

The Contemporary Church In The Southeastern United States

ATH 613 Theological Research & Writing

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September 2017

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Introduction

The United States with all its advancement in technology and theology has embodied the notion of what is known as the contemporary church. When we define contemporary through Webster dictionary we see that contemporary means occurring in the modern.¹ Simply put Contemporary Church refer to the churches in the modern day. As we all know Churches take many different forms, and tradition often plays a role in the denomination that individuals selects to partake. However in today's society the Church has been given an overhaul in terms of music, ministry and in some cases presentation. The exterior building is not the only change that has occurred in the new technological age, but a change in how the Word of God is presented to the people. This assignment seeks to understand the contemporary churches in the United States. After all for the United States traditional churches typically set the tone. However, to understand the contemporary church in the United States there needs to be an understanding of what a contemporary church entails.

Contemporary Church

In order to understand the importance and significance of the contemporary church there needs to be an understanding of the contemporary church as a whole. According to researchers the contemporary church includes utilizing new forms of music, interpreting the Word of God in relation to the modern world, and the way people dress has changed.² In simple terms contemporary churches are inclusive of the modern age, and this is reflected in how the church interprets the Word of God, and even how they dress. Unlike traditional churches where an organ

1 Webster Dictionary Online

2Brisben, David. 2009. "Telling the Old, Old Story: How the Contemporary Church Practices Reading the Old Testament for Faith and Life." *Common Ground Journal* 7, no. 1: 97-112. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 26, 2017).

is the most played instrument, there may be guitars, drums and an electric piano.³ Churches from earlier times are known for the musical endeavors. When one thinks of a great hymnal the organ is traditionally associated with such an assortment of music. However in today's contemporary church, members could hear the bass of a guitar, the tunes of a saxophone, and the organ is not the only instrument being utilized in the worship service.⁴ As wonderful the sound of the organ resonates in the great halls of churches there is a new sound that raises the tempo in the heart of worshippers. In today's society believers utilize every instrument made by hand to worship God. Music is not the only difference in contemporary churches. It was not to long ago that when someone stated they were going to church that meant wearing a suite and tie, or a dress with a church hat. Now in contemporary churches the way one dresses has changed tremendously. In contemporary churches it is not uncommon to see worshippers in jeans, sneakers or just a buttoned down shirt.⁵ Whereas dress for church on Sunday was known as Sunday's best things have changed and believers are coming just as they are to church. Contemporary churches realize that as long as the Word of God is being spread and shared throughout the world that a specific dress code is not required to serve the Lord.⁶ After all, the traditions of the past will not dictate the growth of the individual in Christ. In Joel chapter two verse thirteen said it best, Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.⁷ Though this is an Old Testament scripture it holds true for the contemporary churches today. This scripture also speaks to the grace given to us by God and his desire to connect with us on every

3 Ibid., 99

4 Ibid., 100

5 Cleaver-Bartholomew, David. 2011. "First Testament Wilderness Traditions and the Contemporary Church." *International Congregational Journal* 10, no. 1: 29-46. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 26, 2017).

6 Ibid., 32.

7 KJV. Joel 2:13

level and not just a superficial level. In contemporary churches the focus is not so much on appearance, but on the grace that God has bestowed while incorporating the modern day message of the Word.⁸ This connection with the Word of God while incorporating modern day technology and cultural upbringing is what makes the contemporary church so appealing to believers. This leads to the discussion of contemporary churches in the United States.

Contemporary Churches in Southeast United States

Contemporary Church in the United States are fairly new, as there are so many denominational churches that have been around for centuries. Baptist, Methodists, Episcopal, and Pentecostal denominations have been the leading faith in the south United States for many centuries.⁹ Due to the history of the United States, religion has played a major role in the formation of the nation as well as the development of the people. Also due to the rich history, contemporary churches in the Southern United States have only now begun to grow within the last twenty years.¹⁰ Traditional churches are well established in the Southern United States due to the history of slavery, and religious norms adhered to by many believers living in the region. The belief and service of God is prevalent in what is known as the bible belt, however the method for which the message is delivered is very different. Today a Christian will walk into church and it would not be uncommon to see a projector with a power point, music other than an organ or

8 Cleaver-Bartholomew, David. 2011. "First Testament Wilderness Traditions and the Contemporary Church." *International Congregational Journal* 10, no. 1: 29-46. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 26, 2017).

9 Wilson, Charles. 2004. "Religion and the US South." <https://southernspaces.org/2004/overview-religion-and-us-south>.

10 Wilson, Charles. 2004. "Religion and the US South." <https://southernspaces.org/2004/overview-religion-and-us-south>.

drum player, and even dance ministries.¹¹ Modern Churches today are utilizing every forum to spread the Word of God. Some contemporary churches may even have a media ministry that streams the service live for viewers to see online. Utilizing all forms of ministry is what God has called believers to do, and modern churches in the Southeast United States have embraced this notion. By integrating new forms of media, and various ministries the Word of God is being spread to a new generation.

¹¹ Wilson, Charles.2004. "Religion and the US South." <https://southernspaces.org/2004/overview-religion-and-us-south>.

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