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Item Type	Article
Authors	Hong, Stephen A.
Publisher	Asia Pacific Theological Seminary
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Download date	2026-11-14 22:00:32
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/236573

REVERSING A DOWNWARD SPIRAL: STRENGTHENING THE CHURH'S COMMUNITY, HOLINESS AND UNITY THROUGH INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

Stephen A. Hong

Introduction

The church has a problem: disunity. The body of Christ has been divided and subdivided ad nauseum. Division, in fact, has become an acceptable part of the culture of the church. There are many reasons for this culture of division in the church. Some are reasonable: geography, language, culture, etc, which force the church to meet and organize in separate groups. Other reasons are not reasonable because they are not worthy of the gospel of Christ: pride, racism, prejudice, quarrels, foolish arguments, etc.

Not only is there a multitude of divisions among the disciples of Christ, for whom Jesus himself prayed "that all of them may be one,"[1] but these divisions have been justified and defended by some Christians as normal or even beneficial. Even Christians who do not justify their divisiveness and denominationalism, though, continue to participate in them, even those who see it as wrong. This author must agree with Volt, who has written, "All of us are poor Christians if we live divided."[2] Niebuhr said it first and more strongly: "Denominationalism thus represents the moral failure of Christianity."[3] Denominationalism is out of control. By one estimate, there may be as many as 38,000 Christian denominations in the world at this time.[4]

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[1] John 17:21.

[2] Miroslav Volt, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998), 19.

[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: World Publishing, 1972), 6.

[4] Mary Fairchild, "Christianity Today - General Statistics and Facts of Christianity," About.com Guide, available from:

Pentecostals share much of the blame for this disintegration. At the turn of the 21st century, Pentecostalism accounted for nearly two-thirds of all denominations in the world.[5] By perpetuating a church culture where denominationalism is acceptable, it is inevitable that the dividing of the body of Christ will continue.

The church cannot return to its beginning when there was only one Christian denomination; these divisions are here to stay, at least for a while. Also, despite the wrongness of division, no one should condemn those who are part of a denomination. However, the church should also not wink at denominations and accept them as a necessary evil because denominations *are* divisions, which are disallowed by Scripture. I propose, therefore, that even as the church continues in its denominated existence, its attitude about division needs to change. More Christians need to be teaching, preaching, and writing against division if only to slow the rampant fragmentation of the church and return to the biblical attitude that division is wrong.

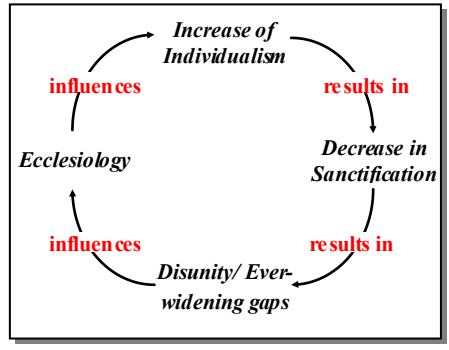


Figure 1
The Downward Spiral of the Church

There are countless reasons for division among Christians, but at the core of all of them is a theological flaw. Somehow, the church has ended up with an understanding of the church that allows it to divide and denominate itself without guilt. I envision a downward spiral that has led the body of Christ further and further down the path of division. As shown in *Figure 1*, the increase of individualism in the body of Christ has resulted in a decrease in sanctification. Unsanctified, individualistic attitudes and actions then resulted in more disunity in

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http://christianity.about.com/od/denominations/p/christiantoday.htm, accessed September 20, 2009.

[5] Barrett reports that in the year 2000 there were more than there were more than 33,800 Christian denominations. Of that total, 21,080 were within the Pentecostal/Charismatic/Neocharismatic Renewal. David B. Barrett, et. al., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 20.

the body of Christ as it split into more and more denominations. The reality of this disunity has influenced the church's ecclesiology, which has been modified to justify divisiveness. Then, because of these theological modifications, individualism has been enabled even more and the downward spiral has continued. This paper will briefly examine each aspect of this downward spiral and offer a solution that may be helpful in reversing this trend.

For the purposes of this paper, I offer the following definitions:

Individualism is the "philosophy which holds supreme the right of an individual to act as he or she wishes as long as his or her actions do not impinge upon the freedoms of other individuals."[6] "Individualism" is a cultural marker on a collectivism-individualism scale and is, of itself, not good or bad. Hyper-individualism is the attitude among Christians that people are saved as individuals into a private relationship with God, neglecting the idea that they have been added to the community of the church and that their relationship with God is meant to take place from within that community. This attitude usually includes the idea that the church exists primarily to provide services to establish and encourage each member's private faith.

