" of the church. This "fresh fire of the Holy Spirit," as it was called, stimulated considerable lay activity, as concerned members contributed non-monetarily toward reform as they saw fit. By mid February, the congregation had created a "positive action" plan of their own making. Paulk's secretary was flooded with letters and calls from lay business leaders wanting a voice in church leadership. These successful entrepreneurs had been inspired to succeed through Paulk's preaching and this success underwrote much of the church's ministry. They were no longer the same directionless, youthful sheep of ten years earlier. They had followed Paulk's guidance to seek out God's will for their lives, develop unique ideas, venture into risky enterprises confident in the protection of the covenant, and become tools in God's plan. They had developed into confident business leaders who were used to and willing to take charge if given the opportunity. These same business persons began meeting early in the morning to pray and strategize. Paulk attempted to stall them from taking charge, but they would not remain on hold for long.

During this time rumblings could also be heard from other lay members regarding the church's ministries. Volunteers protested about a lack of support for their various efforts. Church teachers complained of a need for repairs in the classrooms. Nursery workers grumbled over unsafe conditions. Several African American members vehemently pointed out perceived racial inequities. These members mentioned the obvious unequal distribution of blacks in the entertainment and menial service (child care, maintenance, and parking lot) ministries of the church, the limited representation of blacks in the clergy

ranks, and the devaluation of their African heritage by Paulk. Several black members admitted to harboring extreme resentment over the selection of a white woman to play the role of Sheba in the 1991 play, "When Sheba Comes." One man exclaimed, "All the blacks know that Sheba was black.... We all know this and I think it was like a slap in the face to place Mona [the Caucasian wife of one of the pastors] in that position when we have other qualified blacks to play Sheba. It rubs us the wrong way."[324]

A "WILD KINGDOM"

In the midst of this flurry of lay involvement, another crisis unfolded which intensified the volatile climate of the congregation. Vic Carter, an African American television reporter for the local ABC affiliate who lived in a nearby neighborhood and had a history of investigating the church, had heard many of the rumors circulating about the church. He asked Paulk if he could cover the upcoming "special treasures day" where members were to donate their valuables to the church. The presbytery were very apprehensive about his visit, given the nature of the service, but determined it was impossible to exclude him without the impression of wrongdoing (2/23/92). The reporter's cameras were prominent as members surrendered their family treasures of silver, jewels, coin collections, furs, and antiques to the cathedral cause. During an interview with Earl Paulk following the service these cameras captured a much more unflattering image of the church, however. On camera, Vic Carter directly questioned Paulk about the rumors of financial mismanagement, improper family employment, immorality among church pastors, the reality of bankruptcy, and Paulk's authoritarian leadership. Caught off guard, Earl Paulk admitted to "a pastor's indiscretion."[325] Following the interview, Paulk was visibly shaken. So too would his identity be severely damaged if the leadership did not act immediately . The church countered that afternoon with threats to file a lawsuit against the television station. This caused the station to shelve the interview for the moment. The threat of this recording and the anxiety over when it would be shown

---

[324] Earl Paulk had recently begun to assert that the exodus of white members was due to their racist attitudes. One African American I interviewed expressed a slightly different perspective. "Things are happening here that are also making the blacks uncomfortable. I've been hearing certain things about a 'black flight' also. We do not feel like we are getting a fair shake." He was careful, however, to complain about the staff and not to blame Bishop Paulk directly. He commented, "It's not with the Bishop's vision, but those that are connected to the Bishop, where the problems lie."

[325] The young woman, Laura Gunter, had finally begun to talk of her abuse by Pastor Duane Swilley. It was this situation about which Mr. Carter specifically asked Earl Paulk.

nearly drove the leadership insane with worry. The television station's hesitation, however, provided an opportunity for Earl Paulk to prepare his congregation for the worst.[326]

It Is Not My Fault

Too many voices, and now a very public one, were calling for answers to difficult questions. The potential challenging issues of the interview would have to be addressed. Paulk would have to offer an explanation for the church's difficulties. An effort was undertaken to defuse Vic Carter's interview and remove blame from both Earl Paulk and "the vision." The first step was for Duane Swilley to confess his sexual sin to the presbytery. Several days later, still under the severe pressure of anticipating the broadcast of the interview, Earl Paulk offered core lay leaders an opportunity to give their input into the church's troubles. Before allowing them "to speak their minds," Paulk spent considerable time defending himself on the issues addressed by the interview. According to the reflections of one business person, Bishop Paulk was congenial and open to their suggestions. He took responsibility for several issues and apologized for his errors. He promised that he would hold periodic meetings and would establish a counsel of one hundred lay leaders to advise him on church affairs. At the end of the four hour encounter everybody left feeling good and as if they were heard.

Almost immediately, however, allegations of favoritism by those not invited to this meeting began to surface. Several lay leaders issued a demand for other similar meetings. Phone calls were nonstop between members. At this point a majority of moderate and marginal members were in the dark about recent events and the allegations. Between the anxiety of members who knew what had happened and the frustration of those who did not, the rumors intensified. Paulk would have to respond quickly to this wave of rumors which threatening to overwhelm the congregation if left unchecked. Respond he did -- from the pulpit that Sunday morning. Earl summoned every bit of the spiritual power he possessed to

---

[326] In an effort to defuse the threat of this taped interview, Paulk condemned the "accusatory spirits" rampant in the secular and religious media. Paulk used the "unjust" criticism of several televangelists including Robert Tilton, and Benny Hinn by the television show "Prime Time" as an example of this trend. Christian "cult-watchers" were also identified as spreading untruths in the recent books such as *Toxic Faith* and *Churches that Abuse* thereby destroying the faith of "the flock" in their shepherds. During one worship service Paulk commented "God made us addictive persons.... It's just who you are addicted to.... These books on toxic faith and abusive leadership, they are as rotten as hell. They just want to tear down confidence in leadership" (6/28/92).

reassert his authority. He forcefully reversed his conciliatory and cooperative stance of the previous Friday with statements such as "your job is not to judge me...but to listen..." (2/23/92)!

His tone shifted drastically several hours later as he addressed approximately 2500 members called to a special meeting of the church's leadership. He began by apologizing to lay leaders about the Friday meeting, promising the disgruntled "your turn will come." He also announced he was through being amiable toward former members, saying "I wrote letters, left calls on their machines. I crawled on my belly like an old dog, but today...God told me my crawling days are over for a while." He then quickly asserted, "Even though you left us we still want to fellowship with you." He reflected on how much he had loved those who left but he also warned them, and his membership, of his power.

I loved them.... I stayed close to them.... I could allow myself to get bitter. Now what I'm going to say here I pray to God, 'Holy Spirit hold me chargeable, Let me say it with love.' Those who attack us have aberrated lifestyles and as a pastor I know those things, but they know me enough to know I would never uncover them, I'm not in the job of fighting back.

Following these opening remarks, Paulk presented his rebuttal of the interview, an interview which none of the members had seen or ever would see although this was not known at the time. Essentially he went through each of Vic Carter's allegations and claimed he was not responsible, not at fault. He offered excuses for his vulnerability to Vic Carter, claiming he was "desperately tired...since I tire more easily now than I once did" and innocently naive "because I think everybody loves me." He claimed to have no ultimate authority in administrative affairs or church management, "The church belongs to you. It is operated by a board -- I have **absolutely** no power over what happens to this property. He asserted that he was not the church's singular authority; rather it was governed by democratic practices, "...every time we added to this property, who made that decision? You did as a conference. Who voted to build the cathedral? You did as a conference." He stated he had no hand in setting salaries, opening the financial records for inspection, "I don't mind you checking with [the administrator] what big money we get." He even announced that he had no awareness of the church's financial situation, "[if we are] about to go into chapter eleven, I'm not aware of that and I'm NOT! I made no decision about misspending money.... It has always been a corporate decision." He denied approving any financial expenditure: the extravagant spending by the Worship and Arts department; the expansion

of the television ministry, the cathedral construction overruns, or even the daily administrative and salary issues. He disavowed having any influence over the church's money management, "The finances on the project that we have here is either decided by the conference or by the board.... How the money is spent once it comes in is decided by the administrator." Earl Paulk then reaffirmed that he "did hear from God" regarding the tax returns and special treasures day. Finally in regards to the immorality of a pastor, he asserted that he knew nothing about it until he learned of the allegations by the rumor mill. Earl concluded this meeting by pleading with the core and committed members, "I desperately need the input of our business people.... I need your input.... I never resent your questions." He reminded the gathered members of his loving nature, "If I have made any mistakes at all or bad decisions it is because I love people."

The repercussions from this meeting were staggering among the core, committed, and moderate groupings of members. These more highly involved members had firsthand knowledge of Earl Paulk's power and influence in the inner workings of the church. Likewise, they all had listened to hundreds of sermons where Paulk preached exactly the opposite message about his role in the church. Many persons told me they could not believe Bishop Paulk had used the pulpit to tell such lies. One core staff person, who only weeks before swore she would not leave, commented the following week that she was on her way out saying, "I cannot take the use of the pulpit for propaganda, spreading lies, and covering up, but blaming the money problems on the administrator was the last straw." These members were well aware that Earl Paulk controlled the church and the boards. Several members echoed one man's question, "If Earl is not in charge, then who is? Who is running the show" Paulk's efforts to avoid shouldering the blame for the church's problems had so undermined his credibility and trustworthiness that one woman confessed, "I don't know what to believe anymore, I don't know what is true and what isn't." Both she and many others concluded that if Paulk would lie about issues they knew to be true, perhaps he was lying as well about the rumors being baseless. Another businessman and large giver reported, "I really saw what Bishop Paulk was made of."

Dozens of core, committed, and moderate members either began to attend church elsewhere or gradually started severing ties with the church following this meeting. Many members with whom I spoke admitted that they began to withhold much of their offering from this point forward, although they continued to attend. After months of wavering, Barry Smith even made an internal commitment to himself

to leave and began covertly looking for another job. He said his decision was based on the realization that change could never come from within. "It made me sick, I realized he is not correctable or accountable," he commented, "It did something to me. I lost my trust and hope." Another core pastor told me flatly, "I have no trust in anything he says anymore."

Not everyone reacted negatively toward Paulk's speech. Pastor Lynn Mays affirmed Paulk in a leadership meeting the following day, "It was your best sermon...timely, bold and prophetic." Other staff and core members confessed to their disbelief of the rumors as one said, "If there was any proof to these allegations then I would leave, but I haven't seen any so I'm staying." Another staff person responded positively to the presbytery's efforts at inclusion. He commented, "There is an air and attitude unlike anything I've seen here before...like they are more willing to listen to the opinions of the underlings." Finally, those committed, moderate, and marginal members who were either unfamiliar with the internal dynamics of the church or who had not been present at this meeting continued to accept Paulk's portrayal of church dynamics.

It Is God's Fault

The following few weeks were spent by the presbytery in efforts to control the damage done by Paulk's presentation. The leadership undertook several counter measures to shore up the rapidly eroding congregational trust in Earl Paulk.[327] The rhetorical culmination of these efforts came in the form of a

---

[327] One such effort included Paulk legitimating his authority not in his personality and success, but in an episcopal polity structure. "We are not a congregational church, we are an episcopal church." He argued extensively that this was based on the paradigm of Moses, and that congregational democracy was not biblical. However, this new polity structure did not negate the necessity of trust in him as its singular leader. "I am the head, and it is based on trust, and if certain people didn't trust this head, then they needed to move on" (2/26/92). Another effort undertaken was to present Paulk as a popular religious leader. Over the following weeks many national and international religious personalities visited the church. Several of the Bishops in the ICCC were asked to preach. Reports of Earl at Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral, meeting with Jimmy Carter, and addressing the Georgia State legislature were related to staff and congregation at every opportunity. Then at the end of February, the church's image got an unexpected shot in the arm. While on a stop in Atlanta, President Bush presented the church with a "Point of Light" award. The leadership took full advantage of the footage from this brief ceremony. The first Sunday service in March included a long video presentation of the positive things happening at the church. This was interpreted by many of the increasingly skeptical members with whom I spoke as a "media Blitz" and an effort to give "the perception of success" to counter the negative circumstances. The mistrust of leadership had reached such a level that many members refused to accept anything from Paulk unquestioned.

The church's television program at this time was filled with statements and images of their success. The "Point of Light" award ceremony was replayed several times. It was also covered by the

reinterpretation of the cause for the current troubles. Beginning in March, Paulk and the presbytery spoke often of seeing God's hand at work in this suffering. The Bishop referred to a "time of testing," stating that he was beginning to "see the scriptures in a new way" (3/11/92). It was neither Paulk's fault, nor the board's, the administrator, or any other leader's fault. Instead it was God's fault. The leadership perceived God's hand at work in this "shaking of the church structures." The membership losses were not due to Satan or errors of leadership, but rather it was "God doing all this purging" (3/11/92). Paulk commented, "Sometimes in order for the body to stay healthy offending members had to be cut off" (3/11/92).

This shift of interpretation allowed him to recast the situation as a positive effort of purifying the vision, rather than in a defensive posture of fending off Satan's attacks. The church's difficulties existed in order to cleanse the motives and purposes of its members. Once again the kingdom was being refined through fiery trials. Likewise, with ever increasing numbers of defectors, Satan could not receive the credit for this much damage, nor would Earl shoulder the blame for "offending" ex-members. Therefore, the buck was passed upstairs as Paulk explained (3/11/92).

The Body of Christ would have to be purged and purified in order for it to be the appropriate bride of Christ.... Offense is what creates a clear and pure form of Christianity. That's what is going on now. It isn't me doing the cutting, the offending, or even Satan...but it is God doing it.

Earl used countless scriptural references to Job, Daniel in the lion's den, the trio in the fiery furnace, David's troubles, and the testing of Paul in order to demonstrate the validity of this doctrine (3/8/92).

This is a time of tremendous shaking and from it God will settle down to a core of people who understand...the gospel of the Kingdom... God said the shaking is not coming from Satan, the shaking is coming from God. That's what he did to Job.

---

local television networks. Paulk even prepared his friends and political allies in the state senate for the potential media attacks by Vic Carter. Before his prayer to open the Session he commented, "Germany had its Hitler, Italy had its Mussolini, Russia has its Stalin and the US has its media" (2/26/92). He warned these politicians that the cancerous media could easily come after them next.

Those Shaken Loose

If this process of purification and pruning had removed the free riders, the spectators, and the less committed, the church would have no doubt survived intact and perhaps might even become stronger. What actually happened, however, was that many of the core and committed members and staff were the ones shaken loose from the congregation throughout the Spring. Many of these highly involved persons felt the greatest sense of betrayal, knew the most of the questionable situations, and had sacrificed considerably to actualize the vision.[328] Like Tricia Weeks, these persons were held in high esteem by the congregation; their departure sent a powerful message, especially when several of those leaving were Paulk's daughters. The older two offspring and their husbands, who were pastors at the church, left within a month of each other.[329] Pastor Duane Swilley also distanced himself from the church, having begun an independent traveling ministry. The pastor in charge of the international ministry departed for his native Puerto Rico to start his own church. Pastor Smith finally turned in his resignation as well.[330] In addition several other pastors, two core "elders" in the church, and numerous heads of ministries also severed their ties to the congregation.

The departure of many of his natural and spiritual family was a significant loss for Earl Paulk. He responded to these defections with anger and hostility, commenting in a Wednesday evening service that any of his family who did not agree with the vision were free to leave. He asserted that he had plenty of "spiritual sons and daughters at the church who could carry on the vision" (3/11/92). Nevertheless, this loss was a severe blow to the image of Chapel Hill Harvester as a "family church." More than that, this exodus of so many persons central to his ministry further eroded Paulk's image as a trusted leader above

---

[328] Wright (1987) notes that those with the highest levels of "encapsulation," the most intense loyalties and devotions often become the most disillusioned and suffer the most from departure from a strong religious commitment.

[329] Earl Paulk continued to portray his family members as involved in the church long after they actually decided to leave. He commented in May, "My family has not left me, they are here and we are very much in love.... Beth has stepped down (because of stress and strain) but is still a minister in this place..and has no intention of leaving. Sam and Becky are here whether they agree or disagree, and Joy is here. Steve 3 or 4 years ago talked about beginning a ministry, with the approval of this church."

[330] It is interesting that even at this late date Barry Smith respected Paulk and his ministry enough to end their relationship on a positive note. He recalled this separation publicly months later, "When I left I even had a personal conversation with Earl Paulk. I told him I was not his enemy, that I was his friend. I thought it was time for me to move on, and I thought it would be best for all of us. I tried to make the transition as peaceably as possible" (White, 1992c).

reproach.

Whenever significant members departed, Paulk and the remaining presbytery would insinuate these folk had problematic character faults, would label them as a "Judas" or a "Jezebel," and would demonstratively "kiss them off" from the pulpit. Paulk's pattern from the past, of denigrating those who left, was only partially effective in keeping the blame off himself and the church. As one former member related, "This is the first time ever that [Paulk] has not been able to turn the questioning back on the individual who brought the question, because there are too many people doing the questioning!" More moderate and marginal members began to wonder what was really going on, who was really at fault. All the while Paulk continued to warn these members to avoid those who had left, "You don't need to get out and flirt with those people who are not in covenant, those who are dissident, or those who don't understand the vision" (5/3/92).

In spite of Earl Paulk's many warnings about fraternizing with the enemy, a significant amount of communication took place between current and former members. Given the close ties, especially among the core members, Paulk's derogatory remarks and actions soon reached the offended party. These comments often enraged the targeted defectors. Some drew on the energy of indignation and anger to empower them in efforts against their former church. Others continued in a reflective but passive state of mind, frustrated and bewildered pondering "why us?" or "how could we have been so foolish?" Many of those leaving were worn and weary from the years of kingdom sacrifice and expressed a desire to "drop out and rest," as one man put it.[331] Several persons began to talk of their departure in the language of a "divorce" or "falling out of love."[332] "We are going through a grieving process, like it was when I got divorced." Others reflected on the dynamics that had kept them silent and obedient for so long. As one core couple related, "When we saw Earl as a God it was harder to bring things up about him and against him. Now that we are beginning to see him as a man, it is so much easier to state our grievances."[333]

---

[331] Wright (1984, 1987), Jacobs (1989), Enroth (1992) and others discuss emotions and attitudes surrounding defection from a new religious movement. Jacobs specifically proposes stages of withdraw from an intense religious commitment (1989:126-132).

[332] Wright compares the symptoms of departing from an intense commitment in a new religious movement with those of leaving a long term marriage relationship (1987:5, 1984).

[333] The reasons given for leaving, much like members' attraction to Paulk and the church, depended on their relational ties to the church and the needs they had fulfilled by their commitment. Wright (1987:176)

By the middle of Spring I would estimate that over three hundred families of the approximately 1000 families which comprised the core and committed levels of membership had left. All of these persons were formerly solid supporters of the church, having attended over five years and given well over ten percent of their yearly income. Many more members, who were determined to leave but had obligations to the church such as children in the academy or business interests in the church, withheld much of their money and began attending less frequently. Rumors spread about a mass exodus of members that would take place after Easter and of another group of members who were prepared to depart when the school year ended. Many of these persons expressed that they were not leaving because of the "rumors." In fact, most of those with whom I talked had little or no knowledge of the allegations of immorality. Rather these members discussed having been dissatisfied and burdened for several years. Now that others were leaving, they too took the opportunity to exit. The reflection of one former member summarize this dynamic, "[The desire to leave] been building up in a lot of us for some time now....but seeing people you have confidence in bailing out that makes the decision easier."

These combined losses worsened the already severe monetary conditions. During this time the stated weekly budget was $155,000 dollars, yet the average offering from February to April was approximately $130,000 dollars a week. In early March, Paulk announced to the staff, still numbering well over one hundred, that a mandatory pay cut was into effect with reductions of 30 percent for the founding pastors, 20 percent for pastors, and 15 percent for staff. He also informed them that the church would be pulling out of many television markets after April. Earl mourned, "I weep in my spirit when we take a step backward" (3/1/92).

Troubles arose from several other fronts as well. Former core members drafted a three page letter outlining 18 ethical and fiduciary concerns regarding the church's management. This letter was sent anonymously to the lending agency and bond holders of the Cathedral's debt. Another former volunteer leader of young adults wrote and presented a five page theological treatise identifying the flaws in Earl

---

described five factors that contributed to the likelihood of defection: "(1) the breakdown in member's insulation from the outside world; (2) unregulated development of dyadic relationships within the communal context; (3) perceived lack of success in achieving world transformation; (4) failure to meet affective needs of a primary group; and (5) inconsistencies between the actions of leaders and the ideas they symbolically represent." (Quoted in Jacobs, 1989:9). Both he and Jacobs argue that it is the defector's relationship in response to a leader's actions that had the greatest influence on the decision to leave.

Paulk's thinking to the presbytery. He and other ex-members petitioned several nationally known ministers to investigate the church and demand that Paulk correct any abuses they found (as outlined in the Biblical passages, 1 Corinthians 5:1-6:5 Matthew 18:15-17, often taught by Paulk).[334] At the same time, numerous business men and women became even more vocal in their dissatisfaction with the church leadership. The promised "Friday meetings with the Bishop" had not materialized and these persons were very upset about being excluded after having been guaranteed a role in the church's recovery. Clearly, 1992 was not turning out as Earl Paulk and the church leadership had hoped. As of this point, however, Vic Carter's taped interview still sat on a shelf, the rumors continued to be unsubstantiated stories spread by those "bent on destroying the church," and Sunday attendance in the Cathedral remained at nearly 5000. This atmosphere of speculation and uncertainty about the veracity of these stories was about to end. The next significant incident in this eventful year would lend considerable credence to the allegations.

"SO THERE IS SOME TRUTH TO THESE RUMORS!"

This incident began on the third of May with an emotional explosion in the church's crowded mall atrium between Sunday services. One of the pastors was chastising a core member and active leader in several ministries for her recent lack of participation. She responded to his reprimand repeatedly in a loud voice, delivering a powerful message, "If you want me to participate then you keep Don Paulk from fucking my daughter." This comment, no doubt, peaked the interest of the many members milling around in the atrium. The young woman to whom she referred, Rebecca Moses (Becky), had come to the church early in the Alpha movement, been adopted by core members, worked on staff in various capacities, and eventually taught at the academy. She had recently ended a year long sexual affair with Don Paulk. Becky was severely distraught after bringing the extramarital affair to a conclusion and intended to keep the matter private, just between her family and the church leadership. Her public comments six months later indicated that she interpreted this affair as a "spiritually-elevated" Kingdom relationship that "would not be wrong in the eyes of God...and would in fact be 'beneficial to the church'" (press release,

---

[334] These efforts were to no avail, however. The few church leaders who did contact Paulk privately about the charges accepted his version of the story without talking to those who made the accusations. See Strang (1993:15-16) and Justice (1993:6) for details of these events.

