Liberty University

**Reflection Paper III**

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by

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## Introduction

The churches in America are in a period of change. Models for ministry have been developed that present new options to ministers that seek to reach their communities. This paper will consider the traditional model that the vast majority of churches utilize and reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of this model. In addition, the paper will discuss the attractional model of ministry, considering its strengths and weaknesses, as well as looking specifically at the thoughts of Pastor Rick Warren as he describes how he considered building an effective attractional model church. The paper will then describe this writer's church and the model it utilizes.

## Analysis of the Traditional Church

The structure of the traditional church finds its roots in the methods used in the Catholic Church. A trained clergy was tasked with continuing to transfer knowledge to younger clergy entering the ministry. Since it was relatively uncommon for most people to read, and there was a lack of reading material, the clergy were generally regarded to be intellectually elite. They became a destination for those of a more intellectual bent. The traditions of the church were passed down from generation to generation and remained relatively unchanged for centuries. The Protestant Reformation began a process that fragmented the Catholic Church, and over time, churches and denominations formed based upon their interpretations of Scripture and the doctrines they established. A separate group from the Reformers were those who ultimately birthed the thoughts that lead to the Free Church movement. This movement found fertile ground in America, where distrust and disdain for established ecclesiastical structures were common. The Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, and many other denominations were established

and developed their own methods of ecclesiastical order.  It was still common for these churches

to seek intelligent and trained men who had studied at seminaries.

These ministers often had to have an entrepreneurial trait as they would have to establish

a church in a place without a church.  The frontier of America was harsh, and there was great

danger in moving West.  As the West was settled, new churches were established by these

enterprising ministers.  They were often one of the few in their towns who could read, and they

were expected to display leadership to their congregation.  This repeated condition established a

tradition that the pastor was supposed to preach, teach, marry, bury, baptize, and perform

communion.  These people wanted the biblical community of the church and relied upon the

pastor to care for them and to reach the lost.

Over time, this has led to hundreds of thousands of churches being birth into this model

and was highly effective in a time where people were generally open to God's Kingdom.  The

traditional church usually grew no larger than 150 people, which was about as many people as

the pastor could serve.[1]  A much smaller number of traditional churches grew larger than one

hundred and fifty individuals, and over time, the number of traditional churches has begun to

decline in America.  The post-modern mentality of the populace has made it more difficult for

the ministers to be the primary evangelists, and the unchurched people are less interested in

going to a church to see what it is all about.

The tradition of the worship services are important to many of the congregants and

provides a basis of security and certainty that aids many.[2] These types of churches have

ministered to many millions of individuals and have been the primary tool that God has used to

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[1] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 243.

[2] Alan Knox, "What is a traditional church?", (theassemblingofthechurch, May 21, 2011), Accessed on June 12, 2020, from http://assembling.alanknox.net/2011/05/replay-what-is-a-traditional-church/.

grow the Kingdom in America. This past success seems to have lost effectiveness in the current culture and is less likely to develop disciple-making disciples that prior generations seem to have done. The traditional church's reliance on the minister to be the only active evangelist, as well as the host of other ministerial duties, limits the impact many of these churches have upon their communities.

## Analysis of the Attractional Church

The attractional church is predominately a twentieth-century institution. It could be argued that Charles Spurgeon and Dwight L. Moody used some of the methods that the attractional church is based upon. One key attribute of the attractional church is to have a charismatic leader. These individuals can communicate well and have the personality that others wish to engage with on an ongoing basis. These gifted individuals are often highly educated and quite intelligent. These men tend to attract other capable people and can organize their churches to build large structures and serve the needs of thousands of individuals. These leaders operate more like corporate CEO's and see their role as casting vision for the church and leading the organization to achieve that vision.[3]

In the current day, these leaders often are not part of the mainstream of denominational life but are more likely to establish networks of like-minded church leaders. These churches profess evangelical values and place a high value upon reaching the lost in their communities.[4] A high value is placed upon excellence, and their worship services and other ministries display professionalism that is not common among churches. These churches are likely to use marketing

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[3] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 231.

[4] Brad Blocksom, "The Missional Model vs. The Attractional Model for Church", (Think Theology.org, February 17, 2015), Accessed on June 12, 2020, from http://thinktheology.org/2015/02/17/the-missional-model-vs-the-attractional-model-for-church/.

campaigns to attract non-churched people to visit them, and they program their messaging to be relevant to those people's lives. The ministries are constructed to remove any negative impressions they might have and to make them feel comfortable as they participate in the worship services. The preaching is generally focused on topical issues that are important in the visitor's lives.

