

American churches are declining at an alarming rate

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By [Randy W. Bright](#)

Statistics are not hard to find indicating that the church is in decline in America.

Reports range widely - one source states that about 3,200 churches close their doors each year, and another puts it at 75 per week on average, amounting to nearly 4,000 per year.

Another report states that of the 250,000 protestant churches nationwide, 80 percent are either in a state of stagnant growth or in decline.

Another source says that there are less than half of the number of churches now as opposed to a century ago, and that there are a third less than since 1950.

Yet another says that 3,500 people leave the church each day - amounting to nearly 1.3 million - while another cites it at over twice that amount at 2.7 million.

Finally, a Gallup poll placed the percentage of Americans that regularly attended church at 40 percent, while another placed it at closer to 20 percent.

While there is little doubt that the church attendance is in decline, it is quite another thing to place the blame on any one cause. Taking the decline at face value and assuming that people aren't interested in the church any more is a sure way of losing an opportunity for understanding how to keep the churches we have and to add more through real conversional growth.

So consider some of the influences that are making it a challenge to grow churches in America now:

America has been going through a phase of urbanization for nearly a hundred years or more. The majority of the population back then were agricultural, living in rural areas or small towns that were agricultural enclaves. As production methods and scales changed, there was less need for small family farms, necessitating a large part of our population to move to cities, and then to suburbs for jobs.

Small towns used to be the manufacturing base of America, but when factories moved to Mexico, and then to China and India, another population shift for jobs occurred that has led to the decline of small towns. Young people left for college and never returned, while an entire generation of older residents have passed away with no one to replace them.

Anyone remember the Wildlands Project, the law that liberals literally came within hours of passing in the early 90s? Its sole purpose was to depopulate all of America except for its largest cities and the highways to connect them. Circumstances are now accomplishing the same goal simply through attrition.

So with the decreasing population in rural and small towns, we can understand why churches are in decline in those areas. But cities and suburbs are also going through a major shift.

Cities are not only deep in debt, they are looking for answers anywhere except from God. Higher taxes, more regulations, "calibrating" planning to optimize their chances for financial success and competition to attract young talent have all led to attitudes toward churches ranging from indifference to outright hostility.

Some cities - like Detroit - are in such a serious state of decline that they are razing vast numbers of abandoned homes to reduce infrastructure and operational costs. Undoubtedly, there are abandoned churches in those areas as well. This method of "downsizing" is also being considered by other cities desperate to maintain solvency.

Culturally, churches and Christians are being taken less seriously by the general public, as liberals work hard to demonize Christians as bigots, especially over issues of homosexuality and abortion. Man's wisdom is being promoted as superior to God's wisdom, making it more difficult to attract new converts. This cultural shift is also being seen in the worldview of certain denominations. This is shaking the loyalty of many Christians to their denominations, and many who leave simply never find a church home again.

In addition to all of these external forces being exerted on churches (and those I have mentioned are not an exhaustive list by any means), there still remains the same natural forces that they have always faced.

Many theologians believe that churches go through a natural birth, life and death cycle, and that even though painful, is actually beneficial for keeping the church vibrant.

Another force is one that Paul spoke about in I Cor. 3, and that is for churches and Christians to stay aligned with the truth and teachings found in scripture. Culturally, many churches, both new and old, are only teaching at the "milk" level instead of the "meat" level, assuming that Americans are too lazy, shallow or busy to become deep Christians.

All said, churches are disappearing and so is their architecture. Perhaps that is shallow to say as well? Or not - more on that next week.



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