

The Holy Spirit as the Precursor of Church Growth: A Study of Acts of the Apostles

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100700975>

Received: 01 August 2026; Accepted: 06 August 2026; Published: 18 August 2026

ABSTRACT

In recent times, many Church leaders have misinterpreted the concept and dynamics of Church Growth. They lack the full understanding of its implications, though familiar with the term “Church Growth”. Many Church leaders believe that the membership of their Churches would increase because of their hard work and prayer, without giving the Holy Spirit the needed attention in the Church.

Many Churches have relied on their own efforts without any outcome, thinking they can grow a church by their hard work, and even the way some of our leaders (Pastors) invoke the Holy Spirit as if the jurisdiction of the Holy Spirit lies in their hands, has led some members losing essence of the indwelling and power of the Holy Spirit.

This project seeks to explain who the Holy Spirit is and how the Holy Spirit can be the precursor of Church Growth, studying from the Acts of the Apostles.

However, it is concluded that church cannot grow effectively as in the sense of ‘total growth’ without the workings of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is crucial for Christians to have deep fellowship with the Holy Spirit through spontaneous Prayers and Bible Studies in order to be endowed with the Holy Spirit’s Power from on high both as individuals and collectively as a church.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

When we talk about the Holy Spirit as the precursor of Church growth, many Christians have an idea of what it is and can talk about it, but the way it would be explained by one person would be different from the other. Different people may have different approaches and understanding to the above topic. These approaches would be informed by their religious experiences and background. In this section, the researcher would introduce the entire study about “Holy Spirit as the precursor of Church Growth: A study of Acts of the Apostles.

The researcher would reflect on the command of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the Church as recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew, which is also known as the “Great Commission”. This commission is stated as follows: And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’ Matthew 28:18-20.

This commission is also recorded elsewhere in the New Testament as “And he said to them, Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). “And that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Luke 20:21) and “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of earth” (Acts 1:8).

The desire to fulfill the Great Commission, that is, to evangelize the unbeliever, disciple the new convert and integrate him/her into the Church as responsible member has been the researcher's passion to look into how the Holy Spirit can bring growth of the Church. The Church should seize every opportunity within her powers and abilities to proclaim the Gospel of Christ everywhere as a witness to all in order to make trained and obedient disciples for our Lord Jesus Christ, thereby making them whole persons, spiritually and physically. Critically looking at the number of times and occasions this commission is repeated in the New Testament, is apparently that our Lord desires nothing among his disciple than the growth of His body (Church).

Statement of the Problem

Many leaders of the Church have misunderstood the concept and dynamics of Church growth. In recent times a lot of Churches have sprout up and are using all sort of means to get more members, whilst some have relied on their own efforts without any outcome, thinking they can grow a church by their hard work. The nature of some of our Charismatic and Orthodox Churches today and how some leaders invoke the Holy Spirit has led some members loosing essence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit on Christians. The researcher seeks to find out what effects the Holy Spirit has on Church growth.

Richard Foli (1994) in his book, *Christianity in Ghana, A comparative Church growth study*, states that, a lot of people are familiar with the term Church growth, but they lack the full understanding of all the implications thereof. He explains that many Church leaders believe that the membership of their Churches would increase because of their hard work and prayer. This understanding limits the entire concept of Church growth to increase in membership. Of course, increase in membership is the desire of every Church leader. Indeed, whenever the term Church growth is used the first impression many Christians allude to is increase in membership of a Church. But if that is all there is about Church growth then, it will also be insightful to ask whether a member transferring his or her membership to another denomination or even to another branch of the same denomination can be said to be growth.

Donald McGavran (1970), a prominent member of the Church Growth Movement, however, confronts this erroneous understanding of Church growth seen solely in terms of increase in membership by stating in his book, *Understanding Church Growth* that, *"The goal of Church growth studies is not merely correct facts as to the quality of growth. It is not sufficient to see the structure clearly, though that must be done. The goal is through evaluation of the facts to understanding the dynamics of church growth"*. McGavran (1970) thus suggests that, in seeking to establish the growth status of the church, the focus should not only be on the increase in the statistical returns. There are other vital components of growth that are worth investigating for proper assessment as to whether or not the church is indeed growing, for instance, the importance place on the Holy Spirit by member. This could be determined by the attitude and behavior of the youth.

C. Peter Wagner (2000), another Church Growth Movement member intimates that one of the integral components of Jesus' mission which informed him about the Great Commission mandate to his followers was that He (Jesus Christ) had come into this world among others to "build Church" according to Matthew 16:18. Building the church of Jesus Christ, as described by Jesus Christ and implementation by His followers in the book of Acts involves some key elements like the power of the Holy Spirit etc. This is mirrored in Jesus' final words to the disciples, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8).

Wagner therefore points out that, the most obvious thing about this scenario to sober pastors and church leaders is that no human plan or strategy could possibly accomplish the task (The Great Commission). It can only be done with an extraordinary outpouring of supernatural power through the Holy Spirit.

This nullifies the idea held by some church leaders that Church growth would only come about by dint of their hard work. It should rather be understood that for the success of the Great Commission and in every Church growth endeavour, much is dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit. This can be supported by the fact of 1 Corinthians 3:6 "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

The researcher would look at what the power of the Holy Spirit is and how the Holy Spirit can be the precursor of Church growth.

Objectives of the Study

Since time immemorial, well-being Christians have been very passionate about Christ's mandate to his Church, Go and make disciples of all nations, thereby building and growing His Church. It is obvious that until Christ returns for the second time, we will hold the fort from generation to generation. However, in the order to succeed, scholars have come out with a lot of plans, programs, principles, rules and blueprint to follow. Research has revealed various accusations and counter accusations stretching from one to the other. The researcher thinks that to keep the balance, it will be prudent to look at the following:

1. How the Great Commission was carried out among the first followers of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles.
2. How a church should go about this Great Commission business to effectively win those who have not accepted Christ to come to faith in Christ thereby expanding Christ's Church and His Kingdom.

Specific Objectives:

- Analyze the Holy Spirit's manifestations in the early church and their relevance to contemporary faith communities.
- Identify obstacles hindering the full expression of the Holy Spirit's power in modern Christianity.
- Assess the impact of church commercialization and commodification on spiritual growth.

Research Questions

1. What specific manifestations of the Holy Spirit's empowering work were evident in the early church, and how can they be applied today?
2. To what extent do contemporary Christian communities replicate the Spirit-led practices of the early church?
3. What are the primary barriers to the full realization of the Holy Spirit's power in today's church?

Significance of the Study

A lot has been said on Church growth and its importance. Scholars and missiologists have written about what Church growth is about, but it appears a lot of emphasis is place on structural and numerical growth of the Church rather than the importance of the Holy Spirit. Again, many believers see Church growth activities as so complex as to even talk about in a church. Sometimes in a Christian denomination, Church growth activities or evangelism is the preserve of a few believers or the evangelism committee. This research will help Christians to understand Church growth and its importance and why the need to help in the process of making disciples.

