

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

**And the Lord Added to Their Number Daily:
A Historical Overview of the Growth of the American Evangelical Church**

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of Arts Worship Studies Degree

by

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Chapter One

Introduction

Of the many mysteries of God, one that is equally humbling and strengthening, directly impacting the entirety of human history and all that is to come, is God's allowance and invitation for mankind to come alongside and join Him in His plan and works. Philippians states, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (2:13, New American Standard Bible).¹ From the outset of Genesis, mankind is created in the image of the trinitarian God, declared "very good," and told to procreate and hold dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:26-31). In this context, humanity shares aspects of both function and intrinsic nature with God, and as McConville suggests, the exercise of divine rule on the earth is not merely a delegated task but rather a representative role that man is called to undertake. Only one who is like God can represent Him.²

However, as the work of Genesis soon furthers, mankind's representation of his Creator and continuation of His work quickly falls short (Gen. 3). As the fall of the first Adam occurs, God instantly sets into motion a quest to rescue and redeem humanity once again to Himself, culminating in the incarnation, mission, sacrificial death, and magnificent resurrection of Jesus Christ, the "New Adam" (Heb. 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:45). It is Christ who then sends out His disciples and all who put their hope of salvation in His Name to be the salt and light to a lost and dying world (Matt. 5:13-16). It is the body of believers that gathers together in Jesus' name, the Church, to continue the imperative mission of Jesus.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New American Standard Version (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995).

² J. Gordon McConville, *Being Human in God's World: An Old Testament Theology of Humanity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 25, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Before the resurrected Jesus ascended into Glory, He commanded His eleven remaining disciples to go out amongst all the earth and share His teachings and make further disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:16-20). Thus, it follows that a result of such evangelism and discipleship efforts would promote numerical growth and community. The entirety of believers may be known as the ecumenical church and is also known throughout the New Testament as the body of Christ. The term "church" has also become known as a denotation for a local congregation of believers.³

David Goodhew introduces his theological work in which he consolidates numerous essays authored on church growth by leading scholars of differing theological traditions. He states, "the drive for numerical church growth has become common recently among denominations, clergy, and local churches. Such concern is becoming ever more urgent amidst significant congregational decline, especially amongst historic churches working in the west such as Anglican, Methodist, reformed and Roman Catholic churches."⁴ This congregational decline was witnessed in the decennial publication of the United States' Religion Census, which showed a decline in attendees from both the Roman Catholic Church and those in many evangelical Protestant denominations.⁵ The Christian Century Foundation also details this decline and notes that "the Pentecostal Holiness family is now the only stream of the growing Christian tradition"

³ David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 4, Taylor Francis Group eBook Library.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ Association of Religion Data Archives, "U.S. Congregational Membership: Reports," *2010 Religious Congregations and Membership Study*, 2010, <https://thearda.com/rcms2010/>, accessed March 14, 2021.

within the United States.⁶ It is also of note that while the church is declining in the modern West, it proliferates in many other places around the globe.⁷

Statement of Purpose

This paper is positioned out of concern for the perceived general decline in church growth, curiosity for what is encouraging growth in the American Pentecostal Holiness denomination and other world areas, and a keen interest in aiding the church. This work seeks to investigate the elements that encourage or hinder growth for the purpose of aiding the modern church in its mission to reach the unchurched and make disciples of Jesus Christ. This thesis gives attention to numerical growth, as well as other intrinsic aspects of spiritual growth that are of great importance and consequence to the individual, congregation, and the surrounding community.

Research Questions

The first research question seeks to determine what catalysts God has used to grow His church within Scripture and the church's history. Both New and Old Testaments will be studied to seek common elements among communities of faith that contributed to growth both numerical and spiritually intangible. A survey of the history of the Christian church will also provide further insights as cultures and societies have undergone drastic changes, which have affected the Church both positively and negatively.

The second question examines any detriments to church growth that arose during these eras. The ancient Israelites, those of Jewish faith, and the Christian Church have been forced to

⁶ David A. Roozen, "Negative Numbers: The Decline Narrative Reaches Evangelicals," *The Christian Century*, Vol. 130., Is. 25. (December 11, 2013). Gale in Context: Biography.

⁷ Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 4.

combat numerous impediments to worship, fellowship, and a right relationship with God. By identifying these detriments, the modern Church can be aware of such dangers, allowing for the preparation and education of members to withstand temptation and potential pitfalls. The final research question seeks to compile and synthesize the information gleaned from the entirety of the research study in an attempt to ascertain beneficial lessons or strategies that modern churches may use.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that elements that encourage the growth of the church include: corporate worship, community fellowship, musical styles, evangelism, discipleship, prayer, and preaching. It is further hypothesized that detriments to growth will include idolatry and persecution. It is hoped that this study will prove significant in aiding congregations to fulfill the Great Commission in spreading the gospel message in their communities, nations, and around the world. While numerical growth by way of conversions of faith and additions to church attendance is substantial, this study will also seek to show the importance of growth in other less quantifiable ways, such as personal spiritual development, continuing discipleship efforts, and the fruits of the teaching of correct theology, and the positive transformation of lives, families, and communities.

Core Concepts

Theological Concepts

This work is rooted in the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Therefore, foundational Christian doctrines are assumed to be true. Thus, first and foremost, it is imperative to have a correct theology of the One whom Christians' worship. The religion is monotheistic yet is

centered around a Triune God consisting of three parts: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures are considered the Living Word of God, which instructs, teaches, and has the power to transform the reader. Christianity assumes the following truths pertaining to Jesus Christ to be valid: the divine birth (Incarnation), the teachings shared, the sinless life exhibited, His atoning sacrifice for the sin of all mankind via His death by crucifixion, His miraculous Resurrection from the dead, and His future Second Coming.⁸

As the Lord of creation reveals Himself, allowing mankind to know Him personally, the instinctive response is one of worship.⁹ If the growth of the church is important to God, be it numerically by the conversion of souls to Christ or spiritually as men and women delve into a deeper relationship with Him, it stands to reason that worship would have a positive impact on growth.

The worship of God must be trinitarian in nature. Dwight Vogle explains that this means that “in worship, the community of faith embodies the paschal mystery centered in Jesus Christ. In worship, the community of faith becomes aware of the presence of the Holy [Father]. In worship, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be in relationship with God, each other and the world.”¹⁰ Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, worship is lifted up and presented to God through Christ Jesus. God receives and accepts the believers’ praise through the Son’s sacrifice.¹¹

⁸ "Christianity," *History*, A&E Television Network, Aug. 3, 2021, <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/history-of-christianity>

⁹ Vernon M. Whaley, *Called to Worship: From the Dawn of Creation to the Final Amen*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 3.

¹⁰ Dwight W. Vogel, “The Depth Dynamic of Christian Worship: A Trinitarian Perspective,” *Worship*, Vol. 76, No. 4, (2002): 323.

¹¹ Whaley, *Called to Worship*, 308.

Specifically, this work focuses upon the Holy Scriptures, the Early Church through the Medieval era, and follows the movement of various awakenings in Protestant faith after the Reformation. Though there have been many denominations that have distinguished themselves within Protestantism, no one denomination will be followed, but rather the evangelical tradition shall be studied as a whole. While the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox, and other branches of Christianity have seen their own growth or decline, the study of these denominations is beyond the scope of this work.

Philosophical

It is also essential to indicate that the church has endured against a backdrop of evolving cultural norms and philosophical viewpoints that at times stand in contradiction to the Christian faith. Several influential philosophers have struggled with epistemological concerns that have shaped eras throughout history. It is of note that the current academic climate in much of elite, western society has embraced a secularization theory that has dismissed religion, Christianity in particular, as a fading practice. David Goodhew believes that numerous church leaders and theologians have internalized this mindset and by doing so perpetuate a theology of decline. Due to this unfortunate perspective, Goodhew believes it is "difficult to find major twentieth-century theologians who strongly value the numerical growth of local congregations."¹²

¹² Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 31.

Definition of Terms

Church

P. L. Metzger defines "church" as "the community of the Triune God, serving as the concrete manifestation of the eschatological kingdom in the world."¹³ While this term is also synonymous with physical buildings and properties that house the meetings, this study will focus more on the community of God's people who share a common worship of Jesus as the Christ. This term, designated in the New Testament as *ekklēsia*, is the Greek word for "assembly" found within the Septuagint.¹⁴

Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism is a term commonly utilized when referencing the doctrines and history of an emerging section of Protestants that were distinguishable in the modern period and spread to five continents within three centuries. While "evangelical" identified the churches that formed during the Reformation, the origins of modern evangelicalism are rooted in the Great Awakenings within the North Atlantic region. The teachings of the movement center upon Christ's sacrificial death and atonement of sin, the necessity of a personal conversion experience, and the drawing of laity into Bible study, small-group fellowship, prayer, testimony, and singing. The belief in the assurance of the forgiveness of sins produces the confidence for Christian mission efforts that compel evangelicals to travel to the farthest reaches of the world to preach the gospel's message.¹⁵

¹³ P. L. Metzger, "Church," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Treier, and Walter, A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ B. Hindmarsh, "Evangelicalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Treier, and Walter, A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), accessed August 14, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Evangelize

The International Congress of World Evangelization at Lausanne which met in 1974

defined evangelize as follows

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world.¹⁶

Growth

A multifaceted approach is taken to the concept of growth within this paper. While much attention has been given to the numerical growth of members within local congregations in the last century, there are many other factors to consider. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, considered growth in the Christian life "as a three-fold balance, entailing growth in personal holiness, growth in societal transformation, and the numerical growth of church congregations."¹⁷ Thus, the growth referred to within this paper entails the positive spiritual, societal, and ecumenical transformations found within the Christian church as well as the numerical growth of converts to local congregations.

¹⁶ T.P. Weber, "Evangelism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁷ Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 5.

Research Plan

A qualitative research design was utilized to conduct an in-depth literature review concerning the history of the early nation of Israel and the history of the Christian church to ascertain what elements contributed to the church's growth. Chapter Two uses numerous sources from current literature to examine the elements that encourage or hinder growth. Scripture forms the earliest literature concerning believers who formed the earliest congregations. The Early Church, which consisted of believers in the recently resurrected Christ, experienced explosive growth, evidenced by the writings of several of the apostles. While much of the church was persecuted in its infancy, it earned vast political clout with Emperor Constantine's declaration that Christianity would be the official religion of the Roman Empire. The added element of social acceptance, power, and the spread of false teachings caused spiritual decay in the church.

This decay continued to spread throughout the Middle Ages, ultimately leading to the Reformation. Many spiritual leaders were influential during the Reformation, which led to several avenues of study in the church's growth among different countries. Christianity spread throughout the world mainly via colonization and missiological efforts, which led to the study of growth on a global scale amongst several different people groups and cultures.

Many scholars agree that there have been several Great Awakenings in which God brought revival and the spread of the Gospel caused considerable societal transformation. These Awakenings, as well as other Revival Movements that have typically occurred at various points and locations since the late 1800s, will give another perspective on the growth that occurs as God awakens and equips His servants to accomplish His will. Finally, a study of the Jesus Movement has been a source of influence on musical styles within the church. This portion of the study also progresses forward to the present.

Chapter Three discusses the research plan and explains the design of this qualitative study. A historical, phenomenological, and descriptive method is utilized and expounded upon in this chapter. Elements that have attributed to or hindered the growth of the church are summarized in chapter three. The consequences of these elements and what happened culturally and societally due to growth, or the hindrance of growth, are highlighted.

Chapter Four will involve scrutinizing data collected through the literature review to determine how certain elements used in the history of the Christian church can be used to grow the modern church. Lessons learned from church history are presented. Any methods and elements that the modern church has utilized will be reviewed in light of the research to determine if any of these elements or methods should be re-evaluated in Biblical teaching or lessons gleaned through church history. Finally, any modern elements that have strayed too far from what distinguishes the church from the culture in which it is positioned are examined and brought to light.

Summary

Using a literature review involving Scripture and scholarly publications, a qualitative study focuses upon the spiritual, ecumenical, and numerical growth of the church, a diverse, yet unified, body of believers in Jesus Christ. Theological discussions, historical observations, and accounts have been compiled and studied to ascertain practical lessons that the modern church can use to achieve growth. Ultimately, historical accounts and sound theological principles serve to strengthen the mission of the church to reach the masses with the gospel of Jesus and transform lives and communities in which God has placed each individual believer or local congregation.

Chapter Two

Introduction

When speaking of growth, be it physical, spiritual, numerical, or in any other variety, it must be stressed that "any growth worth having comes from God and is not the work of human hands."¹⁸ As David Goodhew believes, "numerical church growth is the work of God, but humans are meant to contribute to that work. Furthermore, that contribution includes the work of theology."¹⁹ Thus, the beginning point of this work will focus on theology and the history of God's workings through His creation to bring forth a growth worth having.

Theology relating to spiritual and numerical growth will be studied throughout Scripture and the history of the Christian church. The Protestant path will be followed as it diverges from Roman Catholicism during the Reformation. The focus of the remainder of history will be upon Western Christianity, from its spread to North America and beyond.

While growth is important worldwide and is mentioned within this work, the focal point will be upon Protestant Christianity in the United States of America towards the latter centuries. This by no means diminishes the importance of the peoples or the work of God globally; It is simply beyond the scope of this work.

Old Testament Growth

The Creation Account

The first account of growth is found within the opening pages of the Holy Bible. It was "in the beginning" that God first spoke the world into existence (Gen. 1:1). It was *ex nihilo*, out

¹⁸ Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

of nothing, that God initiated the first act of growth as his creative wonder was made manifest. Both the male and female genders of humanity were created and exhorted to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Gen. 1:26-28). In God's image, man was to act as His representatives upon the earth, and by doing so faithfully, would enjoy a purpose, pleasure, and fellowship with God.

Writing on the subject of an Old Testament theology of humanity, McConville states, "the Bible focuses relentlessly on the human being. In biblical terms, it is impossible, of course, to think of humanity apart from its relation to God, just as it is impossible to think about God apart from his relationship to humanity."²⁰ As the individual human being is the essential building block for the socially gathered community of believers, the church must begin with the Creation account and the origin of mankind.

"Creation has always been foundational to the faith of the worshipping community, not only because it displays the power and majesty of the Creator, but also because it provides the basis and even the pattern for God's great work of redemption."²¹ God creates man *imago Dei*, in "His own image" (Gen. 1:27). The *imago Dei* directs dignity towards and distinguishes humanity from the rest of other non-human living organisms.

There is a marked difference in the status this confers in Genesis than in other ancient civilization creation stories.²² In ancient Mesopotamian texts, humans are created as an afterthought in the grand scheme of the cosmos (i.e. the Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Elis*, in which mankind has little worth aside from being slaves to the gods).²³ This is contrasted in

²⁰ McConville, *Being Human in God's World*, 15.

²¹ Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 81.

²² McConville, *Being Human in God's World*, 24.

²³ W.G. Lambert, trans., *Enuma Elish: The Babylonian Epic of Creation*, (Electronic Tools and Ancient Near East Archives, 2021), accessed March 16, 2021, <http://www.etana.org/node/581>

Genesis with the knowledge that Adam is called to ultimately work unto the Lord, not in a slave capacity, but in a covenant of spiritual service.²⁴ In upholding this service, man enjoyed a daily fellowship with God, enjoying His presence and living in the context of a vibrant relationship that provided purpose and pleasure.²⁵ This is the earliest example of the benefits of obedience to the Lord's commands. While the entrance of sin forever changed the fellowship between man and God, nevertheless, it follows that such benefits and blessings are also conferred upon those individuals and churches that are obedient to the Lord's commands, such as the Great Commission.