11/16/92). She later claimed that Don had exploited his clergy authority and spiritual familial role to seduce her into having intercourse with him (White, 1992e). Her adopted mother's public outburst, and a meeting the following week with Becky's lawyer, triggered a swift reaction by the church leadership to avoid further speculation, rumors, and allegations.

Three days later, Don announced to the church staff that he had been involved in "sexual indiscretions" with a parishioner. Within a few hours the press knew of this confession. The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* reported Don Paulk's admission the next day. A rapid barrage of media coverage followed for several days including extensive television coverage and another in-depth *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* article outlining the church's recent financial, membership, and sexual woes (White, 1992a).

Mother's day Sunday May 10, 1992 found the Cathedral filled with its largest attendance since its inaugural service. The loyal and the curious both arrived early for the ten o'clock service. As one woman told her companion, "I really feel like we need to present the best image we can today." When I questioned another member he responded, "I'm here as much out of curiosity as anything." Members' anticipation of Don Paulk's statement charged the atmosphere of the stately sanctuary. After several triumphal orchestra pieces, Earl Paulk opened this media-covered worship time with a litany of good reports. He related that giving had increased the last several Sundays, that Atlanta's Mayor had just called in support of the church as had numerous national religious leaders, and that there would be a "new surge of church growth, God promised me a sign. We shall proceed with great growth and humility" (5/10/92). During the offering, he encouraged members, "the giving today is indicative of the state of the church." After honoring the mothers in the audience, and noting that all his daughters were in the service, he called Don to the pulpit to read a statement.

Don's appearance was met with thunderous applause and a standing ovation which lasted nearly two minutes. He began his statement by berating the media, calling them "electronic vultures." Don Paulk then lamented that his "first recognition [in 32 years] had to be one like this" (5/10/92). He continued by arguing that he was a "human man, guilty of mistakes.... I am not here today as a martyr or hero, but as a fallen wounded soldier" (5/10/92). Don admitted that the rumors and news stories of the previous week were true, "there was an improper involvement...improprieties that do not become a pastor....This involvement was made public, but is now ended" (5/10/92). He then assured members that

he had already confessed his sin and had received God's forgiveness. He apologized to his family, the congregation, the "body of Christ" and to the "young lady who has confessed publicly of our deeds." He added that this affair was "with a friend and fellow worker...this involvement was by mutual consent, there was no force or intimidation" (5/10/92). He concluded by once again making Satan responsible for the church's troubles, "I unwittingly became one of Satan's stooges....The ultimate goal of Satan is to destroy this church....Satan has seen his finest hour in this tragedy but the victory is God's" (5/10/92). Following this, he resigned as a pastor.

Earl Paulk, his family, and the presbytery wept while embracing Don in a show of support. After several minutes of this emotional display, Paulk began his sermon. He spoke on the "true character of the church" as it is "surfacing in dealing with sin." Earl Paulk outlined the various characteristics of the true church as compassion, righteousness, mercy, forgiveness, truth, and restoration. Continuing, Paulk blamed those who had recently left, implying the "dissident members" were in collusion with "world systems" and with Satan. "The church is being attacked by satanic forces," he argued, "the way to scatter sheep is to attack the shepherd. Satan has taken one step too many" (5/10/92). Paulk concluded with the promise, "There will be a proper restoration process for Pastor Don.... Whether it is three days, three months, or three years, there will be an adequate restoration that will please God. Trust us with that" (5/10/92).

Many in the congregation immediately rallied around Don and the church leadership. One core member exclaimed, "We will not be moved by the world, by its accusations." Even after Don's confession, many members continued to interpret his admission as false and nothing more than untrue allegations. A marginal member verified this perception in her comment after the service. "I don't know if I believe [these allegations], but even if they are true he is a good man and we should stand behind him." Others perceived themselves as the remaining few who acknowledged the truth, "We are a faithful remnant standing in the gap." Finally, several expressed the need to forgive if they desired forgiveness themselves. One member echoed this in her statement to an Atlanta Journal and Constitution reporter, "We have to rally around him because we sin too.... He confessed to us, and we must do what the Bible instructs. If he is not restored, then I don't have any hope" (Laccetti, 1992).

In the evening service Benson Idahosa, the ICCC member from Nigeria, delivered what he described as a "message from God." Once again, the events of the church were viewed as God's

intentions rather than as Satan's attacks. He instructed the membership, "I'm here to plead with you, don't be distracted. This is God's doing.... I'm here to tell you, God's hand is upon this ministry" (5/10/92). The message he traveled from Africa to proclaim concerned Don but was directed to Bishop Paulk and the church leadership.

> We are not going to let the world and the press dictate the direction of the church....Restore [Don] as quickly as possible! Please don't allow what the world might say to rule this ministry. Don't let this man die prematurely.... Call Don back as quickly as you can....Let him be back to his post next Sunday.

With this comment, he led Don from a pew, up onto the rostrum, and placed him directly behind Earl Paulk's chair. Pastor Clements then rose, walked to the pulpit, and solemnly confirmed this message to be from God. In response to this prophetic pronouncement Earl Paulk suggested that Don take a three week sabbatical. Don Paulk had been restored.

After Idahosa patched this hole in the image of the church's leadership, the next several weeks were devoted to similar efforts at restoring various aspects of the shaken structure. From the pulpit Earl Paulk redefined what trust meant in this context of acknowledged misconduct, "I don't feel like I could trust anybody who doesn't walk with a limp" (5/17/92). According to one pastor, in a presbytery meeting Paulk clarified what "walking with a limp" meant -- "one who has had some kind of moral problem." Yet on several occasions, he denied any sexual wrongdoing by himself or others with comments such as, "There is nothing wrong sexually," "I'm not keeping my harem; that's ridiculous!" and "there's no `sexual groups'." At the same time, he continued to threaten those "who touch anointed things...or like Sam said Sunday night, 'troubles will come, but woe unto him by whom they come'" (5/27/92). The leadership expanded the causes of their troubles to include all possible sources, identifying the root of their troubles as within God's plan, as the result of evil ex-members out to destroy them, and as a consequence of Satan's attack on their successful efforts at building the Kingdom.

Paulk blamed each of these culprits, often in the same sermon, "When Pentecostal and Charismatic people are trying to kill you it must be of God" and conversely, "I know I'm doing something right because the devil is fighting me" (5/23/92). This pattern continued several Sundays with comments that also implied their troubles were the result of growth to a higher spiritual reality such as, "God is building a new community, before he could do that he had to put us into chaos....These pains...appear

chaotic but for those with spiritual insight they can see God's hand at work" and then "I'm enraged when I see what the devil has done to this place....Satan has had his field day, but it is over now" (5/29/92). Don Paulk also argued that their problems could be attributed to the church's rapid growth out pacing its organizational structures, "These are pains of growth, and we are still growing. Paradigm shifts are often painful" (5/29/92). Earl Paulk even when so far as to explain their troubles for my benefit as a natural process of a group's maturation. "Any sociologist worth his salt knows that for a group to be successful it has to go through times like these to draw the core together in order to continue to grow," he instructed (5/27/92).

The worship service on the last Sunday of May was a celebration of Earl Paulk's 65th birthday. The membership in attendance was petitioned to give an extra "present" to Paulk. Special giving envelopes were printed with "Happy 65th Birthday Bishop Paulk" for the occasion. A note was sent from his wife Norma to all television partners asking for a birthday offering as well. Since Don's admission, giving had continued to plummet. Several weekly offerings in May and June totaled less than 100,000 dollars, well below the reduced budgetary figure of 126,000 dollars. By the end of May the church was, according to Don Paulk, 400,000 dollars behind in its bond payments (5/31/92). Because of this, Earl Paulk and John Bridges paid a visit to the lending agency in Dallas to repair their faltering financial situation. At this meeting they were told to cut the church budget by $25,000 dollars a week. He reported this desperate situation during a staff celebration of his 65th birthday, relating to them, "Don and John [the administrator] made the list....I only approved it." According to Paulk, the decisions were based on "how we can get ministry done still." "But," he went on to say, "it is a weeding out, only those faithful will stay....Those who stay will be called in and questioned about what they believe and their trustworthiness" (5/27/92). Not long after this meeting, thirty-four employees were released, reducing the number of staff from 157 to 123 persons. At the same time, several more staff and clergy left voluntarily.

This Sunday birthday service also marked Don Paulk's return to ministry. The tenor of the service was triumphal, and powerfully celebratory. Much was said of Don and Earl's relationship including how Earl was like a father to Don. The sermon focused on the story of the prodigal son and family togetherness. Don, then, addressed the congregation at length, commenting "I have risen and I am here to fight again!" He suggested that "daytime TV is more tame than life here at Chapel Hill." He assured the congregation that "the Kingdom was still built in trust.... The final chapter hasn't been written

yet." Don then ended the service by "kissing off" and wishing good riddance to those who had left. Immediately afterwards, approximately two dozen persons in the congregation stood up and stormed out, while the rest of the church rose to give him a standing ovation.

THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

Don Paulk's substantiation of several of the rumors, as well as his non-repentant attitude and the church leadership's cavalier attitude in restoring him, incensed many of the members. According to many of those who left, it was not specifically Don's adulterous actions that drove them away. Rather it was the leadership's efforts in framing the incident through lies and deception in order to maintain their image and authority which gave them adequate cause to disaffiliate. A former member related his conversation and observations of a family from the church.

One couple said to me, `I don't care if I saw the Bishop having sex with a woman right in front of me. He is a man of God and he's anointed and I am not leaving him!' And now three weeks later they have left the church because of the way this was handled.

The leadership's actions were perceived by those with whom I talked as a glossing over existing problems and as evidence that they were unwilling to change their path or be corrected. One committed white male member reported shortly after this event, "I have to leave now.... I know there is more going on and always will be." A committed white female member stated this act had severed her trust in the church, "There's no hold on me now.... I'm getting out of this place." A moderate black male member pointed to the congregation's reaction to Don Paulk's adultery as the reason for his immediate departure. He recalled, "When our church greeted Don, who had come to admit a sin, with a standing ovation I thought 'what depths had we sunk to?' and I left." Following Don's rapid reinstatement, a large number of students resigned from the church's academy and college along with numerous teachers and other staff persons. In all, nearly one thousand members, mostly of the committed and moderate levels of the congregation, left within several weeks of these events. Attendance at Sunday services from May to September hovered at approximately 3000.

At this time, the pressures of deciding whether or not to remain committed to the church switched from those who had left to those still attending. With such a large group of well respected

members gone, the momentum began to pull toward the church's exits. As a member said, "We began to fall like dominos." The tide had turned. Members now were having to define and defend why they were staying rather than attacking those who had left. I began to be approached by many persons still in the church. They volunteered reasons for their staying. Whether they felt they needed to convince me, or themselves, of the good still in the church, their comments often were delivered in an intense, impassioned, and defensive manner. Interestingly, most of the reasons given paralleled the efforts Paulk had made to keep his charismatic authority intact -- the family and loving people, the vision, his prophetic anointing, and past success. One committed member explained to me, "I've thought about the worse case scenario and if the bottom falls out [financially] I'd still love living here because I love the people." "People have left because the occasional negative thing affects them, but nothing has affected me really negatively," said another. "Maybe some of that was true," a staunchly supportive pastor admitted, "but I believe in the vision and what they do in their private lives doesn't matter to me." A young pastor from the Alpha ranks resolutely affirmed, "I'm going to stand by him no matter what...till the day I die." A third elderly pastor, distraught and searching, questioned me at length.

How could such meaningful, good, upright, faithful people believe such incredible things like wife swapping. These things just are not true, the Bishop told me himself. There was just that one incident with Don. God's anointing is still on this ministry. How could these people believe these things and say them after all that Bishop Paulk had done, all this ministry had accomplished?

Other members who remained reported that they had in fact severed their emotional and financial ties to Paulk and the church, but not to their ministry in the congregation. One woman echoed a theme I heard from quite a few active members.

Don did not 'repent!' I know there are very serious problems going on and because of these I've completely stopped giving them my money, but I can't really stop my helping others. I'm still at Overcomers, though half my counseling group is gone...and the East Lake literacy program.... I'm happy doing these ministries so why should I quit?

The confession by Don Paulk changed the dynamics at the church. No longer could Earl Paulk insist that the rumors were fabrications and idle gossip. He had admitted his nephew Duane was guilty

and his own brother had confessed to adultery with a young church member. By their own words the leadership proved that there was some truth to the rumors. Again, they were shown to have lied to the congregation. These falsehoods demonstrated that the church leadership might not be entirely trustworthy. As a result Paulk and other church leaders stated over and again, that the Kingdom was built in trust, but that members should now trust "the vision" (5/31/92, 6/10/92, 6/28/92).

This mass exodus of members, the loss of a majority of the core and committed members, further undermined congregational trust in Paulk. Although it seemed each week as if his appealing sermon rhetoric in the context of the emotionally charged worship services could still generate support and the commitment of members, without a solid core community or supportive social networks his charisma had little lasting power over them. A staff person and singer who left at this time remarked, "I came because of one man, and now I'm leaving because of one man," yet less than a month before he swore to me that he would never abandon Paulk. It was not until every one of his close friends had departed that he too came to that decision. Paulk's charismatic authority could not have arisen without a supportive community; and neither could it be maintained in social isolation.

These actions on the part of the Paulks also confirmed for former members that their decision to exit had been necessary and timely. Many of those members who had already departed perceived these events as a "slap in the face" but also as vindication. After being told they were evil for believing the rumors, they found out these rumors were true. No apology ever came from Earl Paulk. In fact, he continued to attack those who had left. One ex-member summarized these feelings in her comment. "We are mad as hell at (Don's) arrogance and Earl sweeping this under the rug." Several groups of these former core and committed members, began to bond together informally. Many communicated with the press and held supportive gatherings where they would trade stories, discuss outrageous gossip, and vent frustrations. Parties were held which often contained equal numbers of former and current members, leading to, as one person put it, "some strange dynamics."

Jokes and sarcasm circulated through the networks of former members and, given these overlapping social groupings, into spheres of remaining members. Some comments, with serious overtones reflecting the perceived desperateness of the situation, contained references to the Jonestown tragedy. On several occasions I heard former members remark to those still involved in the church "Don't drink the koolade" and "I hope no congressman comes here to see what's happening,". Other

statements, although lighter in nature, betrayed underlying feelings of intense anger and animosity by ex-members. One woman joked about printing tee shirts with the slogans, "I'd rather be a 'casual Christian' (at the time Earl Paulk was referring to ex-members by this title) than have casual sex with Earl Paulk" and "I'd rather be a casual Christian than an casualty of CHHC." Earl's book *Sex is God's Idea* took on a new meaning for these members, as did Don's book entitled, *I Laugh, I Cry*. Former members suggested many alternatives to Don's title, including *I Slept, I Lied* and *I Screw, You Cry.* A few of these persons who lived in the church communities even began to follow members of the Paulk family wherever they went.

At the same time, Earl's daughter and son-in-law began a new church, "The Family Church." This alternative worship opportunity attracted many "wounded sheep" from Earl Paulk's fold. Members could leave Paulk without leaving their friends. Each of these various groupings of former members offered alternative social worlds to replace the one which they had abandoned. Ex-members created new stories, a new vocabulary, new networks of friends, and a new communities of support. In doing so they established social structures which aided the departure of others and also sustained their own animosity against the church and its leaders.

This community reflection also enabled many of the former members to realize that "the vision" was their possession, that it did not belong to Earl Paulk or the church. Several expressed that they had come to realize the vision was, as Earl had said, "just lived out Christianity," and that they could live it out elsewhere. Much of this empowerment from their reinterpretation of the vision did not come until a year or more after leaving the church. For the first year or more after leaving, many of the core and committed members remained filled with anger and what several reported as "embarrassment over having been duped."

ANOTHER SPIRITUAL SOLUTION

Meanwhile the church leadership launched several proactive spiritual measures designed to revitalize the existing members' morale and overcome the defensive atmosphere of the congregation. These efforts were framed by Paulk as a "paradigm shift" to a higher spiritual plane. The congregation was envisioned as moving to a new level of spiritual awareness, "God promised us a total new level.... We've had great revelations, but many of them are passing away for the more glorious" (6/28/92).

Satan's role was again minimized; God was perceived as being in charge. Paulk exclaimed, "God knows exactly what He is doing....God is doing something and **it is God** that I know! (6/28/92). He was insistent that the church's "vision" remained strong. "I held on to the vision....The vision is still intact," he informed the congregation (6/7/92). In that regard, he spoke of his own return to the core message of this original vision. Earl Paulk reported in one staff meeting that he had reread *The Ultimate Kingdom* and listened to several key sermons. He commented about these, "they sounded as if somebody else was preaching. We can't fall away from those messages" (7/15/92). What these strategies called for was the spiritual renewal of the membership. Once again Paulk's strategies at maintaining his legitimacy focused on those features of his identity which previously had been most important in grounding his authority.

To accomplish this spiritual intensification, the congregation was encouraged to practice diverse Christian disciplines. The church published a book, *The Holy Spirit is Real*, based on an extensive teaching series by Earl Paulk which everyone was encouraged to read it. Mention was often made of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and various gifts of the Spirit. An impassioned call was made for "prayer warriors" to maintain the 24 hour a day intercessory "Underground Army Watch." The congregation was often reminded, "prayer changes things." They were encouraged to fast and to meditate on "the word." Throughout June and July healing services were held and reports of miraculous healings became rampant. In sermons, Paulk suggested that those who had left were "casual Christians" and had lost their commitment to Jesus. He stated, "When you really got commitment...you don't get weary. If you are not here, the problem is that you have fallen out of love with Jesus.... After all these years I'm falling in love with Jesus again" (6/28/92).

Another effort of revitalization took the form of restructuring the family relationships and the familial trust of the congregation. Many of those for whom the church had been a surrogate family, now had disappeared. This "divorce" not only severed actual relational ties between many members causing a sense of loss and grief, but it also created an instability and anxiety in the social fabric of the congregation. Rituals had to be enacted to re-establish order in the social world (Geertz, 1973). New patterns of relational bonds had to be forged and demonstrated. The chaotic situation, which included his daughters, their families, and his nephew all leaving the church's active ministry, had severely eroded the identity of the church as family and Paulk as "father." Likewise, members' trust in "family members" who had just confessed to committing adultery was strained considerably. Overtly, the ritual activity intended

to restore this familial pattern was the month long "Family to Family Revival." This reunion-like event included the Mushegan's, Earl's oldest sister, and her family, and was held every week night and on Sunday evenings. Several other relatives of Paulk also preached in services throughout the Summer. These meetings modeled a familial intimacy and symbolized the close knit ties which were missing from the congregation. The rhetoric at the time focused on God granting the congregation a new "spirit of a father," grafting spiritual sons and daughters into the family tree, and retelling many stories from the church's history. Those blood relatives who remained were given more prominent roles in the organizational structure as well.

These diverse spiritual and familial efforts, however, had little effect on the tenor and direction the congregation was heading. The social bases of Earl Paulk's charismatic authority were weakened severely. Those core and committed members who had supported Paulk in the construction of his charismatic identity were too few in number to maintain it. Too many key families had lost trust in Paulk's charismatic persona. The Kingdom was being dismantled from its foundation up due to a lack of trust. Likewise, no longer was there adequate evidence of either Paulk's personal, or the church's collective successes to counteract the adversity being suffered. The prophet was no longer producing.

Given the size of this megachurch, its long established webs of interpersonal relationships were crucial for maintaining intimacy and a commitment to the church's vision of the Kingdom, as well as trust in Paulk's authority. The informal relational webs of those who remained, however, were in shambles since so many of their friends had departed. Likewise, following the restructuring of covenant communities/ connection groups, the formal organizational networks had become ineffective and were practically nonexistent. For most of the remaining members, the only actual connection between them was the worship service, mediated by a man whose spiritual leadership many of them had begun to doubt. As the number of committed members continued to shrink, the majority of those in services became comprised of newcomers, moderate, and marginal members. These newer members were not "outcasts" who had been "rescued" by Earl Paulk and the church. Nor did they know the success stories of the church, or even its history. Their membership had come at a relatively low cost compared to those who were leaving. To compound things, this group contained few wealthy donors and those with money, being less committed, gave less freely. Paulk acknowledged this in his sermon comments, "I've got some people around here that have an Ananias and Sapphira spirit here...If you are blessed to hear this

sermon today...and you don't tithe, you are going to suffer" (5/16/93). In all, these efforts did not rectify the serious institutional, relational, and authority crisis facing the church. Paulk's authority came to rest on his office as bishop, his place as church founder, and his position as pastor of a rapidly diminishing church.

THE CALM BEFORE ANOTHER STORM

By mid Summer the drastic nature of the situation required additional, and radical, strategies. These actions indicate just how desperate Paulk and the presbytery were. Serious efforts to reduce expenses were put into place. Some property was sold, television time was further cut, and volunteers were used increasingly for routine day to day affairs. A record of the offering each week was removed from the bulletin, presumably to avoid reminding the congregation of that depressing fact. Paulk also appointed five businessmen from the remaining ranks of the core and committed members to fill vacated seats on the Church's Board of Directors. He charged them with the task of reaching an organizational solution to the crisis. After several weeks, they recommended, among other things, that the church cut its paid staff to the "essential 25." Earl requested that they make the determination regarding which staff to keep. From all outward indication, then, these men were given considerable power to effect actual changes in the organization. Some staff cuts took place, and combined with more voluntary resignations, approximately fifty employees remained. Yet, at this time, several new pastors and staff persons were added. Any actual distribution of power to these men soon dissipated as Earl Paulk reclaimed control when the church attendance and giving stabilized momentarily throughout the Fall.

From late Summer through October relative calm settled over the church. An attendance of approximately 3000 and a weekly income of around $80,000 offered a tolerable, although tight, situation. The lending agency reduced the monthly bond payments, and with staff cuts, reduced television demands, and scaled down ministries, the church's financial burdens eased temporarily. Paulk continued to attack those who had left, this time on a new front. Given that his congregation was now eighty-five percent or more African American, he charged those who left with racism. "Folks are leaving because they don't like the racial mix in this church right at a time when we were getting international notoriety for it," he claimed in one sermon (6/7/92). Continuing he commented, "We were the only white church to stay in South DeKalb, the only church that stayed..."(6/7/92). "God put us out here, not in

Buckhead, in a racially tense area to raise up a standard" he remarked several months later (9/28/92, TV broadcast).

