CHAOS THEORY AND PAUL'S ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE

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In the last few decades biblical scholarship has seen a shift in Pauline studies away from a primarily doctrinal investigation of Paul's letters towards an attempt to understand Paul's letters in their social contexts.[1] Scholars have undertaken investigations of the conditions under which Paul would have worked, the types of people he would have encountered, and the types of groups with which he would have been familiar. Greater attention has been paid to the epistolographic and rhetorical strategies of his letters, comparing them to both philosophical tractates and everyday correspondences.[2] Other investigations have looked at how social conventions such as honor and shame or the ancients' view of human sexuality impacted Paul's words.[3] All such studies have opened up the world within which Paul lived and worked. They have led to a better understanding of the communities that Paul founded and their relationship to their surrounding cultures.[4] Yet despite this positive trend in Pauline scholarship, there has been very little interest expressed in understanding Paul's leadership within this wider context.[5]

Using a cross-disciplinary approach that integrates current studies and models of leadership and organizational

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[1]   I am also attempting to raise the consciousness for biblical studies of what others are noting in other disciplines.

[2]   For example, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

[3]   See Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

[4]   Richard S. Ascough, *What Are They Saying About the Formation of Pauline Churches?* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist, 1998).

[5]   Notable exceptions include Andrew D. Clark, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians and Leaders and Ministers* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), *idem, Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden, New York, and Köln: Brill, 1993), and Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *Paul's Style of Church Leadership Illustrated by his Instructions to the Corinthians on the Collection* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992).

behavior with studies of the undisputed letters of Paul, this paper investigates Paul's leadership style. It briefly describes recent studies in organizational behavior that apply "chaos theory" to leadership and then outlines how Paul reflects this style in his letters. It also touches on how (and why) this was co-opted by the early interpreters of Paul. Rather than offering a tightly-woven exegetical argument, this paper is an attempt to open conversations about where studies of Paul's leadership might go in the future in the light of research in the natural sciences and in organizational behavior.

Choas Theory

Chaos theory, and the related theory of complexity, arises out of the "new" science, from discoveries in biology, chemistry, and physics. "Chaos theory tells us that simple systems can exhibit complex behavior; complexity theory tells us that complex systems can exhibit simple 'emergent' behavior."[6] These theories have changed, or more correctly are changing, our world-view. They represent a paradigm shift in our fundamental notions of the universe, and of life itself. However, like any paradigm shift, it is taking time to filter into our collective consciousness.

The dominant scientific paradigm from the 1700s to the twentieth century was that of a Newtonian world-view. At its core, this paradigm suggests that the world is a well-behaved machine and that the universe predictably obeys certain laws. Cause and effect are simple, clear, and linear. Thus, if I do X then Y will follow – that is, if you kick a ball it will roll away from you. There are certain ways of doing things and, done that way, *predictable* results will occur. In the Newtonian view the world is separated into parts – if one manages all the parts, and their interaction, then the whole thing will run smoothly and predictably. The world is understood as a machine (set in motion by God). Not unlike a watch, it ticks away at an almost consistent rate, although slowly it is wearing down (entropy) and will eventually stop running. This is the old paradigm. Chaos Theory arises out of recent investigations of quantum physics. The science of quantum physics focuses not on "things" as did the Newtonian science but on relationships.

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6   Ian Stewart, *Does God Play Dice? The New Mathematics of Chaos* 2nd edition, (London and New York: Penguin, 1997), x.

Relationships are seen as the key to understanding the world that we inhabit. In quantum physics the world is seen as a living organism, a living system, one which continuously renews itself and provides checks and balances to maintain its own well-being. If it falls apart on one level, it reconfigures itself at a different level.[7]

The "chaos" aspect of chaos theory is not understood as synonymous with confusion, disarray, and pandemonium. That is, we should not picture a four-year-old's birthday party.[8] Rather "chaos describes a complex, unpredictable, and orderly disorder in which patterns of behavior unfold in *irregular but similar* forms."[9]   For example, think of snowflakes, which are regularly irregular – always having six sides but each one unique.[10] Within the disorder in the system order and structure emerge with some regularity.

In a now well-known experiment conducted in 1987 by Craig Reynolds, bird like objects called "boids" were created to simulate bird flight. They were given three simple rules: (1) fly in the direction of other objects, (2) try to match velocity with neighboring boids, and (3) avoid bumping into things. The boids flew in formation and when they broke apart to avoid bumping into objects they soon regrouped into a new formation even though they were not programmed to display collective behavior. In this we find the essence of chaos theory that "simple agents obeying simple rules can interact to create elaborate and unexpected behaviors."[11] What remains central to their being chaotic is spontaneity and self-organization. Disorder becomes a source of order. It is only through disequilibrium that change or growth occurs – order arises out of chaos.[12]

The non-linear character of our world is now perceived as a conglomeration of systems, systems that evolve in ways that prevent predictions. This is where the "butterfly effect" comes into play. The web of physical relationships that make up our world make it possible for the flap of a butterfly in

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[7] Wheatley, *Leadership*, 18-19.
[8] Toby J. Tetenbaum, "Shifting Paradigms: From Newton to Chaos," *Organizational Dynamics* (Spring 1998), 24.
[9] Tetenbaum, "Shifting Paradigms," 24, her emphasis.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 25; cf. Wheatley, *Leadership*, 133.
[12] See Wheatley, *Leadership*, 20.