Delimitations of the Study

In compiling this research, many of the New Testament books could have also been used, but the researcher primarily restricted himself to the Acts of the Apostles.

The researcher focused specifically on the topic: The Holy Spirit as the Precursor of Church growth, a study of the Acts of the Apostles.

Limitations of the Study

This research was limited to the study of Acts of the Apostles and a few literature books. The challenge encountered has to do with the availability of some of the books. Despite the challenges, the researcher was able to overcome it and hope the research made so far would challenge the Church to improve upon her skills and knowledge in witnessing to enable Church growth.

Organisation of the Rest of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter One: This section focuses on the general introduction, which is sub-divided into background of the study, statement of the problem, aims and objectives of the study, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, limitations of the study and organization of the rest of the study.

Chapter Two: This section deals with the literature review.

Chapter Three: This chapter takes care of the methodology used in the research work.

Chapter four: This chapter focuses on discussions.

Chapter five: This chapter deals with the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is a description and critical analysis of what other authors have said on matters relating to the topic under consideration. A lot of literature exists on the concept of Church growth. Through conferences, seminars and reflections, scholars make useful presentations on Church growth activities and their challenges. For instance, during the 2016 Archbishop Lemaire Memorial Lectures held at the St. Nicholas Seminary, the Ven. Dr. George Kotei Neequaye made several insightful comments touching on our passion for mission, motivation for evangelism and among others.

The focus of this research is to find out the clear picture of Church growth as espoused by our Lord Jesus Christ in the Great Commission, the Holy Spirit as a precursor of Church growth, how the early followers of Christ carried this commission in the Acts of the Apostles and how to identify a true local growing church. The researcher would critically review relevant literature on the above areas. Among the literature to be reviewed are the following:

- Christianity in Ghana, A comparative Church Growth study by Richard Foli (2006).
- The acts of the Holy Spirit by C. Peter Wagner (2000).
- Natural Church Development by Christian A. Schwarz (2003).

The Critical Review

The first to be considered is Christianity in Ghana, A Comparative Church Growth Study by Richard Foli, in which he designated a chapter to general Church growth principles. In his work Foli points out that it is a fact that Church growth is fundamentally defined in terms of increase in membership because people do not see the clear picture of Church growth. He argues that; *“Any conception of church growth, which is limited to increase in church membership, is not adequate, (even though) it is true to say, nonetheless, that the terms ‘Church Growth’ suggests an overriding concern with numerical increase of church membership”*

Foli points out that the Church growth movement or anyone who seeks to investigate the dynamics of Church Growth in fulfillment of the Great Commission is to make available to churches and their leadership, clues for the local Church to see the way forward more clearly. This will make the local Church's missionary attempt to be more effective.

Foli brings to the fore that, quite a number of people are affront to the Church growth movement because they see some of their principles and claims as unrealistic. This is because *"The writers have simply used church growth terminology as set of pegs on to which they have preconceived theological ideas. If they are bad theological ideas, the use of Church growth terms does not improve the theology."*

However, Foli spells out that the authenticity of the theology behind Church growth movement may be summarized as: **God's Initiative:** That no church can grow with integrity by simply following a predetermined course of action. If there is a genuine growth, then it is because God's spirit is at work. **The Biblical Sense of Time:** That receptivity of the Gospel of Christ is on timing. This idea is based on the biblical axiom that there is time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3). And that time presents us with opportunity. When opportunity is wedded to response, there is harvest and fulfillment.

Evangelism: That the aim of every evangelism effort is to persuade people to become followers of Christ Jesus; to seek to do God's will in their daily lives, and to become responsible members of Christ's church. **The Mission of the Church:** That evangelism and mission are not interchangeable words. Thus, mission is that Christians do those things Christ expressed in His own ministry, such as showing of love, compassion, purity and others. Whilst evangelism is, making Christ known and persuading people to have faith in Christ, this is part of the church's mission.

Due to the complex nature of understanding Church growth, the author tries to define Church Growth by looking at two main sets of growth posited by Church Growth experts. One group sees church Growth numerically. This underpinned by the factors they allude to. These factors are **Biological growth** – that is through child birth; **Transfer growth** – that is Christians moving from one community church to the other in a new Community or from one parish to the other as in the Anglican Church; **Conversion growth** – where unbelievers come to rest on their faith intelligently on the Jesus Christ.

The other group, however, sees Church growth occurring in the following areas. **Internal growth** – this is also known as qualitative growth, and here, a lot of members are conscious of deepening their religious experience. **Expansion growth-** Occurs when new converts or members are being received to be members of the church. It also involves those who might have been brought up in the church by a parent or a guardian. **Extension growth-** is where a congregation plants another Church of their own kind in their neighborhood. **Bridging growth-** takes place where Churches consciously and deliberately cross to plant a Church in new culture. It is implicit to understand Church Growth in terms of both qualitative and quantitative. This is what Foli has termed as **Total Church growth**. He concludes by setting out some essential marks of a local growing Church.

Upon critical reflection on Foli's work, one makes some insightful observation in respect of the relevance of the material to the researcher's main focus. In the first place, he is commended for providing a deeper theological insight and general over view to my research topic. This is seen not only in how he reveals the traditional understanding of Church growth, but also on how brilliantly he bridges the various schools of thought concerning a valid understanding of the concept of Church growth. The author alludes; it is inadequate to see Church growth in terms of increase in membership. Thus, Church growth must be seen in both qualitative and quantitative terms. In his view, he explains further, that Church growth study should provide clues for local churches to assist them to fulfill the Great Commission mandate. He continues to provide us with essential marks or indicators of a local growing church.

Though the content of Foli's work is very much appreciable, the researcher would like to look more into how Holy Spirit can be a precursor of Church growth or in other words, the role the power of Holy Spirit plays in Church growth. The author intimated that the basic theological background for Church growth is God's initiative, thus alluding to God's power. As far as this work is concerned, it is not enough to cite God's power

without explaining his work and activities towards Church growth. This is why C. Peter Wagner's work is worth considering for a discussion of the power of the Holy Spirit in relation to Church growth.

In his book, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, C. Peter Wagner (2000), a renowned missiologist and a member of the Church growth Movement, makes some profound contributions that is beneficial to accomplishment of the Great Commission mandate. First, he asserts that more than half of the New Testament is dedicated to explaining the origins of Christianity and for that matter the Church. These are the Gospel and the book of Acts. For him, the primary emphasis of the New Testament is directed toward understanding why and how unbelievers can become believers. So, the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are designed to inform us on how the Church came into being and how it grew in the past and how it should happen today".