Paulk also boldly challenged his accusers from the pulpit, "Enough is enough, let's get some proof. A decade or two of lies is enough" (9/28/92, TV broadcast), yet no "evidence" of wrongdoing or any further "disclosures of sins" came to light. By this point any vocal dissident had left the church. Likewise, no overt external pressure from former members was being exerted on the church. Instead, many were trying to put the church behind them and get on with their lives. On several occasions, however, it was reported that Earl prophesied that those who left would be destitute within three years or have other calamities befall them. I too had departed from the scene after Earl Paulk's threat on my life (see Chapter One).[335] Therefore, the only attack on his credibility came from the rhetoric he himself used to frame the situation for the remaining members. His own defensiveness and portrayal of the enemy was the solitary reminder of the previous conflict.

So confident were Paulk and the leadership of their victory over their accusers that the annual church conference that October focused on "The Church in Crisis." This three day conference featured Charles Simpson, formerly of Christian Growth Ministries, and presented teachings on how to: handle the restoration of immoral clergy, effect staff layoffs, restructure the church, and deal with slanderous persons. To dramatize the church's spiritual victory, a play based on Samson's life was performed for this conference. The leadership of the church attempted to equate this period of history to when Samson's "hair began to grow," meaning that, like Samson, the church's covenant with God was restored, and also like Samson, the church's strength was returning. What was left unstated was the conclusion of the story of Samson. Soon, the church would crush those who had abused it, as Samson had the Philistines. Even as Samson met his death during this effort, so too would this act of retribution lead to the church's further undoing.

THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE

---

[335] After Bishop Paulk's threat I returned to the church only three times, once for a press conference, once for a worship service at which I and my guests were followed continually by a deacon, and once for a church drama also with out-of -town visitors. Twice a pastor at the church, Bob Hunter, called me. He wanted to know the status of my research and offer an explanation for Earl Paulk's threat.

The apparent calm of Autumn was deceptive then, for troubling currents continued to circulate beneath the overt tranquility. Members of all levels of commitment still trickled away from the church. Finances did not improve dramatically. Newly appointed Board members took Paulk to task for not heeding their suggestions. As early as September one of them confided that "Earl was trying to run us off." The stories which continued to pass between former members were eventually channeled to several religious periodicals. Finally, unbeknownst to current and former members, the woman with whom Don Paulk had confessed to having an affair was in negotiation with the church's legal counsel over compensation for her pain and suffering. To demonstrate her seriousness, Rebecca Moses' counsel had drawn up a suit asking for a considerable sum of money in damages, but had not filed it. Once again Earl Paulk responded to this threat by taking the offensive, this time prompted by his lawyer, and once again the repercussions of his actions caused more damage to his image as spiritual leader.

On November 13, 1992 the church filed a twenty-four million dollar law suit against seven former members, which included Rebecca Moses, Tricia Weeks, Barry Smith, an ex-staff person, and three former male lay leaders.[336] The suit alleged that these persons "formed and fomented a conspiracy to inflict financial harm" upon the church. It charged these defendants with six counts of libel, slander, malicious interference, and intentional harm to the business practices, reputation, and functioning of the church.

[336] I speak of "the church" as filing the lawsuit and pressuring the former members because in the document the entire church, including all its members since "Every member is a minister," were named as the ones bringing suit. By all accounts, however, this decision was made entirely by the Paulk family and their lawyers.

Almost immediately much of Atlanta was abuzz with the controversy. Newspaper articles and television stories chronicled the event in sensational detail. Four days after being served the lawsuit, Becky Moses held a press conference (her first public appearance since Don Paulk confessed his relationship with her) to defend herself against the church's charges. This was immediately countered by Earl Paulk, who organized his own press conference to convene two hours after hers. These dueling conferences created even more media coverage. During one of his interviews, Paulk defended the suit and his legal attack of former members as a "preemptive strike" of sorts to gain a legal upper hand in case Ms. Moses ever filed her suit.[337]

This action created intense shock waves among members and former members. Those named in the lawsuit were stunned and outraged. Former pastor Barry Smith reported, "I've already been hurt a lot," he said, "but to work with people and be as close to them as I have been, and then try to peacefully move on, and have them come back and sue me, I'm shocked by it" (White, 1992b,c). While these defendants struggled to arrange for legal representation, many persons inside and outside of the church questioned the action in light of biblical injunctions about a church suing its members. One person exclaimed, "I always thought Bishop Paulk taught us as Christians we were not to take one another to court.[338]

The core and committed members who still remained at the church responded in one of two ways: either they were so repulsed by this action that they immediately left (as many did), or they drew in tighter toward the center of the leadership. Several of those in this latter group refused to interact with ex-members who had been their friends. One such pastor exclaimed to a former member, "If the ship goes down, I'm going down with it no matter what you say. I don't care what he did or didn't do, I believe in the vision!" Another core member, when he denied Earl Paulk had ever admitted to a sexual impropriety, was given the newspaper article recording this admission. The member immediately wadded

---

[337] The grounds for the suit perhaps had been in Paulk's mind for quite some time since in his sermon on 5/10/92 Paulk commented," These dissident members...have been illegally tampering with the ability of a church incorporated under the law to do business. This is a violation of the law. Laws broken against us: invasion of privacy, disturbing a worship activity, efforts to destroy the ability of a corporation to do business, slander of character by spreading rumors. All of these are legal matters...."

[338] Paulk, in his 5/10/92 sermon stated that he would not prosecute former members legally since, " We will not allow the outside world to judge this church.... In the Bible we are told not to take our grievances to the world.... How dare you take your problems in dealing with sin and offense to the world."

it up and threw it on the ground commenting, "I don't want to read this. I don't want to see this." Of the other less committed moderate and marginal members, many continued to attend the church for worship. Several of these persons reported the sentiment expressed by two women, "These are just allegations, one bad person doesn't make the whole thing bad." and "I go to that church because I feel God is calling me to go to it." Finally, quite a few persons in these membership levels just quietly drifted away into other churches.

The church launched a second attack against Ms. Moses by name, and indirectly at all former members, the following Sunday. In a volatile service before approximately 2000 members, Paulk denied any wrongdoing, assured the congregation that "we will survive," and asserted "the captain is still at the helm and all is well" (11/22/92). Members were encouraged in song to "Fight on soldier, don't give up the journey." Paulk promised those who remained would become "pillars of the church." Finally, after telling several stories from the church's past, he challenged those in the congregation to make a final decision.

If you joined something that you didn't know about then unjoin yourself and go your way and leave us alone. This is a ministry of refuge. It was begun as one and its never going to change.... I want you to go and I want you to go in a hurry and let the people stay here who want to do something for God!

At the end of the service Earl Paulk provided an opportunity for remaining members to contribute to the church's defense fund. He also distributed a statement to all adult members which answered questions about the lawsuit. In graphic detail, this letter portrayed Rebecca Moses as a temptress who, while posing seductively, would greet Don in his office each morning with the comment "Paulk, can we have sex today." It alleged that Ms. Moses was sexually promiscuous with both males and females. The letter portrayed her as akin to Jessica Hahn only out for money and publicity. Finally, it argued that she and other former members had formed a conspiracy to destroy not just Chapel Hill Harvester but "the Church as an institution." This letter prompted the judge involved in the case to impose a gag order the following day on all parties involved or else, he commented, "no one would survive with their reputations intact" (White, 1992g).

The court ordered silence shelved the issue for a time publicly. Behind the scenes, however, trouble continued to brew. The repressed anger of former members grew in intensity, even as the church

reached "an accommodation" with Becky Moses.[339] Once this issue was settled, the church promptly dropped its suit. Again, the church leadership's actions demonstrated their underlying intentions and further infuriated former members. Many of those persons saw the church as using the lawsuit to intimidate the woman into quietly obeying their wishes. Several months later Paulk even admitted this in a letter to networking churches (2/4/93).

We felt at the time to release the lawyers to circumvent a suit being made against us by filing before they had the opportunity to do so. Immediately after it had served its purpose, we dropped the suit as we had planned.

A day after the dismissal an article appeared in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (White, 1992h) which described the sexual abuse charges being made by five other female former members. This time allegations were made against both Earl and Don Paulk as well as his nephews Duane and Alan Mushegan. Several male ex-members joined these women a few days later in a news conference to describe their experiences. Each participant, many of whom had been previously named in the church's suit, described a system of indoctrination, abused trust, and authoritarian leadership that they found to be rampant at the church.

Again, the interest of much of the city was excited. Radio talk shows picked up the story and featured irreverent, free-for-all discussions about "long dong Paulk" and the "Cathedral of the holy flickering tongue." Several callers to these programs blamed the women and supported the church. The vast majority of callers, however, ridiculed the church and its presbytery. In addition to this media exposure, CNN and the Associated Press, television expose shows such as *Hardcopy* and *Inside Edition*, *People* magazine, and newspaper reporters from the *San Francisco Examiner,* the *Boston Globe,* the *Washington Post* and the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* contacted those involved. One major television network assigned a producer and several writers to create a movie about the subject. Earl Paulk's public image and the church's reputation in the city once again took a serious beating.

The Charismatic Christian voice in journalism and a former ardent supporter of Paulk's ministry,

---

[339] Even though the church's law suit was said to have been instigated because of the church's refusal to "pay hush money" the settlement with Ms. Moses allegedly involved a payment of $300,000 in exchange for no further public disclosure on her part.

the magazine *Charisma and Christian Life*, also entered into this media frenzy. The widely read magazine ran two consecutive two-page articles in January and February of 1993 (Justice, 1993a,b). Its editor, Stephen Strang, wrote an editorial in his other journal aimed at pastors, *Ministries Today*, explaining his position and actions (1993). He condemned Paulk's lack of accountability and the minimal response by other Christian leaders as inexcusable. The printed letters of response in April were evenly balanced, five in support of Paulk and the church and five in support of the magazine's efforts. The following month all eight letters printed, several written by well-known pastors of large churches, were strongly in favor of the pastoral accountability called for by the editor. This public exposure to those most directly within Paulk's sphere of influence clearly damaged the church's image in the Charismatic Christian world. In the long run, however, this publicity, whether secular or religious, had little direct effect on the church. It did not become the focus of national attention. Neither Paulk nor the other ministers were charged with any crime. Most of Atlanta's residents have forgotten these incidents, as has the broader Christian community. For the most part, the church has settled, into a considerably scaled down version of its former self. As one of its current pastors commented, "This is the kind of phenomenon that is going to take several years to evaluate.... We have momentum on our side."

THE LAST CHAPTER?

There can be no doubt, however, that the institutional reality of Chapel Hill Harvester Church/ The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit suffered an immense blow throughout this two year period. My estimates are that 75 percent of the core members, 90 percent of committed members, and 60 percent of moderate and marginal members left the church. Likewise, nearly 90 percent of the white members and 60 percent of the black members departed. The church's attendance decreased by 2/3rds from around 7000 to 2000, while its income dropped from an average of 160,000 to less than 70,000 per week. Its number and scope of ministries were greatly reduced, although it still has 20 pastors. The church services now can be seen only on the TBN network. Paulk's status among other Charismatic ministers has been considerably diminished. He is no longer on the board of regents at Oral Roberts University, nor a part of Roberts' "International Charismatic Bible Ministries" and Robert Schuller's "Churches Uniting in Global Missions." The International Communion of Charismatic Churches has disbanded. Paulk's church is no longer has one of the largest in the country. It is just another megachurch with a 7700 seat Cathedral,

and a huge ministerial complex sitting in the middle of an underdeveloped part of the county which is 95 percent African American.

More so than the institutional and structural reality of the church, Earl Paulk's personal identity and authority were nearly destroyed. He is still seen by the few ardent core members who have remained as the same vital charismatic authority he once was. He continues to preach, "The last chapter has not been written about this ministry" (1/8/93). In sermons he still prophesies, "In the next months you won't have one empty space" (1/8/93), and "If it is of God you cannot overthrow it, lest you be found to be fighting against God.... The vision cannot be overthrown." (5/16/93), although the vibrant success has not come. In one sermon following these events he was found pleading with God, perhaps much as he had after the Hemphill incident, "Give us one more chance. Let your Spirit move in this place. Once more God! Once more God!" (5/16/93). His references to being persecuted and the "rumormongers" who are attempting to destroy the church have not ceased, "If your pastor is not being persecuted then he is not pleasing God" (8/19/93, television broadcast). The themes of rebirth, acceptance of human frailty, and the church being a refuge of the outcast continue to be preached and have remained meaningful for a portion of the congregation.

Although the church has continued to draw new members since 1993, about an equal number leave by natural attrition. In 1996 the church's attendance averaged around 2000 persons. Almost all of those I have talked with who presently attend, came since 1990 and an overwhelming majority are African American.[340] These members know of the charges of sexual abuse but argue either that these stories are untrue, they were past sins for which the pastors have repented and received forgiveness, or that "everyone is human and these things happen." At the same time, few are aware of the full story or the history of the church. None of these persons I have interviewed is involved in ministry through the church. They attend on Sunday, love the service, and give whatever they feel led to contribute. They are primarily what I have described as marginal or moderate members.

As the name change to The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit implies, Chapel Hill Harvester Church is

---

[340] Given the threat against my life I discontinued research on site research after July 1992. Therefore, my conversations with those still at the church have been quite limited. I have spoken with seven persons in the past four years who attend the church. All of these persons were met as strangers, accidentally in various social situations.

nothing like the congregation it was just a few years ago. Its televised services attempt to portray a vital, growing multiracial congregation; however, the camera lingers long on the few white faces in the audience. Other camera angles are carefully calculated to show only the full middle section of the lower level, and not the many thousand empty seats. Two thousand persons in attendance is, by any account, a significant number of persons, but situated in a 7700 seat auditorium they imply a dying church. Along with the strains of defensiveness in the voice of Earl Paulk who is nearing seventy years old, the impression is of the countless churches throughout the country where a "faithful remnant" struggles to hold on to a building three or four times its necessary size just for the sake of what once was. The Kingdom is not completely spoiled, but in the words of Earl Paulk from nearly a decade prior, it is "gradual diminishing from lack of support."

The events described in this chapter graphically illuminate the process of the deconstruction of charismatic authority. The erosion of Earl Paulk's identity can be seen to contain the same elements as those which functioned in its construction. "The vision" and Kingdom theology played a part in how Paulk attempted to reframe what was taking place as he tried to strengthen his faltering image. Likewise, members both consciously and unintentionally used the entire visionary message presented to them to critique and judge what they saw as lacking in the ministry. They called out for a return to the "original vision" and when this did not happen, they took their version of it and left.

As formerly solid members began to leave, they took not only pieces of Paulk's vision, but also the ground of his authority. The connecting networks of social ministries and covenant communities might have hindered this exodus had they not been dismantled. So too might have the kingdom vision itself, if it had not been weakened by Paulk having made it more egalitarian, sharing its ownership and power with the congregation. This kingdom vision had been built both on trust in Earl Paulk and on the success he could generate. As his successes became less frequent, and failures more often, the power of his prophetic authority waned. Trust in his leadership, likewise, began to be questioned. In numerous efforts to persevere the vision and his authority, Paulk attempted to democratize the church's decision making processes, to base his authority on the past success of the church, and to employ the church's media resources to create a synthetic portrayal of vitality. Eventually, however, the costs of remaining a member outweighed the rewards of staying. Members had lost their friends, their mission, their status, and their cause. Paulk's personality alone was inadequate to hold them. The interactional system which

had created "Paulk the charismatic leader" was gone and with it went the highly successful, distinctive ministry known as Chapel Hill Harvester Church. The heart and authority of these massive megachurches, however, reside in the spirit and dedication of the individual members of their churches. Once the dedication of their people dies, so too does their Spirit.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: MEGACHURCHES -- A NEW WAY OF BEING RELIGIOUS

This Chapter has been updated somewhat and newer information about megachurches can be found on Hartford Institute's website.

INTRODUCTION

At its most basic descriptive level, a megachurch is a congregation which has two thousand or more worship attenders in a week. However, size alone is an insufficient characterization of this distinctive religious reality. The megachurch is a new structural and spiritual organization unlike any other. In order to understand fully the dynamics of megachurches, they must be seen as a collective social phenomenon rather than as individual anomalous moments of spectacular growth or uniquely successful spiritual entrepreneurial ventures.

Although variations exist, most megachurches have a similar identifiable pattern and share a common set of organizational and leadership dynamics. The rise of hundreds of these large churches in the last several decades implies that this new pattern of congregational life has a particular resonance to and fit with changes in modern American society and culture. Most importantly, this analysis offers a possible explanation of the symbolic significance of the megachurch phenomenon both for the spiritual lives of its members and its relationship to modern society.

The following descriptive portrait is the result of an extensive five-year study of one megachurch (Chapel Hill Harvester Church, currently called The Cathedral of the Holy Spirit), multiple observations at six other congregations around the Atlanta area, and visits to nine megachurches around the country. In addition, numerous megachurch television broadcasts, distributed literature, and taped sermons from 28 other megachurches were analyzed to broaden the representativeness of this portrayal (See Thumma 1996a,b, 1993a,b) All reference details can be found in the article bibliography.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MEGACHURCHES

A generalized investigation of megachurches shows a distinctive set of common characteristics. Obviously, size is the most evident attribute of these churches; however, the list of shared traits is much more extensive. There is a discernable general pattern to the way in which religion is organized and expressed across these large congregations. Within this generalized picture, three distinctive subgroups, or ways of expressing the megachurch message, can be identified and are described below as the "nontraditional," the "conventional," and the "composite." As with all general descriptions of social

phenomena, any single megachurch will vary in its embodiment of this full set of characteristics. Nevertheless, these congregations have too much in common not to be seen as a distinctive social and religious reality.

A Recent Social Phenomenon

Megachurches are a new phenomenon. This is not to say that very large congregations were absent from the history of the Christian Church (See Vaughan 1993:17-28). Yet at any historical period there were no more than a dozen or so of these massive congregations around the world, none of which matched the functions of megachurches in contemporary society. The megachurch, as it is described here, is more than a church with a huge attendance. It is a congregation with a distinctive pattern of organization, programmatic ministries, and membership relations. The rapid proliferation of this form of congregational life has taken place within the last several decades. It is a particular and distinctive response to this cultural milieu. These definitive traits are uniquely modern, fashioned in reaction to and patterned after modern society.

Nearly all current megachurches were founded after 1955. The explosive growth experienced by these congregations, however, did not begin in earnest until the decade of the eighties (Vaughan 1993:50-51). The 1990's have not slowed this growth. **Data collected in 1992 revealed over 350 such congregations** (Thumma 1993b). Vaughan estimates that the number of megachurches grows by 5 percent each year (1993:40-41). Given this rate over two million persons will be weekly attendees of megachurches in the United States by the start of the new millennium. Anyone familiar with the American religious scene cannot help but have noticed the rapid proliferation of these massive congregations. In fact, it is precisely their size which attracts so much attention.

Mega-Sized

The most overt characteristic of megachurches is their size, the number of persons attending in a given week. Although some disagreement exists over what size attendance should constitute a megachurch, this study uses a minimum weekly attendance of 2000 persons. The size of some megachurches can be deceptive, however. A count of thousands of attenders is seldom completely accurate to the person. More often churches estimate their attendance based on the number of people their sanctuary holds. This is relatively easy to do if a sanctuary has individual seating, but pews

complicate the estimation process considerably. Often megachurches report a cumulative attendance for multiple services based on the assumption that no person attends more than once. Given these issues, any reported attendance should be treated as an estimate, accurate to within several hundred.

This large number of worshipers creates several distinctive dynamics. Once a congregation reaches a critical mass of around 2000, its numeric strength alone becomes a powerful attraction. One megachurch member astutely commented on this fact.

You hit a certain size and you can become self-generating. You attract people by your sheer size. People know that you are on TV and that this is that big place....There is a sense of something going on here...and size itself begats more growth.

A congregation this large creates a social vortex which draws others to it (Ostling 1991:63). A Sunday morning stream of cars on an otherwise quiet street piques the interest, and perhaps ire, of the neighborhood. In addition, acres of parking lots and massive buildings capable of handling several thousand persons have a distinctive presence on the horizon.

Of course, as will be seen below, this size also produces difficulties to which the church must respond. Many megachurches work hard at justifying their large size for potential members. Roswell Street Baptist Church of Atlanta provides a perfect example of this. The church publishes a pamphlet which declares church growth to be a Biblical injunction and "the American way."

Big is Beautiful.... Any church in a large, growing community that is practicing the 'Great Commission' cannot keep from growing. To criticize a church for being big is to imply disbelief in Christ's commission.... A church gets big because its spirit is big.... Nobody ever started a business without hoping that someday, if he or she worked hard enough, it would be a big success. That is the American dream, isn't it?

Often it is not just its massive size which characterizes a megachurch's presence in its community. Most of these large churches experience rapid growth over a very short period of time. It is this "overnight success" that often defines a megachurch's unique place in the local religious ecology (Eiesland 1995). This explosive increase sets this congregation apart from the other spiritual options in the community. The jump from a nonexistent or medium-sized fellowship to a megachurch usually takes place in a short two-to-five-year period of time. One of the earlier and better-known megachurches, Anaheim Vineyard Church, grew, in the words of its founder John Wimber, from "Zip to 3000 in 5 years"

(Wimber 1982).

Not only did this rapid growth create the perception that something unique was taking place at these congregations, but it established a degree of tension with the surrounding community (Eiesland 1995). This social strain was not so great as to inhibit recruitment but enough to generate publicity, build internal coherence, and strengthen the church's boundaries. For instance, the construction of an 8000 seat domed sanctuary by World Changers Ministries, an Atlanta congregation under the leadership of Creflo A. Dollar, caused considerable concern for local neighborhood associations. This in turn generated newspaper reports which provided free publicity for the new sanctuary and resulted in increased attendance (Ramsey 1992; Carnes 1995).

In addition, newly established congregations have a considerable advantage in becoming megachurches (Hadaway& Roozen 1993:129). They are able to build their structures and institutional forms along with the growth, not following it. More established congregations must undertake the painful task of discarding or revising many of their traditions, habits, and old organizational forms in order to keep pace with the growth. New churches, however, have no set patterns to struggle against.

A Suburban Sunbelt Home

If size is a crucial element in the definition of megachurches, region and placement in a city create the context. The national distribution of megachurches reveals a clear pattern. Over 75 percent of these congregations are located in the Sunbelt states, with nearly half of them in the southeast region. According to 1992 data, California had the highest concentration of megachurches, followed by Texas, Florida, and Georgia (Thumma 1993a,b). Vaughan found that megachurches clustered around those metropolitan areas which were among the fastest growing in the country (1993:77-80). Sprawl cities, such as Houston, Orlando, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Phoenix, and Oklahoma City, contained the highest number of megachurches.

