

Fewer Christians seem to be teaching the Bible in depth

By [Randy W. Bright](#) - August 21, 2014

As you might expect, I think about the state of the churches in America a great deal. In my column last week, I announced that it was time to begin archiving and documenting America's churches now while we have the opportunity to do so.

Anyone who has done their family genealogy will tell you that it is much easier to collect family history while family members are still alive and memories fresh. They will also tell you that without verifiable data, it is next to impossible to reconstruct a family's lineage.

For the same reason, we need to be documenting our church buildings and Jewish temples as evidence of our nation's Christian-Judeo heritage. The day may come when we will do as Nehemiah did, lament the fact that so much time has passed that no one remembers our roots. Architecture has as much value in proving that lineage as any manuscript or printed document has. The fact that a group of people banded together their time and their fortunes in order to build a place of worship testifies that America was indeed founded as a Christian nation.

Having said that, there is more to preserving the church in America than preserving its architectural history. While church architecture is important, it is not the church itself, that is, we know from scripture that the church was intended to refer to a body of believers.

The church in America is making a radical change. Some would say that it is a good change, while others see it as the destruction of the church, and there are valid arguments to be made on both sides. I have struggled myself with the change, seeing both pros and cons. The change I am referring to is the new model of church services and church structure, that is the way it conducts its activities. That new structure comes in two separate forms.

The first structural change is in the way we conduct worship services. Music is more contemporary and much louder than before, and the second change is that campus churches are becoming a more widely used model. In that model, sermons are delivered to multiple locations via satellite, while the music is done live.

Here's where the pros and cons come into play.

That model of church is growing at a fast rate, drawing very large crowds to multiple services each weekend. Many Americans are coming to know Christ for the first time because this model is meeting them at their level – especially through music – making it much easier and exciting to join an organized church.

I also see this model, from an urban planning aspect, to be one that may be the only model at present that can not only be inserted into an urban environment and survive, but do so by constructing its own stand-alone facilities. Even if the building does not look like a traditional church building, it does have enough of an architectural identity to be recognized as such without

being so different that urban planners would object to them. They very well may well represent the survivability of the organized church in an urban environment.

On the other hand, as these congregations grow (with people who are largely those who have already been members in other churches), other churches are diminishing. It would be a mistake to say that the new model draws only younger people, when in fact they are attended by a wide range of ages. This means that older established congregations could lose enough members to threaten their existence.

Another asset that is at risk is corporate Biblical knowledge. While the new model places strong emphasis on teaching children and young people, they rely on sermons and small groups that meet at times other than Sunday mornings to educate adults. My experience with small groups is that they have great value for meeting fellowship and building strong, accountable relationships between Christians, but they are a poor substitute for structured adult education.

When I was growing up, my church provided a strong educational program up through my high school years, and later the churches I attended (until recent years) provided strong, structured adult education. Learning the Bible is a lifelong endeavor, and new Christians who are adults do not have the opportunity to be in a strong learning environment. Part of the reason for that is that they simply aren't interested, but also that as the learned population grows old and dies, there are fewer people left with in-depth knowledge of the scriptures who are able to teach.

It is a complex set of circumstances and problems that our churches face today, and it would be better to do so now than when it is too late.



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