The four Gospels tell us remarkable Church growth about how Jesus began His earthly ministry. He attracted twelve disciple and some men and women. This group soon grew to be seventy according to Luke 10. By the time of Acts of Apostles, they had got to an hundred and twenty. In first Corinthians 15:6, we read that five hundred believers saw the risen Christ at once. In simple calculations, by the time of Jesus' ascension, believers might be numbering about six hundred and twenty.

Wagner C. P. (2000), continues that the Gospels are foundational to the Great Commission mandate. But the Acts of the Apostles follow to show how the Christians (the Church) built on the solid foundation laid by Jesus after He ascended. The book of Acts is intended to be a Paradigm of how the Kingdom of God would spread worldwide through the times until the return of Jesus Christ, and the Acts of the Apostles tells us what He expects His followers to do, both then and now.

Second, Wagner points that believers needed the Holy Spirit's power to spread the gospel of Christ worldwide. For example, soon after Jesus' resurrection He told His Disciples to wait for the Power of the Holy Spirit until they embark on the Great Commission mandate. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you shall be witness to Me in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). For Wagner, it seems an 'unusual thing'. Though, the disciples who had been with Jesus for three years and had thoroughly been instructed through both word and deed in theology, ethics, in worship, and ministry; they had on the job training, they were yet not fully equipped for the mandate. This means Supernatural Power (The power of the Holy Spirit) is necessary for God's purposes to be fulfilled. He explains further that,

It is easy to get caught up in techniques and methodology, especially when they have produced positive results in the past such as Jesus' ministry had. The Church Growth movement, of which I am part, began to succumb to this tendency toward the end of the 1970 s when the movement was around 25 years old. At that time, some of our critics began to complain that we had begun to rely on human technology instead of spiritual power. The dangers of such a trap are obvious. The Kingdom of God cannot successfully invade the kingdom of Satan by ingenuity alone, but only being endowed with power from on high.

Wagner further alleges that, it would be wrong to leave an impression that we are to choose between power of the Holy Spirit on one hand and missiological technology on the other. The two must go together like the two wings of a bird, because neither technology nor power by itself will effectively fulfil Jesus' Great Commission. Thus Wagner concludes that, no human plan or strategy alone can possibly accomplish the Great Commission. It can only be done with extra outpouring of supernatural power through the Holy Spirit.

The author has scholarly set out the framework within the issue of Church Growth techniques and methods that they must complement the power of the Holy Spirit in Church Growth. He is also commended for practical insights and personal experience on this subject. Notwithstanding, we cannot wholly take it for the purposes of this work. The researcher's focus is on the role of the power of the Holy Spirit as the precursor of Church Growth endeavours. Also this work is interested in how to be acquainted with the power of Holy Spirit so as to be effective in Church Growth business.

The third literature for this study is Christian A. Schwarz's (2003) work on the Natural Church Development, A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches. To begin with, Schwarz claims that a lot of people do not embrace Church Growth principles by way of ensuring the growth of a local Church.

He argues that their many popular concepts fail to go deep enough and are literally superficial. He explains, 'For now, I simply want to emphasize the need for recognizing the "underground" realities, without which we cannot answer the question of "why" there is growth'.

Again, Schwarz sees Church growth principles as "technocratic" endeavour, in that instead of using God's means, they try to do things in their own strength. Schwarz tries to use *theologia Naturalis* (Natural theology) by comparing Church growth to plant growth. He concedes that there are the difficulties involved in such a theology. However, he claims plants grow by themselves having the suitable environment and that the Church can grow all by itself where there are right quality characteristics in place. These quality characteristics include empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, Inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need – oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. He concludes that 'no Church wanting to grow qualitatively and quantitatively can afford to overlook any one of these eight quality characteristics.'

Critically, reflecting on Schwarz work, he accepts the complex nature of Church growth. He debunks unrealistic principles of the Church growth movement that they are only superficial. He is commended for coming out with the eight quality characteristics that can enhance Church growth. Schwarz's understanding seems like; where there is no Church health, there cannot be Church growth. He also concludes that we need quantitative and qualitative growth of the Church.

In Christian A. Schwarz's material, he condemns what he calls 'technocratic' principles with popular Church growth principles which the experts think that by carefully applying them in your local Church these may lead to Church growth. One of the characteristics is 'love relationship' among believers. From the researcher's experience, true love cannot be experienced in the local Church without the presence of the power of the Holy Spirit, who seems to be relegated in the background. Well, the research cannot wholly take the material for this research because the research is interested in the role the power of the Holy Spirit plays in being the precursor of Church growth once whatever human possible is in place.

Thus far, the researcher has considered three main writers in this section of the work. It is obvious from the above that all the writers have some relevant ideas on the topic under consideration. However, these ideas have not been reviewed uncritically. The researcher has attempted to critique these writers in the light of the significance of their materials to the research topic. All the three authors have glossed over the treatment of the Great Commission mandate which of course, is the bedrock for the Church to embark on activities that may bring about growth.

Conclusion

This study provides the fundamental information about the work and power of the Holy Spirit as the vital ingredient in the church's evangelistic drive. For example, I have observed from the literatures reviewed that it is inadequate to see Church growth only by way of increase in membership. Church growth must be seen in both qualitative and quantitative terms. So this study provides among others, certain clues for local churches to assist them to fulfil the Great Commission business. However, a local church would be able to achieve this kind of growth when technology and methodology is complimented by the power of the Holy Spirit.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter covers the concept of Church growth in relation to mission of the Church and the role of the Holy Spirit as a precursor. The researcher would also look at what is meant by "the precursor of the Holy Spirit" in the light of His work in the Acts of Apostles. Further, the researcher will also want to find out how the followers of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles cooperated with the Holy Spirit in fulfilling the Great Commission mandate. It is done as follows:

- Brief description of the Church

- The Great Commission Mandate
- The meaning of Church Growth
- Underlying factors of Church Growth
- Marks of a local growing Church
- The Holy Spirit
- The power of the Holy Spirit
- How to know the power of the Holy Spirit

What is the Church

According to the NIV Compact Dictionary of the Bible, the English word Church was derived from the Greek *kuriakos* which means ‘belonging to the Lord’. It is also used to stand for another Greek word *ekklesia* denoting “assembly”. It has also been used to refer to the Hebrew word *qahal* which means “congregation” in the Old Testament times. This is adopted to describe the new gathering or congregation of Jesus’ disciples.

The Greek word in the New Testament for church is *ekklesia*. It is derived from the Greek verb *ekkaleo*. The compound *ek* means “out” and *kaleo* means “to call or summon” which renders literally “to call out”. Also, *ekklesia*, (the church) has a loose connection with the Hebrew word *qahal*, which is found about “some 100 times in the Old Testament”. It is translated “congregation, assembly, company”.