In addition, megachurches are a suburban reality. Nearly all megachurches are to be found in the suburbs of large cities. These churches are primarily located in prominent places on highly visible tracts of land. They are generally near the expanding edges of the city, within easy access from major highways, and quite often in the immediate proximity of other megachurches. The only exception to this suburban pattern are those older inner city established "First churches" of all ethnic varieties.

There are many reasons why concentrations of megachurches exist in rapidly developing,

suburban, Sunbelt metropolitan areas. Numerous researchers have found that in growing areas churches of all sizes grow faster (Hadaway & Roozen 1993:131; Olson 1988 **Go to Bibliography for full reference**). These suburban areas offer expansive, less expensive plots of land suitable for acres of parking lots and the multiple buildings that are needed to support a congregation of several thousand. Zoning regulations are often less restrictive than in established urban communities. Most importantly, the suburbs provide a continuous influx of exactly the type of person attracted to megachurches -- consumer oriented, highly mobile, well-educated, middle class families.

Functionally Nondenominational

For the majority of megachurches, denominational affiliation is an insignificant matter. The church itself (its size, pastor, programs, and reputation) attracts adherents, not its denominational ties. Consequently, almost one half of all megachurches are independent and nondenominational. In addition, many of the remaining churches are from denominations with a congregational polity which gives considerable freedom to individual churches. Nearly twenty percent of megachurches are Southern Baptist, while those associated with the Assemblies of God account for another nine percent. Around ten percent of megachurches belong to moderate and liberal denominations. Another ten percent have ties with historically African American denominations.

Actually, there are few overt differences between megachurches with denominational ties and those without them. Many of the large denominational congregations can be seen as functionally nondenominational (Schaller 1990:22; Hadaway 1993:353). They have an appealing identity as a congregation, regardless of their ties to a denomination. These congregations often downplay their denominational connections by dropping reference to it from their name and literature. Neither do they have need for the denomination's resources. If anything, the denomination benefits more from their presence and that of their gifted leaders (Hadaway 1993:353). Gustav Niebuhr, writing for the New York Times, quoted one member of Walt Kallestad's Community Church of Joy in Glendale, Arizona who recounted a common experience of many megachurch members, "We probably came here for a year before we knew it was Lutheran" (1995a:A12).

Three Expressions of One Basic Message

If there is a common message shared by all megachurches, it is that they want to portray what

they do as more vital than other congregations, somehow better than "ordinary" Christianity. Megachurch pastors can often be heard commenting that they are "not just playing church." Nearly all megachurches have a conservative theological orientation. An overwhelming majority would be considered Evangelical, Charismatic, or Fundamentalist. Even the megachurches from moderate and liberal denominations often stand out as having a more conservative theology than do their counterparts (Stevenson 1993).

The ways they express this "serious Christianity," however, vary considerably. The content of the message and mission foci of individual megachurches are quite diverse. Nevertheless, when viewed as a whole, three general approaches can be seen as guiding the message and mission of megachurches. Each of these orientations differs in relation to the congregation's style and world view, its implicit or explicit message, its architectural representation, and its sponsored ministries. These forms offer a similar message of "our church is an extraordinary religious expression," but they address this message to three different clientele bases in three distinctive ways.

The first orientation, labeled the "Nontraditional" approach, best characterizes those megachurches which attempt to attract religious "seekers" and the "unchurched." This is probably the most prevalent form for American megachurches, and especially among churches started in the last eight to ten years. The explicit message of these congregations is "this is not your ordinary church." Pastor John Merritt, of CrossWinds Church in California, described this intention while discussing his nontraditional megachurch, "We're trying to create an environment here so the unchurched person can come in and say, 'this is church like I have never known church'" (Winston 1996:a10).

The goal of this approach is to create new religious forms, to remake the traditions, so they are acceptable and relevant to a modern person who had been turned off by traditional religion. To accomplish that, the buildings of churches using this approach are quite ordinary looking, duplicating everyday structures such as office complexes, schools, warehouses. Inside these structures, persons are greeted by large lobbies with well-lighted signs, information booths, and often a mall-like courtyard complete with refreshments. Their sanctuaries are usually spacious auditoriums, with comfortable theater seating, large stages, and a minimum of religious symbols. The architecture of this orientation, "communicates a message - that religion is not a thing apart from daily life" (Goldberger 1995:b1). The sermon, probably delivered from a clear plexiglass removable podium, conveys a biblical but practical, non-dogmatic, this-worldly message that also suggests religion should not be separate from daily life.

Willow Creek Community Church, arguably the largest church in the country at present, epitomizes this form. The church's minister, Bill Hybels, characterized the intent of this approach in his neighborhood survey done prior to organizing the congregation. He went door-to-door asking residents what they disliked about church and what they would want in a church. From this, he constructed a "user friendly" worship service with sermons oriented to practical life and devoid of appeals for money, religious jargon and "heavy guilt trips." The worship is laid-back, but the message remains solidly conservative Christian. The church's web site describes its efforts,

We may use up-to-date language, music and drama to communicate God's Word for today's culture, but our message is as old as the Bible itself. We embrace historic Christian teachings on all doctrines, emphasizing Jesus Christ's atoning death, salvation through repentance and faith as a work of divine grace, and the authority of the unique, God-inspired Bible.

Willow Creek "seeks to attract those who are probably uncomfortable in most churches" with its Sunday morning "seeker services" (Robinson 1991:68). As Hybels himself stated, "We're on the verge of making kingdom history, doing things a new way for a whole new generation.... [The] neutral corporate setting [is designed to] impress seekers with excellence, but not ostentatiousness" (Chandler 1989:A28).

Willow Creek is not the only shape this nontraditional approach can take. Crenshaw Christian Center, perhaps the largest sanctuary in the United States and one of the largest African American congregations, seats 10,400 in a huge geodesic "FaithDome" structure. This replica of a sports arena has a center stage platform with stadium seating 360 degrees around. In Atlanta, a similar structure resembling the Houston Astrodome and seating 8000, was recently completed for the World Changers ministry, also an African American congregation.

The architectural style and approach must not only convey the message of the movement but also be sensitive and adaptable to the context in which it resides. A different constituency requires a building which expresses the realities of their everyday lives. It is this effort which drives the second approach taken by some megachurches. This orientation, labeled "Conventional" can be found in most of the older "First Churches" that have grown to megachurch proportions. The approach is characterized by a retention of the images of traditional Protestant Christianity. This tradition is reconfigured, however. The implication is that this larger expression is not only more successful and more exciting, but it is more authentically Christian than other churches. It is traditional Protestantism, but on a "mega" scale. This

approach is most often seen in Southern Baptist churches and in urban established Mainline and liberal megachurches.

The architecture of these massive churches is often either Neo-Gothic or Colonial, depending on the region of the country. Christian symbols, steeples, spires, and columns adorn the exterior of the building. Upon entering the church, one is greeted by a traditional foyer, floral arrangements, and bulletin-bearing greeters in business suits. The sanctuary is often an exaggerated replica of a country church. A box shaped interior space contains long straight, uncomfortable wooden pews, hymnals, poor lighting, a crowded altar space, and many traditional symbols such as crosses, candles, descending doves, and stained-glass windows.

The image these congregations want to portray is "This is your parents' religion, but bigger and better." The choirs are superb, the preaching is first-rate, the church school choices are overwhelming, their attendance and baptisms are climbing, and they can even be found in cyberspace. Examples of this type include First Baptist Church of Dallas, Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee, Ben Hill United Methodist Church, and Peachtree Presbyterian Church, the latter two of Atlanta.

Although these conventional congregations have been established for many years, a second generation of similar churches has recently appeared around the Atlanta area. Many of the growing Baptist congregations in the city's surrounding suburbs have intentionally adopted this traditional form. This form epitomizes religion in the South. By employing this style, these suburban churches are providing links to the past for their mobile and more cosmopolitan constituency (Eiesland 1995). One such church, Rehoboth Baptist, reproduced the traditional southern red brick colonial church but at more than ten times "normal size." Its minister, Richard Lee, preaches a fundamentalist message, emphasizing personal piety, soul-winning, and preparation for the end-times. But the leadership also wants the city to know, as their huge highway billboards and television programs announce, that they are "Atlanta's Exciting Metrochurch." Their ministry includes everything from ties with Promisekeepers, the Pre-Tribulation Research Center, and the Christian Coalition to aerobics, karate, weight loss, and divorce recovery groups.

A third less common approach chosen by some megachurches entails a blending of this conventional form with the nontraditional style. This "Composite" orientation attempts to retain some connection to traditional religion but also embraces modern architectural forms and a contemporary

worship format. The megachurches of this type often superimpose a traditional building facade onto a unconventional, "user-friendly" structure. The exterior, or at least the street exposure, of the church may appear "church-like," while the interior resembles a theater, with comfortable individual seating, state of the art sound and light system, and an adaptable performance stage. This building often has both the conveniences of the nontraditional church building and the symbols and trappings of familiar Christianity. Worship may be an equally eclectic mix of hymns, jazz, and praise choruses, combined with liturgical readings and charismatic healing sessions. This can be seen in the worship format at Chapel Hill Harvester Church in Atlanta. This congregation exemplifies this blended approach architecturally, with mixed results (Goldberger 1995:B10). Even in its theology, it overtly attempts to retain an "orthodox" Christian tradition while at the same time embracing "new," "original," and "fresh revelations from God."

Another church using this style, First Baptist of Orlando, describes itself as "a unique blend of the historic and the contemporary." Its ultra-modern building is decorated with many Christian symbols, huge old stained glass windows, and the pipes of a giant organ. A second Florida congregation, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church led by James Kennedy, meets in a graceful white stucco building with a towering steeple. Its modern interior is filled with traditional religious symbols, stained glass windows and "one of the largest European-built organs in the country." A brochure entitled "A Walk Through the Sanctuary" explains to the uninitiated the significance of these symbols and sacred sanctuary areas while noting for the reader that the church is "built with the feeling of a cross in a modern configuration similar to a cathedral with a contemporary design."

Whatever the approach taken by a megachurch, these various congregations each convey the message that what they are about is not "ordinary religion." In the words of one Chapel Hill Harvester first timer, "This is not what I have seen in the past."

A Distinctive Visionary Identity

Within this message of originality and uniqueness, resides another common characteristic of megachurches. Many of these large churches describe their mission in terms of a distinctive visionary identity or purpose. Given that most megachurches are at least functionally nondenominational, they must intentionally construct their congregational identities rather than rely on a traditionally ascribed denominational label. Megachurches must create for themselves a unique identity. This congregational self-concept must be broad enough to appeal to a wide range of persons. Yet it must also be firm enough

to define its position, offer a cohesive world view, and totemically unify a large and diverse gathering of participants. As a result, megachurch ministers often shape their church's identity to reflect a particular mission to a target audience, whether this be "seekers," "unchurched Harrys," "Saddleback Sams," young families, recent northern transplants, those who need healing, alienated teens, or retired adults.

Whatever the focus, this visionary identity is seen as a particular "calling" and God-given "mission." Many of the megachurch pastors speak of this special "mission" as having been given them in a supernatural "revelation," "dream," or "vision." The congregation's identity then is shaped around that vision. One megachurch pastor, Creflo Dollar of Atlanta, spoke of "receiving a vision, [where] believers would become world changers." Earl Paulk, of Chapel Hill Harvester in Atlanta, described his revelatory vision for his "Kingdom" church as "communicating and demonstrating the Kingdom of God."

A common identity motif for many megachurches was that of the "Church as refuge." Earl Paulk specifically identified Chapel Hill Harvester in this manner. John Wimber, the recently deceased founder of the Vineyard movement, described his church in similar terms. He (1982:21-22) referred to his church as,

a second marriage church.... God took us as he found us--broken-bodied refugees from various religious systems---and began to shape us.... Many people have chosen to opt out of the religious system because they felt they couldn't live up to the standards the church set for them. Other have been battered and burned by well meaning, but harsh, treatment. Cultural differences have made it difficult for others to relate to the traditional church. Many of these religious refugees are finding us.

Lakewood Church of Houston, Texas characterized itself similarly as "the oasis of love in a troubled world." A pamphlet of Valley Cathedral in Phoenix, Arizona portrayed the church's revealed vision as being "a forgiveness center, and not a guilt center, a city of refuge, where many who had been injured by the organizational machineries and other religious groups could gather and be healed." Willow Creek Community church has even been described in terms of being a refuge for those who have given up on religion (Robinson 1991:69). Robinson argued that megachurches are unique in that they realize persons have a high degree of emotional broken, individual uncertainty, and family dysfunction. Their success comes as they respond to and fill this need for personal healing (1991:69). Pastor Tommy Barnett of First Assembly of God Phoenix, Arizona summarized this strategy, "When you help people, your congregation grows" (Ostling 1991:62).

Something For Everyone

The programs and specific ministries of megachurches are shaped by the context in which they reside. Yet even with the potential diversity of programs, one common characteristic underlies the efforts of all megachurches and that is choice. A congregation of thousands encompasses many diverse tastes and interests which must be addressed. Not only does this need for choice affect the array of ministries offered, but it also influences the style of worship, preaching, and music exhibited in megachurches.

A number of social observers have suggested that megachurches resemble shopping malls in their wide array of consumer-driven ministerial offerings (Niebuhr 1995a; Eiesland 1995; Schaller 1992; Ostling 1991). The megachurch functions like the mall owner providing stability and a common roof under which diverse ministries, seen as specialized boutiques, can operate. In addition several core ministries, like anchor stores, offer a continuous draw to this spiritual shopping center (Eiesland 1995:73). This organizational arrangement allows the larger church structure to remain unchanged while the lay-driven specialized offerings rise or fall depending on changing needs. This system provides the entire membership with a continuous supply of appealing choices that fit their tastes. It also offers the highly committed members their choice of places to serve. Finally, it ensures that the church as a whole appears relevant and vibrantly active (a seven-day-a-week church) at a minimum of cost both structurally and financially. This mall-like approach enables the megachurch's leadership to maintain a stable worship environment and yet exhibit flexibility in serving a changing clientele by continuously altering their ministry choices. As one megachurch member explained, "It has everything I need in one package."

Worship is one of the central drawing cards that anchors the church. The worship service in megachurches is a high quality, entertaining and well planned production. Given the congregation's size, this service cannot be left to "the flow of the spirit," especially if there are multiple services on a Sunday morning. As a megachurch grows, worship becomes more professional and polished, but also more planned and structured. Many megachurches offer a diverse array of additional religious services of differing styles throughout the week. They hold prayer services, Bible studies, singing services, and perhaps healing or Charismatic praise services. Several megachurches have Saturday evening youth-oriented services, or beginner courses in basic Christianity. The diversity offered at a megachurch extends even to the choice of the style, form, and time of a worship event that best fits one's needs and

tastes.

The majority of these worship experiences, even if they include extensive congregational singing, are focused around the preaching. Megachurch sermons are often inspirational, motivational, and well-delivered. The message empowers members with the challenge that everyone has choices, but that they are also responsible for what they choose. The listener is instructed, "You can do it, make a change, and make a difference." Sermons are almost always powerful, practical, down to earth, and relevant. As John Wimber stated, "We recognize we must answer the questions people actually are asking.... We seek to deal with today's issues in a practical, Biblical manner--a manner that will make a difference in the way people actually live" (Wimber 1982:21-22). About Hybels, Willow Creek's pastor, Sammonds writes, "The people come to hear God's word 'explained in a practical, relevant manner....the senior pastor vowed early on that he would never preach a sermon that couldn't be used by people in their everyday lives" (1994:6).

Another common aspect of the worship programs of megachurches is their use of the arts. Worship often includes performances by large choirs, orchestras, drama troupes, and other artists. Services on Sunday and throughout the week are filled with skits, special musical numbers, interpretative dance, and video presentations. Some churches produce major works of drama such as plays and operas. Several, such as Bellevue Baptist of Memphis, are known for their elaborate musical celebrations at Christmas, Easter, and the fourth of July, drawing as many as 30 thousand spectators to these events. Others offer smaller monthly or quarterly musical performances to suit a variety of tastes and styles. One megachurch, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, offered a "Sampler Concert Series" which featured 15 concerts during the 1995/96 season. This "sampler" included Handel's Messiah with Glen Campbell, a country music concert with Ricky Skaggs and Louise Mandrell, an evening of the Cathedrals performing Southern Gospel, a pops salute to the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber, and a nostalgic night of music from the 50's with the Nelson Riddle Orchestra.

Nowhere is the characteristic of programmatic choice more evident, however, than in the range of internal ministries and the diversity of groups offered by megachurches. Some of these ministries are oriented specifically to religious and spiritual issues such as age-graded Bible studies, prayer groups, new member sessions, and religious education classes. Other ministries focus more on enhancing

interpersonal ties and strengthening fellowship and social interaction through home groups, covenant communities, recreational activities, sports events, and organized celebrations. There are always groups which organize and train church volunteers both to assist in the functioning of the church and in the performance of its ministries. Often programs address the physical and psychological well-being of members with health fairs, preventative health clinics, employment support, vocational training, job fairs, various 12-step type recovery groups, and individual counseling services. In addition, there are any number of interest groups and activities from musical lessons and choir rehearsals to political action committees and auto repair clinics. Many megachurches support elementary and secondary private schools, day care centers, scout troops, head-start programs, and countless teen and young adult activities. These large churches may even provide roller rinks, pools, gymnasiums, racquetball courts, weight rooms, and, as Second Baptist in Houston does, a movie theater. Given this list of possible ministries available to its membership it is not surprising that one researcher has described megachurches as "7-day-a-week churches" (Schaller 1992).

An Innovative Spiritual Entrepreneur

Megachurches are more often than not the product of one highly gifted spiritual leader. The majority of contemporary megachurches were either founded by or achieved mega-status within the tenure of a single senior minister (Vaughan 1993; Schaller1992). The character of these churches usually reflects the vision and personality of this one person. These pastors are usually personally charismatic, exceptionally gifted men. As senior minister, and often the church's founder, these persons occupy the singular, most prominent, high profile position in the congregation. The average length of tenure of these leaders has been estimated at 15 years (Olson 1988). These pastors are often visionaries and innovative spiritual entrepreneurs, many without the usual pastoral credentials (Greeley 1989). Olson reports that one third of megachurch ministers have had no seminary education (1988). For instance, Bill Hybels, pastor of the largest church in the country, is not seminary trained (Niebuhr 1995a:A12).

The organizational demands of these enormous churches necessitate a rational bureaucratic operation with a strong business leader at the helm. Yet, not all megachurch pastors are skilled business persons. Their spiritual visions and ministerial gifts which helped them generate a successful operation may in fact hinder them in managing their religious business. One pastor remarked that upon taking the leadership of an established megachurch he found himself, "acting more like a mayor or governor than a

pastor" (Gregory 1994:318). Comments of a Chapel Hill Harvester Church staff member reflect this reality as well.

As the church has gotten so huge, its harder to make decisions based on an understanding of the Holy Spirit's leading.... By the time [a spiritual decision] gets down to the implementation level, it's nothing but sort of a bureaucratic 'do this' or 'do that.'

Many megachurches have ten to twenty assistant ministers, from 30 to 250 full-time staff members, and up to 2000 volunteers. In addition, the budgets of the smallest of megachurches are at least two million dollars per year. Willow Creek, at the other extreme, had a 1995 budget of 12.35 million dollars, 63 percent of which paid the 260 full and part time workers with the rest being used for operating expenses and the mortgage on a 34.3 million dollar building (Niebuhr 1995b:a10).

These are not just churches; they are also corporations. The administrator of Chapel Hill Harvester church noted this as justification for his rigid managerial techniques.

It's just good business practices that we all need.... We are a church but we are also a business that happens to be operating by the name of a church. We are a ten million dollar a year church that has to operate like a business.

This business may be led by a powerful senior minister but most megachurches also operate with a Executive Board which is said to oversee business affairs. For instance, Crenshaw Christian Center's board has 12 members: the pastor who is president of the corporation, three elders who are also assistant pastors, six deacons who are elected church members, each serving a maximum of four years, a board secretary, and the church treasurer. Ideally, this board, in conjunction with other assistant pastors, church elders and the congregation as a whole, acts as a check to any imbalance of power that may result from the concentration of authority in the senior minister. This may be the ideal, but it may not work as such in reality (Thumma 1996a). For instance, one megachurch minister was quoted as advocating a strong singular authority saying, "A committee run church is a dead church" (Gregory 1994:319).

On the other hand, several megachurch pastors explicitly make a point of decentralizing power, among them is Willow Creek's pastor Bill Hybels. It has been reported of Hybels that, "What hurts... is when he's portrayed as 'high profile, dictatorial, heavy-handed.' "That's not true, " Hybels says," "I'm an

incurable team player." His staff agrees -- as long as he's the quarterback" (Chandler 1989:A30). A recent study of megachurch leadership shows that most pastors report using a "team approach" much as Hybels did (Zook 1993). This may or may not be an accurate representation of how these large churches are led (Schaller 1992:58; Miller 1997:149). Personal observation of one senior pastor's interaction with his staff during many crucial decision-making events showed a more authoritative, highly-directive style of leadership than was professed (Thumma 1996a). While there may be numerous leadership styles used by megachurch pastors, these styles should be uncovered by observing moments of actual decision making, rather than taking the leadership's word for how they lead or are led.

The example of how Chapel Hill Harvester Church leaders viewed the governance of the church is instructive in the analysis of one style of megachurch leadership. On numerous occasions the senior minister described his leadership style as a "team approach." In a workshop on "the church as a corporation," however, the administrator portrayed a different form of congregational authority and leadership.

The Board of Directors does not control this ministry! It has one boss, period! Our job is to protect him...when he feels strongly about something, he feels like he's heard from God...I guarantee you everyone on the Board will fall right in line. Call it a "yes board?" OK, call it a "yes board," but that is the way we operate!...If there was any dissension on that board they would be gone a long time ago.

Not only did this senior minister have complete control of the boards, but the entire church structure reported to him alone. An associate pastor commented during that same conference, "Structure is built on the "one voice" principle...the rest of us are implementers of that." This structure was neither democratic nor congregational, but was as another pastor described it, "an episcopal form of church structure.... What does that mean?...the [senior minister] calls the shots!" (Thumma 1996a). Whether this form is representative of most or any other megachurch is unknown, but the organizational structures in place (a successful charismatic leader, with centralized power, few checks and balances, and perhaps inadequate management and leadership training) clearly allow for this possibility (Schaller 1992).

