

Advent Christian Denomination Organizational Analysis

NATIONAL OFFICES EXPLORATORY SESSION

Summary of Findings

January 6, 2009

Draft

Prepared by

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Executive Summary

Bruce Jones, an ordained Advent Christian minister, and a senior services consultant with a leading software company submitted a proposal and draft research to the National Office done in conjunction with coursework at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, combining his industry consulting experience with his knowledge of the challenges the Advent Christian Denomination faces.

Proposal

The organizational factors that are causing the decline of the Advent Christian Church are largely a result of the limited and conflicted way in which the organizational model of the denomination was forged. A reversal of this decline may be possible by developing a full theology of biblical organization (paradigm of a desired future state), and using consulting processes to create a strategic roadmap towards implementing the desired state.

Engagement Summary

The national offices staff (Ron Thomas, Sam Warren, Tim Fox, and Justin) met with Bruce Jones on January 9, 2009 for a one day briefing and working session to accomplish three objectives:

1. Review a proposed Biblical Organizational Paradigm as an Analysis Framework
2. Review an Organizational Analysis based on the history and formation of the AC Denomination proposing to explain the trend of decline
3. Decide whether or not the proposed consulting processes should be used to develop a strategic approach and roadmap towards implementing a desired state of biblical organization for the denomination.

Summary of Findings

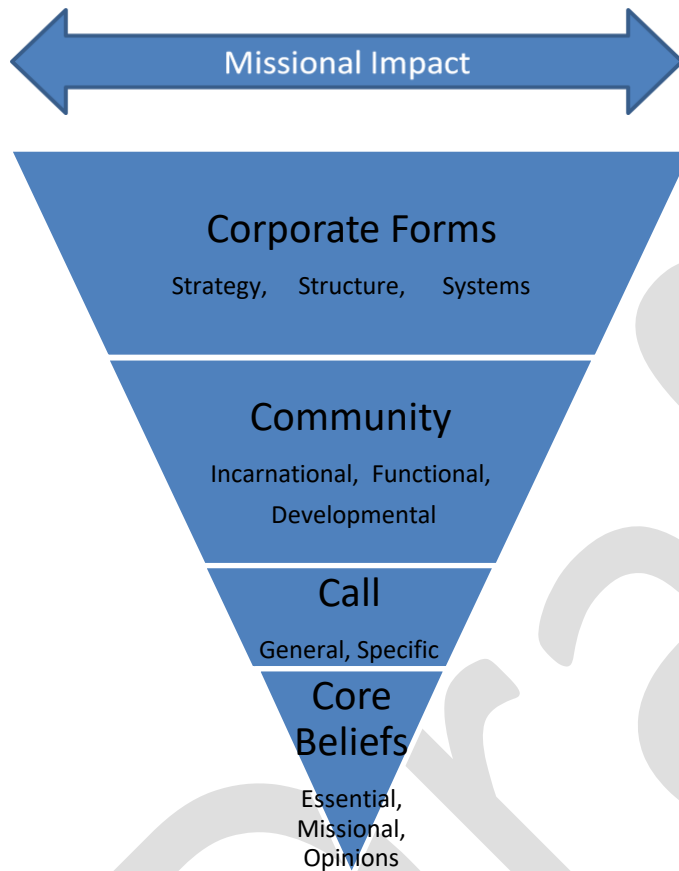
- Organizational Paradigm: The organizational paradigm based on core beliefs, call, community, and corporate forms was found to be a valid analysis framework, and will be modified to harmonize with existing models at the National Office
- Organizational Analysis: The analysis presented suggesting that the denomination is in crisis due to fragmented and conflicting core beliefs, a limited sense of call, a dysfunctional community, and an historical bias against organizational forms was found to be generally valid.
- Developing a Strategic Roadmap: It was determined that the consulting processes proposed, to develop a desired state, current state, gap analysis, and strategic roadmap should be further explored with the regional superintendents

Next Steps

Ron Thomas and the national staff asked Bruce Jones to present this workshop in abbreviated form to the Regional Superintendents during a 4 hour workshop on February 10th, 2009, with the added element of beginning the process of developing a strategic roadmap. Bruce will send a proposed agenda to Ron for revision and approval.

