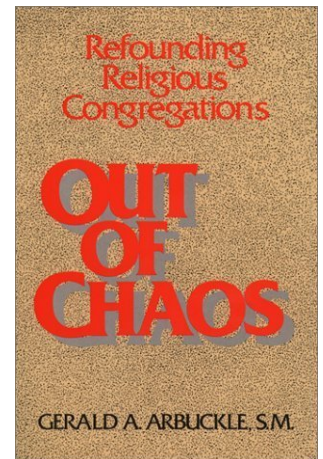


# Review: Out of Chaos – Refounding Religious Congregations

I must admit, I didn't think a 1980s reflection by a Marist brother on the aftermath of Vatican II would be particularly relevant to today's task of dealing with ecclesial torpor. But there is wisdom and insight in this book that plays in the same space as contemporary texts on church leadership and mission action planning, and it does so in a distinct and provocative way.



I've come across Gerald Arbuckle before with regard to pioneering *dissent*. Here the keyword is the need for religious congregations to be **refounded**. "Congregations" in this context are Catholic religious societies dealing with the *chaos* (another keyword) they experienced after the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II occurred in the 1960s, this book was written in the 1980s, bringing with it the insight of a generation's experience.

The applicability in our own generation comes from the fact that the church of the Western World is facing its own existential chaos; our very reason for existence whirls about in a pool of semantics with people swimming in different directions as we begin to differ even on the most fundamental aspects of our *founding myth* (another keyword) or worldview.

What *are* we for? Even today I was referred to a survey that purported to discern the nature and effect of *discipleship* in a region. It was premised on a subjective sense of how the respondents' faith had grown and the "growth activities" they participated in. It's not a bad survey but the *essence* of

discipleship is actually missing. There was no reference to the Great Commission (where we are called to disciple *nations*), no engagement with following Christ on the path of suffering. It appears as subjective semantics with no foundation, chaos artificially blanketed by catch-all words and phrases that cannot tell a story that draws us beyond ourselves. We need *refounding*.

The refreshing difference in Arbuckle's approach is that it is fundamentally *spiritual*. I don't mean in an ethereal contemplative sense, but in the sense that he fully expects that the Spirit of Christ has been, is, and will be forming and preparing his people. This is a Catholic distinctive that we could do well to embrace.

*In salvation history, God permits chaos to develop that people may rediscover that he must be at the very heart of their lives (e.g. see Dt 8:1-4) (Page 3)*

As the Spirit leads us, so he understands that passing through chaos is painful. Refounding involves *suffering*: an antidote to the quick-fix and *cheap* mission action planning that pervades today.

*So this book offers readers no dramatically simple or rapid way to begin and sustain refounding. In fact the road to refounding is a humanly complex and a spiritually painful one, for Christ calls us to a more intimate, privileged relationship with himself, which means being invited to share deeply in the purifying experience of his own suffering. (Page 6)*

But "refounded" is an interesting term. I can see its value over "reforming" which connotes the continuous, ongoing, iterative, day-by-day *semper reformanda*. "Refounding" recognises the passing through of chaos, it reflects a season.

Arbuckle draws on the sociological concept of mythology to explain. "Myth" in this sense doesn't mean vague or imaginary legend, it refers to a founding "story", an "historically transmitted pattern of meanings." When I have come to a new church context I have looked for the "folklore" or "DNA" of the church, to seek to understand where the Lord has led it and is leading it. "Founding myth" is the same thing: it's the *historic story* that gives meaning and order and purpose to a group or congregation. In a season of chaos this story is lost, and *refounding* is not just to rediscover it, but to recapitulate it in a new context, a different world. It is to sing the ancient songs in a new land such that they are heard and joined. "Reconversion" is not an overstatement of how this can be described, as Christ is at the heart of our "founding myth."

Arbuckle's categorisation of "creation/regeneration myth", "character myth", "identity myth", "eschatological myth" and "direction myth" (pages 21-23) are useful in that ongoing discernment of "DNA" and "folklore." They are thoughts that I suspect I will return to.

**The main component** in Arbuckle's thoughts, however, is, I think, the most provocative. He considers that the main actor in the refounding process is not found primarily in councils, committees, working groups, or consultations (such as the many chapter meetings that apparently followed Vatican II), but in "refounding persons", individuals with a particular *charism* gift (page 89) to call the group to its reconversion.

