**Vision Development in Strategic Planning**

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**Problem Statement:** *Who develops the church vision – the people of God or the Man of God?*

Much confusion has risen concerning the definition of **“what a vision is.”** In the church context, this confusion is even more complex when making the difference between the ***Pastors Vision*** verses a ***Shared Congregation Vision***. It is therefore necessary to clarify this issue for the sake of Pastors and Strategic Planning Teams/efforts. Dr. Victor Williams of the Faith Community Church of Houston, Texas stated the dilemma best in a recent consultant training when he said, *“the reason this clarification is so important is that the pastor’s identity and authority are wrapped up in it.”* Clearly this caution is advised in that it cuts to the very heart of a pastor’s pastoral leadership and authority in the local church. Proposed in this brief paper is the thought that this dilemma may not be a ***“either – or”*** but a ***“both – and”*** situation. Proposed here is that there may be room in strategy planning for two visions, one being the ***Pastors Vision*** inspired by his calling and illumination of God and a shared ***Strategic Vision*** developed by the people of God, pastor and Holy Spirit in a given strategic planning effort. The fist vision (Pastors Vision) is a unique one between God and Pastor and the second (Strategic Vision) a generated one thru a combined effort of pastor, current leadership and subject matter expert’s representative of the congregation and community.

Perhaps there is even room for a third vision, as if the first two were not confusing enough, i.e. ***Gods’ Vision*** (Matthew 28:19-20) that connects all efforts to His plans and purposes on planet earth and directs itself to His perfect will thru the third person of the trinity – namely the Holy Spirit. God’s vision is directly connected to His Word and Jesus’ plan for His church and its intended ministry in the community in which it finds itself. These three perspective visions relate to one another but do not have to degenerate the focus of either. The diagram below attempts to picture this three-pronged vantage view and suggest that where all three intersect is what might be called a **“Collective Vision”** for the church.

First let’s attempt to define each of these vantage views concerning vision.

**Pastors Vision:**

“A ***Pastor’s Vision*** is a God inspired preferred future of where the church is going considering the pastors calling/gifts & interest, the churches embracement of the great commission and the needs of Gods targeted community. It is a vision born in the heart of a pastor under the illumination of the Holy Spirit and points the primary direction of the church.”*GCP-2013*

**Strategic Vision:**

“A ***Strategic Vision*** is a dream of what a church wants to be in 5-7 years in light of its strategy, community context, collective giftedness and Holy Spirit guided creativeness. It tends to the question ***how do we get it done*** and is under the umbrella of the pastor’s vision.” *GCP-2013*

**Gods Vision**:

“***God’s Vision*** is stated in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and in the intentions of Jesus Christ’ (Act 1:6) for His Church. Teaching the people of God “all things” and “making disciples” (i.e. shaping character/behavior) is at the core of Gods vision for all efforts on planet earth during the church age. The Vision of God is captured in most Church Mission Statements in that it is a *static purpose rather than a changing one*. It is the overall umbrella under which all things fit to establish and nurture the “Kingdom of God” as Alexander McClain would say. This Kingdom expands from eternity past to eternal future and includes all the known revelation from God.” *GCP-2013*

**Collective Vision Mantra:**

“A published vision mantra that captures the churches current phase of development that motivates the people of God and announces to the public the primary focus of the churches efforts toward them. This Collective Vision Mantra works best when it captures the essence of all three visions above and synthesizes them into a succinct motivating statement that illuminates the primary energy and goal of the church. *GCP-2013*

**Pastors**

**Vision**

**Strategic**

**Vision**

**God’s**

**Vision**

***Collective***

***Vision***

***Mantra***

**Collective Vision Mantra:**

A Mantra has at its core *“an expression or idea that is repeated, often without thinking about it, and is closely associated with something.”* In the case of a church the ***mantra is a statement or phrase that captures the essence of the current efforts of the church to make a major impact for the current phase of Kingdom building***. The idea of *“the current phase”* is intentional in that vision mantras are fluid and change as a new vision is cast that portrays the new immediate mountain top that is freshly in view. Using this imagery, what is seen most by churches is the (BHAG) massive mountain just in view but the reality is there may be/are more behind it that are more ominous and challenging. This illustrates the fluid nature of visions and that one level of accomplishment gives way to another as time changes things, ability increases and confidence builds.