The Abrahamic Covenant

God expressed His longing for reconciliation with His wayward creation through the ratification of several covenants. In the Abrahamic Covenant, also known as the "land, seed, and blessing promises," God promises to bless Abraham, making him a great nation and his name great, protecting him and judging others by their treatment of him, and blessing all the families of the earth through him.²⁶ His obedient, monotheistic allegiance to YHWH distinguished Abraham from the polytheistic culture of the ancient lower Mesopotamian region.²⁷

Much of Abraham's worship centered around obedience to God's revelations and faith in His commands. Cherry states that the Abrahamic covenant was the primary covenant that was established in the Old Testament, as it consumes the entire history of God's history with the

²⁴ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 107.

²⁵ Elmer L. Towns and Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 11.

²⁶ David Andrew Dean, "Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence: New Terminology and a Case Study in the Abrahamic Covenant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 57, Is. 2, (June 2014), 281-308, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁷ Whaley, *Called to Worship*, 41.

nation of Israel from the time of Abraham until the time of Jesus Christ. The formal relationship established between the Lord and Abraham led to establishing a nation comprised of his descendants that became a testament to God's glory.²⁸ While Abraham was still a fallible person whose shortcomings caused undue stress, pain, and complication, (i.e., the birth, strife, and sending away of Ishmael and his mother), so strong was his faith that God remained committed to His servant and his descendants.

The Mosaic Covenant

The Mosaic covenant, established on Mount Sinai after the miraculous Exodus event, solidified the descendants of Abraham as the Nation of Israel and began the next steps of immense spiritual growth within the people. Robert Webber claims that it is this event which marks "the turning point of salvation history in the Old Testament... These great acts of salvation point to the fundamental nature of biblical worship – the epicenter from which all the facets of worship proceed is an event."²⁹

George Mendenhall produced an influential work that sheds light on the Israelite covenants by situating them in the cultural context of international Hittite suzerainty-vassal treaties dated approximately 1450 to 1200 BC. The suzerainty, typically the king, established such treaties which established the terms of the relationship or agreement and comprised six parts: preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, provision for deposit and periodic public

²⁸ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 10.

²⁹ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, Revised Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 20.

reading, list of gods as witnesses, and a curses and blessings formula.³⁰ A "covenant cutting" ceremony typically took place to solidify the agreed-upon covenant or treaty.

Webber seems to agree with Mendenhall's work, citing that God's covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai was similar to treaties that ancient rulers made with officials who governed parts of their empire. It seems that God included many features of the treaties, as they were well known to the ancient Israelites because they comprised part of their cultural background. The terms of this agreement were outlined in the Ten Commandments. Additionally, stipulations in the Book of the Covenant that God directed to Moses were also followed. The covenant terms were frequently shortened and appear as, "I will be their God, and they will be My people."³¹ A sacrificial act of worship in which all the people participated sealed the covenant between God and Israel.

The Mosaic Period (1400-1000 BC) was a formative era in the worship and history of Israel. The religious consciousness and worship practices were primarily shaped by the Exodus's dramatic events and divine law attached to the covenant of Mount Sinai. With God's direction to Moses, these instructions molded and preserved Israel's identity as God's chosen people and a theocratic kingdom of priests.³² This divine legislation expressed God's perfect morality and holiness and laid out essential guiding principles to govern the Hebrew community. It also provided instruction in holy worship and living so that they might be the faithful keepers of the covenant and enjoy His blessing and presence. More importantly, it also allowed God to

³⁰ George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archeologist*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, Sept. 1954), 49-76, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3209151>

³¹ Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 22-23.

³² Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise! Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church*, (Nashville, TN: Baker Books, 1993), 35.

demonstrate this covenant love in pardoning their iniquities and passing over their transgressions.³³

The Tabernacle and the Temple

Exodus 25 begins with the Lord's instructions to Moses regarding the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, a holy place of divine origin and not of human invention. Ross states that the tabernacle was designed to both reveal and conceal the holiness of God. A physical dwelling place gave reality to His presence among the people, yet its curtains, quarters, and divinely regulated procedures prevented an unholy people from approaching holy articles irreverently and suddenly.³⁴

Furthermore, worship within the sacred tabernacle necessitated a sacred ministry. The tribe of Levi was called and consecrated to serve as mediators between Israel and God. Aaron, brother of Moses, served as the first High Priest of Israel. While Moses mediated between God and man, Aaron offered the sacrifices on behalf of the people to God.³⁵

Under the reign of King David, the ark was brought to Jerusalem, making it the central city in Israel's life and worship. During this time, the nation gained independence, widespread wealth, international prestige, the twelve tribes dwelled together in unity, and a vision for the Temple of God was born.³⁶ Corporate worship was greatly expanded as David was deeply committed to the personal and national worship of God. Idol worship and intermarriage with the

³³ Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, xxvi.

³⁴ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 190.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Fred Guyette, "Worship and the Four Kings in Chronicles," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 39, no. 2, (April 2011): 118-124, accessed March 27, 2021, Alma ExLibris Group.

neighboring heathen nations was outlawed. Those conquered nations had their idols burned to destroy the temptation for Israel to fall into the sin of idolatry as they were so often prone.³⁷

David spent much of his later years acquiring materials and preparing for construction of the temple. However, it was his successor, Solomon, who began and completed the immense project. Elaborate and majestic, the complex was divided into two compartments, the Holy Place, where the priests served, and the Most Holy Place, where the presence of the Lord dwelt on the earth. The same basic furnishings were present in the temple as they were in the tabernacle, though on a much grander scale.

Although Solomon began his reign by appropriately honoring God, it was not long before he fell into the practices of idolatry that had plagued Israel since the inception of the Mosaic covenant. His blatant sin included the construction of high places for the idols of his foreign wives. Ross states this "opened the way for state-sanctioned idolatry" that was deeply detrimental to his people's faith.³⁸

Because of Solomon's idolatry, the Lord swore to take away his kingdom and instead give it to his servant. However, for the sake of His servant, David, God spared one tribe from which the prophesied Messiah would one day be born (1 Kings 11:13). Thus, the cycle of idolatry, prophetic response, repentance, and reconciliation, which would again degrade into idolatry, continued. By 587 BC, the city of Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians, and thousands of Hebrews were exiled or deported into various regions of Mesopotamia, which profoundly impacted the religious life of the Israelites.³⁹

³⁷ Whaley, *Called to Worship*, 112.

³⁸ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 314.

³⁹ Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 43.

The Exilic and Intertestamental Period

During the exilic period, the traditional sacrifice of animals and other materials was outlawed or otherwise impossible after the temple's destruction. The preservation of the Word of the Lord became a motivating concern that fueled the establishment of the synagogue. The synagogue became the social, religious, and educational center of Jewish life and established a place to focus on reading and understanding the Word of God. Elements of worship in the synagogue included prayer, affirmation of the faith, and teaching that interpreted and applied the reading of the Torah to the people's daily lives.⁴⁰

In 536 BC, Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Though the construction was a far cry from the glory of Solomon's temple, it was a time in which the people began to return to the feasts and the worship of God (Ezra 3:10-13). Ezra called attention towards and prayed for the conviction of the people to put away their foreign wives that were hindering the worship of God. Under Nehemiah, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, and the people committed themselves, once again to the Lord and celebrated in worship.⁴¹

The restoration of Jerusalem and the reordering of Hebrew society under Ezra and Nehemiah had immediate and far-reaching consequences on the structure of the post-exilic community. State and king were replaced by temple and priest as the stabilizing and ruling institutions of society. Social and economic policy was determined by Mosaic Law, which brought a renewed emphasis on Hebrew exclusiveness and separation from the Gentiles. Ezra's

⁴⁰ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 37-38.

⁴¹ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 348-353.

prominent role in the renewal of Jerusalem became a model for a later class of religious rulers whose role was to study the Old Testament Scriptures.⁴²

New Testament Growth

Jesus

Following approximately four hundred years of silence, God broke through the darkness and spoke once again. However, this time it was in the form of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. As God incarnate, Jesus forever changed the way mankind worshiped. Through Him, the rigorous law of Moses was fulfilled, and the dispensation of grace was ushered in. The dwelling place where worship had been typically confined was also altered as Jesus Himself became the tabernacle.⁴³

In the New Testament, both mediator and high priest roles are fulfilled in one Person, Jesus Christ. The natural progression of revelation and response is found within the communications between God and His people. In the new dispensation, worship continues in this pattern but is no longer dependent upon two mortal, fallible individuals. Now, the downward movement of Divine Revelation and the upward movement of human response is led by Jesus Christ alone.⁴⁴

Jesus' life brought healing and hope to multitudes. His death paid the ultimate sacrifice that was required for the atonement of all sin, ultimately providing a path of restoration to the Father. His Resurrection solidified His deity and power over death. He promises that those who

⁴² Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 44-45.

⁴³ Whaley, *Called to Worship*, 229.

⁴⁴ Ron Man, *Proclamation and Praise: Hebrews 2:12 and the Christology of Worship*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 44-51.

believe in Him will one day witness His return to restore creation to its intended purpose in the form of a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Pentecost: The Holy Spirit

The Gospel of John includes several instances in which Jesus spoke of a Holy Spirit that would come to help His disciples, and later, all believers. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, whom Jesus stated would not be able to come unless He left the earth (John 16:7). The Spirit teaches believers everything, brings remembrance to what was said previously by Jesus (John 14:26), and proceeds from the Father to testify about Jesus (John 15:26). Jesus promised His disciples as He ascended to Heaven that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, granting them the power to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Graham Tomlin emphasizes the Spirit's role in the Trinity, precisely His expansive, missional purpose. "The sending of the Son and the Spirit by the Father are the two primary acts of mission in the New Testament...[it] is a temporal act or at least an act in which God intersects with time and history: an act in the economic, rather than the immanent Trinity."⁴⁵ In the act of sending the Holy Spirit, God seeks to draw believers back to His love and empower them to be involved in the ever-expansive, missional purpose of the Trinity.

⁴⁵ Graham Tomlin, "The Prodigal Spirit and Church Growth," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. David Goodhew, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 136.

History of the Christian Church

The Early Church

The early church grew in both number and geographical spread. Much of the New Testament demonstrates the fruits of the prioritization of Jesus' command to "be My witnesses in both Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The earliest church plants grew as the gospel spread to unreached areas, and new people were evangelized. The geographical ambition of the spreading of the church as a global phenomenon is evident in Paul's determination to continue moving on in new territory (even as far as Spain), James' commendation of wisdom to the twelve tribes of the Diaspora, and the Apocalyptic vision of people of every nation, tongue, and tribe in worship.⁴⁶

Key to the geographical and numerical growth of the early church was the deliberate choice of some to act almost exclusively as church planters, such as the Apostle Paul and his associates. These traveling evangelists stayed in one area long enough to establish their authority in Christ, build relationships and shape the community's life, and seek others to whom he could entrust the church's leadership. Thus, much of the Pauline letters detail his pastoral care and compassion for these new communities of faith, often proactively offering guidance, as well as admonishment, when necessary.⁴⁷

Paul's letters to the fledgling churches also presented a new model of worship for the early Christian believers. Paul categorized the preaching of the Word of God as part of worship (Rom. 1:16; 12:1-8). Previously, reading Scripture, praying, and singing songs had been the

⁴⁶ Mark Bonnington, "The Kingdom of God and Church Growth in the New Testament," ed. David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 67.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

primary expressions of worship. In proclaiming his apostolic ministry in light of his evangelistic efforts, Paul's language suggests the preaching of the Word to the Gentiles fulfills a liturgy or service to the churches, as well as to God.⁴⁸

Church Growth (AD 100-500)

As Christianity spread from Jerusalem into the surrounding areas, so did the persecution and hardship of believers in the first, second, and third centuries. The imprisonment, punishment, and execution of many new Christians at the hands of the Pharisees and Sadducees is documented in the book of Acts. Stephen became the first martyr in the Christian church after being empowered by the Spirit and proclaiming the Gospel to the Council (Acts 6-7). Saul was responsible for the persecutions of a great number of Christians in Jerusalem before his conversion (Acts 8:1). James, the brother of John, was executed by Herod Agrippa.⁴⁹ Ignatius, a bishop of the church at Antioch, was well over age 70 when he was arrested, tried, and executed in Rome.⁵⁰

Because monotheistic Christianity was not compatible with the polytheistic paganism of the day, nor did Christians practice the imperial worship of Caesar, the Roman political elite viewed the early believers as hostile towards the state. False charges of treason and negative rumors involving infant sacrifice and immoral polygamous relations led to contempt and widespread persecution. In AD 60s, Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome, which destroyed two-thirds of the city. When several politically influential individuals

⁴⁸ David G. Peterson and I. Howard Marshall, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), ProQuest Ebook Central, 180.

⁴⁹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 62.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

began suspecting him of arson, he ordered Christians to be tortured, crucified, burned at night to illuminate his gardens, and killed to deflect the suspicions.⁵¹

Waves of persecution arose throughout Rome until Constantine established Christianity as an official religion of the empire. Many reforms took place under Constantinian rule as the church gained a newfound respect and legal standing. Bishops were allowed to carry out government functions, large churches were built, and any attempt to force Christians to participate in pagan religious ceremonies was expressly forbidden.⁵² The effects of Christianity's official acceptance were decisive. As Davidson states

There would be vast new challenges in this for Christian faith, including not least the dangerous potential that had been unleashed for the church itself to become, over time, an instrument of political intolerance and an oppressive force, demanding compliance with its beliefs, trading on its alliance with power in ways which would, at their worst, seriously compromise the identity of the *ecclesia* as the community of the crucified one. Whether the Constantinian revolution was a providential turning-point which facilitated an unprecedented expansion of the Gospel or, by contrast, a sheer catastrophe for the church's moral and spiritual integrity, is a matter upon which Christians continue to hold widely divergent opinions.⁵³

In AD 476, the last of the Roman emperors was overthrown. Christian bishops began to take on the role of politicians, elevating their social and political status to that of nobility. Public singing was stripped from the congregation due to the threat of heretical hymns, and all public singing in worship was reserved for the clergy. As the church formed a closer bond with the state, corruption soon followed.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 68-69.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁵³ Ivor J. Davidson, "Church Growth in the Early Church," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. David Goodhew, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 149, Taylor Francis eBook Library.

⁵⁴ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 78-79.

The Middle Ages

The influence of Roman and Greco-Roman culture dwindled as a result of the fall of Rome. Roman law was no longer enforced, and interaction between the empire's regions largely ceased. Barbarian invasions took place by the Franks from the north in Europe and from Islamic forces in the south. North Africa and the Middle East, once part of the Eastern Roman Empire, soon saw the eradication of any influence of Western Civilization and Christianity.⁵⁵

However, in Europe, the king of the Franks was baptized and converted to Christianity in AD 496. As the Constantinian Christian culture passed, a new Christian culture began. The church continued to grow in both number and influence. As a result of increasing unity between the elite rulers of various parts of Europe, the church grew politically powerful yet regressed spiritually. An early response to this corruption was the spread of monasticism in the West.⁵⁶

One of the most famous monastics during the early Middle Ages was Benedict of Nursia. Benedict was credited with founding the Benedictine Order, whose rules of order regarding life and discipleship became instituted and promoted as the standard of Western monasticism. These rules required vows of stability (lifelong commitment), fidelity (shaping one's character), obedience to superiors, poverty, and chastity.⁵⁷

During the later medieval period, several developments paved the way for a later spiritual reckoning known as The Reformation. Influential individuals such as Francis of Assisi led reform movements throughout various regions of Europe. Francis emphasized congregational singing while writing hymns and songs in the people's language set to popular melodies. This ran

⁵⁵ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 85-86.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁷ John S. Knox, "The Monastic Movement: Origins and Purposes," *World History Encyclopedia*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/930/the-monastic-movement-origins--purposes/>

counter to the canon decreed in approximately the mid-360s by the Council of Laodicea, that "no others shall sing in the Church, save only the canonical singers, who go up into the ambo...and sing from a book."⁵⁸

The twelfth century saw a significant increase in lay literacy and Bible and spiritual literature ownership. Copy shops produced a wide range of Bibles at price points that enabled the emerging middle class to purchase their own personal copies. Hundreds of hand-copied Bibles survive from this period, and psalters, prayer collections, and Bible picture books with texts in the vernacular. The advancement during this century appears to be indicative of spiritual growth among the ordinary people.⁵⁹

AD 1200 to 1500 saw the foundation of numerous schools, colleges, hospitals, and almshouses, as charitable giving increased with the preaching of its importance as a spiritual discipline and responsibility.⁶⁰ The Franciscan Order, established in 1210, served principally as missionaries to unchurched peasants in Italy. The Dominican Order was founded to combat heresy by educating the church to sync with the religious learning coming from newly founded theological universities.⁶¹

In the AD 1300s, John Wycliffe had a vital ministry among academia and ecclesiastical leaders in England. He called for the return to the early church's biblical heritage, condemning the temporal riches being amassed by the contemporary church, as well as the leaders' unbridled

⁵⁸ Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul, The Story of Our Songs: Drawing Strength from the Great Hymns of Our Faith*, Book Three, (Nashville, TN: W Publishing, 2011), 23-24.