Tokyo to affect a tornado in Texas. However, the effect is not always predictable. And this is what makes the weather system quite unpredictable. It is such relationships, such unpredictability, such chaos, which undermines the Newtonian view of the universe. In the quantum world we are more cognizant now of "the webs of an interrelated universe."[13]

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

In organizational behavior the old Newtonian model is applied in "top-down" management theories. Smooth operation of any organization is contingent upon control from those in positions of power. Managers are employed to keep underlings working smoothly and predictably. If rules are applied and obeyed, the whole operation will thrive. Using the paradigm of Newtonian science, organizational leadership models tended to stress the maintenance of a stable system. Leaders controlled everything and everyone under their authority in order to maintain a state of equilibrium. Given this control, certain actions would then produce predictable results. Long-range plans were produced and steps outlined by which the goals would be achieved. Most organizations operated, explicitly or implicitly, with such a model. This model operated with limited results, particularly in the industrial age, when most work was done in factories under close supervision. Even churches saw in careful human planning a way to guide the Holy Spirit's involvement to produce assured results (for example, church growth movements such as "evangelism explosion"). Alas, the world does not always work this way with human beings, as noted long ago by the writer of Ecclesiastes! But neither does the world work this way according to more recent scientific models.

The industrial world is clearly changing. We are now in the information age, with technology opening up a great diversity within the workforce. The Newtonian approach to organizational leadership no longer seems applicable to workers on the move and in various locations around the city,

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[13] Wheatley, *Leadership*, 141; Russ Marion, *The Edge of Organization: Chaos and Complexity Theories of Formal Social System* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1999), 314-15.

country, and globe. In many ways, the working world has become more complex, more chaotic. Paradoxes abound and change is all around us. When we think we have finally defined a moment in our cultural existence, the culture has moved on. We are living in an "accelerated culture."[14] Out of this has arisen the need for a new organizational paradigm – the Newtonian paradigm no longer works. It is within this environment that chaos and complexity theories are being variously discussed and applied in current organizational leadership literature as a new paradigm or "lens" for dealing with current and future change in organizations.

In *Birth of the Chaordic Age*, Dee Hock, the founder of the VISA credit card company, writes "The organization of the future will be the embodiment of community based on *shared purpose* calling to the *higher aspirations of people*."[15] He goes on to illustrate how hierarchical command-and-control institutions alienate and dishearten people within them. They are unable to manage their own affairs and are constantly failing.[16] In contrast, he defines a chaordic organization as "any self-organizing, self-governing, adaptive, non-linear, complex organism, organization, community or system, whether physical, biological or social, the behavior of which harmoniously combines characteristics of both chaos and order."[17] Hence, Hock's coining of the term "chaordic" – encompassing both chaos and order.[18] The Chaordic Alliance, created to bring to life Hock's vision and principles, defines "chaordic" as "1: anything simultaneously orderly and chaotic.

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[14] Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

[15] Dee Hock, *Birth of the Chaordic Age* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 6, emphasis his.

[16] Cf. Margaret J. Wheatley, "Good-bye, Command and Control," in *Leader to Leader: Enduring Insights on Leadership from the Drucker Foundation's Award-Winning Journal*, eds. Frances Hesselbein and Paul M. Cohen (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 151-62.

[17] Hock, *Birth*, 30; also Dee Hock, "The Art of Chaordic Leadership," *Leader to Leader 15* (Winter 2000), http://www.pfdf.org/leaderbooks/L2L/winter2000/hock.html, accessed September 8, 2000.

[18] Hock, *Birth*, 29; cf. Mitchell Waldrop, "The Trillion-Dollar Vision of Dee Hock: The corporate radical who organized Visa wants to dis-organize your company," *Fast Company* 5 (October 1996), http://www.fastcompany.com/online/05/dee-hock.html, accessed October 16, 2000).

2: patterned in a way dominated neither by order nor chaos.
3: existing in the phase between order and chaos."[19]

This new vision of organizational leadership is emerging from lessons learned through the study of physics and biology, lessons embedded in the universe itself about how systems self-organize. In such systems we find a natural balance between chaos and order. Hock states that he calls the new age "chaordic"

> because it will be immensely complex and chaotic, but also requires cohesion and coherence, or order. What we have always thought of as opposites, such as competition and cooperation, will now have to be seamlessly blended.[20]

Building on similar scientific paradigms, Margaret Wheatley speaks of "informal leadership... the capacity for an organization to create the leadership that best suits its needs at the time."[21] Such leadership arises from within the group, not by self-assertion but because such a leader is what is needed for the group to thrive at that particular time and place. Since organizations are living systems (webs of relationships) and not machines, they cannot be controlled in a linear fashion. The true leadership in an organization will create a climate in which other leaders can rise and step back as needs dictate. Persons are no longer defined in terms of an authority relationship to the individual (for example, "she's my boss"; or "he works for me"). Rather, the person needs to be seen as part of the pattern of energy flows that are required for that person to do the job...a conduit for organizational energy.[22]

