

THE FORGOTTEN WAYS HANDBOOK

A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches

**ALAN HIRSCH
WITH DARRYN ALTCLASS**



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Preface

As I write this preface, *The Forgotten Ways* has been out for around fifteen months. I can say that I have been genuinely humbled by the positive reception it has received. As an author I receive a lot of feedback through letters and e-mails or in person, and the nature of the feedback varies significantly. But by far the most common response I get from readers is, “I know this sounds strange, but I feel that I kind of ‘remember’ these ideas even though I have never been able to fully articulate them.” At which point I usually say “hallelujah,” because for me it is an affirmation of the whole idea behind *The Forgotten Ways*—that Apostolic Genius lies latent in all of God’s people, and we have simply forgotten how to access it. We have become so numbed by the opiate of institutional religion that we have simply lost contact with the memory of what we can, and ought, to be. Another reason for my elation is that I believe the Spirit is indeed waking his people up to their hidden potential all across the world. The new emergence of apostolic movements is a global phenomenon, as far as I can tell, and it really is quite remarkable. We have cause for great hope.

But yet another response usually comes in the form of a question: “How can the ideas in *The Forgotten Ways* be implemented?” Most readers find themselves in organizations that feel worlds away from the *movement* ethos described in the book, even though they long to move in that direction. It is important to know that in writing *The Forgotten Ways* I never intended to develop a missional technique, but rather to awaken a lost imagination. We must go deep into our collective memories as God’s people and “remember” the forgotten ways of apostolic movements. We need to think and dream and have our imaginations

charged with possibilities and our hearts inspired by Jesus afresh. This workbook is not meant to short-circuit that much-needed recalibration, but rather to “operationalize” it.

To do this I needed some help. So I invited Darryn Altclass, a long-time friend and colleague, to write this book with me. Darryn is a dedicated and very savvy church planter who has consistently implemented much of the content of *The Forgotten Ways* into real-life practice over many years. He knows me well; we have worked closely together in Forge Mission Training Network and have shared many missional ideas and dreams together over the years. As a local movement pioneer, Darryn initiated Third Place Communities, which we use as the primary test case in the book. We have chosen this network not because of any supposed superiority, but simply because we have both traveled with it over the past few years as they have tried to integrate, with some degree of success, *The Forgotten Ways* into their common life.

We also received some needed guidance from friend and colleague Steve Ogne, an experienced trainer, coach, consultant, and author who works for CRM. Steve helped out with summarizing the information and was a faithful sounding board. We thank him for his insightful input along the way.

It’s hard not to be perfectionistic about a book like this. I’m not sure if we would ever feel it fits the bill, but we offer it to you nonetheless. More importantly, we offer it to God in the hope that he might use it in the advancement of his kingdom in this critical century.

Sola Dei Gloria.

Alan Hirsch
May 2008

A Note to Leaders

The fact that you have begun to read this book indicates not only that you are interested in the theory of the forgotten ways, but that at some level you long to activate them in your own life and in the lives of those around you. This is exactly why we wrote this book.

This is not a theoretical book on mission or missional movements, although it does contain some theory. Rather, it's a practical handbook to provide frameworks and offer suggestions as a means to inspire God's people into mission. Our main purpose is to stir innovative missional action for Jesus in this post-Christian world we inhabit. More specifically, this handbook is a guide to the application of the ideas contained in *The Forgotten Ways*. We suggest you use it as a handbook, a kind of missional journal as you engage the world in mission. Make the book your own, use it well, take notes in the margins, underline, carry it with you, and jot down your ideas and reflections on the road.

Feedback suggests that many who have read *The Forgotten Ways* resonate deeply with the vision of the church articulated within the book. A lot of people reported they felt they were actually “remembering” something they had somehow forgotten, and that they gained a clearer insight into the life force (what Alan calls “Apostolic Genius”) that pulsates through the early church and similar movements. We believe that the reason for this “remembering” is that Apostolic Genius actually resides in all authentic expressions of *ecclesia*, which has simply become dormant over time.

Many long to see something more akin to movements in the various churches and organizations to which they belong. However, they feel the reality of seeing that fulfilled is way beyond their grasp. Others who find themselves deeply embedded within various expressions of Christendom sense that it's an impossible task to transition their church into a missional movement.

Make no mistake; the scope of the change required to shift to the kind of movement described in *The Forgotten Ways* is nothing less than paradigmatic. Every element of mDNA (the name given to the components that together encode and form Apostolic Genius) poses a direct challenge to the prevailing ways of doing church and mission. When taken together, all six elements of Apostolic Genius might make the task seem somewhat overwhelming, but it is not as difficult as it seems, and certainly not impossible. The Chinese church proves that highly institutionalized forms of Christianity can actually become powerful transformative movements, given the right circumstances. And for the record, we don't believe we need persecution to activate Apostolic Genius. Less intense forms of adaptive challenges can, and do, force the church to respond. Because the church carries the gospel and by the power of the Spirit, the full coding of Apostolic Genius, the potential for world transformation is always present. God is able and very willing to empower the church to fulfill her missional calling. In fact, we see this as one of the very special works of the Holy Spirit—to awaken God's people to their calling and destiny as a movement that can and will change the world.