Arbuckle appeals to a management speak of "pathfinders, problem solvers, and implementers" (page 30) that is now outdated. More helpfully, though, he looks to the OT role of *prophet* as exemplars of what he means. There is a pattern: from a season of chaos that is allowed by God "to develop as the preface or catalyst for a marked creative faith response from his chosen people" (Page 50), God calls the people, through his prophets, back to the "regenerative myth" in which

they repent and trust in the Lord's power alone.

*Every time the Jewish people experience chaos or weariness and then resurrection to test Yahweh's love, they relive the primal events of their creation in sacred time. (Page 50)*

These refounding prophets are therefore "Israel's creative, dynamic and questioning memory" (page 57) who simultaneously criticise the people for the gap between the vision of who they are and their reality of who they have become, and energise the people to bridge that gap through faith by giving them hope (page 58).

*The prophets reject the distorted culture in which they live, for they measure it against the vision they know can and should be realized, if the creation myth is taken seriously...*

*They break through the chaos of confusion, of numbness and denial, by pointing out the way the people must go in order to return the culture to Yahweh-centered foundations. (Pages 58-59)*

He takes this thinking, applying it to his post-Vatican II situation, and then generalises to consider the "role of the refounding person." The description is apt:

*There is a fire in these people, a Gospel radicality that inspires the converting, disturbs the complacent, the spiritually lethargic, those who deny chaos both inside and outside themselves and those who compromise with worldly values. They can be feared, like all innovators, because they dare to push back the frontiers of the unknown – chaos, a world of meaninglessness – in the name of Jesus Christ. (Page 88)*

And he summarises their characteristics (Pages 96-97). They are close to people, especially the poor, and with a finger on the pulse. They exercise creative imagination and perception

as to how “people... are starved of Gospel values” and “they are able creatively to construct new ways to respond to this deprivation.” They are committed to hard work. They are committed to small beginnings. They tolerate failure. And they are community-oriented; like the prophets before them:

*Prophets are not loners, even if they are marginalised or threatened with death by the people for whom they work; they earnestly seek to summon the people into the deep covenant communion with one another and with Yahweh. (page 59)*

Now all of this *could* be a disconcerting propensity to look for “supermen” and “superwomen” to come and refound us, a guru mentality that speaks more of worldly celebrity than anything else. But where we might look for “super-apostles” Arbuckle wants us to look for a genuine apostolicity.

He recognises that the refounding charism is predicated on a level of faith (helpfully enumerated on page 99) that expresses a “driving selflessness” made manifest only through a union with Christ in his suffering. He posits “a shattering failure, or rejection by one’s own congregation” as a near necessity to deal with pride and to allow a “refounding person an ultimate jump into a more perfect faith, a faith that moves one into the darkness of belief and away from one’s own false securities” (pages 105-106). Such persons are often marked by loneliness and “a strong urge to escape the prophetic responsibility” (page 106).

The reality is that we all know people like this; we look up to them, and as we grow we begin to realise the cost they have counted and respect them even more. They are not gurus, but gifts to God’s church.

The detail of Arbuckle’s treatise goes into further description, even advice, for refounding persons, and also their superiors. He puts a significant amount of work into

analysing the cultures of contexts and considering where relational and structural facilitation may or may not be effective. But above all, he recognises that there will likely be **conflict** between the refounding persons and their superiors

He notes that true refounders do not deliberately bring discord, but also recognises that the inherent passion and charism will “inevitably cause tension, difficulties, and even conflicts” (page 107). In the face of rejection he urges the refounder towards prayerful discernment and submission, but without quenching the fire. Different authority lines can be pursued, and withdrawal “to a new congregation or reform within a tradition” might be necessary because “religious life does not demand an absolute commitment” (page 109). This is strong, refreshingly unusual stuff.

For the superior authority figure, Arbuckle urges them to recognise, release, and cover the prophets that God will raise up. This is an obligation on the superior who might otherwise risk quenching the Spirit. This counters an attitude that suggests the role of the Superior is to repress, so as to ensure the prophetic refounder may emerge from that repression with a seemingly-helpful humility and holiness. Arbuckle rightly counters that such an attitude is dangerously simplistic (page 118) and effectively pharisaical. Yes, discernment is needed, but in the end the refounding should not be quenched.