That is, the relationship is not hierarchical but vertical – individuals asking how they can support one another. According to Hock,

> In the chaordic age, leadership will be enormously distributive. The old idea of thinking

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[19] Chaordic Alliance web site, "Definitions," http://www.chaordic.org/chaordic/res_def.html, accessed Sept. 14, 2000. Also printed on the front inside cover of the hardback edition of Hock, *Birth.*

[20] Nelson Searcy and Chad Hall, "An Interview with Dee Hock," *SmartLeadership Mag-ezine* (April 2000), http://www.smartleadership.com/articles/hock.html, accessed September 8, 2000.

[21] Wheatley, *Leadership,* 22.

[22] Ibid., 71.

of leaders as superior people at the top dominating inferior people at the bottom will change. Everyone will have to simultaneously lead and follow.[23]

Chaos theory suggests that "if you set a group of people in motion, each one following the right set of three or four simple rules . . . they will spontaneously self-organize into something complex and unexpected."[24] At the same time, it is realistic. It is not advocating the loss of "command-and-control" within an organization. It is a necessary part of many institutional functions (Hock points out that he would not want to be the patient in a "chaordic" operating room – some command-and-control is necessary). It does, however, suggest that command-and-control, is "an increasingly irrelevant and destructive way to run any complex, adaptive organization, institution or society."[25]

The chaordic leader understands the necessity of both chaos and order and is able to create conditions in which each person's "talent, drive, values, and passion," will be released. Conditions must be created "by which they can self-organize in an orderly way so that both individual and organization can evolve and succeed at a very deep level."[26] Hock goes on to suggest that "any leader worthy of the name must develop the wisdom and capacity to create the conditions by which organizations can come into harmony with the human spirit and biosphere."[27]

Examples of chaordic organization can be seen in the growth of Silicon Valley and other high-tech economic areas, the global marketplace, and, of course, the Internet. In such organizations authority is decentralized or non-existent – there is no single person in charge of its development. Nevertheless, these areas have become highly complex, organized, growing webs of relationships. Hock points to these as evidence of a new paradigm of organizational behavior. While I agree that these are new *expressions* of the paradigm, I believe that in the writings of Paul we find evidence that such a paradigm was

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[23] Searcy and Hall, "Interview with Hock."
[24] Tetenbaum, "Shifting Paradigms," 25.
[25] Searcy and Hall, "Interview with Hock."
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

operative in his own approach to local organizational leadership.

PAUL'S APPROACH TO LOCAL LEADERSHIP

The Christian canon contains thirteen letters that claim to be from Paul. Scholars are in general agreement that Paul's authorship can be established for at least seven of the letters (given here in chronological order): 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, and Philemon.[28] Scholars are less sure about the other six (2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), and I find myself in agreement with those who argue that these letters were written later by followers of Paul, some time after Paul's death.[29] When we look at the "authentic" letters of Paul through the lens of organizational leadership's appropriation of chaos theory, we see that elements of this "new" paradigm were being applied by Paul almost two thousand years ago. Clearly Paul himself did not knowingly apply the principles of chaos theory. However, chaos theory provides a lens for understanding Paul's leadership style.

We begin with 1 Thessalonians. In order to explain Paul's leadership in 1 Thessalonians we must first describe briefly our understanding of the composition of the Thessalonian community.[30] When Paul arrived at Thessalonica he found temporary work, and probably lodging, among those who shared his trade (according to Acts 18:3, tent-making or leather-working). Paul himself worked with his hands "night and day" so that they would not need to support him (1 Thess 2:9, cf. 4:11). In doing so, he would have been in constant contact with workers on the shop floor. Such workers typically formed themselves into "guilds" or "voluntary associations." They had no economic power, but they did find in their respective groups an outlet for social interaction along with some helpful practices such as a

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[28] See Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (4th edition, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 79-118.

[29] Roetzel, *Letters of Paul*, 133-60; Marion L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul: An Introduction to his Writings and Teaching* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist, 1987), 131-62.

[30] For details see Richard S. Ascough, "The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119/2 (2000), 311-28.

guarantee of burial and occasional help when falling on hard times. In my view, Paul joined with such a group of leather-workers at Thessalonica and persuaded them to replace their patron deity (for example, Zeus, Isis, etc.) with the one true God as worshipped through Jesus. Thus, I read the second person plural pronoun "you" as collective in 1 Thess 1:9: "[all of] you turned [together] to God from idols, to serve a living and true God."[31]

It is towards the end of 1 Thessalonians that Paul turns his attention to community leadership. Paul makes reference to unnamed leaders by encouraging the Thessalonians "to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (5:12-13). Paul describes their work using three participles, suggesting that he is not writing about offices in the community but activities. The activities of "laboring," "being in charge," and "admonishing" are governed by a single article, suggesting that there is only one group of leaders who engage in all three types of activities, rather than three separate groups of leaders. Paul uses a general designation for such leaders as one who is "over" someone else (*prohist_mi*, "to have charge"). The word here is not used as a technical term of office, even if the persons referred to are leaders in the community. However, it does seem to indicate a group of persons who have a special function within the community. At the same time, it is unlikely that they are patrons of the group and exercise authority by virtue of their wealth since they are not named and thus honored. Besides, such patronage is discouraged in 1 Thess 4:9-12.