Proposed Biblical Organizational Analysis Framework

In order to analyze the decline and propose a solution, a biblical paradigm or theology of organization of the church is needed. The paradigm presented was as follows:



Explaining the Paradigm

Missional Impact: Broadens in proportion to the rest of the paradigm, the effect of the wholeness of the organic body of Christ

Corporate Forms: How the community goes about accomplishing its call to be the body and function

Community: ekklesia, called out ones, Incarnationally being and Functioning as the body of Christ, Developmentally growing into His fullness

Call: kalew, the general call to the church to be holy, be light, be his body, the particular call to some purpose, based on core beliefs

Core beliefs: rightly categorized and prioritized as Essential to salvation, Missional (purpose), Opinions (allowed to disagree, developmental)

What makes an Organizational Paradigm Biblical?

The primary thing that makes a biblical organizational paradigm different is that it is incarnational rather than merely institutional, wherein Christ is the head, and the church is his body. The organization is biblical when Christ lives out the mission through the community that he has called out of the world and into a living relationship with himself. The community's core beliefs and calling are derived from their organic relationship with Christ. Their identity and function, purpose and mission are His. It is in this relationship that the biblical organization accomplishes his purposes using an aligned set of strategies, systems, and structures, using the community's varying competencies and resources as Christ has arranged them, through faith.

A framework such as that proposed above provides the ability to determine a desired state, current state, and the gaps between the two. A strategic roadmap can be built by determining the leadership and management tasks that are required to move the organization from current to desired state

For a detailed explanation see the document "A Biblical Organizational Paradigm and Analysis Framework Version 1.0"

Organizational Analysis of the Advent Christian Denomination

For a detailed and documented version of this analysis see the document entitled "Organizational Analysis of the Formation of Advent Christian Church version 1.0"

The Organizational Formation of the Advent Christian Church

The Advent Christian Church can be considered a "split" from the Christian Church Denomination, which came out of the Restorationist Movement. It is from this movement that most of the core beliefs and organizational forms of the denomination are derived. The Millerite Movement, always intending to stand alongside the church and call it to repentance, gathered in the more radical Christian Churches into the Adventists in minority.

After the Great Disappointment, most of the moderate Adventists went back to their home churches or never left them, leaving the radical Christian Church Adventists in the majority for the first time. With the Christian Church Adventists now in the majority, there was a battle for leadership with the evangelical/moderate leaders. Whether or not conditional immortality was essential to the Advent Message, and whether or not denominational forms were acceptable became the dividing issues between the two rival camps of leaders. The battle became intense, the sides polarized further, and the Christian Church leaders increasingly radicalized the doctrinal issues they used to attack the existing leadership, further separating the camps. The Christian Church leaders, who had not been involved in the leadership or strategies of the Millerite Movement in its successful days, gained control of the community of Adventists when the moderate evangelical leadership quit attempting to compromise and formed their own organization.

At this juncture, what was needed was for the leaders to create an organizational paradigm more appropriate for a denomination, rather than a Parachurch movement, resolving the conflicting core beliefs, expanding the call to the whole mission of the church, and putting corporate forms in place to support the broader call. This never happened due to the Christian Church Restorationist core beliefs against doctrinal precision and against denominational organization. Instead, the denomination was formed based on a highly radicalized and very limited Christian Church organizational paradigm, intentionally framed against the core beliefs and organizational paradigm of the rival moderate evangelical camp.

The denomination has been in decline in North America since its formation as a result. However, starting in 1920 a trend towards becoming moderate and evangelical began. Today the majority of the denomination is moderate and evangelical. The decline in numbers of churches, attendees, and pastors is becoming critical, approaching a tipping point or crisis.

Summary Organizational Analysis

The formation process left the Advent Christian Denomination with:

1. A deep, limited, paralyzing set of conflicting core beliefs (moderate vs. Christian Church) that prevent unity or united action towards the good of the body of Christ.