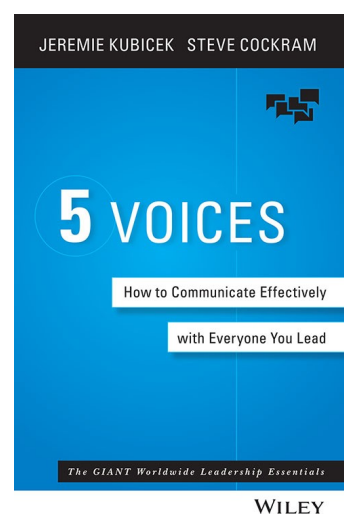
Throughout history, anything charismatic has always been a point of concern and fear for churches and ecclesial organisations. We’ve all seen excesses of exuberance. We are quick to counter with common sense, and to speak from the known. But Arbuckle is right, in times of chaos what is known is fleeting and we need to re-find our foundations. We know what they are in the abstract – biblical Truth, salvation in Christ, the present and coming Kingdom of God. But grasping them, embracing them, embedding them, being *rooted* in them

and *living* them is simply something the church is not doing very well. Whether you call them prophets or apostles or refounders or reformers, we *do* need godly men and women, who have been led through refining fire, through whom God will minister to and lead us. Inasmuch as they bring us to Jesus, they should be recognised, supported, released, and even followed, out of the chaos that so marks our time.

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## Review: 5 Voices – How to Communicate Effectively with Everyone You Lead

Personality type inventories and leadership style analyses are a common tool in leadership and management circles. I'm sure this is the case in the business sector. It is certainly the case when it comes to churches and non-profits, with our high volunteer basis, and our emphasis on vocation and personal engagement.



Over the years I have become familiar with Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), DiSC, Personality Plus, and even some of the more esoteric ones such as Enneagram and Motivational Gifts.

I have recently come across Colour Energies which appears to be a condensed version of MBTI and is apparently growing in popularity in management circles. Each has a different focus on nature or nurture, or things such as innate personality and context. All have a fundamental grounding in an understanding

of the human psyche as individuals and as a team or system. All have something useful to contribute, but some more than others.

And now, on a recommendation, I have picked up a book on the 5 Voices. The focus is a link between personality types with communication in a team dynamic. There's a clear application built into the premise (the subtitle says it all) and this is useful. The authors continually point out the benefit of their readers knowing "what it is like to be on the other side of them" (p17).

The Five Voices are, in order of "loudness:"

**NURTURER** – "Nurturers are champions of people and work to take care of everyone around them... They are always concerned about the relational health and harmony of the group... They are completely committed to protecting values and principles... They innately understand how certain actions, behaviours, or initiatives will affect people." (p31)

**CREATIVE** – "Creatives are champions of innovation and future ideas. They are conceptual architects and are able to see how all the pieces fit together... Creatives are never satisfied with the status quo; they always believe it can be better... They are like an 'early warning radar system' and can see the opportunities and dangers of the future before everyone else." (pp33-34)

**GUARDIAN** – "Guardians are champions of responsibility and stewardship... They respect and value logic, systems, order, procedure, and process... They have a selfless capacity to deliver the vision once it has been agreed... Guardians guard what is already working." (pp35-36)

**CONNECTOR** – "Connectors are champions of relationships and strategic partnerships... They rally people around causes and things they believe in... Connectors believe in a world where everyone can play and get excited about future

opportunities... and they work to make it happen... They are usually persuasive and inspirational communicators.” (p39)

**PIONEER** – “Pioneers are champions of aligning people with resources to win or achieve the objective... They approach life with an ‘Anything is possible!’ attitude... Pioneers believe visioning a new future is always the highest priority... Pioneers brings strategic military-like thinking to achieve the agreed objective.” (p41)

As a simple personality inventory, this system is somewhat lacking. Unlike MBTI and DiSC, for instance, where the categories *derive* from a fundamental framework (the psychology of processing information in MBTI, the interplay of task-or-person focus and empowerment in DiSC) the five voice categories seem a little *arbitrary*.