The Church is not basically a human structure like a political, social or economic organism. It is a building of which Christ is the foundation (Ephesians 2:20-22). It is the fellowship of people of God (1 Peter 2:9), the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-26), and the body of Christ. Christ is the head and Christians are the members (Romans 12:5). This means that the Church draws its life from Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit (James 1:8).

Primary, the function of the Church is to pass on the good news so that others may also be quickened and cleansed. It is to preach the gospel, that is, “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age’”, (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15). Therefore, among other things, the church is to take up the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19) and to dispense the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1).

Defining the Great Commission

Coleman, R. E. (1992) in his book, *The Great Commission Lifestyle; Conforming your life to kingdom priorities*, states that the Great Commission can be seen as Jesus’ final command to the Church just before He ascended to His father. It is a deep request made on His disciples (The Church) to continue His purpose on earth. It can be referred to as Jesus’ will. The disciples (Church) were to be its executor. Therefore it is a great responsibility that Jesus has placed on the church. This responsibility is in three fold: to evangelise the sinner; to edify the believer and to worship the risen Lord as God, thereby increasing the number of believer and deepening their faith daily.

The Great Commission is a Mission to the Church

The word mission means, the sending out of a number of persons entrusted with a special work. This is exactly the position of the Church: she has been sent out to make disciples for Christ; “As my father sends me so I am sending you” (John 20:21). The Church is God’s representative on earth. He expects the Church to accomplish the task entrusted to her. This task is to proclaim to the world that Jesus loves them and that He died for their

salvation. “The son of man came to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). The mission of the Church is to seek and bring the lost to Christ.

The Great Commission as a Commission to the Church

A commission is a responsibility for which one has been given the authority to execute on another's behalf. In other words, it is authority granted to a person or organisation to act as an agent for another. It is interesting to note that the Church is given that authority to act for Christ in the reconciliation ministry. It is important to observe that each of the evangelists included the giving of power and authority to the Church for her mission.

In Matthew, Jesus assures His disciples (the Church) that because I have been given all authority I pass them on to you, so “go and make disciples”. For the Gospel of John, the authority given to the Church includes forgiving and retaining of sin (John 20:23), Mark picks on the manifestation of the authority. That is the power to perform miracles. It is worthy to note that the power to wrought miracles is not given to impress others but to witness and testify to God's confirmation of good news being preached. In Luke's view the giving of the power or authority was to enhance witnessing. That is to enable the Church to preach the good news everywhere so that the Church can overcome any spiritual or physical obstacles to obedience of the commission.

The Great Commission has become a Great Omission

An omission is something left out. It is something that has to be done but has either deliberately or accidentally left undone. Church growth experts seem to suggest that the Great Commission has not received the needed attention in recent times and that it has become a “Great Omission”. Therefore an attempt is made to find reasons why the Church, on the average has either failed, or in some cases refused to execute her mission.

Emmanuel Richard Amissah (1994) in his book *Great Commision, The Great Ommision of Today's Church* assigns a number of reasons for the Church's neglect in executing one of her major tasks that gives meaning to her existence. Among those reasons following: **Ignorance of Purpose:** That the Church is ignorant of the purposes for her being. As a result some churches end up doing what others might be doing at expense of her commission. **Lack of Vision:** Leaders provided vision to the church. If they fail to lead on the lines of the Great Commission the Church will certainly leave out the Great Commission. **Complacency:** Those big cathedrals were already full so there is no need witnessing for more souls. **Pastor dependency:** In Ephesians 4:12, pastors are responsible to equip the members to fulfil the mission. So if the churches leave the act of witnessing to the pastor or the evangelists it will surely become an omission. Some Church leaders fail to recognize and use all spiritual gifts to the Church for the fulfillment of the commission. **Lack of commitment:** The Great Commission calls for commitment and deep sacrifice. Where members are so much concerned with the cares and worries of the world it becomes difficult to get committed and dedicated members prepared to execute the commission.

The Church is sometimes financially handicapped. Especially rural churches with poor finances find it difficult to fulfil her mission. Therefore, we should all seek to work together to remove these hindrances and fulfil the Great Commission mandate as a church so that we can grow.

The Concept of Church Growth

It is somewhat difficult to simply and clearly define the term Church growth. For Church growth experts posit that “Church growth is not a package deal. It begins with each local situation, with its ministers, members, programmes and buildings”. As Foli has put it, “it has been conceded that many people have defined Church growth as purely numerical without taking into account other measurements of growth”. It is inadequate to see Church growth as only an increase in membership. Simply put, Church growth must be “total” in the sense of both “qualitative” and “quantitative”. He cites Jeffrey Harris from his book *Can British Methodism Grow again?*

"The improvement of the quality of membership is as basic to it as is numerical growth. So also is a membership which is active and responsible in today's world".

In order to arrive at a basic understanding at our level it will be expedient to look at some of the ways Church growth experts have defined the term "Church growth."

Church growth experts basically define Church growth in three main ways but using terminologies. According to Foli, Donald McGaravan uses Biological growth, Transfer growth and Conversion growth to define the term. He explains **Biological growth**, as having been derived from those born into Christian families. It should be understood that though Christians are admonished to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord, it is not likely that this type of Church growth can effectively convert and make all nations "Disciples" of Christ Jesus. It is obvious that non-Christian's birth rate is at a faster rate than Christians, for example, the Moslems who are allowed to marry as many wives as they can may have more children than Christians who believe in monogamy. It is also true that many people born into Christian homes grow to become true Disciples of Christ; others have lost their faith entirely. Therefore, the Church cannot depend on biological growth as a means of fulfilling the Great Commission leading to Church growth.

The second factor leading to Church growth is **Transfer growth**. What Donald McGaravan meant by Transfer growth is that some churches increase in membership while other decrease because they have moved from one community to another community and joining the Church in that new environment. This kind of growth is not growth at all in terms of numbers because no new person has joined the Christian community. They are new because they find themselves in a new environment. Any Church who depends largely on this kind of growth will surely omit the Great Commission.

Conversion Growth is the third kind of Church growth courtesy of McGavran. This is where unbelievers come to believe Jesus Christ as their Lord and personal savior and are baptized and become responsible members of a local church. This is the only kind of growth that comes about as a result of the Great Commission mandate.

However, all the three kinds of growth seem to be understood by increase in numbers, or they depict quantitative growth.

Foli again introduces the understanding of Ralph Winter and C. Peter Wagner. He asserts that there are four ways helpful in understanding Church growth; they are Internal growth, Expansion growth, Extension and Bridging growth. They explain **Internal Growth** having occurred when the Church is growing in quality because the members are "conscious of a deepening of their religious experience". This kind of growth brings vitality and spiritual renewal among Church members. **Expansion Growth** is also known as numerical growth. This is where a local Church is increasing in membership once new members are being added on whether by biological means, transfer or through conversion. **Extension Growth** also occurs when churches plant new churches in a similar environment as an attempt to fulfil the Great Commission mandate. **Bridging Growth** takes place when a Church deliberately plants a new Church in a different cultural setting. This growth factor also makes use of the Great Commission mandate. The four growth factors above could be reduced in terms of the two main growth being advocated by well meaning Church growth experts that it should exist in a local Church if it is actually growing. These are Qualitative growth and Quantitative growth. This is what Foli calls it "Total Church Growth".

