

What Is a “Change Agent”?

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Introduction

The term, *change agent*, has been in use at least since 1947 in social psychology circles in reference to those whose task it is to facilitate change in organizations. Lynn Anderson is generally credited with being the first to apply the term to the church, using it to describe himself and others in his 1994 book, *Navigating the Winds of Change* (ACU Press, Abilene, TX). What the social psychologists hope to facilitate in secular institutions, Anderson and his cohorts are doing in (and to) the church of the Lord. Thus, it seems that he has chosen the term advisedly and applied it accurately.

A Bit of History

The current pressures to make changes in the church of Christ did not arise overnight; they have resulted from steady increases over the past half-century. Those earliest change advocates were generally dismissed as liberal extremists and their complaints were recognized for their dangerous digressive implications.

Acceptance of a growing liberal/change element gradually increased from the late 1960s through the 1970s to the point that many congregations and some schools were willing to support and defend men who openly taught error. This trend accelerated rapidly through the end of the century and into the new century, and those cries that were once considered aberrations of extremist elements have now become the norm for a vast segment of the church.

The common mantra of those who have continued moving leftward has been and is: “We don’t like the church of Christ, and we’re going to change it or die trying.” Anderson might have more accurately called himself and his confederates “revolution agents,” for verily they are leading a religious revolution.

Why the Cry for Change?

These fellows justify their clamor for radical change in the church on at least the following factors:

- **Tradition**—They credit mere tradition with several significant practices (e.g., weekly, Sunday-only observance of the Lord’s supper). They would change whatever they assign to tradition.
- **Culture**—They claim that various things generally considered obligatory constants (e.g., exclusion of women from leadership roles) are rooted in first-century “culture” rather than in Scripture. They thus seek to change many Scripturally authorized and mandated practices.

- **Growth**—They claim that the church cannot grow numerically unless it drastically changes. They thereby justify use of various artifices that appeal to fleshly appetites to attract crowds (e.g., concerts by professional entertainers, dramatic productions, et al.).
- **Community image, popularity**—They decry our “community image” (especially our exclusivistic reputation) among the sects. They say we must learn to get along and cooperate with the denominations. The change agents believe the church is way “behind the times” and needs to “lighten up.”

What Changes?

Let me be more specific about their change aims. Are they talking about needed changes in the lives of individual Christians? There is a never-ending need for each of us to examine ourselves constantly and to make necessary changes (2 Cor. 13:5). Were these the changes for which they clamor, we could heartily join their crusade.

Were they calling for changes in optional matters (e.g., meeting times, whether to build or rent a place to assemble, number of songs and prayers in worship assemblies, et al.), we could agree that some changes would at least be permissible (albeit, not necessarily expedient or productive). Since liberals continue to cry for change in the face of great latitude on such items, their lust for change obviously involves more than merely optional matters.

All that is left for the change agents to tamper with is obligatory elements of the Gospel. Sadly, many are so Biblically ignorant that they cannot (or they are so liberal that they **will** not), distinguish between optional and obligatory constituents of the Gospel. Their indiscriminate approach to Bible doctrine serves as a classic demonstration of “mixing apples and oranges.” Verily, apples and oranges are more alike in some respects than some of the things the change agents confuse.

The “Change Agent Checklist” below is by no means intended to be exhaustive, only illustrative, of what makes a “card carrying” change agent tick. He will advocate at least some, if not all, of the following:

- The church is too negative, dogmatic, and exclusive
- The church does not know the meaning of *grace*
- The church is legalistic, pharisaic, and judgmental
- The church must have a “new hermeneutic”
- The church is merely one among many denominations
- There is no such thing as “pattern theology”
- Where the Scriptures are silent we may act and speak
- A cappella congregational singing in worship is not obligatory

- The sinner need not know the Scriptural purpose of baptism
- There are faithful saints scattered among the denominations
- We should recognize denominational members as brethren
- We mistreat women by forbidding them to occupy leadership roles
- God's marriage law has numerous exceptions and loopholes

Astute Bible students who are dedicated to doing all things "according to the pattern" will immediately recognize the enormity and severity of the changes these folk seek. These items, where implemented, will render (and have rendered) systemic, fundamental, constitutional alterations, striking at the very nature and heart of the Christian system. The congregations that have embraced them have, in practicality, lost their identity as churches of Christ.

A Brief Who's Who of Change Agents

It is time to put some faces and names on those who are leading the assault against Zion. We need to understand that error does not have feet, hands, or a tongue of its own. Error is always a hitchhiker, using the feet, hands, and tongues of human beings to spread its poison. For this reason the Lord, Paul, and other inspired writers shrank not from identifying by name at least some of those who taught and/or practiced error and the errors in which they were involved. It is necessary for us to know not only the "what" of error, but the "who" that are diffusing it.

Some become very uncomfortable when names and errors are connected, but it must nevertheless be done. (I could wish that all brethren would get as uncomfortable about the **destructive work** of the change agents as they often get about the **identification** of them.) I do not relish calling names and assessing blame, but the time comes when it must be done. **Surely that time is now.** There should be no "sacred cows" (papers, schools, institutions, or individuals) when God's Truth is at stake.

Space does not allow a long listing, and besides, only God knows everyone who belongs on it. However, there are certain ones who have gone out of their way to qualify for their places on this roster. (I offer my sincere apologies to any who believe they deserve to be enrolled below, but who were omitted.)