Author Steve Crockram talks about his desire to “repackage” the 16 MBTI personalities (page x), but this is not that. How do you condensed 16 into 5 in a way that maintains the integrity of its derivation? And besides, that work has been done: there is so much material on, for instance, how NF’s interact with ST’s. It is telling that in some of their subsequent analysis they feel the need to *split* the Creative voice into Creative-Feeler and Creative-Thinker (p115).

Similarly, at other times, they need to *combine* the Nurturer and Guardian voices into a single entity. There isn’t a consistent framework, a derivation to look back to in order to justify their conclusions, or reach forward to new ones. The voices are presented as simply “what is”, a product to buy into, or otherwise.

The spiritually minded could perhaps attempt a mapping from APEST/Pentagon/Fivefold terminology: Apostle = Pioneer, Prophet = Creative, Evangelist = Connector, Shepherd/Pastor = Nurturer, Teacher = Guardian. But this is tenuous.

I think this is why I found myself pushing back at some of the over-simplifications. For instance, the Nurturer voice could easily be caricatured as maternalistic, always ready with the empathy. But Nurturers (as an expression of their *nurturing*) also know how to exhibit “tough love”, avoid mollycoddling, and to break symbiosis or transference. They can be *champions*, not just wetnurses. Similarly Pioneers are caricatured as militaristic generals, ready to roll over the top of other people for the sake of the goal. But Pioneers (as an expression of their *pioneering*) also know that bringing the people with them is not just part of the goal, but integral to it. Creative voices can be quiet, but not always so!

Nevertheless, the **benefit of the book is significant** and it lies, as mentioned, in the area of communication and team dynamics.

The first benefit is that of self-awareness, not only of yourself, but of others in your team. The descriptions of each voice throughout ask questions such as “What do they bring at their best? What questions are they really asking inside?” and considerations of likely negative impacts. They also encourage you to not only work out your *foundational voice* (and so understand your weaknesses and limitations) but also your *nemesis* voice that you will often fail to hear, and often fail to reach.

They suggest “Rules of Engagement” for staff meetings and the like, because there’s “no such thing as accidental synergy” (p128). Having a speaking order of Nurturers, Creatives, Guardians, Connectors, and Pioneers makes internal sense to their system, as well as the assurances and challenges that are put before each voice.

I’m not entirely convinced; for instance, it’s not just about ensuring that the louder voices wait their turn, it’s also about a dynamic in which the quieter voices are willing to

step up, in which case something like Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team might be a better place to start.

Nevertheless, they fully acknowledge that their Rules of Engagement might (initially) feel a little contrived. The unpacking of the sort of "weapon" each voice brings to a dysfunctional table is useful as a description.

*All the weapons deployed every day in any environment where human beings interact. Usually, teams simply accept friendly fire and allow the Nurturers to care for the wounded without analyzing what's really happening. But where the use of weapons remains unchallenged, teams function at far below their true potential. Where team members understand the impact of their weapons system and become intentional in how they deploy it, team culture and productivity will change immediately for the better. (p108)*

Similarly helpful is the role of each voice in vision casting and change management. The gap between Creative/Pioneer and Nurturer/Guardian is stark, and the alignment of each with progressives and conservatives respectively is well-made. The role of the Connector voice in keeping the two ends together is no mere "piggy in the middle" here, but a crucial part of the dynamic.

*In a perfect world, Pioneers and Creatives would be out on the front lines, focused on and exploring the future possibilities. Connectors would be trying to message the opportunity, getting everybody on the same page and fully aligned. Nurturers and Guardians are connected and engaged but invariably towards the back because they want to make sure it's safe and that the people, money, and resources are being taken care of. (p169)*

All of this can help the reader to analyse their team health, be self-aware of their own voice, and the voice of others, and to avoid being an unnecessary contributor to dysfunction.

What it doesn't do is give you a real way forward in how to deal with dysfunction.

This could have been explored. For instance: How do you deal with a disconnect, when all have retreated to their castles?

How do you deal with an other-voice leaning team, when you're well outside of your energising 70/30 principle situation in which you are using your natural voice 70% of the time (p155)? How do you go about motivating team health from an empowered position, a disempowered position, an oversight position, or a "leading-up" position?

