

Spiritual freedom in concrete form (Acts 1:15-17, 21-26)

In Acts, the gospel takes on organizational structure.

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The body language of the church communicates the gospel—through the movements of the body of Christ, the way people get together and worship God and offer their lives as a blessing for the world. “The church knows God by revealing him,” explains Dom Sebastian Moore in *God Is a New Language* (1967). “She does not know God first and then pass on what she knows. Her style of knowing depends on, is, her bodying-forth of the eternal Word.”

The gospel is a bodily reality. The church is the body language of God. How we organize our worship and fellowship communicates the gospel.

In the first chapter of Acts we glimpse organizational decision-making in the newfound church. The disciples look for a replacement for Judas Iscariot, who abandoned Jesus’ movement. There is something important about continuing with the structure Jesus established—that there would be 12 apostles to give shape to the rest of the people. They select Matthias by casting lots.

And a few chapters later, after the Jesus movement picks up speed with the events at Pentecost, we find another organizational development for the people of God. In Acts 6 we read about the appointment of seven people to care for the needs of the community—including Stephen, the early church martyr.

The gospel takes on organizational structure. The movement of Jesus takes on a shape. The freedom of the Spirit becomes a form of life. God creates a way of life, organized in such a way as to care for the people who join the movement. Freedom and form are not opposites. In Acts we learn how the freedom of Christ takes on a concrete form, with leaders, with strategies for organization, with ways of relating to one another and dealing with conflict and discerning God's will. All of this is the flow of the gospel in the world.