

Final Paper: Urban Church Models

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Introduction

Many people, especially here in America, are religious to some degree. However, when it comes to Christianity, people are often categorized into one of two groups. They are either religiously faithful or somewhat religious. When asked, the questions that most often come up are “Do you go to church?” or “What type of church do you attend?” These questions aren’t meant to cause strife in others; instead, they are the harsh reality many Christians and people face every day. What does it mean to go to church, and if we avoid it, does that make us less of a Christian? When we think of a church, we mostly bring up an image of an old building with some image of a Saint or Jesus Christ. Others may think of a static place that provides the same type of service every Sunday or other specific day of the week. Despite this, many people don’t realize that they all come up with different rebuttals and answers when asked to describe church honestly. The reasoning behind this is that there are numerous different types of churches and various models to fit the diverse communities. The best model for the church is the one that best fits its community and targeted members. As it stands now, there is no one fits all model that works perfectly in today’s modern urban world.

Foundations of the Church

A church, specifically a Christian church, is defined in several different fashions. From the Bible, we learn of one definition, such as the embodiment and fullness of Jesus Christ. "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church. Which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:22-23). The believer's group began in Acts 2

of the New Testament, the Day of Pentecost, all through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is categorized as the day of His arrival as the day of the church's rapture. This acceptance of the Gospel of the Lord was one of the first mentioning of a group coming to those terms. The several different denominations of Christianity have come to define the church as the true body of Christ and the original ecclesiastical created by Jesus Christ. This is further supported by the texts "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (Cor 12:13). The church represents Jesus Christ's spirit and a place of sanctity where anyone faithful can embrace the Holy Spirit. To define the church is to define the theological implications it presents, in addition to the symbolism it contains. For starters, the church itself is a meaning rather than just a physical building located in a particular space. That's not to say that the church isn't tangible; instead, it's a culmination of faith, the gospel, and attendance from its members. Understanding the foundations of the church starts with asking, "what's the purpose and goal of the church"?

The church, specifically Christian churches, are set up to allow Christians to gather and practice their faith of Christianity. In its simplest form and a means of laying the framework of what the church is. The function of the church can be categorized under three main areas, assemblage, spirituality, and propagation. Together with the understanding of what the church is, each of these functions will define and enlighten the Christian church. The first and most known function of the church revolves around the assembly. The church helps to bring people together, the faithful, non-believers, and those seeking answers. In the New Testament, the church is often defined by the Greek term "ekklesia." That word also appears over a hundred times throughout the Bible. It had represented several different meanings, such as the body of Christ worldwide

and God's people in a particular region. In other parts, it signified the local congregation of Christians. However, we must ask ourselves, "what does it mean to congregate or assemble in a church setting?" Assembly can mean a few select things but most notably means the coming together of several persons, usually for a particular purpose.¹ That purpose as uncovered was the for the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the earlier days, Christians were sporadic and scattered across the lands at the start of the millennium. The Christian communities needed to build upon their strengths and commonalities in their efforts to convert the Gentiles. Despite their racial or class differences, they were ultimately bound together by their faith and loyalty to Jesus Christ. The typical pattern of worship was thus highlighted when they joined together under a common place.² Their common goals in the Lord solidified these bonds of unity. The rite of baptism was the passageway to the church or gatherings of like-minded Christians. As such, they created recurring meetings labeled "Thanksgivings" every Sunday for those who were baptized. Together they ate and drank wine in a sacred meal that signified "eating the body" and "drinking the blood" of Christ.³ Participating in this meal was significant as it represents the essential relationship and membership of the society or scattered Christians that were now one under one roof. Thus, the first act or function of the church, assemblage, is accomplished. The table has been set, and now the church must present its second function, spirituality, to all those it brought to the table. Spirituality requires more than just stating the facts and belief in the Holy Spirit. The concept or word spirituality has become more prominent in modern times. Spirituality can

¹ "Definition Of Assembly | Dictionary.Com", *Www.Dictionary.Com*, last modified 2021, accessed August 11, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/assembly>.

² Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 1st ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

³ *Ibid*, 55

suggest a state of being or values placed through the reaching of transcendence.⁴ To be spiritual is to explore a specific part of human nature. It's the way we as humans or Christians place value in life, ethics, and spiritual practices that relate to a better comprehension of God. The foundation of spirituality is based on the holistic approach to our views of the world. We are to see the world as a whole rather than in specific parts. What does God say about nature, our tangible and intangible assets? How can we as Christians use the world and environment around us to get closer to the Lord? The Bible, or New Testament, teaches us to follow in the path of Jesus Christ. Christian spirituality is a way of life, such that we as Christians should be devoted to the Lord.

Furthermore, Christian spirituality has a glaring implication in understanding God, tangible assets, and our self-identity. The central premise is that spirituality evolved out of practice and is not just limited to theory. Christians experience spirituality or strive to encounter it through prayer, deeds, meditation, and other actions. It's not just some theological theory that we hope to understand randomly; we seek to meet and explore it. The reasoning behind that is that Christians can further embrace God in some form or capacity through spirituality.⁵ Thus, we come to the place in which the church is involved in spirituality. The church accelerates the belief and understanding of spirituality through its function of the assembly. Christian disciples became the children of God and ultimately the heir of God's promise in Jesus. As told in scripture, "Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."(Gal 4:6). This passage signifies a close relationship or unity between Christians and God. More so, it's highlighting how Jesus' beliefs extended beyond His disciples.