Akin to the idea of waking up to something long forgotten, we believe the church itself will “remember” the forgotten ways of apostolic movements. For this to happen, leaders will need to create the right environment and give meaningful vocabulary to what people are experiencing. This is precisely what we wish to achieve in writing this book—to make the forgotten ways, well . . . less forgotten.

Our hope is to help you, at whatever level (grassroots or strategic leadership), in whatever form of Christian organization, to reactivate the missional church *where you are*. We propose to do this by suggesting a set of habits and practices formed around each of the mDNA elements described in *The Forgotten Ways*. We believe this will allow us to “remember” once again what it means to be a transformative movement for Jesus in the West.

What's Inside?

Each chapter is structured in the same way, so that the users can expect some degree of uniformity. This approach basically comprises three sections.

1. A Summary of Each mDNA Element

This will provide the participant with an adequate overview of each chapter and mDNA element. It is relatively free of jargon, so it should be understandable by most. However, when somewhat technical phrases are retained, it will be the leader's task to explain them in a meaningful way. There is a glossary at the back of the book to help with this.

2. Suggested Habits and Practices

You will notice that after each summary we have arranged the practical section into Habits and Practices. Habits are the overall behavior we suggest groups adopt in order to appropriate the specific mDNA element, while practices are helpful ideas for living out the habits. The practices are simply proposed ways in which to act out or embody the habit in everyday life. Habits can be viewed as the framework of a ladder, and the practices as the rungs on which we place our feet.

Please note that these are suggested habits and practices. They are prompts, not prescriptions. Don't try doing them all; you will only exhaust yourself. In fact, you might not choose any of the ones we have suggested, but we hope that in that case, they might function simply as a stimulus for you to find your own.

3. A Group Learning Process

We wrote this book with a group context in mind. While people might choose to read the book in their own time, we recommend that the information is better processed with others. Our hope is that the information and examples contained within this book will prompt rich discussion and will lead groups into missional action. This is why we have called them action groups.

For this purpose you will find at the end of each chapter a set of questions for groups to use as a way to process and apply the principles. We believe that this is where great learning will occur as together you explore, evaluate, and begin to employ these concepts in community life. Here's an overview of the framework we suggest for group processing.

Session 1: Explore (talk about it)

In preparation please ensure everyone reads the chapter. Start with an overview of the mDNA element, to clarify the theme and associated concepts. If there are words or ideas people are not clear about, this is the time to clarify. It's a good idea for one person to take responsibility to guide this section, and for that person to have read (and understood) the associated chapter from *The Forgotten Ways*.

After the overview, explore the ideas and suggestions presented in the chapter. The exploration phase is highly relational and probes people's initial responses and feelings. Ask a few open-ended exploratory questions to allow the group space to share and think out loud. This is a good way to discern what's on the surface of people's minds and hearts and in need of discussion.

Session 2: Evaluate (reflect deeper)

While the exploration section encourages general sharing and relating, the evaluation phase is where deeper reflection and critical thinking occur. During this time ask questions and make statements that promote critical thinking. These questions will prompt the group to prioritize and brainstorm various options and alternatives. This is also where you identify blockages and resistance and sort out what is important and what is not.

Session 3: Employ (act on it)

The employing section is about moving the group into action. By this stage the group has explored the ideas through talking generally, evaluated by reflecting more deeply, identified barriers, and has begun to sort out what's important and what's not. Now it's time to probe the way ahead. What plan of action will the group employ as a way forward? This is where the group can start to refocus and respond by brainstorming and mapping out various options and action steps. What

will they need to let go? What will they need to pick up? Who will they need help from? During this phase ask questions and make statements to provoke action.

Session 4: Personal Journal

After processing much information, we encourage you to take some time to pray, listen, and respond to God. How is God prompting you, and how will you respond? Take time to record your impressions as well as insights from the group. Write a prayer expressing your desires to God. If appropriate, share your thoughts in the group, and then pray together.

There are two other sections in the book, both found at the back.

Resource Section

We have included an appendix with relevant resources and examples that are referred to throughout the book. Due to the interrelated nature of Apostolic Genius, these resources are relevant to many different sections. That's why we've placed them together in a general resource section at the back. Just flick over to this section when needed or prompted.

Glossary

Because the primary book contains phrases and terms that might be obscure to many, we have included here the glossary (dictionary of terms used) from *The Forgotten Ways*. Feel free to read it first to familiarize yourself with some of these definitions. Rest assured, it will all become clearer as you go.

A Call to Action

To avoid the group becoming just another *discussion* group, we suggest you call them *action groups* or something to that effect. We don't want to foster mere understanding, but rather *informed* action. Whether you are using this book to guide a group of cell leaders or a small group

trying to activate their cell, think of the handbook as a guide to the revolution, and of each member as an active participant in the movement. Remember that each and every Christian has the seed-potential for world transformation. Each can and must play a part. To embed a movement ethos throughout the church or organization, we suggest you recruit as many people as possible for the journey.

We recommend that someone assumes responsibility for coordinating the action group. The handbook is a standalone text, but it's very important that at least one person in the group has thoroughly read *The Forgotten Ways*, perhaps even twice, so that he or she can act as an informed guide along the journey. Leadership always necessitates a deeper appreciation of the issues. Whoever it is, this person should take responsibility at the beginning of each meeting to conduct the overview and to make sure everyone comprehends the basic ideas and terminology associated with Apostolic Genius. Alternatively, given that a great way to learn an idea is to actually teach it to others, you might like to suggest every member of the group takes a turn in teaching the overview. Given the complexity of the material at times, you might divide a chapter into two and distribute it to two different participants.