⁵⁹ Miranda Threlfall-Holmes, "Growing the Medieval Church: Church Growth in Theory and Practice in Christendom c.1000-c.1500," ed. Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 193.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Threlfall-Holmes, "Growing the Medieval Church," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. Goodhew, 188-189.

pride and materialism. Wycliffe mocked the doctrine of transubstantiation, warned against the doctrine of papal supremacy, and condemned the sale of indulgences. Breaking with the longstanding tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, Wycliffe and his disciples translated the entire Bible into the English language. For his beliefs and his work, he was condemned as a heretic. His public dissatisfaction with the church further laid the groundwork for the coming Reformation.⁶²

The Reformation

While several individuals were critical to the spiritual movement known as the Reformation, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk of Wittenberg, was perhaps the most influential in boldly challenging the Roman Catholic Church's control over the Western Christian world. In approximately 1512, Luther was said to have neared the point of desperation and resentment toward God because his religious observances failed to make him feel accepted by or at peace with God. In his anguish, he had what he described as a genuine illumination from God as Paul's word in Romans 1:17 flashed through his mind: "the just shall live by faith." Upon this liberating experience, he was said to have "felt reborn, and it seemed that the doors of paradise opened up for me."⁶³

Luther's challenge to the Roman Catholic Church was manifested by the posting of 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. He publicly challenged the pope and his authority over the church on many grounds, most notably through the doctrine of justification through faith. As Cantalamessa explains, "this doctrine is defined by those who

⁶² Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 90-91.

⁶³ Raniero Cantalamessa, "'The Righteousness of God Has Been Manifested': The Fifth Centenary of the Protestant Reformation, an Occasion of Grace and Reconciliation for the Whole Church," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 53, no. 3, (Jan. 1, 2018), 423, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecu.2018.0028>

began the Reformation themselves as 'the article by which the Church stands or falls' (*articulus stantist et cadentis Ecclesiae*).⁶⁴ Luther believed that the forgiveness of sins came through the grace of Jesus Christ once a believer places their faith in Him. According to the Reformers, repentance from sin and faith in Christ were the only two requirements for salvation. Contrary to the Roman Catholic Church's teaching, one could not buy their way to God through indulgences, pilgrimages, or membership in monastic orders.⁶⁵

In Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli followed the example of Luther by breaking from the Roman Catholic Church and establishing a Reformed church. Zwingli stripped away every practice in worship that he believed could not be supported by Scripture, including the doctrine of transubstantiation, saint worship, purgatory, statues, and Mass itself. He stressed that civil governments should submit to Christ and the Scriptures were the sole religious authority for life, rather than the pope or church government.⁶⁶

John Calvin published a theological treatise, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, that became the foundation of the reformatory movement in Geneva, Switzerland. The religious life of the city was organized around his concept of model Christianity. He believed that each citizen should respectfully submit to proper government and pay taxes.

The First and Second Great Awakenings in Europe and America

The First Great Awakening was positioned against a backdrop of increasing secularism and modernity. The Brethren of the Common Life, after facing persecution throughout Saxony and Germany, found a home at the estate of Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf in Herrnhut. In

⁶⁴ Raniero Cantalamessa, "'The Righteousness of God Has Been Manifested,' 424.

⁶⁵ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 102.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

1727, as the group gathered to observe the Lord's Supper, the presence of God was experienced so profoundly that a twenty-four-hour prayer meeting began. The result of these prayers was the commissioning of hundreds of missionaries that were sent out around the world.⁶⁷

Soon after, the Awakening spread to England through the innovative preaching of George Whitefield. Along with John and Charles Wesley, Whitefield established several dissenter churches that opposed the Church of England. This new movement, called "Methodist," emphasized preaching, small accountability groups, and prayer meetings.⁶⁸

Whitefield traveled to America to preach the Gospel, making Savannah, Georgia, his home. Known as the "Great Itinerant," he traveled along the Atlantic coastline, preaching in every colony. Whitefield "tended to eschew denominational labels in favor of evangelical ecumenism, preaching Christ crucified to anyone who would listen."⁶⁹

The character of churches in Europe and America was changed as a result of the Great Awakening. New congregations were led by pastors who lacked university training yet were led by the Holy Spirit's power. Pastors such as John Edwards helped to develop evangelical revivalism in America. Edwards believed revivals were "seasons or outpourings of the Holy Spirit. In a revival, significant numbers of individuals, and at times whole communities, asserted inspiration from God's Spirit, which affectively moved them to acknowledge both their sins and God's redeeming love."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 116-117.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

⁶⁹ Christopher Grasso, "George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy, 52, no. 2, in *Early American Literature*, ed. George Hammond, David Ceri Jones," (2017): 486-491.

⁷⁰ Nathan Friend, "Inventing Revivalist Millennialism: Edwards and the Scottish Connection," *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (March 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12426>

The Second Great Awakening, lasting roughly from 1795 to 1835, first became characterized by the camp meeting revivals along the American frontier. The first camp meeting along the American frontier occurred in June 1800, as James McGready and five area pastors preached to five hundred people at the Annual Red River Communion. The meeting grew so large that it was moved outdoors. The event lasted for three days and was so successful in converting souls to Christianity that another series of meetings was scheduled for late July.⁷¹

The July meeting was held in the forest due to the expectation of large crowds. Frontiersmen drove their horses and buggies, bringing provisions and making their wagons their home for several days. At an attending pastor's request, McGready agreed to lead a meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. In August 1801, more than a thousand wagons arrived at the Cane Ridge Revival, with estimates of those in attendance ranging from 10,000 to 20,000. By 1811, more than 400 camp meetings had been organized among various denominations seeking to recreate the successful revivals that had taken place in Kentucky.⁷²

Layman's Prayer Revival

Several years before the American Civil War, an influential prayer revival began and continued through the turn of the century. Jeremiah Lanphier, a New York City missionary, held a meeting with the intent to encourage the working men of the area to take a break during their lunch hour for prayer.⁷³ After spending 20-30 minutes of the first meeting alone, six attendees eventually joined Lanphier. They were challenged to fast and pray, giving an hour to intercession

⁷¹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 141-142.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 140-146.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

for revival. After three weeks, enough people joined the meeting to relocate to a larger room where it began to meet daily.⁷⁴

News of the revival traveled quickly by telegraph throughout America. Mass media attributed to the public awareness of the prayer revival, with newspaper publishing companies such as the New York Herald, New York Tribune, and the New York Times regularly running stories that garnered a great deal of publicity. Similar noon prayer meetings began in Boston, Baltimore, Washington D.C., Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, and numerous small towns and rural areas. Within four months, a revival of prayer had spread across America.⁷⁵

The American church experienced a renewed awareness of God's presence and power, as well as an unprecedented ingathering of new converts. While figures vary, notable scholars of the movement estimate between 200,000 and 500,000 conversions took place nationally. Each denomination gained a multitude of new church members and communities experienced the redeeming power of the Spirit throughout the nation.⁷⁶

The spirit of revival continued throughout the Civil War and in the decades following. Dwight L. Moody became the most noted evangelist during this time, due in part to the influence of the Layman's Prayer Revival. In 1860, Moody devoted himself to full-time ministry, preaching the Gospel to Union soldiers during the Civil War at age 23. He was heavily involved in the Sunday School ministry affiliated with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), noon prayer meetings, open-air preaching, and a homeless ministry. He became the pastor at

⁷⁴ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 180-181.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁷⁶ John D. Hannah, "Layman's Prayer Revival," *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Vol. 134, No. 533. (1977), 70-73,

what is now called "The Moody Church," where he gave popular sermons where crowds continued to grow.

Welsh Revival

In Wales, Evan Roberts conducted a series of meetings at the church in his hometown. What began as a group of seventeen young people continued to grow in number as the gathering continued a second week without formal publicity.⁷⁷ The revival meetings soon attracted thousands of people into the chapels. Much of the prayer, preaching, and worship was spontaneous and full of emotion. There were numerous conversions and people who spoke of being "baptized in the Spirit." Meetings also included expressions of direct guidance, visions, healings, and prophecy.⁷⁸ Much of the ministry was carried out by college students and was known as a "singing, prayer, and worship revival." Within two years, there were more than five million people estimated to have converted to Christianity.⁷⁹

The Azusa Street Revival

In the early twentieth century, William J. Seymour, born to recently freed slaves in Louisiana, traveled to Topeka, Kansas, to meet with Charles F. Parham, a Caucasian preacher who ran Bethel College, a Holiness Bible School. Seymour was intrigued by Parham's teachings on the "baptism of the Holy Ghost." A sign of this baptism was the practice of glossolalia, in

⁷⁷ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 204.

⁷⁸ Ian M. Randall, "The Breath of Revival: The Welsh Revival and Spurgeon's College," *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. 41, Iss.4, (2005), Accessed July 4, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1179/bqu.2005.41.4.002>

⁷⁹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 201-205.

which one supernaturally spoke in a language previously unknown to the individual. Seymour traveled to Houston, Texas, and eventually, Los Angeles, California, to preach.⁸⁰

In April 1906, word spread that a small group led by Seymour began speaking in other languages and praising God in an unknown tongue. Crowds gathered to listen to Seymour warn that the end of the world was nigh, and Jesus was coming soon to establish His kingdom and judge the world. The Azusa Street Revival continued for years and cemented the link forged between baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues. This served as the "launchpad of twentieth-century Pentecostalism, as hundreds of Christians from all over North America, and then from Europe and the Third World, visited Azusa Street and took its message back with them."⁸¹

Within the past two decades, there has been explosive church growth within the Southern Hemisphere. The common denominator in this situation is that most churches experiencing such growth are either Pentecostal or Charismatic in origin or character. In 2009, there were approximately 600 million Pentecostals worldwide, and the denomination is believed to be expanding at a rate of 19 million conversions per year.⁸²

Shantung Revival

Protestant missionaries were unable to legally explore China's interior until the treaty settlements of 1858-60. Their initial efforts were confined to the coastal cities of Yantai, Dengzhou, and Tianjin. The gospel was spread through preaching in marketplaces and inns,

⁸⁰ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 222-224.

⁸¹ Tim Dowley, *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, 3rd ed., (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), accessed June 28, 2021, 593-594, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸² Tomlin, "The Prodigal Spirit and Church Growth," ed. David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 128.

though the results of evangelistic efforts were largely unsuccessful. By the end of the nineteenth century, Protestant churches in China claimed only 37,000 members, despite extensive missionary endeavors.⁸³

The beginnings of the Shantung Revival are usually associated with the Norwegian Lutheran missionary Marie Monsen in the Henan and Hubei provinces from 1901-1932. Monsen met with Southern Baptist missionaries at Chefoo and soon became the catalyst of a movement that resulted in a great revival in North China. The revival spread from Chefoo to other Southern Baptist missionary stations.

The Boxer Rebellion nearly extinguished these fragile efforts. The secret Chinese society, known as the Yihequan ("Righteous and Harmonious Fists"), had the original aim of destroying the dynasty and Westerners who had been given a privileged position in China. The "Boxers," as foreigners called them, began to increase in strength in the North China provinces. The Christian missionary message and lifestyle and their efforts to pressure local officials to side with converts, who were typically of the lower classes in Chinese society, in property disputes and lawsuits; the Chinese converts were emboldened by their faith flouted traditional ceremonies and family relations. These grievances aggravated the Boxers, who began openly attacking Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries by 1899.⁸⁴

By May 1900, bands of Boxers had burned churches and killed suspected Christians on sight in Beijing. An international relief force was dispatched to aid Beijing in June but was blocked by imperial forces by order of the empress dowager, Cixi. Estimated casualties were up

⁸³ R. G. Tiedemann, "Protestant Revivals in China with Particular Reference to Shandong Province." *Studies in World Christianity*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2012), 216, Alma ExLibris Group.

⁸⁴ "Boxer Rebellion," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, n.d., accessed July 7, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Boxer-Rebellion>.

to 100,000, with a great majority of them being civilians. Numerous foreign ministers, their families, staff, and hundreds of Chinese Christians were besieged within their quarters until they were freed in August by international forces from Japan, Russia, Britain, the United States, and France, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.⁸⁵

Jonathan Goforth was a Canadian Presbyterian missionary serving in China since 1887. He was gravely wounded and left for dead by a mob in the uprising, and Goforth and his family fled to Canada. When the uprising died down in late 1901, Goforth and his family returned to China to discover that its endurance of the persecution had emboldened the church.⁸⁶

Heavily influenced by earlier revival figures such as Charles Finney and D. L. Moody, Goforth longed for revival in China. He witnessed a revival in Pyongyang and felt that if God had sent revival to locales such as Korea, Wales, and India, He could also send revival to China. He led people to Christ in places such as the Henan Province, Manchuria, Kwangning, Chinchow, Shinminfu, and Shansi.⁸⁷

Jonathan Goforth's preaching began to inaugurate an era in China which the itinerant revivalist or evangelist became reasonably common, similar to awakenings in North America. He was invited to speak at several meetings during the Shandong Revival of 1909-14, where "his gatherings would follow the now-familiar pattern of simultaneous praying aloud, public confession and restitution."⁸⁸ By the 1920s, there had been years of upheaval in China. Warfare, famine, and political agitation weighed heavily on the population. As a result, many believers

⁸⁵ "Boxer Rebellion," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, n.d., accessed July 7, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Boxer-Rebellion>.

⁸⁶ Collin Hansen, John D. Woodbridge, and John Woodbridge, *A God-Sized Vision : Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), accessed July 7, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central, 140.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 141-147.

⁸⁸ Tiedmann, "Protestant Revivals in China," 217.

responded positively to the emotional style and message of the imminent apocalypse of many native revivalists and charismatic missionaries. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Shantung's revival movement was much more intense than the previous revivals.⁸⁹

Reports of the revival noted that preachers, teachers, and missionaries, both men and women, had been blessed by the Holy Spirit and known a power they had never known before. The public confession of sins became an unexpected key element in these revivals. This phenomenon was entirely out of character with the Chinese culture, which emphasized stoically preserving one's dignity. An anonymous missionary remarked that the movement was "perhaps the greatest revival in the history of Southern Baptists in North China being experienced in many Chinese churches of our North China Mission. This has come as a result of EARNEST PRAYER, FAITH IN GOD, BIBLE TEACHING, and MUCH PREACHING on sin and kindred subjects."⁹⁰

Revivalists & Great Evangelistic Campaigns in America

Towns and Whaley state that "one of the characteristics of a 'Great Awakening' is that the working of the Holy Spirit has a vast, most often international, implication and impact."⁹¹ As revival moved throughout Wales and Shantung in the early 1900s, churches throughout the Northeast region of America began to experience the Spirit's movement. Pennsylvania saw more than 10,000 converts to the faith among Methodists alone by the late spring of 1905. New York, New Jersey, Maine, and Massachusetts all saw similar conversions and positive societal change as crimes decreased and prayer meetings increased.