2. Conditionalism elevated to a Cardinal doctrine and Test of Fellowship – a legacy of the fight for leadership, driving the moderates out, and continuing to do so
3. A Call insufficient for the church, and more appropriate to a Parachurch organization – to restore a particular doctrinal message to the church universal
4. A Community unable to organize or resolve conflict, dysfunctional, and undeveloped – formed initially by radicalized Christian Church factiousness
5. A fear and deliberate rejection of organizing around the kinds of successful strategies and structure that made Millerism a success
6. A hermeneutical history that establishing any organizational corporate forms that go beyond explicit biblical terms is to become apostate.

Two Likely Future States of the Advent Christian Denomination

The realignment of the Advent Christian Church in the last 30 years to a position where the leadership and the members are in majority moderate and evangelical paves the way for two possible outcomes.

1. The first outcome may be that the crisis of decline is insufficient to motivate change, and the movement loses its sense of distinctive call and either fragments around various localized beliefs and calls, or fades away, as did the parent Christian Church Movement, and as did the Evangelical Adventists.
2. The second outcome could be that the denomination in light of the crisis of decline has the opportunity to reform its radicalized core beliefs (especially concerning the trinity and Conditional Immortality), it's "parachurch" sense of call (to restore the Advent Doctrine to the denominations), and its dysfunctional anti-organizational bias. It has the opportunity to provide leadership to promote movement from the current state to a full biblical paradigm of the church, more aligned to the general call and missional purpose of the church relevant to today's world.

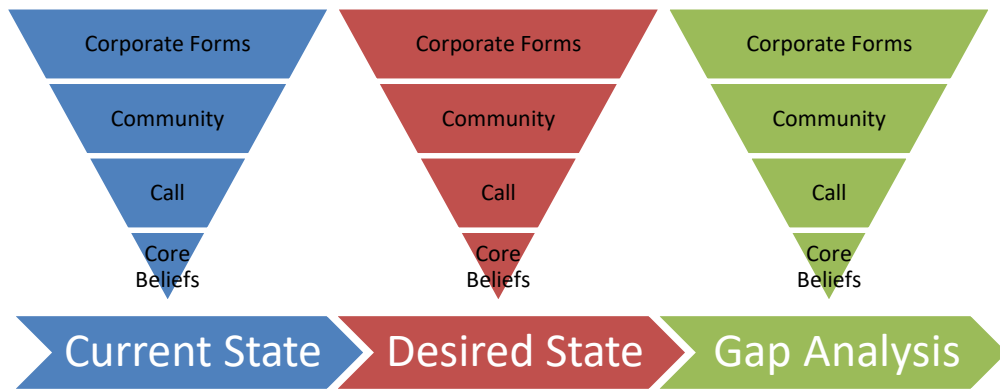
Developing a Strategic Roadmap

Leadership implies moving of a Community from a less desirable state to a more desirable state. Since the church is by nature organic and developmental, strategies should be chosen appropriate to the developmental phases of the organization, and for effectiveness in promoting maturity. The more mature the Community becomes, the more missionally effective it will be. The Roadmap should consist of strategic actions that move the organization forward toward maturity in a prioritized manner.

Step One: Determine what needs to be done

1. Develop a current organizational state analysis of the existing communities in the denomination
2. Develop a desired state organizational state vision

