Reformed Theological Seminary RESTARTING THE DYING CHURCH

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Reformed Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

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May 2001

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks be to God for His redeeming love, grace, and mercy, and for His call to a lifetime of service. To Him be the glory. I wish to express my thanks to Luder Whitlock, President of Reformed Theological Seminary, for his challenge to pursue seminary study and to Allen Mawhinney, Academic Dean of Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, for his teaching and counsel on two coasts over four years. Also, I would like to thank Reformed Theological Seminary faculty member Steven Childers for his encouragement and guidance throughout my doctoral studies.

A special thanks is expressed to the leadership of the Church Multiplication

Training Center, Colorado Springs, Colorado; especially Executive Director Bill

Malick and Operations Director Bill Armstrong, for the opportunities that have led to
the development of much of the material in this dissertation. Thanks also to the
denominational leaders and pastors who participated in the research.

My gratitude is also extended to the leadership and congregation of Bridgeway Community Church, Phoenix, Arizona, for their prayers and for their allowing me the time to pursue my doctoral studies and to minister with the Church Multiplication Training Center. May God bless them for their sacrifice.

My heartfelt love and gratitude are expressed to my wife, Sharon, and my children, Brooke, Reid, Kara, and Dylan. Theirs is the highest price and the greatest reward for our ministry together.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the issues related to the dying American Protestant church. Leading church authorities note that more than eighty per cent of American Protestant churches are in plateau or decline. Many more churches die each year than are planted. Many more churches decline each year than grow. This paper seeks to understand the dynamics of the dying church and prescribe a model for "ReStarting" the dying church.

The research investigates decline and restoration in the biblical, theological and historical records. Old Testament emphasis is placed on the ministries of Ezra,

Nehemiah, and Amos. New Testament emphasis is placed on Acts 2, Ephesians 4, and the letters to the churches in Revelation. Historical research places its focus on two specific periods in American church history: (1) the Great Awakening of early to mideighteenth century, and (2) the three decades following World War II. These two time periods reveal prolific church growth followed by steep decline. Research into recent church development studies the influence of modernism and postmodernism on the dying church.

Further research reflects on the findings of two surveys. The first, titled "Dissertation Questionnaire", features responses from denominational leaders whose ministries involve working with pastors and congregations in dying churches. The second, a twenty question pre-training assessment, features responses from pastors of

dying/declining churches who are about to receive training in restoring those churches to health.

The research develops a model for ReStarting the dying church, honing and adjusting that model through several years of application. Key considerations include the ministry of the effective ReStart Pastor, understanding the unique ministry challenges of ReStart, methodology for successful ReStart, and leading a congregation through change.

The study concludes that dying churches can be successfully turned around when the parties involved are willing to make the necessary sacrifices and are trained in the proper methodology. The study also concludes that accelerated multiplication of the American Protestant church can be the product of ReStart.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus states, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Why, then, is the American Protestant church in such sharp decline? Later, as recorded in Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus commissions his disciples, sending them to evangelize the world and build the church with the phrase, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Why, then, are churches closing at such a staggering rate? Acts 2:42-47 describes the activity of the early church, ending with the statement, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Why, then, are church memberships declining and why are many more churches dying than are being planted?

According to Lyle Schaller, "This year (1997), 9000 Protestant churches will close across the United States" (1997:108). This is an alarming statement, one that should send the church to its knees seeking guidance and direction for the stewardship of God's church. Of course, there may be a rare situation in which a particular church has served its purpose, fulfilling all that God has designed for it and in such a case it may be appropriate for that church to close. But these cases are few and far between. The vast majority of church closures are church deaths, brought about by failure. Linus Morris cites the tragic irony of the American church, "Literally thousands of men, women, and

children are being added to the church each day in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. In sharp contrast, most Christian churches in the Western World are either in decline or are stagnant at best" (1993:13).

In 1990, The Frog in the Kettle by George Barna was published. In this book, Barna states:

Make no mistake about it: the pressure on the Christian community is mounting. Typically, we have been five to ten years behind society, responding to changing conditions long after transitions have begun. And now we have run out of time. If we want the Christian faith to remain a vibrant alternative to the world system, we must stop reacting and start anticipating. The 90's are a pivotal decade in the history of American Christianity (1990:26).

State of the Church

So what is the state of the church as this "pivotal decade" has drawn to a close? Consider the statements of leading church growth specialists. Roozen and Hadaway write, "What can we say about membership growth and decline in congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1980-88 as compared with 1968-74? First of all, the overall picture is one of continuing membership decline" (1993:204). Wagner comments, "[M]any of the mainline denominations in America now find themselves in a serious membership decline that has continued for over 25 years" (1990:11). Though evangelicals might argue that mainline decline is of no concern, as mainline denominations tend to be liberal, it is important to note that the decline in the mainline denominations represents a trend. Decline has hit liberal, moderate, conservative and even Pentecostal denominations. Schaller warns, "This year (1997), 9000 Protestant

churches will close across the United States. Most will close because they couldn't compete; closing was a more attractive alternative than thinking" (1997:108).

Thousands of churches die in this country every year and the death rate is increasing. The kingdom of God, at least in terms of the number of churches and the size of memberships, is not growing. Rather, it is shrinking. This is the problem I have chosen to address in this dissertation.

Nanus observes, "There is an old Chinese proverb that says that unless you change direction, you are likely to arrive at where you are headed" (1992:3). This seems obvious, almost comical. But the statement's simple truth seems lost on the American church. It seems that the church intends to arrive at a destination other than where it is headed without changing direction. This simply cannot be done. To state it bluntly, change requires change!

To consider the problem of death, one must consider the causes of death. Church death is really not the disease, it is the fatal symptom of the diseases that lead to death.

These diseases could be viewed as sub-sets of the larger problem of death. There are several of these sub-set problems, but all are linked to a consideration of leadership, both at the denominational level and at the local level.

Two Key Leadership Issues

Two key leadership issues stand out, the first being the attitude, or perspective, of leadership. Often, leaders who have authority and responsibility for churches see church death as the inevitable result of lifecycle. This also seems to hold true among secular organizations. Senge writes:

Few large corporations live even half as long as a person. In 1983, a Royal Dutch/Shell survey found that one third of the firms in the Fortune '500' in 1970 had vanished. Shell estimated that the average lifetime of the largest industrial enterprises is less than forty years, roughly half the lifetime of a human being! The chances are fifty-fifty that readers of this book will see their present firm disappear during their working career (1990:17).

Many church leaders seem to favor the scenario of accepting church death as inevitable, allowing the church to die in order to turn its assets over for use in church planting. Regele observes:

[E]veryone wants to talk about starting new churches. It is without a doubt a whole lot easier than dealing with an old and dying congregation, just as having babies is more fun than dealing with an aging and feeble parent. But it is not the primary need. When honest, church leaders will tell us that the real issue for them is the hundreds of little congregations that are already living on borrowed time (1995:184).

The second leadership issue is that of the skill of leadership in meeting the challenge of the terminal church. Again, Senge comments on this situation in the marketplace, "In most companies that fail, there is abundant evidence in advance that the firm is in trouble. This evidence goes unheeded, however, even when individual managers are aware of it. The organization as a whole cannot recognize impending threats, understand the implications of those threats, or come up with alternatives" (1990:17). The leadership lacks the skill to recognize a church as terminal and avoids a harsh diagnosis. Schaller states, "The majority of North American Protestant congregations founded before 1970 are in a state of denial" (1998:19). What is being denied? The church denies responsibility for its state of health, it denies that it needs to change and it denies that its problems are internal rather than external.

Even when the terminal church is properly identified, leaders lack the skill to turn the church around, not just helping it to survive but developing the once terminal church

into a healthy, multiplying church that contributes to the kingdom of God well beyond its own walls. Warren notes, "I believe the key issue for churches in the twenty-first century will be church *health*, not church growth" (1995:17). The problem is that American churches are dying at an alarming and ever increasing rate, and church leaders seem to lack the perspective and skill to reverse this trend.

Personal Passion and Calling

Many roads have led to my interest in the problem of the dying church. In 1985, I was recruited to be part of a team that was being formed to plant a church in North San Diego County, California. Previously I had been in the music business, ministering in music whenever the opportunity arose. In California, I served as the music/arts director of a contemporary church plant, getting involved in local church ministry for the first time. I began as a musician in ministry. Five years later I had grown into a minister who could play the piano. I went to seminary to prepare for further ministry. While there, I was once asked to articulate as concisely as possible what I believed my call to ministry to be. I wrote that I was called to serve two kinds of churches, church plants and churches in distress that need to begin again. I am not sure I knew what I meant by this second kind of church at the time, but God would soon show me.

Coming out of seminary in 1993, I was called as a church planter to a ministry in Phoenix, Arizona. A church that had been founded in 1906 had dwindled down to six families. As a church planter, I was to work with these families to start a new church. I carried my church planting experience, training and methodology into this new setting, but soon found myself in unfamiliar territory. This church did not feel like a church plant and

did not act like a church plant. Things moved much slower than in a church plant. It seemed heavy.

I came to realize that this attempt to restart what had been a dying church would need all of the pioneer spirit, entrepreneurial skill and even the methodology of church planting, but it would need more. It would require shepherding the families that were the congregation of the former church. It would require working through policies and procedures that had been in place for decades. It would require instilling vision in people who had lost vision and it would require moving people who had been reactive and passive to become proactive and aggressive. Church planting is starting from scratch. This effort would require starting from less than scratch.

Over time, this once dying church was turned around. At this writing, some seven years later, Sunday attendance averages around three hundred. The congregation meets in a new building on fourteen acres of land in a new, growing community. Ministries abound, both inside the church and beyond, including missions work in northern Mexico and involvement in church planting efforts in and around metro Phoenix. Approximately one hundred have been baptized, most by way of confession of faith. Through the experience of this ministry, I have seen first hand what it takes to turn at least one dying church around.

Another road to my interest in the dying church came through my ministry with the Church Multiplication Training Center (CMTC) of Colorado Springs, CO. In its inception, CMTC began to offer training for church planters. Now seven years old, CMTC has worked with hundreds of planters from over ninety denominations and mission agencies worldwide. Six years ago, I began serving with CMTC on its training conference

staff. At first, my ministry was exclusively in the training of church planters. However, demand from churches that were dying began to manifest itself and CMTC felt the call of God to address this need. Because of my experience in Phoenix, I was assigned the task of trying to understand the dying church and developing training for leaders whose ministry responsibilities included working with such churches. For the past five years, I have been studying the dying church and developing training designed to equip leaders with the perspectives and skills to minister successfully to and through such churches. Currently I provide this training through CMTC conferences as well as through special training events sponsored by a variety of evangelical denominations.

In summary, my local church ministry and my broader training ministry are both dedicated to the successful turnaround of the dying church. Church planting methodology is among the tools that I use. Indeed, I am serving two kinds of churches, church plants and churches in distress that need to begin again.

Thesis Question

How can the surviving remnant of a dying church be led to a healthy new beginning?

Definitions

The following terms will be used in this study:

Dying Church: A dying church is a church that has been in decline for a
significant period of time; that is, its ministry has been steadily diminishing in
both quantity and quality. Leadership has not been able to reverse this downward
trend. Without immediate and significant change, this church will close its doors,

- its ministry will cease, its congregation will disband, its corporate existence will be dissolved, and its assets will be liquidated and redistributed.
- Surviving Remnant: The surviving remnant of a dying church is the body of
 people who are still with the church when significant change is attempted.
 Usually the remnant is few in number, most having been longtime members, a
 large proportion of whom hold leadership positions.
- 3. Church Health: Church health is the state of the church in terms of its ministry effectiveness and its viability as an ongoing organization. Wagner notes, "It is only natural to suppose that churches can be either sick or healthy, and that their health will influence their growth" (1996:13). A healthy church is a church that is growing in terms of quantity and quality, fulfilling the biblical purposes of discipling and multiplying, and fulfilling its unique calling and vision.
- 4. New Beginning: A new beginning for a dying church is the position it takes once the problems have been solved, the obstacles to effectiveness have been removed, and properly trained leadership has been put in place.
- ReStart: ReStart is the process of leading a dying church to a healthy new beginning.
- 6. ReStart Pastor: The ReStart Pastor is the key player in the ReStart process, the one most responsible for leading a dying church to a healthy new beginning.
- 7. Third Party: The Third Party is a person apart from the Surviving Remnant and the ReStart pastor who plays a significant role in facilitating the process of leading the dying church to a healthy new beginning. This person is usually in the ecclesiastical structure of a denomination such as a district superintendent or

someone ministering through a presbytery, classis, synod, or diocese. In systems where such a person is not in place, an independent consultant may serve in this capacity.

Significance

God has given me both the opportunity and responsibility to make a difference in this challenging area of ministering to and through dying churches. It is my hope and prayer that this study will contribute greatly to stemming the tide of dying churches, raising in their place healthy churches which not only survive, but thrive and become vibrant, multiplying churches.

This study will first impact the remnants of dying churches. They have the most to lose. It is one thing to speak of a dying church as a statistic; it is another to consider the actual people involved, the remnant. Most are godly people who truly desire to serve God. Most have invested years of their lives in this dying church. Most have utilized their spiritual gifts for the cause of Christ in this particular ministry. Most have given thousands of dollars in tithes and offerings to this work. Most have seen their children raised in this church. Most remember a time when ministry flourished in this now depreciated ministry. They have the most to lose with the deaths of their churches. They also have the most to gain in successful ReStart.

This study will also impact the community in which the dying church is located.

To close a church's doors will rob its community of many things. It will be robbed of whatever ministry and services the church provided. It will be robbed of the witness to the truth that this church represents. It will be robbed of the presence of a worshipping,

discipling body that may be the only hope of light in this community's spiritual darkness. If nothing else, it will be robbed of its opportunity to see God in a proper, positive light. The community has much to gain in a successful ReStart.

The kingdom of God at large is at stake in this study. A quick look at numbers reveals why. Statistics vary, but studies suggest that 5,000 to 10,000 churches die each year, while only about 1,500 to 3,000 churches are planted. That is a net loss of between 2,000 and 8,500 churches per year. What if some, or even most, of these churches could be successfully ReStarted? What if some, or even most, became healthy, multiplying churches, planting daughter churches every few years? The number of deaths could be greatly reduced while the number of church plants could be greatly increased. The kingdom of God has much to gain in the successful ReStart of hundreds, even thousands, of churches.

This study has great significance in my present ministry, both in my local church ministry and in my training ministry. My local church, Bridgeway Community Church, continues to develop as a ReStart. It is a case study in progress. As our local leaders find ways to minister to our own congregation, our church and community benefit, and another chapter in our case study is written. The leaders of Bridgeway have made a huge investment in this study, affording me as the senior pastor the time to study and to travel in connection with my training ministry. The perspective of our elders is not that I am away from Bridgeway during these times. It is that I am sent from Bridgeway as part of our church's ministry beyond ourselves, what we call our "Far-Reach" ministry. Also, the Church Multiplication Training Center has much to gain in this study, as it is providing the

foundation for training material that will be presented to evangelical organizations throughout the United States and beyond.

In June, 2000, my ministry setting will change. I will move with my family to Richmond, Virginia, this time to "plant a district." I will serve as the planter for this new district's beachhead church, and will then oversee new church development for a four-state area. In addition, I will continue to teach and train in the area of the dying church. Much of my role will be as a "third party." This study will be of great help to me in embracing this new ministry.

On a personal level, this study will be significant in terms of my own spiritual growth. The grand scheme in the Old Testament of the people of God falling away spiritually until only a remnant remains is all too characteristic of my own walk with the Lord. The lifecycle in the modern church of once thriving churches reduced to churches holding on to life by a thread could be a metaphor for my own fickle faithfulness at times. Through this study, I hope to gain insight into maintaining a genuine, healthy, growing relationship with my Father in my personal devotional life that will help me remain faithful and focused throughout my entire life.

Goals

Biblical/Theological Goal (Chapter Two):

A description of how leadership perspectives and skills led to the restoration of God's people in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, with added insights gained from a study of remnant theology and the letters to the churches in Revelation.

2. Historical/Contemporary Studies Goal (Chapter Three):

A description of conditions that led to explosive church growth followed by swift decline during the periods of the Great Awakening and post-WWII, and a description of the influence of modernism and post-modernism on the dying church of today.

3. Analysis Goal (Chapter Four):

An evaluation of the problem of the dying American church in light of 1) the biblical/theological findings of Chapter Two and 2) the historical/contemporary studies findings of Chapter Three.

Synthesis Goal (Chapter Five):

A suggestion for how these descriptions and evaluations can be used as a model to equip denominational and local church leaders to be more effective in leading remnants of dying churches to healthy new beginnings.

Assumptions

The following assumptions have been made prior to the beginning of research:

- The permanence of a church. This study assumes that a true, biblical church is
 not supposed to die. A church is not intended by God to run a lifecycle that
 inevitably leads to death, but it is to be a vibrant expression of God and his people
 until the return of Jesus Christ.
- Some churches will die. This study assumes that, though churches are not supposed to die, some, in fact, will die. However, a church can die with strategic purpose and can die with dignity.

- 3. Poor track record with the dying church. This study assumes that church leaders in recent church history have had a poor track record of bringing new life to the dying church and have generally held a negative attitude toward the dying church in terms of its potential for effective ministry.
- 4. Biblical and historical models are available. This study assumes that both the Bible and church history provide models of working with the dying church effectively and that these models provide insight into bringing new life to today's dying church.
- Dying churches have potential. This study assumes that dying churches have great potential for effective ministry. They are worth the effort.
- 6. The primacy of leadership. This study assumes that the problem of dying churches in the United States is primarily a leadership issue. Properly selected, trained, and positioned leadership will be effective in leading dying churches to healthy new beginnings.

Research Methods and the Literature

The methodology for this study was a combination of exegetical, theological and historical research combined with research of topical literature and a broad based survey of church leaders. Exegetical and theological research concentrated on three areas: 1) the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah, 2) remnant theology and 3) the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. Historical research concentrated on two areas: 1) early American church development, especially the period surrounding the Great Awakening and 2) the Post-WWII period. Exegetical and theological research primarily informed biblical and

theological studies (Chapter Two). Historical research primarily informed historical studies (Chapter Three).

Research of topical literature included reading and study in the disciplines of church growth, leadership, revitalization, culture and change. The survey targeted church leaders in seven categories: 1) pastors who served in dying churches during their critical decline, 2) pastors who led dying churches to new life, 3) remnant survivors of dying churches, 4) executives with relevant experience, e.g., district superintendents, church planting directors, directors of church revitalization, 5) assessment designers, administrators, and interpreters, 6) teachers, trainers, and coaches of church planting/revitalization and 7) authors and researchers working in related fields. Research conducted through topical literature and the survey primarily informed contemporary studies (Chapter Three) and analysis (Chapter Four).

Primary literary sources for exegetical, theological and historical research were drawn from the library at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida; the main library at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona; and the William Smith Morton Library at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. Research through RTS and ASU was ongoing. Research through Union was conducted during a six-week sabbatical in the summer of 1998.

Topical literature for this study came largely from my personal library, developed through course work in the Doctor of Ministry program and through regular and extensive acquisition of literature in the identified disciplines. In addition, I drew from books, articles and papers provided by colleagues to assist in my research.

The church leaders who participated in the survey are people who are personally known to me through my work with the Church Multiplication Training Center and through my serving on my denomination's national Church Planting Committee and my district's Church Multiplication Committee. The survey was administered in three formats: 1) mail or e-mail, 2) phone conversation and 3) face-to-face interview.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Biblical and Theological Foundations

I am puzzled by the dichotomy that exists between the invisible church and the visible church. I am puzzled by the dichotomy that exists between churches that are growing and churches that are declining. I wrestle with the reality that many churches in the United States are in steady, long-term decline while Jesus emphatically states in Matthew 16:18, "[O]n this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

Every single day, perhaps we could say every single second of every day, the invisible church grows by the number of people who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

And yet every single day, visible churches decline. Some die. Why? Peter Wagner observes:

In virtually every sizable metropolitan area of the country, a predictable phenomenon can occur. During the same time period and in the same place, some churches grow, others decline and die, and still others stay about the same year after year. The question in the minds of those who carefully observe this state of affairs is: What are the differences between growing as opposed to nongrowing churches? (1996:11)

To understand decline is first to understand health. What does a healthy church look like? Acts 2:42-47 describes the healthy church, concluding with the observation that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47b). Wagner remarks, "It seems that one of the signs of good church health is growth. If a given church

He did to the Church that came into being on the Day of Pentecost" (1996:9). In the preface to the book, Natural Church Development, by Christian Schwarz, Robert E. Logan evaluates the extensive research for this book with, "The research confirms what many leaders have known intuitively – that healthy churches are growing churches, making more and better disciples in loving obedience to Christ" (1996:3). Healthy churches are churches that are growing spiritually and numerically, qualitatively and quantitatively.

Church as Described in Acts 2

One might argue that the coming into being, or genesis, of the New Testament church in Acts 2 would suffice as the creation ordinance of the church. In other words, the description of the church in Acts might well be the genetic code of what the church is meant to be, much as the relationship described between Adam and Eve in Genesis serves as the foundation for what marriage is meant to be. Could it be that the teaching in Acts 2 regarding the church is meant to be prescriptive, not just descriptive?

In his commentary regarding Acts 2:42-47, William Barclay says of this church:

It was a learning Church; it persisted in listening to the apostles as they taught. . . It was a Church of fellowship – togetherness – a band of brothers. . . It was a praying church . . . they were able to meet the problems of life because they had first met him. . . It was a reverent Church. The Christian lives in reverence (fear that has the idea of awe in it) because he knows that the whole earth is the temple of the living God. . . It was a Church where things happened; signs and wonders. Great expectations. It was a sharing Church; these early Christians had an intense feeling of responsibility for each other. . . It was a worshipping Church; they never forgot to visit God . . . It was a happy Church . . . It was a Church whose people others could not help liking. In the early Church there was a winsomeness in God's people (1976:30-31).

Bruce comments that the three thousand added to the church following Peter's Pentecost sermon was partial fulfillment of Jesus' promise in John 14:12, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (1988:73).

Is this the description of the early church, or the prescription for the evangelical church of all times? Is this a snapshot of first century Christianity, or the standard by which all churches should be evaluated? If not the prescription or standard for all churches of all times, it is certainly a model of what it means to be a healthy church.