What follows is important information on how to get the most out of this handbook and maximize impact in your church and organization.

How to Apply the Apostolic Genius Model

There is no magic formula in using this handbook to apply the many ideas contained in *The Forgotten Ways*. Much will depend on both your context and the commitment of the group to search for the answers and then apply them in your situation. But we do suggest the following:

1. Get as Many to Read the Primary Text as Possible.

This is especially true for the key and influential leaders in the group. We recognize that *The Forgotten Ways* is a comprehensive text containing complex terminology and that it introduces many different paradigm shifts in how we think of church and movements. The reason for this comprehensiveness is to dislodge our thinking from the prevailing ideas

and forms that seem to exercise a monopoly over our imaginations. We have so wedded our thinking of church to the institution that we no longer easily recognize a more dynamic Jesus movement when we see it. It is critical that we engage our minds and hearts in the quest to recover the forgotten ways of apostolic movements.

2. Get a Realistic Perspective on Change

Every group must deal with the issue of how long it will take to see Apostolic Genius genuinely embedded in the group or church. It is our clear belief that an established church can become significantly missional, but to do so the leaders will need to have a clear perspective on the change process needed to get this done. To a large degree this will depend on the situation of the organization when it starts the process. However, we are certain that to fully transform an existing organization will take significant time. However long you decide to take in study and applying the suggested practices, we encourage you to be patient, prayerful, and committed to sustain long-term change. Don't look for short-term solutions when the issues you deal with are complex. (You may want to read "A Crash Course in Chaos" in the addendum of *The Forgotten Ways* and try developing a change process along similar lines.¹)

3. Embed mDNA at the Core of the Organization/Church

In applying the Apostolic Genius model, it is essential to seek to implant mDNA at the very heart of the group. If you are a new church planter, then you have at least one advantage: you can clearly lay down the basic movemental approach and get it right from the start. If not a new church, then you will need to choose a strategic point of departure (see #5 below). Either way, to embed mDNA you will need to make sure that each member of your core team grapples with the ideas contained in *The Forgotten Ways* and begin to pre-empt how they might be integrated as you go. Much depends on what you build into the "stem cells" of the church. Corrupted DNA in any organism can cause mutations and problems later on, so don't be afraid to be a stickler about getting it right at the foundational level. But leaders will have to keep their eyes on things as they develop, because there is an innate tendency in all

organizations to institutionalize over time. We have to assume that each member has most likely been deeply shaped by the institutional idea of church in its many forms. You will need to work hard to disembody the inherited imagination where it blocks the appropriation of Apostolic Genius (the combination of the six elements of mDNA).

4. *Think Systems*

The Forgotten Ways provides us with a system, a way of seeing movements in their wholeness. It is not a one-dimensional look at the simple characteristics of movements; rather, it describes the phenomenon of movements in their wholeness—as a system of interrelating and interconnected elements. The claim made in *The Forgotten Ways* is that the Apostolic Genius typology actually *applies to all Jesus movements that achieve hyperbolic growth*, or, as Roland Allen calls it, “spontaneous expansion.” *The Forgotten Ways* is an attempt to describe the essential elements that come together and inform one another to create hyperbolic growth curves and high impact. Because the Apostolic Genius typology is a system, it is critical that you keep your eye on the whole while focusing on any of the singular elements. Never lose sight of the fact that a true apostolic movement needs all six elements to make it cook.

5. *Use the Apostolic Genius Typology as a Strategic Tool*

The user can adopt the Apostolic Genius typology to assess how close the organization is to being a genuine movement. It also can be used as a tool for strategic focus. For instance, taking the Apostolic Genius approach, you can assess the organization and identify the weakest elements. We suggest that the weakest element of mDNA then becomes the focus of strategic effort for that organization. Once that is developed over time, then the same process is undertaken to identify the next-weakest element, and that becomes the focus of effort until it is further developed, and so on. How do you do the assessment? If you can’t develop your own, then there is a thoroughly researched online test available to help you in this regard. Go to www.theforgottenways.org, and you can take the mPULSE test there as regularly as you need to.²

6. Resist Temptation to Use Any Single Element as a Silver Bullet

Do not succumb to the temptation to treat any of the mDNA elements within itself as some sort of silver bullet, a quick cure for the ailments of your church. While developing one, say, discipleship, is likely to enhance the church, if you are seeking to engender apostolic movements, then none of the elements *by themselves* will be enough. Even though developing one will contribute to the whole system, it *takes all six to create an apostolic movement*. Each is necessary but not sufficient.

7. Create Real-Life Action Heroes

It is critical that you ensure that people are actually attempting to do what is being discussed and agreed upon. This is a handbook, and its task is not to stimulate conversations that lead nowhere, but to inspire and guide action. The real heroes of the group ought not to be the ones who can master the information intellectually, but rather those who are willing to give things a go and risk failure. You will need to inspire a culture of experimentation imbued with a genuine pioneering spirit.