- The annual rosters of the Tulsa Soul-winning Workshop (and copy-cat programs), of the now-defunct Nashville Jubilee, of several of the university lectureships, seminars, and workshops.
- Pepperdine, Abilene Christian, and David Lipscomb Universities have for years promoted and protected faculty members (and others whom they have invited to speak on various occasions) who have amply proved themselves to be forceful facilitators in the liberal

conspiracy to work pivotal changes in the church. (Administrators in these institutions first applied their change agent program in their respective institutions and are now using those changed institutions to push their program in the congregations.)

- Lubbock Christian and Harding Universities (see note on Oklahoma Christian University below in connection with *The Christian Chronicle*) are perhaps not as blatant in their defense of digression, but they seem unable ever to issue forth a consistent, certain sound of Truth. They continue to provide platforms for some of the most notorious change agents around. (And when has an administrator of even “our” less liberal universities ever uttered the first peep of concern over the egregious departures of Pepperdine, ACU, or DLU? Even the “less liberal” schools do not always evince much discernment in those invited to **their** campuses.)
- Harding Graduate School of Religion, Memphis, Tennessee, has for several years had men on its faculty (and has therefore produced graduates) who have strong change agent convictions.
- Sunset International Bible Institute, Lubbock, Texas, has for several years employed false teachers on such subjects as grace, the Holy Spirit, and marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Students from this school have wrought much havoc, especially in various mission works throughout the world.
- Max Lucado, preacher at the Oak Hills Church, San Antonio, Texas, and world-renowned author. (I hesitate to list him because he is so far out on the fringe that he does not even consider himself a part of the church any more. However, many gullible folk still fail [or refuse] to acknowledge his utter surrender of the Truth and blindly follow his blind leading.) Because of his outrageous unscriptural behavior and doctrine, he gets my vote for the all-time “change agent’s change agent.”
- Rubel Shelly, preacher at the Woodmont Hills Church, Nashville, Tennessee (do they still stoop to using the designation, *Church of Christ?*), one of the “pioneer” change agents and co-editor of *New Wineskins* (the sole aim of which seems to be the destruction of the restored church).
- Mike Cope, preacher at the Highland Church, Abilene, Texas (yes, regrettably, they still use *Church of Christ*), co-editor of *New Wineskins* and part of the Abilene/ACU change agent consortium.

- *The Christian Chronicle* is the primary voice of the entire change agent complex. This paper, owned and published by OCU, is sufficient evidence to declare that this school is in full change-agent mode.
- ACU Press, owned by ACU, has been a primary publisher of some of the most blatant advocacy books for change, many of which were written by current ACU professors.
- Howard Publishing Company, West Monroe, Louisiana, owned by Alton Howard, was the owner and publisher of *Image Magazine* until its merger with *Wineskins* two or three years ago. Howard has seemed to compete with ACU Press to see who could produce the greatest number of change agent books.
- The preachers and elders of numerous large congregations in metropolitan areas belong on this list. The only way a traveling saint might distinguish most of these churches from full-fledged denominations is by the sign out front. The following is only a partial list of change agent congregations just in the state of Texas: Singing Oaks—Denton; Southside, Richland Hills, Midtown, Altamesa—Fort Worth; Highland Oaks, Preston Road, Prestoncrest, Skillman Avenue—Dallas; Oak Hills, Sunset Ridge, MacArthur, Northside—San Antonio; Highland, Hillcrest, University, Southern Hills—Abilene; Golf Course Road—Midland; Johnson Street—San Angelo; Brentwood Oaks, University—Austin; Southwest Central—Houston; Broadway, Monterey, Quaker Avenue, Sunset—Lubbock. Multiply this list by similar ones in other states and one will begin to see the extent of the change-agent influence.
- Others who have demonstrated strong advocacy for illegitimate change include Carroll D. Osburn, C. Leonard Allen, Bill Love, Randy Harris, F. LaGard Smith, Jeff Walling, Joe Beam, Prentice Meador, Mike Armour, Marvin Phillips, Terry Rush, Calvin Warpula, Buddy Bell, ad infinitum.

Conclusion

The very essence of God's message to men in every age has been a call for them to change. We should therefore urge and welcome change, **but only as dictated by the Word of God.**

The lines have been drawn in this religious confrontation, but those who are faithful saints did not draw them. The Lord did that almost two thousand years ago. The change agents are not content to leave them where He drew them, attempting to remove the ancient landmarks (Pro. 22:28). Consequently, the purity of New Testament Christianity and the salvation of countless souls are at stake. God's faithful people dare not retreat from the battle before us.

More of us must hear the spiritual call to arms and join the fray. Many need to arouse themselves from their indifference and lethargy, and using every honorable and Scriptural weapon, begin fighting for every soul and for every congregation that may still be salvageable.

We will do well to heed Solomon's words of inspired advice concerning change agents: "My son, fear thou Jehovah and the king; And company not with them that are given to change" (Pro. 24:21). The question is not one of **whether** we must cease to have any company with the change agents, but only one of **when**. Some are already so far gone that fellowshiping them would be equivalent to fellowshiping denominationalists. Many others are well on their way down the same broad path, all because of their unmitigated aim of changing the unchangeable.

[Note: I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared as an "Editorial Perspective" in the October 2002 issue of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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