

The Future of the Christian Church in America; A Return to Relevance or full Retreat???

There are four significant cultural trends in America. Trends that if left unchallenged guarantee the decline and possible destruction of the Christian Church.

The 1st is the graying of the faithful and the rise of Secularism and Relativism among Millennials and Generation-Z.

“SIX out of TEN Protestant churches are plateaued or declining in attendance, and more than half saw fewer than ten people become new Christians in the past 12 months.”

- A Study from Exponential by LifeWay Research

“An estimated 30,000 congregations shut their doors in the United States from 2006 to 2012.”

- Sociologist Simon Brauer in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

In an article titled: Millennials Are Giving Up On God, this Is What They're Reaching for Instead . . .

“It seems that people's general attitude toward God is shifting . . . Last week, the Pew Research Center offered that a majority of Americans think a belief in God isn't necessary to be, you know, a good person with fine morals.”

- Inc.com Oct. 2017

Based on these trends, do you know . . .

What % of your congregation are Millennials ? (Ages 23-38)

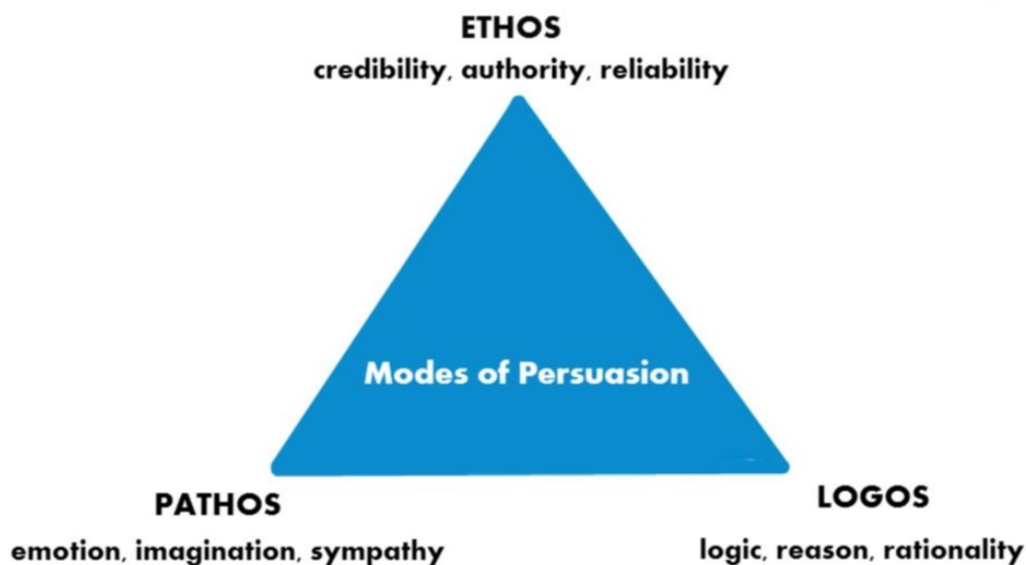
What % of your congregation is Generation-Z ? (Ages 0-22)

You may be asking, “why is it important what percentage of our congregation is under the age of 38?”

The reason is simple, TODAY, 49.5% of the U.S. population is under 38. So, if your congregation is not at least 50% under 38 years of age, and growing in that sector, the future for your church is decline.

The 2nd issue driving the decline of the Christian Church in America is the mode of persuasion pervading society.

Ask yourself; which is primarily driving the culture today?



If you answered pathos, you are right, and therein lies the problem for the Church. A culture driven primarily by emotion and sympathy sees Christian theology as intolerant and judgmental.

Statistics from Barna Research reported recently that perhaps as much as 50% of people who attend a church are not even Christians. Moreover, as the mainstream culture becomes more and more “anti-Christian,” how many of these non-committed churchgoers will continue to attend?

Are you starting to get the picture? Are you already well aware of these issues but do not know how to counteract what is happening? Have you entered into “survival mode.” Many churches in America are doing just that. They have decided to merely try and keep the doors open, the lights on, and the bills paid. They are capitulating to the culture. This strategy is an abandonment of the mission given to us by Jesus Himself, and it guarantees the demise of any church that adopts it. To go down the road of compromise and capitulation is to fulfill a prediction by Charles Spurgeon.

“A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats.”

The 3rd trend is the rise of Islam in the West.

The world's Muslim population grew much faster than Christians over the past five years. Their births will outnumber those of Christian moms for the first time in 2030, signaling a tremendous global religious shift, according to a new survey.

You cannot argue with the numbers when it is simple multiplication. The average fertility rate in America is 1.7. However, according to Pew Research Center - “Globally, Muslims have the highest fertility rate of any religious group—an average of 2.9 children per woman, well above replacement level.” Also, according to Reference.com; “Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States and throughout the world, as of 2015.”

The problem for the Christian Church is that Islam does not exist merely as a religion within a nation-state. No, it is a nation unto itself,

and thus once it is the majority population within any nation, it takes over control of the government. Then it establishes Sharia Law, subjugating all Non-Muslims to a second-class status known as “dhimmi.” This transition is happening in Europe right now. In his book, *While Europe Slept* by Bruce Bawer, he documents the replacement of native populations by Muslims from the Middle East and African countries. Estimates indicate that by 2030, Belgium will be a predominately Muslim country. As you most likely know, Brussels is the seat of NATO. Sweden is also well on its way to becoming an Islamic state. Not just from births but also conversion. Then there is this—

"European pride or European self-consciousness depend on the rejection of European history and European civilization! We want nothing to do with the Christian roots, and we absolutely want to be perfectly welcoming to Islam".

- Pierre Manent is a renowned French political scientist and professor at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in Paris.