Signs of a local growing Church

In every local Church where there is *Total Church Growth*, one can confidently conclude that the Church is a growing Church. For such churches there must be certain indicators or visible evidences manifesting in the Church and among members both in private life and during congregational worship service. These indicators are what we refer to as "signs" or "marks" of a growing church. These signs of growth are "spiritual vitality and life" under the control of the Holy Spirit. Christian A. Schwarz calls these signs of growth as *Eight quality Characteristics* which leads to Church health and consequently Church growth. Various Church growth experts and Church leaders have attempted to discuss these "signs of growth". After careful gleaning from a number of them, Foli concludes that the following are signs of a local growing church: *Constant Prayer*,

Respect for Biblical Authority, Effective Leadership, Mobilized leadership, Eventful Worship, Continuous evangelism, Compassionate Service, Openness to Change, and Released Resources.

Constant Prayer: This is a first sign evident in a growing Church. In such a Church, members are encouraged and taught to use both private and corporate prayer regularly. The Church that does not give prayer its proper place does not grow. The second evidence of a growing Church is **Respect for Biblical Authority:** Churches where the bible is allowed to speak is always renewed and reformed. **Effective Leadership:** Growing churches always have effective leadership. They have leaders who get the job done and nothing else. They also give the required vision for growth. **Mobilised Membership:** Church growth studies indicate when Church members are mobilized in the service of Christ, they grow tremendously. That is to say, each member has a particular function to fulfil and a special contribution to make in the event of evangelism, edification and worship lifestyle of the local church. **Eventful Worship** means that the worshippers present themselves before God in a way and manner acceptable and pleasing to God. Eventful worship services are those that are helpful and uplifting; members sing, dance and give enthusiastically; and where there are even first timers or seekers, they participate with joy and understanding. Any local church with these signs and others manifesting in any environment cannot help but grow.

Other “signs” of a local growing Church include; **Community life:** Fellowship is a distinguishing mark of true and healthy church. The word fellowship is in the sense of the Greek word, *Koinonia*. The root of this word is *Koinonos*, meaning a “sharer”, in terms of an ‘associate’, ‘companion’, a ‘partner’ and a ‘partaker’. It literally renders a ‘partnership’ and ‘participation’ of some sort. It also indicates a social intercourse. Sometimes it involves pecuniary and benefaction, i.e., the tendency of donating to charity, distribution in all forms and communal living must characterise this kind of fellowship in a growing Church. Christians are related eternally to each other because of our salvation through faith in Christ. Therefore the local Church must be a visible expression of community on earth.

A local growing Church would also **evangelise continuously**. There must be spontaneous evangelism; where individual Christians are encourage to witness for Christ wherever they are in their daily lives. This is sometimes called Relational Evangelism. It takes place on a personal level at home, the work place, among peers and friends. The other aspect of that Church where there is continuous evangelism is that they have planned mission and services that give opportunity to unbelievers to respond to Christ. The Church must have **Compassionate Service;** just as Christ the head of the Church was compassionate, any growing Church must exhibit such a character on the individuals and the community at large. Thus a local Church must be motivated by the love of Christ and serve its neighbourhood. The growing churches are also **Openness to change:** Change is vital to growth in every Church, yet many are not open to change. Lot of churches go by the slogan: “we have always done it this way” even if the Holy Spirit has prompted the change. Also individual lifestyles are changed toward the purposes of God as they become new creatures. Finally, McGavran has indicated that growing churches are willing to and able to **Release resources** of leadership and ministry of individual members for the service of God and humankind. Both leadership and membership are willing to give generously to support the Church’s mission.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the blessed Trinity. He is said to proceed from the Father and to be sent by the Father and the Son upon disciples, (John 14:26; 15:26). He is also the Spirit of the Father, (Matthew 10:20; 1 Cor. 2:11); and the Spirit of Christ, (Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19) . Thus, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune Godhead, (Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthian 13:14). The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God Himself in the world. The ascription of Holiness accords to the Spirit the character and the personality of God.

There are four words which are translated “spirit” in the Bible. Two of those words are in the Hebrew and the other two are in the Greek of these four, two are used only twice: the Hebrew word *neshamah*, which means “breath” and the Greek word *phantasma*, which means “phantom” or “apparition”. The other two words are the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma*, each used several hundred times. Understanding these words is crucial to understanding the Holy Spirit.

The Hebrew *Ruach* means “breath, air, strength, wind, breeze, spirit, courage, temper, spirit”. The concepts of “wind,” “breath” and “spirit” are all related in biblical thought and language. We see these intertwined in the use of *ruach* in Ezekiel 37, which describes a great multitude of peoples being resurrected and restored to physical life to understand God’s truth. In the Greek the spirit is rendered *pneuma*. This word “primarily denotes the wind” (*akin to pneo*, “to breath” “to blow”), also “breath”; then, especially “the spirit” which, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial and powerful. *Pneuma* is the equivalent of the Hebrew *ruach*. In Luke 4:18, where Christ read from Isaiah 61:1, the Septuagint account uses *pneuma* for the Hebrew *ruach* in referring to “the spirit (*ruach/ pneuma*) of the Lord”. The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures (known commonly as the Old Testament) prepared in the third and second century B.C. and used in the time of the early Church, translated *ruach* as *pneuma*. Therefore, both words came to be used for the unseen reality of living beings, especially God and man.

Holy Spirit as a Person

The Holy Spirit is a real Person and not merely as attribute or emanation of God. It is clear from the numerous passages in the Bible which describe him as exercising the acts, thoughts, emotions and volition of a distinct intelligent person. None other than a person could be pleased, vexed, and grieved, speak, console and intercede or divide his gifts severally to everyone, as he wills. So also, in Greek as in English, the personal masculine pronouns are accorded to Him.

In a more clear sense the Holy Spirit exhibits qualities of a person. These qualities may include:

- The Holy Spirit has **intellect**. 1 Corinthians 2:10, “But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit for the Spirit searches all things, yes even the deep things of God”
- The Holy Spirit has **knowledge**. 1 Corinthians 2:11, “even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God”.
- The Holy Spirit has **emotions**. Ephesians 4:30, and grieve (*lupeo*; to make sad or sorrowful, heavy of heart) not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.
- The Holy Spirit has his **will and he makes decisions**. Acts 16:6, “now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia”.
- The Holy Spirit **loves**. Romans 15:30, “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.”

