

CHURCH GROWTH: ARE THERE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN CHRISTIANITY?

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A recurring question that pops up in all discussions of church growth in recent years is whether there are differences between Western countries which are mostly located in the Northern Hemisphere and non-Western countries which are mostly located in the Southern Hemisphere of the globe. For instance, a recent assessment of protestant Christianity noted that the hub of global Christianity has shifted to the south. Another research concluded that protestant church growth is highest in three countries of the world presently--China, Brazil and Nigeria—all of which are non-Western countries and located in the southern hemisphere.

1. Conventional Explanations:

The conventional explanations for this state of affairs in the literature have been sought in cultural, economic and political differences between these hemispheres—the north and south. Its much like the debate on economic development...a famous author had written *in Asian Drama* by Gunnar Myrdal that the Asians would never be able to experience or achieve rapid economic development due to their culture. Twenty years later, Asian values are identified as the main explanation for Asian countries' rapid economic growth by the World Bank and other analysts. While not making light of the significance of what we should best refer to as ecological differences, this paper challenges the facile assumption that revival is possible in particular ecological environments. The conditions for the movement of the Holy Spirit and His power are the same irrespective of cultural, economic and political differences.

We posit that what brings revival in any country or circumstance is the existence of *faith, holiness and individual and/or collective prayer*. These three are always accompanied by the release of God's power—which leads to a revival on the part of large numbers of people in matters of the spirit. Whenever these three conditions meet in any nation or culture, revival will break out and the church of God will grow.

The evidence can be established in Old and New Testament times as well as contemporary experiences today in different parts of the world.

2. Revival in OT times: A great revival among God's people in Egypt led them to call on the Lord. Exodus 2. 23-25 tells us that when the children of Israel sighed on account of their bondage and cried to the Lord, the latter had respect on them. In the next chapter, he calls Moses whom He gives the divine mandate of bringing forth His people from Egypt (Ex.3.7-10). When Israel gets to the land they served the Lord in the times of Moses and Joshua and lapsed into idolatry and a careless spiritual existence until the times of Samuel and the first kings of Israel, of whom the most famous was David. The nation experienced great revival—culminating in the worship of Jehovah until David passed away and the nation slipped back to idolatry until the times of Elijah and Elisha. Again the nation is brought back to God until the Lord led His own people to exile –see Jeremiah 52 and Lamentations. After 70 years, the Lord raises some prophets and leaders who prayed resulting in a heathen King, Cyrus ordering the rebuilding of God's

temple in Jerusalem. This takes us to the Minor Prophets and the long period of continuing drifting away by God's people until the times of John the Baptist.

3. Revival in NT times: The inauguration of Christ brought a great revival in the things of God, leading to the emergence of a new religion, out of Judaism, called Christianity. After the departure of Christ, this was championed by the apostles whose exploits are written in the book of Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament. Within three hundred years, in spite of great persecution and great sufferings, Christianity triumphs in the Roman Empire with the emperor Constantine declaring for Christ and the empire 'christianized'. This led to the union of church and state which historians tell us led to a period of spiritual and secular decline until the reformation under Martin Luther.

4. Revival and Church growth today: Revivals since that time have flourished in diverse parts of the globe—in England and Wales, in the European continent, then moving to the United States of America, the Azusa revivals and then on to the new world—South Africa, Latin America, Asia (Indonesia, South Korea), and now in Africa.

In all these countries, the rule was the same, wherever people find time to seek the Lord, He would be found by them (Jeremiah 29.13). When people draw near to Him He in turn has also drawn near to them...and vice versa when they stayed away or strayed into idolatry has now happened in most parts of the world. Philip for instance successfully takes the gospel to Samaria whereas Barnabas was successful in taking the gospel to his own home nation of Cyprus and Apollos perhaps to Alexandria in Egypt (Acts 14, 18). But the greatest revivalist of all times after Christ and His apostles was Paul formerly Saul whose life experience and work constitutes more than one half of the New Testament (His exploits in Ephesus is particularly striking –see Acts 19.1-11). Wherever he went there was a revival and of course also persecution. But again the most critical point was a recreation of the Lord's own experience---Acts 10.38.

5. The RCCG Experience has been well documented and a short video of that experience would be shown at this meeting. How the Lord raised a barely literate pastor to start a movement that relies completely on the Holy Ghost to prepare the way for His coming Son....such that by the time His Son returns to the earth, the church would be in all the nations of the earth. As the man never travelled out of his country until a few years to his death, most people that heard him dismissed him or at best thought that he must be speaking about his native country Nigeria....all the towns because the church was only in one corner of the nation, Nigeria.

However, this man was a man of prayer who heard constantly from the Lord. One of the things the Lord told him was that his successor was not yet in that church until a few years to the time he was to die...the ascendancy of his successor brought to bear the prophecy that the mission would reach the whole world. But the rule has also held....the work of the missions and revival moves forward by prayer, prayer the word of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit (see Olowu 2011, Himitian 2011). From that experience we can distill some of the steps to revival today in most of the RCCG churches.