Church as Described in Ephesians 4

Another model of the healthy church is found in Ephesians 4:1-16. Though many points could be made from this text, I will make four. First, the healthy church is a unified church. Verse 3 exhorts us to keep the unity of the Spirit. Our common bond is articulated in the confession of verses 4-6. Findlay comments:

In missionary fields, confronting the overwhelming forces and horrible evils of Paganism, the servants of Christ intensely realize their unity; they see how trifling in comparison are the things that separate the Churches, and how precious and deep are the things that Christians hold in common. It may need the pressure of some threatening outward force, the sense of a great peril hanging over Christendom to silence our contentions and compel the soldiers of Christ to fall into line and present to the enemy a united front (1892:218).

Second, the healthy church is a diversified church. Verse 7 speaks of the varied apportionment of grace. Verse 11 identifies a variety of functions for some will serve as apostles, while others serve as prophets, evangelists, pastors, or teachers. And why do they serve in these various ways? Verse 12 tells us that these leaders are to prepare God's people for service.

Third, the healthy church is a maturing church. The goal of this God-given unity and diversity is described in verse 13 as becoming mature in our faith. This maturity concerns growing in the knowledge or theology of the faith, the discovery of each member's respective spiritual giftedness and the application of that diverse giftedness for the benefit of God, his people, and those who will become his people, in the spirit of love and unity.

Fourth, the healthy church is a growing church. Verse 16 gives us an image of an organic church in which each member of the body joins together with other members of the body and continues to grow. With Jesus as the head, the body grows corporately and its members, its body parts, grow individually. The picture is one of constant qualitative and quantitative growth. Verse 16 further explains that this growth is the product of each body member's doing its work. Foulkes comments, "The *gifts* are the people. All, in their particular ministries, are God's gift to the church. . . As it is, the apostle is not thinking of the ministers of Christ in their offices but rather according to their specific spiritual gifts and their work" (1989:125).

Acts 2 - Ephesians 4 Church

In combining Acts 2 with Ephesians 4, the description, if not the prescription, of the healthy church emerges. The healthy church is devoted to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2). The healthy church is unified, diversified, maturing and growing (Ephesians 4).

How is this possible? It is possible through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:33 states, "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the

promised Holy Spirit and poured out what you now see and hear." These are the words of Peter as he explains the spiritual phenomenon of Pentecost as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit is identified as "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" in Ephesians 1:14 and is the one through whom grace is apportioned in Ephesians 4:7. Finally, the church grows as "the Lord adds to their number" (Acts 2:47), and "the whole body . . . grows and builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:16). How does the Lord add to the number? He moves in the minds and hearts of people through the Holy Spirit. How does the body grow and build itself up in love? These are products of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Conditions that Lead to Decline

Decline in the church must be viewed from two biblical viewpoints: first, from the viewpoint of the centralized Old Testament church and second, from the viewpoint of the decentralized New Testament church. The church of the Old Testament was a highly centralized church. It concerned one people, the Jews, and worship was centered in one location, the temple in Jerusalem. It must be noted that Pentecost was yet to come and so the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out. In the Old Testament, the church, the people of God, is the nation of Israel. It is addressed by God through the prophets in corporate terms. Note these examples:

Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. Deuteronomy 5:1

At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them a warning from me." Ezekiel 3:16-17

Decline in the Old Testament

Decline in the Old Testament refers to the corporate decline of the centralized church. It has little to do with numbers and everything to do with the heart of the nation of Israel. A pattern repeats over and over throughout the history of the people of God as seen in the Old Testament. This pattern concerns the corporate relationship between Israel and God. It is a cyclical pattern that sees the nation of Israel in a right relationship with God. Over time, this relationship deteriorates as the people of Israel corporately slip from faithfulness to faithlessness. Through the prophets, God warns them of impending judgment unless they repent. They repent and are restored amidst a variety of judgments ranging from mild to severe.

Simply stated, the cause of this decline is syncretism, the bleeding of the philosophies and religions of the surrounding pagan nations into the bloodstream of the nation of Israel. This is seen most overtly in the adoption by Israel of pagan religious practices and the intermarriage of the Jews with pagans. These practices are viewed by God as spiritual adultery and unfaithfulness. For example:

I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and idolatrous priests – those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the Lord and who also swear by Molech, those who turn back from following the Lord and neither seek the Lord nor inquire of him. Zephaniah 1:4-6

Decline in the New Testament

Decline in the New Testament takes on a different dimension as the church becomes decentralized. Events of great significance have taken place. The Incarnate

Christ has been born, has lived, has ministered, has been crucified, buried, and resurrected. He has ascended and has poured out his Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of all believers. Worship has shifted from corporate worship in the temple to worship in spirit and in truth (John 4). The temple is now the heart of the believer and consequently, the location of worship is anywhere. Also, the designation of the people of God has grown beyond the nation of Israel to include both Jew and Gentile, now known as the body of Christ. Fellowship in the Old Testament was a type of offering that included a communal meal involving God, the priests and the worshippers. In the New Testament, fellowship has become κοινονια, a relationship among believers centered on the faith and their love for each other. The Greek word εκκλησια, described in Kittel as a secular term meaning "assembly" as used in the LXX (1965:527), has taken on the more specific meaning "church." In the New Testament, εκκλησια has three usages: as universal church, as regional church or as local church. The word of God no longer comes through the prophet to the nation of Israel per se, but through the apostle to the church in Rome or Corinth or Ephesus.

In the New Testament context, decline is more personalized, less corporate. Each church experiences its own unique successes and failures. As with the Old Testament, decline is not measured in numbers but in faithfulness. And as with the Old Testament, the root of New Testament decline is syncretism, exhibited in a less overt form as worldliness. Note this text:

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Scripture reveals a New Testament syncretism, not the idolatry and spiritual adultery of the Old Testament, but something more insidious. This new brand of syncretism is harder to detect and identify, but the result is the same. The church that is called to be the church in the world becomes the church of the world and the church that is called to be a spiritual body remains a fleshly body. The church that is called to preach the pure gospel preaches a compromised gospel that bears no resemblance to the church of Acts 2 and Ephesians 4. It loses its purpose as the bride of Christ and falls into decline.

Warnings of Imminent Decline

Warnings of decline and its consequences resound throughout scripture. The role of the prophet, the judge, the apostle, the preacher, the teacher and the shepherd means sounding the alarm that decline is near, followed by its accompanying judgment. This preponderance of warnings bears witness to the fact that without constant diligence, the church, which is filled with mere mortals, will lapse into unfaithfulness, ranging from simply failing to fulfill the calling of God to its maximum potential to completely embracing a false gospel. Warnings are evident throughout both Old and New Testaments:

You say, "We want to be like the nations, like the peoples of the world, who serve wood and stone". But what you have in mind will never happen. As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I will rule over you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered – with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you into the desert of the nations and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. Ezekiel 20:32-35

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or

take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

The calling of God is to live lives of faithfulness and holiness. To fail as an individual is to bring God's wrath upon oneself and to fail as a body is to bring God's wrath upon the body. It is this failure of the body that brings about the decline of God's people and the decline of the church. There should be no mistaking this, for the warning of imminent decline is clear.

Two Kinds of Remnants

Remnant theology is the study and recognition of the pervasive presence of the faithful few throughout scripture. Whenever and wherever the judgment of God fell on his unfaithful people, there were always a faithful few who survived the judgment and became the seed of God's restoration (Ezra 9:10, Isaiah 11:11, Jeremiah 23:3, Zechariah 8:12, Romans 11:2-5). The Book of Amos provides an interesting study in remnant theology. Hasel notes, "There is a twofold usage of the remnant in Amos. In a negative sense the remnant heightens the picture of judgment. . . The positive aspect of the remnant theme holds out hope for a faithful remnant from within the nation" (1991:113-114). This observation holds true for the treatment of the remnant theme throughout scripture, but there is also a different aspect to the use of the remnant in Amos, consistent with the unique message of Amos.

The Unique Message of Amos

In general, the message of the prophets was that the unfaithfulness of the people of Israel, their apostasy, had kindled the wrath of God, and that they must repent in order to avert the impending judgment of the Lord. The message of Amos, however, was different. He stated that a remnant will remain, but the wrath of God will not be averted and will come independent of any contingencies. Finley comments, "Amos already recognizes that the threat to the nation is certain. A remnant cannot be left unless the nation is first decimated" (1990:242). He further remarks, "To summarize, Amos examines the covenant between Israel and her God and finds the nation guilty of rejecting it. Even though their apostasy will bring unprecedented judgment, the covenant will continue because of the faithfulness of the Lord" (1990:114). The certainty of this unprecedented judgment is captured in Amos 7:7-9 with reference to the measuring standard of the plumb line and the judgment of the sword. Howard observes:

As Amos sees Yahweh holding the plumbline against Israel he falls silent. . . . no longer is he able to pray for the judgment to be averted, for he sees that it is too late, Israel has passed the point of no return. The whole national structure is warped and out of true, it cannot stand any comparison with that which is upright, and, as a builder will destroy that portion of a building which is crooked and rotten, so Yahweh would destroy the nation of Israel, for it too was crooked and rotten, both spiritually and morally (1989:99).

Amos reveals that it is too late for the nation to repent. Individuals within the nation may repent and become part of the remnant that will survive, but the nation will be destroyed. The juxtaposition of the remnant of individuals and the remnant of the nation makes Amos' treatment of the remnant theme unique. The remnant of individuals, the faithful few, whom God will restore and upon whom God will rebuild is seen in Amos 9:11-12, a view consistently seen throughout scripture.

The Unique Remnant in Amos

There is quite a different view of the remnant captured in Amos 3:12:

This is what the Lord says: "As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved, those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches."

To understand the significance of this metaphor, we must turn to Old Testament law. First, consider what Stuart refers to as the "curse of decimation" (1987:331):

If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.

Leviticus 26:21-22

This warning is given as a description of the judgment that will fall on the nation of Israel if its people fail in their faithfulness to God, clearly the case in the Israel seen in the Book of Amos.

Next, consider the law of restitution as stated in both implicit and explicit terms.

The law is implicit in the relationship between Jacob and Laban. In an angry exchange,

Jacob explains:

I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. Genesis 31:38-39

The implication is that Jacob should be free from responsibility for those animals lost to destruction by wild beasts because the law explicitly frees a steward from this responsibility if it can be proved that an animal was lost to destruction. "If it was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring in the remains as evidence and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal" (Exodus 22:13).

Mays comments:

According to the customary legal tradition of Israel and the surrounding cultures, a shepherd had to give evidence to the owner of the sheep, when any of the flock had been captured, by producing what was left of the carcass. He had not stolen or sold it, for here was proof! . . . A similar law appears in the Code of Hammurabi: "If a visitation of god has occurred in a sheepfold, or a lion has made a kill, the shepherd shall prove himself innocent in the presence of the god, but the owner of the sheepfold shall receive from him the animal stricken in the fold." This custom lies behind the saying. Israel's deliverance will be like that of a poor beast whose remains only serve as evidence of destruction. The rescue of evidence proves that rescue came too late – surely an ironic thrust! The saying does not promise the survival of a remnant, however small and wounded, after the coming judgment, but rather shatters any hope of rescue (1969:67).

The message of Amos is loud and clear; there will be two kinds of remnants. The remnant of Amos 9 refers to faithful individuals whom God has preserved and upon whom God will rebuild and restore his people. However, the remnant of Amos 3 is defined as an unfaithful nation that is more remains than remnant, evidence of the destruction brought about by the unprecedented judgment of God.

Conditions that Lead to Restoration

As previously mentioned, the people of God, and virtually all Christians of all times, follow a cyclical pattern of faithfulness, rebellion, repentance, and restoration. How does restoration of the fallen nation of Israel happen? Simply stated, restoration happens when the people as a nation repent of their sins and return to living in faithfulness and obedience to God. God's wrath is turned away and his blessing returns.

Restoration in the Old Testament

Old Testament examples include Joshua 7 and 2 Chronicles 7. Joshua 7 involves the account of Achan, who sinned against God by desecrating the sacred things following the victory at Jericho. Because of this, God's blessing was removed and the Israelites were defeated at Ai. Restoration is seen at the close of the chapter as God turns from his anger.

In 2 Chronicles 7, Solomon is visited by the Lord following the dedication of the temple. The Lord prescribes the way of restoration, stating:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 2:12b-14

For God, it is a foregone conclusion that the nation will sin and that he will judge, so he sets this prescription in place in order that the people of Israel will know how to find restoration once they are convicted and truly repent.

Restoration in the New Testament

A glimpse of restoration in the New Testament is seen in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. His first letter to them had been a scathing indictment of their practice and tolerance of sin. His exhortation to them was a call to repentance. In his second letter, his words reveal knowledge of a genuine repentance on their part:

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while – yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed by us in any way. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

2 Corinthians 7:8-10

Genuine repentance is the starting point of restoration. How does a nation, or a church, get to the starting point? Biblical evidence prescribes the intervention of strong, godly leadership to serve as the catalyst for spiritual change and the champion of strategic development.

Nature and Role of Leadership

Scripture reveals a long succession of strong leaders who serve to move the people of God according to God's purpose. From Noah to Abraham to Isaac to Joseph to Moses to Joshua to Deborah to David to Solomon to the major and minor prophets to Jesus to the apostles, the people of God are guided by dominant leaders who capture the essence of servant leadership. Burt Nanus accurately characterizes leadership with, "Leaders take charge, make things happen, dream dreams and then translate them into reality" (1989:7). Though secular in its context, this characterization describes much of what we see in biblical leaders. When this leadership skill is combined with godly calling and character, the people of God are effectively led.

In the context of restoration, two prominent leaders emerge, Ezra and Nehemiah, who were used significantly by God to restore the nation of Israel following the Babylonian exile. Examples of their leadership are significant in understanding how a remnant is to be led to a new beginning. The key is in whom they served and in whom they led. They served God and they led the remnant of Israel.

The Example of Ezra

In the case of post-exilic Israel, it is interesting to note how God used the power of the nations to prosecute his will. God's judgment was poured out on the southern kingdom of Judah through the invasion of the Babylonians. While in exile, many Jews became well educated and rose to levels of power, authority, and influence within the governmental structure of the conquering nation. Three Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, were used to give permission to vital Jewish leaders in order to spearhead a return to Jerusalem and to provide the means by which restoration of the nation and its religion would take place. The biblical record cites two men, Ezra and Nehemiah, as the dominant leaders of this restoration. Both men provided spiritual leadership. Ezra established theology from the posture of high priest, administering the law of God from the rebuilt temple. Nehemiah established theocracy from the posture of governor, administering the law of God through the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the city and population of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the nation of Israel itself.

What qualified Ezra to serve as high priest to the restored Israel? First, Ezra was highly regarded by King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:12, 21, 25). Second, Ezra was both gifted and passionate about the law of the Lord, having devoted himself to its study and observance (Ezra 7:6a, 10). Fensham comments:

Ezra thus concentrated his whole life on the study of the law. But it is not only a question of study – he also practiced the law. It was not a dead letter, but a living reality to him. *To teach Israel*. This phrase refers to the fulfilling of his mission. He taught the Jews the law in Babylon and now he had come to Judah to do likewise (1982:101).

Ezra 7 and 8 are loaded with references to Ezra's calling and empowerment by God, speaking repeatedly of the fact that the hand of the Lord was upon him and that the Lord answered his prayers (Ezra 7:6b, 9, 28b; 8:18, 23, 31).

What was the specific content of Ezra's ministry? Ezra's ministry carried three emphases: the establishing of the law of the Lord, the leading of the nation through confession and repentance and the separating of the people of God from the people of the nations, thus renewing the covenant with the Lord as his holy people. Ezra respectively fulfilled these three assignments by teaching and administering the law, leading the people of Israel through prayers of confession and repentance and by attacking the practice of intermarriage, demanding that the guilty separate themselves from their foreign wives.

In summary, Ezra was qualified, called and empowered. He established the law of God as the standard and demanded that the people of Israel be held to that standard. As a true servant leader, Ezra served God and led the people.

The Example of Nehemiah

Ezra served in tandem with Nehemiah, however, the chronology of the ministries of these two men is widely debated. Referring to the question of the chronological order of Ezra and Nehemiah, Williamson states, "No critical issue raised by the book of Ezra and Nehemiah has evoked more discussion than this question. Since Nehemiah's date is generally agreed, the controversy centers on the date at which Ezra came to Jerusalem" (1985:xxxix). Regardless of the chronology, it is clear that the combined leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah was God's plan for the post-exilic restoration of Israel. Nehemiah's

role might be characterized as practical theology, spiritually driven but manifest in tactical and logistical strategies.

Nehemiah's qualifications are more implicit than explicit. He held a trusted position in the Persian court, that of cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. This position placed him in the presence of the king, who was instrumental in Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 5, there is a rather casual mention of the fact that Nehemiah was appointed by Artaxerxes to be governor of Judah and served in that position for twelve years.

These facts provide insight into Nehemiah's positional authority, but his spiritual authority came from his calling and his passion. Upon learning of the woeful condition of the Jewish remnant in Judah and the woeful condition of the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah responded in tears with fasting and prayer (Nehemiah 1:4). In this prayer Nehemiah confessed the sins of a nation that had failed to obey the commands, decrees and laws of God. He reminded God of his covenant promises and determined personally to take responsibility for effecting change. With this prayer, Nehemiah answered the call of God to go to Judah and lead in the restoration effort. As with Ezra, the calling and empowering of God were seen in the fact that the hand of God was upon him (Nehemiah 2:8b) and the king provided Nehemiah with all the resources he would need to make his journey to Jerusalem and fulfill his ministry.

What was the content of Nehemiah's ministry? Nehemiah's ministry was first to cast a compelling vision for the remnant of Israel. Holmgren comments, "God's promises for the future seldom come to pass unless some person 'catches the vision' and works with God to bring the future to reality. Nehemiah was such a person; he caught the vision of a

restored, secure Jewish community" (1987:89). The casting of vision is captured in Nehemiah 2:

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

Nehemiah 2:17-18

What follows in Nehemiah 3-6 is the account of Nehemiah's masterful organization and empowerment of the people to rebuild the wall and the gates of Jerusalem, while balancing hard physical labor with defensive protection to ward off military threats from surrounding nations.

Ezra and Nehemiah: Combined Results

With the wall completed, Jerusalem became repopulated as more exiles returned.

The ministries of Nehemiah and Ezra merged as Ezra brought the law of God to bear in the lives of the community. The people rededicated themselves to the covenant of the Lord.

The rebuilt temple, the rebuilt wall and a rebuilt Israel were dedicated. Kidner summarizes:

In short, what we see in Ezra-Nehemiah is an Israel cut down almost to the roots, but drawing new vitality from its neglected source of nourishment in the Mosaic law and already showing signs, by its new concern for purity, of growing into the Judaism which we meet, both for better and for worse, in the New Testament (1979:23).

Ezra devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel (Ezra 7:10). Nehemiah devoted himself to the work

on the wall (Nehemiah 5:16). These men were qualified, called, empowered, devoted and focused. The gracious hand of the Lord was upon them.

Letters to the Church in Revelation

A final consideration in our biblical and theological look at the church will focus on the letters to the churches in Revelation. There are, of course, many letters, or epistles, in the New Testament that are addressed to churches. Most are written by Paul and contain vital theological insights that instruct and encourage the people of God to live the lives they are called to live. These letters constitute in large part the apostles' teaching that demands our devotion in Acts 2:42.

But the letters to the churches in Revelation are unique because they are apocalyptic in genre, combining the mystery of prophecy and end times. And though all scripture is authored by God, these letters feature a more direct authorship as John writes them by way of dictation.

Structure and Pattern

The structure of these seven letters adheres to a general pattern of seven elements.

Hendriksen identifies these seven elements as:

- 1. The salutation or address
- 2. Christ's self-designation
- 3. Christ's commendation
- 4. Christ's condemnation
- 5. Christ's warning and threat
- 6. Christ's exhortation
- 7. Christ's promise (1967:59-60)

This pattern is generally consistent in all of the seven letters.

Of great significance for our purposes is the reality that although these letters are addressed to specific churches in specific geographical regions during a specific time, they are applicable for all churches in all places during all times. Ladd comments, "The phrase repeated seven times, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,' suggests that the message in each letter is intended for a wider audience than for the local church alone" (1972:36). And just what, or who, is that wider audience? Hendriksen observes, "As this number seven occurs again and again in the Apocalypse and is everywhere symbolical of completeness, we may safely take it for granted that such is the case here, and that it indicates the entire Church throughout the full span of its existence to the very end of the world" (1967:16).

If this is true, and I believe that it is, the combined letters to the seven churches, structured with the pattern of the seven elements, provide an excellent diagnostic tool for the evaluation of today's church. Any church of any age would be well served to measure itself by what is revealed in these letters. The salutation might read, "To the angel of the church in Mainline, U.S.A." Questions might be asked and answered. Who is Jesus? How has he revealed himself to and in our church? For what would Jesus commend us? For what would Jesus condemn us? Of what would Jesus warn us? What might the threat of Jesus be to us? What exhortation would Jesus bring to us if our ears were willing to hear? What would be the promise of Jesus to us if we were to overcome?

The following table organizes the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 according to Hendriksen's seven elements.

TABLE 1

THE SEVEN LETTERS DIAGNOSTIC TABLE SCRIPTURE INDEX

Revelation	Salutation	Self-	Commenda-	Condemna-	Warning &	Exhortation	Promise
2-3		Designation	tion	tion	Threat		
Ephesus	2:1a	2:1b	2:2-3,6	2:4	2:5	2:7a	2:7b
Smyrna	2:8a	2:8b	2:9	х	2:10	2:11a	2:11b
Pergamum	2:12a	2:12b	2:13	2:14-15	2:16	2:17a	2:17b-c
Thyatira	2:18a	2:18b	2:19	2:20-23	2:24	2:25	2:26
Sardis	3:1a	3:1b	3:4	3:10-2	3:3	3:6	3:5
Philadelphia	3:7a	3:7b-c	3:8-10	x	х	3:13	3:11-12
Laodicea	3:14a	3:14b	х	3:15,17	3:16,19	3:18,22	3:20-21

Summary

The invisible church is growing while certain visible churches decline and die.

Acts 2 and Ephesians 4 give us descriptions, if not prescriptions, of the healthy church.

The Bible identifies syncretism as a leading cause of decline and death. The warnings against compromising with the world cry out from verse after verse of scripture; from scene after scene in biblical history.