⁸⁹ Tiedmann, "Protestant Revivals in China," 228-229.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 225-226.

⁹¹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 235.

Several denominations partnered together in revival campaigns amongst the Southern states where God moved just as He had in the North. This was the atmosphere of spiritual awakening that many professional revivalists and evangelists were used to bring revival to America. In the 1910s, around 1,850 revivalists (650 full-time and 1,200 part-time) crossed the United States, holding over 35,000 campaigns in major cities and towns.⁹²

Billy Sunday, a former major league baseball player, became one of the greatest revivalists in America during his nearly 40 years of ministry. Sunday held campaigns in every major city in the country, and a total of more than 593,000 people made decisions for Christ as a result of his revivals.⁹³ Immensely popular, Sunday set a new standard for urban revivalism, making it a corporate, systematic, and even scientific endeavor. With a team of thousands of volunteers, Sunday created revivalism that took advantage of the age of mass production and was palatable to a cross-class, nationwide audience. Sunday tailored his revivals to the popular American cultural ideals of efficiency, expertise, order, and rationalization while embracing urbanization and modern business methods.⁹⁴

Billy Graham emerged in the latter half of the 1900s as an influential historical figure who is said by numerous biographers to have "contributed more than any other single person to the renaissance of evangelical Christianity in post-World War II America."⁹⁵ In partnership with Cliff Barrows and George Beverly Shea, Graham led evangelistic crusades across America, used

⁹² Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 238-239.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 239-240.

⁹⁴ Jennifer Ward, "The Gospel of Efficiency: Billy Sunday's Revival Bureaucracy and Evangelicalism in the Progressive Era," *Church History*, Vol. 85, No. 3, (September 2016), 589-593, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁹⁵ Curtis J. Evans, "Billy Graham as American Religious and Cultural Symbol," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 108, Is. 3, (Cambridge University Press, July 2015), 476, JSTOR.

radio ministries and mass media as marketing tools to reach vast audiences. "Graham's campaigns were characterized by spirited congregational singing, large choral presentations, testimonies by celebrities, high-quality vocal presentations by soloists with large or small singing groups, and evangelistic preaching."⁹⁶ The crusades provided a model for worship as evangelical congregations began to use these elements in their services.

Graham also played a crucial role in shaping American society in post-1960s America in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Biographer Darren Dochuk writes of the vision and influence that Graham championed, "one in which racial gaps were bridged through changed attitudes, evangelical political activism was made respectable, and Christian virtues of personal initiative and community responsibility were lifted up as the answer to society's troubles."⁹⁷ Graham also identified Christianity with American ideals, earning him widespread acclaim with senators and governors and eventually developing relationships with presidents. Graham was also responsible for making evangelicals respectable, pushing them out of isolation and urging them to become full participants in politics.⁹⁸

Jesus Movement

By the late 1960s, three types of demonstrations against the so-called "establishment" had been identified: anti-Vietnam War protests, civil rights protests, and counterculture protests known as the Hippie Movement.⁹⁹ It was during this tumultuous time that The Jesus Movement

⁹⁶ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 286.

⁹⁷ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York, NY: Norton, 2011), 291, quoted in Curtis J. Evans, "Billy Graham as American Religious and Cultural Symbol," 47, JSTOR.

⁹⁸ Evans, "Billy Graham as American Religious and Cultural Symbol," *Harvard Theological Review*, 473.

⁹⁹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 294-295.

began. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a revival swept around the world. Originating in San Francisco through the establishment of the Christian World Liberation Front by Jack Sparks, deliberate attempts were made to reach disillusioned hippies, drug addicts, and homeless people within the community. Similar to past awakenings, there was an emphasis on confession, repentance, and Christian mission and ministry commitments. Through this outreach, as well as other ministries, young hippies began to embrace Christian teachings.¹⁰⁰

Members of the early movement were dubbed the "Jesus People" by the mainstream media. While they embraced Jesus Christ as their Savior and made significant lifestyle changes, they did not abandon some aspects of the hippie subculture. Several of these retained characteristics included: informal dress, informal speech, rock music, and simple living. The phenomenon became a movement as many Jesus People began spreading to develop churches of their own, many of which became megachurches with international outreach.¹⁰¹

During the latter portion of the 20th century, evangelicals Protestants enjoyed growing church membership church memberships, even as oldline Protestant denominations were declining and the Roman Catholic Church seemed to hold constant. However, within the first decade of the 21st century, the growth of memberships in Catholic and evangelical churches began to decline as well.¹⁰²

This follows many assessments or predictions from sociological theorists, secularists, and even theologians, church leaders, and church members. Secularization theory states that the church in the modern western world is in decline. As a result, a drive to increase the numerical

¹⁰⁰ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 296-298.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 296-302.

¹⁰² Roozen, "Negative Numbers," Gale in Context: Biography.

growth of church congregations has become common and even urgent, especially in historic churches such as Anglican, Methodist, and the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰³

The Church Growth Movement arose as a missiological response to the initial warning of church decline. It originated as an examination by Donald McGavran on why certain missionary efforts were fruitful and others were not. McGavran believed that God intended the church to grow, and those that did not were in danger of sin. He and others applied the results of his experiences and inquiries to American congregations in the 1960s and 1970s. The descriptions of qualities that seem to enhance church growth were transitioned into "prescriptive principles that churches desiring to grow should adopt."¹⁰⁴

While there was some good to come of the principles of Church Growth Movement, as a whole, it did not strengthen the "true growth" of the church. Many leaders took exception to the prescribed approaches and argued that God was responsible for the growth of the church, or that physical location was more of a factor in numerical growth than the movement conceded. Regardless, the principles espoused by Church Growth Movement leaders did not function as effectively as hoped.

Growth Innovations into the Present

The impacts of the Jesus Movement stretch into the modern-day church era. The development of new songs whose lyrics were directed towards the worship of Jesus yet reflected the popular rock n' roll musical style, profoundly influenced the genre of "contemporary worship music" through the coming decades. The Jesus Movement also established the guitar as the

¹⁰³ Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 1-2.

¹⁰⁴ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 26-27.

primary instrument of contemporary worship music. The informality of dress and casual leadership of the early Jesus People continued to spread throughout churches.¹⁰⁵

The Church Growth Movement attributed the new style of worship of the Jesus Movement to the numerical growth of churches in the 1960s and 1970s. In writings by church growth proponents, descriptions of these qualities soon led to prescriptive principles marketed to churches wishing to grow numerically. These principles were utilized frequently in the 1980s and 1990s in mainline denominations that were experiencing declining membership.¹⁰⁶

Towns and Whaley state that "the last 15 years of the twentieth century were marked by isolated movements of God rather than in one global awakening, like those experienced by previous generations."¹⁰⁷ During this time, evangelicals recorded and published new praise and worship songs, organized large worship gatherings, and hosted worship conferences. Private Christian colleges began to train students to be leaders and formal worship pastors. Church music became a rising industry and traveling worship artists emerged. Christian music publishers gained significant influence and were the primary source of music literature, education in worship leading, and new songs for evangelical churches.¹⁰⁸

An emphasis on world missions propels the current growth of modern evangelical churches. The cultural landscape in America and much of the world has become more ethnically diverse. As people of every nation and tribe are reached for Christ, these new converts' ethnic and racial diversity influences the church's worship. As God's people are committed to the call of the Great Commission, the Gospel reaches people groups across the globe. The study of the

¹⁰⁵ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 343.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 343-345.

components that are attributable to church growth help further Jesus' command to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Chapter Three

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide details about the methodology utilized in this study. An overview of research terminology is given to solidify the understanding of the appropriate research process. The study undertook a qualitative research design, and the required procedures are explained in detail. Data is analyzed thematically and compiled into graphs when applicable.

Design

John and J. David Creswell attempt to define the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research as being "framed in terms using words (qualitative) rather than numbers (quantitative), or better yet, using closed-ended questions and responses (quantitative hypotheses) or open-ended questions and responses (qualitative interview questions)."¹⁰⁹ A qualitative design also allows for exploring the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to emerging human questions and problems, with data being collected and analyzed inductively that build from smaller details into general themes. The researcher then interprets these themes from the meaning of the data, often culminating in a final report that is flexible in structure and honors an inductive style given the situation's complexity.¹¹⁰ Given the approach of answering the often complicated, open-ended questions regarding the growth of a construct that has increased exponentially throughout human history, a qualitative design was most suited to this study.

Several research methods were utilized and combined due to the breadth of time and history that this project's focus spanned. The methods that were involved in this research process

¹⁰⁹ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

included: historical, phenomenological, and descriptive. A historical method was used to systematically examine accounts of past events in Jewish and Christian religious history. Primary sources include numerous Bible books that are believed to have been authored by significant figures in the lives of Old and New Testament believers who experienced the settings they depicted firsthand. Examples of these authors are Moses, Ezra, Nehemiah, Luke, and the Apostles Peter, Paul, and John. The dynamic account of these past events involves an interpretation attempt on behalf of this researcher to recapture the ideas of settings and events from primary and secondary sources to discuss ways that the modern church can learn from the history of its forefathers in the faith.¹¹¹

A phenomenological method was also used in understanding the experiences of members of the Christian church from the perspective of the individuals. The phenomenon of church growth, either spiritual or numerical, has taken place over thousands of years. This study sought, in part, to understand the experience of church growth or decline from the perspective of individuals that witnessed this phenomenon.¹¹²

Lastly, a descriptive method was used to describe the phenomenon of church growth or decline. As descriptive research is more concerned with what happened rather than why or how, this method is employed to better explain the phenomena within the overall body of Christ and the influence of the surrounding secular environment throughout the centuries. Data has been collected qualitatively yet has sometimes been analyzed quantitatively to determine if a

¹¹¹ Prasanna Devaramatha Anilkumar, *Historical Method of Research*, (Gulbarga University: Gulbarga, 2014), https://www.academia.edu/22583546/Historical_Method_of_Research

¹¹² Steve Tenny, Grace D. Brannan, Janelle M. Brannan, and Nancy C. Sharts-Hopko, "Qualitative Study," *StatPearls*, (Treasure Island, FL: StatPearls Publishing, May 30, 2021), National Library of Medicine.

relationship exists between the church growth phenomenon and any outside source or influence.¹¹³

Procedure

The procedure for implementing a qualitative study began with the selection of a topic. The topic was decided upon by considering what areas would be practical and useful to study both personally and for a larger group. Given the nature of recent public assumptions that American Christian churches are in a state of decline, a determination was first made to verify if this information was quantifiable. To make this determination, a search was conducted from numerous recent polls, surveys, research studies, and the large database, World Christian Database.

The World Christian Database was primarily used to conclude that the number of adherents to Christianity within the United States has declined recently. This database includes detailed statistics on 41,000 Christian denominations and other religions in every country. The dataset concerning the change in religious preference over time confirmed that the Christian church as a whole (including all Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Independent traditions) had declined considerably since the 1970s. Compared to the total population, the total number of professing Christians in the United States has declined from 97% to 82% in the twentieth century alone. (See Appendix A).¹¹⁴

To further the usefulness with which this study could contribute to problem of church decline, it was decided to study the possible elements that may have an impact upon the

¹¹³ Hossein Nassaji, "Qualitative and Descriptive Research: Data Type Versus Data Analysis," *Language Teaching Research*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (March 1, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747>

¹¹⁴ Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed October 2, 2021).

phenomenon of the growth of the Christian church. A review of the existing literature followed. Creswell and Creswell state that the literature review accomplishes several purposes. "It shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the one being undertaken. It relates a study to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature [and] provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study."¹¹⁵

With these objectives in mind, a broad search began of the literature concerning the ecumenical church, the church's history, and individual congregations. This study's time period is vast, with the Creation account in Genesis is the starting point for the study and modern time as the ending point. Keywords such as: church/congregational growth, church decline, church growth figures and statistics, evangelical growth, missiology, etc. were used to locate various relevant sources.

Numerous online and print publications formed the basis of the literature review, and databases such as EBSCO, ProQuest, and JSTOR were utilized to obtain various source materials. As the literature review progressed, attempts were made to summarize and integrate what scholars have previously researched and written on similar topics. Integrating prior research into a series of chronological topics made it easier to build bridges between related topics and summarize the literature while pointing out central issues.¹¹⁶ After this integration, the data was used to complete a thematic analysis.

¹¹⁵ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 26.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell and Creswell, qualitative research studies typically involve both inductive and deductive data analysis. Inductive analysis includes building categories, patterns, and themes from organizing the data collected into informational units that are increasingly more abstract. This process involves working back and forth between the literature and various themes until a comprehensive set of themes have been established. Deductively, data from the given themes are examined once more to determine if further evidence is available to support each theme. Additional information is gathered as needed.¹¹⁷

A thematic analysis is one procedure commonly used for inductive data analysis. It is a descriptive method that is used to identify and report patterns or themes within the wide variety of qualitative data gathered. These themes help capture the essence of the phenomenon being investigated by the research questions and the study's overall purpose.¹¹⁸ The thematic data analysis for this project will be presented in Chapter Four.

Summary

A qualitative research design allows for the research and attempts to answer questions that are not easily quantifiable and closed-ended. A historical and phenomenological method was used to gather and analyze data both inductively and deductively. Primary and secondary sources about the growth phenomenon in Scripture and throughout the church's history have been compiled and analyzed for specific themes that the modern church may utilize today to achieve success in numerical and spiritual growth.

¹¹⁷ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 181.

¹¹⁸ Ashley Castleberry and Amanda Nolen, "Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research Data: Is It As Easy As It Sounds?" *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 10, Is. 6, (Elsevier, June 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019>

Chapter Four

Introduction

Romans 15:4 states, "for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." It is for these reasons that notable developments concerning the growth of the church throughout Judeo-Christian history have been explored in Chapter Two. The research questions that will be answered in this chapter are as follows: what are the catalysts for church growth, what are the detriments to church growth, and what lessons can the modern church apply from these findings?

What are the Catalysts for Church Growth?

Genesis

From the initial pages of Genesis, God has set forth a pattern of growth that has been in motion since the formation of all creation materialized by His words. Mankind has been on an increasing numerical trajectory of growth from the calling of the first couple to procreate. According to world-historical data from the United States' Census Bureau, the world's population has grown exponentially from the lower end of estimations of 170 million people in the year AD 1 to roughly eight billion over 2,000 years later.¹¹⁹

Along with numerical growth, the spiritual growth of those called by God has increased as well. Johnson and Grim, editors of the World Religion Database, state that the most prominent religion is currently Christianity, with approximately one-third of the world's population

¹¹⁹ United States Census Bureau, "Historical Estimates of World Population," last revised Oct. 8, 2021, accessed <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/international-programs/historical-est-worldpop.html>

claiming to be Christian adherents over the past 100 years. While there has been an increasing concern in Western countries of the decline of religion along with the increase of secularization, there has been evident growth in countries within the "global South," with the majority of Christians located in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.¹²⁰

To discern catalysts that propel the growth of the church, it must first be stated that all growth, whether numerically or spiritually, proceeds from and continues by the blessing of God Almighty. As Graham Tomlin suggests, "theologically speaking, mission and the consequent growth of the church begins with the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit from the Father. It starts with the Trinitarian life of God before it ever involves the creation, let alone the human part of that creation."¹²¹ It is this movement outward that enables any significant growth, not the result of human striving.