6. Steps to Church Growth:

The first step to revival is a compact by the leaders of the mission with the Holy Spirit. This means tarrying long times in the Lord's presence to hear His instructions. (Jer. 23. 21-23, Mk 3.13-14). It is this that culminates in Sunday services at which miracles and signs happen but also in the monthly Holy Ghost nights and quarterly special global ministrations of the Holy Ghost.

Other actions that promote revival are: house fellowships or home churches, Sunday schools, specialized evangelical outreaches during festive seasons, ministry to young

people and children, social and community projects as tools of evangelism....this is strongly promoted by the wife of the leader of our mission, through the African Missions—details available on the website. Other social programs include outreach to miscreants of society—area boys, prostitutes etc. Another important aspect of revival is family building through specialized ministries of women....etc.

Annexes 1 and 2 are excerpts on messages on church growth by two missions experiencing revival in the United States and Europe Mainland.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Lord is moving in all countries of the world today within many ministries and churches around the world. Annex 1 contains notes from the leader of a church of 20,000 worshippers every Sunday in the United States. He is also the author of an important book on church growth that pastors might find useful...(The Purpose Driven Church, 2007) This underscores the fact that revival is possible in any country...when the Lord's people meet His four conditions....stated in 2 Chronicles 7.14. The key question we should actually spend more time reflecting upon at a meeting like this is how to sustain revivals... I think this would include the deliberate raising of younger people to sustain revival as the Lord and his apostles seem to have done.....see Acts. 1.1-8; 13.1-5.

ANNEX 1: Eight Steps to Grow Your Church

- by [Rick Warren](#)
- in [Administration](#) · [Leadership](#) · [Rick Warren](#)
- — 17 Apr, 2013



Do you realize that if your weekend attendance totals about 90 people, you're an above average church (at least in the United States and when measuring by such numbers)?

If you're wondering what you need to do to grow, here are eight steps that can help you break an attendance barrier:

1) Decide you really, really want to grow – Believe it or not, the primary barrier to church growth is desire. Do you really want to grow? If the answer is yes, then you must commit to this goal and be willing to accept changes.

And the people in your congregation must also be willing to accept changes.

The Bible says, "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain*" (John 12:24, NKJV). In order for a church to grow, some things have to die. Those who had intimacy with the pastor have to learn to share

him with new people. They have to be willing to let go of the control they have in certain decisions and in certain areas.

It takes an incredible unselfishness. They must be willing to die to some traditions, to some feelings, to some relationships in order for the kingdom of God to be advanced. That takes a lot of maturity.

2) Your role as pastor must change – Once you decide you want to grow, you'll need to analyze your role as pastor. You must be willing to change from minister to leader. If everything depends on you — if you have to personally minister to every person in your church — then the church cannot grow beyond your own energy level. And that is a barrier! You become a bottleneck, an obstacle to growth.

This is called the Shepherd-Rancher Conflict. As the pastor of a little church you know everybody, you do all the praying, all the baptizing, all the teaching, you know every family, every kid, every dog and cat and you shepherd everybody personally. But there's a limit to how many people you can personally shepherd.

As the church grows you must change roles from Shepherd to Rancher. The Rancher helps oversee the under-Shepherds. Practically everybody on my staff does more weddings and counseling than I do (in fact, I do very few now because I don't want to show favoritism among our 20,000 members).

You must be willing to let other people share the ministry. Ask yourself, "Would I be happy being a Rancher?" If you answer no, then I suggest you take on a goal that your church will sponsor new churches — so you're still growing, but in a different way.

3) Mobilize members for ministry – Be willing to give up some leadership and entrust ministry to the people in the pews. After the congregation has decided it wants to grow, then start teaching about "the ministry of the laity" and talking about the importance of every believer using their unique gift to minister to the body.

Let your people know, "If you don't do your part in ministry by sharing your unique gifts, then the rest of us get cheated. If I don't do my part in ministry, then you get cheated." Help your people understand this concept and mobilize them to begin ministering.

4) Begin having multiple services – If you're not already doing so, I encourage you to seriously start planning for it. By offering people a choice of services, you're effectively putting another hook in the water.

5) Multiply your staff – In order to grow past that 200 barrier, you must begin moving to multiple staff. You must begin to specialize the staff under your leadership.

6) Plan big days – The best way I know to break through barriers is to break a few all at one time. Plan a big day — an event — and your numbers go up. Yes, they go back down afterwards, but not as far as they were before the event. Keep doing this and you grow. Big holidays are an obvious time to concentrate on events — Easter, Christmas. Plan outreaches to the community.

7) Have multiple cells – People will often complain about not being cared for when the real issue is that they're losing control. "There are so many people here I don't feel like anybody cares for me anymore" is a common complaint. Another is: "The pastor is too busy for me now." Caring is a legitimate issue, but you can respond through the multiplication of cells — groups of 8-12 people. Cells become tools for caring for the body.

8) Expand your facility – At Saddleback, we had over 10,000 members before we ever built our first building, so I’m not advocating rushing out to build a facility. In fact, many churches build too small, too fast. What I’m saying is you need to plan for growth and project out what your needs will be.

May God bless you and anoint you as you begin to implement these changes.