The road to restoration is paved with confession and repentance. The people of God need strong leadership to make the journey down that road. Ezra and Nehemiah provide excellent examples of such leadership.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place" (Revelation 1:1a) is also the revelation of the churches of Jesus Christ. Honest self-evaluation through the grid of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3 provides accountability to help churches become and remain healthy.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

Historical Studies in Early America: 1650 - 1750

What is the relationship between theology and history? Because the entire history of the Anglo-American church is post-Reformation, it appears that European exploration of what is now the United States was at least in part driven by the theological developments that led up to and followed the sixteenth century Reformation. The religious freedom sought after by those who would shed the tyranny of both the Roman Church and the Anglican Church was surely in some part fueled by new understandings in theology brought about through the Reformation.

Loren Mead divides the history of Christianity into two paradigms, the Apostolic Paradigm and the Christendom Paradigm. In describing the church of the Apostolic Paradigm, Mead states:

It was a community that lived by the power and the values of Jesus. That power and those values were preserved and shared within the intimate community through apostolic teaching and preaching, through fellowship itself, and through ritual acts, preeminently the sharing of the bread and wine of the Eucharist. You gained entrance into this community only when the community was convinced that you also held those values and had been born into that power. The community was intense and personal. Belonging to it was an experience of being in immediate touch with God's Spirit (1991:10).

According to Mead, a shift to the Christendom Paradigm occurred in the early fourth century as Emperor Constantine named Christianity the official religion of the

Roman Empire. Mead writes, "There was now no separation between world and church within the Empire. The law removed the hostility from the environment but also made the environment and the church identical" (1991:14). In other words, the shift from the Apostolic Paradigm to the Christendom Paradigm was a shift from Christianity as counterculture to Christianity as mainstream culture.

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century is a definitive line of demarcation in terms of theological understanding, but remains within the sociological and psychological scope of the Christendom Paradigm, that is, Christianity before and after the Reformation was mainstream. But now, at the advent of the twenty-first century, the church is in a state of great uncertainty evidenced by the widespread decline of thousands of churches. Regele sees this collapse as the breakdown of the Christendom Paradigm, stating that the decline in the church is a reflection of the "paradigm under stress and cracking because of the weight of the transformational changes that were at work in the world" (1995:192). History and theology are clearly related.

Establishing the Church

Historian Walter Kirchner writes:

By far the most momentous event of the early modern period was the Reformation. It started as a reform movement within the Catholic Church . . . But the effect of their (the Reformer's) work was soon felt in all areas of European life – in politics, social relationships, sciences, and arts, and also in the economic arena (1966:39).

It seems no coincidence to me that the Renaissance and the Reformation were historical companions. If Mead's division of Christian history into the Apostolic Paradigm and the Christendom Paradigm is credible, and I believe that it is, we must allow for a distinction

within the Christendom Paradigm between the periods before and after the Reformation, before and after the Renaissance. We must recognize changes in the world in both thought and deed between the Dark Ages and the Enlightenment, between the pre-modern world and the modern world. Kirchner remarks:

Reformation and Counter Reformation left a deep imprint upon the western world. They affected its intellectual trends, its economics, its national developments. They stimulated education, changed social relationships, and led to new legal concepts and new laws. As two or more different faiths were to live subsequently side by side, a measure of tolerance became necessary, and the possibility emerged for the individual to make a choice in religious matters. Indeed, the cause of individualism, which the Renaissance, humanism, and capitalistic enterprise had fostered, was also advanced by the Reformation (1966:50).

Developments within the theological context of the Christendom Paradigm together with developments within the historical context of the Christendom Paradigm were setting the stage for the establishing of the American Church, a church that would be different from the Roman Church and the Anglican Church, a church that would reside in a nation that would be different from the nations of Europe.

The early seventeenth century saw the movement of Europeans into the thirteen colonies that would become the United States in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Protestantism was a key factor in the founding of the colonies. Among the religious groups who had a part in the founding of colonies, towns or religious communities were Puritans, Independents, Separatists, Baptists, and Quakers. The church in the thirteen colonies was overwhelmingly Protestant. Roman Catholicism did play a small part in the founding of Maryland, but even in Maryland the Roman Church was soon supplanted by the Church of England. However, the authority of the Church of England was never firmly established, leading Latourette to conclude, "In 1750 the most compact and the most

numerous and influential group of churches was not the Church of England but New England Congregationalism" (1975:954). The church as it developed in New England became the dominating church influence in the thirteen colonies, setting a pace that other colonies positioned along the Atlantic seaboard would follow.

Problems in the Church

Perhaps as a carry over from the Roman Church and the Anglican Church in Europe, in New England the church and state were closely related. Latourette remarks, "In principle New England was made up of Christian commonwealths where Christians controlled both the Church and the state and where all society was governed by Christian standards" (1975:953). However, there was one significant difference. The state churches in Europe considered all inhabitants as members. Simply being born in a certain place, especially with a certain ethnicity, made a person an automatic member of the church. But in New England, the Congregationalists held that a person's membership in the church was based on that person's individual, conscious Christian experience. The church was bound together by personal commitments to shared values, beliefs, and experiences, not by birthright or geography.

In theory, this distinction was a good thing. Under this new Congregationalist system, the visible church would be a more accurate reflection of the invisible church, composed of actual believers who had expressed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The visible church would be the elect, those whom Peter described with, "[Y]ou are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter

2:9). This church would be a church of truly regenerated believers with Christ, not the pope or the king, as head of the church.

Despite this seemingly pure and holy manifestation of the church, tensions were soon apparent, tensions that were political, social, economic, and religious. The church dominated the political scene. To hold office, one had to be a professing Christian. The Congregationalist Church held power, yet the vast majority of immigrants to the colonies came not as seekers of a pure or free religion, but driven by social and economic interests. These same immigrants migrated from countries where state churches were institutions to which one belonged by virtue of birth. This new idea of church membership by way of confession was foreign and smacked of oppression and exclusivity.

The Half-Way Covenant

The Congregationalist movement found itself caught in an ironic tension. The vision of Puritanism was to create a new society that would be an authentic Christian society. Individual congregations would be autonomous and membership would be restricted to those who professed Christ and who demonstrated the power of regeneration in their lives. Apparently it was assumed that autonomous Christ-centered churches would, by their nature, be accurate reflections of the character of Christ and that there would be peace and harmony throughout the communities and commonwealths. Pope comments, "[W]ithin human limits Congregationalists had done their best to separate the wheat from the chaff and narrow the gap between the visible and the invisible church" (1969:5-6). With these pure churches established in the communities, it was reasoned that

society as a whole would follow their lead and Christianity would hold sway as the dominant influence.

However, the desire to be separate from the world and the desire to have influence over the world at the same time turned out to be contradictory. It seems there was much more chaff than wheat. With church membership standards being raised, more and more of the population was found outside of the church, outside of its influence, and outside of its discipline. The only real leverage the church held came from practices characteristic of the European state churches that were desired and expected by the population at large, particularly baptism and communion. Ultimately it came down to having a church with purity or a church with control. Pope identifies the problem:

[O]nly communicants and their children qualified for baptism and this became the source of Congregationalism's quandary, for the continuing life of the church was predicated on hereditary growth of faith. The children, as heirs to the covenant through the membership of their parents, would be baptized, learn their catechism, observe the faith of their fathers, benefit from church discipline and the preaching of the word, and ultimately qualify for communion. But the regenerative experience now required placed a new barrier between baptized children and the realization of church membership. If these children were members in their infancy, albeit incomplete, what happened to their church status if conversion failed to materialize? Were they still members? If not, when had their membership ceased? More important, what was the status of their own children: could the next generation receive baptism even though its parents were not communicants; did apparently unregenerate parents terminate the covenant relationship (1969:6)?

In the Synod of 1662, the Massachusetts General Court put forth a proposition that was later dubbed by critics as the "half-way covenant." Pope remarks, "Churches adopting the synod's recommendation created a class of half-way members, persons capable of transmitting baptism, recognized as members and subject to church discipline, but barred from the Lord's Supper and from voting in church affairs" (1969:7). Evidence

of regeneration was not required for this partial membership. With this new interpretation, the church was able to expand its control over society, while believing it had maintained true purity in its full membership.

The half-way covenant represents the challenge and controversy that surrounded early Congregationalism. It represents the compromise that runs rampant through the people of God of most times and places. Pope concludes, "Ultimately the half-way covenant served to draw in the unchurched inhabitants, to bring new adults and children under the parochial wing of the churches. By the turn of the century purity had been largely sacrificed to community" (1969:275).

The Great Awakening

The Congregationalism of England and the Congregationalism of America wore two quite different faces. In England, Congregationalism was a movement of rebellion.

Bushman observes:

Part of the impulse behind the Puritan movement was resistance to the Establishment. Psychologically the Independents as a group were trying to shake off the onerous burden of ecclesiastical authority, and their church organization gave this desire institutional expression. Ultimate authority was transferred from the Kings and Bishops to members. In America, however, Congregationalism had to transform its polity from an instrument of rebellion to one of control. The church carried the responsibility of subduing men to the social order, a task that was not simple when members themselves had the final voice in the discipline of transgressors (1967:147).

Unlike the state churches of Europe that were funded through state taxation,

Congregationalist churches in America had to rely on the voluntary support of their

members who had authority within the church that they had never had before. The gain in

authority of members was reflected in the loss of authority of the clergy. Clergy was now dependent on members for their salaries. Bushman comments:

Few clergymen were actually dismissed, but frequently party divisions resulted in a diminished salary. Whenever contentions arose in the parish, the pastor was likely to be short-changed on his yearly income. If censure and excommunication were his ultimate sanctions, popular control over wages was the congregation's restraint on its pastor (1967:156).

As the eighteenth century approached, tension mounted. In its zeal for purity, the American church had shed the control of the state and the inclusion of all inhabitants as members. It favored an exclusive membership based on confession and the testimony of personal Christian experience. However, this meant the loss of state funding and the loss of ecclesiastical control of inhabitants who previously would have been bound by church discipline. Volunteerism replaced compulsion as church revenues had to come from volunteer contributors and submission to church discipline had to come from confessing members, a very small minority. The clergy, who once yielded strict control backed by both church and state, now had little positional authority.

Many colonial communities were being less and less impacted by Christian influence. Society was driven more by economy than purity. Moral life slipped further and further into decay as the restraints of the church were lifted and the authority of the clergy waned. Bushman remarks, "After 1690 changing conditions in the economy and in communal life made the minister's task virtually impossible" (1967:160). The minister became more of an arbitrator of social and economic conflicts than a spokesman of God. With each passing year, the church became more and more anemic and voluntary loyalty among the Congregationalists churches fell further and further into decline.

Adding to the problem of the weakening authority of Congregationalist clergy was the opposition resulting from the rising development of minority denominations. The battlefield for Congregationalist clergy expanded from within their own churches to churches outside. The clergy was now pressed by membership within their churches, by social conditions outside of their churches, and by rising conflict with other movements. Bushman captures the essence with:

The established (Congregationalist) clergy also felt keenly the loss of power as a result of opposition from these minority churches. Anglicans and Baptists could not exist peacefully alongside the established churches; they had to dissent volubly and persistently. Oversensitive to aspersions because of opposition within their own churches, the ministers fought back vehemently. The incessant warfare diminished the dignity of the clergy and raised doubts about its authority (1967:168-169).

The Outbreak of Revival

Unpredictably widespread revival broke out in 1721 with a sudden acceleration of conversions in New England's Windsor, Windham, and Norwich, radiating out in all directions. These conversions were the early signs of an explosive revival that would become known as the Great Awakening. Latourette announces, "In 1734-1735 the Great Awakening broke out in Northampton, Massachusetts, under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards . . . [A] wave of conviction swept over the community and hundreds professed conversion" (1975:959). Many evangelists serving in a variety of denominations built upon the foundation laid by Edwards. Perhaps the most prominent of the later evangelists was George Whitefield, an Oxford educated Anglican who found a great following among colonial Presbyterians and Congregationalists in the mid-eighteenth century.

The Great Awakening crossed social and religious lines as it spread through the colonies, impacting people through the work of many denominations and reaching rich and poor, educated and uneducated, churched and unchurched. The results of the Great Awakening were striking. Latourette notes, "Out of the Great Awakening came a large increase in the number of churches, of young men entering the ministry, of earnestness among the rank and file of professing Christians, and of missions (1975:960). A number of prominent educational institutions were founded, among them Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania.

Where did the Great Awakening come from? Why did it happen? How did it happen? What conditions led to sudden revival? Cowing remarks, "On the eve of the Great Awakening in the eighteenth century, evangelically inclined clergy – 'New Lights' – likened themselves to the biblical saving remnant struggling to keep religion alive in a trough of apathy" (1995:1). Was this self-identified saving remnant unlike any other such group from any other historical setting? Were they somehow uniquely catalytic in lighting the revival fire? And what of renowned clergy such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield: were they cause of the Great Awakening, or simply the effect? Would it be possible to identify and recreate conditions just prior to the Great Awakening to force such a revival in our time?

Gaustad's Three Conditions: Regele's Two Pivotal Points

Gaustad notes three conditions that were key to the development of the Great Awakening: 1) contagious concern, 2) widespread disease and 3) prolific use of communications technology. These first two conditions were motivational; one positive,

one negative. The third was a matter of the practical utilization of the technology of the time. Gaustad writes, "In March, 1735, there were unmistakable signs of revival in South Hadley and in Suffield. The characteristics of concern – a profound and disturbing consciousness of sin with a subsequent feeling of relief and joy – then appeared in Sunderland and soon overspread the town" (1957:19). He further notes, "The news of so much zeal and fervor acted and reacted as a stimulant to others" (1957:19). This concern, described as beginning with "a profound and disturbing consciousness of sin," does indeed align with the kind of conviction that always seemed to fall on the biblical remnant of God's people as they came to grips with their apostasy and syncretism and repented, returning to God and receiving the return of his favor.

Regele concurs with what he calls, "the First Pivotal Point: Spiritual Awakening." He writes, "During a spiritual awakening, society focuses on the inner life, on values and beliefs. . . Awakening moments call a society to renewed concern for the inner life of the spirit and to judge the facile and meaningless material values revolving around the creation of things" (1995:29). The move from England to the colonies was filled with great expectations and driven by grand assumptions. But the utopian ideal of a pure society was never realized. Purity was met by compromise and the church was marginalized. Yet some, perhaps a faithful few or a remnant, remained faithful and would be used by God to spark revival.

To what degree was this returning to God driven by the outbreak of disease?

Gaustad observes, "A phenomenon of disastrous proportions – sufficient to have caused a religious reaction or a popular revolt – was the epidemic of 1735-1740 known as the 'throat distemper'. Causing more deaths in the New England colonies than any war before

the Revolution, the diphtheria plague was most severe in the New Hampshire and Maine areas" (1957:20). It is certainly intriguing to think in terms of a throat disease epidemic sparking the prolific proclamation of the gospel. Perhaps the population was quieted to hear the truth better.

Again, Regele concurs and he identifies a "Second Pivotal Point: Secular Crisis." He comments, "This is a period when the troubles of the world reach a boiling point and then boil over. . In response to the crisis, society begins to feel its vulnerability to negative forces and in reaction halts its individualistic momentum and begins to recoalesce around a common set of values – generally for survival reasons" (1995:30). Fighting an epidemic shares many of the characteristics of fighting a war. A common enemy is a threat to all and defending against that enemy becomes the focus of society. All other things in life become secondary as resources are poured into a singular fight. Perhaps this explains the church's tendency to grow and flourish while under persecution. In the early eighteenth century, the diphtheria epidemic provided the secular crisis.

The Great Awakening permeated the colonies, covering the young American population with the proclamation of God's word. This profound penetration was due in large part to the use of the printing press. This technological advance fulfilled a huge role in the Reformation, and now would be harnessed for God's purposes in the New World. Gaustad comments:

The Awakening was "Great" because it was general: none escaped its influence or avoided its controversy. In both coastal and frontier areas, within cities and rural communities, in churches and in open fields, people gathered to hear an earnest evangelistic gospel, be it preached by their own minister, a neighboring pastor, a trespassing itinerant, or an exhorter. Men whose words had never before been heeded now proclaimed, wrote, and published their zealous defense or their acrimonious contempt of the "present extraordinary work of God". New England's printing presses

vastly increased their output, giving to religious subjects significant precedence. Executive, legislative, and judicial officials were obliged to note and to deal with this upsurge of religious interest. Over the most keenly intellectual or the most grossly credulous, the revival had its sway (1957:42).

Gaustad's observations drive one to seek an analogy today. What parallels to his three conditions exist today? Is there enough concern in evangelical ranks to cause a revival fire? Is disease rampant, forcing thought of both relief for this life and the destiny that lies beyond? Is the state of communications technology such that the gospel might find a vehicle for widespread proliferation?

The answer in regard to disease and technology is a resounding, "Yes!" Physical disease is in abundance. Pick one! Third world nations suffer from widespread disease in many varieties. Thousands die daily from simple malnutrition. In the United States, though free from most preventable disease, thousands have been lost to AIDS, a disease that continues to spread despite the fact that millions of dollars have been poured into treatment, research, and information. Technology has experienced an unprecedented paradigm shift with the development of radio and television, satellite links, the computer and the internet, and all things digital. Communication has the capacity to go worldwide any second of any day.

The only issue really at question has to do with the depth of evangelical concern and the depth of evangelical commitment to the Great Commission. Where is the evangelical community? Is the evangelical community Cowing's "biblical saving remnant struggling to keep religion alive in a trough of apathy"? Or is the evangelical community drowning in that trough, more concerned about worship forms, building projects and protecting home turf than the souls of men, women and children?

The Wind Down of Revival

Even more illusive than the question of the origin of the Great Awakening is the question of the end of the Great Awakening. Gaustad remarks, "The suddenness with which the blessings of heaven fell on New England soil in 1741 is comparable only to the abruptness with which those showers were withdrawn. And the ending appeared as inexplicable as the beginning" (1957:61). He concludes:

In the first half of the eighteenth century revivalism was a phenomenon as wondrous as it was inexplicable, to be classed with meteorites and rattlesnakes. There was no revival technique. The extraordinary "outpourings of the spirit of God" were regarded as being truly from God, while the minister or church was only a channel through which that spirit was poured. How or why the revivals began or stopped, here and not there, were divine secrets. The wind blew where it listed, but none could tell whence it came or whither it went. Edwards' account of the revival at Northampton is of "surprise conversions", the element of surprise in this and other early revivals is real (1957:16).

It appears that the conditions that existed prior to the Great Awakening were not causative, but were simply used by God for his purposes in his timing. So what is the evangelical community to do? Does the evangelical community simply throw up its hands and do nothing, seeing itself as the victim of circumstance or the occasional recipient of God's unpredictable blessing? As the Apostle Paul might say, "By no means!" Three lessons emerge from a study of the Great Awakening. First, explosive revival is the outpouring of blessing from the Holy Spirit. Second, the church cannot force this outpouring of blessing, but the church can prevent such an outpouring through its apathy, pettiness and self-absorption. Third, when the outpouring of God's blessing comes, the church must be ready.

Historical Studies in mid-20th Century America: 1950-1980

In the United States, the mid-20th century was dominated by events surrounding World War II. On the heels of recovery from the 1929 economic depression came the rise to power of Adolph Hitler. The late thirties were preoccupied with a Hitler watch as Third Reich aggression overtook Europe. With the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese in 1941, the United States formally entered the war. For the next four years, the people of the United States were galvanized around the war effort, the great common denominator that pulled the entire country together. All resources, human and material, were poured into battle to defeat Hitler and his allies.

In the United States, World War II was far more than defending friends against territorial takeover, or even defending against the possible attack of our own nation on our own soil. It was the classic battle of good versus evil, of right versus wrong, of democracy versus fascism and communism. To many Americans it was the battle between Judeo-Christianity and atheism. And good, right, democracy and Christianity won.

Although the forces of good were victorious, the cost of the victory was extremely high. Thousands of lives were lost. Thousands of service men and women came home with horrific wounds, both physical and psychological. An entire national economy had been turned over to funding the war. Careers were lost or at least put on hold. Education was delayed or forfeited altogether. Kids were forced to grow up fast. Women took over what had traditionally been male roles in the home and in the workplace. For over four years, each day was lived under the threat that today might be the day when a loved one caught a bullet, or stepped on a mine, or went down at sea or was blown from the sky. Hope, pride and confidence ebbed and flowed against fear, pain and suffering.

Post-World War II Growth of the Church

With the end of World War II, the people of the United States celebrated national victory, while at the same time many struggled with personal trauma. One source of peace and resolution was the church. Kirchner observes:

After World War II the memory of the horrors and uncertainties of war had the apparent effect of impelling man to intensify his search for security and comfort. Many who were fearful of the dangers inherent in man's growing mastery of natural forces (as evidenced by the development of atomic weapons) and who were disturbed by the use of subtle weapons which physiological and psychological studies made available for the purpose of propaganda, indoctrination, and mental persuasion (drugging and "brainwashing"), turned anew to the consolations of religion (1966:300).

The intense "search for security and comfort" led to a boom in church growth and also to the baby boom. With so many families separated and ripped apart by the war, the desire to regroup and reestablish the family became a passionate pursuit in the post-war United States, sparking an unprecedented rise in the birth rate. On another front, the economy boomed. Kirchner comments, "The nation (United States) had quickly 'returned to normalcy' after the war. Rationing had been abolished, farm incomes had risen, a measure of controlled inflation had led to an increase in prices and wages, and a feeling of confidence and, with it, new incentives for further production and broader employment had been created" (1966:306).

Peace and prosperity were the order of the day following World War II. The economy, the family and the church flourished. Churches within the urban centers were generally well attended and a new phenomenon, known as the "suburb," was about to have tremendous impact on the growth of the church. The United States had been a nation of two basic communities, the city or urban community, and the rural community, consisting

of the small town and its nearby farms. But following World War II, the suburban community was born. The economic boom allowed developers to go to the outer boundaries of the city to create new residential communities. These "bedroom" communities attracted young urban families who desired to own homes of their own and young rural families who sought lives away from the farm. The midway point between city and farm was the suburb.

As suburban populations grew, the need and opportunity for new churches to serve these new suburban developments grew. Throughout the fifties and sixties, hundreds of new, mostly mainline denominational churches sprang up. At the time, there seemed to be no end in sight. To have a church building was to have it filled. In fact most church planting methodology began with the simple construction of a church building on a small parcel of land that the developer had set aside for church use. The suburbs were church friendly and saw a prolific growth of the church in numbers, size, programming and buildings.