8. Be Realistic

A word needs to be said about whether churches and organizations in Western contexts can become *exactly* like the movements described in *The Forgotten Ways*, namely the early church and the Chinese underground church. The straightforward answer is, probably not—at least not in the same way or to the same degree. There are many reasons for this. One is that we live in a post-Christian context that makes our task more complicated due to the inoculation of our culture against genuine expressions of Christianity. This is also due to the fact that we do not live in a premodern cultural context, but a postmodern one, where the structure of belief is far more complex. But this should not deter us from applying the Apostolic Genius model to our setting. Grassroots apostolic movements are definitely growing across the West, and in our opinion, they represent the hope and the future of Western Christianity. Not only is becoming a movement a challenge for most of us, but it is one that must be undertaken by as many churches and agencies as possible if we are to reestablish Christianity in the West. Failure

here will mean the continuing decline of Christianity in every context in the West—and this is unacceptable to all committed to seeing the gospel appropriated and Jesus worshipped throughout our cities and neighborhoods.

As for the existing organization that finds itself largely bound to the institutional idea of church, this challenge should not be the cause of despair. Remember that every community that faithfully follows Jesus has all the latent potential already present within them. Our task is not to introduce faddish new ideas, but rather to awaken the collective memory and create the condition in which they can reactivate and reapply Apostolic Genius.

Our suggestion, therefore, is that you start using the strategic process suggested above and thus begin to *approximate* the kind of church expressed in apostolic movements. It is important to remember that in many ways, the churches and organizations we inhabit will to some degree always be hybrids—a mixture of organic and institutional elements. The challenge for most of us will be to continually move toward being more movemental by increasingly applying the Apostolic Genius typology with its six elements. It is our contention that at a certain catalytic moment, when the six elements are present and interacting in a significant way, spontaneous expansion *will* begin to occur.

Rationale for the Handbook

Two interrelated educational philosophies guided the formation of this handbook. First, given our current state of knowledge and how we gain it, we have to shift from trying to *think our way into a new way of acting* to the process of *acting our way into a new way of thinking*. The other guiding concept is related to action (praxis) as a basis of insight into God, discipleship, and church. There is a fundamental difference between core values and core practices.

Acting Our Way into a New Way of Thinking

We are all familiar with the gospel story in which Jesus selected a band of disciples, lived and ministered with them, and mentored them on the

road. It was this life-on-life phenomenon that facilitated the transfer of information and ideas into concrete situations. The idea of discipleship will be explored in one of the chapters; we simply note that this is the way Jesus formed his disciples and that we should not think we could generate authentic disciples in any other way.

Please don't misunderstand us; we do need serious intellectual engagement with the key ideas of our time, but what is truly concerning is that such engagement largely takes place in the disengaged and passive environment of the classroom. This is simply not the way Jesus taught us to develop disciples. And it is not that Jesus lacked an appropriate model of the classroom—the Greeks had developed this hundreds of years before Christ, and it was well entrenched in the Greco-Roman world. The Hebrew worldview was a life-oriented one and was not primarily concerned with concepts and ideas *in themselves*. We simply do not believe that we can continue to try and *think* our way into a new way of acting; but rather, we need to *act* our way into new way of thinking.³

How did we move so far from the ethos of discipleship passed on to us by our Lord? The cause lies in Western Christianity being so deeply influenced by Greek, or Hellenistic, ideas of knowledge. By the fourth century, in the church the Platonic worldview had almost triumphed over the Hebraic one. Later, it was Aristotle who became the predominant philosopher for the church. He too operated under a Hellenistic framework. Essentially a Hellenistic view of knowledge is concerned about concepts, ideas, and the nature of being. The Hebraic on the other hand, is primarily concerned with issues of concrete existence, obedience, life-oriented wisdom, and interrelationship of all things under God. As Jews, Jesus and the early church quite clearly operated primarily out of a Hebraic understanding rather than a Hellenistic one.

The diagram below demonstrates this distinction. If our starting point is *old thinking* and *old behavior*, and we see it as our task to change that situation, taking the Hellenistic approach will mean that we provide information to try and get the person or church to a new way of thinking—and hopefully to a new way of acting. The problem is that by merely addressing intellectual aspects we have failed to be able to change behavior. The assumption in Hellenistic thinking is that if people get the right ideas, they will simply change their behavior. The

Hellenistic approach therefore can be characterized as an attempt to try and *think our way into a new way of acting*. Both experience and history show the fallacy of this approach. And it certainly does not make disciples. All we do is change the way a person *thinks*, and their behavior remains largely unaffected. Even though gaining knowledge is essential to transformation, we soon discover that it's going to take a whole lot more than new thinking to transform us.

So what is that better way? We mentioned it before. It's found in the ancient art of disciple making, which operates best with the Hebrew understanding of knowledge. We need to take the whole person into account in seeking to transform an individual, and educate them in the context of *life for life*. The way we do this, is the way Jesus did it, *to act our way into a new way of thinking*. So whether we find ourselves with old thinking and old behavior, or new thinking and old behavior, the way forward is to put actions into the equation.

The assumption is that we bring all these dynamic thinking processes with us into our actions. It is all about context, not just content. We do not, as is supposed by the Hellenistic model, leave our thinking behind when we are doing our actions. We think while we are acting, and act while we are thinking. So what we are proposing looks something like this. . . .