Sanctification is a two-part process. First, there is the sanctification that takes place at conversion when a believer is justified and made holy before God by means of the cleansing blood of Christ. Second, there follows a lifetime of growing in holiness through ongoing discipleship, demonstrated by an increasingly sanctified worldview and lifestyle.

Division refers to the splitting of the church into subgroups with distinct names, organizational structures and human leadership. This includes most Christian sects and all denominations.

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[6] John Scott, "What is Individualism," Individualism.com, http://www.individualism.com/?p=5 (accessed August 31, 2010).

Hyper-Individualism in the Church[7]

Many Christians today view their faith as a private matter—something between the individual and God. People are often invited to receive Jesus as their "*personal* Lord and Savior," starting them immediately on a road that will possibly lead to a hyper-individualistic Christian existence. As one person said, "It's not religion or the church that's going to save you. Rather it is your 'personal relationship' with God. Christ will 'come into your heart' if you ask, without any church at all."[8] As Christians focus excessively on "personal growth," they develop an attitude that the church exists to help "me" live out "my" personal relationship with my Lord. Even the practices of the church that must be done corporately, such as congregational worship, end up being, tragically, "A thousand individual experiences of worship"[9] rather than the communal experiences they were meant to be.

It is a symptom of the widespread nature of hyper-individualism in the church that Christians take biblical concepts, relationships, and terms such as prayer, prophecy, Lord, Savior, Pentecost, etc. and add the word "personal" to it when the Bible does not. Likewise, Christians are encouraged to have "personal revivals,"[10] and "personal mission statements"[11] and to go on "personal retreats"[12]

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[7] This paper represents a condensed version of the Literature Review chapter of my doctor of ministry project. Due to a lack of time and space, the biblical/theological portion of my argument has been almost totally omitted from this presentation.

[8] Robert Bellah, et. al., eds. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 234.

[9] Gordon Fee, in Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 14.

[10] Mains, David, *The Bible for Personal Revival* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1998); Nancy Leigh DeMoss and Tim Grissom, *Seeking Him: Experiencing the Joy of Personal Revival* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009).

[11] Aubrey Malphurs, *Ministry Nuts and Bolts: What They Don't Teach Pastors in Seminary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2009). Malphurs has an peculiar understanding about personal missions. He believes that, although the church as a whole has its mission, each individual Christian also has his or her own mission—their "personal mission." Especially important to Malphurs is that "people must know that their pastor's personal mission may be different than their church's mission," 71-72.

[12] Ben Campbell Johnson and Paul H. Lang, *Time Away: A Guide for Personal Retreat* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 2010); Jan Johnson, *Learning to Hear God: A Personal Retreat Guide* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009).

for one's "personal development."[13] It may be said that many modern Christians are nearly obsessed with their own personal religions.

This sort of hyper-individualism is damaging to the mission and existence of the church. Religious sociologist Robert Wuthnow, in describing the pluralistic tendencies of postmodern people, coined the term "patchwork religion,"[14] which describes a type of personal religion where people piece together whatever spiritual elements they like and form their own personal form of Christianity. Often, it is the unpleasant or disliked doctrines and practices that are removed and the enjoyable, pleasurable, satisfying doctrines and practices that are emphasized so that "increasingly you find individuals who put together their own particular religious profile."[15] This phenomenon is directly related to the rise of hyper-individualism in the church because this "quest for 'spirituality' is a quest of individuals disconnected from traditional communities and institutions."[16] As the individual is overemphasized, the community is inevitably deemphasized and the results can be seen in the fragmentation of the church that has taken place since the time of the Reformation and, more recently, the Enlightenment.

The Contribution of the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was that period in the history of Western culture, roughly the eighteenth century, in which people were relatively free for the first time in centuries to think about and openly discuss life, the universe, and everything without fear of condemnation or punishment. The Enlightenment was, according to Kant, one of its best-known philosophers, "'man's release from his self-incurred immaturity' through the use of reason and without guidance from

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[13]Alexander, *Christian Spirituality*, 186; Doug Addison, *Personal Development God's Way* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2010).

[14]Peter Berger, "Religion in a Globalizing World," *Pew Research Center* (Dec. 4, 2006), http://pewresearch.org/pubs/404/religion-in-a-globalizing-world (accessed November 25, 2011).

[15]Ibid.