Post-Growth Death in the Church

Ironically, while the church was experiencing exponential quantitative growth, it was losing ground qualitatively. Latourette includes an essay by Ralph Winter who states:

[T]he most useful generalization about what happened to Christianity in the Western world between 1950 and 1975 is simply that it continued its gradual, painful withdrawal from entrenched legal and cultural establishment. This process of disestablishment . . . began much earlier and seemed to move much faster in America (1975:1480).

It could be argued that the nation had completely turned upside down. Originally founded by Christian visionaries who sought a holy and biblically pure society, the United States was becoming more and more unfriendly to the Christian church as Christianity moved from the mainstream of U.S. culture to the fringe. Winter further notes:

In 1975, the California State Court of Appeals ruled the "three hour closing of state offices on Good Friday is unconstitutional and an 'excessive governmental entanglement with religion". That same year the California State Legislature appointed a Buddhist priest as chaplain, a move profoundly significant in the disestablishment process (1975:1483).

These decisions are symptomatic of the cultural swing that was taking place as the baby boomer began to reach adulthood. The optimism of the fifties and early sixties had been replaced by the pessimism and distrust that accompanied the disillusionment brought about by the failure of materialism to produce happiness and fulfillment. The patriotism of World War II had been replaced by the anti-war activism of the Viet Nam era. Trust in institutions of all shapes and sizes fell. The once overwhelming influence of Christianity on society and its beliefs gave way to secularism. The urban church, the suburban church and the rural church began a slow but steady decline that has become extremely severe in our time. Morris warns, "Eighty-five percent of American Protestant churches are either stagnated or dying" (1993:35).

What is the root cause of this decline? Klaas observes, "[T]he most potent factor in declining membership is the change from a churched to an unchurched society" (1996:viii). Unfortunately, the church at large is still blind to the reality that society has changed that much, still choosing to act as if the United States were a churched society and wondering why churches are not growing. Klaas remarks, "In the 1970s, a few prophetic people started to talk about problems. In the midst of booming growth, their words received the treatment usually accorded prophets: they were ignored. In the 1980s most

people began to sense something was wrong. Their usual solution was to work harder at what they were already doing" (1996:vii).

By the year 1980, the Protestant church in the United States was in a downward spiral that continues with rapid acceleration. As a whole, the church has neither recognized the depth of its problem nor discovered a solution. Dramatic change is needed but the American Protestant church, though born through the eruptive change brought about by the Reformation, resists change with every fiber of its being. The church is fast becoming an island, a self-absorbed and shrinking speck in an ocean of cultural change. Uninterrupted, steep decline will continue.

Contemporary Studies: Today's Church

The Protestant church in the United States is in trouble. Even a casual investigation into the state of the average church reveals unhealthy conditions and trends. A more careful investigation leads to the conclusion that things are even worse than indicated at first glance. The preponderance of evidence is overwhelming. Lyle Schaller, George Barna, Loren Mead, Leith Anderson, Linus Morris, and Mike Regele all agree, the church is in serious decline and needs significant change. The future of the church, on its present course, is one of increasing decline and marginalization, rendering it less and less effective in fulfilling its biblical purpose.

Regele, while articulating a harsh diagnosis of the church, sees light at the end of the tunnel. He postulates:

As the institutional church faces the unfolding of the twenty-first century, it faces a great challenge. In the postmodern world, there is a "reality for every occasion." The church's message is simply one more voice in the cacophony of created realities competing to attract a following. This will

not change. It is in engaging what this means that the church again comes face-to-face with its own death. However, it is also in this place of death that the greatest opportunity dwells and nowhere else (1995:80).

Regele's thought is along the lines of John 12:24, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." Regele has concluded that the kind of change needed in the church is so radical that it cannot be accomplished through modification, but can only be accomplished through total death and rebirth. This kind of productive death, however, must be intentional, sacrificial and strategic. Dying in and of itself will produce only a corpse. Dying with purpose can yield new life.

The declining church is rarely looking ahead because it is most often preoccupied with current survival issues and looking to the past rather than to the future. Barna observes, "Rather than prepare for the coming battles, we (the church) revel in past victories, focusing on what can never be changed or relived, at the expense of tomorrow's opportunities" (1990:23). This orientation toward the past in the declining church puts blinders on the church, blocking its view of its mission field. Assuming the current mission field is the same as the past, the declining church unsuccessfully employs outdated methods.

To find the future mission field in the past would require traveling all the way back to the first century. Anderson captures the challenge as he comments:

First-century Christians had to deal with a totally pagan culture. The world they lived in and sought to evangelize had never heard of Jesus Christ and knew nothing about the Judeo-Christian God and religion. For most of the twentieth century, American churches and Christians have lived in the midst of a pre-evangelized culture. The majority of people we have tried to evangelize have had some kind of religious background and were at least familiar with basic Christian ideas and vocabulary. Now the situation is rapidly changing. Millions of Americans have never been to

church, never owned a Bible, and have no interest in, nor sense of need for, religion (1990:133-134).

But the declining church is not thinking twenty centuries in the past, it thinks twenty or thirty years in the past. Anderson dryly observes, "Yesterday's church keeps hoping that tomorrow will be 1954" (1990:141).

Increase of Dying Churches

Churches are dying at an alarming rate. Statistics vary from author to author and research group to research group, but it appears roughly four times as many churches die as are planted each year, a net loss of at least several thousand churches a year. Schaller, Barna, and Morris cite eighty to eighty-five percent of existing Protestant churches as in plateau or decline. The writing is clearly on the wall.

What is the problem? Where do we begin to focus our attention? The problem, stated in very simple terms, is that there is a gap between the people on the inside of the church and the people on the outside of the church, and that gap is getting wider.

Communities have changed over the years while the churches in those communities have stayed the same. Regele writes, "There are neighborhoods in major cities today that were White in the sixties, Black in the seventies, and became Hispanic in the eighties" (1995:106). Shrinking Anglo congregations in those same neighborhoods are undoubtedly wondering why the church is in such poor shape, blaming the community for changing.

The gap widens due to congregational attitude and focus, and a vague understanding of the purpose of the church. The growing church reaches out while the declining church focuses inward. Klaas observes, "Attitude about the central purpose of ministry distinguishes congregations that grow from those that do not. About 80 percent of

congregations focus on ministry to current members" (1996:21). No wonder so many churches go year after year without seeing a single conversion.

One characteristic of the church that focuses on the congregation, rather than the community, is that it becomes calendar-driven, filling up all the available space with self-interests. Callahan warns, "Too many churches are merry-go-rounds of programs and activities, and not enough churches are mission posts of help and hope" (1983:68). He continues, "When a congregation does focus on just a few programs and does them so extraordinarily well that the community is enriched, then that congregation will become increasingly effective and successful" (1983:70).

The gap between those inside the church and those outside the church that widens as the result of wrong attitudes, motives and purposes from those on the inside, further widens as the result of developing beliefs on the part of those on the outside. Barna's research reveals, "A large minority of adults say that the Church is not 'relevant' for today. The majority of adults say that in difficult times they will put their trust in self rather than in God. Less than half of the public believes that churches and religious faith can help people deal with difficult times in their life" (1990:117).

It is the church's mandate to close the gap between itself and the community in order that the Holy Spirit be given opportunity to close the gap between God and man.

This is the essence of the Great Commission. This is the biblical purpose of the church.

Modernism Influence

Many historians and philosophers look to the Enlightenment as the beginning of the modern era while others place its foundation further back in history in the Renaissance.

In either case, for the purposes of our study, it is important to note that the development of the United States from its beginnings in the colonial period has taken place within the historical framework of this modern era. Hence, the development of the American Protestant church falls within that framework as well.

The American Protestant church is a modern church because it began and developed during the modern era. As such, it is to some degree the product of Enlightenment thinking. Grenz writes:

In addition to assuming that knowledge is certain and objective, Enlightenment thinkers also assume that it is inherently good... This assumption of the inherent goodness of knowledge renders the Enlightenment outlook optimistic. It leads to the belief that progress is inevitable, that science, coupled with the power of education, will eventually free us from our vulnerability to nature, as well as from all social bondage. Enlightenment optimism, together with the focus on reason, elevates on human freedom. Suspect are all beliefs that seem to curtail autonomy or to be based on some external authority rather than on reason...[T]he modern ideal champions the autonomous self, the self-determining subject who exists outside any tradition or community (1996:4).

Grenz makes an important statement regarding modernism here, one that warrants a closer look. Note the components of his observation. Knowledge is certain, knowledge is objective, and knowledge is good. The outlook is optimistic; progress is inevitable. Science plus education will free us from nature and society.

The goal is to become an independent, autonomous self, subject to nothing and no one, the captain of one's own ship.

This is the mindset of the Enlightenment, a mindset that fully matured into the belief system of modernism in the day of the baby boomer, who adopted these components as if they were the basic doctrines of a modern religion. Indeed, they were - a religion of

so-called reason, a religion of knowledge, a religion of science and education, a religion of optimism, a religion of egocentricity, a religion void of community.

A sub-set of modernism is secularism, a philosophy that rejects all influence of religious faith. Morris observes, "Secularism defines two ways of thinking – fact and faith. Facts are based on anything that can be experienced through the five senses. Only facts are acceptable in the public realm. If something is categorized as faith it is considered a private matter" (1993:27). Religious faith, the central fabric of the founding of the colonies in the early days of Renaissance, and then Enlightenment, thinking, finds itself on the fringe as modernism and secularism become the "religion" of the day. The church, once a central institution, has become a marginal institution. The baby boomer, a member of what is sometimes referred to as the "me first" generation, becomes less and less loyal to a particular denomination, and less inclined to attend a church, unless that church meets his individual, self-determined, self-interested needs. With this mindset, the day of church shopping has begun. The boomer, the modern man, is consumer oriented in every facet of life. Why should the church be different? Anderson remarks, "It may seem contradictory that baby boomers who aren't loyal to institutions have high expectations of those same institutions. Contradiction or not, it is characteristic of this generation" (1990:83).

So as the church is pushed to the margins in terms of its impact and influence, the church attendee becomes a church consumer, shopping from one church to the next to find the church, if any, that meets his or her individual needs and expectations. The church becomes an environment of marketing and promotion as it competes for valuable shoppers. And the church member, lacking a sense of loyalty and commitment, will leave and go to the church down the street the moment his needs or expectations go unmet.

Imparato and Harari refer to the modernist culture as a "rights happy society."

They identify two developments born of this condition:

- 1. A "me-first" excessive individualism. By this we are not referring to self-reliant behavior that reflects free choices and launches entrepreneurial initiatives. Rather, we are referring to an egotism that is preoccupied with self-interest and psychological "self-realization".
- 2. A legalistic emphasis on behavior and relationships. By this we are referring to the self-protective, self-enhancing preoccupation with the letter of agreements rather than with the spirit of agreements (1994:232).

The "me-first" condition captures the central theme of modernism's egocentricity. The "legalistic" condition seems to import the flesh-driven letter of the law mentality of the Pharisees, when what we really need from first century religion is the spirit-driven obedience to the law called for by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Christian community. As the church moves further and further to the margins, and as modern people become more and more individualistic and self-interested, the more the church declines. Regele poses the question, "What does all this mean for the future of the current form of the institutional church" (1995:51). He observes:

Unfortunately, too many (churches), like the alcoholic, are living in denial. Others are immobilized, having done little positive mission or ministry in their communities for years. Governing bodies, while facing declining congregations and, consequently, falling budgets, fill their time making sure the ecclesiastical machinery doesn't skip a beat. At least we know that is stable and unchanging. In fear, many are cutting back on the very activity that is most needed: a renewed effort to develop healthy congregations while facing the stewardship issue raised by the growing number of dead ones (1995:51).

In a harsh interpretation, modernism in the context of American Protestantism has pushed the church from the center of society to the fringe, causing it to evolve from a church that gathers the body of Christ together in its service to God into a church that

competes for self-serving individuals. And the church at large remains unaware of its real internal problems and therefore unaware of real internal solutions.

Postmodernism Influence

Postmodernism is so named because it follows modernism. However, a more accurate name might be antimodernism. Postmodernism is not the next step in a modernist direction, nor is it the next level in a logical pattern or progression. It is a rejection of all that modernism represents. Grenz comments, "Scholars disagree among themselves as to what postmodernism involves, but they have reached a consensus on one point: this phenomenon marks the end of a single, universal worldview" (1996:11-12). The dissonance between the World War II generation and the baby boomer generation has been identified as a typical generation gap. The dissonance between the baby boomer generation and Generation X and beyond is far more than a generation gap. It is an era gap; an outlook gap; a worldview gap.

Regele draws an interesting analogy, comparing the institutional church of today to the people of Israel in Egypt following their favored status as the kinsmen of Joseph.

He states:

[W]hen a king arose who no longer "knew Joseph", this favored position collapsed. There was a significant cultural and political shift – a transformation – that no longer gave favored status to God's people. Where they had been a protected and supported people, they found themselves outcasts. Far from being favored, they became objects of scorn and ridicule (1995:181).

Regele's point is well taken. A king has now risen who does not know Joseph.

The king is the sweeping transition that is being driven by postmodern thought. Grenz observes, "Postmodernism represents a rejection of the Enlightenment project and the

foundational assumptions upon which it was built" (1996:5). And Joseph, of course, is the institutional church.

Imparato and Harari concur with Regele, offering an epochal timeline that outlines major transitions:

The Classical Age
First Transition Point – About 313-476

The Middle Ages
Second Transition Point – Early 1300s – 1600s

The Modern Age
Third Transition Point – 20th Century

The Fourth Epoch (1994:11).

The question is whether postmodernism will be the next epoch or simply the expansion joint between the Modern Age and whatever will come next. Regardless, the impact of postmodernism on the church is profound. Barna captures one of the symptoms, "Studies show that we have become a nation of biblical illiterates, lacking a knowledge of what is in the Bible, and showing limited commitment to applying its truths to our daily behavior" (1990:116). How far we have come from the days when the Bible provided the backbone of law and ethics. Mead paints the challenging and disturbing picture:

We still wake up in the morning thinking we are in Jerusalem. Until a generation or so ago that *seemed* to be true. But now we wake up finding ourselves in Babylon... We look out the window and see all the furniture of our supposed Jerusalem: churches on the corners, some of them bursting at the seams. And yet more and more of us have begun to realize that the world we inhabit is not Jerusalem. We live in Babylon. And I see no signs that Babylon is going to become Jerusalem (1996:83-84).

The collapse of modernism and the rise of postmodernism have not carried us as the people of God off into exile. It has brought exile to us. The church is in steep decline and thousands of churches are dying. Babylon has come to us.

Summary

In searching through the highlights of growth in the history of the American Protestant church, one would hope to uncover spiritual characteristics and patterns that could be recreated in an effort to prime the pump for twenty-first century revival. Such is not the case, however. Rather, one finds that each historical path, regardless of vintage, leads to disappointment. Colonial movement toward purity in the New England church was both noble and theologically sound. But the conflict between trying to be separate from the world while controlling the world proved too challenging. The church could not maintain purity and control at the same time. The so-called "Half-Way Covenant" attempted a compromise, but compromised purity is no purity at all. Both purity and control gave way.

The Great Awakening brought a marvelous season to the American church. Its value in terms of transformed lives and its legacy of literature are profound, but identifying either the reasons for the origin or the demise of the Great Awakening remains elusive. Richard Lovelace notes the centrality of an awareness of the seriousness of sin in the Great Awakening and in subsequent spiritual awakenings. But in regard to today's spiritual condition he states, "Perhaps the shallow results of the current evangelical and charismatic resurgence spring from a spirituality which takes a detour around the vision of sin in order to grasp at psychological and material comfort" (1985:21).

Post-World War II America saw a prolific burst of church planting in the new

American suburb, but it appears that this upsurge in church growth had more to do with
economy and culture than with authentic faith. The peace and prosperity psychology of
Post-WW II America, coupled with the fact that Christianity was culturally mainstream at

that time, propelled the church into unprecedented growth in terms numbers and membership. But with the aging of the baby boomers, the influence of modernism and the marginalization of Christianity, the church has fallen into steep decline. Many church leaders have turned to the past trying to recapture mid-twentieth century growth using mid-twentieth century methods. This has proven ineffective.

Simply stated, the historical record of the American Protestant church, whether in terms of twenty years ago or two hundred years ago, teaches us more about the decline of the church than the growth of the church. The more the church in the world becomes the church of the world, the deeper it falls into decline.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Dying Churches

In <u>Beyond Church Growth</u>, Robert Logan states, "The great hindrance to reaching the unchurched is the Church" (1989:60). Is this the hyperbolic raving of a modern day prophet or is this a true assessment of the modern day church? My experience, my study and my observations suggest that Logan's comment is more truth than hyperbole. The truth is, the most common condition found in the American Protestant church today is the condition of decline.

Why is this so? Speaking in broad terms, the church does not see its problem.

And even when seen, the problem is not understood, rendering a solution impossible. The church is in serious trouble and is in need of significant change. Change is not likely to come, however, as the church blames outside forces beyond its control for the problem and seeks solutions through minor rather than major change. Mead remarks:

The great creative adaptation of Israel began when they discovered that they were living in Babylon. I believe we in the churches are, indeed, in Babylon. But too many of us continue to pretend that we are surrounded by the comfortable walls of Jerusalem, safe in the shadow of the temple. Or we think we have only to make a few adjustments to the city wall or the architecture of the temple to return to the comfortable days we think we had in the past (1996:85).

Mead's reference to the way "we think" connects with Senge's concept of "mental models." He writes, "Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations,

or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (1990:8). The church has become institutionalized and with that institutionalization has come certain patterns of thought and behavior which are not effective in today's context. We must find new solutions that will require new ways of thinking.

of primary importance is the church's realization that its problems are internal and not external. The church has created problems for itself. It is not simply the victim of circumstance but is suffering from the consequences of its own choices. Barna concludes, "Our research shows that churches usually die from the inside out. Death is largely due to an inward focus, rather than an outward concern" (1991:110). This is both ironic and tragic. The church tends to focus inward over time, becoming more and more concerned about its internal population than the lost community outside. But as its ministry implodes, it finally turns its attention to what is outside, not to reach out but to blame the outside for its internal woes.

The starting place for turning such a church around is honest self-assessment.

The dying church is often in a state of denial, not able to see itself as it truly is, nor able to see its own culpability in any perceived problem. Schaller advises, "The congregational self-appraisal process is one way to combat denial" (1998:20). Until the church confronts reality, it cannot see the need for change and therefore will not change, making death inevitable.

Death is usually slow and often silent. Barna observes, "In most cases, a church does not truly fall apart overnight. In a few of the churches we studied, the decline had an

identifiable starting point, such as a major split... More frequently, though, the collapse took between two years and two decades to run its course" 1993:41).

Death and dying are running rampant in today's American Protestant church.

Fortunately, national, regional, and local church ministries are beginning to see the problem. There is clearly a shift in church ministry focus from an exclusive emphasis on planting the new church to a renewed interest in the dying church. Buttry writes, "Evangelism and Church Growth were big words in the seventies and eighties... The word for the nineties is Renewal. It is the underlying concern of mainline churches everywhere" (1988:7). Though late in arriving, the renewed interest in renewal is much needed.

Approached properly, churches, and the entire American Protestant movement, can be turned around.

Distinction: Dying Churches vs. Declining Churches

A fine line exists between a church that is in serious decline and a church that is dying. They may look very similar, but a dying church was first a declining church in the majority of cases. They share many of the same characteristics. In both, there is a lack of vision and a lack of high expectations that create a resource shortage in terms of people's time and money. Barna concludes, "Stagnant churches frequently lack the resources to grow because they do not provide people with a compelling reason to give... Sometimes they set their sights too low. Thus, even when their demands are met, they have failed" (1991:180-181).

Declining and dying churches both lack faith in the powerful movement of God.

Again Barna observes, "Stagnant and declining churches frequently restrict the scope of

their ministry because they doubt that God would bless unusual or enormous efforts" (1991:175). These churches trust the power of God on an objective theological level, they just do not believe that God would act powerfully in their subjective situations. Lack of self-confidence becomes lack of God-confidence. This attitude is self-defeating as little faith produces little fruit, giving further evidence that the lack of faith is well founded. Knowing that God could act is not at all like knowing that God will act, or better yet, seeing God act.

Churches that are in decline and churches that are dying share an orientation toward the past. This stifles vision as vision, by definition, requires a future orientation. Schaller refers to the church with a past-orientation as a dysfunctional church and dysfunction has consequences. He writes, "A common sign of dysfunctionalism appears when most ministry goals are designed to re-create yesterday — especially a yesterday that never existed" (1997:125). Nostalgia has a fascinating psychology. It suggests a longing for the past, not the actual past, but a romanticized past. Those longing for the church's yesteryear are really longing for how they felt about the church in that time, or at least the way they think they felt about the church then. In a sense, it is a psychotic condition. This makes it even harder for the church of the present to compete because it is competing against some ideal of a past church that never truly existed. What makes this all the more complicated is the fact that many of the problems of the present are actually derived from that past. Senge observes, "Today's problems come from yesterday's solutions" (1990:57).

Although the declining church and the dying church share much in common, there are significant distinctions and clear lines of demarcation between the two. My survey research produced the following observations:

The dying church has sensed its own pain but has responded by surrendering to the death that is coming... The line between the declining and the dying church is that when challenged to work toward new life, those present in the dying church vote "No". Dr. Tom W. Collins: Director Church Planting Training Center – Denver Seminary

A dying church has lost significant ability of its organs to function and has no ability to reproduce enough life to keep up with the dying members. A declining church is like a middle-aged man who has lost his edge. He has all the faculties present to be productive but needs to put them in shape and focus them toward productivity. The line drawn between these two kinds of churches is whether or not they really want help and whether or not they are willing to pay the price. Paul Drost: Church Planting Director – Assemblies of God

The distinction is leadership. Renewal can only occur where gifted, skilled leadership is present and empowered, not pastoral leadership, but leadership capable of change. Jared Roth: General Superintendent – Foursquare Gospel USA.

Bill Malick, Executive Director of the Church Multiplication Training Center, articulated the following chart:

Dying Church
No cultural relevance
Inappropriate facility
Inadequate financial structures
Visionless leadership
Lost in the past

Declining Church
Potential for cultural relevance
Adequate facility
A giving base that can be revitalized
Willingness to be led
Willingness to jettison baggage

Malick summarizes, "Willingness and potential form a line between the declining and the dying" (comments recorded on questionnaire).