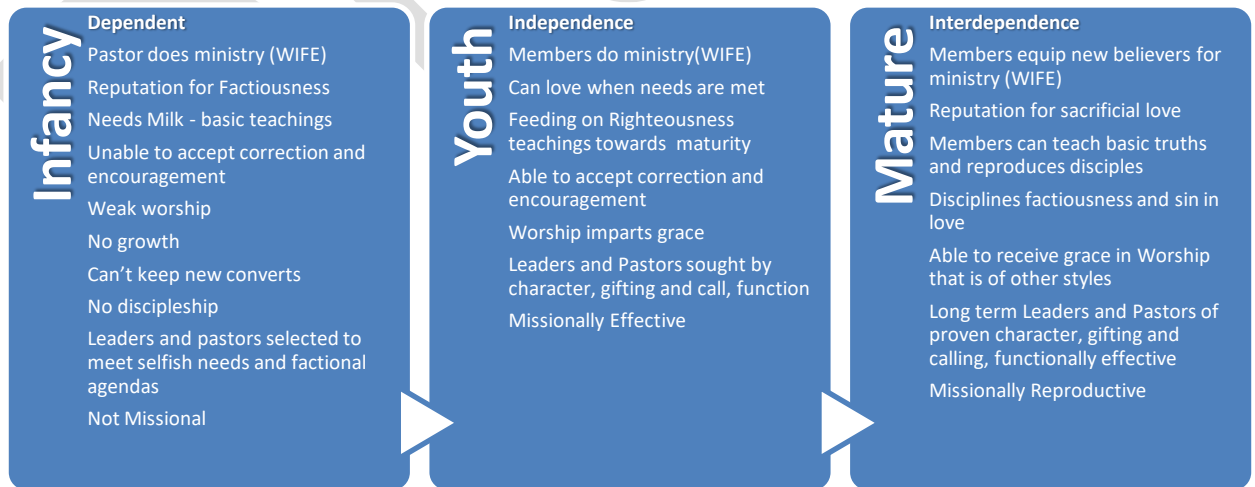
3. Perform a Community Gap Analysis informed by the inputs of the current and desired state analysis



Step Two: Determine what can be done developmentally

Because the church community is incarnational, it is developmental. Care must be taken to develop the church in line with its level of maturity. The output of the Gap Analysis should be used to help determine the level of maturity of the organization, and to provide insight into what is needed to develop the church to its next phase of maturity.

1. Determine the maturity level of the community with respect to the Organizational Paradigm
2. Develop a prioritized list of draft Strategies (assigning resources to tasks to accomplish a goal) that will address the Gaps most likely to develop the organization's maturity and therefore Missional Impact



Step Three: Execution and Management

1. Attempt to Call (Align) the Community to the highest priority strategy based on shared core beliefs, call, and mission.

2. Enlist the Communities that answer the call to determine the specifics of the Systems required for the Strategy: inputs, processes, and outcomes
3. Enlist the Community to evaluate the resources required and the organizational constraints (ability to lead) to determine an initial structure (decision making process)
4. Enlist the Community in creating momentum and credibility by executing on these strategies with small, "Proof of Concept" opportunities, adjusting the strategy, systems, and structure until the desired outcomes occur

Step Four: Scaling Out to the Larger Organization

1. Begin to make the larger denomination aware of the successes.
2. Develop leaders to expand the leadership span of control of the Strategy
3. Evaluate the larger community for similar gap opportunities with aligned core beliefs and call, maturity level, and available resources that could execute a similar strategy
4. Call the Community with similar gap opportunities to engage the strategy

Step Five: Expand on Success

1. As the Corporate Forms mature, leadership resources will be freed up. Engage those resources to the next prioritized Strategy, seeking synergy opportunities to maximize resources and impact

This effort should include the regional Superintendents, and occur over the next two months.

Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations were made during the course of the day.

1. Core Beliefs
 - 1.1. Survey the denomination to determine the categorization of core beliefs (essential, missional, opinions), to determine the current state as to what is believed by the majority of Advent Christians.
 - 1.2. Set a long term goal of adjusting the Declaration of Principles, or create a new Declaration stating what the majority believe today. This should be done with careful
 - 1.3. Closely examine the missional impact of the current “essential” or “vital piety” categorization of the doctrine of Conditional Immortality, and consider alternatives.
 - 1.4. Determine whether or not Conditional Immortality should be considered an essential doctrine (doctrine of vital piety), and a “hill to die on” as a result of its effect in limiting the ability of the denomination to expand its pool of potential pastors
 - 1.5. Determine the impact of the way the current core beliefs of the denomination are presented to potential new members, leadership recruitment, and
2. Call
 - 2.1. Examine the success of the founding call to promote restoration of the doctrines of the Imminent Premillennial Return of Christ and Conditional Immortality to the visible church (and derivative doctrines) to determine whether this call has been fulfilled, and needs to be modified.
 - 2.2. Strategically seek to expand the Call of the Denomination to include the General Call (Biblical Purposes)/Worship, Instruction, Fellowship, Evangelism) of the Church
 - 2.3. Create a Strategic Call to Action based on clear data regarding the impending crisis of decline, and a clear strategy that all will believe is accomplishable
3. Community
 - 3.1. Identify the current sub communities, and what defines them in terms of the Organizational Paradigm. Use these findings to determine the common organizational state, and to provide a framework from which you can successfully influence each community.
 - 3.2. Only promote a call when the called community can believe that the proposal has a good chance of success, and it aligns with their core beliefs and own sense of call.
4. Corporate Forms (Strategy, System, Structure)
 - 4.1. Build Credibility to lead an area of organizational Mission by identifying objections, seeking small, “Proof of Concept” opportunities to overcome the objections and successfully execute the mission, and make that success known in the organization.
 - 4.2. Build Grass Roots Momentum to reach regions or conferences or churches that would not otherwise engage by starting with those opportunities optimally aligned for success based on core beliefs, call, community, and corporate forms, and build on success. An example included the Lead Team concept.