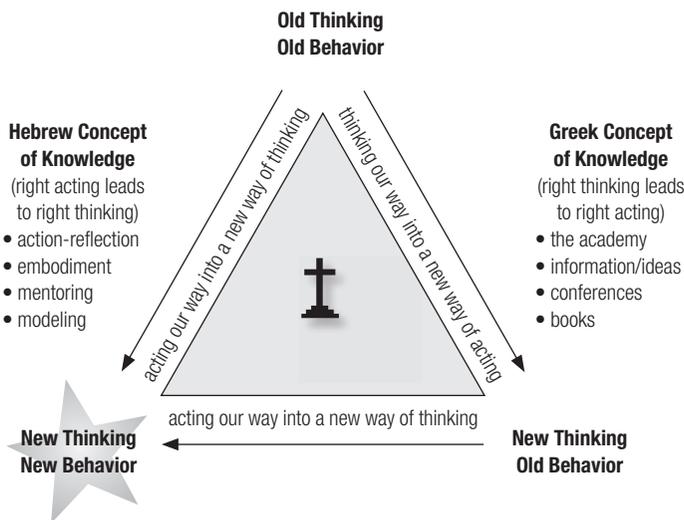


Figure 1
Action-Learning (Discipleship) vs. the Academy

At Forge Mission Training Network, we have built the entire system around this concept of action-learning discipleship. Our twin aims are to develop missionaries to the West, along with a distinct pioneering missional mode of leadership. To do this, we host an internship where each intern is placed in an environment of mission. The vast majority of the intern's learning is by "having a go" in mission. They also meet regularly with a coach for reflection and goal setting, and attend inspiring intensives where they are exposed to a significant amount of theory. This information is communicated by those who have a demonstrated capacity to model what they are teaching—in other words, they are active practitioners in their own right. Engaging in training in this way, the intern's ability to grasp the issues, to resolve and integrate them, is significantly increased.

Core Practices vs. Core Values

Closely related to the idea of action-learning described above, is the distinction between core values and core practices. Keep this distinction in mind, because the content of this book is structured around the idea of developing *core practices* as a means of changing church culture.

Following standard business practice, many churches use the idea of developing core values to help shape organizational culture. The core values, along with vision and mission statements, are created to guide the organization's activities and shape its culture. The weakness of this approach is that they can easily become mere "motherhood statements," preferred rather than actual values. If you don't develop practices based on the values, establishing core values simply becomes an intellectual process rather than informing behavior. It is very hard to change people's values by referring them to a new set of values on paper that they're meant to believe in and assimilate into their lives. So we suggest focusing your efforts on a raft of possible practices, which if applied, will inform behavior and so change thinking as a result.

We will suggest this again later, but the process of moving from values to practices can be developed in the following way. Identify the core value you wish to integrate, and state it clearly. Once the idea is clear, work together to ask the question, "What action, if applied, will most consistently *embody* this core value in the organization?" It's im-

portant to seek to link the action as closely as possible to the ordinary rhythms in life. For example, if a core value of the group is hospitality, don't just say, "We value hospitality." Rather, look for natural ways in which the community might actually practice hospitality.

Calling for a Conspiracy of Little Jesuses

The instinct, power, and genius of the early church rests within the memory of God's people, and so we call for pioneering mission-hearted groups to stir that memory into action. We honestly believe that the hope of Western Christianity rests within each group of Christians living out their calling to be God's people in the localities where they work, rest, and play.

If we're going to impact our world in the name of Jesus, it will be because people like you and me took action in the power of the Spirit. Ever since the mission and ministry of Jesus, God has never stopped calling for a movement of "Little Jesuses" to follow him into the world and unleash the remarkable redemptive genius that lies in the very message we carry. Given the situation of the church in the West, much will now depend on whether we are willing to break out of a stifling herd instinct and find God again in the context of the advancing kingdom of God.

"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

—attributed to Johann Wolfgang Goethe

1

Introduction to *The Forgotten Ways*

After a time of decay comes the turning point. The powerful light that has been banished returns. There is movement, but it is not brought about by force. . . . the movement is natural, arising spontaneously. The old is discarded and the new is introduced. Both measures accord with the time; therefore no harm results.”

—*I Ching*

Before delving into the details of practicing the forgotten ways, it’s important to take an overview of the core ideas. Some of you will have read the original text, and others will have not. Either way it will be helpful to be familiar with the key information. For this purpose simply insert the original introduction here as a point of entry for those who haven’t read the book and as a refresher for those that have read it. It goes like this . . .

Imagine there was a power which lies hidden at the very heart of God’s people. Suppose this power was built into the initiating ‘stem

cell' of the church by the Holy Spirit but was buried and lost through centuries of neglect and disuse. Imagine that if rediscovered, this hidden power could unleash remarkable energies that could propel Christianity well into the twenty-second century. Is this not something that we who love God and his cause would give just about anything to recover? The idea of latent inbuilt missional potencies is not a mere fantasy; in fact there are primal forces that lie latent in every Jesus community and in every true believer. Not only does such a thing exist but it is a clearly identifiable phenomenon that has energized history's most outstanding Jesus movements, perhaps the most remarkable expression of which is very much with us today. This extraordinary power is being recovered in certain expressions of Western Christianity, but not without significant challenge to, and resistance from, the current way in which we do things.