I would add an extremely important distinction to these comments regarding categorization and treatment. As I have developed training for declining and dying churches over the past five years, I have concluded that the treatment required for the

dying church is a church planting treatment. There is much more to the process than simple church planting, but so much of the methodology of church planting is needed for a dying church that I place it in the category of church planting. The declining church does not need such severe treatment and should receive what I refer to as redevelopment, building on the good that exists rather than stripping down and starting over.

Warning Signs

A church on the verge of death has one fatal flaw - it has lost sight of the biblical purpose of the church. Consequently, it is not functioning as the body of Christ either to itself or to the world outside nor is it the church of Acts 2 or Ephesians 4. It is not realizing the Great Commission or the Great Commandment because it is consumed with its own existence and survival. Miller warns, "[T]he nature of the church is not first of all to serve itself, but to serve God" (1986:45).

The deeper a church moves toward death, the more comfortable, or resigned, it gets with decline. Schaller makes an interesting analogy, "Many adults who have lost thirty or forty pounds of excess weight rejoice about how good they feel. What is more surprising to the evangelistic Christian is how comfortable a 1 or 2 or 3 percent annual decrease in the size of their congregation can be for longtime members" (1997:119). When I asked one women who is a longtime member of a dying downtown church to describe her vision of the church's future, she said that she was hoping that their decline would reach a point where their denomination would reclassify the church as a mission church and begin to subsidize the church financially. I was stunned when I heard this response several years ago, but I have heard something similar many times since.

Many churches taking their last breaths have lost touch with their communities.

Communities tend to shift over time, while churches tend to stay the same. The gap widens until there is no contact or relationship between them. Morris exhorts, "Penetrate subcultures. Don't become one" (1993:119). He adds, "Instead of penetrating city groups with the love of God, many churches have themselves become subcultures, separating themselves from the very people God has called them to reach" (1993:119).

Buttry cites three symptoms of dying churches: 1) the Goal of Survival,

2) Memory as the Glue and 3) Fear of Change (1988:17-19). These three symptoms
resonate with my experience in working with dying churches, hitting the mark on three
significant challenges to turnaround, survivalism, past-orientation, and resistance to
change. Section 9 of my survey asked the questions, "What common causes lead to the
deaths of churches? What are common characteristics of churches that die?" The
following responses were representative:

The dying church is out of sync with its region, its target group. It is clinging to old ways. Allen E. Likkel: New Church Development Specialist – Christian Reformed Church

Dying churches have failed to find new vision and maintain relevance to the culture and have lost compassion for the lost. They are isolated from reality. Such churches have little or no conversion growth. They have no connection with people around the church. They are in a survival, inward focus. They have no vision. Robert Ransom: Director of Church Planting – Missionary Church.

Lack vision. Lack leadership. Become irrelevant. Ingrown. Not conversion driven. Caught in lifecycle. Unwilling to change. Michael Noel: Assistant Vice-President for Church Multiplication - Christian & Missionary Alliance.

An important book in the study of the dying church is Peter Wagner's <u>The Healthy Church</u> (Regal, 1996). In this book, he identifies nine "diseases" that infect churches. <u>Leadership Magazine</u> includes a compilation of Wagner's nine church diseases:

Ethnikitis: Ethnikitis is caused by contextual factors, usually revolving around a static church in an ethnically transitioning neighborhood Ghost-Town Disease: Another contextual illness, found in communities where old residents are moving out, and no one is moving in People-Blindness: This malady is directly related to a lack of understanding of the significant differences between diverse people groups

within the community, and how those differences impede evangelism

Hyper-Cooperativism: When everyone is responsible for evangelism, no one is responsible for evangelism. Local-church evangelism is much more

effective than city-wide cooperative efforts

Koinonitis: When interpersonal relationships within the church become so deep and mutually absorbing that we ignore the world around us, church programs tend to become centripetal rather than centrifugal

Sociological Strangulation: This is a slowdown in the rate of church growth caused when the flow of people into the church begins to exceed the capacity of the facilities to accommodate it

Arrested Spiritual Development: When people in the church are not growing in the things of God or in their relationships with one another, the total health of the church deteriorates, and the church cannot grow

St. John's Syndrome: When Christians become Christians in name only; feel that their faith is only routine; when church involvement is largely going through the motions, and belonging to the church is nothing more than a family tradition or social nicety, St. John's Syndrome is likely at work.

Hypopneumia: Hypopneumia is a church disease caused by a subnormal level of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the church (1997:39).

In my experience in working with dying churches, the three diseases identified by Wagner that are most prevalent are Ethnikitis, Koinonitis, and Hypopnuemia. The first two are driven by the preoccupation with those inside the walls of the church to the exclusion of those outside of the church. The third is driven by the lack of commitment to the movement of the Holy Spirit often followed by God's removing his presence and blessing altogether.

Diagnosing the Dying Church

From an objective standpoint, the goal of diagnosing a dying church is not to determine whether or not the church is dying, but to determine the treatment. On the outside looking in, the signs of death and dying are fairly obvious. Treatment will be determined by assessing ReStart viability. Viability is based on two basic criteria: 1) the spiritual condition of the remnant: Is the remnant preserved by God in order to rebuild or is the remnant more like the "two leg bones or a piece of an ear" found in Amos 3:12? and 2) Financial strength: Is the remnant capable of resourcing a ReStart either on its own or with the strength of financial support from some outside agency? A viable remnant can be led to a healthy new beginning, provided the proper process is followed. The process begins with diagnosis.

From a subjective standpoint, the goal of diagnosis is to help the remnant see reality. Diagnosis can be seen as a large mirror, held up before the remnant, to give it an accurate understanding of its condition. Many remnant congregations are in denial about the severity of their condition and the causes for it. Diagnosis attempts to bring reality to bear.

An excellent diagnostic tool is the Natural Church Development Survey. This tool is inexpensive, easy to use, and an effective device for diagnosing the church on an objective level. The survey measures the church in what creator Christian Schwarz refers to as the eight essential qualities of ministry effectiveness which include, "Empowering Leadership, Gift-Oriented Ministry, Passionate Spirituality, Functional Structures, Inspiring Worship Service, Holistic Small Groups, Need-Oriented Evangelism, and Loving

Relationships" (1996:22-37). One of these qualities will emerge as the "minimum factor," indicating where the church needs to focus its attention.

In addition to the Natural Church Development Survey, I recommend another diagnostic tool which is perhaps more subjective in nature. This is a tool that I have designed in order to understand the church in terms of its culture, its atmosphere and its psychology. The idea is to take the remnant on a journey of self-discovery. My experience suggests that you really cannot tell people anything, they must discover for themselves. Such is the concept behind this device that I call, "The Status of Status Quo."

Schaller cautions, "[I]f you are happy with the status quo and want to avoid challenging people with the need for change, it may be prudent not to begin the self-appraisal process" (1991:19). Many in the remnant are quite content with the status quo. The point is to challenge that contentment and move the remnant toward "Divine Discontent." The goal of this subjective diagnosis is to get the remnant to the point of saying, "We are not fulfilling God's purpose for us and we can't live with that anymore."

Status of Status Quo

The Status of Status Quo diagnostic tool asks seven yes or no questions. Each question deals with a particular issue and is accompanied by the follow-up question, "How so?" The yes or no format forces a definite position to be taken, while the follow-up question demands an explanation or proof that the yes or no analysis is accurate.

Question 1: Can the activity of God be discerned? How so? This question connects with Wagner's Hypopneumia. If God is building his church (Matthew 16:18) and his church is going and making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20), then it follows that the

activity of God should be clearly present in the life and ministry of the church. This question probes whether or not this church has a sense of God's vision and God's calling for this church, and if this church has an understanding of where it fits in God's plan of redemption. This question also searches for evidence of God's blessing on this church. Often the dying church is unable to identify anything in recent history that is clearly the hand of God's blessing on the church.

When God's blessing is absent, a reason must be sought. This investigation has led me to identify what I call, "The Achan Syndrome." In Joshua 7, we learn that the blessing of God has been lifted because of sin in the camp, the sin of Achan, who has desecrated the sacred things. Every trace of evidence that this man ever lived is eradicated from the face of the earth. The people of Israel are consecrated to the Lord and his blessing returns. This harsh treatment of Achan indicates how much God values his holiness.

In many of the dying churches I have investigated, there are issues of serious sin in the camp that have not been resolved. These sins range from sexual sin to financial wrongdoing to abuse of power. On a more subtle level, they include failure to be a witness to the community and hoarding funds for self-interests. Where God's holiness has been offended, his blessing has been lifted. His blessing will not return until there is repentance.

Question 2: Is the leadership moving the church in a positive spiritual direction? How so? There are two aspects to this question. First is the determination of whether the leadership of the church is in fact moving the church toward spiritual maturity. Usually, in the dying scenario, they are not. Second is the determination of how the church people perceive their leadership. Often, in the dying church, the perception is poor.

Question 3: Is the church in a state of qualitative and/or quantitative decline? How so? This question is designed to determine how much ministry is being done and how well it is being done in comparison with some past peak season of the church's ministry.

Question 4: Is there a cultural match or mismatch between the church and its community? How so? In the dying church scenario, the church is often mismatched with the community. Usually this is an indication that the community has been in transition over time while the church has stayed the same.

Question 5: Has survivalism set in? How so? Dying churches tend to turn inward, preoccupied with their own survival. My observation of the dying church has led to my developing two concepts regarding survivalism. First is the need ratio. The proper relationship between a church and its community is that the community has needs that the church meets. These begin with the felt needs of the community and later grow into the true spiritual needs that the church knows exists in the community. In the dying church, the need ratio becomes inverted, with the church having needs that it expects the community to meet. For example, the church begins to resent the community for not providing the finances it needs.

The second concept is the reach perspective. In the dying church, the concern for reaching the lost is replaced by concern for losing the reached. As the congregation shrinks, each remaining person is seen as more and more vital. The church will compromise greatly to avoid losing any of its existing congregation, even at the expense of potential growth and evangelism.

Question 6: Are negative emotions running high? How so? Often there is fear, conflict, and tension in the dying church, resulting in the presence of negative emotions such as anger, division, depression, and helplessness.

Question 7: Does the church have a sense of hope for the future? How so?

Dying churches tend to have no sense of what the future might hold for them, seeing themselves as victims of circumstance. The future will simply happen and what will be will be.

Combining the results of the Natural Church Development Survey and the Status of Status Quo will give the church an accurate assessment of itself. If the church is indeed dying, the reality of the diagnosis can provide a catalyst to the spiritual breakthrough that will propel the church toward embracing change. Without the spiritual breakthrough, change will not take place. The church will die.

Changing Culture's Contribution

Contextualization has always been an accepted strategy in the world of ministry, especially in the world of missions. It has long been realized that to be effective, a missionary team going into a foreign nation must take steps to connect with the culture of that nation's people. An obvious example of contextualization would be learning the language of the people. It would be ridiculous to consider going to a foreign nation and ignoring its native language, choosing rather to minister in English, expecting the indigenous people to find some way to learn English so that they could understand what the team was saying. To attempt to reach people in this way would result in a waste of

valuable ministry resources, the total frustration and disheartenment of the team, and no one's receiving Christ as Lord and Savior.

Van Engen exhorts, "The church administrator should be concerned with fitting the congregation's life to its context. An administrative duty of the leaders is to constantly check the shape, form, and lifestyle of their missionary congregation against the matrix of the culture they wish to reach" (1991:187). The same principle of contextualization used by the missionary team in a foreign land must be used by the local American Protestant church in its own community. For many years, the American church has operated on the assumption that the culture of the church and the culture of the community were the same culture. That may have been true in the past, but it is true no longer. Malphurs observes, "America is experiencing change in a way unprecedented in its history" (1993:20). He further states, "[T]he key to anticipating the future lies in understanding fads, trends, megatrends, and paradigms" (1993:23). The problem in the dying church, as has already been established, is that it is not looking to the future, but to the past. This orientation keeps the church stuck in cultures of the past as it assumes that the church of the past can be successful in the present and future. That would be true if culture were static, but it is not. Klaas captures the dilemma:

The idea of a "believing unchurched person" is a serious challenge for effective Great Commission outreach efforts. Working out of their own understanding of the Gospel, church, and mission, churched people say to unchurched people, "Come to church and be saved." However, unchurched people are not asking, "What must I do to be saved?" Rather, they ask, "How can I make my life work?" In effect, people in the church are providing an answer to a question that unchurched people do not ask (1996:51).

In general, the church of the fifties was a solid cultural match with the culture of the fifties. But the church of the fifties is not a match with the church of today. Yet many

churches continue to try to minister with the programs, methods, and mindsets of the past. Such is the case with the dying church. Typical responses from church leaders responding to my survey bear this out. Bill Armstrong, Operations Director of the Church Multiplication Training Center, states, "The church is no longer a leader or center of community activity or involvement...The church no longer has the respect of the world. It is viewed as dated, irrelevant and always asking for money." Jim Osterhouse, Home Missions Regional Director for the Christian Reformed Church, remarks, "Postmodernism has led to (increasing numbers of) unchurched people, while declining churches only know how to minister to churched people." He further comments, "The church is now seen as irrelevant, unnecessary, and unhelpful...People do not seek out such a place."

The rapidly changing culture of the United States is leading to many church deaths. The church, being slow to react to the ever-increasing rate of change in this country, falls further and further behind in cultural relevance. Rather than adjust, adapt, and update, the dying church seems to resent the changes and the culture, alienating itself further from the people it is called to reach.

Lifecycle Impact

When any organization, including a church, is born, it begins a lifecycle that will likely follow the predictable pattern of birth, growth, plateau, decline, and death.

Uninterrupted, this lifecycle pattern is inevitable. I have developed a parallel nomenclature for these five lifecycle phases in regard to the church; Start, Incline, Recline, Decline, and ReStart.

Start centers around the original planting of the church. Incline is characterized by quantitative and qualitative increase in the ministry capacity of the church. During Incline, the church finds its identity in its vision and moves from start to stable. Recline begins to set in as the church reaches stability. During Recline, the church is in a sevenday loop of Sunday to Sunday, driven by activities and the calendar. The church in Recline finds its identity in its programs and moves from stable to stagnant. Decline is characterized by quantitative and qualitative decrease in ministry capacity as the church begins to lose its effectiveness, turning more and more inward as quantity and quality plunge. During Decline the church finds its identity in its structure. Structure includes staff, committees, boards, organizational charts, by-laws, policies and procedures, finances, buildings, and property. Survivalism sets in as the church becomes more and more self-absorbed. Buttry informs:

Survival mentality is a spiritual disease, a congregational cancer that is life threatening to the body of Christ in the form of a local church. In advanced cases the condition is clear and the symptoms stark. But in the early stages the symptoms can be ignored because the health and vitality of earlier years mask the gradual decline of church life (1988:17).

During Decline the church moves from stagnant to sick. Death follows as the church finally closes its doors, unless the church enters ReStart, an intentional rebirth.

The church will inevitably follow this lifecycle pattern unless deliberate intervention interrupts and sends the church into new seasons of Incline. Unfortunately, by the time most churches realize they are in serious trouble, the problems are too deep, leadership too anemic, and the mindset of the dying congregation too stuck in the past and in survivalism to embrace the traumatic changes necessary for ReStart.

Given the explosion in church planting following World War II, thousands of churches have now traveled through the lifecycle and find themselves in steep decline.

Buttry captures the essence of the problem:

Most white, mainline, urban churches are in a serious state of decline. Hundreds of churches have closed, or congregations have sold their facilities to newer ethnic congregations, and now some suburban churches are beginning to notice the same patterns in their church life. These suburban churches have reached a similar point many urban churches reached twenty years ago, cause for the warning lights to go on. Whatever the reasons for the decline, when people begin to realize what is happening, they shift their mental gears and begin to develop survivalist thinking. As the decline accelerates, survival mentality becomes the shared psychology of the congregation (1988:13-14).

Though this lifecycle is inevitable, it has no power of its own, rather it happens by default. Awareness of lifecycle and intentional intervention can propel a church into successive seasons of Incline. Without this deliberate intervention, the church will fall victim to lifecycle and will die.

ReStart Pastor

The key person in the process of restarting a dying church is the ReStart Pastor.

ReStart requires a unique person who will have to play a special role, because ReStart combines church planting with shepherding an established church. Neither being an effective church planter nor being an effective shepherd is enough. Being both, however, is extremely challenging.

ReStart ministry requires the pastor to be both visionary leader and agent for change. Nanus speaks to both of these roles. Of the visionary leader, Nanus states, "[Y]our job as a visionary leader is to set the direction and personally commit to it, to spread visionary leadership throughout your organization, to empower employees to act, to

listen and watch for feedback, and to always focus your attention on helping the organization achieve its greatest potential" (1992:171). The challenge is that the typical congregant in the typical dying church is not visionary, is not future oriented, and is not thinking about greatest potential but is thinking mainly about survival.

Of the agent for change, Nanus advises, "The leader's purpose as a change agent is to make the investment decisions and other organizational changes necessary to realize the vision. When a visionary leader has an extraordinary ability to act in this role, he or she literally creates the future and, in the process, also changes the way we think about it" (1992:141). The challenge here is that the remnant of a dying church will aggressively resist change, often frustrating the strategic move toward a new vision before it gets started.

Remnant congregations tend to be inwardly focused on their own perceived needs. Stevens and Collins, aware of the tension between preoccupation with perceived need and spiritual giftedness, state, "The leader's 'call' should be a living, Spirit-led, continuing process of negotiating with people in terms of their felt needs and their spiritual potential" (1993:14). This tension is keenly felt in the ministry of the ReStart Pastor.

Profile of the Effective ReStart Pastor

We have described the ReStart Pastor as a church planter, shepherd, visionary, and change agent. My assessment is that the ReStart Pastor must be a "Church Planter Plus." ReStart is a subset of church planting. It requires all of the components of church planting: the ability to formulate vision and rally people around that vision, the skill of

determining effective strategies and implementing those strategies effectively, and the drive to create something out of nothing.

However, ReStart is more than church planting. Church planting might be described as starting a church from scratch. ReStart is starting a church from less than scratch. Rather than starting with a clean slate, ReStart begins with a dying remnant congregation in an unhealthy church that is usually located in a community with which it has no cultural connection. Resources are often low and vision is nonexistent. The future, if considered at all, is seen as bleak.

So the ReStart Pastor, though he needs to be a church planter, needs to be more. He must be a sensitive shepherd who has demonstrated a high skill level in caring for people, resolving conflict, and solving problems. In effect, he must be an entrepreneurial shepherd. The pure church planter might be described as a bull in a china shop. The remnant is china. If a pure church planter is mixed with a remnant congregation, expect to hear the sound of breaking glass.

The balance between entrepreneur and shepherd is critical. If the ReStart Pastor leans too much to the side of the entrepreneur, he will alienate the remnant. The vision will not be realized because the people of the church will not own the vision and will not commit to the sacrificial changes required to reach it. If the ReStart Pastor leans too much to the shepherding side, he will spend his entire ministry serving as a chaplain to the remnant, never moving forward toward the vision.

Mickey Noel, in his dissertation, "A Case Study in Revitalizing Plateaued or Declining Churches", articulates his "Principle of Proactive Pastoral Leadership." The

principle cites four characteristics that should be included in the profile of the ReStart Pastor as follows:

- 1. [C]hurches that have been languishing in a plateaued or declining condition must have pastors who will not accept the status quo...The situation requires action. What is needed is a pastor who has the ability and the inclination to bring that about.
- 2. The profile of the proactive pastor...includes commitment to longevity, a willingness to see the change through. If the minister is unwilling to take risks and live with the consequences, or does not expect to stay more than a year or two, then he is not a candidate for restoring the outpost.
- 3. The proactive leader must...be forward looking. A leader must know where he is going so he can articulate to followers where they are headed. A future orientation provides a focal point on which the church can focus together.
- 4. The proactive pastor understands the concept of stewardship and goes to work every day with his accountability to the Lord of the church for his watch in the back of his mind (1993:7.1.1-7.1.4).

The effective ReStart Pastor is a Church Planter Plus, an Entrepreneurial Shepherd.

Assessing the Effective ReStart Pastor

To select candidates for ReStart, an assessment must deal with both the church planter and the "plus" aspects. Numerous proven assessment tools for the selection of church planters exist. I recommend a behavioral assessment such as that developed by Charles Ridley of Indiana University. This assessment considers the candidate in thirteen categories significant to the church planting process. The behavioral interview examines and measures the candidate's skill and experience by probing for an understanding of demonstrated behaviors in these thirteen categories. The categories include Visionizing Capacity, Intrinsic Motivation, Creating Ownership of Ministry, Reaching the Unchurched, Spousal Cooperation, Relationship Building, Committed to Church Growth,

Responsiveness to the Community, Utilizing the Giftedness of Others, Flexibility, Building Group Cohesion, Resilience, and Exercising of Faith.

Assessing for the "plus" is more of a challenge. To date, there is no specific assessment tool, but there are clear categories that warrant consideration. The candidate should be considered in the areas of shepherding skill, problem solving, conflict resolution, leading change, building shared vision, and leading without congregational affirmation. The candidate must have demonstrated success in these areas in actual ministry. Potential is not enough; field experience is required.

· ReStart and Church Planting

I have identified ReStart as a subset of church planting. How are ReStart and church planting similar? Like church planting, ReStart is a pioneering, entrepreneurial venture. Starting over is much like starting because it requires the formulation of a vision. The dying church tends to have lost all vision, having turned inward in its focus. Church planting and ReStart require the designing of a future based on an outward focus of going into the community and making disciples. The identity of both the church plant and the ReStart would be centered on that vision. If asked the question, "Who are you as a church?", the answer would be, "We are the church that is fulfilling this vision."

Once the vision of a desired future is formulated, both church planting and ReStart must develop the strategies to actualize the vision. These strategies would be based on a future orientation and would have the reaching and assimilating of newcomers from the community at the heart. Strategies for the plant and the ReStart would both begin with the identification of a primary target group. This group would be determined by an

examination of the community population and discerning who among this population God would have as the ministry focus group of this particular church. Most plants and ReStarts tend to follow the "Homogeneous Principle," seeking to serve in communities where there is a predominance of one demographic group of people. Others may find themselves in diverse communities, therefore needing to determine which subset of the community it will target. A church cannot be all things to all people. True, the Apostle Paul stated that he had become all things to all men, but it is important to note that he was only one thing at a time.