Paul refers to one of the responsibilities of these leaders by using the verb "work". The cognate noun occurs twice elsewhere in the letter, once for Paul's manual labor among the Thessalonians (2:9) and once for his work at the formative stages of the community (3:5). It is likely that the leaders at Thessalonica continued with both kinds of activity, the manual labor alongside community members and the labor of community formation. If so, the leaders of the Thessalonians are like the leaders of many voluntary associations. They are chosen from within the association itself and carry on with

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[31]   Ascough, "Thessalonian Christian Community," 322-23.

their everyday tasks as workers while having some authority in official meetings of the association.

That the leaders in the community are unnamed does not indicate that Paul does not know them so much as that the leadership positions may have rotated on a monthly or yearly basis, as was common in the voluntary associations. Paul leaves them unnamed so that the general exhortation will be applicable to any who are in a position of leadership (note the fact that Paul does not address the leaders directly but addresses the entire community). That is, Paul does not attempt to either apply a label to them or give requirements that must be met if a person aspires to leadership. It reflects Paul's willingness to allow this Christian community to develop locally and without a preconceived notion of "church leadership" imposed upon them. Although it is clear that leadership arises within the community, his primary concern is that the leaders, whomever they might be, be given the proper respect within that community. This minimalist approach to overseeing the leadership of a group is a true mark of a chaordic leader.

When Paul writes the first letter to the Corinthians he takes up a number of issues that have arisen in the community, issues such as sexual ethics, marriage, food sacrificed to idols, proper hairstyles in liturgical assemblies, and the manifestation of spiritual gifts. However, many of these issues arise out of the central issue of the letter, that of divisions within the Corinthian community. The Corinthian Christian community was comprised of a number of house-groups that met regularly throughout the city. Each group had their own leader, female or male (for example, Chloe, Silvanus), who acted as patron to the group (1 Cor 1:11, 16; 16:15-17). On some occasions these groups would all come together for a large gathering, likely in the house of Gaius (Rom 16:23). The factionalism manifests itself with groups claiming allegiance to one or another important leader: "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ" (1 Cor 1:10).

In response to such divisions Paul argues for unity in the body of Christ. Thus, in response to divisions over spiritual gifts Paul writes

> For just as the body is one and has many
> members, and all the members of the body,
> though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.
> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into
> one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and
> we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed,
> the body does not consist of one member but of
> many. (1 Cor 12:12-14)

Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul advocates that the Corinthian Christians recognize the rights of one another and that they be sensitive to one another. He stresses mutual up-building of one another in love (for example, 13:1-14:1; 16:14), with an emphasis on choosing to serve others as a slave (9:15, 19; cf. 7:22).[32]

In terms of ethical behavior, Paul emphasizes that the corporate body takes precedence over the individual and the rights of the individual are embodied in the group. It is not the intellect (what you know) but the community good (what is best for others) that should govern action. Thus, concerning the issue of whether it is right to eat meat sacrificed to idols, Paul recognizes that meat sacrificed in a pagan temple is not impure (because other gods do not exist). He argues, however, that some persons in the community still struggle with their own conscience as to whether they can eat such meat. If one does not have this struggle, such a one can go ahead and eat, unless someone who does have this struggle is around, in which case, do not exercise the right to eat. The argument is complex, taking up three chapters of the letter on this single issue (chapters 8-10).

What is significant for our investigation is Paul's approach to the issues in Corinth. Paul does not lay down a single, simple rule to govern all situations. Instead, he offers a principal – "put others first" – which he hopes the Corinthians will apply in every situation:

> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you
> do, do it all to the glory of God. Give no offense
> to Jews or to Greeks or to the church (*ekkl_sia*)
> of God, just as I try to please everyone in
> everything I do, not seeking my own advantage,

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[32] Cf. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership*, 124-26, 131.

but that of many, that they may be saved.   Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (10:31 - 11:1)

For Paul, community involves mutual slavery and mutual up-building in love, the only two things necessary for the Christian community to flourish. No external rules are needed, since Christians have the Spirit dwelling in them to provide guidance in how to live.

Although already present in the Corinthian correspondence, this aspect of the Spirit comes to the fore in Paul's dealings with the communities of Galatia. When Paul writes his letter to the Galatians, the situation is much more critical than at Corinth. According to Paul the Galatians are being persuaded to follow what he terms a "different gospel" (Gal 1:6), one that he sees having dangerous consequences. In his response Paul outlines how he understands the Spirit to function in the life of the believer.