[16]Mary Collins, "Liturgical Spirituality: Communal and Ethical." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 26. No. 4 (Aug. 1999): 270-282, 271. http://content.ebscohost.com/pdf19_22/pdf/ddd/rfh/n00982113/atla0000988319.pdf?T=P&P=AN&K=ATLA0000988319&S=R&D=rfh&EbscoContent=dGJyMNLe80Sepq840dvuOLCmr0meprBSr6e4SrSWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMOzprki3qbROuePfgeyx44Dt6fIA (accessed September 1, 2011).

others."[17] That "immaturity" was the result of centuries of philosophical oppression, in which the church controlled, regulated, and policed intellectual thought and expression.

The Enlightenment had many good effects for the kingdom of God, such as human rights, self esteem, opposition to slavery, and exploration, which opened up new lands for missionary work. One of the effects of the Enlightenment on the church, however, was not as positive. Before the Enlightenment, people were seen not so much as individuals, but as parts of a greater social group. In the centuries preceding the Enlightenment, individual people had significance as individuals, but only as far as their eternal soul was concerned.[18] In other areas of social life, individuals had value mostly as a contributor to a group.[19] Ironically, in order to "rescue" God from the assaults of the rationalists, theologians began to describe Christianity in terms that distinguished it from the rest of the natural world. "God was not an object to be verified like other objects. He was sensible only to the individual psyche."[20] This began a movement in Christian thought toward individuals as recipients of God's work apart from the community of the church. Yung says that the Enlightenment "gave rise to the ethnocentrism of the Western world" and points out that because of it, "unlike the first few centuries (of the church) when the emphasis was on the evangelization of communities, increasingly, and especially in the modern period, the focus was on the salvation of individuals."[21] Therefore, since the time of the Enlightenment, "redemption has been

[17]Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed., William Beik and T.C.W. Blanning, eds., New Approaches to European History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.

[18]Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediæval Philosophy*, trans. by A.H.C. Downes (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1936), 203.

[19]Some medieval philosophers, for example, believed that, while individual people obviously had their own intellects, there was also a common intellect that was shared by all people. Robert Pasnau, "Human Nature," A.S. McGrade, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 218-219. In fact, this medieval idea that individuals had little value as such came by way of the Greek philosophers, who were influential in the thinking of Medieval philosophers. "Neither Plato nor Aristotle…ever had a sufficiently high idea of the worth of the individual as such…In a doctrine like Plato's it is not at all this (individual, such as) Socrates, however highly extolled he may be, that matters: it is Man…(In a doctrine like Aristotle's), the individual exists for the sake of the species." Gilson, 190, 202.

[20]Chris Sugden, *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 210-211.

[21]Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 76.

individualized and social issues as far as they are related to God are viewed through that category."[22]

The American Contribution

A few years ago, "*Time* magazine's person of the year was a mirror: Behold YOU. Yourself. You can do it. You did it. Be all you can be. YouTube. You are the star. It is a proclamation of pure, absolute narcissism. The world ends at my face. Me. My space. My autonomy. I rule my world."[23] Individualism is much a part of American culture. It pervades easpect of American life, even in such a strongly communal organization as the church. In fact, "for many Americans, individualism is a kind of secular religion influencing the way they live more than the religious traditions some of them espouse."[24] Sociologically, it is interesting to see this individualism play itself out in a powerful nation. Ecclesiologically, it is alarming to see it play itself out in the Kingdom of God.

The development of Christianity in the European colonies of North America and, later, in the United States of America was largely responsible for the later growth of hyper-individualism that allowed and encouraged the rampant division that characterized the church in the twentieth century. "Individualism is a distinctively American ideology…more than anywhere else, individualism took on distinctive meaning and central importance in America."[25]

America's individualism comes, in part, from the circumstances of its birth: dissent against totalitarianism, rebellion against the suppression of individual rights, fighting for independence, and the rugged individualism needed to survive in a harsh new land. In addition to these circumstances, many of the "Founding Fathers" of the United States of America, such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, were educated during the mid-eighteenth century, so it is no surprise to find that they were strongly influenced by the philosophy of

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[22]Sugden, 210.

[23]John F. Kavanaugh, "Autonomous Individualism," *America* 196, issue 2 (2007): 8 [journal online]; available from: http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=5&hid=5&sid=deff5653-fd57-416f-90f8-46724d03bdf8@sessionmgr11; Internet; accessed September 19, 2009.

[24]Mount, "American Individualism reconsidered," 362.

[25]Eric C. Mount Jr., "American Individualism reconsidered," *Review of Religious Research* 22, Issue 4 (June 1981): 362-377, 362-363 [journal online]; available at: http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid= 5&hid=5&sid=deff5653-fd57-416f-90f8-46724d03bdf8@sessionmgr11; Internet; accessed Sept. 19, 2009.

the Enlightenment. "The (American) Declaration of Independence of 4 July, 1776, and in particular its commitment to 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness', were the fulfillment of Enlightenment programmes."[26] All of these early influences have ultimately resulted in a culture today that is strongly individualistic.