The Holy Spirit also does things only person can do. They include:

- He **teaches** you things about God and yourself. John 14:26 “but the comforter which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you”.
- He **tells** the truth. John 15:26 “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me”
- He **guides**. John 16:13 “Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak and he will show you things to come”..
- He **convinces**. John 16:8 “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment”.
- He **prays** for you. Romans 8:26-27, “Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning

which cannot be uttered. And he that searches the hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God”.

- He **commands**. Acts 13:2 “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them”.

The Holy Spirit as a Divine Person

Even though the Holy Spirit is a person, He is a Divine Person. He is equal with God the Father, and God the Son. This is proved from His association with them in a great variety of actions that are purely divine. This is evidence in the work of creation, (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 33:6; 104:30). He is honoured just as God the father and God the Son in the baptism formula, (Matthew 28:19), and in the apostolic benediction, (2 Corinthians 13:14). He receives the divine name of God, 2 Corinthian 2:10; 6:19; Hebrews 9:14). He is prayed to as God, (Revelations 1:4, 5); we can sin against Him as we sin against God, (Acts 5:3, 4; Ephesians 4:30), and blasphemy against Him is unpardonable, (Matthew 12:31).

Divine Attributes

Some of the Divine attributes of the Holy Spirit include the following:

Omnipotent – That the Holy Spirit is all powerful, (Luke 1:35). And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore, that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.

Omnipresent – He is at all places at once, (Psalms 139:7). “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee your presence?”

Omniscient – All knowing. The Holy Spirit knows everything, (1 Corinthians 2:10). “But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit searches all things, yea, and the deep things of God”.

Eternal – Hebrews 9:14 “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God; purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Equal with God – Acts 5:3-4, “But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not yours? And after it was sold, was it not in your own power? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied unto men, but unto God.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

The role that the Power of the Holy Spirit heralds in Church growth is very supreme. Only God and not human forces can build the Church. Jesus said, “I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18). The Apostle Paul also acknowledged that while he plants and Apollos waters only God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). The sovereign power of the Holy Spirit often surprises us by overriding all factors, be it contextual or institution and thereby granting vigorous growth under the most uncompromising circumstances. For McGavran asserts, “*Where the church is up against an insuperable barrier, there, no matter what you do, how much you pray, how much you work, how much you organize, how much you administer for growth, the Church either does not grow, grows only a little, or grows from within, not without*”.

The Power of the Holy Spirit in Church Growth can be seen in a number of manifestations attributed to Him, which includes: convincing and convicting the sinner to become a Christian, Enabling the Christian to lead a holy life, Bringing about physical healing and other miracles that override our natural senses and also gives boldness to believers to witness for Christ.

The Power of the Holy Spirit convinces and Convicts the Sinner

Macalao's view quoted above the power of the Holy Spirit in witnessing and Church growth activities indicates that we need not physically force or psychologically lure the unbeliever to respond to our witness for Christ. In such attempt, we normally end up in making "unbelieving Christians".

To convince, according to the Encarta dictionary is to make someone to be sure or certain about something. To convict on the other hand, means to make someone to accept that he or she is in the wrong of some sort and therefore willing to change. For Willmington H. L. (1984), the Power of the Holy Spirit will always "track down the sinner", convince and convict him, leading to total transformation.

According to J. C. Ryle on the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, he claims that; "There is hope in the Gospel for any man, so long as he lives. There is infinite willingness in Christ to pardon sin. There is infinite power in the Holy Spirit to change hearts. The hardest and wicked of hearts can be changed. Those very people, who now seem most utterly dead in sins, may be raised to a new being, and walk before God in newness of life. The Holy Spirit is a mighty, merciful, and loving Spirit. He passes by no one, because his sins are black and scarlet. For example, there was nothing in the Corinthians that the Holy Spirit by His power should come down and quicken them. Paul reports of them, that they were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortionists. Such, he says, were some of you! Yet even those people, the Holy Spirit made alive".

The Power of the Holy Spirit Enables Godly Living

The Holy Spirit admonishes Christians through Apostle Peter; as; "Therefore, prepare your minds for action: be self controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written; "Be holy, because I am Holy" (1 Peter 1:13-16). By this scripture, Christians are called upon to holy and Godly living. Anything short of this is unchristian.

Ashly Scott asserts that the Holy Spirit leads to change; a holy Christians living. He explains that Paul graphically describes the lives of those who live apart from God's Spirit: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). In contrast, he presents us with another way of life: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Power of the Holy Spirit gives Boldness to a witness

Before Jesus was taken into Heaven, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would give them power to "witness" about Jesus. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth," Acts 1:8. After we come to faith in Christ, we receive power, because God's Holy Spirit is dwelling in us. God empowers us to take the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the world. All we need to do is to yield to the power of the Holy Spirit. The closer we are to the image of Christ, through the transforming power of the Spirit, the more clearer the command is.

The Power of the Holy Spirit produces "Signs and Wonders" in Witnessing

In his work, 7 Power Principles I learned after Seminary, Wagner C. P. (2005) posits that when Jesus ministered during His earthly Ministry, He healed the sick as routinely as predictable. And so when He sent out His disciples to preach the kingdom of God, part of their message was literally to demonstrate tangibly that God the Holy Spirit has power to heal the sick and manifest in signs and wonders.

He explains by quoting Jesus as saying, "As you go, preach, saying, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons" (Matthew 10:7-10). He further argues that Jesus

wanted the demonstration of the Spirit's Power to follow the disciples in their witnessing, that is why He instructed them to wait until they were clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Any witnessing or evangelism which is characterized by signs and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit elicits great response and aids conversion of souls for Christ.

In summarizing, the Holy Spirit possesses all the divine attribute of God, He possesses all the characteristics of personality. By His power he convicts and transforms sinners, enables Christians to lead godly lives. He also grants boldness to the Christian disciple in witnessing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Holy Spirit As The Precursor Of Church Growth. A Study Of Acts Of The Apostles

Introduction

This chapter briefly looks at the pattern of evangelism as pertains to the Great Commission mandate and how the Holy Spirit enabled the early disciples to become effective and then lessons derived from it.

Evangelism in the Church –Acts of the Apostles

According to Rainer T. S. (1990), the subject of evangelism and Church growth in the Book of Acts have been unaccountably neglected in recent years. Church growth writers refer to Acts rather consistently to support their theology and practice. A return to the principles and practices unfolded in the book of Acts is the only reliable answer for effective Great Commission endeavour or evangelism and that will ultimately lead to total Church growth.

Defining the core themes

It is necessary to define the two words used to describe the central activity of the Acts of the Apostles: Evangelism and Church growth. Evangelism in Acts is the communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ through verbal proclamation and lifestyle witness, with the intent of leading a person or group of persons to salvation in Christ. Church growth is the building of the Church primarily through evangelism. It should be noted that Evangelism and the resulting Church growth are main activity of the great Commission mandate of the early Church.