⁴ Philip Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality And Social Transformation", <https://doi.org/10.1093/Acrefore/9780199340378.013.231>, last modified 2016, accessed August 5, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.231>.

⁵ Ibid,

The Lord's discipleship broadened to include the community of His believers, and such a community was established in the form of the church.⁶

The final foundation of the Christian church revolves around propagation. In this regard, propagation is the continuous spread of a belief or view into new regions. For churches, propagation is tied to the spreading of faith. Through propagation, the gospel is extended to those beyond the walls of the church. The spreading of the Christian gospel is carried out through evangelism. Binkley best described Christian evangelism as, the bringing of the Lord's gospel to others and using its power to save their lives. Through evangelism, men, women, and children are exposed to the teaching of Jesus Christ and are tasked with saving that which was lost.⁷ The gospel creates an assurance from God that He possesses a purpose for the people. The purpose of Jesus Christ was to bring Christians the gift of life. From John 10:10 "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" Thus, what better place to amplify the gospel and propagate the good word than the church. The church creates an establishment where people can join to seek spirituality and spread the gospel. It functions as an all-in-one place that seeks to unify and empower Christians. The function of the church is to create a place where they can propagate evangelism and teach others the ways of Jesus Christ.

Church Needs

The foundations of the church were established hundreds of years ago, during a time when there was little to no sanctuary for people to practice their faith. It was also encouraged that the only true way of devoting oneself to Christ involved the gospel which could only be provided

⁶ Ibid,

⁷ Olin Binkley, "The Total Objective Of Christian Evangelism", *SAGE Journals*, last modified 1945, accessed August 8, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463734504200106>.

by the church. That way or model of church is no longer sustainable in today's modern 2021 society. The most significant impact on the church's failing model is the generational differences of Millennials. This generational group makes up the largest group in the U.S. as of 2019.⁸ The chances of a millennial having no religion is equal to the chance that they are Christian. The reasoning behind this downtrend is that this generational group never had strong religious ties to begin with. They were less likely to attend weekly service unless they forced to by their parents. Millennials are more likely to have partners of different religious backgrounds or even nonreligious. Finally, the viewpoint of morality and religion are far and have left a stain on their perspective for the need of religion.⁹ Part of that stems from the negative views and perspectives they shared around religion. Given to them partly from the overly zealous followers of religion and terroristic attack often blamed on religion. There is also a viewpoint that religious people are less likely to cater to other religions or non-religious people. For millennials, their stance is that attending church and catering to its many demands serves little purpose for them. They either practice their faith in their own way or avoid all together.

An argument that can be made is that the church needs to be more holistic. The church needs to provide an atmosphere that is inclusive of the communities it resides and provides for. The messaging needs to be more than just that the church is there to spread the gospel. It needs to adopt a model that showcases how anyone willing to learn the teachings of Christ can do so without a full commitment to their daily lives. That includes taking the input and perspectives of millennials. Many of them are often overlooked as the next step in church leaders or voices of reason. The church also needs to understand that its message is heard and the same. Each church

⁸ "U.S. Population By Generation 2019", *Statista*, last modified 2021, accessed August 9, 2021,.

⁹ Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion And Not Coming Back", *Fivethirtyeight*, last modified 2019, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religion-and-not-coming-back/>.

doesn't need a unique message if it's part of the same denomination, as all churches are the body of Christ. Finally, the next step is to avoid blaming culture and instead focus on how the church's culture can adapt to be more diverse and inclusive. This is especially prevalent in urban areas and communities. To rectify this problem we must produce the next proposed model of an urban church.

Church Culture and Model

Thus, we ask, what does a holistic urban church look like? The answer to that question would be a church-based off the restart model—the best place for this to happen in New York City. Despite the large population, New York City is the best place to make a new beginning. It's an urban area with several diverse cultures and communities. The name of the new church would be the Inception church of Queens. For starters, the name would instantly be recognized by many people, especially millennials familiar with the Hollywood movie from 2010. The church's focus would be a revival in DE&I initiatives, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The restart model will follow a set guideline based on the present church committee. In this case, it would be the most outspoken community members that have identified a church that has fallen.

The committee would ultimately choose a new committee for that church and join together with community members. The church will be closed for a set period, a few months, to allow for a transition period. The new church, Inception church, would seek out a new pastor and leadership that incorporates members of the surrounding community. Service would be provided on a rotating schedule to encompass the many schedules of its community. Service would be provided in-house when safe and virtually for others unable to visit. Prayer meetings will happen on a volunteer basis, and weekly project meetings would occur. These project meetings would focus

on the dire needs of the community and how the church can assist where possible. Finally, a mentoring and outreach program would reach those underserved or overlooked in the community. The church would cater to millennials who live a busy life or are just starting families of their own.

Inception church would seek to galvanize others to its cause and rehash the teachings of Jesus Christ for the new age. The mission statement would be based on the passage from John 3:3: “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (John 3:3). The targeted group would be all communities in the Queens area of NYC, particularly millennials. That passages were selected to lead the mission of the church because of what it represents. Through rebirth, we and others can truly see a new path, whether it's towards God or the teaching of Jesus Christ. The idea behind this church is to renew interest in Christianity through assembly spirituality and propagation for the 21st century.

Conclusion

To close it out, the church's mission should be aware of the current issues plaguing society. It should also seek ways to incorporate the spirituality and gospel of the Lord into the daily lives of everyone. While the church's foundation was built on three principles, each should be expanded to reach other audiences. If the purpose of the church is to bring people together, it should aim to make sure all the people in its community are accounted for and included. The ministry should see that its population is an image of the population of its community.

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