> In American Society today, the unquestioned assumption is that the individual takes precedence over the group. Freedom means individual independence. Civil rights means the individual's right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'...The concept of organic community has been heavily eroded by technology, urbanization, political ideology and legal definition. Even marriage and family are increasingly accepted as matters of individual contract and convenience. The group has become for us a collection of individuals created by individuals for their own individual advantages.[27]

All things considered, it comes as no surprise that a recent study of 76 countries by Dutch anthropologist Geert Hofstede, found that America was the most individualistic nation in the world on a scale measuring individualism versus collectivism.[28]

Never before in church history has such an individualistic society had so much influence on the trajectory of the body of Christ. Due mostly to America's strong missionary effort, and the influence of American theologians, scholars, seminaries, and publishers, the progress of the global church at this time is tightly bound to American culture and the church has little choice but to accept the individualism inevitably comes along with an American presentation of the gospel.

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[26]Outram, 3-4.

[27]C. Norman Kraus, *The Community of the Spirit: How the Church is in the World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 31-32.

[28]Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010), 95. This interesting survey, which places nations on a scale of 1 (collectivism) to 100 (individualism), shows that Western nations dominate the higher ranks of the survey. The United States is ranked first with an index of 91. Other high-ranking individualistic nations were Australia (90), Great Britain (89), Canada (80), and the Netherlands (80). In fact, the highest ranked non-European nation is South Africa, ranked 20th with an index of 65. The opposite end of the scale, collectivism, is dominated by Latin American nations. Guatemala was the most collectivist nation, ranked 76th with an index of 6. The other highly collectivist nations were Ecuador (8), Panama (11), Venezuela (12), and Columbia (13). The Philippines is ranked 47th with an index of 32.

> As a result of the western church exporting its theological methodology with its missionary endeavors, it has given spiritual birth to children who have followed this individualistic road. Tragically, we have often displaced cultures where corporateness naturally existed and which would have given the new believers a valuable insight into the New Testament, with our western, Hellenized, individualistic, mindset.[29]

Individualism in Philippine Culture and Christianity

Whereas American culture emphasizes an individual's autonomy within society, Philippine culture has a much more Asian understanding of an individual's place in society. A Western worldview "presupposes the priority of the individual over the group"[30] and assumes that individuals have the right to make decisions apart from the groups to which they belong. Conversely, in most Asian cultures, an individual rarely has the freedom to make decisions of any significance, including the decision to belong to a certain religion. That sort of decision is a family matter, not to be made individually.

While a "Filipino looks at himself as a self…as a 'person,' conscious of his freedom, proud of his dignity and sensitive to the violation of these two,"[31] it is not in the same way that Americans look at themselves.

> Individualism and its expression in the United States may be the most profound value gap separating Americans from…the people of the Philippines…Filipinos consider themselves individuals, but within a group. They are defined by, and linked to, the identity of the groups of which they are members.[32]

Nevertheless, because of the Western values firmly attached to Christianity in the Philippines, Filipino believers have tended to have more of a Western attitude about their faith, which they see as something personal, not for community participation or evaluation.

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[29]Holland, Tom. "Individualism and the People of God," *Evangel* 23, Issue 3 (Autumn 2005): 86-91, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=6&hid=5&sid=deff5653-fd57-416f-90f8-46724d03bdf8@sessionmgr11; (accessed September 19, 2009).

[30]Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 83.

[31]Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City, Philippines: Divine Word University Publications, 1976), 50.

[32]Theodore Gochenour, *Considering Filipinos* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1990), 15.

"The personal reality of salvation is emphasized, but it is also distorted by being understood in a fragmentary and individualistic fashion."[33] It is somewhat inconsistent in this communal culture that "among Christian Filipinos, image changes once certain religious rites are performed…each of our identities as individuals is specified and separated from other identities."[34] Filipinos easily live with this dissonance because five hundred years of colonialism taught them to tolerate the ambiguity of having one set of values for their family and societal culture and a separate set of values for their religion. Thus, despite the indigenous culture, which is communal, and despite the fact that biblical Christianity is communal, Christianity in the Philippines is egocentric and hyper-individualistic in a Western way.