Critically studying the book of Acts of the Apostles, Rainer T. S. attempts some principle which may be yard stick for today's Church as it were. He emphasizes that, "Indeed, contemporary evangelism and Church growth would be less than complete without these basic precepts established by the early Church" They are the following: Prayer, Spiritual warfare, God's sovereignty, strategy, and indigenization.

The Principle of Prayer

Though Church growth writers undoubtedly recognize that prayer is indispensable to the growth of the Church, many of the contemporary writings fail to give prayer the prominent place it deserves. The principle of unified prayer is a thread that runs throughout the Acts of the Apostles. Luke's initial description of the prayer session of the 120 (Acts 1:15) shows that they followed Christ's command to wait for the Holy Spirit by obediently praying as a group with one mind. The power of "prayer in agreement" again is established when the Sanhedrin threatened the followers with punitive action if they continued to speak about the "name", Jesus Christ (Acts 4:18).

The Principle of Spiritual Warfare

Prayer was the primary weapon of the early Church because the followers knew their battle was "not against flesh and blood but.against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms". From the early disciples we are to open our spiritual eyes to see the ongoing conflicts between the Holy Spirit and Satan. One such confrontation is stated explicitly in Acts 5:3 when Peter accuses Ananias; how he allowed himself for Satan to

fill his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit by keeping for himself some of the money he had got from the sale of land. For Rainer, Satan first attempts to destroy the Church with persecution by means of the Sanhedrin when the apostles are arrested, jailed, tried, flogged, and forbidden to preach (Acts 4:1-22 and 5:17-42). The Second ploy of the devil is to ruin the Christian fellowship with the moral compromise of Ananias and Sapphira. The third weapon of Satan in Acts is the subtle ploy of distraction. He attempts to divert the apostles from their calling of prayer and preaching by creating a problem of social administration (Acts 6:1-7). At each point when Satan attacks and the Church overcomes, there is a new wave of revival in the Church: "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly.." (Acts 6:7). There cannot be effective witnessing of the Gospel leading to total Church growth without serious spiritual warfare through constant prayer.

The Principle of God's Sovereignty

Despite the numerous conflicts and setbacks to the early Church, Luke communicates clearly that God is the final victor. God is in control. The martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) does not reduce the church to a level of frightened ineffectiveness. On the contrary, the persecution that broke out against the disciple scattered the Church throughout Judea and Samaria. God in His sovereignty turned defeat into a larger victory (Acts 8:4). Rainer agrees with M. Green when he asserts that Stephen's death led to the beginning of a massive lay movement which spread the gospel. The 'amateur missionary', eventually became the leaders who changed the face of the movement by preaching to the Greeks and initiating the Gentile mission at Antioch. Though we are the vehicles to communicate the gospel, our strength and power is from God. God in His sovereignty is able to use any condition to further His purpose.

The Principle of Strategy

Luke emphasizes the vital necessity for human cooperation. With specific instructions from the Saviour, the apostles established a strategy of evangelism to reach Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Such evangelistic strategy should not be seen as a mandate action to fulfil the perfect purpose of God. An evangelism that requires no work of the believers usually results in no or little impact.

For example, the ministry of Paul provides a clear example of an evangelistic strategy that he followed with only few exceptions. In an urban area, the apostle would typically go first to the synagogue where he proclaimed the gospel to Jews and God-fearers. He would then take his message to other Gentiles (i.e. other than the God-fearers), obediently following the command to take the gospel first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles (Acts 17:16-34). Though the synagogue would be his first stop, he would then go to the market place to proclaim the message day by day to whoever "happened to be there" (Acts 17:17). That provided an area ripe for the gospel because it was centre of public life. Paul strategically communicated the gospel on a level that would be best received by his audience. If religious people can be reached in religious buildings, secular people have to be reached in secular buildings.

The Principle of Indigenization

In the Acts of the Apostles there is principle of indigenization with regards to the Great Commission mandate and the subsequent Church growth. Paul and Barnabas often left the indigenous Churches with leadership that would provide the direction after they were gone. Rainer here asserts that though the forms of Church government vary in the NT, at several of the Churches Paul and Barnabas appointed elders to continue their leadership roles. The elders were within the Church (in each church, Acts 14:23), so the indigenization policy was complete. While the evangelistic 'policy' of Paul included doctrinal teaching and leadership appointment, the apostle ultimately left the Churches under the divine care of the Holy Spirit. Seeking God's direction, "with prayer and fasting, (he) committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23). Doctrinal guidelines and local leadership were provided, but the true step of faith came when the Church founders could walk away and leave the Church in the care of God. The indigenous Churches became the growing evangelistic Churches.

Great Commission and the Power of the Holy Spirit

Soon after Jesus resurrection, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem, as Luke records in his Gospel: “Behold, I send the promise of my father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). For Wagner, it is unusual, for having stayed with Jesus all these while, yet they cannot effectively evangelize without the Spirit’s power. He says, supernatural power is necessary for God’s purposes to be fulfilled. The disciples fervently waited in prayer until they were clothed with the power from on high as evident in out pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). They also continued and persevered in prayer as posited by Rainer. The disciples however ended up doing what was expected of them in the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the following Church growth reports were realized.

The original nucleus was 120 (Acts 1:15), Three thousand more came on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), People were subsequently being added to the church daily (Acts 2:47), Soon there were 5,000 men plus women and children (Acts 4:4), Multitudes were being saved (Acts 5:14), Additions changed to multiplication (Acts 6:1), Religious leaders began to be converted (Acts 6:7), Samaritans came to Christ (Acts 8:12), An Ethiopian was saved (Acts 8:38), Entire towns committed to Christ (Acts 9:35), A Roman proconsul believed (Acts 13:12), Large number of multitudes of Jews and Greeks accepted the faith (14:1), Churches increased in number daily (Acts 16:5), Prominent women followed Jesus (Acts 17:12), A ruler of the synagogue became a Christian with his household (18:8), So the word of the lord grew mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:20)

Wagner further suggests that, Luke specifically mentions the influence of the Holy Spirit as a means toward the conversion of many individuals and communities in Acts of Apostles. For example:

- On Pentecost, 3000 were attracted through the miracles of tongues.
- The process leading to the 5000 began with Peter and John healing the lame man at the temple gate.
- Believers were added when Peter’s shadow healed some and demons were cast out.
- The gospel broke through to Samaritans because of the miracles done through Philip.
- Many believed in Joppa because Peter raised Dorcas from the dead.
- The Proconsul believed when Paul had a power encounter with Elymas the sorcerer.
- The word of the Lord spread through Ephesus when demons were cast out through handkerchiefs blessed by Paul.