Outsiders have apparently come to the Galatian province after Paul's departure and are teaching the Galatians that Paul's gospel is incomplete because it did not include the necessity for males to become circumcised. Having been shown by these so-called "interlopers" that the scriptures teach that the promises of God belong to the children of Abraham and that the mark of belonging to the children of Abraham is circumcision, it seems that some males in the community reasoned that they too needed to be circumcised. However, Paul reasons that when one compares Christ and the Torah, or law, Christ has chronological priority and theological superiority over the Law, because the promise to Abraham (fulfilled in Christ, according to Paul) preceded the Torah (that is, it was made before the Law). For Paul, the Galatians' use of the Law is amateurish (they only keep part of it) and calls into question the adequacy of the true gospel (they no longer follow Paul). For Paul, Christ has brought the end of the Law; as a believer in Christ one lives by following the guidance of the Spirit. There is no need for any laws, old or new.

We see in both the Corinthian and Galatian correspondence that Paul was a minimalist in giving directions to the communities that he founded. Rather than lay down a set of rules he advocated a few simple concepts (mutual love, mutual slavery, Spirit guidance) and expected that from these the communities would grow and flourish. Like the boids of

Reynold's experiment, Paul was content, even in the face of adversaries and rejection, to allow chaos in community, so that indigenous order might arise. That is, rather than set out parameters of behavior, Paul insisted that by following the Spirit, and loving and serving one another, the community would flourish. In doing so he manifests the traits of what modern organizational behavior theorists term chaordic leadership.

More could be said about these and other of Paul's letters, but I want to draw one last example from Paul's letter to Philemon. The short letter of Paul to Philemon stands out among his seven "authentic" letters as being the only one primarily addressed to an individual rather than a community, although even here Paul greets others, including Philemon's wife and son and the church *(ekkl_sia)* that meets in his house, indicating that Paul assumes a communal reading of the letter.

Paul writes to Philemon in order to appeal on behalf of Onesimus, a slave who has left Philemon's household in order to seek out a "friend of the master" to intercede on his behalf (precisely what Paul is doing in the letter).[33] However, rather than simply command Philemon to do what Paul wants (namely, to release Onesimus from slavery and return him to Paul) Paul uses not-so-subtle pressure tactics. He states, "though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love" (vv. 8-9). Paul refuses to play a possible trump card, that of his authority within the community that he founded.

Nevertheless, Paul does apply some strong hints about the direction he feels the situation should go. To paraphrase: "I am Onesimus' daddy" (v. 10); "he is useful to me" (v. 11); "in sending him back I am sending my very heart back" (v. 12); "I want to keep him with me, but need your consent" (vv. 13-14); "treat him like you would treat me" (v. 17); "I'll pay for any damage he has caused (and I won't even mention that you owe the salvation of your soul to me)" (vv. 18-19). Although Paul wants Philemon to act voluntarily (v. 14) he also adds the note that he is coming to town soon and will be staying with Philemon (v. 22), a strong indication that he is going check up on him.

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[33] Cf. Robert Jewett, *Paul the Apostle to America: Cultural Trends and Pauline Scholarship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 62.

We see here that Paul does not apply the model of hierarchical, command and control, top-down leadership. At the same time, Paul does not take an attitude of "anything goes" nor leave Philemon's decision to chance. With such a critical issue at hand, perhaps even a man's life at stake, Paul gives strong direction to the one clearly under his authority without demanding obedience. The decision taken by Philemon will be "owned" by Philemon as having been made independently. In that way, it will be acted upon without resentment. Although there is room for the situation to turn out differently than Paul desires, in true chaordic fashion he allows the situation to unfold with a minimum of directives.

Earlier I recounted that under the paradigm of chaos theory, "if you set a group of people in motion, each one following the right set of three or four simple rules . . . they will spontaneously self-organize into something complex and unexpected."[34]   Paul initiates this process within his communities. The few "simple" rules seem to be "love one another," "serve one another," and "listen to the Spirit that dwells in you." Of course, his churches seemed not to have been able to apply these to the degree that Paul expects them to. However, Paul resists laying down specific rules; he rather calls them back to mutual love, mutual slavery, and the filling of the Spirit. There is no formula, no blueprint, for how they are to be organized and structured.

In Hock's view of chaordic leadership the primary responsibility of a leader is to manage oneself, "one's own integrity, character, ethics, knowledge, wisdom, temperament, words, and acts."[35]   And this we find in Paul. Paul speaks often of his own ability for self-control and right action. Led by the Spirit he does not stray into sin (the common picture of Paul struggling with his human propensity to sin in Rom 7 is based on a long-held mis-interpretation of that text[36]). Thus we find in Paul the admonition to "imitate me" (1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:17) sometimes qualified with "as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

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[34] Tetenbaum, "Shifting Paradigms," 25.

[35] Hock, "Art of Chaordic Leadership."

[36] Krister Stendahl, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78-96.