The result of this learned hyper-individualism has had the same effect in the Philippines as in Western nations. It has led to a lack of sanctification in the Philippine church and has ultimately resulted in the same kind of division that the Western church has experienced. Division has become the norm in the Philippine church. According to Barrett, in 2000 there were 598 Philippine denominations[35] and uncountable church and organizational splits. Occasionally, Filipino leaders such as Enrique Sobrepeña[36] have called the Philippine church toward unity, but in the past fifty years, any progress toward unity has been overpowered by widespread division among Filipino Christians. Thus, in terms of hyper-individualism in the church leading to a church culture where division is acceptable, Filipino Christians are in the same situation as Western Christians.

How Hyper-Individualism Has Led to a Decrease of Sanctification

The church is the proverbial frog in the pot: the water is getting more and more individualistic but Christians aren't noticing the gradual change. When Christians "live and breathe a culture which values individualism to the point of obsession…in which individualism

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[33]Emerito P. Nacpil, "A Gospel for the New Filipino," 118.

[34]F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino World View* (Manila, Philippines: Punlad Research House, Inc., 2001), 7.

[35]David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of churches and Religions in the Modern World*, Vol. 1: The World by Countries: Religionists, Churches, Ministries, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 600.

[36]See Enrique C. Sobrepeña, *That They May Be One* (Manila, Philippines: United Church of Christ in the Philippines), 1964.

has run riot,"[37] they have to be less and less sanctified in order to stand out. The consequences in the church are disturbing. In a hyper-individualistic Christian culture, the church becomes a place to meet each believer's individual spiritual needs, but "discipleship offered in a consumer package targeted at individual needs isn't sufficient to form people into the image of Christ."[38] The assumption is that the church is responsible for the spiritual growth of its members. So if members' lives are characterized by worldliness, it is the church's fault. The Christian divorce rate in America, denominationalism, church splits, theological quarrels,[39] etc., warn that the church is on a trajectory that will allow God to observe once again, "every man is doing that which is right in his own eyes."[40]

Many Christians "tend to think that their testimonies to their private experiences are self-authenticating and so settle all ultimate questions."[41] When spirituality is a private matter, no one else can be involved, even in a positive way. In a study of young children, it was found that by the age of ten they were inhibited in discussing spiritual matters. The children became shy and embarrassed by their own spiritual awareness. Hay sees this as the result of the "privatization" of spirituality and has also shown that "once adult life is reached this prohibition is extremely widespread."[42] It is inevitable, then, that such Christians will not only avoid seeking help with their spiritual development, but they will also tend to resent and resist help coming

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[37]John McIndoe, "The Individualist," *Expository Times* 115, no. 6 (March 2004): 199-200.

[38] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 296.

[39]See Robeck, "Pentecostals and Christian Unity," 315-318.

[40]Judges 21:25 (NIV). In a recent news article, a former member walked into a Florida church and shot two pastors with a handgun. The man had previously left the church and "started his own church" in his home. Apparently frustrated with the lack of success of his own church, he lashed out in anger at the church he had quit. Though this is an isolated incident and certainly not common, it illustrates that the condition of the church is such that disgruntled members feel free to start their own church. Associated Press, "Man accused of killing wife, wounding 2 pastors in Lakeland, Fla." Heraldbulletin.com, September 18, 2011, http://heraldbulletin.com/news_tab3/x1700250297/Sister-Gunman-killed-wife-before-church-shooting-in-Lakeland-Fla (accessed September 28, 2011).

[41]Gordon R. Lewis, "The Church and the New Spirituality," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 4 (December, 1993): 433-444, 439.

[42]David Hay, "Spirituality versus Individualism: why we should nurture relational consciousness," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 5, Issue 1 (June 2000): 37-48, 40, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=4&hid=46724d03bdf8@sessionmgr11 (accessed September 18, 2009).

from someone else. Additionally, when Christians see spirituality as a private matter, they feel that they have no right to address anyone else's spiritual condition. All of this excessive privacy in matters of spirituality results in a lack of confrontation, a lack of discipline, a lack of concern about spiritual matters and inevitably leads to a general decrease in sanctification in the church.

Whatever theological view one adheres to in regard to sanctification, it is difficult to deny that people develop their sanctification in identifiable stages. Wesleyan theologians, for example, see a parallel between human emotional development and Christian spiritual development: "The twofold structure of sanctification arises out of, and is implicit in, a twofold structure which is inherent in normal personality development… the first toward self-interest and the second toward other-interest."[43] If spiritual lives develop in similar ways, then immature Christians are naturally going to focus on their own spiritual growth, but as they mature, they will gradually focus more and more on the spiritual growth of others. In a situation where sanctification is decreasing, however, fewer and fewer Christians will reach the level of maturity where their focus is on others. When this takes place in an atmosphere of hyper-individualism, many Christians will be left on their own to grow or not grow spiritually, depending upon their own convictions.