The claims of abuse by leadership and a lack of accountability, especially for nondenominational megachurches, are frequent charges heard from former members and external critics. Jack Hyles, pastor of the very large First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, his son, and several staff members have all been accused many times in recent years of sexual and authority abuses. Hyles has denied the

allegations; however, they continue to plague his ministry (Elder 1990). Chapel Hill Harvester Church in Atlanta has also had numerous charges of sexual and authority abuse made against its leadership (Thumma 1996a).

Given the pivotal role played by megachurch pastors, it is hard to imagine their churches functioning without them. Indeed this is a concern for many such congregations -- how to create ministerial continuity and a congregational identity apart from the senior minister (Schaller 1992). This raises the ever-present question of succession. For those churches with denominational ties one would assume an easy transition, but such is not always the case. Joel Gregory's attempt to succeed W. A. Criswell at First Baptist Church in Dallas failed when, as Gregory wrote, Criswell essentially refused to relinquish control (Gregory 1994). On the other hand, the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Anaheim has successfully survived the retirement and later death of its visionary leader John Wimber (Brasher 1992; Miller 1997).

The Membership of a Megachurch

Megachurches share another common characteristic, the type of person they attract. Several studies offer a similar portrayal of the membership of a typical megachurch (Brasher 1992; Miller 1993, 1997; Perrin 1989:90; Thumma 1996a). With few exceptions these large churches draw a predominantly "baby boom" constituency. These congregations have young memberships, with the median age estimated at 38 years or less. Between sixty and seventy percent of attenders are women. The majority of megachurches are also populated by Caucasians. Over sixty percent of participants are married and have an average of two children. Those attracted to megachurches are generally middle class, and highly educated. Miller's recent study of the Calvary, Vineyard and Hope Chapel movements found that 38 percent of respondents had college degrees (1997:196). Another examination of the Vineyard Movement also discovered 38 percent had college or graduate degrees (Perrin 1989:94). Survey data on Chapel Hill Harvester members showed over 40 percent had a college degree (Thumma 1996a). Megachurch members are upwardly mobile, highly transient, and generally live in suburban neighborhoods.

At the same time, this picture of a typical megachurch congregation is somewhat deceptive. This generalization masks the considerable degree of diversity often found in these large gatherings. Many of the megachurches entice persons of all racial groups. Some congregations have embraced this multi-

cultural reality as a part of their identity. The congregation of Lakewood Church in Houston proudly claims its congregation to be forty percent white, thirty percent African American, and thirty percent Hispanic. Another Houston megachurch, Braeswood Assembly of God, reports that its membership contains persons from 48 countries who speak 22 languages (Vaughan 1993:100-101). In addition, ten percent of all megachurches are African American congregations; several are Hispanic such as Templo Calvario Assembly of God in Santa Ana, California, and a few, like Young Nak Presbyterian of Los Angeles, are Korean. Even the predominantly white megachurches in Atlanta and elsewhere generally contain a small representation from various racial groups.

These congregations also appeal to a diversity of economic levels, although a majority of members are upwardly mobile, middle class persons. No one occupational status dominates megachurch memberships. Instead, persons employed in service, managerial, professional, technical, and skilled labor are nearly equally represented. One church, North Phoenix Baptist Church actively promotes its economic diversity. A church pamphlet offered the following fictional dialogue and commentary,

"Is your church blue collar or white collar?" "Doesn't make any difference." "But blue collar and white collar are different." "True, but both need to be clean." North Phoenix Baptist Church has done the best job I have ever seen of blending ethnic and economic groupings."

Another distinctive trait of megachurch participants is their extremely high rates of participation and involvement. It is estimated that fifty percent of Chapel Hill Harvester Church's membership were weekly attenders, who consistently contributed large amounts of money, and regularly participated in church ministries (Thumma, 1996a). Both Miller (1997) and Perrin found that over 75 percent of their respondents in studies of "new paradigm" movements attended worship services every week (1989:103). Another study of a very large Presbyterian church showed that three quarters of its membership attended weekly and gave nearly 1200 dollars per member annually (Stevenson 1993). Judging from those megachurches for which data are available, giving appears to be a minimum of between 1000 and 1500 dollars per person each year. This is considerably more than the estimated national average of 445 dollars per church member in 1992 (Niebuhr 1995b).

Every study of megachurch members indicates that personal religious practices take place at high rates as well. Members claim to pray, participate in religious study groups, evangelize, and read

religious literature at rates considerably higher than national averages for conservative Protestant believers (See Perrin 1989 compared to Roof & McKinney 1987). Given that megachurches both require massive numbers of volunteer workers and offer hundreds of religious and social activities in which to be engaged, it is not surprising to find high rates of involvement by committed members. Willow Creek, for instance, requires 1000 volunteers a week to conduct its services. (Chandler 1989:A28). At the same time, one of the most prominent messages of many megachurches is that religion is not just a Sunday enterprise, but rather is a 24 hour a day, seven day a week lifestyle. Few megachurches preach that their members should retreat from the world. In fact, the opposite is nearly always stressed, that members should become "salt and light to a lost world." They are encouraged to change the system, take dominion, demonstrate the kingdom, and become world changers. This message finds a resonance with members since many of them report that they came to their megachurch intentionally to hear a stricter, more demanding, serious version of the Christian faith (Perrin 1989:141ff, 211, Thumma, 1996a).

The large worship gatherings at megachurches often raise the concern that members attend with the intention of being anonymous (Chandler 1989:A28). Others suggest that the massive worship service promotes a "pseudo-intimacy" of a "live studio audience" with worshipers as passive viewers seeking an intense but private religious experience (Robinson 1991:69). Some commentators even argue that megachurches offer "relatively weak systems for insuring individual religious accountability" (Eiesland 1994, 1995:94). These observations are all true to some extent. It must also be realized, however, that megachurches are actually made up of distinct, sizable clusters of both more and less committed persons. The congregational dynamic for the least committed group of members may be considerably different than for the more involved members.

The approach taken in many large churches is to preach the message of active involvement and high commitment, provide the structures and ministries to support that involvement, and then allow members to choose how committed they want to be. Earl Paulk, senior minister of Chapel Hill Harvester Church, spoke of this model as "preaching the standard but ministering to the need." These large churches, by allowing for anonymity and choice, draw some persons to church who never would come otherwise. As one writer said about Willow Creek, "seekers can be anonymous here. You don't have to say anything, sing anything, sign anything, or give anything" (Chandler 1989:A28). In fact, many people want to remain anonymous. Hybels' survey found this to be one of the primary components unchurched

persons wanted in a worship service (Olson 1988:192). Other members use the private space to recover from burnout or over commitment (Neff 1990). Several megachurch members echoed one woman's comment about her involvement, "I hung around for several years, just resting, before I got involved."

Many of these megachurches intentionally try not to leave their uncommitted members in that noncommittal state for long. Some, such as Willow Creek and Johnson Ferry Baptist Church of Atlanta, have explicit steps toward increasing new members' involvement in the congregation (Olson 1988:185ff). Saddleback, likewise, has a system that it calls the "baseball diamond strategy" for "moving people from unchurched and uncommitted to become mature believers who fulfill their ministry in...church and their life mission in the world." The components of this system are: first base - committing to membership, second base - developing spiritual maturity, third base - empowering for service, and home base - fulfilling a life mission to the world.

These churches, and others, have created intentional structures to promote commitment to Christianity, to the congregation, and to missions. Such structures include new member classes, personal deacons, care or fellowship groups, assistance in discovering ministry gifts, ministry "fairs," and volunteer recruitment "drives." Several congregations have established courses to instruct new members in the basics of the Christian faith, for instance Saddleback offers C.L.A.S.S. 101, 201, and 301 teachings which lead members into a deeper understanding of the faith. All the megachurches which use the above noted rhetoric of "refuge" also encourage the "rescued" members to help others once they themselves are mended. More than those non "full-service" churches, megachurches are intentionally structured to offer multiple avenues by which members can increase their levels of commitment and accountability, if they so desire. The choice is each member's to make, under the intense prompting of pastoral appeals for involvement.

At the same time, however, many megachurches direct their energies on those persons who are active participants and who choose to be highly involved, rather than on those who want to be affiliated but remain as minimally active members. Willow Creek, for instance, asks every participant to renew his or her commitment to the church each year. Those who do not are dropped from membership (Olson 1988:202). Participation counts; involvement is what defines membership for many of these congregation. Some megachurches even claim to have larger numbers of weekly attenders than they have persons on their membership rolls.

Megachurches, like all other congregations, must constantly try to reduce their attrition rates. They must also compete with the strong societal norm that justifies sporadic attendance and marginal participation. In addition, all churches have to deal with people who feel that they can drop in, enjoy the show, and ignore the threats to give or be involved, even at the cost of possible eternal damnation. Unlike many other congregation, however, megachurches often spend much more time attracting those who choose to be committed rather than trying to coerce marginal members to change their minds.

Every successful organization has to attempt to weed out its free-riders either by encouraging them to leave or by getting them involved (Iannaccone 1992). Megachurches contain large numbers of new, non-contributing, and marginal members, often as many as half the congregation. The percentage of such persons in megachurches may be greater than it is in smaller churches precisely because of the anonymity of size and the fact that these large churches often intentionally "cast their nets" upon an "unchurched" constituency (Schaller 1992). At the same time, these megachurch "free loaders" might not tax the institution to the extent they do in a smaller church (Stonebraker 1993:239). Several church researchers argue that even though the large churches require more money to maintain themselves, percentage-wise they are more efficient and generate considerable amounts of additional revenue (Vaughan 1990; Schaller 1992). Megachurches have a greater surplus of resources to compensate for the marginal participants (Stonebraker 1993).

The large number of minimally involved persons may, in fact, actually be an asset to the megachurch organization in a way they are not for smaller churches. Several thousand free-riders are crucial for the megachurch to maintain its large congregation, a "critical mass," of worshipers which help attract others to the church. These large numbers help the church stand out in the religious marketplace. Therefore, whether the free-riders are committed or not, their presence alone contributes significantly to the draw of these massive churches.

Another question which arises in relation to the members of megachurches is from what sources are they being drawn? Given that most of the megachurches began within the last 25 years, nearly all of their congregations are the result of proselytizing. Very few members were born into these churches. Much of the rhetoric of megachurch pastors suggests that they target and convert non-Christians and the "unchurched." One study found that among members of the Vineyard movement 13 percent had no previous religious affiliation. A total of 29 percent were classified as "unchurched," having attended

church in their childhood once a month or less (Perrin 1989:126). A survey of Chapel Hill Harvester Church members found that 6.1 percent of respondents were "religious nones;" while over 27 percent claimed to have been new Christians for two years or less (Thumma 1996a). These data seem to indicate that a majority of megachurch members arrive by switching from other churches or denominations, rather than having been converted from noninvolvement. Church literature from one megachurch, Valley Cathedral of Phoenix, proudly proclaimed this fact, stating that it began with persons from 34 different denominations.

These thousands of worshipers from diverse backgrounds gathered in a massive service requires that megachurches must work hard to create a sense of acceptance and intimacy. The many groups and ministries in place offer small group opportunities to find intimacy in a megachurch, if one is interested in looking for it. At the same time, these structures may not provide the deep, long term relations, within a community of memory that promotes true intimacy (Wuthnow 1994).

Nevertheless, many large churches have been diligent in attempting to create a congregational atmosphere which promotes intimacy. Jerry Falwell wrote of his Thomas Road Baptist Church, "I believe you will find us to be a friendly church with a warm family atmosphere." Phoenix First Assembly (of God) speaks of itself as the "Church with a heart for the family." First Baptist of Orlando refers to itself in all its literature as "The First Family." Another Southern Baptist in an Atlanta suburb, First Baptist of Snellville, proclaims in its literature that it is "The Caring Place." Roswell Street Baptist Church, also of Atlanta, described itself as "A big down-home church where everybody is somebody." Its visitor's brochure attempts to prove this point, "studies show that most persons know an average of 60 people by first name. That is true if they belong to a church with 6, 60, 600, or 6000 members." This church developed an elaborate cell-group system of concentric rings labeled "Fellowship circles," "Friendship circles," and "Kinship circles" to promote intimacy and "build a friendly church." Chapel Hill Harvester Church leadership, likewise, encouraged the congregation to be friendly, warm, and open to each other. Judging from the congregational survey the membership reflects this attitude, two thirds of respondents stated that they knew as many or more persons at Chapel Hill Harvester than at other churches they had attended. Three of their five closest nonfamily friends attended the church. In addition, over forty percent had extended family at the church. Finally, over eighty percent of the survey respondents also reported that they "felt cared about" and "were not just another number" at the church.

A final innovative way nearly all megachurches promote intimacy and a sense of community is through the use of their media resources to enhance congregational communications. A reliance on various media is necessary given both the size of the congregation and the number of activities taking place in any given week. This knowledge distribution is essential for the functioning of the organization. This use of a church's media resources, however, extends far beyond information management. Newspapers, magazines, weekly bulletins, pamphlets, video presentations and taped messages create traditions even as their stories inform members of church history or current events. With the use of slick desktop publishing programs these media are colorful, attractive, and quite professional looking.

These various media forms function the way the "coffee hour" might in a smaller congregation. Articles in these various resources feature biographies on staff members, introduce the "deacon & elder of the month," and identify recent new members. Stories and regular columns in church newspapers provide an opportunity for key leaders or guest lay writers to give their testimonies. Some articles share the wisdom of members' experiences on how to parent, handle aging relatives, recover from a divorce, or even witness to a neighbor. Many megachurch ministers use these media forms to augment their sermons, to instruct the congregation, to press their position on upcoming issues, or to keep home bound members connected (Eiesland 1995:86-87).

In addition, media resources are employed by the leadership to compensate for their full and busy schedules. Ideally, they want to seem constantly available for every parishioner. Various modern technologies such as voice mail, paging services, cellular phones, faxes, and e-mail help make this possible. Many of the megachurches use automated phone forwarding systems, such as Chapel Hill Harvester Church's after hours message "If you are calling about a death in the family, press nine." Computers have also been a technological godsend for megachurches. They keep track of giving and attendance, organize members' volunteer interests, and customize form letters to members. For instance, Chapel Hill Harvester used its computer data base to generate personalized birthday cards "from the Senior Minister." These elaborate systems allow for a technological intimacy with otherwise unreachable spiritual CEO's and ministerial board members.

Of course, megachurches also make use of their media resources to spread their influence and extend their advertising budget. Tapes, printed materials, conference announcements, and radio and television broadcasts often cover the continent. Many churches televise their services, even if it is just in

the local area and many use video presentations in worship as well. Willow Creek is a notable exception here, having intentionally chosen to avoid television entirely (Chandler 1989:A28). Within the last few years an additional medium, the Internet, has captured the attention of some megachurches. At present dozens of congregations, including Chapel Hill Harvester, Willow Creek, Saddleback, and First Baptist Atlanta, have very professional, and quite extensive pages on the World Wide Web.

Networks of Like-minded Congregations

The national influence of megachurches has given rise to another of their distinctive characteristics -- the creation of unique organizations which function somewhat like a "quasi-denominational association" gathered around the leadership of these large churches. The various associations, fellowships, or networks of megachurches and their affiliates represent a distinctive and major structural innovation in the organization of American religion. A large number of megachurches are involved in networking with other smaller churches. For instance, Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard Christian Fellowship each have several hundred churches affiliated with them (including several other megachurches), many of which were started or "planted" from within their ministries (Parrott & Perrin 1991; Dart 1991). Saddleback Church has incorporated 27 "daughter churches," while Highland Park Baptist Church had in 1983 over 60 "chapel ministries" (Vaughan 1984:112). Willow Creek Association designed "to provide support to other seeker-sensitive congregations" had a 1992 membership of over 700 but by 1996 claimed to have 1400 affiliate churches from 70 denominations (Gilbreath 1994; Church's web site).

Legitimacy may have been the initial reason these independent congregations affiliated with the larger megachurches; however, the sharing of resources, instruction, and the need for direction from a leader with a successful model can also be seen as part of the attraction to these networks. This idea of a loose affiliation of like-minded churches fits with modern management Amegatrends" away from hierarchical leadership models (Naisbitt 1984). The networks allow individual congregations to choose their affiliational ties based on their momentary interests and needs rather than having it be denominationally-fixed, or permanently committed. These churches, both independent and nondenominational, are able to select with whom they want to associate and to whom they choose to submit and be accountable.

In none of these associational efforts was the denominational model adopted.. These networks

intentionally envision themselves as non-bureaucratic, non-hierarchical, and non or intra-denomination. The head of one fellowship stated firmly, "This is not and never will be a denomination" (Dart 1991). These networks are often a loose affiliation of egalitarian congregations gathered around one or several outstanding ministries with the intent of sharing information, gathering resources, and linking up with other churches that share a similar vision of ministry. They may vaguely resemble the denominational structure, but the characteristics, quality, and grounds of the relational dynamics between the central congregation and its association of affiliates more resembles getting one's degree through a correspondence course than it does earning it by attending a college. One network, Fred Price's "Fellowship of Inner city Word of Faith Ministries, had 210 networked congregations. The requirements for membership in this fellowship were $100 per year dues and agreement with a statement of beliefs. Price states, "We have accountability to one another, but it is very loose. We're not saying you have to do things this way or that way" (Dart 1991).

Neither are these networks schismatic or sectarian in origin. Unlike sectarian splinter groups, these fellowships were ecumenical groupings of churches, some of whom retained their connections to denominational organizations. New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, founded by Pastor Eddie Long, is dually aligned with the NBC and ABC, in addition Long is a Bishop in the network headed by New Orleans pastor, Paul Morton. These networks, then, are not exclusive, rigid associations. Brasher notes, in her study of the Calvary Fellowship, the decentralized nature of member congregations' relationship with the mother church in Costa Mesa. She suggests, "It would be inaccurate to infer...that Calvary affiliates are totally independent. They are bound together with the fuzzy boundaries of indefinite connectedness.... the rudimentary tie which strings Chapels together as an approach to ministry" (1992:14). One pastor in the Calvary network called this "gentle accountability." Brasher also notes that the Calvary association was quite fluid with numerous churches leaving and others joining. In one year's time 76 joined but 35 congregations left the fellowship (1992:15). In fact, a small church may link itself to several major ministry networks, so too might a network be connected to other networks through one of the broader umbrella groups.

The idea behind networks, as expressed by several of these groups and numerous affiliate church pastors, is cooperation in ministry, a sharing of mission perspective, and fellowship. These groups can be seen as functioning similar to "parachurch" organizations and "special interest groups" offering

smaller churches information on a distinctive brand of Christianity or way of doing ministry. Many of the megachurches host church growth or pastoral development conferences for their affiliates and others. Willow Creek, for instance, offers three conferences a year. Its conference in May 1995 had 2,391 participants from 644 churches, with 78 denominations and 17 countries represented. In addition Willow Creek, as well as other networks, connects its associational members through cyberspace. The Association's web site provides considerable information on its "fellowship" as well as describing the extent of its relationship with affiliate churches, and offering on-line registration. It publishes its networking newsletter online and offers a listing of churches including home pages for each church.

Megachurches in general share most of the above described characteristics. Taken together these traits define a distinctive congregational form. Growth is partially responsible for the creation of this new reality, but it is not size alone which produced this phenomenon. The modern context can also be seen as constitutive. These churches, however, are not just accommodated versions of denominational or sectarian congregations.

Megachurches strain the boundaries of traditional ways of describing and categorizing religious phenomena. These massive congregations have certain qualities of a sect (they have high commitment costs, proclaim a unique legitimacy, and reject structural differentiation by seeing religion as important to all of life); they are like a denomination (they have an openness to society, high organizational complexity and a mass religiosity where choice is essential); they are like a parachurch organization (they provide a specialized service to interested consumers, function as a resource, and allow for minimal commitment). At the same time, they can not be encompassed fully by any one of these categories.

This new configuration of religious life is a result of the creative adaptation to a changing social situation. Megachurches as a social phenomenon can only be seen as a collective response to shifting social and cultural patterns of American society. The words of one Chapel Hill Harvester Church member underscore this reality.

[The church] is very open to change...and that is part of the success. It's that fluid posture that says, "Let's shift, Let's move." That really adds some strength to the ministry. You know the world is fluid, it changes. And a fluid ministry is one that can go with that flow.

MEGACHURCHES: A MODERN CULTURAL FIT

Megachurches are not just a unique expression of baby boomer religion, a "new paradigm"

religiosity, nor are they the result of an overabundance of religious entrepreneurs. Rather changing cultural and social conditions have created a context in which this alternative form of religious organization has come to be seen as a viable option. The megachurch phenomenon is new. It represents one of the most prominent religious patterns which has developed in relation to recent changes in American society. It is exactly this relevance which enabled most of the megachurches to reach their present size. They were able to adjust to a changing context in order to address the needs of their clientele. To do this, many megachurch pastors simply asked people what they wanted in a religion and then sought to create that product. However, this is not why megachurches exist. They are not a distinctive social reality because they crassly cater to choosy consumers. If this were the case, this religious expression of programmatic flexibility based on marketing expertise would have produced a shallow commitment to a watered-down Christianity and short-lived social phenomenon.

For the answer to why megachurches have become so popular and plentiful in the last several decades, one must examine their common characteristics in relation to the personal, social, and cultural reality of those who become megachurch members. These distinctive congregations must be seen in their cultural context in order to identify their appeal, beneath their obvious programmatic efforts.

A Mega Institutional World

If a congregation experienced rapid and phenomenal growth in 1996, that church would send representatives to conferences sponsored by Willow Creek or Saddleback Church to learn how to structure itself and how to manage its growth. The earliest megachurches, however, did not have the luxury of established models to draw upon or pattern themselves after. Their pastors and leadership had to create a new organizational form through a process of institutional adoption and syncretic blending, an organizational bricolage, of successful patterns around them to meet the specific needs of their expanding congregations.

To both plan and structure their burgeoning matrix of ministries, church leaderships looked to one of the most prevalent institutional realities in the neighborhood, the shopping mall. Consciously or unintentionally, the mall concept became the organizational style for ordering and presenting a diverse array of educational, support, political, fitness, and religious programs, all under one roof. These individual shops examined secular service organizations for their inspirations of what "sold" among

consumers, but also to find out what the needs were that they had to address.

The creation of these large congregations came about, then, as gifted, innovative leaders began to draw masses of persons around them and around their visions of a relevant, lived Christianity. As this growth occurred these leaders drew upon the forms and structures of everyday life to fashion a reality which would meet the needs of their institutions and the requirements of their membership. As a result, their creations, megachurches, both fit their message of an practical, no nonsense religion and resonated with their experiences and those flocking to hear the message. Both the message and the form fit the constituency.