- 4.3. Determine the number of needed pastoral resources to establish 5% growth, and create a proposal containing proven, measurable strategies and systems to increase the pool of qualified leaders to 100 times the number of needed pastors. (Based on the Law of Large Numbers, 1% will respond).
- 4.4. Do not restructure (change the hierarchy of decision making) without in parallel aligning around the lower portions of the organizational paradigm (core beliefs, call, community) in order to prevent unnecessary opposition.

Draft

Organizational Analysis of the Formation of the Advent Christian Denomination

For a detailed and documented version of this analysis see the document entitled "Organizational Analysis of the Advent Christian Church version 1.0"

The Advent Christian Church derives most of its core beliefs from the Restorationist Movement of the early 1800's, and more particularly from a radical split off of the Christian Church Denomination. These core beliefs (individual right of interpretation, creeds are pagan additions to the Bible, no creed but the bible, Bible words for Bible Doctrine, nontrinitarianism, the denominations were the Great Apostasy) were framed *against* the disenfranchisement of the poor and uneducated, and against the "tyrannical" and "apostate" condition of the denominational churches of that day. The leaders of the Christian Church called the apostate Out of Babylon, out of the corrupt churches, into the newly restored, loosely defined primitive church Community. Their corporate forms aligned nicely with their core beliefs and call, consisting of a very loose structure of disempowered state and general "conferences" with no denominational offices or overtones. They believed the true church had become apostate in the fourth century, and that they were the true restored church paradigm.

William Miller, a moderate evangelical with restorationist sympathies, developed a core belief in the imminent Premillennial Second Coming of Christ's call. He shared the belief that the denominations were corrupt, but not apostate. His call was based on these core beliefs, to go where invited, to warn the heavily corrupted church to repent and be prepared for the Second Coming of Christ in 1843. Miller's call was aligned with the core beliefs of the common people, and his scriptural argument was compelling regarding the 1843 date. However, his sense of call was narrowly limited to only go where invited, and he had no strategy, structure, or systems to support his call. Miller saw only local missional success in the churches he was invited to in rural New England.

Millerism exploded into a national movement when joined by a moderate Christian Church leader, J.V. Himes, who had extraordinary gifts in administration, and therefore was a genius in Call and Corporate Forms (Strategy, Systems, Structure). It was Himes that challenged Miller to expand the call from "where invited" to warning the entire nation and the world. It was Himes who developed Millerisms strategies and structures, and who through an unprecedented mass publication and preaching campaigns, gathered Millerite Communities of mostly moderate Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and a minority of Christian Church restorationists into Campmeetings numbering up to ten thousand each, with a total community of perhaps a half a million. The call was a particular or specific call for that time and place, more of a parachurch call, standing alongside the church, calling it to mission of reform. It was not the general call, the call to incarnationally be and function as the church. Miller and Himes never felt called to a mission of starting a denomination. The imminent return of Christ was an essential core belief of crisis, and the two otherwise incompatible groups, the moderate majority, and the restorationist Christian Church minority, could temporarily put aside their animosities and align behind this narrow, shared call to reform, based on common core beliefs in the corrupt status

of the denominations, and the imminent return of Christ in 1834, and the common Corporate Forms that were not denominational in structure, the Millerite Campmeetings.