I was impressed one year at the Willow Creek Leadership Conference as I heard Bill Hybels tell the story of the new vision that he and Rick Warren were casting for Saddleback and Willow Creek. The vision was to “mobilize the two congregations and their influence/affluence to impact poverty and aids prevention on the continent of Africa.” In the beginning days of Willow and Saddleback it would have been a fantasy to envision such a feat but in the current reality of both congregations’ it is completely doable. In fact, they have the ability to mobilize the Christian church in America to do something that the American government cannot seem to do. This illustrates that there are multiple facets (phases) of vision development and that each new phase must be labeled to focus on its intended accomplishment.

An example Vision Mantra’s for the Saddleback Church might be:

***“Saddleback – Spiritually tending to our beloved community while making a major impact in healing the world from Poverty, Aids and Injustice.”***

***“Being the healing hands of Jesus at home and across the world”***

Spare me the task of explaining to Rick my projection on to his churches vision for these are made up as I write, but they serve as an immediate example of a Vision Mantra that could emerge as a result of the fresh phase of vision development embraced by Rick and Bill. The first statement is longer and expresses an internal thrust (what they will do inside the church and local community) moving on to identify and external global thrust with three targeted areas. The second is shorter in that it invokes the Creator of the Universe (Jesus) into a task (Vision) that they intend to do for Him. The central essence in both statements is the word/concept of “Healing” whether it be body, soul or spirit.

The key questions concerning the Vision Mantra’s are:

* Does it Motivate…
* Does is Invigorate Energy…
* Does it Inspire…
* Is it Understandable…
* Does it Invite Participation…
* Is it Doable…
* Can it be Measured…

**Pastors Vision:**

It’s worth repeating what was alluded to in the introduction of this paper concerning the distinction between a Pastors Vision and Strategic Vision must be acknowledged. To say that this difference is important is an understatement. Ira Antoine noticed among a group of pastors that when this topic emerged in a strategy planning training session the body posture and language change dramatically. Threat might be the key element here in that these leaders went into the classic “fight or flight” mode. What is it that provoked such immediate and intense response? I think it right when Dr. Williams said, “the very identity and authority” of pastoral leadership is at stake.

In the context of spiritual leadership there is a rich antecedent backdrop of Gods involvement with His intended leader and that Vision emerges for the people by a illuminating communication from God. This illumination may be in the form of a dream, a vision, a burning bush, an ass (donkey that is), or directly person to person as in the case of a Christophney. Whatever the mode the leader walks away from the encounter with instructions to engage the people in a direction as instructed by God. Lacking the objectivity of Old Testament direct interventions, the New Testament Leader must largely trust the subjective illuminations of God in pointing the visionary direction. It is this subjective illuminative intervention between Leader (Pastor) and God that must never be minimized or threatened in the strategy planning process. This thought gives way to the definition above in hopes that it captures the essence of pastoral vision and the subjective illuminative process in which it is received.

While here let me explain the usage of the words *Objective* and *Subjective*. By *Objective* I mean that an encounter can be verified by empirical data as in the Word of God. The prophets of old received direct revelation from God (2 Timothy 3:16) and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The visions, encounters, meditations, observations and even thoughts can be said to be objective movements of God under the illumination of the Spirit of God. These objective illuminations/observations made it into scripture and for the basis of the very Word of God. So, by objective I mean that whatever message communicated by God to the Leader in this case is equivalent to scripture. On the other hand, *subjective* illumination is the still private voice between a contemporary leader and God wherein God illuminates His direction (Vision) using the talents, gifts, preparations, and interest of the leader along with the pre-planted gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14; Romans 13) of the people. In the case of subjective illumination, the only verification is that of the leader as he projects forth what ***“thus says the Lord.”***