Both the church plant and the ReStart will need to be led by an entrepreneurial pastor who is a visionary and a self-starter, someone who is highly motivated and with great drive and energy. This pastor must be able to create ministry where there is no ministry, articulating a vision of the desired future and moving the church to the fulfillment of that vision. He must be a person who needs little affirmation for his efforts and someone who thrives on challenge. He must be willing to take high risks both personally and corporately. The pastor who leads both the church plant and the ReStart must be a church planter.

Though there are many similarities between the church plant and the ReStart, there is one notable difference. The ReStart, unlike the church plant, has an existing congregation, a history, and usually church buildings and property. This changes the approach significantly. The existing congregation, the remnant, is mired in the past and dominated by survivalism. In addition, serious problems often exist within the remnant. Despite a long and varied history, recent history would indicate steep decline. The church buildings and property are often in poor condition and located in a community where the

population is no longer a cultural match with the remnant population. All of these conditions put a demand on the ReStart Pastor that is quite different from the demand placed on the church planter. The ReStart Pastor, then, must indeed be a church planter, but he must be more.

Leading a Dying Church to Health

A dying church will not become healthy by accident. ReStart is only possible through a deliberate, intentional plan. Schaller describes an appropriate planning model as he states, "In somewhat simplified form, (the planning model) consists of three steps, (1) define contemporary reality, (2) articulate the vision for a new tomorrow, and (3) formulate the strategy to get from here to there" (1991:23).

Defining contemporary reality is accomplished through diagnosis. I have recommended utilizing The Natural Church Development Survey and the Status of Status Quo. Next comes the formulation of God's vision for this particular church. Vision must balance spiritual faithfulness and cultural relevance. Stott exhorts:

[I]t is comparatively easy to be faithful if we do not care about being contemporary, and easy also to be contemporary if we do not bother to be faithful. It is the search for a combination of truth and relevance which is exacting. Yet nothing else can save us from an insensitive loyalty to formulae and shibboleths on the one hand, and from a treasonable disloyalty to the revelation of God on the other. "Truth and timeliness" (to quote Bishop Phillips Brooks) make for communication, and without communication there is no evangelism, no actual sharing of the good news (1975:43).

The dying church has become culturally irrelevant. It may think of itself as true to revelation, but indeed it is not or it would not have become isolated from its community. It would not have become inwardly focused, and it would not be void of evidence of the

activity of God. It would not have abandoned, at least in terms of behavior and results, the Great Commission.

To ReStart, the church must be intentional about its ministry with a focus on outreach and expanding the kingdom. Van Engen advises, "Goal setting becomes the primary arena where the unique saltiness and the scattering of the saints is intentionally built into the life of missionary congregations" (1991:134). Goal setting is part of the vision design and is the primary means of tracking the church's effectiveness and holding the church accountable. The church is measured by results and not by conversation about results. Anderson remarks, "Discipleship will be outcome-based. The criteria for success will be changed lives that reflect Christian behavior rather than learning a prescribed curriculum" (1992:45).

Strategy would begin with the identification of the target group. To plan a strategy and launch into ministry without identifying the target group would be to waste valuable resources on a mission that was bound to fail. Morris observes, "While the high-impact church desires to reach as many subcultures as possible, to be effective it must begin by targeting a primary sub-culture and design a culturally relevant strategy for that group" (1993:139). The key is to minister by intent, not by accident.

One important issue that must be considered is the remnant congregation's perception of its pastor. MacNair offers:

Sooner or later the congregation will demonstrate that they view the pastor as either an employee or as a servant of the Lord. It is a dominant opinion in many congregations that they have employed their pastor to serve as janitor, fund raiser, promotional expert and building program superintendent. What's more, they view him as the evangelist, the Bible teacher, the youth director, the choir director, etc. The members may not openly profess this view of their pastor, but they show it in their

unwillingness to take on aspects of these responsibilities themselves and to free him to do the work the Lord has called him to do (1980:89).

The remnant of the dying church tends to view its pastor as an employee, someone who is paid to take care of the existing congregation, to manage all matters of church life, and to bring someone to Christ every once in a while. An effective ReStart Pastor will know that he works for God and that he must lead, and not follow, the sheep.

Essential Components of Effectiveness

The foundation of effectiveness in ReStart is what I call a spiritual breakthrough. Remnant congregations tend to be stuck in self-absorption, concerned with survival and their own protection. They tend to be resistant to change, the antithesis of visionary. All the appropriate methodology in the world will not move this remnant forward without the supernatural movement of the Holy Spirit. Barna captures the essence of this as he states, "[T]he key to spiritual revival of any kind is the presence of the Holy Spirit and the openness of the people to the working of God's Spirit" (1993:42). Openness to the working of God's Spirit will not be present without a spiritual breakthrough. This breakthrough is the goal of diagnosis as the dying church is challenged to see itself as it truly is, hopefully creating divine discontent.

Building on the foundation of the spiritual breakthrough will be the placement of the right leader in the role of ReStart Pastor. First and foremost, this leader must resist the temptation to bypass the remnant in his pursuit of the future vision, making sure to connect with the remnant genuinely. In Barna's research of thirty successful "turnaround pastors," he found leaders who truly committed to the congregation. He writes, "[W]hat the turnaround pastors teach us is that regardless of the spiritual gifts, seminary training,

church experience, natural talents and leadership skills they possess, a key to being effective is to demonstrate love in such a way that people will realize they are significant and cared for in God's eyes" (1993:46).

Selection of the ReStart Pastor is critical. The ideal would be to bring in a new, properly assessed ReStart Pastor at the beginning of ReStart. Barna observes, "To turn around a church, a new pastor must be brought in to lead the revolution. Some churches have probably come back from the edge of extinction without a change in pastor.

However, we did not find such a church" (1993:47). He further states, "[M]ost declining churches never return to health because they have well-intentioned but ill-chosen people directing the comeback effort" (1993:114). O'Toole adds a marketplace perspective as he comments, "The only difficulty with...cookbook procedures is that they do not address the most common underlying cause of the failure to bring about successful and meaningful change: ineffective leadership" (1996:x). This realization brings about a dilemma as most dying churches are being led by pastors who have been with the church for a considerable time, and who will most likely stay.

Another component for effectiveness is the ability to overcome resistance to change. The tension is simple. ReStart demands change but remnant congregations resist change. Nanus advises, "The visionary leader must overcome resistance to change and adapt the organizational climate to the new agenda" (1992:145). Dying churches want the church to generate different results while doing exactly the same things in exactly the same way. This is impossible. The church cannot change without changing!

An important aspect of the change that must take place is to shift from an inward to an outward focus. Van Engen comments, "Jesus spoke... of a saltshaker Church, a

communion of disciples who are the salt of the earth" (1991:134). The dying church must open the doors and go outside. The truth is, remnant congregations provide a negative witness and actually repel people from the church. The dying church must get outside and fulfill its true purpose.

With a new vision formulated, this vision must be repeatedly communicated.

There is no such thing as too much communication. The message of the vision must be sounded again and again and again. The remnant must be constantly reminded and constantly rallied around the vision. Otherwise, the natural gravity of lifecycle will pull the church back into itself.

A final component must be mentioned. This component may seem self-evident, but indeed requires mention. The dying church must want to grow. Unfortunately, many dying churches do not really want to grow. They want to survive. They may give lip surface to the desire to grow, but their behavior suggests otherwise. In this regard, there is good news and there is bad news. Roozen and Hadaway inform:

The good new is that churches that want to grow can grow. The bad news is that few of the churches studied here emphasized growth. Only 37% of the respondents in the sample say that their church places a "strong" or "very strong" emphasis on membership recruitment. This suggests that membership declines have more to do with a desire for growth than with the techniques of church growth programs (1984:219-220).

To state the obvious, a dying church that desires to ReStart must truly desire to grow.

Primary Challenges to Effectiveness

The challenges to effectiveness are many and varied. It seems best to address them in the categories already established as the components of effectiveness. A spiritual

breakthrough is needed if ReStart is to have a legitimate opportunity to succeed. The challenge is that the dying church is spiritually asleep. Barna concurs with, "The first challenge we must rise to meet is the need to awaken the Christian community to America's spiritual crisis. Incredibly, most Christians do not perceive the Church to be in the midst of the most severe struggle it has faced in centuries" (1990:123). The American Protestant church has been lulled into a false sense of security by its mainstream acceptance for the past three hundred years. Being oriented toward the past, the dying church still sees itself as mainstream in American culture, when, in fact, it is increasingly losing influence as it is pushed to the margins.

The ReStart Pastor is advised to develop and demonstrate a genuine love for his people. His credibility is suspect. The benefit of the doubt is not his to lose. The certainty of doubt means that credibility is something that must be earned. Kotter informs:

A major challenge in leadership efforts is credibility – getting people to believe the message. Many things contribute to credibility. The track record of the person delivering the message is extremely important in terms of both its strength and seeming relevance to the situation at hand. So is the content of the message itself, in terms of how sensible it seems" (1990:57).

Barna adds, "[O]ne of the most basic requirements for a turnaround was for the pastor to establish a bond of trust with the congregation" (1993:43).

There is a challenge regardless of whether the same pastor stays or a new pastor is brought in. The new pastor is often seen as someone who does not have the interests of the remnant at heart, but who is determined to take over the church. This is especially true if the new pastor has been brought in by an authoritative body such as a district, conference, synod, or presbytery. These authorities are sometimes viewed as vultures waiting to pounce on the dying church's assets once it has breathed its last. The new pastor, then, can

be seen as an undertaker, or even as a carpetbagger. If the same pastor stays, his motives may be trusted, but his ability to turn the church around may be in doubt. After all, he has been leading the church as it continued to decline. It is important to note that, just as the church has a lifecycle, so does pastoral ministry. A pastor in personal ministry decline cannot turn a dying church around. If he must stay in place, he must first be renewed before attempts at ReStart of the church are undertaken.

Another significant challenge is resistance to change. Much thought is given regarding the reason people have left a church as it falls deeper and deeper into decline. An equally important question is, "Why have people stayed?" It is perhaps easier to understand why some people leave such a church than to understand why others stay. One reason is that people in dying churches tend to be the type of people who naturally resist change very strongly. They would rather stay in a negative environment than risk moving on to something new. This, of course, lobbies against embracing the sweeping changes that will be necessary for ReStart.

Effectiveness demands that the salt get out of the saltshaker. However, the remnant has become so isolated from outside that it is out of touch. It will be a challenge to move from ignoring the community to diving into the community. The church will find itself at best out of practice and will need to retool its outreach strategies in an attempt to become culturally relevant. Barna captures the tension, "Our goal...must be to describe the faith in ways which are clearly relevant to today's circumstances and tensions, but without minimizing the hard truths that Jesus taught and demands of us" (1990:124).

Other challenges include the church's need to stay focused on an intentional ministry after becoming accustomed to drifting over the years. Habits are hard to break.

Also, ReStart is sacrificial ministry. The cost of ReStart is high. People must give up comfortable ways of doing church, they must give up leadership positions often held for years, they must embrace a community that has been viewed with bias for many years and they must die to self in order for new life to emerge. Usually the price seems too high to a congregation that has been self-focused for years. However, the cost of not committing to ReStart is even higher.

Insuring Continued Health

Continued health can be insured through one simple concept. To gain health and remain healthy, the church must become a biblical church. It must become the church as described in Acts 2 and Ephesians 4. Four components are essential: (1) the church must be committed to the biblical purpose of the church, (2) the church must be led by biblical leadership, (3) the church must be comprised of a biblical followership, and (4) the church must commit to continuous self-examination and continuous change.

Biblical Purpose

Van Engen directs, "When missionary congregations begin to see themselves as branch offices of the kingdom of God, they are often led to examine more closely their role and function in the world and to study the passages which show Jesus' mission, work of revelation, reconciliation, and lordship" (1991:119). To become healthy, the church must discover its biblical purpose, both in terms of the general purpose of all churches as well as the unique purpose God has for this particular church. Once found, the church must commit itself to remaining focused on the biblical purpose. In his survey, Rod Koop,

District Administrator and Church Planting Coordinator for Midwest Foursquare

Churches, answers the question, "What are the essential components that should be built

into a healthy new beginning to insure continued health?" He states, "An intentional return

to the roots of why the church exists." The biblical church gets healthy and stays healthy.

Biblical Leadership

One reason that the church is in such a state of decline is that too many pastors are following the sheep instead of leading them. This is not biblical. The model of the pastor who is the employee of the church, who spends all of his time catering to the needs of a self-absorbed congregation, is not in the Bible. Biblical leadership leads; it is strong and aggressive. Yes, biblical leadership serves people, but only in the context of serving God first. In Luke 4, Jesus turns away from legitimate expressed human need in order to go to other towns to preach the gospel. Why? He indicates that preaching the gospel to other towns was why he was sent. The biblical leader knows why he is sent and is faithful to his calling. Biblical leadership insures health.

Biblical Followership

For a church ReStart to remain healthy, the congregation must be committed to biblical followership. It must be willing to sacrifice and it must stay focused on the biblical purpose of the church, not allowing itself to lose sight of spiritual issues. The church must follow its biblical leaders, supporting them, encouraging them, and submitting to their leadership. The congregation must be committed to peace and unity within the church.

Continuous Self-Evaluation and Change

Remaining healthy is a constant battle. The natural gravity of the church will pull it inward. Vigilance is required. This can only be achieved by continuous self-evaluation. I encourage churches to evaluate everything all the time. By way of example, Barna observes, "Every successful church had some formal type of review session on Monday (or Tuesday) to assess every aspect of the Sunday experience" (1991:66). To avoid sliding back into decline, the church must become its own critic. Also, the church must recognize that much of its decline came as a result of its failure to change with changing times. The message is timeless, but the type and approach of ministry must keep up with the pace of change. Change should come as a proactive matter of choice, not as a reaction to crisis.

Summary

The dying church tends to be in a state of denial. It denies that a problem exists. Once recognizing that a problem does exist, the church denies that the causes are internal, choosing to see itself as a victim of circumstance, subject to the pressures and attacks of outside forces. The dying church denies that it must undergo significant change, choosing to seek solutions in the application of successful methods from the past. It denies that new solutions and new ways of thinking are credible and the only means of successful turnaround.

Several warning signs appear in the church on the verge of death. This church has lost sight of the biblical purpose of the church, has resigned itself to its condition of decline and has lost touch with its community. It is characterized by survivalism, a past-orientation, and resistance to change.

The dying church is in urgent need of a spiritual breakthrough, a breakthrough that will lead the church to divine discontent. This can be accomplished through diagnosis, the process that holds a mirror up to the church so that it can see itself as it truly is.

Successful breakthrough diagnosis must be followed with strong leadership by a qualified ReStart pastor, the entrepreneurial shepherd, the church planter plus. He must lead and not follow the sheep. He must see the reality of the present, formulate the vision for the future, and know how to get from one to the other. He must set appropriate goals that will give direction to the ministry and hold the ministry accountable.

Once turned around, the ReStart will continue in good health as it remains committed to biblical purpose, led by biblical leadership, supported by biblical followership, and submitted to continuous self-examination and continuous change.

CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIS: A TRANSFERABLE MODEL

Qualifications of the Effective ReStart Pastor

Effective ReStart ministry requires a uniquely qualified pastor. In a sense, ReStart is a kind of "schizophrenic" undertaking. The ReStart Pastor must be able to move toward the future while dealing with the past. He must be able to draw newcomers to the future vision while pulling the remnant from the past. He must be able to create new ministry while rebuilding a broken congregation. He must be leading on the front lines while taking care of the wounded back at camp. He must be able to connect with a new target community while connecting with an established congregation. Usually these two populations are, at best, different, and at worst, actually adversarial. Tension in balance is the key.

The effective ReStart Pastor is called, experienced and trained. That is, he is called specifically to ReStart ministry, he is experienced in the kinds of ministry that are essential to ReStart and he is trained in the art and science of ReStart ministry in terms of its theology, its principles and its methodology. When these three are present, the ReStart Pastor is effective. When either of these is missing, the ReStart Pastor is much less likely to be effective.

Calling is paramount. To be called by God is to be gifted by God. With this prerequisite in place, the rest can follow. The spiritual dynamic is the most important.

Remnant congregations are usually suffering from a spiritual retardation and need a spiritual breakthrough to begin the turnaround. Once any hint of turnaround is seen, spiritual warfare intensifies. Without the calling of God, the ReStart Pastor is ill equipped to deal with these spiritual realities. Attempts to minister in the flesh may be helpful and may show some moderate gain, but will not hold up for the long term and will not result in abundant fruit.

The discernable calling of God will also give the ReStart Pastor the confidence and assurance that he will need to sustain him through difficult times. There will be many such times. In fact, there will be times when only the calling of God keeps the ReStart Pastor at his post. This discernable calling will also provide a solid foundation for the ReStart Pastor's family to stand on under stress and tension, and can provide stability for what is usually an unstable remnant.

The effective ReStart Pastor is experienced in the kinds of ministry that will be needed in the ReStart process. Effective ReStart is much more than mere strategy and methodology. It requires working with people in very challenging circumstances. On one hand, the ReStart Pastor must shepherd the remnant through a difficult transition, moving them from a past of hurt and disappointment to a future of hope and promise. On the other hand, he must draw newcomers to a future vision, building a new work out of the remains of an old one.

In short, the ReStart Pastor must be a Church Planter Plus. He must have experience as a visionary and entrepreneur, and he must have experience in problem solving, conflict resolution and leading a reluctant group of people through change.

The effective ReStart Pastor is trained in the ministry of ReStart. By the grace of God, the ideal candidate will figure out what to do instinctively. But training can save lots of time and heartache. The less than ideal candidate, the average candidate, will not have those instincts and will fail without proper training. The church may not die, but it will never grow and thrive.

Characteristics of the Effective ReStart Pastor

The effective ReStart Pastor is an aggressive but sensitive leader. He clearly leads the sheep rather than follows them. The remnant will tend to want a pastor who will take them where *they* want to go. The ReStart Pastor must take them out of their comfort zones into very uncomfortable territory. He must get the remnant to listen to what they do not want to hear, to give what they do not want to give, to go where they do not want to go, to leave what they do not want to leave, and to be what they do not want to be. This will require firm, aggressive leadership.

At the same time, the ReStart Pastor must be sensitive. He must be a respecter of people. There is a tendency among pastors who assume the leadership of dying churches, particularly pastors with a pure church planting mindset, to see themselves as saviors to the dying remnants. This perspective negates the past, even that which is worthy of esteem and celebration, and moves ahead as if the history of the church were forgotten and irrelevant. This attitude does not play well with the remnant and will create unwarranted tension.

The effective ReStart Pastor is thick skinned and able to handle doubt and criticism well. There is no honeymoon period for the ReStart Pastor as he assumes

command. There has been no wedding. Rather, there has been a funeral. A grieving period has begun. Trust must be earned as it is not given as a benefit of the doubt. The ReStart Pastor will rock the boat and challenge the status quo. This will be met with resistance. Affirmation from the remnant will be slow in coming. Related to this reality is the need for the ReStart Pastor to have a solid family life and a solid devotional life with the Lord.

Another important characteristic is that the effective ReStart Pastor is a cultural match to the newcomer target group. It would be extremely difficult to connect with a group that is completely different culturally. The challenge here is that the remnant may not be a cultural match to the target group. The ReStart Pastor must be able at least to bridge to the remnant culturally. This cultural dilemma is of utmost importance because one of the leading causes of death in churches stems from cultural community shifts that go unmatched by the church.

The effective ReStart Pastor is a self-starter, motivated from within and able to hold himself accountable. It has been my observation that many churches in decline are being led by pastors whose personal ministries are in decline. This may be due to age, to illness, to depression brought about by lack of fruit, or any number of reasons. The rule of thumb here is that a pastor in personal decline cannot lead a dying church to a new beginning. He must be revived first.

There are several "X" factors that I look for in an effective ReStart Pastor. These include: (1) high energy, (2) appropriate training, (3) solid support from family and denominational structures, (4) proven experience, (5) good health (mental, emotional, spiritual, physical), (6) strong drive and (7) a large ministry capacity. Ministry capacity

refers to how much ministry an individual can be responsible for and how well he manages it.

Strategic Steps in the Process

To gain an understanding of the strategic steps in the process of effective ReStart, one must begin with an understanding of church lifecycles and the relationship between vision, strategy, and structure. Church lifecycles, like the lifecycles of other organizations, follow a predictable pattern of birth, growth, plateau, decline, and death. I have developed a parallel nomenclature as follows:

Birth	=	PreStart
Growth	=	Incline
Plateau	=	Recline
Decline	=	Decline
Death	=	ReStart

PreStart and ReStart are at the extremes of the lifecycle and are both church planting functions. Churches between the extremes are either in Incline, Recline, or Decline.

Inclining churches are healthy and are growing qualitatively and quantitatively. Reclining churches are maintaining a program-based ministry that continues more or less the same year after year. Declining churches are unhealthy and are losing ground qualitatively and quantitatively.

Incline, Recline and Decline

In Incline, the church moves from start to stable. Stability can be the first sign of trouble because churches that have been dependent on God in those high-risk growth seasons tend to lapse into dependence on an established track record once such a record is

established. If so, the church moves into Recline and moves from stable to stagnant unless the lifecycle is interrupted. Once stagnant, the church enters Decline and will slide toward sickness and death unless deliberate intervention ensues. The pattern looks like this:

Incline: The church moves from start to stable.

Recline: The church moves from stable to stagnant
Decline: The church moves from stagnant to sick

The following chart identifies distinctive characteristics:

INCLINE	RECLINE	DECLINE
Intense	Satisfied	Complacent
Future Oriented	Present Oriented	Past Oriented
High Risk	Low Risk	No Risk
High Faith	Low Faith	No Faith
"Do or Die"	"Live & Let Live"	"Don't or Die"
\$ = Investor	\$ = Sustainer	\$ = Preserver
Entrepreneurial	Managerial	Custodial
Build	Maintain	Survive
Vision I.D.	Programming I.D.	Structure I.D.
Test Pilot	Auto Pilot	Pilot Light
New Leadership	Established Leadership	Incumbent
		Leadership

The dying church is a church in steep decline, exhibiting the characteristics of decline in their most severe form. Death is inevitable, unless there is ReStart.

Vision, Strategy and Structure

A new church always begins with vision. Someone or some group has a vision, a dream, of what could be. If nothing further develops, it remains only a dream. For that dream to become real vision that has a chance of actualization, strategy must be added.