Covenant

God's desire to reconcile humanity to Himself is apparent throughout the rest of Scripture. To this end, God made covenants with several individuals that sought to obey His commands and carry out His will. Though the Edenic Covenant was broken by the disobedience in eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, God still allowed Adam and Eve to multiply throughout, and have dominion over, the earth (Gen. 1-3). The Abrahamic Covenant displayed the power of faith and obedience, as God provided a son to a barren couple well past child-bearing age. This child would continue the patriarch's lineage to become a great nation that God intended to use for the blessing and redemption of all the nations on the earth (Gen 26:4-5).

¹²⁰ Johnson and Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures*, 12.

¹²¹ Tomlin, "The Prodigal Spirit and Church Growth," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. David Goodhew, 136.

The establishment of the Mosaic Covenant was also the official establishment of the nation of Israel. Rescued miraculously from the horrors of slavery in Egypt, God sets apart the people to be a nation of priests, holy and set apart from all other peoples. Israel was to obey the commandments that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai, with God promising blessings upon them and their families for their obedience and curses for their disobedience (Exod. 24).

The Davidic Covenant continues the trajectory of redemption set in place by the Abrahamic & Mosaic Covenants. This covenant promises that God will establish His kingdom through one of David's offspring, pointing to the promised arrival of the Messiah who will reign eternally (1 Chron. 17). Finally, the New Covenant forever changed worship, instilling Jesus Christ as the Mediator between man and God through the sacrifice of His life on the cross and His resurrection from the dead (Luke 22:20).

A Royal Priesthood and the Dwelling of God

With the establishing of the Mosaic Covenant, God promised the Israelites that they would be regarded as His treasured possession out of all nations if they were to keep His covenant and obey Him fully. He promised that they would "be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). The tabernacle was of immense importance to the Israelites, as it signified God's presence dwelling among His people. Unlike the pagan nations who built idols and images of their gods, the God of Israel chose to actually be present among His people. The dwelling of the Lord and the holy priesthood drove the spiritual growth of Israel.

Emmanuel – God with Us

The fulfillment of Messianic prophecy, as well as the beginnings of the transformation of the worship of God, began with the birth of Christ. He was to be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5) from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). He lived a sinless life (Heb. 4:15) yet gave His life to pay

the sin-debt of all nations (Rom. 6:23). He was accused, arrested, tortured, tried, executed, and finally arose from the tomb on the third day after His death. Worshipped as part of the Trinity, Jesus forever changed the way of worship.¹²²

The Old Testament was replete with legislation that was necessary for a defiled people to have a relationship with a Holy God. Unmediated access to God was broken after the Fall, and prescribed rituals were put in place to show repentance and make sacrifices on behalf of the people so communion with God could be celebrated. A holy priesthood was installed to ensure these rituals and commands were executed properly. With the advent of the New Testament, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament legislation is now found in Jesus Christ.¹²³

Whaley states that all elements of the Old Testament tabernacle pointed toward the future Christ.

The Ark spoke of Christ's person. The tablets represented Christ as *living word*. The golden pot of manna typified Christ as Bread of life. Aaron's rod connoted the Resurrection. The mercy seat denoted Christ's purpose. The table illustrated Christ's humanity. The golden lampstand and its branches indicated Christ's deity. The oil for the lamps symbolized the Holy Spirit's working. The veil epitomized God's righteousness. The colors in the curtains suggested Christ's attributes.

Through Jesus, the tabernacle is no longer necessary for worship. Its purpose, to provide a dwelling place for God amongst His people, is fulfilled as "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

"In the same way that Old Testament worship celebrated the Exodus event, New Testament worship proclaims the story of the second Exodus -- Christ's leading his people out of

¹²² Whaley, *Called to Worship*, 231.

¹²³ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 217.

their bondage to sin."¹²⁴ Stepping down from His throne He came to dwell among His people in the form of a man. The prophesied New Covenant in Jeremiah 31 was established at the Last Supper and the violent, sacrificial death He endured. Jesus truly transformed worship and is a catalyst for the growth of the body of believers who accept Him as Lord of all.

The Holy Spirit

Jesus promised His disciples was that it was to their advantage that He was to go away because of the great importance the Holy Spirit would have in the lives of believers (John 16:7). As Ross states, "when Jesus returned to the Father, he sent the Spirit to continue the work that he had begun."¹²⁵ The Spirit works in numerous ways within the believer's life. He is responsible for the conviction of sin, intercession, guidance in righteous living, and the enablement of spiritual gifts. Every Christian has at least one gift, and all are expected to use these gifts regularly with humility and for the glory of God.¹²⁶

The Holy Spirit serves as a tremendous catalyst for all growth, be it physical, numerical, or spiritual. In the beginning of creation, the Spirit of God was present and "moving over the surface of the waters" of a formless and void earth (Gen 1:2). It was the Holy Spirit that was responsible for the Immaculate Conception (Luke 1:35). As Ross further posits, "nothing divine can happen without the Holy Spirit being the one who enables it to happen—Creation, redemption, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, or communion with God in worship."¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 42.

¹²⁵ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 420-421.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 421-423.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 421.

The Early Church

The Early Christians responsible for growth of the first Christian communities had numerous exciting reasons to share the gospel. They had seen the resurrected Christ, had felt the power of the Holy Spirit fall from heaven and realized the immense change that now took place in worship as their own bodies became the new “temple.” Bonnington lists further key contributions to the growth of the church in the earliest era of Christianity. Among these are “a gospel and movement rooted in the ministry and message of Jesus...a combination of deliberate an incidental evangelism; convincing living to back the claim of a life-changing message...[and] sacrificial life-styles that reflect the seriousness with which the message is taken.”¹²⁸

The Growth of the Church Through the Ages

Just as Jesus mandated, Christianity spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and began to grow throughout the ends of the earth. Those that accepted God’s Word began to form communities with other like-minded believers. After the Edict of Milan by Constantine, Christians experienced newfound freedom and political clout. While this gave rise to numerical growth, this act would have spiritual consequences that impacted the coming centuries.

The church and surrounding society has experienced cycles of moral decline and renewal throughout its history. Decline typically follows society’s turning from God’s commands, while renewal begins as God makes Himself known and individuals respond to Him in worship. Several of the Great Awakenings displayed completely new methods, styles, or techniques of

¹²⁸ Bonnington, “The Kingdom of God and Church Growth in the New Testament,” in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. David Goodhew, 75.

worship and evangelism. “Through awakenings, lives are always changed, communities are transformed, families are restored, and people turn from wickedness to righteousness.”¹²⁹

What are the Detriments to Church Growth?

Introduction

Just as there have been catalysts in the growth of the church, there have been numerous detriments to the health and growth of the church throughout human history. Ultimately, each of these detriments stem from the consequences of sin. Idolatry was a near-constant snare for ancient Israel, causing tremendous pain, sorrow, and ultimately the destruction of their temple and home. The worship of other gods is always detrimental to the worshiper, no matter the era in which he or she lives. Far from a primitive, stone-carved statue typically seen in ancient civilizations, idols can come in the forms of materialism, obsession with financial assets, sexual pursuits, or even intangible idols such as control, political power, and reputation. Regardless of the form, idolatry is an ever-present danger to the growth of individuals, as well as the church.¹³⁰

Old Testament Detriments

As stated previously, the very essence of the *imago Dei* is both functional and intrinsic to the human being, allowing a catalyst to growth as well as giving mankind proper purpose and work as designed by God. However, the temptation to be God, rather than be content to be made in His image, was the first sin committed by Adam and Eve. The sin of elevating oneself in the place of God, rather than be content with the status that God has blessed one with, continues to be a detriment with which the entire human race has struggled.

¹²⁹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 5.

¹³⁰ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 21-22.

McConville postulates that the manifestation of the human agency of God within the world is continually complicated by man's hubris and apprehension of himself. Determining this as a "hostage to fortune," he states that the reality of being made in the image of God is developed within the reality of the human condition. This becomes paradoxical. "Humans are entrusted with presenting God in the world yet are subject to a fatal misreading of what this means as subjective reality."¹³¹ As a result, a struggle continually ensues with man's knowledge of good and evil, an awareness and judgment of which he argues is a divine prerogative. The obligation to exercise correct discernment now occurs concerning human maturing and in the moral responsibilities found in living within obedience to the covenant with God.¹³²

When God rescued the descendants of Abraham from slavery in Egypt, He enacted a covenant that was willingly engaged by the people. Despite witnessing the dramatic evidence of His glory, it took very little time for the Israelites to forsake the newly forged covenant. While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the stipulations regarding the covenant, the people demanded a god with a physical presence like the pagan religions. Under Aaron's leadership, the people melted down their golden earrings and formed an idol in the image of a calf. The inspiration for this image was also derived from the pagan nations, as the calf was revered in Egypt and Canaan. "They thus robbed God of his glory—as well as the gold that was to be used for the tabernacle."¹³³

Idolatry was a perpetual problem for Israel that continued well past the golden calf incident. After the renewal of the worship of God alone and the casting out of idols under

¹³¹ McConville, *Being Human in God's World*, 42.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 41-43.

¹³³ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 181.

David's reign, his successor set up temples to the gods of his foreign wives. Whaley states that the worship of anything other than God causes separation from God, the removal of blessing and the granting of a curse in their place (Deut. 11:28), the absence of God in time of need, a sentence on subsequent generations, destruction, and a ruined reputation.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, Israel continued to forsake the Lord and continually sought after pagan gods, despite the warnings by numerous prophets of God to rebuke their sin and redirect their worship. Finally, just as prophesied, God brought all the consequences of Israel's idolatry with the destruction of Jerusalem and His people were either exiled, slain, or forced into slavery.¹³⁵

New Testament Detriments

During the intertestamental period, the Jews built synagogues to teach the Scriptures, and the Jewish faith became increasingly institutionalized. This endeavor helped to preserve the faith and identity of the Jews during a time when several other cultures disappeared. However, the long-term ramifications of the restructuring of Hebrew society began to reveal negative consequences. "The idea of Hebrew exclusiveness fostered by Ezra slowly degenerated into an unhealthy preoccupation with separation from the 'unclean' lifestyle of the Gentiles" and consequently desensitized many Jews to their spiritual bankruptcy.¹³⁶

A zealous yet misguided appeal to Mosaic Law led to a pharisaical legalism that increasingly lost the prevailing elements of faith, mercy, and justice that comprise the essence of the Torah.¹³⁷ Religious traditions, comments, and interpretations were recorded in books such as

¹³⁴ Whaley, *Called to Worship*, 203-207.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 228-229.

¹³⁶ Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 45.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

the Talmud, Cabala, and Midrashim. This literature was revered and soon considered as authoritative as the Scripture on which it reflected.¹³⁸ By the first century A.D., a professional class of scribes motivated by political and economic power had become the ruling aristocracy of Jerusalem, usurping the priestly role of the people's spiritual leader.¹³⁹

The Pharisees tended to be at the forefront of many of Jesus' rebukes (Matt. 23). Priding themselves on remaining separate from Gentiles, sinners, and the illiterate who did not observe or understand religious laws, much of their teachings focused on the observance of the Sabbath, uncleanness, and detailing requirements that were intended to guide others in keeping their oral traditions and laws. Their burdensome requirements proved to be more than most could uphold. The Pharisees stood ready to point out the violations and had the effect of sapping the joy out of worship. Despite much of their hypocrisy and self-righteous behaviors, the Pharisees enjoyed political power and clout and even popular support, as compared to other sects such as the Sadducees and Samaritans.¹⁴⁰

Detriments Throughout Church History

Much of the detriments that arose after Jesus' resurrection and after the apostolic period were disputes about false teachings. Gnosticism arose that saw the material world as inferior, and the spirit or mind was superior. The body was a prison to escape, or at least "a mere instrument to be manipulated to serve the goals of the 'person,' understood as the spirit or mind or psyche."¹⁴¹ Arianism arose in the third and fourth century A.D. that charged that Jesus was

¹³⁸ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 40.

¹³⁹ Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 45-46.

¹⁴⁰ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 367-368.

¹⁴¹ Robert P George, "Gnostic Liberalism," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, Iss. 268, (December 2016), ProQuest Ebook Library, 34.

created and was a lesser divine being than God the Father. A famous slogan employed by some within the sect was, “there was a time when the Son was not.”¹⁴²

These disputes were taken seriously by the early church leaders. Warnings were given to be on the alert for men speaking perverse things, intending to draw disciples away from the truth (Acts 20:30). The tensions surrounding which teachings were true and what beliefs should form official doctrine contributed to the formation of councils, decrees, and ministry structures which sought to promote and control the teachings of the church.¹⁴³

While well-meaning, many developments made to combat heresy were ultimately detrimental to the church. The Council of Laodicea stripped the congregation of the ability to sing corporately.¹⁴⁴ The itinerant activities of teachers and preachers were constrained and assumed by more settled roles among local church leaders. A monarchical episcopate began to emerge over the course of several generations out of a “concern to determine the boundaries for the church’s message, to ensure that what was preached was consistent with the ‘true faith.’¹⁴⁵”

In 313 A.D., the Edict of Milan granted religious freedom to those within the Roman Empire, as well as bestowing official state patronage on Christianity. With what may be considered numerically as a catalyst, this edict proved to be a detriment to the spiritual growth of Christianity. Davidson states,

the Constantinian revolution in no sense ‘Christianised’ the Roman Empire, nor, certainly, did political sponsorship bring only good to the churches, but it altered the status of the faith in a way that was truly decisive. People did not suddenly flock in their

¹⁴² R.T. Mullins, “Divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism, *The Journal of Analytic Theology*, Vol. 4, Iss. 1, (2016), 276-276, Alma Ex Libris Group.

¹⁴³ Davidson, “Church Growth in the Early Church,” in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. Goodhew, 147.

¹⁴⁴ Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul*, 23-24.

¹⁴⁵ Davidson, “Church Growth in the Early Church,” in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. Goodhew, 147.

thousands to commit their lives to Christ, nor were they coerced to profess faith, but Christianity became a visible reality, and a public authority, as never before.¹⁴⁶

Large churches were constructed, and Roman basilicas were converted into Christian places of worship during this time. The growing number of attendees also encouraged the development of a church hierarchy. Ross notes that over time, that the chair of the bishop, or overseer, was moved from the center of the congregation to a place behind the altar. This move established a place of power over the congregants and was symbolic of the growing divide in power between the clergy and the laity. As worship began to gradually move from an active work of the people to a work of the select clergy, worshipers were moved to a passive, observant role.¹⁴⁷

Don Hustad observed five areas of deterioration in what was now known as the Roman Catholic Church. The preaching of the bible was minimized, or even omitted, in favor of readings about various saints. Services were no longer conducted in the vernacular, but in Latin, and congregational singing was nearly eliminated by Laodicean Council decree. Emphasis was placed only on Christ's death during Mass, and the Eucharist was turned into a service of mourning, with only the officiating priest permitted to take of the bread and the cup. Finally, the Prayer of Thanksgiving became a lengthy petition for God to receive offerings from the saints. As a result, corruption tainted the clergy and stunted the spiritual growth of the congregation.¹⁴⁸

Other detriments in the history of the church highlighted the incompatibility of a secular world with a Christian faith. Eight major periods of persecution are typically recognized under

¹⁴⁶ Davidson, "Church Growth in the Early Church," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. Goodhew, 148-149

¹⁴⁷ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 414-415.

¹⁴⁸ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 106-107.

Roman Empire alone, beginning with Nero in the AD 60s, and ending under Diocletian in the early 300s.¹⁴⁹ The years AD 500-1500 were fraught with war as the Franks invaded the fallen Roman civilization, the rise of Islam and its occupation of the Mediterranean World, the Crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the reestablishment of Islamic control by the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century.¹⁵⁰

There were notable divisions within the church during this period as well. In AD 1054, Christendom was divided into the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. As the Roman Catholic Church grew entrenched in political corruption, monasticism arose as a form of protest in the early Middle Ages.¹⁵¹ The Thirty Years' War began as a Catholic-Protestant Conflict in 1618 and led to mass persecution of sects such as Anabaptizers and Pietists. The conflict turned political and eventually engulfed the entire continent of Europe and caused extreme hardship, famine, and poverty.¹⁵² Divisions, often less than amicable, between Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and the numerous Protestant denominations extend into the present.