Wagner intimates that none of these signs and wonders by themselves saved anyone. They were accompanied by the preaching of the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah and the Son of God. People are saved because they put their faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord not that they were healed or delivered. However healing and deliverance make many more open to consider the claims of Jesus Christ than they would be without them. It is obvious that the presence of the power of the Holy Spirit aided the early Church in her evangelistic activities as result of constant prayer and real dependence of the Holy Spirit. For Wagner, prayer was not incidental to the apostles but rather very central in all their dealings. Prayer was spontaneous, frequent, aggressive, expressive and at times very emotional (Acts 4:23-31).

In this chapter, we have seen the pattern that characterised the Great Commission of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostle aided by miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This could be summarized as follows:

- They waited upon the Lord in prayer for the power from on high.
- They then went out to preach to the world that Jesus Christ is Lord.

- The unbelievers believed their message and repented of their sins.
- Those who believed were incorporated into the church and became disciples.
- They continued in prayer for spiritual vitality, boldness and also were apt against the powers of darkness.
- Then all disciples (the faith community) went out everywhere with reconciliation message of Christ.
- And the Lord added to their number daily.

Thus, the pattern for the Great Commission that ensured “Total Church Growth” among the early Christians is in the Acts of Apostles.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher presents the summary of findings from the research, conclusion and recommendations.

Summary of findings

Generally, the objective of the research is to gather information about “The Holy Spirit as a precursor of Church growth, a study of the Acts of the Apostles” in order to fulfil the researcher’s academic requirements and then to make this knowledge available to the church and Christians in general to help plan a better strategy for embarking on the Great Commission mandate resulting in effective Church growth. Specifically, the research is intended to ascertain:

1. Proper understanding of Church growth.
2. Underlying factors to Church growth.
3. The marks of a local growing Church.
4. The role of the Power of the Holy Spirit in Church growth.
5. The Holy Spirit and Church growth among the Apostles in the book of Acts.

Understanding: Church growth

Church growth must be “total” in the sense of both “qualitative” and quantitative. It is inadequate to see Church growth as only an increase in membership. In fact, there must be increase in membership and also members should have a deepening desire to live for the Lord. Church growth should not be seen as a package deal. There are lots of dynamics backed by the power of the Holy Spirit that interplay for any church to have a *Total Growth*.

Factors to Church Growth

- First and foremost, every Church growth is as result of God’s initiative.

Thus, Paul planted, Apollos watered, but the increase is as God.

- There is also the biblical sense of time. People tend to be receptive to the Gospel message at certain times and situations.

- Again where there is spontaneous evangelism to persuade people to become followers of Christ and seek the Lordship of Christ in their daily lives and thereby become responsible members of the Church, growth is facilitated.
- Finally, when Church consciously seeks to fulfil the Great Commission at all cost.

The marks of a local growing Church

In every local Church where there is *Total Church growth*, one can confidently conclude that the Church is a growing Church. For such Churches there must be certain indicators or visible evidences manifesting in the Church and among members both in private life and during congregational worship Service. These indicators are what we refer to as “signs” or “marks” of a growing Church. These signs of growth are “Spiritual vitality and life” under the control of the Holy Spirit. They are: ***Constant Prayer, Respect for Biblical Authority, Effective Leadership, Eventful Worship, Community Life, Continuous evangelism, Compassionate Service, Openness to change, Released Resources***

How the Holy Spirit can lead to Church growth

We have come to appreciate that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. He is Co-equal with God the father and God the Son. He possesses all divine attribute of God. The Holy Spirit is a person because he possesses all the characteristics of a personality. By His power he convicts and transforms sinners to become Christians. He grants boldness to the Christian disciple in witnessing and above confirms Christian witness for Christ with ‘signs, wonders and miracles.

Church growth in the Acts of Apostles

It is of interest to note that the pattern that characterized the Great Commission of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles aided by miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This could be summarised as follows:

- They waited upon the Lord in prayer for power from on high.
- They then went out to preach to the unbelieving world that Jesus Christ is Lord (The Messiah).
- The unbelievers believed their message and repented of their sins, and accepted the Lordship of Jesus.
- Those who believe were incorporated into the church and became disciples.
- They continued in prayer for spiritual vitality, boldness and also were up against the powers of darkness.
- Then all the disciples (the faith community) went out everywhere with reconciliation message of Christ.
- And the Lord added to their number daily.

Conclusion

In this work, the researcher has tried to show that no church can grow effectively as in the sense of *total growth* without the workings of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is crucial for Christians to have deep fellowship with the Holy Spirit through spontaneous prayers and bible studies in order to be endued with the Spirit’s power from on high both as individuals and a local church.

That no church can grow without continuous evangelism. The Gospel message that liberates every soul must be sent to the unbeliever wherever they may be. For instance, Orsborn T. L. (1996) in his book, *Soul winning*,

writes, “Non-Christians do not go to Church”. It is observed from this work that the only single factor of Church growth that can make disciples of all nations is the *Conversion growth*. And that the whole Church membership must be mobilized to fulfil the commission from our Lord. It will also be prudent to meet the welfare needs of members of the Christian community should the church grow.

That it could be gleaned from this research that the effects of the workings of the Holy Spirit include the following:

- Authenticate the Gospel
- Aid conversion of souls
- Reveal’ God’s purpose
- Attract crowds for witness
- Elicit praise from humankind: “In the day of His power His people shall be willing” (Psalm 110:3).
- Grants confirmation to Gospel message
- Makes Christianity living faith

Recommendations

From the forgone discussions and analysis, the following are worth recommending:

Obedience to wait in prayer is crucial to Church growth

In Luke 24:49, Jesus commands us to wait until we are clothed with the power from on high. Sometimes we are tempted to talk extensively about prayer without making effort to pray at all. It is by constant prayer that we receive the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us to witnessing.

Obedience to the Great Commission

“Go ye, therefore, and make disciples..” That is, the church should always emphasise the need to evangelise unbeliever and always take the initiative to do so. The Christians preoccupation is to make converts for Christ. We should never be enthused with transfer growth which is prevalent in our churches today. Go and make disciples of all nations, this is the church’s mission and the essence of her being. The Church is commissioned because Christ has given us the authority to act on His behalf.

Emphasis on how the Holy Spirit can be the Precursor of Church growth

Most Christians know and accept the Holy Spirit and his power as authentic. However, when it comes to appropriating the power of the Holy Spirit in the area of Church growth, we turn to forget about him. Our evangelistic approach should be of the kind found in the New Testament if we are to be effective ambassadors of Christ. For Jesus said, “As you go, preach, saying, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons” (Matthew 10:7-8). So we cannot reduce the preaching of the Gospel to persuasive words and human wisdom. As Paul puts it, “My speech and preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit’s power” 1 Corinthians 2:4). There must be emphasis on the working of the Holy Spirit and his power in our witnessing so that both believers and those who would believe will not be led astray but would find themselves to be part of Christ’s Kingdom.

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