— Rick Warren

ANNEX 2: EXCERPTS FROM OCTOBER 2013 MESSAGE

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**From: The RC ´s Desk
Message**

Subject: Monthly

**To: All - RCCG EM
2013**

Date: 1 October

OCTOBER 2013: MONTH OF SERIOUS PRAYING FOR CHURCH GROWTH

Saul made havoc of the Church....therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ to them. ...multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing the miracles which

he did. ...And there was great joy in that city. Acts 8.3-8

You are welcome to the month of October. It is a month to pray seriously for the growth of the Church. Around the world, the Church of Christ is presently exposed to all kinds of attacks—some religious groups have targeted Christians specially to kill, destroy their property, visiting their schools and churches with mindless destruction in diverse countries as Egypt, Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, Pakistan, India to mention a few. The challenges confronting the Church are not only so violent but are equally

devastating. They are particularly impactful because they come both from outside and also from within. From outside, there are the strong forces of economic and social hardships, hedonism, secularism, humanism, homosexuality, and other anti-God philosophies that seek to make fun of Christ and His Word as expressed in the Bible. But there are also some sinister forces within the Church--the most serious are those of self, liberalism, division, faithlessness and unfaithfulness to God and to man even by leaders of the Church. But the heartening news which I bring to you this day is that the gospel of our glorious Christ has always prospered under threats and challenges. It is said that many more people came to Christ during the years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in that country than in the whole world put together. We also read in the Acts of the Apostles how the gospel prospered greatly at a time when key leaders were killed, imprisoned and their properties destroyed. One of the more memorable passages is the one cited above. If only we would pray we would see the church of Christ multiply and grow in these countries of Europe (and around the world) at a time when the attacks on the Christians and the core principles of the christian message are most intense.

What are the reasons for the Church to grow?

First, the Lord has assured us that He will build His church and the gates (elders sit at the gates in olden times, hence, leaders of hell) will not prevail against it. Once we allow Him to do the building through our prayers and the directions of His Holy Spirit, we would find that the church would grow in spite of the challenges from the economy, the society and the polity (Jn 15.5). Second, as the church grows the forces of darkness would recede—because the light would always drive darkness out (Jn.1.5). Most of the problems of Europe have arisen because the people of the land left their Lord who has done only good to her people, the economy and society.

A third and final reason for church growth is that the Lord actually told us that when His church grows we would have fulfilled the reason for our calling...which is to bear fruits and for our fruits to abide. If these happen, He promised that He will give us great rewards and one of these is that all our prayers would be answered (Jn. 4.36; 15.16).

The practical question though is what must we do to see growth in the church in a time of great difficulties and challenges?

First, we must **enter into partnership with the Holy Spirit**. If we do, He would lead and empower us to become champions of Godly change in our communities and societies.

Second, we must **reach out to our neighbours with the good news as itemized for us in**

Lk10.5-9 (bring peace, eat and drink, heal their sick, preach Christ and His kingdom).

Thirdly, we must **seek to build seeker-friendly churches**. These are churches that target people who are not their members and who are not even Christians. These are paradoxically the people that need the good news most. It would shock many of us to learn that many people in this European society (especially young people) have NEVER heard the gospel of Christ. No one told them...all they have heard are the reasons why they must reject faith in any one and especially in Christ. The church of God was created to present and project Christ to such people. This means making our services friendly to new comers, using available technology to invite them and also encouraging every member to bring non-Christian friends and acquaintances to Bible-believing churches....These three must be done consistently and in tandem.

Fourthly, we would need to **have house-fellowships or mini-churches** of some 8-12 people. These fellowships are useful as evangelical tools and also as caring and training centers of the church.

Fifthly, we must **target children and youths**...because if they find church interesting they would bring their parents and their peers. Unfortunately, for many churches, it's the reverse that is happening.....the church is not attractive to young people. It has to be. Lk. 18.15-17.

Sixthly, leaders must **delegate responsibilities to others so they can focus on prayer and the ministry of the word** (Acts 6.1-4). It is particularly important also that there is openness and accountability of leaders in this environment (2 Cor. 8.20-21).

Finally, all **members and seekers must be taught to have faith in Christ for their homes, finances, health and any other challenges that they face** for without faith it is impossible to please God and to experience His great miracles which the Lord continue to use to mesmerize Satan and his hosts. It is also what makes people keep coming to the living God. But these would not happen without serious intensity of prayers. Mt.17.21

For this month, we would like to pray for the following for a new beginning as the leaders of this mission meet in Bucharest, Romania from October 10 to 12. **To this end, we are declaring the days from October 2 to 8 as fasting and prayer days. Please include the following in your prayers:**

- Faithfulness of Leaders in the use of Time, Talents and God's Treasures...1 Cor. 4.2

Lord, make your leaders faithful in their use of time—let them give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word and delegate other activities to lay people within the church.

Help us to make use of all the talents that you have in your church. Let those who have not discovered their talents do so in this season.

Let us have faith in you concerning our finances. Givers are blessed in return. The more we give the more you can entrust to us. Bring an end to all kinds of unfaithfulness among us all and especially among leaders of your church. Lk. 16.10-

12