Pentecostal Contradiction

Pentecostal scholars point out a contradiction that for most Pentecostals, their relationship with God is first and their relationship with others is secondary. But no real communion with Christ is possible until you are part of his body.[44] Thus, hyper-individualism stunts the spiritual growth of Christians in many different ways because sanctification "is perfected in communion with others, never apart from it."[45] The challenge of sanctification has always been to overcome our natural egotism with the character of Christ. Johns and White observe that "contemporary Christianity has too often opted for an individualism which, like the dominant society, makes the moral life a

[43]Rob L. Staples, "Sanctification and Selfhood: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Wesleyan Message" (*Wesleyan Theological Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 3-16, 8-9.

[44]Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 99.

[45]Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 102.

private affair of the individual. Consequently, persons may attend a church and never be challenged regarding their lifestyles."[46] Where hyper-individualism reigns in the church and faith is a private matter, sanctification is always the loser.

Among Pentecostals, a unique problem has arisen. Although baptism in the Holy Spirit properly understood is "to actualize our communal life and fellowship in Christ,"[47] Spirit baptism in reality is seen as something private—an individual event, a personal experience.[48] A private view of baptism in the Holy Spirit results in a decrease of sanctification in two possible ways. First, some people see baptism in the Holy Spirit as "the goal of their spirituality…their membership card into (the) Pentecostal club."[49] If this is the case, then once people have experienced it, there will naturally be a sense that they are "finished;" their spirituality is complete and further growth is unnecessary. Second, there is a "tendency to seek the Baptism in the Holy Spirit *in order to* speak in tongues rather than to be influenced by the Spirit in one's life and behavior."[50] Thus, the myriad of other roles that the Holy Spirit desires to fulfill in a believer's life, including sanctification and empowerment for service, are neglected or ignored as they are overshadowed by the desire to experience speaking in tongues. There is an "ongoing need to challenge Pentecostals that whether or not they have been baptized in the Spirit, they are to develop their walk with God."[51]

Sanctification has always been central to the Christian faith. "Alien and archaic as the idea may seem, the task of the church is not to make men and women happy; it is to make them holy."[52] When the church is holy because it is seeking sanctification, it is strong and effective.[53] It follows then, that when sanctification is not being sought

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[46]Cheryl B. Johns and Vardaman W. White, "The Ethics of Being: Character, Community, Praxis," in Michael D. Palmer, ed., and Stanley M. Horton, gen. ed., *Elements of a Christian Worldview* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2002), 298.

[47]Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 99.

[48]Ibid., 98. See also Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 129-130.

[49]Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology. A Theology of Encounter* (London, T & T Clark, 2008), 125.

[50]Ibid., 127. Emphasis added.

[51]Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 125.

[52]Chuck Colson, *The Body: Being Light in Darkness* (Dallas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1992), 46.

[53]E.g., The Methodist Revival, the American Frontier Revivalism of the 19th century, and the Pentecostal Movement in the early 20th century were all characterized by a deliberate seeking of holiness and they were also accompanied by great effectiveness in evangelism.

and decreases as a value of the church, the church will be weak and ineffective. This appears to be the case in the church today. Lowe observes that there is an "underestimation of the need for sanctification (that is) characteristic of much of contemporary evangelicalism."[54] When the church does not understand the need for sanctification and, as a result, does not seek it, a decrease in the overall sanctification of the body of Christ is inevitable.

Regardless of whether one agrees with Wesley's idea of "Initial Sanctification" and "Entire Sanctification," the theology is excellent in one aspect that is crucial to increasing the value of sanctification in the church: it creates an *expectation* of growth in holiness. In the absence of such an expectation, the tendency is to see spiritual growth as an endless path to a vague, unattainable objective. Instead of Wesley's terms, it might be better to think of it as "Initial Sanctification" and "Ongoing Sanctification" in the same way that Gelpi describes "Initial Conversion" and "Ongoing Conversion."[55] Whether God's people agree with Wesley's idea of "Entire Sanctification" or not, they desperately need an expectation of sanctification to motivate them and lead them to an ever-holier lifestyle. Otherwise, the lack of motivation will inevitably lead to a lack of growth and a worldly church which, in turn, will further encourage hyper-individualism and lead to more division within the body of Christ.