Vision expresses where to go. Strategy expresses how to get there. Strategy derives its existence from vision. When a church has developed a vision and has determined a

strategy to realize that vision, it is in the lifecycle stage of PreStart (Vision + Strategy = PreStart).

With vision and strategy in place, structure must be developed. Structure consists of the resources and processes that will be needed to support the strategy that fulfills the vision. Structure includes staff, finances, administration, organizational charts, boards, committees, by-laws, policies, procedures, buildings and property. Structure derives its existence from vision and strategy. When a church has developed a godly vision, determined an appropriate strategy and supported that vision and strategy with the appropriate structure, it is in the lifecycle stage of Incline (Vision + Strategy + Structure = Incline). A church in Incline finds its identity in its vision.

As churches Incline, they expand their ministry capacity, growing both quantitatively and qualitatively. They also become more stable, relying more and more on an established record of attendance and financial giving, becoming less dependent on God. Unless there is deliberate intervention, the original vision will begin to fade, becoming less dominant as time passes. With vision faded, the original strategy is no longer strategic. Instead, strategy evolves into programming. The church is now in Recline. Vision has faded. Strategy has evolved into programming. Structure is now supporting programming instead of vision and strategy. The church in Recline finds its identity in its programming. Resources are now allocated to keep the programming operating rather than actualizing a vision (Programming + Structure = Recline).

Proverbs 29 tells us that without a vision the people will perish. Such is the case in the Reclining church. Programming alone will not keep a church vibrant forever.

Eventually, both quality and quantity will fall off and programming will begin to collapse.

Quality will slip as the church turns inward, becoming less and less concerned about how it is perceived by those outside of the church family. As quality slips, eventually quantity will slip as some in the church will find their needs going unmet, and newcomers will be less likely to stay. A downward spiral results with declining quality adding to declining quantity and so on. The church is in Decline. With programming collapsing, the church is now identified by its structure (Structure = Decline). The following chart expresses the phasing over time:

VISION = DREAM
VISION + STRATEGY = PRESTART
VISION + STRATEGY + STRUCTURE = INCLINE
XXXXX + PROGRAMS + STRUCTURE = RECLINE
XXXXX + XXXXXXXX + STRUCTURE = DECLINE

With structure in the driver's seat, the church is upside down. Instead of supporting vision and strategy, structure is now preeminent and seeks support for itself. Now, if vision surfaces, it has to go to structure to ask permission to exist. Structure will say, "No." Structure is looking to the past, not to the future. Structure is led by incumbents who are making the same decisions in the same way year after year. They are hoping for a different result, but it will not come. The church falls steeper and steeper into decline and will ultimately die unless it embraces ReStart.

Phases of ReStart: De-Structure and Authorization

Equipped with an understanding of the church lifecycle and the relationship between vision, strategy and structure, the strategic steps in the process of effective ReStart can be understood in context. The church is dying. It is in steep decline. Vision has been lost. Strategy has evolved into programming and programming has collapsed. Structure, a

supporting mechanism, is now in charge. This structure is rigid and has become complacent. It is past oriented and unwilling to take risks. Structure believes objectively in the power of God, but has no faith that God will act in this church. It is afraid. It sees finances as something to preserve the church, not as something to invest in the kingdom. Structure is just trying to survive, to keep the doors open.

Structure has inverted the "Need Ratio." Rather than seeing its community's needs and trying to meet those needs, the church sees its own needs and looks to the community to meet its needs. The church sees itself as a victim of circumstance, blaming outside forces for its internal condition. Structure has a skewed "Reach Perspective." That is, the concern for reaching the lost has been replaced by concern for losing the reached. The church needs ReStart.

ReStart consists of a five phase strategic process. These phases are De-Structure, Authorization, Revision, Innovation, and Assimilation. A correct diagnosis will identify a church as being in Incline, Recline, or Decline. Decline can range from moderate to severe. As the declining church approaches severe decline, it approaches death. The dying church must ReStart.

The first phase in ReStart is De-Structure. The dying church is over-structured, with structure having taken command from vision and strategy. Structure will block any attempt to develop, and move toward, a new vision. In effect, "You can't get there from here!" Before the dying church can move forward, it must first move back. De-Structure involves streamlining the structure so that it is removed as a barrier to new vision. A range of treatments can be considered. A moderate treatment would be simply to reduce the number of layers in the organizational chart, reduce the number of people who hold

offices, reduce the number of committees and meetings and refashion policies and procedures to enable quicker, easier, more decisive decision-making. A severe treatment would be actually to dissolve the church board and suspend the by-laws, creating the opportunity for a completely new approach to decision-making.

The flip side of De-Structure is the next phase, Authorization. De-Structure serves a negative function, reducing the clutter and bottle-necking created by a structure that has taken power from vision and strategy. A leadership void is created by De-Structure. Authorization fills that void. In this phase, authority to make decisions and spend money is placed in the hands of a small group of visionaries. This group should include the ReStart Pastor and one to three other leaders who are clearly visionary and capable of developing strategies appropriate to new vision. With authority in the hands of visionaries and with structure taking its hands off the wheel, the church returns to being right side up. Vision is back in the driver's seat. This new vision will be supported by strategy and eventually a redesigned structure. And vision plus strategy plus structure equals Incline.

The primary challenge to De-Structure and Authorization is to the ruling structure that will be extremely threatened and reluctant to make the necessary sacrifices. Since in Decline the church identifies itself with its structure, it will see De-Structure as corporate suicide. Also, those in power may be reluctant to give up that power, especially to put in it the hands of risk-taking visionaries. This is why the spiritual breakthrough that creates divine discontent, brought about through the diagnosis, is pivotal.

The most successful format for negotiating the difficult terrain of the diagnosis followed by De-Structure and Authorization is to have an intervening third party oversee

these parts of the process. The third party will contribute objectivity and experience and can take much of the emotion out of the process. If a third party, such as a district superintendent, is not available, the church should contract a consultant to serve in this role. To try to get through these phases alone would be like trying to climb Mt. Everest without a guide.

Phases of ReStart: Revision

With De-Structure and Authorization complete, ReStart enters its third phase, Revision. At this point, all attention shifts to the future. The original vision has faded and needs to be replaced by a new formulation of a desired future. I recommend two questions to drive this formulation: 1) How does God want to express himself through this church in this community at this time? and 2) What did God mean by that?

The first question has four components that are vitally important. First, it is God's vision we are seeking to discern, not our own. To be successful, we must be able to see through God's eyes, to want what God wants, and to feel what God feels. It is godly vision that will draw people and sustain them for the long haul. Second, the concern is for this particular church, not the church universal nor for some other church. The unique vision that God has for this church must be found. Third, this new vision must focus on the particular community the church is called to reach. The community must be known and understood. Because communities vary, visions to reach them must vary. Fourth, the church must minister now, at this time, not in some other time. We are living in postmodern America at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Vision must understand the times and adapt itself accordingly. Church as it was in 1954 will no longer be successful.

The second question is a retrofit or adjustment. Vision is organic; it grows and breathes. Despite our best efforts to discern God's vision, we never get it all. As the church proceeds in the direction of vision, however well articulated, surprises will come. When a surprise appears, prayerfully considering what God might mean by this unexpected development allows us to adjust the vision to the new data or circumstance.

Revision will consider six categories in its formulation. The first category is Values. The church must ask, "Who are we?" What are the true behavioral values of the church? What will this church die for? What are this church's priorities? In what will this church invest its limited resources? The second category is Target. Whom is this church called to reach? What needs do they have? What are the community's demographics?

The third and fourth categories have to do with mission. Mission 1, the third category, asks, "How are we going to reach them?" This concerns the church's outreach strategies and evangelistic efforts. The fourth category, Mission 2, asks, "What are we going to do once we reach them?" This concerns the inreach strategies of discipleship and assimilation. Mission 2 is given a separate category because it is often overlooked. Churches attempting ReStart tend to focus their attention outward, which is appropriate, but fail to plan exactly how to minister to people if their outreach strategies are successful.

The fifth category is Culture. What kind of environment and atmosphere will best connect who the church is (values) with whom the church is trying to reach (target)? And finally, category six is Philosophy. What strategic model of ministry will best connect who we are with whom we are trying to reach (Mission 1 & 2)?

Phases of ReStart: Innovation and Assimilation

The fourth phase of ReStart is Innovation. Revision has given the church a new vision, the picture of a desired future. During Innovation, new strategies are developed to express how this new vision will be realized. A new structure will be determined to provide the support that the new vision and its accompanying strategies will need. Once new vision, new strategy, and new structure are in place and properly aligned, the church will have the opportunity to re-enter Incline (Vision + Strategy + Structure = Incline).

Assimilation is the fifth and final phase of ReStart. There are two primary aspects to Assimilation: (1) the assimilation of the remnant congregation and (2) the assimilation of newcomers. Assimilation is most often used in the context of assimilating newcomers into the life of the church. Although this is an important aspect of assimilation, there is a prior consideration - the assimilation of the existing remnant congregation into the new vision. Leaders often overlook this dynamic, assuming that the existing congregation will automatically own the new vision once it is articulated, promotional mailings are mailed out, and an event such as the "Vision Night Dinner" is held. This is not the case, however, especially with ReStart. Serious attention must be given to assure that the remnant is truly behind the new vision and not just giving lip service to acceptance of what it sees as an unavoidable transition. This is not ownership of the vision; it is acquiescence.

The second aspect of Assimilation involves the assimilation of newcomers into the new vision and into the life of the church. The challenge here is to make sure that the newcomer is being assimilated into the new church vision and not the declining church, which would pull the newcomer toward the past rather than the future. When ReStart is complete, the desire is to see a new church, not the rearranging of an old one.

Ministry Development

Having established the grid of the five phases of ReStart, a closer look at developing the strategies of Innovation and executing effective Assimilation is in order.

Essential Ministry Identification

These include Values, Target, Mission 1, Mission 2, Culture and Philosophy. Using these components as a grid, thoughts turn to essential ministry identification. The dying church is declining both qualitatively and quantitatively. Given the shortage of resources, a strategic decision must be made about what to do first. What will take priority? The essential ministries must be identified.

An essential ministry is a ministry that must be in place and functioning effectively for the new vision to be achieved. It is vital to the life of the new vision. These are the ministries that will receive the first priority and will be resourced first. It is recommended that between four and six such ministries be identified, more will stretch resources too thin. To identify some ministries as essential will by necessity identify others as non-essential. This designation will be challenged, as some in the remnant will disagree over which are essential and which are not. This will require firm leadership. This is why Authorization must put the authority to make decisions and spend money in the hands of visionaries.

The line of demarcation between essential and non-essential ministries will be drawn by the components of Revision. Ministries vital to the values, target, mission, culture and philosophy of Revision will be essential. Those that are not will be non-

essential. If there are more essential ministries than resources will support, a second analysis will be required to rank essential ministries from more essential to less essential. Hard choices will have to be made.

To make these distinctions, all ministries active in the church should be listed.

Each should be run against the grid of the components of Revision to prayerfully separate the essential from the non-essential and the more essential from the less essential. This process should culminate in the identification of four to six essential ministries that will receive priority.

Essential Ministry Strategic Planning

With the essential ministries identified, deliberate strategies must be developed to move these ministries forward. With ReStart, resources are usually limited, so effective stewardship of those resources is vital. The dying church must get the most ministry per available resource that it possibly can. This is challenging because the dying church has been the antithesis of strategic planning probably for years. Valuable ministry may have happened over the years by "accident," but with ReStart, the church must become intentional about its ministry, one aspect of which is to become effective at applying resources to ministry.

Essential ministry strategic planning is simple, but tedious. It starts with vision.

Church leaders, most notably the ReStart Pastor and his team of visionaries, must know the strategic destination in order to build the correct strategic road. To determine the destination, the vision team must take a look at each essential ministry, one at a time. In light of the overall Revision, including values, target, mission, culture and philosophy, the

question must be asked of each essential ministry, "What should this ministry look like in twelve months?" A detailed, quantifiable description of each ministry must be articulated. For example, one essential ministry might be cell groups. The twelve-month description might include:

- 4 cell groups of 8-12 people each
- 4 leaders
- 4 apprentice leaders
- 4 host families
- 4 cell groups functioning as ministry teams
- Effective Bible study curriculum in place
- Effective cell leader training program in place

The description of the desired future should be as detailed as possible. With these descriptions, the church has a snapshot of what the future should look like in each of the essential ministries.

Next, the vision team must describe each of these essential ministries as they actually are in the present, using the same categories used to describe the future. Using the same example, the present description might include:

- 1 cell group of 9 people
- 1 leader
- 0 apprentice leader
- 2 host families
- 0 cell groups functioning as ministry teams
- No effective Bible study curriculum in place
- No effective cell leader training program in place

The distance between the essential ministry as it is and the essential ministry as it could be in twelve months is the "Vision Gap." The goal of essential ministry strategic development is to close that gap through intentional planning and implementation. The next step in the planning process, then, is to determine how to close the gap in each essential ministry.

To close the gap, all of the steps necessary to move from the described present to the described future must be identified and positioned on a twelve-month timeline. For instance, our cell group example identified one current cell leader and four future cell leaders with four apprentice leaders. A timeline might look like this:

1 month:	Promoted need for additional cell group leaders
2 months:	Recruited 5 potential cell group leaders
3 months:	Began training with potential cell group leaders
4 months:	Continued training with potential cell group leaders
5 months:	Promoted formation of a new cell group
	Identified leader for new cell group
6 months:	Began new cell group with new leader
	Assigned 2 leaders as apprentices to new group
	Assigned 2 leaders as apprentices to existing group
7 months:	Promoted need for additional cell group leaders
	Recruited 5 potential cell group leaders
8 months:	Began training with potential cell group leaders
9 months:	Continued training with potential cell group leaders
10 months:	Promoted formation of two new cell groups
11 months:	Split two existing groups to form 2 new groups
	Selected 2 leaders from first group of trainees to lead
	Selected 4 apprentices from second group to apprentice
12 months:	Formed 4 cell groups with 4 leaders and 4 apprentices

Note that each of these strategic entries is written in past tense. This is deliberate and builds accountability into the system. When the time for completion is past, the task is either completed or it is not. This gives everyone involved in the process a crystal clear understanding of progress that is either being made or not made.

When the ReStart Pastor and vision team formulate detailed strategies for moving all essential ministries toward a clearly articulated desired future and hold themselves and the church accountable for the implementation of those strategies, the church will grow and become healthy, and ministry will happen by intent, not by accident.

Strategic Steps to Insuring Continued Health

ReStart will give a church a new beginning. It will take a church from the depths of severe Decline and put the church back on the path of Incline. What will keep it growing and healthy? The truth is, a dying church that turns around and gets back into early Incline is destined to return to Decline by simple virtue of lifecycle. Without deliberate steps, the church will inevitably lapse into Recline and Decline as the cycle is repeated.

A church in ReStart has gone from upside down, when structure usurps the place of vision and strategy, to right side up, when vision takes command, supported by strategy and structure. The church has returned to Incline. Recline begins when vision begins to fade and strategy, no longer strategic, begins to evolve into programming. Decline is soon to follow as programming collapses and structure assumes command.

The secret, then, to continued health has to do with the church's treatment of vision. A church will remain healthy in so far as it maintains a proper relationship between vision, strategy and structure. This calls for a total commitment to keeping vision in its proper leadership position. Constant monitoring of the church is in order. Constant evaluation of all aspects of ministry is vital, especially in the essential ministries. The basis for this evaluation will be to measure each ministry against the vision or revision; that is, the values, target, mission, culture, and philosophy. At least yearly, the vision itself must be evaluated and revised (Revision) to determine the course for the next year. When Revision is approached yearly, while the church is still in Incline, adjustments will be moderate, requiring only moderate adjustments in strategy and structure. When Revision

is approached only in times of crisis, the church is already in Decline and extreme changes will be necessary.

Insuring continued health is a matter of having the discipline to evaluate everything all the time and making moderate adjustments to vision, strategy and structure on a yearly basis. The challenge, though, is that the church does not see the need to evaluate and adjust while ministry is growing and healthy. But change as a choice is always preferable to change as a response to crisis. Staying healthy is much easier and much less costly than getting healthy. The church must evaluate and adjust.

Ministering With and To the Remnant

To minister effectively with and to the remnant is first to understand who the remnant is and is not. The remnant is, by definition, the surviving congregation of a dying church. The remnant tends to be past oriented and caught in an attitude of survivalism, afraid to take risk and having little faith that God would do anything significant through this dying church. Subsequently, the remnant is not the core group or launch team of a dynamic new church. Often, however, that is how they are portrayed to the unsuspecting new pastor who comes to the church with a vision for turnaround.

Change is difficult and complicated, having at least three dimensions: 1) the willingness to change, 2) the ability to change and 3) the substance of change. Willingness to change is a decision. A person simply decides that change is in order and that he or she is willing to change and will support change. This is purely hypothetical, however, as no actual change has taken place at the moment of willingness.

Once change is actualized, the second dimension gets tested. Ability to change is separate from willingness to change. Many people and many remnant congregations have expressed willingness to change in its hypothetical state, but have proved unable to change, once planned change becomes reality. Unable to accept change, they become adversaries of change or leave the church.

A third dimension of change must be considered, the substance of change. It is much easier to get people to agree on what to change from than to agree on what to change to. Ten people may agree that the church needs to change from a traditional music format, but each will have a different concept of what to change to. Contemporary music may be considered, but what is contemporary, Bill Gaither or Sonic Flood or something in between? Some might opt for a classical format, arguing that a hundred years from now, no one will know Amy Grant while everyone will know Beethoven. Others might lobby for jazz or country. What connects with the target anyway? Simply stated, what the church is changing to can cause as much or more friction than what the church is changing from.

Strategic Interaction with the Remnant

Divide and conquer is a strategic principle of war. Divide and serve is a strategic principle of interaction with the remnant. The typical remnant has been together for many years; patterns of decision-making are well rooted, with a few key influencers usually deciding for the remnant. The ReStart Pastor needs to change the way opinions are formed and decisions are made. Rather than always addressing the remnant as a group, the ReStart Pastor and other visionary leaders must relate with those in the remnant, person by person

or family by family. They must fully explain the new vision and its motivations in these smaller settings where individuals will have the opportunity to ask questions and gain information in a more private, informal way. Independent thought will win out over group thought dominated by a few people. The remnant will move toward the new vision person by person, not as a group.

Dividing and serving will give the leader the opportunity to establish relational bonds with each individual or family of the remnant. This relationship will be key as a remnant will tend to view the ReStart Pastor as an outsider, particularly if he has been called in specifically to lead the remnant through ReStart. Trust and credibility will be built one person at a time.

It is important that the leader take the time to learn, acknowledge, and respect the history of the remnant. A leaders who comes into a dying church with an attitude that the church has failed and that he is here to erase the past in order to forge ahead will find that he is leading with no one following. Any church, regardless of how steep it may be in decline, will have moments from the past which are praiseworthy and which are of great importance to the remnant. The effective leader will find these moments and commend the remnant for them.

The remnant will likely have no idea how ministry is being done outside its own walls. This tunnel vision will cause the remnant to be very suspicious of other ways of doing church, new ways that the ReStart Pastor and vision team are proposing. Therefore, leaders should create opportunities for the remnant to become exposed to new models of ministry. This can be done through books, videos or by simply taking the remnant around to other churches to see how church is done in a variety of contexts.

A remnant congregation will have to adjust to major changes, a challenge for all involved. One simple way to get started is to break old patterns. If the remnant has been meeting for Bible study every Wednesday night at 7:00 for the past ten years, change it to Thursday night or even Wednesday night at 7:30. This may seem silly, but small changes such as this will begin to unseat the remnant from its patterns and will begin to prepare the way for more significant changes to follow.

Perspectives on Assimilation

The ReStart Pastor must be a Church Planter Plus, an entrepreneurial shepherd.

He must balance the competing and even conflicting demands of moving toward a new future as a visionary while nurturing the remnant as a shepherd. This balance is very sensitive. To err in either direction is to fail at ReStart.

Once the vision of the desired future is determined, the challenge of drawing both the remnant congregation and the newcomer toward that vision begins. One common mistake made by the ReStart Pastor is to perceive the road to the desired future as running through the remnant. In other words, he reasons that the remnant must own the vision as a prerequisite to achieving the vision. Once the remnant is on board, he thinks, the church will move toward the vision and draw newcomers on the way.

This perspective is wrong and virtually doomed to failure. It allows the remnant to hold the vision hostage by withholding its ownership of the vision and its commitment to it. The ReStart Pastor, in an effort to win the remnant, invests more and more into gaining remnant approval. His ministry becomes a ministry of inreach, focused inside the church. The ReStart Pastor and the vision team work harder and harder, spending more

time and energy in trying to convince the remnant to move ahead. The new vision fades and the ReStart Pastor gets frustrated, eventually giving up and becoming the chaplain of the remnant, rather than the champion of the vision. The church returns to corporate decline. The pastor enters personal ministry decline.

The truth is, the desired future is not dependent on remnant approval. It is dependent on the ability to draw newcomers to the new vision. The remnant is a finite body of past-oriented people whose number will decrease over time. The newcomer group is an infinite group of people whose number will increase over time, assuming the vision is godly and the effort is thorough. In regard to the new church, the newcomer is future-oriented. On which group does leadership build the future, the finite, shrinking, past-oriented remnant or the infinite, growing, future-oriented newcomers? The answer is obvious.

The ReStart Pastor must be the Church Planter to the newcomer and the "Plus" to the remnant. He must be newcomer entrepreneur and remnant shepherd. In perspective, the ReStart Pastor must remove the remnant from the line of sight to the vision, ministering to the remnant congregation on the side, while driving the vision forward with newcomers. He must treat the newcomer trajectory like that of a church plant, making a direct line toward the vision. He must care for the legitimate needs of the remnant, while moving the remnant person by person into the trajectory of the new vision.

To do this, the ReStart Pastor must intentionally separate his ministry into two parts: 1) ministry to the remnant and 2) ministry to the newcomer. He must determine the minimum ministry warranted by remnant ministry, committing the minimum time and energy to fulfilling that ministry. The majority of his time and energy must be spent on

newcomer ministry. Depending on the size of the remnant, fifty to seventy-five per cent of the ReStart Pastor's ministry must be devoted to developing a newcomer base that will provide the platform for reaching the new vision.