The Great Disappointment caused most moderate Millerite followers to lose faith in the call of their leaders, because they no longer held with the core belief of the imminent return of Christ. These moderate Millerites quit coming to the Campmeeting Communities. They by and large never left their Methodist, Baptist, and Congregationalist Communities. About 30 to 50 thousand Restorationist Christian Church Millerites however continued in the Adventist Community, some continuing to set dates. What kept them together was their restorationist belief that the doctrine of the Imminent, Premillennial Second Coming was also essential to restoring the primitive church, and that the denominations (Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalists) were still apostate. The organizational paradigm is in great crisis at this point, because the leaders, Miller and Himes and others, did not share the other restorationist core beliefs regarding the apostasy of the denominations, anticreedalism, or that the only test of fellowship was Christian Character. Thus the structure of the remaining Millerites had leaders that held opposing core beliefs and sense of calling. The predictable result is that they would not be able to align the community to further strategies, structure, or systems in support of the mission, and that the community would soon align behind other leaders that called them in line with their own core beliefs and sense of call.

Further, Millerism's core beliefs, call, and corporate forms were very narrow, well suited for a Parachurch organization. Being narrow, they were very insufficient for the full incarnational and missional functions of a complete church organizational paradigm.

Soon, the realignment began. The evangelical moderates attempted to define the Adventist Organizational Paradigm in 1845, with essential core beliefs, call, and corporate forms for the Community based on their past success with the Millerism model for organization. They met with strong, unanticipated opposition from the Community, which was now largely made up of former Christian Church members. New leaders from Christian Church backgrounds emerged, and set up competing Corporate Forms, including publications, campmeetings, and conferences. The new leaders blasted the moderate evangelicals, appealing to the old restorationist core beliefs and call to come out of Babylon. The two sides polarized even further when Miller died in 1849.

Conditional Immortality, a long standing "Opinion" core belief in the Christian Church, had been promoted by George Storrs in 1841 among the Millerites as a restored doctrine of the primitive church, to not much effect as Miller and Himes and the Evangelical majority were not conditionalists, and conditionalism did not play a role in the missional effectiveness and success of Millerism. However, after the Great Disappointment, the leaders of the Christian Church raised the level of this doctrine from "opinion" to "essential" to vital piety, being the reason why Christ was coming again, to impart immortality. They then sought to discredit and disenfranchise the moderate evangelical leadership under Himes on this basis, and on the basis that Himes was moving them towards apostasy by encouraging them to adopt the Corporate Forms of a denomination. The attack was severe and uncompromising, and ultimately successful. While Himes attempted to compromise with the conditionalists, they would not bend. In 1858 Himes and the moderates gave up trying to lead the

Christian Church core belief and call dominated Community, and formed the Evangelical Adventist Denomination.

With the departure of the moderate evangelicals, the Christian Church rapidly consolidated their overall organizational paradigm in line with their existing core beliefs and call, and formed their own denomination in 1860. The effect of the battle over leadership was to radicalize the core beliefs and call of the Community, and the socialist and materialist (God has literal eyes, ears, and the Holy Spirit is a force) theology of Miles Grant, the person who emerged as the dominant leader of the Community, became the core beliefs of the Community. The impact of the use of Conditional Immortality to gain leadership caused this doctrine to supplant the doctrine of the imminent Premillennial Second Coming as the basis of the call to "Come Out of Babylon." Thus the strategy of evangelism for the newly formed Advent Christian Church became one of debating the "apostate mortalists" of other denominations, seeking to convert them to be Adventists. This strategy by and large was unsuccessful.

The new leadership from the Christian Church background also fought the establishment of any other core beliefs, sense of call, and corporate forms based on their core belief in no creed but the Bible, and Bible words for bible doctrines, and in the Great Apostacy. Thus the denomination was born with a very incomplete organizational paradigm, insufficient to the general call of the church. It was predictable that it would therefore be consigned to a future of drift, decline, and fragmentation as varying sub Communities began to fill in the missing pieces of the paradigm.