The Modern Megachurch Member

Those who are drawn to megachurches find their various organizational forms quite familiar, a part of their everyday lives (Eiesland 1995). Megachurch members are at home in large scale institutions (Ostling 1991; Schaller 1992). They grew up in them and were nurtured by them. They were probably born in a giant hospital, educated in a consolidated high school and large public university, and entertained by rock concerts, cable television, and multiplex movie theaters. No doubt they shop in malls and food warehouses, and may commute thirty minutes or more to jobs in large corporations situated in office parks. These institutional realities and their practices have shaped both the character and the needs of these people. They find the megachurch to be "home." They are willing to drive past dozens of other congregations, fight to find a parking space, follow the signs to get to the nursery, and worship in a communal setting with five thousand other relatively anonymous persons, just like they do every day of their lives.

These megachurch members are also highly mobile, transient, and without roots. They long for a place, a heritage, and commitments however fleeting (Roof 1993). Megachurches offer these persons a history, a narrative tradition, and programs to which they can commit (Eiesland 1995:78). The fellowship groups and need-based therapeutic social ministries provide a rapid integration into a community and the personal intimacy of subjective, expressive encounters (Wuthnow 1994; Hadaway & Roozen 1993). The advertisement of one megachurch succinctly captures this social situation of its potential members,

The difference is worth the distance! Have you noticed how far you have to travel in this metropolitan area to get to: a shopping center or grocery store, school or post office; doctor or mechanic?

[Our] membership...assembles from a radius of twenty miles. Someone near you worships here. The road to the house of a friend is never very long.

Above all else these persons are looking for a choice that addresses their needs. This is not merely a superficial choice of a variety of market products, but a choice which is constitutive of who they are. Research shows that ascribed identities have been weakening, especially in a highly mobile society (Hammond 1988; Wuthnow 1988; Roof & McKinney 1987). As a result, the act of choosing functions to define who person are, it provides them with alternative achieved identities. Many megachurch members want to make personal choices which, likewise, require a commitment. They desire causes that matter and choices that demand something of them. It is this kind of person, one who is willing to commit, upon which megachurches specifically focus their attention. Megachurches accept all who come, but they also demand commitment. As one Chapel Hill Harvester pastor stated during a call for members, "This church is not for everybody. We call for a high level of commitment."

This requires two things of megachurches: that they offer a clear, well-defined identity, and that this identity be a worthy pursuit. As Roof suggests, many of these religious seekers are interested in finding "a religion you can believe totally in" (1993:213). This need not be expressed in a rigid fundamentalist way, although it is often a faith with a conservative theological orientation. Actually, many megachurches defy easy classification as strictly liberal or conservative in relation to both the diversity of members' beliefs and the programs sponsored. These congregations and their ministries exhibit considerable pluralism. Although the official theology espoused may be orthodox conservative Christianity, a variety of opinions and practices are tolerated in relation to women's roles, sexuality, abortion, and political persuasions. In a cultural climate which emphasizes the self-construction of beliefs and spirituality, tolerance of a diversity of possible alternatives, unified under a common vision, is an asset. This vision, however, must be one which can be enacted, which propels members to engage the world and their neighbors. They must have a place to demonstrate their commitment to this identity. Megachurches provide exactly that -- countless possibilities for service united by a strong visionary identity (Roof 1993:184).

The Religious Reality

Megachurches likewise offer an organizational form that parallels much of the religious context of modern American society. Contemporary religion has been seen as characterized by a new voluntarism.

Persons are free to choose whether to be religious or not (Roof & McKinney 1987). If they do belong to a church, they are more likely to shop around for a congregation that "has what they want" and "feels comfortable" (Roof 1993:5; Hadaway 1993:349). Megachurches offer an institutional setting that may be familiar to church shoppers. In addition, they provide the plethora of choices that allow spiritual consumers to get all their family's needs (spiritual, emotional, and recreational) met under one roof (Schaller 1992).

Within this context, "ascriptive loyalties" to the denomination of one's childhood have diminished in importance as a way in which persons define who they are religiously (Roof & McKinney 1987). The significance of denominational labels as a definitive characteristic of congregations is on the decline, a fact which is not lost to most nondenominational megachurches. As a result, persons are free to draw on multiple sources of religious experience to construct a faith that "works" for them. It is those persons who are most likely to do this, the middle class, suburban baby boomer, whom megachurches target as potential members.

Megachurches also address another characteristic of the modern religious life, that is the desire for quality, entertaining, and expressive worship combined with relevant, practical and biblical preaching (Schaller 1992). A large number of megachurch members left the ranks of "the unchurched" or switched from other congregations precisely because they claimed they wanted a deeper expression of Christianity (Perrin 1989). They were looking for a faith that could make a difference in their lives, give them a purpose, and provide them with a place to be of service to humanity. Megachurches were an answer to their needs.

Megachurches -- A Symbolic Presence in American Society

Megachurches offer a unique way of being religious in modern society; one that fits the social and religious context of many people. These large churches also create a distinctive symbolic presence as local congregations in contemporary society. Massive congregations of two to fifteen thousand participants occupy an undeniable space in the religious and social landscape. It is not just their prominent location, massive buildings, countless ministries, or television programs that give these churches their high visibility. It is also their vision of playing an role in changing society which both attracts attention and functions as part of their appeal. These congregations preach a message of action and

empowerment to their membership. Their goal is to make a difference in individual lives, in the local community, and in the world. It is the rhetoric, and often the reality, that these churches are actively engaged in reshaping their social context which is appealing to members .

The cumulative effect of the mass gatherings, the giant structures, and the local and national influence which these churches have is to create a powerful symbolic presence of a publicly vital and influential congregation. The message offered implicitly, and occasionally explicitly, by these congregations is that they are not, as one pastor explained, "just a local church on the corner, but a world missions outreach center." These megachurch pastors and their congregations see themselves, in the words of this same pastor, as "World Changers - changing their worlds in their homes, workplaces, and communities."

Whether these churches actually will change the world remains to be seen. However, both their presence and their power in shaping their immediate surroundings have been actualized. The implication of this success can be seen as an unstated but real challenge to the impression that religion is impotent in a secularized society. For members of megachurches, as it is for many modern Americans, the influence of religion, and specifically Christianity, has been perceived as declining at an alarming rate. The powerful influence of their congregations provides considerable evidence to the contrary. The successful megachurch, with its thousands of vibrant committed Christians, offers the message to America that religion is alive and well, at least in this place.

It is always in congregational settings where new ways of being religious have their birth and are nurtured. In the current changing cultural and social context, megachurches offer new visions of faith and new structures in which to be religious. These forms have tremendous potential to reshape their members and their local communities as well as the face of religion in the United States. If they can accomplish this, perhaps they will, as they hope, remake the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adler, Patricia A and Peter Adler

1987 Membership Roles in Field Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom

1988 "Fundamentalists Proselytizing Jews: Incivility in Preparation for the Rapture." in Martin E. Marty and Frederick E. Greenspahn, eds. *Pushing the Faith: Proselytism and Civility in a Pluralistic World*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company.

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom

1987 *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Anderson, Robert Maples

1979 *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Atlanta Journal and Constitution

1991 "DeKalb County Home Prices" Sunday Homefinder (November, 24):11.

Atlanta Regional Commission

1985 *Annual Report*. Atlanta, Georgia.

Baird, David

1990 "A Charismatic Cathedral?" World Congress Information Packet. Kingdom Publishers,

Balswick, Jack

1974 "The Jesus People: A Sociological Analysis." in Patrick H. McNamara, ed. *Religion American Style*. New York: Harper and Row.

Balch, Robert W.

1982 "Bo & Peep: A Case Study of the Origins of Messianic Leadership." in Roy Wallis, ed. *Millennialism and Charisma*. Belfast: Queen's University.

Balmer, Randall

1989 *Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America.*

New York: Oxford University Press.

Barnes, Douglas F.

1978 "Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 17(1): 1-18.

Barron, Bruce

1992 *Heaven on Earth?: The Social & Political Agendas of Dominion Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House

Barron, Bruce

1987 *The Health and Wealth Gospel*. Downers Grove,IL.: InterVarsity Press.

Baybrook, George W.

1974 "Six Churches: Thriving on Common Grounds." *Christianity Today*. (May 21): 26-27 and (June 18): 18-19.

Becker, Howard

1963 *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press.

Bellah, Robert N. Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton

1985 *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Berger, Peter L.

1967 *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Bernard, Richard M. and Bradley R. Rice, eds.

1983 *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War II*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Board, Stephen

1990 "Moving the World with Magazines: A Survey of Evangelical Periodicals." in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Bork, David

1986 *Family Business, Risky Business: How to Make it Work*. New York: American Management Association.

Bowman, Robert M.,Jr. with Craig S. Hawkins and Dan R. Schlesinger

1988a "The Gospel According to Paulk: A Critique of 'Kingdom Theology.'" *Christian Research Journal*. 10(3):9-14.

Bowman, Robert M.,Jr. with Craig S. Hawkins and Dan R. Schlesinger

1988b "The Gospel According to Paulk: A Critique of 'Kingdom Theology.'" *Christian Research Journal*. 11(1):15-20.

Bradley, Martin B., Norman M. Green, Jr., Dale Jones, Mac Lynn, and Lou McNeil

1992 *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990*. Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center.

Bradley, Donald S.

1980 "Back to the City?" in Andrew Marshall Hamer, ed. *Urban Atlanta: Redefining the Role of the City*. Atlanta: Georgia State University Press.

Brasher, Brenda

1992 "Calvary Chapel: Understanding the Mega-church Phenomenon." Unpublished paper, presented at the annual meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Washington, D.C..

Burawoy, Michael, et al.

1991 *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Burgess, Stanley M. and Gary B. McGee

1988 *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Burt, Robert L., ed.

1990 *Good News in Growing Churches*. New York: Pilgrim Press.

Caldwell, E. S.

1985 "Trend Toward Mega Churches." *Charisma*. (August): 30-38.

Camic, Charles

1980 "Charisma: Its Varieties, Preconditions, and Consequences." *Sociological Inquiry*. 50(1):5-23.

Carnes, Ann

1995 "Neighbors Pray for Containment." *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. (September, 22): A3.

Carroll, Jackson W., Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds.

1986 *The Handbook for Congregational Studies*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Chandler, Russell

1989 "Customer Poll Shapes a Church." *Los Angeles Times*. (December, 11):a1-a28.

Cho, Paul Yonggi

1981 *Successful Home Cell Groups*. Plainfield, NJ: Logos International.

Cho, Paul Yonggi

1979 *The Fourth Dimension*. Plainfield, NJ: Logos International.

Christenson, Larry

1970 *The Christian Family*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship.

Christenson, Larry and Nordis Christenson

1977 *The Christian Couple*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship.

Christianity Today, Religious News Service

1990 "Successful Churches Target Specific Groups" *Christianity Today*. (October, 8): 71-72.

Christians, Clifford G.

1990 "Redemptive Media as the Evangelical's Cultural Task." in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Church of God

1954 Minutes of the 45th General Assembly.

Church of God

1986 Minutes of the 61st General Assembly

Clapp, Rodney

1987 "Democracy as Heresy." *Christianity Today.* (February, 20):19-23.

Clements, Kirby

1988 *The Second: A Practical Guide to Establishing Church Structure*. Atlanta: Kingdom Publishers.

Conn, Charles W.

1955 *Like a Might Army Moves the Church of God*. Cleveland,TN: Church of God Publishing House.

Conn, Charles W.

1977 *Like a Might Army Moves the Church of God*. Rev. Ed. Cleveland,TN: Pathway Press.

Connolly, James

1977 Neo-Pentecostalism: The Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches of the United States. (PhD dissertation) University of Chicago.

Crews, Mickey

1990 *The Church of God: A Social History*. Knoxville,TN: The University of Tennessee Press.

Dabbs, James McBride

1972 *Haunted by God: The Cultural and Religious Experience of the South*. Richmond: John Know Press.

Darrand, Tom Craig, and Anson Shupe

1983 *Metaphors of Social Control in a Pentecostal Sect*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon.

Dart, John

1991 "Themes of Bigness, Success Attract Independent Churches. *Los Angeles Times*. (July, 20): F14.

Dawson, David

1992 *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dayton, Donald W.

1987 *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press.

DeMar, Gary

1988 *The Debate over Christian Reconstruction*. Atlanta: American Vision Press.

DeMar, Gary and Peter Leithart

1987 *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt*. Ft, Worth: Dominion.

Dent, Borden D.

1980 "The Challenge to Downtown Shopping." in Andrew Marshall Hamer, ed. *Urban Atlanta: Redefining the Role of the City*. Atlanta: Georgia State University Press.

Derstine, Gerald

1980 *Following the Fire*. Plainfield, NJ: Logos International.

Digitale, Robert

1990 "An Idea Whose Time Has Gone?" *Christianity Today*. (March 19): 38-41.

DiMaggio, Paul J. And Walter W. Powell

1991 "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organization Fields." In Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds. *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Douglas, Jack

1976 *Investigative Social Research: Individual and Team Field Research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Dow, Jr. Thomas E.

1978 "An Analysis of Weber's Work on Charisma." *British Journal of Sociology.* 29(1): 83-93

Drucker, Peter F.

1985 *Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Practice and Principles*. New York: Harper & Row.

Dudley, Carl S., ed.

1983 *Building Effective Ministry: Theory and Practice in the Local Church.* New York: Harper & Row.

Duin, Julie

1987 "The Holy Spirit and World Evangelism." *Christianity Today*. 31 (September 4): 44-45.

Duin, Julie

1986a "What Does the Future Hold for Charismatic Renewal?" *Christianity Today*. 30 (May 16): 38-44.

Duin, Julie

1986b "Signs and Wonders in New Orleans." *Christianity Today*. 30 (November 21): 26-27.

Durkheim, Emile

1973 *Emile Durkheim: On Morality and Society*. Robert N. Bellah, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dwiggins, Marnie

1995 "Church-run Facility Offers Hand Up, Not Just Hand Out." *DeKalb Neighbor*. (February, 1):12A.

Dyer, Jr., W. Gibb

1986 *Cultural Change in Family Firms: Anticipating and Managing Business and Family Transitions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Egerton, John

1974 *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America*. New York: Harper and Row.

Eiesland, Nancy L.

1995 A Particular Place: Exurbanization and Religious Response in a Southern Town. (PhD dissertation) Emory University.

Eiesland, Nancy L.

1994a "Contending with a Giant: The Case of a Mega-church in Exurbia." Unpublished paper prepared for the Congregations in Changing Communities Project, Institute for the Study of Economic Culture, Boston University.

Eiesland, Nancy L.

1994b "Irreconcilable Differences: Conflict and Schism in a Small-town/Suburban United Methodist Congregation. Unpublished paper presented at the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicalism.

Elder, Lee

1990 "Allegations Continue to Hound Fundamentalist Hyles." *Christianity Today*. (September, 24): 45-46.

Emerson, Jr., William A.

1959 "Where the Paper Clips Jump..." *Newsweek*. (October, 19):94-96.

Enroth, Ronald M.

1992 *Churches That Abuse*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing.

Enroth, Ronald M., Edward E. Ericson, Jr., and C. Breckinridge Peter

1972 *The Jesus People: Old-Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

Entziminger, George

1949 *How to Organize and Administer a Great Sunday School*. Fort Worth: The Manning Company.

Escott, Paul D. And David R. Goldfield

1991 *The South for New Southerners*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Farrah, Charles

1987 "America's Pentecostals: What They Believe. *Christianity Today*. (October, 16): 22-30.

Fee, Gordon D.

1985 *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*. Beverly, MA: Frontline Publishing.

Ferre', John P.

1990 "Searching for the Great Commission: Evangelical Book Publishing Since the 1970's." in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Fichter, Joseph H.

1975 *The Catholic Cult of the Paraclete*. New York: Sheed and Ward.

Fichter, Joseph H.

1951 *Southern Parish: Dynamics of a City Church*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Flynt, J. Wayne

1981 "One in the Spirit, Many in the Flesh: Southern Evangelicalism." in Harrell, Jr., David Edwin, ed *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Fortner, Robert S.

1990 "Saving the World? American Evangelicals and Transnational Broadcasting." in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Fortune, Marie M.

1989 *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship*. San Francisco" Harper & Row.

Foskett, Ken

1993 "Mega Church a Cross for Fulton to Bear." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (February, 3): C5.

Frame, Randy

1990 "Maranatha Disbands as Federation of Churches." *Christianity Today*. (March 19): 40-42.

Franklin, Robert M.

1994 "The Safest Place on Earth: The Culture of Black Congregations." in James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (eds.) *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations.* (Vol.2) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Franklin, Robert M.

1990 *Liberating Visions: Human Fulfillment and Social Justice in African-American Thought*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Garlock, Ruthanne

1981 *Benson Idahosa: Fire in his Bones*. Tulsa,OK: Praise Books.

Garrow, David J., ed.

1989 *Atlanta, Georgia 1960-1961: Sit-ins and Student Activism*. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishers.

Gaston, Paul M.

1970 *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking*. New York: Alfred A. Knoft.

Geertz, Clifford

1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books.

Gilbreath, Edward

1994 "The Birth of a Megachurch." *Christianity Today*. (July, 18): 23.

Glazier, Stephen

1980 *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America*.

Washington, DC: University Press of America.

Goffman, Erving

1961 *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books.

Goldberger, Paul

1995 "The Gospel of Church Architecture, Revised." *The New York Times*. (April, 20): B1, B4.

Greeley, Andrew M.

1989 *Religious Change in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gregory, Joel

1994 *To Great A Temptation*. The Summit Group.

Griffin, William

1987 "Kingdom Now: New Hope or New Heresy." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Virginia Beach, VA.

Gruber, Jay

1980 "Central City Manufacturing Firms: Who is Leaving and Why." in Andrew Marshall Hamer, ed. *Urban Atlanta: Redefining the Role of the City*. Atlanta: Georgia State University Press.

Gustafson, James M.

1961 *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: the Church as a Human Community.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Guyton, James Terry

1988 "Dynamics of Pentecostal Church Growth." (DMin dissertation) Fuller Theological Seminary.

Hadaway, C. Kirk

1993 "Church Growth in North America: The Character of a Religious Marketplace." in David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway, eds. *Church & Denominational Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Hadaway, C. Kirk, Francis M. DuBois and Steward A. Wright

1987 *Home Cell Groups and House Churches*. Nashville: Broadman Press.

Hadaway, C. Kirk

1993 "The Growth and Decline of Congregations." in David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway, eds. *Church & Denominational Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Hadden, Jeffery K.

1990 "Televangelism and Political Mobilization." in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Hadden, Jeffery K. and Anson Shupe

1988 *Televangelism: Power and Politics on God's Frontier*. New York: Holt.

Hadden, Jeffery K. and Charles E. Swann

1981 *Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

Hammond, Phillip E.

1992 *Religion and Personal Autonomy: The Third Disestablishment in America.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Hammond, Phillip E.

1988 "Religion and the Persistence of Identity." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 27 (1): 1-11.

Hamer, Andrew Marshall, ed.

1980 *"Urban Atlanta: Redefining the Role of the City*. Atlanta: Georgia State University Press.

Hamon, Bill

1981 *The Eternal Church*. Phoenix: Christian International.

Hargrove, Barbara

1976 "Church Student Ministries and the New Consciousness." in *The New Religious Consciousness*. Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Harris, Adrienne S.

1987 "Something for everyone at Chapel Hill." *The Atlanta Tribune*. 2:3 (June): 27.

Harrell, Jr., David Edwin, ed

1981 *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Harrell, Jr., David Edwin

1975 *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America*. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press.

Hazard, David

1988 "Relationships, Real Estate, and Reality." *Bridge Builder*. (July/August):21-23.

Heilman, Samuel C.

1973 *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Helyar, John

1988 "The Big Hustle." *Wall Street Journal*. (February, 29).

Hochschild, Arlie Russell

1983 *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hocken, Peter D.

1988 "Charismatic Movement." in Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Hoge, Dean R., Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens

1994 *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press.

Holdcroft, L. Thomas

1980 "The New Order of The Latter Rain." *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. (Fall):46-60.

Holifield, E. Brooks

1994 "Toward a History of American Congregations“ in James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (eds.) *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations.* (Vol.2) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hollenweger, Walter

1972 *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches.* Minneapolis, MN., Augsburg Press.

Hollinger, Dennis

1988 "Enjoying God Forever: An Historical/Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel. *Trinity Journal*. 9: 131-149.

Hoover, Steward M.

1990 "The Meaning of Religious Television: The ‘700 Club’ in the Lives of its Viewers." in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Hoover, Stewart M.

1988 *Mass Media Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic Church*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Press.

Hopewell, James F.

1987 *Congregation: Stories and Structure*. ed. Barbara Wheeler, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

House, Robert

1977 "A 1976 Theory of Charismatic Leadership." in J.G. Hunt and L. L . Larson, eds. *Leadership: The Cutting Edge*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press.

Hughes, Ray H.

1974 "A Traditional Pentecostal Looks at the New Pentecostals." *Christianity Today*. (June 7): 1036-1040.

Hunt, David

1985 *The Seduction of Christianity.* Eugene,OR: Harvest House.

Hunter, James Davison

1983 *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity*. New Brunswick, NY: Rutgers University Press.

Hutcheson, Jr., John D. and Elizabeth T. Beer

1980 "In-Migration and Atlanta's Neighborhoods." in Andrew Marshall Hamer, ed. *Urban Atlanta: Redefining the Role of the City*. Atlanta: Georgia State University Press.

Iannaccone, Laurence R.

1992 "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-riding in Cults, Communes, and other Collectives. *Journal of Political Economy*. 100:271-291.

Iverson, Dick

1990 "Do You Love Your City" sermon transcript printed in the Chapel Hill Harvester Church World Congress on the Kingdom of God syllabus notebook.

Iverson, Dick with Bill Scheidler

1975 *Present Day Truths*. Portland, OR: Bible Temple Publishing,

Jacobs, Janet Liebman

1989 *Divine Disenchantment: Deconverting from New Religions*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Johnson, Benton

1992 "On Founders and Followers: Some Factors in the Development of New Religious Movements." *Sociological Analysis*. 53 (S): s1-s13.

Johnson, Benton

1960 "Do Holiness Sects Socialize in Dominant Values?" *Social Forces*. 39: 309-317.

Jones, Charles

1983 *Guide to the Study of the Pentecostal Movement*. Metuchen, NJ: American Theological Library Association, Scarecrow Press.

Jones, P. L. and LeRoy Carver

1986 The Continuing Generations: A History of the Church of God in Georgia. Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press.