The fact that you have started reading this book will mean that not only are you interested in the search for a more authentic expression of *ecclesia* (the NT word for church), but you are in some sense aware of the dramatic changes in worldview that have been taking place in general culture over the last fifty years. Whatever one may call it, this shift from the modern to the postmodern, or from solid modernity to liquid modernity, has generally been difficult for the church to accept. We find ourselves lost in a perplexing global jungle where our well used cultural and theological maps don't seem to fit. It seems we have woken up to find ourselves in contact with a strange and unexpected reality that seems to defy our usual ways of dealing with issues of the church and its mission. All this amounts to a kind of ecclesial future-shock where we are left wandering in a world we can no longer recognize. In the struggle to grasp our new reality, churches and church leaders have become painfully aware that our inherited concepts, our language, indeed our whole way of thinking are inadequate to describe what is going on both in and around us. The problems raised in such a situation are not merely intellectual ones but together amount to an intense spiritual, emotional, and existential crisis.

The truth is that the twenty-first century is turning out to be a highly complex phenomenon where terrorism, technological innovation, an unsustainable environment, rampant consumerism, and discontinuous change confront us at every point. In the face of this, even the most confident among us in our more honest moments would have to admit

that the church as we know it faces a very significant adaptive challenge. The overwhelming majority of church leadership today report that they feel it is getting much harder for their communities to negotiate the complexities before them. And as a result the church is on massive, long-trended, decline in the West. In this situation, we have to ask ourselves probing questions, “Will more of the same do the trick? Do we have the inherited resources to deal with this situation? Can we simply rework the tried and true Christendom understanding of church which we so love and understand, and finally, in an ultimate tweak of the system, come up with the winning formula?”¹

If we are honest, it seems that the inherited formulas simply won't work anymore. And there are many others who think this way. There is a massive roaming of the mind going on in our day as the search for alternatives heats up. However, most of the new thinking as it relates to the future of Christianity in the West only highlights our dilemma and generally proposes solutions that are little more than revisions of past approaches and techniques. Even much of the thinking about the so-called Emerging Church leaves the prevailing assumptions of church and mission intact and simply focuses on the issue of theology and spirituality in a post-modern setting. This amounts to reworking the theological “software” whilst ignoring the “hardware” as well as “operating system” of the church. In my opinion this will not be enough to get us through. As we anxiously gaze into the future and delve back into our history and traditions to retrieve missiological tools from the Christendom toolbox, many of us are left with the sinking feeling that this is simply not going to work. The tools and techniques that fitted previous eras of Western history simply don't seem to work any longer. What we need now is a new set of tools. A new “paradigm”—a new vision of reality: a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions, and values, especially as they relate to our view of the church and mission.

And it's not that reaching into our past is not part of the solution. It is. The issue is that we generally don't go back far enough; or rather, that we don't delve *deep* enough for our answers. Every now and again we do get glimpses of an answer, but because of the radical and disturbing nature of the remedy we retreat to the safety of the familiar and the controllable. The *real* answers, if we have the courage to search for and apply them, are usually more radical than we are normally given

to think, and because of this they undermine our sense of place in the world with its status quo—not something that the Western church has generally been too comfortable with. But we are now living in a time when only a solution that goes to the very roots of what it means to be Jesus’ people will do.

The conditions facing us in the twenty-first century not only pose a threat to our existence but also present us with an extraordinary opportunity to discover ourselves in a way that orients us to this complex challenge in ways that are resonant with an ancient energy. This energy not only links us with the powerful impulses of the original church, but also gives us wings with which to fly. *The Forgotten Ways* primary text could be labeled under the somewhat technical category of *missional ecclesiology*, because it explores the nature of the Christian movements, and the church as it is shaped by Jesus and his mission. But don’t be fooled by the drab terminology—missional ecclesiology is dynamite. Mainly because the church (the *ecclesia*), when true to its calling, and on about what God is on about, is by far the most potent force for transformational change the world has seen. *The Forgotten Ways* was written in the hope that the church in the West can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, arouse and reengage that amazing power that lies within us.

A Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with a Single Question

In 2003 I attended a seminar on missional church where the speaker asked a question. “How many Christians do you think there were in the year AD 100?” He then asked, “How many Christians do you think there were just before Constantine came on the scene, say, AD 310?”² Here is the somewhat surprising answer.

100 AD	As few as 25,000 Christians
310 AD	Up to 20,000,000 Christians

He then asked the question which has haunted me to this day, “How did they do this?” “How did they grow from being a small movement to the most significant religious force in the Roman Empire in two centuries?” Now *that’s* a question to initiate a journey! And delving

into this question drove me to the discovery of what I will call Apostolic Genius—the inbuilt life force and guiding mechanism of God’s people—and the living components or elements that make it up. These components I have tagged missional DNA or mDNA for short.

So let me ask *you* the question—how *did* the early Christians do it? And before you respond, here are some qualifications you must factor into your answer.

- *They were an illegal religion throughout this period:* At best, they were tolerated; at the very worst they were very severely persecuted.
- *They didn’t have any church buildings as we know them:* While archaeologists have discovered chapels dating from this period, they were definite exceptions to the rule and they tended to be very small converted houses.
- *They didn’t even have the Scriptures as we know them:* They were putting the canon together during this period.
- *They didn’t have an institution or the professional form of leadership normally associated with it.* At times of relative calm, prototypical elements of institution did appear, but by what we consider institutional, these were at best pre-institutional.
- *They didn’t have seeker sensitive services, youth groups, worship bands, seminaries, or commentaries, etc.*
- *They actually made it hard to join the church.* By the late second century aspiring converts had to undergo a significant initiation period to prove they were worthy.