In contrast to the Advent Christian Church, the Seventh Day Adventists followed a different route. The dominant leader of the Seventh Day Adventists saw that in order for the Community to effectively accomplish the mission of the church, a full organizational paradigm would be needed. The Seventh Day Adventists were also largely comprised of restorationist Christian Church members, holding with the same radicalized core beliefs and call as the Christian Church members who became the Advent Christian Church. However, James White led with a firm hand, and stood up to the "Babylon" argument, insisting that they could not be effective in their call as a church generally if they did not organize. He also led the process of resolving which core beliefs were essential, functional, and optional, leading the Seventh Day Adventists to a Trinitarian essential belief, together with their distinctive doctrines. He also expanded the call of the community to embrace the full general call, and to embrace a new particular call from Ellen G. White around health and the Sabbath. The immediate result was a decline to about 100 in the community. However, this community was energized by this full organizational paradigm, and rapidly grew until today they have over 18 million adherents.

From the death of Miles Grant to the present, the predictable fragmentation and drift of the Advent Christian Church has taken place based on the lack of a complete organizational paradigm, and based on the institutionalization of the core beliefs of the restorationists refusing to define core beliefs beyond stating they are to have *no creed but the Bible*, and simply use *Bible words for Bible doctrine*. Further, the general call of the church has been ignored in favor of the particular call, to restore the doctrine of conditional immortality to the church. The refusal to adopt corporate forms in a unified manner left the Advent Christian Church powerless to follow in the genius of J.V. Himes in concerted missional action.

Even the adoption of the NAE statement of faith by the General Conference does not really constitute a clarification and completion of the core beliefs of the denomination, in that the core belief that refuses to acknowledge denominational authority allows any church that so desires to simply ignore the action.

Efforts to address “holes” in the paradigm have been well intentioned, and effective to a limited degree. Examples include the attempt to promote discipleship, and evangelism through church planting. However, the incompleteness of the paradigm makes it difficult to achieve these missional objectives. For example, it is difficult to define what a disciple is, and what the community needs to be to functionally produce disciples, and how the overall organization can function together strategically and structurally to support the effort.

This incompleteness set the stage for dissatisfaction in the community, and for new leaders to attempt to address the problem by calling the Community around a refined and larger set of core beliefs, and fuller sense of calling to strategic missional action together. As a result, the Advent Christian Church today consists of a number of informal sub communities, each becoming more distinct in their core beliefs, call, and overall organizational paradigm, making the whole difficult to call to unified strategic actions. Further many of these sub communities have more in common with other Communities in Christianity, making loyalty to the Advent Christian denomination less and less of a factor in their choice of organizational alignment. This fact is reflected in the serious decline in attendees of Advent Christian Churches, down to 16,000 and dropping quickly.

Sub communities in the past formed around the paradigms of the Academic Organizations of Berkshire Christian College and Aurora University. With these organizations no longer able to call any significant number of the Community of the Advent Christian Denomination, new communities are forming around new paradigms. These include the paradigms of the Reformed Church, of the evangelical Academic institutions, the church growth or cell church movements, the emerging church movement, particular ethnic communities (Philipino, Hispanic, Black), and a minority still around nontrinitarian, restorationist core beliefs. The traditional core beliefs do not resonate like they used to, and the ability of leadership to call the community to unified missional activities based on these beliefs is waning fast.

This lack of a clear, complete organizational paradigm guarantees missional ineffectiveness, reduces the ability to produce incarnational community life, and promotes instead immaturity, factionalism, and makes the denomination an unattractive Community for new believers, transfers, and for the recruitment and retention of pastors alike. Unless clear action is taken to consolidate, clarify, and complete the paradigm of biblical organization around a common set of core beliefs, call, and mission, the likely outcome will be the departure of some communities around their own paradigm, the decline of others who ignore the insufficiency of their paradigm, and the collapse to a core community around the denominational leadership depending upon the alignment of their core beliefs and call with that community.