At the heart of chaordic leadership is the emphasis on minimal specificity of rules. Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers give an interesting modern example of the formation of community around a minimum of behavior specifications.[37] At a robust (unnamed) junior high school all behaviors and decisions are based on three basic rules agreed upon by faculty, staff, and students: "take care of yourself," "take care of each other," and "take care of this place." These rules serve to keep the community focused, but are "open enough to allow for diverse and individual responses to any situation."[38]   This is very much like Paul's call to mutual slavery, mutual love, and Spirit guidance. Interestingly, "chaordic organizations are, by definition, conflictual, but the very tension that produces conflict also produces genuinely creative, fruitful ideas."[39]   Perhaps this is why Paul's churches were so full of conflict!

Studies in quantum physics show that there are "no pre-fixed, definitely describable destinations."[40] Rather, there are only "potentials." That is, the world is "always subjective and shaped by our interactions with it."[41] We cannot observe anything from "outside" but always interfere with it and, in some ways, participate in its "being."[42] For example, since we can never measure both the position of light (particle) or the momentum (wave) at the same time, what we choose to measure determines the boundaries around what we will discover. Its potentiality has become limited. Thus, light is observed as either a particle or a wave, never both. Yet, without our observation it is neither, and both. In each interaction the relationship will be different, and thus the potentialities evoked always depends upon the players and the moment.[43]

Another aspect arising out of quantum theory is the idea that physical reality is more than material – it is also composed

37 Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, "The Paradox and Promise of Community," in *The Community of the Future*, eds. F. Hesselbein, M. Goldsmith, R. Beckhard, R. F. Schubert (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 15.
38 Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers, "Paradox and Promise," 15.
39 Tetenbaum, "Shifting Paradigms," 28.
40 Wheatley, *Leadership*, xi.
41 Ibid., 8.
42 Ibid., 20.
43 Ibid., 34.

of non-material fields. Wheatley likens the universe to an ocean "filled with interpenetrating influences and invisible structures that connect."[44] One astronomer in 1930 described the universe as "more like a great thought than like a great machine."[45] Wheatley uses "cyberspace" to illustrate this – the term describes air filled with information that we can access electronically.[46] It is invisible but very real. It is within these multiple interpenetrating fields that we live ("and move and have our being"!). The fields are vast and "can connect discrete and distance actions." Interestingly, since fields are invisible, Wheatley advocates connecting ourselves with them on the basis of faith.

As with the observer-participant in any scientific experiment, so Paul becomes the observer-participant in the leadership of Christian communities. Even in his struggle to allow Spirit-leadership of the communities he himself has influence in the communities. Without necessarily wanting to, and in some cases trying hard not to, Paul does participate in the creation of the type of community that the recipients of his letters will experience. Yet rather than deliberately attempt to create that community Paul seems intent on evoking the potential that already exists. He does not assign tasks but describes a process whereby relationships can be nurtured, grow, and evolve. Wheatley's description of modern organizational leadership is also descriptive of Paul's approach:

> What gives power its charge, positive or negative, is the quality of relationships. Those who relate through coercion, or from a disregard for the other person, create negative energy. Those who are open to others and who see others in their fullness create positive energy. *Love in organizations, then is the most potent source of power that we have available.* And all because we inhabit a quantum universe that knows nothing of itself, independent of its relationships.[49]

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[44] Ibid., 51.
[45] Ibid., 32.
[46] Ibid., 52.
[47] Ibid., 55.
[48] Ibid., 57.
[49] Ibid., 39, italics mine.

But Paul would push further. Love is what we have as the basis of human relationships (cf. 1 Cor 13). However, it is driven by the Spirit of God with whom the believer also exists in relationship. It is the Spirit, then, that acts as the "invisible field that shapes behavior" within which the relationships develop chaordicly.[50]

FROM CHAOS TO STRUCTURE: POST-PAULINE DEVELOPMENTS

There is a scene in the film *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979) where a great crowd awaits words of wisdom from their now-designated messiah. Brian tells them, "You've all got to work it out for yourselves." After some brief pondering they call back in unison, "Yes, yes. We've got to work it out for ourselves . . . . Tell us more." There seems to be a natural human tendency to want to be told what to do (even when we do not like what it is we are told to do). We want direction, guidance, commandments. Authority figures are quickly elevated and obeyed. We need only look at the growth of various forms of fundamentalisms, including Christian fundamentalism, within our accelerated and accelerating culture.

It is precisely over this issue that Paul's leadership 'experiment' fails. In the wake of Paul's death and the quick growth of various Jesus-believing communities, not to mention disputes with other groups both inside and outside the trans-local Christian sect, Paul's churches seem to have looked for more directive leadership. We see this particularly in the "household codes" of Colossians and Ephesians ("wives submit to your husbands," etc.; Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:22-6:9) that were introduced to Pauline Christianity for any number of reasons. Most likely they were adopted as ethical teachings "for the long haul" once the belief in the imminent parousia began to wane. In particular, they may be a reaction to the charges of outsiders that Christianity was socially irresponsible and domestically disruptive. They encourage the Church's integration into Greco-Roman society by promoting the adoption of certain values of that culture. This is certainly the apologetic function that the household codes have elsewhere, in writings such as those of Philo and Josephus.[51]

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[50] Cf. Ibid., 47.
[51] See David L. Balch, *"Let Wives Be Submissive": The Domestic Code in I Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981).