Jordan-Lake, Joy

1991 "Conduct Unbecoming a Preacher." *Christianity Today*.

Jorgensen, Danny

1989 *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Publications.

Jorstad, Erling

1972 *The New-Time Religion: The Jesus Revival in America*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.

Jules-Rosetta, Bennetta

1989 "The Sacred in African New Religions." in James Beckford and Thomas Luckmann (eds.) *The Changing Face of Religion*. London: Sage Press.

Justice, Nancy

1993 "Chapel Hill Sues Ex-Members." *Charisma and Christian Life*. (January): 76-77.

Justice, Nancy

1993 "Women Charge Paulk With Abuse." *Charisma and Christian Life*. (February): 54-55.

Kanter, Rosabeth M.

1972 *Commitment and Community*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kantzer, Kenneth S.

1980 "The Charismatics Among Us." *Christianity Today*. (February, 22): 245-249.

Kelly, Dean M.

1972 *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*. New York: Harper and Row.

Kets de Vires, M. F. R.

1977 "The Entrepreneurial Personality: A Person at the Crossroads." *Journal of Management Studies*. 14:34-57.

King, Pat

1971 *The Jesus People Are Coming*. Plainfield, NJ: Logos International.

Kirkindoll, Michael Lynn

1989 "A History of the Effects of Urbanization on Southern Baptists in Atlanta, Georgia, 1945-1988." (PhD dissertation) Baylor University.

Laccetti, Susan

1992 "Pastor Admits Affair with Church Employee, Leaves Ministry." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (May, 11):C1.

Lawton, Kim A.

1990 "Growing but Not Groaning" *Christianity Today*. (March, 5): 23.

Lee, Thonnie and Kenneth Worthy

1989 "Taking It To the Streets." *Atlanta Journal & Constitution, DeKalb Extra*. (August, 24):1,4.

Lewis, Don

nd "Assessing the Wimber Phenomenon." Christian Research Institute (DV-020).

Lewis, James R. and David G. Bromley

1987 "The Cult Withdrawal Syndrome: A Case of Misattribution of Cause?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 26 (4): 508-522.

Lewis, James R.

1986 "Reconstructing the 'Cult' Experience." *Sociological Analysis*. 42 (2): 151-159.

Long, Theodore E.

1986 "Prophecy, Charisma, and Politics: Reinterpreting the Weberian Thesis." in Jeffery Hadden and Anson Shupe, eds. *Prophetic Religions and Politics: Religion and the Political Order*. Vol. 1 New York: Paragon House.

Long, Thomas

1981 "Preaching (in the South)." Samuel S. Hill, ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Lovett, Leonard

1975 "Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement." in Vinson Synan, ed. *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*. Plainfield: NJ: Logos.

McConnell, Dennis D.

1980 "Investing in Neighborhood Revitalization." in Andrew Marshall Hamer, ed. *Urban Atlanta: Redefining the Role of the City*. Atlanta: Georgia State University Press.

McConnell, Dennis R.

1988 *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*. Peabody, MA: Hendeickson.

McDonald, Alan

1994 "Seven-Day-a-Week Buildings." *Christian Ministry*. 25 (July/August): 19-20.

McDonnell, Kilian

1980 *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

McGavran, Donald A.

1970 *Understanding Church Growth*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

McGaw, Douglas B.

1980a *A Tale of Two Congregations: Commitment and Social Structure in a Charismatic Mainline Church*. Hartford: Hartford Seminary Foundation.

McGaw, Douglas B.

1980b "Meaning and Belonging in a Charismatic Congregation: An Investigation into Sources of Neo-Pentecostal Success." *Review of Religious Literature*. 21(3):284-301.

McGuire, Meredith

1982 *Pentecostal Catholics: Power, Charisma, and Order in a Religious Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

McKee, Robert H.

1949 "Brother Paulk Routs Satan at His New Greenville Church." *The Atlanta Journal*. (January, 18): 13.

Marler, Penny Long and David A. Roozen

1993 "From Church Tradition to Consumer Choice: The Gallup Surveys of the Unchurched American." in David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway, eds. *Church & Denominational Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Martin, David

1990 *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Martin, Harold H.

1987 *Atlanta & Environs: Years of Change and Challenge 1940-1976.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Maudlin, Michael G.

1991 "Seers in the Heartland." *Christianity Today*. (January 14): 18-22.

Maust, John

1980 "Charismatic Leaders Seeking Faith for Their Own Healing." *Christianity Today*. 24 (April 9): 44-46.

Maxwell, Kimberley

1992 "Group Forms to Address South DeKalb Resident's Concerns." *The DeKalb Neighbor*. (March, 4):3A.

Mead, Loren.

1972 *New Hope for Congregations*. New York: Seabury Press.

Mears, John

1987 *Bind Us Together.* Old Tappan,NJ: Revell.

Metford, JCJ

1983 *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Mickler, Michael L.

1986 "Charismatic Leadership Trajectories: Two Case Histories." in Jeffery Hadden and Anson Shupe, eds. *Prophetic Religions and Politics: Religion and the Political Order*. Vol. 1 New York: Paragon House.

Miller, Daniel ed.

1994 *Coming of Age: Protestantism in Contemporary Latin America*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Miller, Donald E.

1993 "Postmodern Characteristics of Three Rapidly Growing Christian Movements: Calvary Chapel, Vineyard Christian Fellowship, and Hope Chapel." Unpublished paper, presented at the annual meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Raleigh, NC,

Miller, Donald E. and Paul Kennedy

1991 "The Vineyard Christian Fellowship: A Case Study of a Rapidly Growing Non-Mainline Church." Unpublished paper, presented at the annual meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Pittsburgh, PA.

Miller, Elliot, and Robert M. Bowman, Jr.

1985 "The Vineyard." Christian Research Institute (DV-15).

Miller, Herb

1990 *The Vital Congregation.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Miller, Timothy, ed.

1991 *When Prophets Die: The Postcharismatic Fate of New Religious Movements*. Albany: The State University of New York Press.

Miyahara, Kojiro

1983 "Charisma: From Weber to Contemporary Sociology." *Sociological Inquiry* 53(4): 368-387.

Morgan, David L. and Margaret T. Spanish

1984 "Focus Groups: A New Tool for Qualitative Research." Qualitative Sociology. 7(3):253-270.

Morgan, Marabel

1973 *The Total Woman*. Old Tappan, NJ: Revell.

Murray, Alice

1977a "Charismatics Meet in Kansas City." *Atlanta Journal & Constitution*. (July, 21): 11a.

Murray, Alice

1977b "Unity Theme of Charismatic Meeting." *Atlanta Journal & Constitution*. (July, 22): 14a.

Murray, Alice

1977c "Charismatic Renewal a Great Awakening." *Atlanta Journal & Constitution*. (July, 23): 1a,4a.

Naisbitt, John

1984 *Megatrends: Ten New Directions*. New York: Warner Books.

Nation, Garry Dale

1992 "The Restoration Movement." Christianity Today. (May, 18):27-31.

Nation, Garry Dale

1990 The Hermeneutics of Pentecostal-Charismatic Restoration Theology: A Critical Analysis. (PhD dissertation) Southwestern Saptist Theological Seminary.

Nee, Watchman

1972 *Spiritual Authority*. New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers.

Neff, David

1990 "Home of the Whopper." *Christianity Today*. (March, 5): 23.

Niebuhr, Gustav

1995a "Where Shopping-Mall Culture Gets a Big Dose of Religion." *The New York Times*. (April 16):1,12.

Niebuhr, Gustav

1995b "Religion Goes to Market to Expand Congregations." *The New York Times*. (April 18):1,10.

Niebuhr, Gustav

1988 "Charismatic Bishop Building a Mighty Fortress." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (May 5).

Niebuhr, H. Richard

1957 *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. New York: Meridian.

Niebuhr, H. Richard

1951 *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper and Row.

Neitz, Mary Jo

1987 *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment within the Charismatic Renewal*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Neuman, H. Terris

1990 "Cultic Origins of Word-Faith Theology Within the Charismatic Movement." *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. 12(1): 32-55.

Newman, Robert J.

1984 *Growth in the American South: Changing Regional Employment and Wage Patterns in the 1960's and 1970's*. New York: New York University Press.

O'Connor, Edward

1971 *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press.

Olson, Richard

1988 "The Largest Congregations in the United States: An Empirical Study of Church Growth and Decline." (PhD dissertation) Northwestern University.

Orfield, Gary and Carole Ashkinaze

1991 *The Closing Door: Conservative Policy and Black Opportunity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ostling, Richard N.

1991 "Superchurches and How They Grew." *Time* (August 5): 62-63.

Paris, Arthur

1982 *Black Pentecostalism: Southern Religion in an Urban World*. Anherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Parrott, Les and Dale Robin Perrin

1991 "The New Denominations" *Christianity Today* 34 (March 11):29-33.

Parsons, Paul F.

1987 *Inside America's Christian Schools*. Macon,GA: Mercer University Press.

Parvin, Richard H.

1987 Letter to the Editor: Wimber and Wacker. *The Reformed Journal*. (June): 8.

Paulk, Don

1987 *I Laugh...I Cry: Confessions of a Pastor*. Atlanta: Kingdom Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1991 *The Local Church Says Hell No*! Atlanta Kingdom Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1990a *The Church: Trampled or Triumphant?* Atlanta: Kingdom Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1990b *101 Questions your Pastor Hopes you never Ask*. Atlanta: Kingdom Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1988a *Spiritual Megatrends: Christianity in the 21st Century*. Atlanta: Kingdom Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1988b *20/20 Vision: A Clear View of the Kingdom of God*. Atlanta: Kingdom Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1988c *Subtle Doors to Satanism: How to Avoid the Snares and Pitfalls of the Enemy.* Atlanta: Kingdom Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1988d *Winning Spiritual Warfare in the Family*. Atlanta: Kingdom Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1987 *That the World May Know*. Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1986 *Ultimate Kingdom: Lessons for Today's Christian from the Book of Revelation*. Rev. Ed. Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1985a *Held in the Heavens Until...: God's Strategy for Planet Earth*. Atlanta K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1985b *Sex Is God's Idea*. Atlanta K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1985c *To Whom Is God Betrothed: Examining the Biblical Basis for the Church's Support of National Israel.* Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1984a *Ultimate Kingdom*. Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1984b *Satan Unmasked: Exposing the Work of Satan in the World Today*. Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1983 *The Wounded Body of Christ.* Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1978 *Divine Runner*. Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1960 *Forward in Faith Sermons*. Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press.

Paulk, Earl P., Jr.

1958 *Your Pentecostal Neighbor*. Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press.

Pederson, Duane

1971 Jesus People. Glendale, CA: Regal Books.

Pellauer, Mary

1987 "Sex, Power, and the Family of God." *Christianity and Crisis*. (February, 16): 47-50).

Pennington, John

1957 "Racial Beliefs Cited By 80 Pastors Here." *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (November, 3): A1,6.

Perrin, Dale Robin

1989 "Signs and Wonders: The Growth of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship." (PhD. dissertation) Washington State University.

Peshkin, Alan

1986 *God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Plowman, Edward E.

1975 "Deepening Rift in the Charismatic Movement. *Christianity Today*. 20 (October 10): 52-54.

Poewe, Karla

1989 "On the Metonymic Structure of Religious Experiences: The Example of Charismatic Christianity. *Cultural Dynamics*. 2(4):361-380.

Poewe, Karla

1988 "Links and Parallels between Black and White Charismatic Churches in South Africa and the States: Potential for Cultural Transformation." *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal*

Studies. 10:141-158.

Pousson, Edward Keith

1990 Origins, Aspects, and Missionary Activities of Independent Charismatic Churches and Ministries Based in the U.S.A.. (DMIN dissertation) Fuller Theological Seminary.

Poloma, Margaret M.

1989 *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas*. Knoxville,TN: The University of Tennessee Press.

Poloma, Margaret M.

1986 "Pentecostals and Politics in North and Central America." in Jeffery K. Hadden and Anson Shupe, eds., *Prophetic Religions and Politics: Religion and the Political Order*, Vol.1. New York: Paragon House.

Poloma, Margaret M.

1982 *The Charismatic Movement: Is There a New Pentecost*? Boston: G.K. Hall.

Pratt, Thomas

1991 "The need to Dialogue: A Review of the Debate on the Controversy of Signs, Wonders, Miracles, and Spiritual Warfare Raised in the Literature of the Third Wave Movement." *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. 13 (Spring): 7-32.

Quebedeaux, Richard

1983 *The New Charismatics II: How a Christian Renewal Movement Became Part of the American Religious Mainstream*. New York: Harper & Row.

Quebedeaux, Richard

1982 *By What Authority: The Rise of Personality Cults in American Christianity*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Quebedeaux, Richard

1976 *The New Charismatics: The Origins, Development, and Significance of Neo-Pentecostalism*. Garden City,NY: Doubleday.

Raboteau, Albert Jr.

1980 *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford

University Press.

Ramsey, Vikki L.

1992 "Amazing Growth in Numbers." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (May, 2): E6.

Ranaghan, Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan

1969 *Catholic Pentecostals*. New York: Paulist Press.

Reed, David

1975 "Aspects on the Origins of Oneness Pentecostalism." in Vinson Synan, ed. *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*. Plainfield, NJ: Logos.

Reed, John Shelton

1986 *Southern Folk, Plain & Fancy: Native White Social Types*. Athens,GA: The University of Georgia Press.

Reed, John Shelton

1983 *Southerners: The Social Psychology of Sectionalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Reed, John Shelton

1982 *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press.

Reed, John Shelton

1972 *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass society*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Reid, Tommy

1988 *Kingdom Now, But Not Yet*. Buffalo, NY: IJN Press.

Rice, Bradley R.

1983 "If Dixie Were Atlanta." in Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, eds. *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War II*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Richardson, James T.

1991 "Calvary Chapel: A New Denomination?" Paper presented at the conference on Evangelicals, Voluntary Associations, and American Public Life, Wheaton College, June 14.

Richardson, James T., Mary White Stewart, and Robert B. Simmonds

1979 *Organized Miracles: A Study of a Contemporary Youth, Communal, Fundamentalist Organization*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Rieff, Philip

1987 *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Riss, Richard M.

1988 "The Latter Rain Movement." in Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Riss, Richard M.

1987 *Latter Rain: The Latter Rain Movement of 1948 and the Mid-Twentieth Century Evangelical Awakening*. Mississauga,Ontario: Honeycomb Visual Productions.

Riss, Richard M.

1982 "The Latter Rain Movement of 1948." *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. (Spring):32-45.

Romanowski, William D.

1990 "Contemporary Christian Music: The Business of Music Ministry." in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Roof, Wade Clark

1993 *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.

Roof, Wade Clark and William McKinney

1987 *American Mainline Religion*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Roozen, David A.

1993 "Denominations Grow as Individuals Join Congregations." in David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway, eds. *Church & Denominational Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Rose, Susan D.

1988 *Keeping Them out of the Hands of Satan: Evangelical Schooling in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Rose, Susan D.

1987 "Woman Warriors: The Negotiation of Gender in a Charismatic Community." *Sociological Analysis*. 48(3): 245-58.

Sammonds, Mary Beth

1994 "Full-service Church." *Chicago Tribune: Tempo Northwest*. (April, 3):1, 16.

Schaller, Lyle E., ed.

1993 *Center City Churches: The New Urban Frontier.* Nashville: Abingdon.

Schaller, Lyle E.

1992 *The Seven-Day-A-Week Church.* Nashville: Abingdon.

Schaller, Lyle E.

1990 "Megachurch!" *Christianity Today*. (March 5):20-24.

Schaller, Lyle E.

1980 *The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church*. Nashville: Abingdon.

Schein, E. H.

1985 "The Role of the Founder in Creating Organizational Cultures." *Organizational Dynamics*. 12(1): 13-28.

Schultze, Quentin J., ed.

1990 *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Schutz, Alfred

1970 *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*. Helmut R. Wagner, ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Schwartz, Gary

1970 *Sect Ideologies and Social Status*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shakarian, Demos

1975 *The Happiest People on Earth*. Old Tappan, NJ: Revell.

Shavin, Norman and Bruce Galphin

1985 *Atlanta: Triumph of a People*. Atlanta: Capricorn Corporation.

Shealy, Larry and John Reetz

1978 "South DeKalb." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (March, 12): 1b, 5b.

Shibley, Mark

1991 "The Southernization of American Religion." *Sociological Analysis*. 52 (2): 159-74.

Shupe, Anson and David G. Bromley

1991 "The Modern American Anti-Cult Movement: A Twenty-Year Retrospective. Unpublished paper, from the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Cincinnati, OH.

Sidey, Kenneth H.

1993 "So Long to Sacred Space: Consumer-minded, User-friendly Buildings. *Christianity*

Today. 37(November, 8): 46.

Sidey, Ken

1991 "Church Growth Fine Tunes Its Formula." *Christianity Today*. (June, 24): 44-47.

Silk, Mark.

1993 "The Church That Swallowed Dacula." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (February, 13): E6.

Silk, Mark.

1992 "Cover Doctrine at Core of Appeal of DeKalb Church." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (December, 5): E6.

Smidt, Corwin E. Lyman A. Kellstedt, John C. Green, and James L. Guth

1994 "The Spirit-Filled Movements in Contemporary America: A Survey Perspective." Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Mainstream Protestantism and Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA (March 10-12).

Smith, Ben

1996 "South DeKalb Demanding More From Leaders." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (February, 25):C3.

Smith, Dena

1993 "Cherry Ridge: Young Professionals Drawn to DeKalb by Room, Luxury." *Atlanta Journal & Constitution Homefinder*. (January, 10):8.

Smith, Dennis A.

1990 "The Gospel According to the United States: Evangelical Broadcasting in Central America. in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Smith, Stephen A.

1985 *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind*. Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas.

Smith, Tom W.

1992 "Religious Beliefs and Behaviors and the Televangelists Scandals of 1987-1988." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 56 (Fall): 360-380.

Speed, Billy Cheney

1971 "Paulk Marks Half Century As Minister." *The Atlanta Journal*. (May, 29): 7-A.

Speed, Billy Cheney

1968 "Clergymen Seek Outlets for Helping City's Poor." *The Atlanta Journal*. (July, 12).

Stacey, Judith

1990 *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America*. New York: Basic Books.

Stafford, Tim

1986 "Testing the Wine from John Wimber's Vineyard." *Christianity Today*. (August, 8): 17-22.

Steadman, Ray

1972 *Body Life*. Glendale, CA: Gospel Light Publications.

Steinberg, H.W., et al.

1987 "A Summary of Some Kingdom Now doctrines Which Differ from the Teachings of the Assemblies of God." A White Paper of the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Virginia Beach, VA.

Stevenson, A. Russell

1993 "Mega-Churches Prove That Theology Matters." *The Presbyterian Layman*.

(September/October): 6,8.

Stokes, Allison and David Roozen

1991 "The Unfolding Story of Congregational Studies." in *Carriers of Faith: Lessons from Congregational Studies*, ed. Carl S. Dudley, Jackson W. Carroll, and James P. Wind Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.

Stonebraker, Robert J.

1993 "Optimal Church Size: The Bigger the Better." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 32 (3):231-241.

Strang, Stephen

1993 "Leaders Must Be Accountable." *Ministries Today*. (March/April): 14, 16.

Strang, Stephen

1988 "Nondenominational Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches." in Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Swatos, Jr., William H.

1981 "The Disenchantment of Charisma: A Weberian Assessment of Revolution in a Rationalized World." *Sociological Analysis*. 42(2): 119-136.

Swidler, Ann

1986 "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review*. 51: 273-286.

Sweeting, George

1974 *Is America Dying?* Chicago: Moody.

Synan, Vinson

1993 "Friends Mourn Shakarian's Death." *Charisma*. (September): 99.

Synan, Vinson

1991 *In the Latter Days: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Twentieth Century*. (Revised Edition) Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications.

Synan, Vinson

1988 "Kansas City Conference" in Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Synan, Vinson

1987 *The Twentieth-Century Pentecostal Explosion: The Exciting Growth of Pentecostal Churches and Charismatic Renewal Movements*. Altamonte Springs,FL: Creation House.

Synan, Vinson

1986 "Pentecostalism: Varieties and Contributions." *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. Fall: 31-49.

Synan, Vinson

1976 "Reconciling the Charismatics." *Christianity Today*. 20 (April 9): 46.

Synan, Vinson

1971 *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*. Grand Rapids,MI: Eerdmans.

Taeuber, Karl E.

1980 "Residential Segregation in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area." in Andrew Marshall Hamer, ed. *Urban Atlanta: Redefining the Role of the City*. Atlanta: Georgia State University Press.

Thigpen, Paul

1990a "Restoring the Arts to the Church." *Charisma and Christian Life*. 16:2 (June):

Thigpen, Paul

1990b "The New Black Charismatics." *Charisma and Christian Life.* 16:4 (November): 58-67.

Thigpen, Paul

1988 "What's the Fuss About 'Kingdom Now'?" *Ministries Today*. 6:4 (July/August): 33-39.

Tindall, George B.

1964 "Mythology: A New Frontier in Southern History." in Frank E. Vandiver, ed. *The Idea of the South: Pursuit of a Central Theme*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinney, James

1978 "Exclusionist Tendencies in Pentecostal Self-Definition: A Critique from Black Theology." *Journal of Religious Theology*. 36:32-49.

Tipton, Steven M.

1982 *Getting Saved From the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thomas, Patricia

1980 "The Alpha Imperative." *Atlanta Journal*. (November 9): 40-43.

Thompson, Wayne L., Jackson W. Carroll and Dean R. Hoge

1993 "Growth or Decline in Presbyterian Congregations." in David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway, eds. *Church & Denominational Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Thumma, Scott L.

1996 "Megachurches of Atlanta." *Religions of Atlanta*. Gary Laderman, ed. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Thumma, Scott L.

1995 "Rising out of the Ashes: An Exploration of One Congregation's use of Southern Symbolism." *Religion in the Contemporary South: Diversity, Community, and Identity*. O. Kendall White and Daryl White, eds. Athens,GA: University of Georgia Press.

Thumma, Scott L.

1993a "Sketching a Mega-Trend: The Phenomenal Proliferation of Very Large Churches in the United States." Unpublished paper, presented at the annual meetings of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Miami, FL.

Thumma, Scott L.

1993b "List of the Megachurches in the United States." Unpublished list.

Thumma, Scott L.

1993c "Switching In: Mainline Charismatic Converts in One Nondenominational Congregation." Unpublished paper, presented at the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicalism.

Thumma, Scott L.

1991 "A Good Shepherd?: An Analysis of the Appeal of a White Minister for African American Christians." Unpublished paper, presented at the annual meetings of the Southeast regional American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, GA.