These churches seek to connect those they have reached with a salvific message to the church small group ministries. These small groups usually meet away from the church facility in member's homes, and the groups are encouraged to be highly relational. Typically, most of the people involved in an attractional church are not connected to the small group ministry and would be considered to have a low spiritual maturity. Disciple-making is typically low in the attractional model.

These churches usually value numerical growth, the highly excellent performance of the weekend services, the number of people they see respond accepting Jesus as Lord, and the growth of their financial revenues year after year. Of course, this is not all that attractional churches seek to accomplish, but these are usually standard metrics that they all measure and set goals to achieve at some level. These churches gather many people and expose them to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, it is common for these churches to have as big of a "back door" problem, people leaving, as they have the opportunity to see many come in the front door. It is difficult for most people to find connectivity in this large church format.

## Twelve Characteristics of a Purpose Driven Church

One mega-church pastor named Rick Warren authored two books that have gained widespread acceptance. These books, *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church,* have allowed Warren the opportunity to explain why he chose to move away from a traditional

model church and develop the attractional church.  His simple argument for this move was that

he did not think the traditional church was easily able to adapt to reach the people of the current

culture.[5]  He described twelve characteristics that he felt a purpose-driven church should

consider.[6]

1. They have a Purpose Statement (in their own words) that describes their commitment to building the church around the five New Testament purposes: worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry.
2. They use a Purpose Driven ("PD") strategy to fulfill their purpose statement. While using a variety of terms, a PD strategy brings people to Christ and into membership in God's family, then builds them up to maturity, then equips them for ministry in the church, and then sends them out on a life mission in the world in order to bring glory to God.
3. They organize around a PD structure, which insures balance and gives equal emphasis to all five New Testament purposes.
4. They program by purpose.
5. They staff by purpose.
6. The pastor preaches by purpose.
7. They form small groups on purpose.
8. They calendar by purpose.
9. They budget by purpose.
10. They build by purpose.
11. They evaluate by purpose.
12. Most PD Churches are built from the outside-in, rather than in the traditional way from the inside out.

Warren's methods speak to a highly structured mental construct that aids the leadership

in making the necessary decisions for operating the church.  The vision to achieve their purposes

is used as a "guide-rail" to keep them pointed toward achieving their goals.  Warren is quick to

explain to others that these methods will not necessarily work in their ministry context.  He

recommends seeking the Lord and building a vision for ministry based upon what the Lord

challenges that local church to endeavor to do.

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[5] Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 41.

[6] Rick Warren, "Twelve Characteristics of a Purpose Driven Church", Purpose Driven Church, Accessed on June 13, 2020 from https://pd.church/12-characteristics-purpose-driven-church/.

**Characteristics of this Writer's Church**

The Crossing Church, where this writer serves, began as an attractional model church. The lead pastor is a charismatic individual, who studied at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and gained his MDiv with a specialization in Church Planting. His vision was to establish a church to reach those far from God. He has a natural tendency toward evangelism and has been able to grow the church to the point that it has three campuses where three thousand five hundred attend on weekends and an online campus that usually has over five thousand viewers. The lead pastor has gathered a staff of individuals who have been raised from within the congregation. He has hired three executive staff who have professional degrees and years of experience working in the mega-church environment. The church has prioritized building the small group ministry as a way of combating the "back door" losses that routinely occur. In addition, the church has established a Bible College to provide training for the members who wish to grow in the knowledge of the Lord as well as become more proficient in becoming disciple-makers. The college is part of a multi-pronged approach to move toward helping disciples become effective disciple-makers.

Conclusion

Each church leader must consider how they intend to lead God's people toward the accomplishment of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission with the context of their local church. The traditional church model appears to limit the effectiveness of the local church due to the definition that the clergy does the ministry and the laity watches and is served by the clergy. The attractional model seeks to gather the lost but cannot rest in that one purpose as the charge to make disciples who make disciples requires that significant energy be expended to

create a healthy church, full of connected believers.[7]  The larger staffs that can be deployed by

the attractional churches provide for efforts to be developed that grow a biblical community and

turn the church to become an evangelistic, dicipling organization.  Neither model fully describes

what the church should be, and it is up to each minister to carefully build the local body to

become the ministry outpost that God intends it to be.

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[7] Rod Dempsey, *Presentation: Traditional Church and Attractional Church Models,* (Liberty University, November 23, 2015), Retrieved on June 12, 2020, from https://learn.liberty.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_621246_1&content_id=_39428153_1.

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