Philosophical Detriments

A final detriment to be discussed in this work is the battle between Christianity and the various philosophical underpinnings that have arisen throughout the course of church history which continue to influence philosophy and methodologies throughout the modern Western world. The Renaissance period brought a pronounced form of humanism that undercut much of Christianity. The rise of Enlightenment thinking and the superiority of logical reasoning

¹⁴⁹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 70.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 105.

diminished the socially acceptable legitimacy of the spiritual. Christianity was scoffed at and criticized as humanists denied the existence of God and a supernatural realm.

What Lessons Can the Modern Church Apply from These Findings?

Representative

After a thorough view of Scripture, it is evident that God has purposely brought about a people to join with Him in His work of redeeming what was lost during the Fall. This is visible in the concept of the *imago Dei* in that mankind was to serve as both functional and intrinsic representatives of God. McConville states, “human representation of God is to be understood in this sense, that only one who is like God can represent him...the human being, as ‘image of God,’ may be said to be the place where God is present in the creation.”¹⁵³

Not only should humanity be God’s representatives, but certain aspects of God have been bestowed upon man as well. When Scripture states that believers are to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” it is only possible because God has given His created beings hearts, souls, and minds, as well as shown them how these vessels should work (Matt 22:37). Mankind has the capacity to love because He first loved mankind (1 John 4:19). Mankind has the inherent ability to create because God is the Creator. Because God is missional, man is to function as His representatives on the earth, fully engaged in His mission to seek and save those spiritually lost in the world (Luke 19:10).

Lessons from Jesus

Arguably one of the most recognized verses in the Bible is John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but

¹⁵³ McConville, *Being Human in God’s World*, 26.

have eternal life.” Whereas the Old Testament covenant required physical sacrifices of animals, grain, and other materials to be given for sin and trespasses, the New Covenant established by Jesus involved His sacrificial death on the cross that paid the sin debt forevermore.

In Old Testament Covenant, Moses served as mediator, relaying messages to the people on behalf of God. Aaron served as high priest as he gave sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. Under the New Covenant, Jesus serves as both mediator and high priest, serving as the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of all who believe in His Lordship for salvation, and as mediator revealing the nature of God to man.¹⁵⁴

Presently, Jesus continues His ministry by being present in the midst of believers as they gather, leading their praises to the Father. It is only through Christ that believers may enter into God’s presence through worship. God, in His unfathomable grace, has provided the worship He requires of believers through Christ. Ron Man states, “this is an amazing truth, and one which infinitely distinguishes Christianity apart from all other faiths.”¹⁵⁵

There are many lessons the church may learn from the prior earthly ministry of Jesus. Much of his teaching and many of His works and miracles occurred in settings of worship. He preached throughout synagogues in Nazareth, Capernaum, Judea, and many others.¹⁵⁶ Jesus modeled a vibrant personal prayer life, often going away by Himself to pray alone. He also worshiped with singing, as was custom in the synagogues, and a song was also sung as He and the disciples went out after the Last Supper. The most obvious act of worship modeled by Jesus

¹⁵⁴ Man, *Proclamation and Praise*, 44.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

¹⁵⁶ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 373-376.

was obedience, as He was willing to give His life in obedience to His Father's Will for the redemption of mankind.¹⁵⁷

Lessons from the First Christian Church

With the works and words of Jesus still fresh upon their hearts, the apostles set out to proclaim the gospel of Christ and take His truth to the nations. New disciples of Jesus spread throughout the known world, with thousands baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within a century of the Resurrection. As Bonnington states, "the first churches grew because the gospel was foundational to their life and through it the life transforming power of God created its own dynamics of conversion and community."¹⁵⁸

It was evident that the gospel was foundational in the lives of new converts. Christian conversion was a high commitment activity, as it continues to be today. As it was impossible to have a secular mindset during this time frame, Christians made exclusive claims that had radical religious, social, and relational consequences. Through the power of God, lives were transformed in visible ways which attracted many. Those that embraced the gospel of Jesus created their own community dynamic, complete with revolutionary social and religious change, which eventually grew exponentially.¹⁵⁹

Personal transformation, which leads to societal transformation, should continue to be an intrinsic hallmark, as well as a mark of growth, in present-day Christian churches. The gospel and the call for believers to live lives of holiness has not changed. Paul's imploration to believers "to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and pleasing to God" is increasing relevant in a

¹⁵⁷ Whaley, *Called to Worship*, 238-246.

¹⁵⁸ Bonnington, "The Kingdom of God and Church Growth in the New Testament," ed. Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 70.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

modern society that has exchanged sacrifice for self-gratification (Rom. 12:1). The call to offer a holy sacrifice involves the separation from the influence of the surrounding idolatrous culture, for both individual and church.¹⁶⁰

Prayer

Benedicta Ward stresses that "all growth in the Christian life is rooted in growth of prayer...The supreme lesson of our fathers is that there comes first the call to prayer to God: it is the one thing needful."¹⁶¹ Before the visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit in nearly every Great Awakening, there was a group of believers gathered together for prayer. Before Jonathan Edwards preached his famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," he fasted and prayed for three days. Before the awakening spread in Germany, a small group of persecuted believers from the Brethren of the Common Life met together to share the Lord's Supper and pray.¹⁶² Before the Cane Ridge Revival, Presbyterian preacher James McGready established an agreement with three surrounding churches to pray at sunset on Saturday and sunrise on Sunday for the sinners in their country, as well as the world.¹⁶³ The evangelistic campaigns of D.L. Moody and the revivalists that followed grew after the Laymen's Prayer Revival.¹⁶⁴

Jesus held a deep commitment to personal prayer, where he was known to go away to a private place to commune with His Father. At the request of the disciples, Jesus modeled the way in which believers should pray. He specifically prayed that God's kingdom would be done on

¹⁶⁰ Whaley, *Called to Worship*, 285-286.

¹⁶¹ Benedicta Ward, "Verbum et Exemplum Docere: Bede, Cuthbert, Aidan and Mission in the Early English Church," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. Goodhew, 23.

¹⁶² Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 114-117.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

earth as it is in Heaven (Matt. 6:9-10). The Early Church members continually met together for prayer and fellowship, and as a result, "the Lord [added] to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42, 47). Prayer is a vital element of the growth of the church when it is based in faith and dependent on seeking God's will.¹⁶⁵

However, prayer must never be used as merely a strategy for church growth born from a motivation rooted in egotism from increased attendance numbers. Pastor Daniel Henderson states, "while God delights in a praying people and is eager for the advancement of His church, He would not reduce something as pure and distinctive as prayer to the next strategy for our human-centered success."¹⁶⁶ Too often, when prayer does not result in increased numbers immediately, it is discarded for a different methodology, typically one more aligned with increased success in the secular world. Prayer should be viewed as a lifelong focus on God and His character, not a temporary fix to a problem.¹⁶⁷

Corporate Worship

Ross states that "the whole spiritual cycle moves from prayer to praise. If prayer is nonexistent, praise will be lost or, if routinely performed, hollow."¹⁶⁸ Worship may encompass numerous rituals that are directed towards God, but one act that is particularly effective in the growth of the church is the use of music and song. The Early Church engaged in corporate worship as they met to praise in the temple as well as among each other's homes (Acts 2:46-47).

¹⁶⁵ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 378.

¹⁶⁶ Daniel Henderson, *Fresh Encounters: Experiencing Transformation Through United Worship-Based Prayer*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NAVPRESS, 2008), 85.

¹⁶⁷ Henderson, *Fresh Encounters*, 85

¹⁶⁸ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 57.

Towns and Whaley explain that during each period of awakening, the people composed new styles of worship using new methods or techniques.¹⁶⁹

In the Old Testament, King David is credited with structuring temple and tabernacle worship. Webber states that tabernacle worship "may be seen as a type of church worship during the Davidic era. Here was a model of the people of God entering into God's gates with thanksgiving and offering their sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving night and day."¹⁷⁰ The Levites led the people during all hours in praise to the Lord through song, dance, and musical instruments, which featured musical prophecy.¹⁷¹ As Ross states, "Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthan were 'prophets' using harps, strings, and cymbals, and they wrote psalms for the hymnbook which ultimately became Holy Scripture...these psalms were understood to be God's word to the people, that is, prophetic compositions."¹⁷²

Another example of exceptional corporate worship is found in Second Chronicles. As the people gathered to dedicate the Temple which was constructed under Solomon to God, the Levites brought the ark and tent of meeting into the Temple. Singers, along with one hundred and twenty priests with trumpets, and others with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, lifted up their sounds "to make themselves heard with one voice and to praise and glorify the Lord" (2 Chron. 5:12-13). At the sound of the Israelites' unified worship, the Lord filled the Temple with "the Cloud of His '*Shekinah*,' *chabod* glory, and His presence was so pervasive that no one could

¹⁶⁹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 6.

¹⁷⁰ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 35.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 257.

even move...arguably, no more significant spiritual event is recorded in the long history of Judah."¹⁷³

The eighteenth-century Great Awakening in Europe and America was also a time when hymnody and musical composition influenced society. As Towns and Whaley state, "most historians agree that the 'awakening' in Europe and America from 1727 to 1790 is easily one of the first times in history when God used hymn singing and musical expressions as a means for introducing revival to his church."¹⁷⁴ A new era of congregational singing was established by the "father of English hymnody," Isaac Watts. As a theologian and preacher, Watts united paraphrases of Scripture with devotional poetry using precise language in the English vernacular, which sought to affect ordinary people's minds, will, and passions.¹⁷⁵ Simple meter hymns with frequent parallelism and repetition included topics such as doctrine, devotion, and personal testimony.¹⁷⁶

While music within the eighteenth-century awakening provided an important means of introducing revival to the church, it was in no way the first occurrence of such expression. The previously listed Old Testament and Early Church examples listed show that the musicality of the human voice paired with instrumental accompaniment has long provided a rich heritage of worship to the Lord. In the centuries that congregational singing was outlawed and music within the church was controlled completely by priests, Gregory the Great advocated for reforming

¹⁷³ Dave Williamson, *God's Singers: A Guidebook for the Worship Leading Choir in the 21st Century*, (Nashville, TN: Dave Williamson, Worship Leading Choirs International and In: Ciite Media, 2010), 43.

¹⁷⁴ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 113.

¹⁷⁵ Donald K. McKim, "Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion, and the Revival of Religion," by Graham Beynon, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 68, Is. 4, (Cambridge University Press, Oct. 2017), 886-888, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046917000902>

¹⁷⁶ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 120-122.

Christian music, establishing liturgy that codified and shaped church song, which is now named in his honor, Gregorian Chant.¹⁷⁷ Martin Luther broke from the exclusively mandated Latin translation of the Scriptures and translated the Bible in the vernacular. Luther further composed theological songs, adapting texts and melodies familiar to the German people from sacred and secular folksongs.¹⁷⁸

What was seen as a radical shift in worship during the Reformation was a necessity for access to the Word of God by the priesthood of all believers. If song is to be used for the worship of God, the lyrics must be understandable to the participating individuals. Worship leaders should realize the gravity of their responsibilities of first being a theologian, basing the lyrics of congregational song choices on accurate scriptural influence. Songs resonate within the human heart, therefore any lyrics presented must be theologically accurate if worship is to be accurate and pleasing to God.¹⁷⁹

Towns and Whaley expound upon the influence on evangelical worship music that has been the enduring legacy of the Jesus Movement. The deeply personal and expressive style, reflecting popular stylistic mixtures of pop, folk, country, and rock-'n'-roll, became a new style that aimed for creating a corporate worship experience rather than music to be performed.¹⁸⁰ The new music became its own genre, Contemporary Christian Music, which grew into a multi-billion-dollar industry by the turn of the century. The role of musicians changed as a result of the Jesus Movement, with a new demand for full-time professional worship pastors, a growing need

¹⁷⁷ Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul*, 24.

¹⁷⁸ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 108-109.

¹⁷⁹ Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 18.

¹⁸⁰ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 323-324.

for skilled musicians to play and sing during services, and a rapidly growing publishing industry that was eager to respond to the need for music and worship resources.¹⁸¹

The advent of Contemporary Christian Music during the 1970s also had a commanding influence on evangelical services, radically shifting how evangelical churches viewed the relationship between music and worship. "For the first time in church history, worship and music were seen as synonymous."¹⁸² A distinctive element of present-day services among Protestants, and particularly Pentecostal expressions, is the concept of divine presence experienced through congregational song being formulated into systems of theology. Lim and Ruth, authors of *Lovin' on Jesus*, a history of contemporary worship, explain that this "might be called *sacramental* if we allow this term to refer to a general notion of encounter with God's presence."¹⁸³ The authors note that the connection between music and divine presence has become mainstream, even to the effect of nearly replacing the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. As the opinion states, "if God was encountered in the music, they were not needed."¹⁸⁴

Perhaps the adoption of the sacramentality of congregational music was one reason that swift changes in musical style propelled by the Jesus Movement proved startling to a good number of American churches and their congregants. Disagreements among the elements of worship is in no way a new phenomenon within church history. However, the conflicts involving musical selections within the worship service, deemed "worship wars," has bitterly overtaken the spirit and focus of worship away from the Lord in many congregations. It is understandable, given the fairly recent assumption of "music as sacrament," that selections of congregational

¹⁸¹ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 326.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁸³ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 118.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

song and stylistic considerations must be undertaken with understanding and reverence.

"Worship music is a new liturgical symbol that requires conscientious reflection on commodity and consumption, along with the gift and grace it facilitates...It must provide more than a satisfying performance. The song becomes worship as the community performs its faith."¹⁸⁵

If music within the worship service is assumed to be sacramental, whether implicitly or explicitly to the believer, it further heightens the necessity of pursuing correct theology, focus, and response to the revelation of God. As stated previously, a Scripturally accurate theology in worship is essential for true worship of God. As Kevin Navarro states, "if faith is absent in our church, it is because ignorance of the Scriptures is escalating."¹⁸⁶

Not only does the ignorance of Scripture cause the decline or absence of faith in the church, but "worship devoid of scriptural influence will degenerate into idolatry."¹⁸⁷ The struggles of ancient Israel serve as a warning to the modern church of the dangers of idolatry. At Mount Sinai, the construction of the golden calf idol nearly caused the destruction of the entire Israelite people, were it not for Moses' intercession (Ex. 32:10-14). Prophets such as Elijah, Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah, Huldah, and many others, were continuously sent by God to warn of the consequences of their idolatry. In the New Testament, the Pharisees were rebuked by Jesus for their cold legalism, a form of idolizing themselves by obsessively observing the law, while vindictively punishing those who disobeyed their strict commands. In the modern West, the spirit

¹⁸⁵ David Lemley, *Becoming What We Sing: Formation through Contemporary Worship Music*, (Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), ProQuest Ebook Central, 10.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

of idolatry is present in pursuit of money, science, and other objects or persons that attempts to fill one's desires, effectively replacing God as the source of satisfaction and devotion.¹⁸⁸

If worship through music focuses on anything other than Christ, it ceases to be worship and runs the risk of becoming a theatrical performance. This is a serious issue within the church, as well as popularized Christian music accessible via live performance, or through radio and recordings. Lyrics may not only be theologically unsound; they may also be too focused upon the fostering of a feeling regarding what God has done for the individual. Kauflin states, "as valuable as emotional engagement is, it's possible for feelings and experiences—rather than God himself—to become our goal. We come hoping to get a good feeling from worship..."¹⁸⁹ While this type of praise has a worthy place in worship, without a focus on the attributes and nature of God, this type of "feel-good" emotional response genre can quickly devolve into a form of narcissistic, inward-focused idolatry. Sound doctrine should be favored over devotion, for we worship God for who He is, not for what he does for us.¹⁹⁰

It must also be emphasized that musical traditions and preferences, though not inherently wrong, do not constitute Biblical doctrine. Whaley describes this hindrance to the local congregation as "idealism" and is typically "based on the suppositions that worship is only genuine when it includes that which is familiar to our own cultural experience and is only right when it is based on a right formula."¹⁹¹ Far too often, churches become entrenched in their traditional worship experiences and fear the unavoidable change that comes with existing in an ever-shifting cultural society. It is vital to remember that not everything "which may creep into

¹⁸⁸ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 311.