Overall, the codes seem to reflect a conviction that the new life in Christ is to be lived within the framework of existing so-called "natural" and social orders. In an orderly world, the church, it was thought, must also be orderly. We see this also in the dominant metaphor used of the church in these deutero-pauline letters. In Paul's authentic letters (particularly 1 Corinthians) the Christian community comprises the whole body of Christ – some members are hands, some are ears, some are eyes, some are feet, and so on (1 Cor 12:12-27). In the deutero-pauline letters the church remains the body of Christ. However, Christ is now the "head" of the body. This is the top-down approach to leadership, with the "head" controlling the rest of the body.

This "climaxes" (to inject a linear model for a moment) in the Pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus). The writer(s) of these letters proposes a leadership structure based upon apostolic succession from Paul. There is a clear move away from flexible, multiple leadership options towards stability and order (similar to the move from itinerancy to local leadership in the *Didache*). The pastor does this by indicating that Paul chose and ordained those who were to follow him (namely Timothy and Titus; 1 Tim 1:18, 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Titus 1:5) and authorized them to "appoint elders" (Titus 1:5) and bishops and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9) in local congregations.

The Pastoral epistles attest to a number of official designations of local leaders: Bishop (*episkopos*); Deacon (*diakonos*); Elder (*presbyteros*). Unlike Paul's use of *episkopos* and *diakonos* in Philippians 1:1, in the Pastoral epistles the characteristics of those qualified to fill these positions are given in detail. Most glaringly, they are to be married males, and probably wealthy ones at that. Despite Paul's openness to women as leaders and "co-workers" (Phil 4:2-3; 1 Cor 1:11; Rom 16:1-3, 6-7, 12, 15) women are now relegated to the small, and tightly defined leadership roles tied to the category of "widow" (*ch_ra*; rich, old, self-sufficient women). The pastorals seem to merge the leadership of wealthy patrons with that of local male bishops, which patriarchalizes church order according to the model of the wealthy Greco-Roman household. Thus, the Pastor has the church emulating the civic and domestic leadership structure.

It is intolerance of complexity and chaos that cause

organizations to become entrenched in structure. Uncertainty and ambiguity are feared and not tolerated long before some sort of order is imposed. Certainly this was the case in the Pauline communities. Control replaced chaos and the paradigm of top-down leadership asserted itself within the Pauline Christian communities.

Due to the delay of the parousia of Jesus the church became institutionalized and hierarchical. I do not here intend to debate the necessity of this here, although some see it so. What I do question however, is the permanency of it. Once canonized, the Pastoral epistles became the lens through which all of the Pauline letters were read. This point in time becomes the touchstone, then, for all subsequent points, defining how the church is to structure itself – namely, hierarchically (and patriarchicly). This is often the case today, even in churches that claim to be congregational. Pastors are still perceived as authority figures and boards are given greater powers than the rest of the membership.

In light of the emerging paradigm of chaos theory it seems that the we are now at a point where we can see that the ever-present but unfulfilled parousia of Jesus calls the Church as an organization to be fluid, constantly redefining itself according to its current contexts. Chaotic? No! Rather, it should be chaordic, that is, self-organizing, seeking out its own optimal solution to its current environment.[52] Yet this self-organizing change is not random or incoherent. Systems

> evolve to greater independence and resiliency because they are free to adapt, and because they maintain a coherent identity throughout their history. Stasis, balance, equilibrium –these are temporary states. What endures is process – dynamic, adaptive, creative.[53]

In such self-organizing each local Christian congregation will be true to the spirit, or Spirit, of Paul's leadership.

IMPLICATIONS

It is both tempting and dangerous to think of "the church" as a single entity. Even more to the point is the sentiment, sometimes expressed as a quandary, that the

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[52] Cf. Wheatley, *Leadership*, 97.
[53] Wheatley, *Leadership*, 98.

apostle Paul founded and organized "the church." In the
course of this paper I have attempted to suggest that this is
both true and false. Paul founded local, voluntary associations
of persons of like interests (namely, worship of Jesus). These
local manifestations were given great autonomy by their
founder.[54] No overarching organizational mandate was
imposed by Paul, either through his own authority or by
drawing upon the authority of God. Yet this very autonomy
granted to each of Paul's associations became a web of
interactive relationships which self-organized into the entity
which we know of as "the church." Yet at its core, "the
church" is local and autonomous, open to environmental
influences and adaptive to change around itself.

In an earlier work on the formation of Pauline Christian
communities I analyzed various community models such as
synagogues, philosophical schools, the ancient mysteries, and
voluntary associations that are used as analogues for Paul's
communities. I concluded that each community structure was
determined locally and not based on one specific analogical
model imposed by Paul.[55] That is, there was no community
blueprint to which each and every congregation had to
adhere. The same is true for Paul's leadership style. There is
no truly Pauline "model" of leadership in terms of a blueprint
for creating Christian leaders; no external control by which
one can check off characteristics of Christian leaders. To be
sure, the checklists came into the churches two generations or
so later and, for better or (I think) worse, remain there
embedded in our canon. But for Paul the leadership "style"
(not "model") was chaordic.