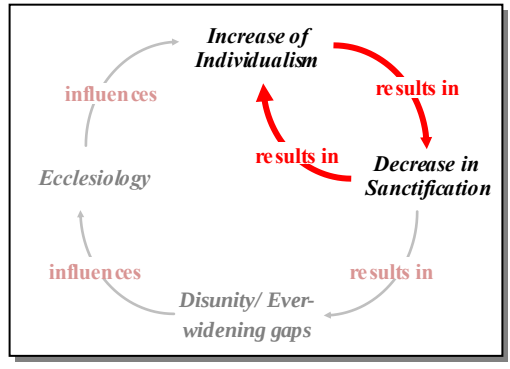


Figure 2

The Sanctification/Individualism Sub-Spiral

The church's widespread hyper-individualism and resulting loss of communalism is both causing and caused by a lack of sanctification. In Figure 1 (above),

[54]Chuck Lowe, "'There is No Condemnation' (Romans 8:1): But Why Not?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 2 (June 1999): 231-250, 249.

[55]Donald L. Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience: A Reflective Process for RCIA Participants and Others* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press,1998), 101-109.

there is a downward spiral when the increase of individualism leads to a decrease of sanctification which results in division, which then influences our ecclesiology. But there is also, amidst the bigger spiral, a loop that forms between individualism and sanctification which is illustrated in *Figure 2*. So while it is true that individualism can lead to a lack of sanctification, it is also true that a decrease in sanctification contributes to the increase of individualism. Christians who lack personal sanctification are less mature and therefore less likely to have overcome the natural self-centeredness that characterizes most people throughout their infancy, childhood, and especially adolescence.[56] When those immature Christians also live in a secular culture so strongly characterized by individualism, they are ill-equipped to overcome that self-centeredness. This naturally makes them more individualistic in their worldviews. This individualism is then encouraged by their secular culture and sometimes by their Christian culture so that the person's motivation to grow in sanctification is severely hindered. So within the larger downward spiral, there is this sub-loop that feeds itself on both weaknesses in the church.

Sanctification and Pentecostalism

The Pentecostal Movement finds its roots in the Holiness movement of the nineteenth century.[57] This movement was committed to leading Christians to experience "entire sanctification" in their lives—the point where they would be "liberated from the flaw in (their) moral nature that caused (them) to sin."[58] Because of these roots, the Pentecostal Movement was initially seen as an outpouring of holiness on the church and it quickly spread among the Holiness churches. As the movement flourished and grew throughout the twentieth century, the Pentecostal understanding of sanctification was debated: "Were

[56]Jean Piaget, "Adolescence: Thought and its Operation; the Affectivity of the Personality in the Social World of Adults," in Zita M. Cantwell and Pergrouhi N. Svajian, *Adolescence: Studies in Development* (Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1974), 44-51. Piaget describes human psychological development as stages of egocentricity. Each new stage of development (infancy, childhood, adolescence, etc.) begins with an egocentric understanding of one's place in the world. "Only later does it attain equilibrium through a compensating accommodation to reality" (46). In fact, Piaget defines adulthood (maturity) as the time when people have reached this accommodation to reality and have come to realistic terms with their egocentrism.

[57]Vinson Synan, *In the Latter Days: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1984), 37-38.

[58]Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), s.v., "Holiness Movement, American," 517.

there three steps in the process of salvation: conversion, a subsequent moment of entire sanctification, and then a baptism in the Holy Spirit? Or were there two, conversion and sanctification essentially constituting a single experience followed by baptism in the Holy Ghost?"[59] This debate resulted in emergence of "Non-Holiness" Pentecostal groups, such as the Assemblies of God, who taught "sanctification as a progressive work following conversion with baptism in the Holy Spirit following as the second blessing."[60]

For Pentecostals, regardless of their theological stance on the nature of sanctification, holy living was an extremely important tenet of their movement. At first, holy living was gauged by external evidence such as drinking, watching movies, wearing jewelry, etc. Then, throughout the twentieth century, as the Pentecostal Movement expanded and influenced the Charismatic and Third Wave movements, "the precise definition of the holy life to accompany the Pentecostal outpouring (was) left to the individuals and groups themselves."[61] Thus, Christians were expected to determine their own version of holiness, tailored to their personal convictions.

The decrease in sanctification in Pentecostalism today has roots that go back to the beginning of the movement. Land points out that "with the emergence of the Finished Work[62] view, the fivefold gospel was effectively reduced to fourfold again, leaving out the distinctive emphasis on sanctification; victory replaced sanctification."[63] Speaking in the first decades of the Pentecostal Movement, one of the first Assemblies of God General Superintendents said: "I feel that the weakness in our movement when it comes to preaching sanctification, is that the doctrine is taught so vaguely that many fail to get sight of something definite which they may have in

[59]James H. Moorhead, "The Quest for Holiness in American Protestantism," *Interpretation* 53, no. 4 (Oct. 1999): 365-379, 367.