In fact they had none of the things we would ordinarily employ to solve the problems of the church, and yet they grew from twenty five thousand to twenty million in two hundred years! So, how *did* the early church do it? In answering that question, we can perhaps find the answer to the question for the church and mission in our day and in our context. For herein lies the powerful mystery of church in its most authentic form.

But before the example of the Early Christian Movement can be dismissed as a freak of history, there is another perhaps even more astounding manifestation of Apostolic Genius,³ that unique and explo-

sive power inherent in all of God's people, in our own time—namely, the underground church in China. Theirs is a truly remarkable story: About the time when Mao Zedong took power and initiated the systemic purge of religion from society, the church in China which was well established and largely modeled on Western forms due to colonization, was estimated to number about two million adherents. As part of the this systematic persecution, Mao banished all foreign missionaries and ministers, nationalized all church property, killed all the senior leaders, either killed or imprisoned all second and third level leaders, banned all public meetings of Christians with the threat of death or torture, and then proceeded to perpetrate one of the cruelest persecutions of Christians on historical record.

The explicit aim of the Cultural Revolution was to obliterate Christianity (and all religion) from China. At the end of the reign of Mao and his system in the late 70's, and the subsequent lifting of the so-called Bamboo Curtain in the early 80's, foreign missionaries and church officials were allowed back into the country, albeit under strict supervision. They expected to find the church decimated and the disciples a weak and battered people. On the contrary, they discovered that Christianity had flourished beyond all imagination. The estimates *then* were about 60 million Christians in China, and counting! And it has grown significantly since then. David Aikman, former Beijing bureau chief for *Time* magazine, suggests in his book *Jesus in Beijing* that Christians may number as many as 80 million.⁴ If anything, in the Chinese phenomenon, we are witnessing the most significant transformational Christian movement in the history of the church. And remember, not unlike the early church these people had very few Bibles (at times they shared only one page to a house church and then swapped that page with another house group.) They had no professional clergy, no official leadership structures, no central organization, no mass meetings, and yet they grew like mad. How is this possible? How did they do it?⁵

But we can observe similar growth patterns in other historical movements. Steve Addison⁶ notes that by the end of John Wesley's lifetime one in thirty English men and women had become Methodists. In 1776 less than 2 percent of Americans were Methodists. By 1850, the movement claimed the allegiance of 34 percent of the population. How did they do it?

These are dangerous stories because they subvert us into a journey that will call us to more radical expression of Christianity than the one

we currently experience. It was the central task of *The Forgotten Ways* to give a name to these phenomena and attempt to identify the elements which constitute it. The phenomenon present in these dangerous stories I call Apostolic Genius and the elements that make it up I have named mDNA. They will be defined fully later. The object of *The Forgotten Ways* is to explore Apostolic Genius and try to interpret it for our own missional context and situation in the West. These two key examples (the Early Church and the Chinese Church) have been chosen not only because they are truly remarkable movements, but also because one is ancient and the other contemporary and so we can observe Apostolic Genius in two radically different contexts. I have also chosen them because both movements faced significant threats to their survival; in both cases this took the form of systematic persecution. This is significant because as will be explained later, the church in the West faces its own form of adaptive challenge as we negotiate the complexities of the twenty-first century—one that threatens our very survival.

Persecution drove both the early Christian movement and the Chinese church to discover their truest nature as an apostolic people. Persecution forced them away from any possible reliance on any form of centralized religious institution and caused them to live closer to, and more consistently with, their primal message, namely the gospel. We have to assume that if one is willing to die for being a follower of Jesus then in all likelihood that person is a real believer. This persecution, under the sovereignty of God, acted as a means to keep these movements true to their faith and reliant on God—it purified them from the dross and any other unnecessary churchly paraphernalia. It was by *being true to the gospel* that they unleashed the power of Apostolic Genius. And this is a huge lesson for us: as we face our own challenges we will need to be sure about our faith and who it is in whom we trust or else risk the eventual demise of Christianity as a religious force in Western history—witness Europe in the last hundred years.

In pursuit of the answer to *that question*, the question of how these phenomenal Jesus movements actually did it, I have become convinced that the power that manifested itself in the dangerous stories of these two remarkable movements, is available to us as well. And the awakening of that dormant potential has something to do with the strange mixture of the passionate love of God, prayer, and incarnational practice. Add to this mix, appropriate modes of leadership (as expressed in Ephesians 4),

the recovery of radical discipleship, relevant forms of organization and structures, and the suitable conditions for these to be able to catalyze. When these factors come together, the situation is ripe for something remarkable to take place.

To nail down this rather elusive concept of dormant (or latent) potentials, recall the story of *The Wizard of Oz*. The central character in this well-loved movie is Dorothy, who was transported in a tornado from Kansas to the magical Land of Oz. Wanting to return home, she gets guidance from Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, who advises her to walk to the Emerald City and there consult the Wizard. On the yellow brick road she acquires three companions: the Scarecrow, who hopes the Wizard will be able to give him some brains; the Tin Woodsman, who wants the Wizard to give him a heart; and the Lion, who hopes to obtain courage. After surviving some dangerous encounters with the Wicked Witch of the West and numerous other nasty creatures, they eventually make it to see the Wizard, only to find out he is a hoax. They leave the Emerald City brokenhearted. But the Wicked Witch, perceiving the magic in Dorothy's ruby slippers, won't leave them alone. After a final encounter with the Wicked Witch and her minions, they overcome the source of evil and thereby liberate Oz. But through all their ordeals and in their final victory they discover that in fact they already have what they were looking for—in fact they had it all along. The Scarecrow is very clever, the Tinman has real heart, and the Lion turns out to be very brave and courageous after all. They didn't need the Wizard at all. What they needed was a situation that forced them to discover, or activate that which was already in them. They had what they were looking for, only they didn't realize it. To cap it off, Dorothy had her answer to her wish all along; she had the capacity to return home to Kansas—in her ruby slippers. By clicking them together three times, she is transported back to her home in Kansas.