Thumma, Scott L.

1987 "Straightening Identities: Evangelical Approaches to Homosexuality." Unpublished Masters Thesis, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Towns, Elmer, John N. Vaughan, and David J. Seifert

1981 *The Complete Book of Church Growth*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale.

Towns, Elmer

1990 *An Inside Look at Ten of Today's Most Innovative Churches.* Ventura, CA: Regal.

Towns, Elmer

1976 "Sunday Schools in the U.S.: The 100 Largest '76." *Christian Life.* (October): 38-45.

Towns, Elmer

1974 *World's Largest Sunday Schools*. Nashville:Thomas Nelson.

Towns, Elmer

1972 *American's Fastest Growing Churches.* Nashville:Impact Books.

Towns, Elmer

1969 *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Trice, H. And John Beyer

1985 "Charisma and Its Routinization in Two Social Movements." in Shaw and Cummings eds. *Research in Organizational Behavior*. Greenwich, CN: JAI Press.

Tornquist, Chris W. And John B. Aker

1990 "The Shadow of a Megachurch." *Leadership*. (Fall Quarter): 94-98.

Turner, Victor

1969 *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

U.S. Bureau of the Census

1990 General Population Characteristics: Georgia. U.S. Printing Office.

1980 General Population Characteristics: Georgia. U.S. Printing Office.

1970 General Population Characteristics: Georgia. U.S. Printing Office.

1960 General Population Characteristics: Georgia. U.S. Printing Office.

Van Maanen, John

1988 *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vaughan, John N.

1993 *Megachurches & America's Cities: How Churches Grow*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Vaughan, John N.

1992 "North America's Fastest Growing Churches in 1990-1991." *Church Growth Today*. 7(6): 1-4.

Vaughan, John N.

1991 "North America's Fastest Growing Churches in 1989-1990." *Church Growth Today*. 6(6): 1-4.

Vaughan, John N.

1990a "North America's Fastest Growing Churches in 1988-1989." *Church Growth Today*. 5(6): 1-4.

Vaughan, John N.

1990b "Megamyths" *Christianity Today*. (March, 5): 24.

Vaughan, John N.

1984 *The World's Twenty Largest Churches*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Voskuil, Dennis N.

1990 "The Power of the Air: Evangelicals and the Rise of Religious Broadcasting." in

American Evangelicals and the Mass Media. Quentin J. Schultze, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Wacker, Grant

1987 "Wimber and Wonders -- What about Miracles Today?" *The Reformed Journal*. (April): 16-19.

Wagner, Melinda Bollar

1990 *God's Schools: Choice and Compromise in American Society*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Wagner, Peter C.

1976 *Your Church Can Grow*. Glendale, CA: Regal Books.

Wagner, Peter C.

1973 *Look Out! The Pentecostals are Coming*. Carol Stream, IL: Creation House.

Wallace, Samuel E., ed

1971 *Total Institutions.* Transaction Books.

Wallis, Roy

1993 "Charisma and Explanation." in *Secularization, Rationalism, and Sectarianism: Essays in Honour of Bryan R. Wilson*. Eileen Barker, James A. Beckford, and Karel Dobbelaere, eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Wallis, Roy

1986 "The Social Construction of Charisma." in Roy Wallis and Steven Bruce, eds. *Sociological Theory, Religion, and Collective Action*. Belfast: Queen's University.

Wallis, Roy

1984 *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Wallis, Roy

1982a "The Social Construction of Charisma." Social Compass 29(1): 25-39.

Wallis, Roy

1982b "Charisma, Commitment, and Control in a New Religious Movement." in Roy Wallis, ed. *Millennialism and Charisma*. Belfast: Queen's University.

Walton, Rus

1975 *One Nation Under God*. Old Tappan, NJ: Revell.

Warner, R. Stephen

1994 "The Place of the Congregation in the Contemporary American Religious Configuration." in James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (eds.) *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations.* (Vol.2) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Warner, R. Stephen

1991a "Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (March): 1044-93.

Warner, R. Stephen

1991b "Oenology: The Making of *New Wine*." in Joe Feagin, Anthony Orum, and Gideon Sjoberg, eds., *A Case for the Case Study*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Warner, R. Stephen

1988 *New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small-Town Church.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Weber, Max

1968 *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weber, Max

1958 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's.

Weber, Max

1949 *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Edward Shils and Henry Finch (trans., eds.) Glencoe,IL: The Free Press.

Weeks, Tricia

1986 *The Provoker: A Biography of Earl Paulk*. Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers.

Weightman, Judith Mary

1983 *Making Sense of the Jonestown Suicides: A Sociological History of the People's Temples*. Lewiston,NY: Mellon.

White, Gayle

1992a "Pastor's Troubles Are Church's Latest." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. (May 8) D1,6.

White, Gayle

1992b "Paulk Church Files Lawsuit Over 'Rumors'." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (November, 13) A1,6.

White, Gayle

1992c "Paulk's Cathedral Accuses Ex-members of 'Rumors'." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (November, 14) A1,15.

White, Gayle

1992d "Woman: Pastor Manipulated Me To Have Sex." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (November, 16) B1,4.

White, Gayle

1992e "An Affair To Fight About." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (November, 17) C1,2.

White, Gayle

1992f "Earl Paulk Admits Sexual Encounter." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (November, 21) B2.

White, Gayle

1992g "Mediation Is Ordered In Cathedral's Libel Suit." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (November, 23) B1.

White, Gayle

1992h "More Sex Charges Leveled Against Church's Pastors." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (December, 17) A1,11.

White, Gayle

1992i "Women Alleging Sex Links To Ministers Push For Law." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (December, 22) C4.

White, Gayle

1993 "Fallout: Some Swayed But Some Stayed." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (February, 6) E6.

White, Gayle and Susan Laccetti

1993 "A Megachurch In Revival Or Denial?" *Atlanta Journal and Constitution.* (February, 6) E6.

Williams, J. Rodman

1975 "Profile of the Charismatic Movement." *Christianity Today.* 19 (February 28): 9-13.

Williams, Melvin D.

1974 *Community in a Black Pentecostal Church: An Anthropological Study*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Willis, Ken

1981 "Latest Child Slaying May Force Police to Unify Probe Efforts." *The Atlanta Constitution*. (March, 9):A1,10.

Wilson, Bryan

1981 "Time, Generations, and Sectarianism." in Bryan Wilson, ed. *The Social Impact of New Religious Movements*. New York: The Rose of Sharon Press.

Wilson, Bryan

1959 "An Analysis of Sect Development." *American Sociological Review*. 24 (February): 3-15.

Wilson, Bryan

1957 "The Pentecostal Minister: Role Conflict and Status Contradictions." *American Journal of Sociology* 64(5): 494-504.

Wilson, Charles Reagan

1990 "Review of Religion in the South Studies" *Religious Studies Review*. 16:3 (July): 205-210.

Wimber, John

1982 "Zip to 3,000 in 5 Years." *Christian Life*. (October): 19-23.

Wimberly, Edward

1987 "The Dynamics of Black Worship: A Psychosocial Exploration of the Impulses that Lie at the Roots of Black Worship." *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*. 14:195-207.

Wind, James P. and James W. Lewis, eds.

1994a *American Congregations: Portraits of Twelve Religious Communities*. (Vol.1) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wind, James P. and James W. Lewis, eds.

1994b "Introduction“ in *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Studyof Congregations.* (Vol.2) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Winston, Kimberly

1996 "That Old-time Religion No Longer." *Tri-Valley Herald*. (April, 7): A1,A10.

Wood, James R.

1981 *Leadership in Voluntary Organizations: The Controversy of Social Action in Protestant Churches*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Wooding, Dan

1993 "Memories of the Jesus Movement." *Charisma*. (September): 16-25.

Wolfe, James

1976 "Three Congregations." in *The New Religious Consciousness*. Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wright, Stewart A.

1987 Leaving Cults: The Dynamics of Defection. Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Monograph Series, Number 4.

Wright, Stewart A.

1984 "Post-Involvement Attitudes of Voluntary Defectors from New Religious Movements." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.* 23(2): 172-82.

Wuthnow, Robert

1994a *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and American's New Quest for Community*. New York: Free Press.

Wuthnow, Robert, ed.

1994b *I Come Away Stronger: How Small Groups are Shaping American Religion*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

Wuthnow, Robert

1991 *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Wuthnow, Robert

1989 *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans

Wuthnow, Robert

1988 *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zaleznick, A.

1977 "Managers and Leaders: Are They Different." *Harvard Business Review*. (May-June): 67-78.

Zook, Thomas

1993 "An Examination of Leadership Practices in Large, Protestant Congregations." (PhD dissertation) Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

The focus of this congregational study was to explore the life and culture of one very large church. With that intent the study was designed as an ethnographic investigation. Due to the size of the congregation, the study was intentionally planned to extend over a three year period, which eventually stretched to nearly five years. From the outset the plan of the study was to use as many sources of information and methods of data collection as possible given the size and complexity of the organization. These methods included participant observation, interviewing, a questionnaire survey, content analysis, examination of historical archival data, analysis of video tapes, and reflection on my own experiences. By using these multiple methods I hoped to compensate for the weaknesses of each approach and gain a fuller picture of the congregation. In an effort to compensate for the particularity of a single case, I have also conducted exploratory and comparative research in many of the megachurches located in the Atlanta area. In addition I attended several megachurches in other parts of the United States and examined church materials sent to me from 25 other megachurches.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Chapel Hill Harvester Church became my second home for several years, so my wife thought. I spent much of my spare time there from 1988 until 1993. Prior to this sojourn in the field, I had also attended one of the church's ministries for over a year. In all this time I came to know, respect, and enjoy my relationships with many of the church's members. I have observed and participated in at least 145 worship services at the church. In addition I attended new members classes twice, pre-marriage classes, Sunday school classes, "Life and Growth in the Spirit" services, Overcomers meetings, covenant community meetings, various social ministries, academy and Institute classes, and many weekly staff and administrative meetings. I volunteered in several ministries, performed mundane administrative tasks, participated in cathedral cleanup days, and became a permanent fixture in the church's bookstore and tape libraries. In all these activities and events I recorded what I saw, heard, and felt.

As stated before, I became a member both in my commitment to worship there for several years and also in my willingness to be vulnerable to the world view and social forces of the congregation. As a

result I experienced the church and its dynamics in a way that profoundly affected me. I thought I had begun to understand what it meant to be a member of the church after having been there several years. Once I was forced out of my commitment with the church, I became certain I knew what it meant to be a former member. Chapter one provided a description of my entrance, experiences and roles while at the church.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Formal individual interviews were conducted with a total of 42 persons (35%). The total number of persons from which interviews were requested was 120. These names were drawn randomly from a randomized list of 521 names generated by the church's computer of ten percent of its member household data base. The total data base is 5288 households, and includes incomplete, out of state, and out of date addresses. Interviews were conducted primarily in members' homes, although a number took place in the church mall. These interviews took place during 1990 and 1991. The interviews generally followed the interview schedule below. In addition, I formally interviewed Earl Paulk on numerous occasions, 11 of the church's associate ministers (several more than once), and 37 paid staff and volunteers in charge of various church ministries. These interviews followed the same schedule with the addition of relevant leadership questions. The majority of these interviews took place at members' offices in the church. I also sought out persons who had left the church, for a variety of reasons, prior to 1991. I found and interviewed 12 former members. Of these, their disaffiliation from the church spanned the years 1974 to 1990.

SCHEDULE:

Introduce research, discuss preliminaries, and hand out demographic information sheet.

Relationship to the church:

How did you hear about CHHC?

Did you move here for the church?

What about it attracted you?

Are you a member? How long did you attend prior to joining, how long after?

Who (or what) was most instrumental to your joining, how and why?

What were your first impressions of the church? Have they changed? How?

Church involvement:

1. What is you favorite thing about the church?
2. Are you involved in church groups, ministries, activities? Which ones? How often?
3. Are you involved in a covenant community? How long? Leadership role? If no, were you involved? What caused you to drop out? Did the church attempt to get you involved or re-involved?
4. What led you to join a covenant community?
5. How many of your really close friends go to CHHC?
6. How often to you see these or other persons from the church during the week?
7. How did you meet these persons?
8. Do you feel an integral part of the church?
9. How does the size of the church affect your relationships? Your worship?
10. Do you ever feel lost or insignificant, disconnected at church?
11. Have you ever gone to your deacon or pastor with a problem?
12. Have you used any of the social services at the church?
13. Are you involved in community work? What kinds?

Spiritual Life:

1. When were you saved? Are you spirit-filled? When did you receive the baptism?

2. How did your family and friends react?
3. How has your life changed since salvation, since the baptism?
4. What gifts of the spirit to you see yourself having?
5. Do you engage in "spiritual warfare"? Under what circumstances?
6. Do you wish the bishop would give more or less answers and guidance on spiritual questions?
7. Do you attend "life and growth in the spirit"?
8. Are the gifts evident enough in the worship services? More or less? Before or now?
9. What does it mean that Earl Paulk is a Bishop? A prophet?
10. Is it proper to question what the Bishop says? Do you ever disagree with him?
11. Do you have any leadership roles in the church? What?

Worship:

1. How do you feel about all the different kinds of people in a service?
   a. Were you here when African Americans first started moving into the area? Into the church?
   b. What was it like? Did some people leave? Why did you stay?
   c. If already integrated, what was it like to come to an integrated church?
2. Is the racial mix of ministers ok?
3. How do you feel about women as ministers?
4. Did you ever have a difference of opinion with someone at church? About what? How did it get resolved?
5. What do you think of the pastors wearing collars?
6. What are your feelings about the worship styles? Variety? No hymnals?

The Kingdom

1. What does the "kingdom of God" mean to you?
2. How is it a reality in your life?
3. How does this message confront the problems and issues of your daily life?
4. Is CHHC unique? In what ways? How would you describe what happens here?
5. How do you see CHHC fitting in with the larger Christian church?
6. What does building the cathedral mean to you?

Authority:

1. Who is your "spiritual head"? (and your husband's?)
2. Have you ever been corrected by him/her?
3. Do you think the Bishop talks too much about authority and covering?
4. What do you think the Bishop means when he says he has heard from God?
5. What is the five-fold ministry, its affect on your daily life?

Covenant:

1. What does "covenant" mean? What is "living in covenant"?
2. Would you describe yourself as "being in covenant"? What does that mean? Why or why not?
3. How is this idea a part of your everyday life?
4. Do Bishop Paulk's sermons relate to your everyday life? How?
5. Do you think about what he has said during the week?

Family:

1. If married, Are you willing to talk about your relationship with your spouse?
2. How would you describe your relationship prior to CHHC?
3. Have things changed between you two since coming? Because of the church?
4. Your children? Describe your relationship with them before and since CHHC?
5. Do both you and your spouse work? If it wasn't necessary, would both of you work?
6. How are important decisions made in the family?
7. What does it mean to you when you hear the Bishop talk about the "spiritual headship of the husband"?
8. Does that effect the way things are done around your house?
9. Are your children in the Academy, public, other private schools?
10. Is the whole family involved in CHHC? If so how? If not why?

Identity:

1. What do you think of the Bishop's emphasis on everyone needing a sense of purpose?
2. Do you have a sense of purpose in your life?
3. What is it? Describe?
4. What role does the church play in this identity?
5. Are you more conscious of your health since coming to CHHC?
6. Have you gone to school or night classes since coming to CHHC? Did you many this decision based on what you heard here?
7. Did you like diverse music styles, drama, arts, ballet prior to coming to CHHC?
8. Since being here what do you think about these arts now?

The World:

1. How do you see the world we live in?
2. What are the main problems of our modern society?
3. What must be done to and for the world?
4. What is the task of Christians in the world?
5. What is the role of Satan in this reality?
6. What is it like for you as a Christian in this setting?
7. In the world, are things better or worse than they used to be, particulars?

Economy:

1. Are you satisfied with your present job?
2. Have you changed jobs since being at CHHC? To a better job? Was it due to something you heard at CHHC?
3. Did you get help or direction from the church business leaders? Form the referral services?
4. Do you work with other CHHC members?
5. Do you talk about the church (your faith) at work?
6. Do you see your job as your vocation, part of God's plan for you? If not What?
7. Did you grow up "with money"? Is money tight now?

8. Would you tell me approximately what percent of your income you give to the church?

9. How did you decide what to give?

10. Does the Bishop over-emphasize giving? Do you get tired of hearing about it?

11. Is tithing necessary to be a "good Christian"? Offerings?

Politics:

1. Did you vote in the last election, presidential, local? Do you always vote?

2. Did anything the Bishop said help you make up your mind about who to vote for?

3. Does the Bishop talk enough about politics?

4. Does it change your opinion of them to see politicians in church? Why are they there?

5. Would you vote for someone if all you knew about them was that they came to CHHC, or were a Christian?

6. What role should the church have in politics?

7. Are you involved in politics in any way? Specifics, increased due to CHHC?

8. What is the government's role in the church, family, education?

9. Do you think our government is doing a good job? How would you want to correct it?

10. What would you do if one of your elected officials voted in a way you thought was very wrong?

Church:

1. What are the main strengths of CHHC?

2. What are the areas in most need of improvement?

3. Do you think the church will grow bigger? Is that a good or bad thing?

4. How do others outside of the church see/ think about it?

5. Do you know about the networking churches? What do you think their relationship is to the church?

6. What do you think of the television kingdom partners? The television ministry in general?

7. What does it mean to you to belong to a church that televises around the country and world?

8. What role do you see the Bishop playing in the larger Christian church?

9. What do you think the future holds for CHHC?

10. Would you like to live in one of the church's planned communities? Why?

AUDIO TAPE CONTENT ANALYSIS

During 1991, I conducted extensive content analysis on audio tapes of the church's Sunday morning worship services. From the tape archives, I selected five services to listen to, four randomly making sure to include one from each quarter of the year and the "Harvest Sunday" service. At my request eight members of the clergy provided me with a list of what they judged to be the ten most significant sermons they had heard at CHHC. From these lists I selected the 24 sermons which appeared on the lists at least twice (several others had already been chosen randomly). In total I analyzed 114 sermons. This analysis included word counts on terms or ideas in Earl Paulk's sermons judged by me to be significant to the congregational culture after several years of observation at the church. See the content analysis form included below for these terms and categories. In addition, I listened to the rest of the service as a historical record of the character of the worship, type of music, and responsiveness of the congregation. I also observed 31 video tapes of historically important services.

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY OF THE CONGREGATION

In the fall of 1991 I designed a questionnaire to be distributed to the congregation during Sunday services. A draft of this survey form was examined by the clergy and staff during a Wednesday staff lunch meeting. In addition the group also acted as a pre-test for the questionnaire. After refinement and final approval, the questionnaire was printed by the church's publishing staff. Approximately 2000 were distributed over a period of three services. Instructions and reminders were given from the pulpit by myself and several pastors. Boxes were placed at the doors of the cathedral for members to return the completed forms. Of the 2000 or so distributed, 694 usable questionnaires were received (34.7%). This approach certainly did not obtain a representative random sampling of the membership, or perhaps even those in attendance during the three weeks they were distributed. The survey was done in this manner due to a limited budget. Nevertheless, the information obtained from the questionnaire was helpful in correcting or augmenting the data collected by other methods.

See the questionnaire form below.

GROUP INTERVIEWS

In an effort to talk formally with as many persons as possible from Chapel Hill Harvester Church, I invited groups of fifteen to twenty persons to participate in a series of twelve, one to two hour group interviews. The persons chosen for seven of these interviews were randomly selected from the computer generated list given to me by the church. The total number of persons interviewed in this manner was 47 out of 125 asked (37%). These interviews were conducted in a classroom at the church's academy. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. This setting was somewhat artificial, much like a market research focus group. Thus, when the interviews began there was a forced, stiff quality to the discussions; however, by 20 minutes into each of the interviews they began to resemble prayer meetings or informal class discussions. Two of these groups developed into praise sessions with considerable sharing, testimonies and prayer. The other five all ended with a group member asking to "close in prayer." The dynamics resembled a conversation between participants rather than a question and answer interview session. Much of the spontaneous discussion took place between the interviewees, with myself as a moderator. As a result I was not only able to get a different type of information to my questions as they responded to each others answers, but I was also able to observe the social interactions which took place between the participants.

I also received permission from five existing groups within the church structure to conduct formal interviews during one of their meetings. The numbers in these clusters of persons ranged from five to 45. These interview groups included an Alcoholics Recovery meeting, an eleventh grade biology class, a group home, a covenant community fellowship, and a Sunday school class. These interviews were more structured and of a question and answer format.

SCHEDULE:

Introduce research, discuss preliminaries, and hand out demographic information sheet.

1. What does "demonstrating the Kingdom of God" mean to you?

A. How is this a reality in your daily life?

B. How does the kingdom message alter the problems you encounter?

C. How does this idea fit with your previous thoughts about the church, the end times, your involvement i

2. How would you describe the state of the world, country, or the local area?

A. What are the crucial problems in society for the church?

B. What needs to be done?

C. How can these things get done? What is our role as Christians? As a church?

3. What does the Cathedral mean to you?

4. What does living in covenant mean to your daily life? Examples.

5. What are some of the strengths of the church?

6. What are some of the aspects of the church, if any, that need to be improved?

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF AUDIO TAPES (1974-1991)

Date ____________ Preacher ________ Tape Number __________

Regular service_____ or Special Event_____

Title of the sermon: ________________________________

Mood of the service (observations):

General context for the sermon (what was happening in the church?):

Theological Issues covered:

Quotes and notes:

Content Analysis (word counts)

1. God 19. Drugs, alcohol (overcome)

2. Jesus 20. Acceptance

3. Holy Spirit 21. Love

4. Lord 22. Higher dimension

5. Satan 23. Indiv. Vocation

6. Kingdom 24. Miracles

7. Rapture 25. Discernment

8. Prosperity (success, victory) 26. Family

9. Spiritual authority, power 27. Baptism of H.S.

10. Submission 28. Spirituality

11. Divine healing 29. Discipline (discipleship)

12. Church story 30. Obedience

13. Founders 31. Unity

14. Dualism	32. Anointed ministry
15. Last days	33. vs.. Other rel. Groups
16. Vision	34. Political
17. Faith	35. "World"
18. Uniqueness	36. Relationships

How Paulk is addressed:

Legitimation claims:

Paulk's praise exclamations --

Overt praise times --

ISSUES of Race ____________________ Social Ministry _________________________

Diversity_____________________ Size _________________________________

Tithe (money)_________________ Patriarchal comments___________________

Internal conflict, strife ___________ _____________________________________