¹⁸⁹ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 167.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁹¹ Whaley, *The Dynamics of Corporate Worship*, 36-37.

the devotional traditions of the Church necessarily becomes a divine revelation of the true faith."¹⁹² Like all other human activities, worship should be evaluated and reformed as prudent.

Preaching

The Apostle Paul set forth the importance of preaching in the worship service in his letter to the church in Corinth. He stated that it was Christ that sent him to preach the gospel. His preaching was powerful not because of his own wisdom or eloquence, but a demonstration of the Spirit's power (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:4). Paul saw the proclamation of the Christ event as central to preaching in the context of worship. In 1 Timothy, Paul emphasizes the importance of teaching within preaching, referring to this as "sound doctrine" and "good teaching" (1 Tim. 1:10; 4:6). Webber draws the conclusion from these texts that "the preaching of the Gospel always contains teaching, and teaching always contains the preaching of the Gospel. They both belong to the same Word of God."¹⁹³

The act of preaching the Word has continued well beyond the ministry of Paul. Key individuals during the Reformation leaned heavily on preaching the Word of God as a priority, such as Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin. The First Great Awakening in Europe and America saw the rise of the preaching of the brothers Wesley, Edwards, and Whitefield, and the move to itinerant preaching. The Second Great Awakening likewise featured preaching, with the Cane Ridge Revivals hosting tens of thousands of people traveling by horse and buggies to attend, as well as outdoor camp meeting revivals which featured sermons that were scheduled throughout the entire day.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² William Nicholls, *Jacob's Ladder*, (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), 9.

¹⁹³ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 165.

¹⁹⁴ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 106-154.

Individuals such as Charles Finney and D.L. Moody utilized modern marketing techniques to preach to multitudes. Their methods and preaching paved the way for the success of later evangelists such as Billy Sunday and Billy Graham. William Seymour preached messages of dire eschatological consequences, including the "Latter Rain" outpouring of the Holy Spirit to crowds at Azusa Street.¹⁹⁵

God has used preaching and evangelism to draw multitudes to Himself through the message of the gospel and the teaching of His Word. Whaley states that preaching is one way to engage the congregation in worship as it expounds upon the gospel. The preacher worships as the power of God is extolled. The Holy Spirit can move the preacher in a personal way that settles the heart, calms an anxious mind, and gives the courage to speak the Word to the congregation.¹⁹⁶

Evangelism

The word evangelism derives from a combination of the Greek noun *euangelion* and the verb *euangelizomai*, which means "good news," and "to announce good news," respectively.¹⁹⁷ Chapter One includes an official definition from the International Congress on World Evangelization, which will be inspected closer in this section. Evangelism's effectiveness relies on the celebration of the noun, "the good news," with the commitment to the verb, "to announce good news."

The command to go and make disciples of all nations, formed the foundation for the growth of the believing body from the life of Jesus to the present time (Matt. 38:19-20). By sharing the Gospel and modeling their lives upon Scriptural principles and commands, believers

¹⁹⁵ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 224-225.

¹⁹⁶ Vernon Whaley, *The Dynamics of Corporate Worship*, 2nd ed., (Virginia Beach, VA: Academx Publishing Services, Inc., 2009), 148-153.

¹⁹⁷ T.P. Weber, "Evangelism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 586.

"become the hands and feet of Jesus. They are driven by a passion for God and love for others."¹⁹⁸

But such passion for God and others does not simply manifest itself after one surrenders to Christ. A passion for God is cultivated through a relationship with Him, and a passion for others should be a result of outflow of divine communion. This is modeled by Jesus' response when asked what the greatest commandment was. He answered "'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'...The second is like it, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-340).

An example of the power of balancing the Greek noun and verb that evangelism derives from was seen in the Early Church. Apostles and believers spread the gospel far and wide, and many came to believe in Christ and were baptized. Their lives were transformed, and they continually came together to devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayer, sharing in the Eucharist, praising God, and sharing or selling their possessions help those in need (Acts 2:41-47).

Another example of a "balanced evangelism" was evident during the Second Great Awakening. As preachers brought the gospel to revivals and camp meetings, many Methodist and Baptist churches experienced a tremendous increase in membership. Soul-winning, or seeking to convert nonbelievers to Christianity, became the primary function of ministry. In turn, this stimulated several philanthropic and moral reforms, including the temperance movement and greater freedoms for women. The founding of numerous seminaries and colleges and the

¹⁹⁸ David Wheeler and Vernon M. Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-Based Evangelism*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 52.

organization of mission societies resulted from the evangelical revivalism of the Second Great Awakening.¹⁹⁹

Euangelizomai

When evangelism is solely focused on the verb form, "announcing the good news," it may be easy to lose sight of the "good news." Though no Christian is immune, new believers are more vulnerable to attack and the least likely to be able to defend themselves against the adversary who is constantly seeking someone to spiritually devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Such believers need the guidance of more mature believers to show them how to "take up the full armor of God" to resist the spiritual forces of wickedness (Eph. 6:13). Ongoing discipleship is necessary to gird oneself with the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel, shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph. 6:14-17).

Though evangelicals may be keen to share the gospel and the benefits of a life in Christ, they must not neglect the obligations of discipleship and fellowship. Converts that are left without the direction of other believers may feel as if "they have been offered 'cheap grace' rather than the gospel's free but costly grace."²⁰⁰ They must know that salvation entails obedience to God's commands and participation in the body of Christ. The fellowship of believers, the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit, is vital in the Christian life. The Holy Spirit relates believers not only to God, but also to each other, as well as with the world.²⁰¹ Evangelism must not be detached from discipleship or fellowship.

¹⁹⁹ "Second Great Awakening," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, ed. Melissa Petruzz, accessed June 27, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Second-Great-Awakening>

²⁰⁰ "Evangelize," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 549.

²⁰¹ Dwight V. Vogel, "The Depth Dynamic of Christian Worship: A Trinitarian Perspective," *Worship*, Vol. 76, No. 4., (2002), 321, Ex Libris Group.

Euangelion

Likewise, the singular focus of having received the "good news" without actively going out into the world to "announce good news" is detrimental. The secularization theory arose in the 1960s, which combined empirical and theoretical analysis from social theorists to declare that religion was finally dying in the Western world. Dominic Erdozain contends that this theory rested on a weak assumption, that the world follows Europe's lead, yet it has been internalized by theologians, church leaders, and laypersons alike. In fact, leading sociologists and proponents of secularization theory were often said to be surprised at how quickly their predictions of doom and demise were internalized by church leaders.²⁰² This internalization of secular theory has seemed to produce a general sense of despair within the church. This has led to reactions of reclusiveness and an assumption of remnant theology amongst the remaining faithful. Twentieth century theologian Karl Rahner, also influenced by secularization, writes that the position of the church in the modern world is one of a little flock of sheep, a small diaspora scattered across a world of secular pluralism.²⁰³ American theologian George Lindbeck's "progressive dechristianization" argues that soon Christians will be reduced to a small minority with no hope or growth in their churches.²⁰⁴

When the church begins to assume a theology of decline, it is easy to see the natural, yet unfortunate, reaction of defensiveness and withdrawal from the secular world that threatens to consume, if not eradicate them. As a result of these changes, Reggie McNeal boldly states that "in North America the invitation to become a Christian has become largely an invitation to

²⁰² Dominic Erdozain, "New Affections: Church Growth in Britain, 1750-1970," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. Goodhew, 216-219.

²⁰³ David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 29.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

convert to the church."²⁰⁵ In an effort to hold out against the assumed rise of secularization, many church members have retreated into their buildings and succumbed to "refuge thinking, (allowing Christians to hide out in Bible study.)"²⁰⁶

McNeal compares this present-day scenario with the Pharisees that Jesus continually rebuked. He states that their evangelism strategy was to demand conformity to their laws and had contorted God's message to a moralism that was quick to condemn and punish rather than to allow "iron to sharpen iron" in love (Prov. 27:17). Instead of joining the insular culture that the Pharisees had long cultivated, Jesus sought out the sinners, the poor, and the unclean who were disenfranchised or even cast out from the religion.²⁰⁷ While believers are warned to not be conformed to the secular world, the challenge for the church is to remain committed to seeking out those within the world while being transformed by the renewing of our minds through Christ. "We are not being realistic, or faithful, if we simply seek to live in a bubble that is self-defined and deluded, talking to ourselves about our faith, and failing to connect with anyone else."²⁰⁸

Service

The church who joins together in corporate prayer, worship, and evangelism that both proclaims the Word of God and seeks to reflect the heart of God, ministers to their community's needs. "Worship does not stop when the service ends. Indeed *service* does not end."²⁰⁹ Serving

²⁰⁵ Reggie McNeal, *Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 11, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁰⁶ McNeal, *Present Future*, 27.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-30.

²⁰⁸ Martin Warner, "Incarnation and Church Growth," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. by David Goodhew, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 108.

²⁰⁹ Vogel, "The Depth Dynamic of Christian Worship," 322.

the world not only includes evangelism by word, but also in deed. Ministering to hurting individuals displays the commitment to Christ in way that powerful resonates within the community.

Davidson states that there seems to have been relatively high numbers of women and children within the Early Church and appealed to much of the destitute, which included a large number of people in ancient cities. With poor social conditions, disease, poorly built dwellings, violent crime, and frequent food shortages, every community held a sizeable number of people dependent upon the support of charity. Christian churches had a powerful witness amongst these populations.²¹⁰

Noland writes that God calls the church to serve the world in tangible ways, especially among the disenfranchised of society. Proverbs commands believers to speak up for the rights of those who cannot speak for themselves, the poor, and the needy (Prov. 31:8-9). We are to be as the Early Church and give to those in need (Acts 2:45).²¹¹ The prophetic rebukes declare that for worship to be pleasing to God the believer must follow His commands to care for the widow, orphan, the needy, and the poor. Ross believes that "the 'Christianized' modern, affluent societies have the personal and physical resources to meet the needs in society, and the churches have the responsibility to inspire this by leading the way. But they have failed to do so."²¹²

If Ross is correct, the situation for today's society may mirror the church and society several centuries ago. During the latter seventeenth-century, the Anglican Church was

²¹⁰ Davidson, "Church Growth in the Early Church," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed., David Goodhew, 161.

²¹¹ Noland, Rory. *The Worshiping Artist: Equipping You and Your Ministry Team to Lead Others in Worship*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.

²¹² Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 334.

documented as being overly concerned with the outward image of worship, with little concern about the spiritual or physical welfare of the laity.²¹³ State churches and clergy throughout Europe, both Catholic and Protestant, were often regarded as lethargic, distanced from their parishioners, and frequently corrupt. Enlightenment figures, such as Voltaire, criticized clergy of all denominations as soporific, preoccupied with accumulating wealth, and rebuked for falling short of ideal religious standards.²¹⁴

The Secular Situation

While the influence of secular philosophies impacted the growth of the church throughout its history, today's church still struggles with some of the same issues and philosophies. Before the first Great Awakening, Europe and the early American colonies were challenged by individual Enlightenment thinkers who arose in a movement that reoriented politics, philosophy, science, and communications. Traditional authority, including religious authority, was questioned, and the notion that humanity could improve through rational thought increased in popularity. Philosophers such as John Locke argued that human nature was subject to change and one's knowledge was accumulated through life experiences rather than accessed from an outside truth. Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, and David Hume published works centered around a common theme of rational questioning.²¹⁵

Though successful in establishing independence from England, the American Revolution saw a great deal of physical and spiritual destruction before the Second Great Awakening. These

²¹³ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 115.

²¹⁴ Jeremy Gregory, "Religion: Faith in the Age of Reason," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 31, Is. 4, (November 2, 2011), Wiley Online Library

²¹⁵ "Enlightenment," *History*, (A&E Television Networks, December 17, 2009), accessed June 20, 2021, <https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/enlightenment>

issues, compounded by a growing fascination with European empiricism and rationalism, coupled with a rapid spread of deism and secularism, resulted in a long period of spiritual decline.²¹⁶ The Jesus Movement was situated against the backdrop of social and political unrest in America. Church attendance began to decline as humanism, liberalism, and hedonism increased, and the youth began to erupt into violent demonstrations against the government, as well as the rebellious Hippe culture. As Towns and Whaley elaborate, "Many claimed to be antimaterialism, antitechnology, antieducation, anti-Christian, antisocial, and antibusiness success. In an effort to calm inner turmoil, many sought answers in ancient and modified versions of the occult, Eastern mysticism, and other fringe religious practices."²¹⁷

Humanism has not receded from among the forefront of societal opinion. Humanism is defined today as "a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good."²¹⁸ Humanism's present motto speaks to the same beliefs and attitudes as it did in its inception: "good without a God."²¹⁹ Present-day humanism continues to appeal to the idolization of humanity in exchange for God's providence, with a stubborn self-reliance and hubris that has not changed since the Fall.

The growth of individualism also occurred during the Renaissance as economic wealth transferred from feudal landowners to trade centers across Europe, thereby creating a middle

²¹⁶ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 135.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 295.

²¹⁸ American Humanist Association, "Definition of Humanism," n.d. accessed November 20, 2021, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/definition-of-humanism/>

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

class consisting of merchants, bankers, and industrialists.²²⁰ What is now known as the United States of America served as the champion of individualism as a nation of individuals broke free from their sovereign nation and sought to govern themselves in an experimental democracy that upheld the economic freedom and self-reliance of the common people to apply their own creativity and pursuits to advance their own circumstances. While each individual strove after their own "pursuit of happiness," as a whole, society was benefited by an expanded economy and growing quality of life. Individualism is still a large part of American life, and according to the Center for Individualism, it has "raised the standard of living in the developed world by 3,000 percent in 200 years."²²¹ While individualism has its merits, it is the drive for self-reliance that has weakened the Western church's reliance on God alone for providence.

John Jefferson Davis highlights two pervasive ontologies that vie for the believer's worldview and perception of God. In the ontology of modernity, also called scientific materialism, "the ontological center is the natural world of energy and matter and natural selection, the world that can be studied, measured, and controlled by the scientific method and by the technology based on it."²²² Modernity allows human beings to have religious beliefs, but those beliefs have no basis in reality and are merely human constructions that reflect various psychological needs and wishes. An economy of industrial capitalism propelled consumerism, and a scientific materialism became the established worldview within academia and is now presupposed into American law and business.²²³

²²⁰ Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 101.

²²¹ Center for Individualism, "What is Individualism?" *Center for Individualism*, n.d. accessed November 20, 2021, <https://centerforindividualism.org/principles/what-is-individualism/>

²²² John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence*, (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 2010), 21.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 22.