Under Sharia, all members of non-Muslim religions are denied the right to proselytize outside of their own family. Also, if a member of your family converts to Islam, you cannot attempt to win them back to your faith under penalty of banishment or death. In addition, a congregation may not expand or even repair their place of worship.

This system of laws ensures that within 1-2 generations, the Christian population of that country would be minuscule and well on its way to extinction.

The 4th and final trend is the ascension and acceptance of occultism within mainstream society and the culture.

“Many millennials have found a substitute for a traditional deity. They're turning to the likes of astrology and witchcraft in order to find a celestial connection.”

- Marketwatch

There is a faith that is growing even faster rate than Islam in the West. It is called Wicca, and it is currently growing at an astounding pace.

“The number of Wiccans is doubling every 30 months, and at this point, there are more than 200,000 registered witches and approximately 8 million unregistered practitioners of Wicca.”

- Marla Alupoicei, who co-wrote the book “Generation Hex” with fellow Christian author Dillon Burroughs.

This search for a “*celestial connection;*” is another reason why people are falling away from the faith. They are not even looking at Christianity. The occult seems so much more exciting and offers more worldly gain and power in a society fixated on those things.

There is an ancient Samurai story called; “The demon and the Swordsman. There is a line in it that goes like this: “The demon said to the swordsman, it is not that man is inherently evil, it is just that from the moment of his birth he is soaked in it, and so it has become NORMAL to him.” This mindset seems to be where we are as a society.

Well, there you have it; the four major trends that are whittling away at the Christian faith and the individual church. Moreover, it is happening much faster than most members of the clergy are willing to admit.

Again, the trends are:

1. The graying of the faithful and the rise of secularism and relativism among Millennials and Generation-Z.

2. A culture driven primarily by emotion and sympathy who see Christian theology as intolerant and judgmental.

3. The rise of Islam in the West.

4. The ascension and acceptance of occultism within mainstream society and its culture.

Therefore pastor, your church may be an island of stability and maybe even have some growth, but are the new people just moving from another church? Each year 4,000 churches close their doors, and only 1,000 new ones open theirs. So, ultimately, you are in a rising sea, and soon, very soon, your island will be getting smaller and eventual swallowed up.

How has this happened in a nation founded by Christians? A country full of churches, including Trinity Church where on April 30, 1789, the nation itself was consecrated to God and prayed over by George Washington and his fellow patriots immediately following Washington's Inauguration as President. How is it possible that the Church, the bride of Christ, has failed to transfer its legacy of knowledge and faith in God, Jesus, and the Great Commission from one generation to the next? Moreover, failed to do this within its very own community? Furthermore, how could the "Good News" message become less appealing to the masses than Secularism, Islam, and the Occult?

I could point to several causes, but the one that I find common among people I talk to who have stopped going to church, or never started, is simple. The failure of the faithful to have given their children and grandchildren a reason for the hope that was in them. Were they just assuming that they knew? Or was it that their parents didn't really have a reason? Maybe they had only considered themselves Christian because their parents and grandparents were. They may have gone to church as children, and perhaps were even baptized and gone through confirmation. However, in reality, it was just something one did, and a label passed down from one generation to the next — a social group affiliation that had become a habit, and nothing more. If you think about it for a moment, you'll know that is true.

So, can a new, more dynamic music program, or an exciting new kid's activity program get people to stay? Can it draw the millennial relativist out from the comfort of their home on Sunday morning? Will those changes make Christianity and the local church attractive and relevant to the life of a member of Generation-Z? No, they already have their preconceived notions about Christianity and where it fits into their life if at all. As I quoted earlier, Barna Research reported that perhaps as much as 50% of people who already attend a church are not even Christians. As the mainstream culture turns more hostile to Christians, how many of these churchgoers will continue to attend services? Who

in your surrounding community will want to cross your threshold to even investigate Christianity? They think they already know what it is.

Now if you are not sure about that 50% figure, then you need to look no further than what has happened to Willow Creek Church of South Barrington, IL. It enjoyed an attendance of over 25,000 before a scandal erupted around the founding pastor during the “Me Too” uproar. Their audience is now less than half what it was 24 months ago. That tells me that half that congregation did NOT have its faith in Jesus Christ as the reason for their hope and their attendance. No, the congregation had their hope fixed to a man, or the entertaining music and child programs. Or maybe it was just the sense of power and prestige of belonging to the largest church in the Chicagoland area with a pastor who had counseled and was friends with a President of the United States.

So, if a new more dynamic music program, or an exciting new child activity program or even a fancy new building is NOT going to keep people or draw new people to your church . . . is there NO hope?

No, there is always hope, for God makes a way when there appears to be no way. He is still drawing people to Him —

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

- John 12:32 (KJV)

God prepares them and puts the longing, the emptiness, the pain, the fear; whatever is necessary into their heart. They may not recognize it as their need for God, for a Savior, but it’s there. Few are going to say to themselves, “I need to get to a Christian church.” But they are now looking for an answer, something to fill that God-shaped hole in their soul. HOW does your church compete against the 4 Trends? There is a way, one thing that is universal and never changes. Something that everybody needs, seeks, and wants. Have you guessed it? It’s LOVE.

Therefore, to become relevant again, the Church must teach its member community and the greater community outside its doors how to refocus on the one thing that touches everyone at the heart level, pure, sacrificial LOVE. It must find a way to be the vehicle to connect them to the people in their life that they love and make that connection

on an even deeper level. Yes, love is what universally matters to people. If you want to talk to people about God's love for them, you start by talking about whom they love and who loves or has loved them.

**“But now faith, hope, love, abide these three;
but *the greatest of these is love.*”**

- 1 Corinthians 13:13 *NASB*

To learn more about how to make that connection with your member community and the greater community outside your doors, see *The Legacy Focus Program*.