Blending Newcomers with the Remnant

A number of guidelines or perspectives must be considered when blending the remnant and the newcomer into the new vision. First, the ReStart Pastor must be aware of the "Ghost of Church Past" and the "Ghost of Church Future." Much is made of the baggage a remnant congregation might be carrying, its Ghost of Church Past. However, the truth is, the newcomer will also be carrying church baggage; it will just be different baggage. No one comes to the church with a blank slate. The same is true for the future. No one comes to the church without some concept of what he or she wants this church to look like in the days ahead, the Ghost of Church Future. Everyone has an agenda. It is naïve to think otherwise.

Second, establish a foundation of shared experience based on the new vision.

Avoid bringing a newcomer into a setting dominated by the remnant. The remnant is unaccustomed to reaching out and will tend to build walls between itself and the newcomer. Create scenarios where there is a good balance of remnant to newcomer and where the focus of the gathering is on the new vision.

Third, involve the remnant and newcomers equally in servant ministry. The tendency will be to fill the serving slots with the remnant as they are the people who have been with the church and have perhaps served before. This creates a sort of caste system that is not healthy. Related to this concept is the fourth guideline, involve the remnant and

newcomers in leadership training at a ratio of at least two to one, newcomer to remnant.

With De-Structure and Authorization, the remnant has given leadership to the ReStart

Pastor and a small vision team. The tendency, once it is time to establish a new structure,
is to place the remnant back in leadership as they have been the people who have been with
the church the longest, are known the best and may have served in leadership positions
before. This is fatal. To fill leadership and serving positions with the remnant is simply to
recreate the church that has just been brought out of decline into ReStart.

Fifth, the remnant must be assimilated into the new vision. The ReStart Pastor and the vision team cannot assume that the remnant is on board. In fact, the remnant is not and must be led into vision ownership. And sixth, the surprising truth is that the burden of assimilation, of blending in or fitting in, is on the remnant, not the newcomer. The newcomer does not join a remnant that is headed toward a new vision. The people of the remnant, one by one, join the congregation of newcomers headed toward the new vision. To join with the remnant is to join with the past. To join with the newcomers is to join with the future.

ReStart in Denominational Strategy

One of two arguments is frequently presented as a rationale for not adopting ReStart as a strategy. The first states that ReStart is difficult and unlikely to succeed, and that a better strategy would be to close the church and to invest its assets in church planting. The second, like the first, states that ReStart is difficult and unlikely to succeed, and that a better strategy would be to allow the church to die a natural death and then to invest its assets in church planting.

Each of these positions is flawed. First, ReStart is difficult, but if handled properly it can be successful. Closing a church should be a last resort if credible efforts at ReStart have failed. To close a church is to accept defeat and to leave the legacy of a negative witness in the community. On a strategic level, it may make sense if all that is being considered are the numbers. Replacing a small declining church with a growing church plant makes numerical sense. But what about those particular people who have invested so heavily in their church? What if all they need to become successful is properly assessed and trained leadership? Every remnant in a dying church deserves the opportunity for ReStart, the opportunity for its ministry to be redeemed.

Allowing a church to die a natural death seems an odd position to take. No church dies from natural causes; it dies because it gets sick. And there is no such thing as a terminal illness where ReStart is available. Another key factor is that a church will likely take years to die. During that time valuable resources will be lost. This is the antithesis of stewardship. To sit by and wait for the church's death is irresponsible.

Denominational strategy must embrace ReStart. It gives new life to the remnant, it gives newcomers a visionary ministry to embrace, it gives communities the opportunity to meet Christ and it expands the kingdom of God. Churches were never meant to close. Churches were never meant to die.

Summary

The key to successful ReStart is holding tension in balance - the tension between the past and the future, the tension between vision and structure, the tension between remnant and newcomer. The effective ReStart Pastor holds that key. He is called,

experienced and trained, an aggressive but sensitive leader who is a cultural match for the church's community.

The dying church is caught in an uninterrupted lifecycle that has brought it to the verge of death. The church is upside down in that vision is serving, rather than leading, structure. The ReStart phases of Destructure, Authorization, Revision, Innovation and Assimilation will get the church right side up and restore it to health. Continued health will be assured by maintaining the proper relationship between vision, strategy and structure. This will require continuous evaluation and making moderate adjustments to vision, strategy and structure on, at least, a yearly basis. Staying healthy is much easier and much less costly than getting healthy.

The ReStart Pastor and other visionary leaders must understand that the future will be reached through newcomers, not through the remnant. Making remnant ownership of the vision a prerequisite for moving forward will hold the vision hostage for a ransom that will never be paid. To be successful, leadership must go after the future through newcomers, giving the people of the remnant every opportunity to come along but not hesitating to move ahead without them. The burden of blending is on the remnant, not the newcomer.

Denominational strategies of closing a dying church as a first resort or allowing it to die over time are flawed, discounting the remnant, the community, proper stewardship and the power of God to break through spiritually and bring about effective change. God redeems a person. God can redeem a church.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Research Summary

The American Protestant movement is in serious trouble. The vast majority of its churches are in Recline or Decline. Noted church leaders such as Lyle Schaller, George Barna, Mike Regele, and Linus Morris place the figure of churches in plateau or decline at eighty to eighty-five per cent. That totals approximately three hundred thousand churches nationwide.

Biblical Record

Decline is recorded in the Bible. The Old Testament reveals a repeated pattern, a cyclical pattern, in the relationship between God and his people, the nation of Israel.

Decline is very much a part of that cycle, decline brought about by syncretism. This pattern might be viewed as beginning with the people of God in a right relationship with him, a relationship of faithfulness and obedience where right belief is coupled with right behavior. But over time, the nation drifts from faithfulness to faithlessness as the people turn away from God and embrace the beliefs and behaviors of pagan nations nearby.

Prophets warn and eventually the people repent and return to God, suffering a range of deserving judgments, but back on the path to holiness.

Decline in the Old Testament is the centralized corporate decline of a nation, a national church. Decline in the New Testament is the decentralized individual decline of a local, or perhaps regional, church. The New Testament covers a much shorter time period than the Old Testament, therefore not showing the repeated cycle seen in the Old Testament. However, the nature of the exhortations of the Apostle Paul and other New Testament writers, especially John's penning of the letters to the churches in Revelation, assure us that the cycle is present and continuing. As with the Old Testament, the New Testament reveals the negative impact of syncretism as the world continues to have more influence over the church than the church over the world.

There is also a biblical record of restoration. Restoration occurs when heartfelt repentance and confession are followed by a return to faithful, obedient living. God's judgment turns away and his blessing returns. This is seen repeatedly in the Old Testament as the nation of Israel falls under conviction and returns to God. In the New Testament, restoration is seen more by prescription than by description, with its context in the local or regional church, or perhaps the individual human heart. Genuine repentance is always followed by genuine forgiveness. Biblical evidence prescribes the intervention of strong, godly leadership to serve as the catalyst for the nation's, or church's, change of heart.

Historical Perspectives

The two periods of time in American history that contained the most prolific church growth were the period of the Great Awakening and the period immediately following World War II. The Great Awakening concerned the colonial church of early to

mid-eighteenth century, pre-Revolutionary War America. The outbreak of revival was sudden and growth was exponential. Prominent figures included Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. No particular cause can be found for either the beginning or the end of the Great Awakening, apart from the mysterious will of God. Observers cite several conditions that were present at the advent of the revival: 1) a spiritual awakening or intensity, 2) an outbreak of disease and 3) the technological advance of the printing press. Were these catalytic, causing the revival? More likely they were simply tools that God used to prosecute his will.

Post-World War II America saw economic boom, the baby boom and the boom of suburban development. In the mainstream of that explosion was the expansion of the church. In retrospect, this expansion of the American Protestant church seems more cultural and demographic than spiritual. Certainly many genuine conversions took place and much valuable ministry was accomplished. But the foundations of this growth now seem institutional in nature, and as the church as institution has lost its place in American culture, the growing church of post-World War II America has become the turn of the millennium declining church.

Contemporary Perspectives

Today's church positional leaders can be divided into two camps. One camp seems oblivious to the actual state of church, viewing stable churches in Recline as healthy, and viewing intentionally strategic approaches to ministry and church growth theory as manipulative and void of the leading of the Spirit. This group continues to live and minister as if the church were part of America's mainstream. The other camp is much

more tuned in to reality, seeing the writing on the wall. Respected leaders, such as Peter Wagner and Leith Anderson, point to the condition of the church today and prescribe sweeping changes that must take place for the church to be effective in the days ahead. Church futurists, such as Loren Mead, are calling for significant changes in the church and new models for the future. They are calling for the shrewd application of limited resources and a strategic approach to ministry that fully utilizes church growth theory as a tool in the hands of the Spirit-led church.

Two types of surveys and interviews were conducted for this dissertation project.

One targeted church leaders across the country who are aware of the growing crisis of the decline of the church. The other targeted pastors who had registered to attend training conferences designed the help them turn their dying churches around. Several common denominators emerged: 1) steep decline in the church is widespread, crossing geographical, denominational and theological lines, 2) the average pastor is unaware of the writings of church growth theorists and church futurists, 3) the average pastor is not trained in strategic ministry, 4) the average pastor is not trained in church turnaround and 5) the average pastor has, at best, a vague vision for the future of his church.

Conclusions/Findings

#1: Without deliberate and strategic intervention, any church is destined to follow a lifecycle most often articulated as birth, growth, plateau, decline and death. With appropriate intervention, this lifecycle can be characterized by extended periods of growth. The best spot to intervene in the lifecycle is at the peak of growth, prior to plateau. Most

churches that attempt intervention do so at the depths of decline, changing as a response to crisis rather than changing as a strategic choice.

#2: A dying church is a church that is upside down and inside focused. It is upside down in that structure, a supporting mechanism, is in command. For vision to exist, it must receive permission from structure. Structure should derive its existence from vision followed by strategy. Vision should never serve structure. The dying church is inside focused because it serves itself and its own survival, rather than serving God and reaching the community with the message of Christ. The church is blind to this reality and would verbalize its devotion to God and its desire to reach people. However, this is not evident in the remnant's behavior, which is where true values are revealed.

#3: A healthy church is a church that is right side up and outside focused. Vision is appropriately in command and this vision is being carried out through effective strategy, supported by a vision-strategy-driven structure. As such, it is in the lifecycle stage of growth, or Incline. The healthy church is outside focused because it features a ministry driven by obedient service to God and the fulfillment of God's mandates of being witnesses to the world and makers of disciples. A healthy church stays healthy by remaining committed to the biblical purpose of the church, by biblically following biblical leadership and by submitting itself to continuous self-examination and continuous cultural adaptation.

#4: The most important dimension in effective ReStart of the dying church is the selection of the ReStart Pastor, the Church Planter Plus. The effective ReStart Pastor is called, experienced and trained. He leads the sheep rather than following the sheep. He is both entrepreneur and shepherd. The ReStart Pastor handles criticism well and is adept at

problem solving and conflict resolution. He is a visionary who is able to draw people into ownership of the vision, realizing that without the vision the people will perish, but without the people the vision will perish.

#5: The phases of effective ReStart are 1) De-Structure, 2) Authorization, 3)
Revision, 4) Innovation and 5) Assimilation. De-Structure dismantles the structure that is dominating decision-making while Authorization places the authority to make decisions and spend money in the hands of visionaries. Revision formulates a new godly vision that is the picture of a desired future. Innovation develops the strategy and structure needed to move forward toward fulfilling the vision, utilizing essential ministry identification and essential ministry strategic planning as tools. Assimilation draws both the remnant and newcomers into the trajectory of the new vision, recognizing that the burden of blending in is on the remnant, not the newcomer.

#6: Denominational leaders who favor closing the dying church or allowing the dying church to die, thinking that the assets of the dying church would be best applied to church planting are missing a very important point. Church plants are dying churches waiting to happen. Without an understanding of lifecycle and the proper relationship between vision, strategy and structure, and without the effort of continuous self-examination and continuous cultural adaptation, the church plant will become a dying church. One dying church will simply be replaced with another. The church planting movement will not grow exponentially as a result of church planting. It will explode into growth as large numbers of dying churches are turned around and become healthy, multiplying churches that stay in Incline because of spiritual vitality and strategic awareness.

Responses

In <u>The Living Church</u>, author Donald J. MacNair refers to the living church as one that plans for an uninterrupted and unlimited existence (1980:18). My study has looked at its antithesis, the dying church, whose ministry has been greatly interrupted and whose very existence is severely threatened. How can the surviving remnant of a dying church be led to a healthy new beginning?

There is hope. There is good news. Anderson observes:

America is spiritually thirsty. After decades of advancing secularism, oppressive communism, and declining spiritual interest, a spiritual awakening is sweeping the world. America is part of this awakening. There is a fascinating mix of disillusionment, post-secularism, generational depression, fear about the future, and return to fundamentalism (1992:19).

The fields are ripe for harvest. How will the dying church respond?

Response of the Remnant

The surviving remnant congregation must face reality. This will require undergoing a thorough assessment and diagnosis. Unique aspects of the dying church may be revealed through this process, but certain common denominators will always surface. The church's problems will be found to be internal and not external. The church will not be found to be the victim of changing external circumstances, suffering from wounds inflicted by a changing community. Rather, the church will be found to be the perpetrator, committing the crimes of inward focus and survivalism, suffering from self-inflicted wounds. The problem is not that the circumstances outside of the church have changed, but that the church has failed to adjust to these changes. Once this reality is faced, the church must repent of its egocentricity and begin the climb back to health.

The surviving remnant congregation must grasp the significance of the incarnational nature of the gospel. God is the God of pursuit. He has come after us, becoming that which would reach us. He revealed himself through creation, through the prophets and through his written word. He revealed himself through the Incarnate Christ and continues to reveal himself through his Spirit. The Apostle Paul became all things to all men to win some. For the remnant to be effective in turnaround, it must become something new, something relevant, something capable of connecting with its community and revealing the love of God. It cannot remain the same or it will die and no one will be reached.

The surviving remnant congregation must follow an aggressive leader. The remnant must serve and not be served. It must perceive its pastor as God's appointed leader and not as its caretaker or employee. The choice is clear. The dying church will either live for itself and die, or it will die to itself and live.

Response of the ReStart Pastor

The ReStart Pastor must discern a specific calling to ReStart ministry. He must have a genuine burden for the dying church, not simply an attraction to a challenging ministry. He must be properly assessed as a Church Planter Plus, proving that he is qualified as a church planter, and that he has successful experience in working with people in challenging circumstances. He must be a proven problem solver and conflict manager, and must have demonstrated the capacity to formulate vision, gather a team around that vision, and successfully carry out that vision.

The ReStart Pastor must take advantage of available training in the specialized ministry of ReStart. He must understand its unique spiritual and relational dynamics, and be familiar with ReStart methodology. He must also remain committed to continuous evaluation and continuous change. Today's innovation is tomorrow's rut. Failure to maintain the organic nature of innovative change will lead the ReStart back into decline as the lifecycle progresses.

Response of the Third Party

Anyone who sits in a supervisory position within a denominational structure will have multiple churches under his supervision. Statistically, eighty to eighty-five per cent of those churches will be in plateau or decline. The third party must become an expert in the ministry of ReStart. He is the one who must intervene with the remnant, calling attention to the problem. He is the one who must oversee the diagnostic process and lead the remnant through De-Structure and Authorization. He is the one who must recruit potential ReStart Pastors and oversee their assessment and training. He is the one who must coach and trouble-shoot as the ReStart takes its first steps.

The third party must build solid relationships with congregations well before decline sets in and before the congregation takes on the properties of a remnant. With this relationship established, the third party is able to guide the remnant through the ReStart process in a smoother and healthier way than if he arrives on the scene at the time of crisis and has to minister to the remnant without its trust.

Response of Denominational Leaders

Like the surviving remnant congregations, denominational leaders must face reality. The American Protestant church is in steep corporate decline. Denominational leaders have the responsibility for this problem and the authority to effect change. Many of these leaders see the dying church as a means of acquiring assets that can be used for church planting. This view is shortsighted. First, the remnant of a dying church consists of real people who need and deserve the opportunity to be led through ReStart. Second, denominational leaders who take this view often suggest waiting for the church to die, particularly in denominations where local churches are autonomous. This approach usually reflects poor stewardship of both time and money as time is lost and financial resources are depleted. And third, the universe of church planting is a small universe of some three thousand churches per year in the United States. The universe of the dying church is the universe of tens of thousands of churches that already exist in a community and are already self-supporting.

The solution is not in the conversion of dying-church assets into church planting resources. The solution is in stemming the tide of decline, and turning declining churches into healthy, reproducing churches that stay in perpetual incline through continuous evaluation and change. Loren Mead writes:

In recent years I have seen three kinds of responses in denominational systems: 1) Frantic effort to recapture the initiative, to get "ahead of the curve" and to develop a NEW PROGRAM so compelling that it will reattract all the eroded support...2) Holding steady and hoping for the best, if not for divine intervention... 3) [M]oving ahead into a new paradigm of mission, rebuilding and reinventing the church as we go. This choice would be simple to make if two things were clear — what the new paradigm really is, and how we determine which parts of the collapsing system we need to keep to make it into the new era (1991:5-6).

Obviously, the third strategy that Mead identifies here is the path for denominational leaders to follow, but who will lead? Who will take the risk of corporate entrepreneurial leadership? The history of the American Protestant church is one of occasional innovation followed by widespread duplication of a model that is successful. Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago and Saddleback Community Church in suburban southern California are recent examples. Hundreds of churches have been planted across the country in the last few years patterned after Willow Creek's "seeker" model or Saddleback's "purpose-driven" model. These models are certainly valid and credible, but were they meant to be normative for all of American Christendom, or are they unique manifestations of God's plan in a particular context? How do we know what is principle and what is context?

In summary, the church needs an outpouring of innovative models that seek to solve the mystery of how to minister in post-modern, post-Christian and perhaps post-secular America. Denominational leaders must face the reality that the responsibility for change is in their hands. Expectations are high. Failure to respond will be catastrophic. The approach to church growth must shift from replicating a few successful traditional or contemporary models to an avalanche of research and development that will stretch conventional thinking in pursuit of multiple new models. This approach will celebrate the failure of many models in pursuit of the successful and most likely will cost millions of dollars in trial and error.

If eighty to eighty-five per cent of American Protestant churches are in plateau and decline, then the vast majority of American Protestant denominations are in plateau

and decline. What is true for the dying church is true for the dying denomination. Live for self and die or die to self and live. Tomorrow will not be 1954.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for further research in related areas of study:

- The development of assessment tools for the selection of candidates to serve as ReStart Pastors.
- 2. The development of training materials and processes for people who will serve in a Third Party capacity.
- The tracking of churches attempting ReStart using the model prescribed in this paper to determine its long term effectiveness in the field.
- The further development of the rationale and process of implementing ReStart in denominational strategy.
- The further development of the cooperative potential of church planting and ReStart as partners in church multiplication.

APPENDIX A

DISSERTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

DISSERTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _	
Title/Pos	sition
Affiliation	on/Organization
	Fax
e-mail_	
Please a	inswer each question to the best of your knowledge and experience.
1.	How would you describe a typical dying church? What are its defining features?
2.	Divide the universe of dying churches into three categories: (1) Those that are displaying symptoms of terminal illness. (2) Those that will die without significant and immediate change. (3) Those that are terminal.
	What might differentiate each category from the others? What are the distinctives of each category?
3.	How can the dying church be differentiated from a church that is simply in need of refocus, renewal, revitalization, etc.? Where can, or where should, the line be drawn between dying churches and churches in decline?
4.	Defining the surviving remnant of a dying church as those people who remain in the shrinking congregation, identify its defining characteristics:
	Are there different categories of remnants? If so, how are they differentiated?

- 5. If a dying church could experience a healthy new beginning, what components/elements would this include? What would be the defining features of a healthy new beginning for a dying church?
- 6. What leaders could play a role in leading a dying church to a healthy new beginning?

By category/position, what are the characteristics/qualifications of these leading role players?

More specifically, what are the qualifications of an effective ReStart Pastor?

What conditions must be present for the ReStart Pastor to be successful in leading a dying church to a healthy new beginning?

- 7. What Scripture passages and/or theological principles are relevant to the ReStart scenario? (consider remnant and leaders of remnant restoration, among others)
- 8. By name and or by type, list pastors known to you who have led dying churches to healthy new beginnings. What common characteristics/common denominators did they share?
- 9. What common causes lead to the deaths of churches? What are common characteristics of churches that die?
- 10. In what ways has contemporary culture contributed to the deaths of churches?
- 11. In what ways has public perception of the church changed in the past 20 years?
- 12. Has this change in perception contributed to the deaths of churches? If so, in what ways?
- What are the essential components that should be built into a healthy new beginning to insure continued health?

APPENDIX B

PRE-TRAINING ASSESSMENT

Pre-Training Assessment

Name:	Position:
Church:	
Address:	
Phone:	Fax:e-mail:
	Event:
and muc	oose of this Pre-Training Assessment (PTA) is to help you get a sense of where the s in its present condition and circumstance. There are no right or wrong answers h of what's included here is subjective in nature. The PTA concerns perception as it does reality. Feel free to express what you feel or sense or think as much as a know. Your responses will be held in absolute confidence.
1.	When was this church founded?
2.	How many locations have been this church's home throughout it's history? Please describe the various locations.
3.	How long has this church met at its present location?
4.	What time period would be identified as the prime of this church's life?
5.	Describe the church during its prime including attendance, membership, giving, and ministry/programs.
6.	Describe the church now including attendance, membership, giving, and ministry/programs.

7.	How long and in what capacity have you served in this church?
8.	What factors have contributed to the decline in this church?
9.	Why have those in the present congregation stayed with this church?
10.	What would motivate the present congregation to embrace significant change?
11.	Using biblical mandates such as the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, how is this church fulfilling the biblical purpose of the church?

12.	How is God blessing this church? What can be pointed to in the past 6-18 months that is unmistakably God's blessing on this church?
13.	Are you aware of any unresolved issues of serious sin in the history of this church? Is so, please explain as appropriate.
14.	Is the leadership of this church leading the church in a positive spiritual direction? Please explain.
15.	Is the congregation of this church following the leadership in a positive spiritual direction? Please explain.
16.	Is there a cultural match or mismatch between this church and its community? Please explain.

17.	Is "survivalism" evident in this church? Survivalism is the dominating presence of concern for the church's survival, usually at the expense of outward-focused ministry. Please explain.
18.	Is there evidence of negativity in the church? Please explain.
19.	Do the leaders of this church have a defined sense of the church's future? Please explain, including a description of that future.
20.	Are you the right person to be serving in the position you now hold in this church? Please explain.

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