Dee Hock, the one who coined the term "chaordic,"
suggests that the term does not mean that our present
concepts of organization are bad and should be destroyed. It
means that they are no longer relevant and must be
transformed.[56]   This is the case not only in the corporate
settings in which Hock works but also is true in today's
churches, both locally, nationally, and internationally. At the
same time, in the ecclesial setting it is not as radical or
revolutionary as Hock makes out for the corporate setting. For

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[54] See Richard S. Ascough, "Translocal Relationships Among Voluntary Associations
        and Early Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5/2 (1997) 223-41.
[55] Ascough, *Formation of Pauline Churches*, 98.
[56] Searcy and Hall, "Interview with Hock."

in the ecclesial setting chaordic leadership is simply a return to the roots of our tradition as expressed in the letters that Paul sent to the communities that he founded.

I find these comments by Tetenbaum intriguing in thinking about the current ecclesial concern for drawing in new, particularly younger, members:

> Chaos theory is potentially threatening to organizations, particularly to those that are large and traditional, owing to the risk involved in the concept of self-organization. The concept has a prime audience, however, in the newer, smaller entrepreneurial companies whose work forces are made up of 20- and 30-year-olds who have little investment in traditional ways of doing things.[57]

Of course, for the Pauline organizations there was no "traditional" way of doing things – no "church" or "synagogue" model imposed on them from the outside.[58] Like any other newly formed voluntary association they had a free hand locally to organize themselves as they saw fit. It is possible that a return to this model of church leadership would prove more attractive for younger persons today.

I am not necessarily suggesting that Paul is a model to be emulated. Even the VISA company, founded by Dee Hock and run as a "chaordic" organization, is not held up as a paradigm for emulation. Hock admits that as an archetype of the chaordic organization VISA was never more than a third "right."[59] But both VISA and Paul are before us as exemplars to study, to learn from, and to improve upon. My intention in this paper is not to say, "do as Paul does" but to give us a new lens through which to view Paul on a subject which, as I suggested earlier, is usually ignored or poorly conceived. Leadership is essential in the churches today. I hope that by exploring Paul through this lens we can gain greater insight into what made him a great leader, or not.[60]

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[57] Tetenbaum, "Shifting Paradigms," 26.

[58] Again, Ascough, *Formation of Pauline Churches*, 98.

[59] Michael Toms, "The Chaordic Organization: An Interview with Dee Hock," *The Inner Edge* 3/1 (Feb/Mar 2000), http://www.inneredge.com/html/articles/v3n1-int-f.html, accessed September 14, 2000.

[60] Paul does seem to embody what Wheatley (*Leadership*, 42) sees as an expression of quantum perception of reality: "think globally, act locally." It is move-

CONCLUSION

It is clear that I have by no means done adequate service to the complexity of either chaos theory or organizational leadership studies. Some may feel the same way about my treatment of Paul, although there I feel somewhat safer, even if I did not document and nuance my claims as fully as biblical scholars are wont to do. Although my topic was broad my aim was modest. I did not intend to redefine the nature of Pauline studies. Rather, by juxtaposing two separate but related fields of inquiry, organizational leadership studies and study of Paul, I hope to have broken new ground, stimulated thought, and opened avenues for further investigation and exploration.

In this paper I have deliberately attempted to push some boundaries a little bit – both exegetically and ecclesiastically. I do not claim to have the final word in this area; I simply intend to raise some issues for further thought and discussion. One thing that remains unclear to me still is the viability of Paul's chaordic approach. Although Paul may have been evidencing chaordic leadership at Corinth, the church became increasingly chaotic. I suspect this is because they did not follow Paul's "simple" rules of mutuality and spirit-directedness. But does this breakdown suggest that chaordic leadership is not possible in religious contexts? Or perhaps it suggests that Paul was so ahead of his time that the cultural milieu was not such that chaordic leadership could thrive? If the latter, then we must ask ourselves whether we are now in an environment wherein chaordic leadership is the hope of an ecclesial structure looking for new directions within which it might thrive.

In some ways I am also trying to raise the consciousness for biblical studies of what others are noting in other disciplines. Again, Margaret Wheatley: "We social scientists are trying hard to be conscientious, using the methodologies and thought patterns of seventeenth-century science, while the scientists, traveling away from us at the speed of light are

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ment in the local level that will create a ripple of movement within the system and have far reaching impact beyond the immediate environment and at the outer edges of the organization. The butterfly flaps her wings in Tokyo and affects a tornado in Texas. Paul implements local groups of Jesus-worshipers and changes the religious contours of an Empire. What will local changes do within the larger system of which Christian groups are a part today? Only God knows (or maybe even God will be surprised!; Stewart, *Does God Play Dice?*, xi-xii, 338).

moving into a universe that suggests entirely new ways of understanding."[61] A new way of looking at the universe by scientists has led others to a new way of looking at modern organizational leadership. It is my contention that this might also allow us a new way of looking at both Paul and the modern church.

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[61] Wheately, *Leadership*, 141.