To the extent that the 5 voices can provide a common vocabulary, and be a catalyst for personal and interpersonal reflection, it remains a useful resource. Despite its weaknesses, it's a worthy addition to the menagerie of leadership style products. Add it to the mix, and use it when it's useful.

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## Can Churches Be Too Churchy?

What is a church? I don't mean as a denomination, or as a theological entity. I mean in terms of the *local* church: the St. Somebody's that's in the town, or village, or just down the street. What is it?



It's a place of worship, for sure (one hopes). For many it's where the milestones of life – births, marriages, deaths – are marked and solemnified. And, of course, it's not just a

building but a community which provides fellowship, companionship, and belonging.

But all of this only speaks to one aspect of the local church.

In technical terms, this is the church as a *modality*: the universal church expressed in a local mode. Each particular geographical place is cared for by one local expression of the one church. It's why we think of "parishes" and why even non-established denominations still have local congregations with the name of the town in their own name.

But there is another aspect of church. In technical terms, it is the church as a *sodality*. This aspect reflects more of the sense of a church as a *movement*. The word itself comes from the latin *sodalis* meaning "comrade" and so portrays a group of people moving with common purpose. When we think of things such as monastic orders and mission agencies we are thinking of sodalities.

There has often been tension between the two: from historic power plays between monasteries and local bishops, through to a local pastor bemoaning yet another appeal for energy and resources from a parachurch organisation.

But my reflection here is about this: **our churches are too churchy.** The *modal* aspect has become the overwhelming characteristic; we need to learn to act more like sodalities, like *movements*, like purposeful communities.

To be sure, there are many blessings in modal ministry. At its best the church acts truly as the community's chaplain.

It is a steady presence, available in season and out of it.

It is a refuge for people with busy lives. It's a place where the solace of word and sacrament are regularly offered for regular folk. It is a provider of pastoral care, particularly for those who would otherwise be forgotten.

In this, those who serve the church (in everything from flowers to singing) can rightly see themselves as also serving

the community in which the church exists.

But the purely modal church has missed something major: the church's task is not simply to serve the world, but also to *change* the world. There have always been those who have caught a vision for some sort of renewed mission, evangelism, or social activism. And many times they have found the local church unwilling or unable to embrace this form of movement, and they have formed a parachurch organisation.

A consequent phenomenon is the "hidden" mission of volunteerism. Christians are by and large excellent volunteers, devoting resources and energy to worthy causes. They will give time and energy to the church in its modal chaplaincy mode. And they will also give much time and energy to "sodalities": other charities, agencies, and programmes that bless and build the wider community. This is excellent in so many ways! But it does mean that the various forms of activism are *divorced* from church life; they are merely competing opportunities to serve. A volunteer can serve the church, or they can seek to change and bless the world by volunteering with other groups; the two don't go together. I have known a congregation where a significant section of the membership was doing wonderful good works together through another organisation but this common movement was simply not a factor in how they worshipped and shared in fellowship. The church simply did not matter for that part of their lives.

These days it is further amplified. As the church's chaplaincy role in society wanes, so service to the church begins to feel more and more like self-serving. Anecdotally, there is an increasing number of those who are "done" with church. They want to serve the Christian community, but towards an *end*. Without that missional movement, the church seems self-referential. Things like, "we were just playing at church," "we were talking the talk but not walking the walk", "devoted to Sundays and nothing else", "we just never *did* anything", "a nice friendly church that in the end was an

inch deep” is the sort of language that gets used. It is usually a justifiable critique.

The reflection is simple: a local church must recapture a sense of “sodality”, not content to simply just *be* in the place, but to be an *active movement*. Collectively, a church must be seeking to answer the question of how it is being called to engage, confront, and improve the world. It must therefore not just offer solace, but also good and godly *provocation*. It must be more than a place of solidity, but a generator of *instability*, of discontent with the status quo, providing the tools, language, and opportunities to push ahead down gospel-shaped paths. The church needs to not just be a worthy end of charitable acts (amongst many) but an effective *means* for them. We must be a movement, shedding our churchiness so that we can truly be the church of God.