This story highlights the central assumption here and gives a hint to why it has been called *The Forgotten Ways*: namely, that all God's people carry within themselves the same potencies that energized the early Christian movement and the Chinese church. Apostolic Genius lies dormant in you, me, and every local church that seeks to follow Jesus faithfully in any time. We have quite simply forgotten how to access and trigger it.

A Sneak Preview

Here is where the rubber hits the road. Here is the heart of the book as it attempts to describe Apostolic Genius and the constituent elements of mDNA that make it blaze up. Einstein said that when the solution is simple, God is speaking. Following this advice, I have tried to discern quintessential elements that combine to create Apostolic Genius and to simplify them to the absolutely irreducible components. There are six simple but interrelating elements of mDNA, forming a complex and living structure. These present us with a powerful paradigm grid with which we will be able to assess our current understandings and experiences of church and mission. They are:

- **Jesus Is Lord:** At the center and circumference of every significant Jesus movement resides a very simple confession. Simple, but one that fully vibrates with the primal energies of the scriptural faith, namely, the claim of One God over every aspect of every life, and the response of his people to that claim (Deut. 6:4–6ff). The way that this was expressed in the New Testament and later movements was simply “Jesus Is Lord!” With this simple confession they changed the world.
- **Disciple Making:** Essentially this involves the irreplaceable, and lifelong, task of becoming like Jesus by embodying his message. This is perhaps where many of our efforts fail. Disciple-making is an irreplaceable core task of the church and needs to be structured into every church’s basic formula.
- **Missional-Incarnational Impulse:** This refers to the twin impulses of remarkable missional movements. Namely the dynamic outward thrust and the related deepening impulse which together *seed* and *embed* the gospel into different cultures and people groups.
- **Apostolic Environment:** This refers to apostolic influence and the fertile environment it creates in initiating and maintaining the phenomenal movements of God. This will relate to the type of leadership and ministry required to sustain metabolic growth.
- **Organic Systems:** This relates to the idea of appropriate structures for metabolic growth. Phenomenal Jesus movements grow precisely because they do not have centralized institutions to block

growth through control. Here we will find that remarkable Jesus movements have the feel of a movement, structure as a network, and spread like viruses.

- **Communitas, not Community:** The most vigorous forms of community are those that come together in the context of a shared ordeal. Communitas emerges from communities who define themselves as a group with a mission that lies beyond them, thus initiating a risky journey. Everyone loves an adventure. Or do we?

Apostolic Genius is the phrase I developed to try to name the unique energy and force that pulsates through the remarkable Jesus movements in history. My own conclusions are that Apostolic Genius is made up of six components, or elements, called mDNA. These six elements are briefly described above. Loaded into the term Apostolic Genius is the full combination of all the elements of mDNA that together form a system, as it were, each informing and impacting the other. As already stated, Apostolic Genius is latent, or embedded, into the very nature of God's gospel people. I suggest that when all the elements of mDNA are present and are in dynamic relationship with the other elements, and an adaptive challenge acts as a catalyst, then Apostolic Genius is activated.

And so the system of Apostolic Genius will look something like this. . . .

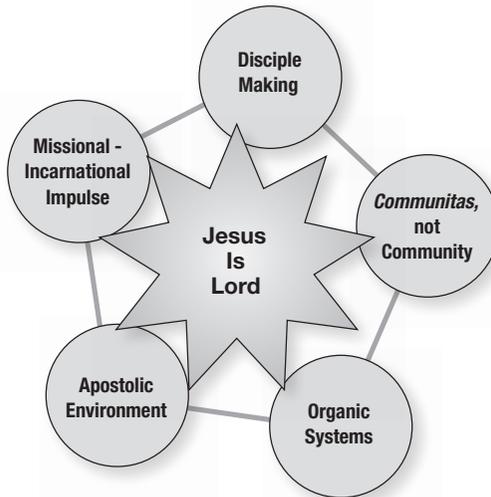


Figure 2
The Structure of Apostolic Genius

Suffice to say here that in exploring these ideas I feel that I am peering into things that are very deep, things that, if recovered and applied, could have considerable ramifications for Western Christianity. I say this as someone who is not claiming something as my own. If anything, like all who receive a grace from God, I feel that I am the humble recipient of a revelation, an unearthing of something primal, in which I am privileged to participate. *The Forgotten Ways* is a stumbling attempt to articulate that ever elusive revelation of the nature of Apostolic Genius—something that belongs to the gospel itself and therefore to the whole people who live by it. Albert Einstein said that when he was peering into the mysteries of the atom he felt he was peering over God's shoulder into things remarkable and wonderful. I must admit to feeling the same sense of awe as I look into these things.