Jefferson's discussion of the second ontology, digital virtualism, corresponds to the postmodern era. This ontological framework leans heavily on the simulated virtual realities of television, computer simulations, and internet technology. In this era, "one could go for days at a time not noticing the natural world, since both one's job and one's leisure-time entertainment revolve around the center of socially constructed images, services and experiences that are the basis of the digital and information age economies."²²⁴ Religion is inundated with pluralism, as everything revolves around the correctness of an individual's choice, and no one version of religion, is better than another. Like modernity, postmodernism "places the autonomous self at the center of its universe of meanings."²²⁵

Conclusion

Scripture and church history serve as effective material from which lessons may be learned about the catalysts, detriments, and lessons regarding church growth. The catalysts of creation, covenant, priesthood, dwelling, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, message of the Early Church, and revivals and awakenings spurred the numerical and spiritual growth of the church throughout the ages. The detriments of growth have taken various form of idolatry, be it legalism, false teaching, power, politicization, or the many secular forms which are popular today. As the modern church moves forward, the lessons of representation, teachings of Jesus, the model of the Early Church, prayer, corporate worship, preaching, evangelism, and service, as well as warnings about secular concerns, should prove to be helpful.

²²⁴ John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 22.

²²⁵ Ibid.

Chapter Five

Introduction

As the Father sent the Son into the world, the Son, in turn, sends the church (John 20:21). Tomlin states that the church was born on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was sent to the world to dwell within believers. As the Holy Spirit works within the church, believers are restored to the Father through the Son and regain their sense of purpose. This is the reason he believes church growth matters. "Healthy well-functioning churches are places where people can be restored and become agents of change and renewal within the world beyond the church. The reason we need churches to grow...is to enable humanity, in tune with the Spirit of God, to fulfill its divine calling to care for and nurture the world which God has created."²²⁶ The summary of the findings concerning the study of church growth catalysts, detriments, and lessons the modern church may learn are listed below, as well as significance, limitations, and recommendations for further study.

Summary of Findings

The historical overview of the Old Testament, New Testament, and history of the church, following the Protestant and Western evangelical traditions, has contributed several findings on the subject of church growth. The catalysts to growth as related to numerical, spiritual, and societal transformation in the Old Testament were Creation, covenants, and the priesthood of believers in service around the dwelling of God. New Testament catalysts were Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the message and model of the Early Church as they spread the gospel throughout the nations. Church history bears witness to the moving of the Holy Spirit in

²²⁶ Tomlin, "The Prodigal Spirit," in Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 141.

awakenings such as the Protestant Reformation, First and Second Great Awakenings, the Laymen's Prayer, Welsh, Shanghai Revivals, as well as the Evangelist Campaigns and the Jesus Movement. The detriments that arose throughout the studied timeframe involved idolatry in various forms such as legalism, false teaching, power, politicization, and conflicts with allegiance to the secular world.

Finally, the lessons that may be learned from the people of God within this study include the representation of God in the world, emulating the life of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit while following the model of the Early Church. The church grows through coming together corporately in prayer, worship, preaching, and evangelism that includes both proclamation and service. Lastly, an overview of the modern secular culture was undertaken to further the understanding of the world into which the church must go to serve and make disciples.

According to Ferreira and Chipenyu, a biblical standard of the church is realized when the church functions as a united body joined together by Christ. This is seen in the unity of diversity through personal gifts of the Holy Spirit working together as one body. The authors conclude that fellowship, devoting themselves to the Scriptures, breaking of bread, and prayer causes growth in both quality and quantity of church members.²²⁷ This confirms several of the findings of this paper, though the breaking of bread was not mentioned in most studies outside of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is still to be observed together in the fellowship of the church.

²²⁷ Ignatius W. Ferreira and Wilbert Chipenyu, "Church Decline: A Comparative Investigation Assessing More Than Numbers," *In Die Skriflig* Vol. 55, No.1, (Jan. 2021), <https://doi.org.10.4102/ids.v55i1.2645>, Academic Search Ultimate Database.

Significance

In March of 2021, a Gallup poll was released which summarized the trend that secularization theorists had promoted and much of the church had pessimistically internalized. For the first time in Gallup's eight-decade trend, less than a majority of Americans, 47%, said they belonged to a church. Comparatively, in 1999, 70% of Americans polled claimed church membership. U.S. church membership was polled at 73% when first measured by Gallup in 1937 and remained near the 70th percentile for six decades before steadily declining around the turn of the century.²²⁸

Questionable methodology concerning intricate religious topics in polls aside, (such as lack of peer review, use of mixed methods, replications, and transparency, coupled with low public confidence, sharp decrease in response rate, etc.), a declining trend in religious affiliation so visibly portrayed in mass media has led to much reflection within the Christian community.²²⁹ Many contribute the decline to an increase of Americans who increasingly have no religious preference, as well as the generational gap in church goers. Gallup cites in the demographical breakdown of their poll that "currently, 31% of millennials have no religious affiliation, which is up from 22% a decade ago. Similarly, 33% of the portion of Generation Z that has reached adulthood have no religious preference."²³⁰

The World Christian Database helps to put this information into perspective. Atheism and agnosticism are two of the largest groups accounted for under the label of "no religious

²²⁸ Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," *Gallup*, (Gallup, Inc. March 29, 2021), accessed November 30, 2021, news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx

²²⁹ Robert Wuthnow, "In Polls We Trust," *First Things*, (August 2015), <https://www.firstthings.com/articles/2015/05/in-polls-we-trust>

²³⁰ Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," *Gallup*, 2021.

preference." In the year 2020, the percentage of Christians in the United States was 74.16%, while atheists comprised 2.91% and agnostics 16.77%.²³¹

Arising in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the term, atheism, is based upon the rejection of the idea of any deity, opposition to theism, and refusal of all forms of organized religion. In sociological evaluations, this typically includes anti-religious groups such as Marxists, Communists, and Maoists.²³² "Agnosticism' is an umbrella term that includes 'classical' agnostics (who believe it is impossible to know for certain whether or not there is an ultimate reality or God), individuals who profess uncertainly as to the existence of ultimate reality/God, and other non-religious persons such as secularists, materialists, and humanists."²³³ Interestingly, while claiming no religious affiliation, the Pew Forum found in 2007 that 42% of those claiming to have no religious affiliation pray monthly, and 41% considered religion at least somewhat important to their lives.²³⁴

There are also those who profess to be Christian but have no interest in being affiliated with a corporate church. Author Tara Isabella Burton claims that "young people are more likely to mix and match elements of different religions and put their own 'spin on it' rather than take in 'something that is prescribed.'"²³⁵ McNeal suggests that interest in spirituality is up, despite the downward trend in interest in institutional religion. However, this spirituality is not informed by

²³¹ Johnson, Todd M. and Zurlo, Gina A. eds., "Religions 2020, Country: United States," World Christian Database. Leiden/Boston: Brill.

²³² Johnson and Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures*, 41.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 28.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ Jamie Johnson, "Church Membership in US Falls Below 50% for the First Time in Nearly a Century," *The Telegraph Online*, (Telegraph Group, Ltd. March 31, 2021), Gale in Context: Biography.

accurate Christian theology.²³⁶ The "a-la-carte Christianity" that some amongst the younger generations are choosing for themselves form a conglomeration of their preferences in beliefs, somewhat twisted to how they see fit in their life experience, while discarding anything that they deem disagreeable. This type of theology is highly affected by the acceptance of personal truth in the postmodern era.

This is detrimental not only to the world's perception of the church, but also to the unbelievers themselves. Whether one claims to believe in a deity not, the human being is hardwired to worship. People search for awe and experiences that are "larger" than themselves such as roller coaster thrills, hang gliding, sky surfing, or bungee jumping, yet the experience is transient. Others may look to leadership or role-models, such as media stars or political leaders, but will quickly be disillusioned by moral flaws or other aspects which prove superficial against their expectations. As Vogel states, "awe is in short supply today."²³⁷

There is a deep need within the heart of every human being to find something, or someone, that is worthy of their worship. The church possesses the only knowledge that can satisfy this need and must be about Jesus' business of bringing living water to the spiritually dehydrated (John 20:14). Thomas Cranmer, a central figure of the English Reformation, believed the church had a duty to proclaim proper theology in a way that its hearers could be moved to accept it. His combination of "feeling faith" with "*sola scriptura*" created "distinctive theology which can underpin numerical church growth – a deep attentiveness to scripture and a concern to translate faith into the culture in which churches are to be grown."²³⁸ This concept has broad

²³⁶ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 11-12.

²³⁷ Vogel, "The Depth Dynamic of Christian Worship," *Worship*, 320.

²³⁸ Ashley Null, "Thomas Cranmer and a Theology of Church Growth," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. Goodhew, 25.

applications for the modern church that is seeking to save the lost. Whether they are conscious to the fact or not, the lost are seeking absolute Truth amidst the labyrinth of postmodern confusion.

Limitations

Several limitations hinder the study of numerical and spiritual growth in church history, as well as the application of the findings of the study. Secularization theory has discouraged not only the growth of the church, but much of the belief that it is proper to even hope for church growth. Elite academia almost universally acknowledges that the Western church is in decline, yet few have stopped to ponder whether this assumption is the result of "empirical observation – or the result of the absorption of the surrounding culture."²³⁹

As a result, it is difficult to find modern theologians who value the numerical growth of the local church. Quantitative studies abound that seek to prove through membership logs or other means that the church in the west is "dying," yet those that look closely at spiritual growth qualitatively are sparse. Numerical church growth is not considered a major part of church life to most theologians affected by modernity and secularization theory.²⁴⁰

A second limitation to this study is another assumption of many recent theologians: the idea of confident Christian proclamation to all peoples, including those of other religions, is seen as "old-fashioned, arrogant and divisive."²⁴¹ The growing social acceptance of both pluralism and secularization create a fear of being seen as proselytizing. Liberal thinking has persuaded many Christians to accept that their religion is but "one among many equally valid and efficacious

²³⁹ Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 33.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁴¹ David Marshall with William Glass, "Dialogue Proclamation, and the Growth of the Church in Religiously Diverse Societies," in Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 37.

paths to God," as John Hicks has proposed.²⁴² Goodhew states that this falls within a secularized theology of decline which fits neither nuanced epistemology, New Testament narrative, nor core Christian doctrines.²⁴³

The last limitation to be discussed is the scope of the study. The sheer amount of information discovered involving several millennia of human history makes it impossible to fully scrutinize every facet of growth in depth. This study serves as a brief overview to glean as much pertinent information as possible for the modern church, but it acknowledges that much is left for further studies.

Recommendations

A study of the growth of the church which is conducted without these preconceived limitations, such as secularization theory or fear of proselytization and arrogance, is recommended. Though difficult to find in current literature, it is imperative that theologians are aware of the impacts of the surrounding culture on their own biases. It is difficult to envision the church in modern culture without secular underpinnings but should prove worthwhile in imagining a more optimistic view of growth. The implicit assumption of church decline is proving to be a self-fulfilling prophecy that is unhelpful, at best, and debilitating, at worst.

A study of the growth of the church in the global South would prove helpful to discovering what considerations are fueling the growth of Christianity outside of the West. Johnson and Todd predict that by 2100, over three-fourths of all Christians will likely be living in the South. Interestingly, the authors state this depicts a return to a similar geographical

²⁴² Marshall and Glass, "Growth of the Church in Religiously Diverse Societies," 39.

²⁴³ Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 34.

makeup of Christianity nearer to the time of Christ.²⁴⁴ The Pentecostal denomination is experiencing substantial growth in these areas and a closer inspection of its spread amongst these areas would also be recommended.

Summary

“Christian church was not just a typical ancient cult which succeeded more than any other; it purveyed an account of reality which challenged in both intellectual and practical ways the cultural assumptions of the ancient world.”²⁴⁵ God's challenge to live a life emulating His holiness has always been a practical, intellectual, emotional, physical, moral, and spiritual challenge. The Old Testament documented the growth of a nation dependent on the Lord's protection, and its subsequent decline and challenges due to the forsaking of their covenantal responsibilities. The New Testament documented the transformation of worship by Jesus Christ, and the church has come into a new covenant through the Resurrection. In an age of Enlightenment that values intellect above things unseen, the message of Christ still challenges intellectual and practical cultural assumptions.

A church that witnesses growth, as defined in Chapter One, encompasses growth as numerical, spiritual, and societal transformation, and utilizes Scriptural theology to correctly serve as God's representatives to nonbelievers. A growing church emulates the life of Jesus and models the Early Church by joining together in prayer and corporate worship. The preaching and proclamation of God's results in proper evangelism that is concerned with serving others in a secular world that may or may not accept the church or their efforts. This church realizes that

²⁴⁴ Johnson and Grim, "World's Religion in Figures," 13-16.

²⁴⁵ Davidson, "Church Growth in the Early Church," in *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, ed. Goodhew, 156.

true growth is from above and is "rooted in suffering and the cross, rather than in neo-liberal paradigms of what constitutes 'success.'"²⁴⁶ Above all else, a growing church is reliant on the power of the Holy Spirit, through the sacrifice of Jesus, and to the glory of the Father.

²⁴⁶ Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 19.

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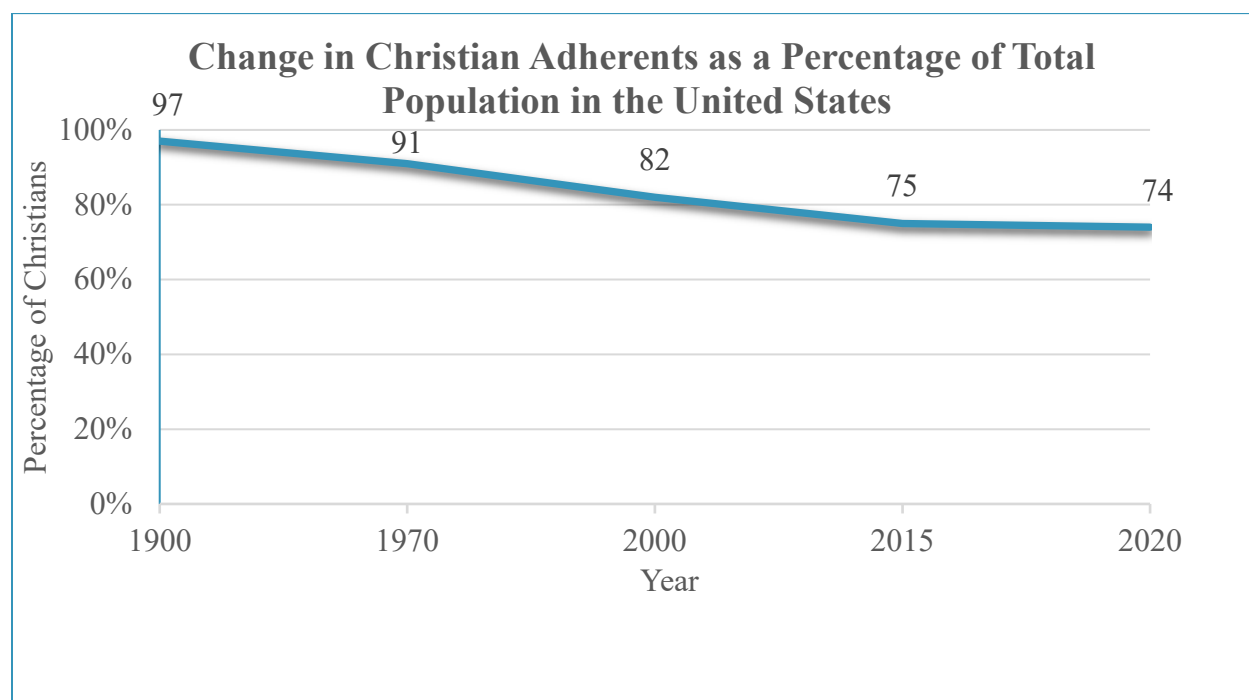
Appendix

Table 1. Religious Change Over Time in the United States

Year	Christian Adherents	Total Population	Percentage of Christians
1900	73,712,200	75,995,000	97%
1970	191,202,340	209,513,340	91%
2000	231,040,954	320,878,312	82%
2015	240,444,569	331,002,647	75%
2020	245,457,098	379,419,097	74%

Source: Data from Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed October 2021).

Figure 1. Religious Change Over Time in the United States



Source: Data from Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed October 2021).