[60]Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), s.v., "Pentecostalism," 837.

[61]Moorhead, 377.

[62]The "Finished Work" controversy was a major debate in the early Pentecostal Movement over whether sanctification is a second definite work of grace. It resulted in a significant split within Pentecostalism. See R.M. Riss, "Finished Work Controversy," in Stanley M. Burgess, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Revised and Expanded Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 638.

[63]Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, John C. Thomas, Rick D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, eds., Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, no. 1 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) , 210.

their own lives."[64] This weakness of early Pentecostalism has grown into a major problem in the twenty-first century as the value of pursuing holiness has decreased in believers' lives.

This decrease in sanctification in Pentecostalism is reflected in the concern of McGee: "Over the years the word *sanctified* (depicting a believer's holiness) has lost its prominence in our vocabulary."[65] Warrington lists several reasons why standards of and teaching about sanctification (holiness) is declining among Pentecostals. First, pastors are afraid of being accused of being hypercritical. Second, there has been a strong emphasis on the charismata and a corresponding lack of emphasis on holy living. Third, instances where immoral leaders were working supernaturally until the moment they were caught may have reinforced the feeling that holiness is not really necessary. There is also, fourth, a fear of being legalistic and, fifth, a fear of doing harm in reaction to the perceived excesses of the Shepherding Movement.[66]

In a book *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, theologians take turns explaining their particular understanding of sanctification. The Lutheran, Reformed, Wesleyan, Pentecostal and Contemplative views are given. Each scholar also comments on each of the other chapters. All of them described their perspective well, except for the Pentecostal, Russell Spittler.[67] The Contemplative scholar, in his response to the Pentecostal chapter commented that there was little said "about spiritual growth and development, or sanctification (and asked), is that due to the fact that Pentecostalism values this concept less than it does other elements of spirituality?"[68]

Perhaps this neglect by Pentecostals comes from the early conflicts over the issue of sanctification. The division caused by this conflict, which led to the distinction between the "Four-Fold Gospel" and the "Five-Fold Gospel" (which adds "Christ the Sanctifier") is conspicuous. Considering that the Wesleyan Holiness movement, with its emphasis on sanctification, was the "cradle" of Pentecostalism,[69] it

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[64]E.S. Williams, General Superintendent of the A/G (1929-1949) in Dennis Leggett, "The Assemblies of God Statement on Sanctification" (*Paraclete* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1991), 19-27, 19.

[65]G.B. McGee, "The Quest for Holiness," *Pentecostal Evangel* (August 2, 1987): 6.

[66]Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 211-213.

[67]In a similar book, *Five Views on Sanctification*, Stanley Horton gives the Pentecostal perspective and does a fine job of explaining the Pentecostal view of sanctification.

[68]Alexander, *Christian Spirituality*, 168.

[69]Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 186.

is surprising that any group of Pentecostals would exclude sanctification from their gospel even if they disagreed with holiness groups regarding the nature of "Entire Sanctification." And yet, if this lack of emphasis on sanctification has been carried out over nearly a century, it is not surprising that Pentecostal churches today are having a problem with a deficiency of holiness in their members.[70]

It is reasonable to assume that the general trend of decreasing sanctification in the church is at least partially caused by a lack of desire for sanctification. This realization is cause for great concern because "the desire for holiness or sanctification is at heart a desire for God himself, to be like Christ in love."[71] A weakness in sanctification then, indicates a lack of desire for God himself, an attitude that demonstrates worldliness at its worst in the body of Christ.

Division as the Result of Unsanctified and Hyper-Individualistic Attitudes

Unity is clearly the desire of God for the church. It is extremely difficult to justify disunity among Christians, regardless of any circumstances. Even necessary divisions of convenience for reasons such as lingual or geographical distances can be done in a spirit of unity. Unfortunately, "the Western world does not place a high premium on unity. Wherever individualism reigns supreme, community is easily sacrificed for personal preferences."[72] Moreover, where "individualism reigns supreme" in a church environment also lacking in sanctification, the result of conflict or disagreement will frequently be division. All this is not to say that the desire for unity should result in an attitude where harmony is sought at any cost, but the church today is characterized not so much by a desire for harmony as a desire to be "right," or doctrinally flawless, or methodologically correct. This was not the case in the early church, where the desire for unity was so great

[70]Ron Auch, *Pentecostals in Crisis* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 1988), 14-23. Ron Auch is a Pentecostal pastor who writes of his concern for the lack of spiritual maturity and commitment from the "wishy-washy" third generation of Pentecostals.

[71]Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 144.

[72]Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 25.

that "conflict led to the consolidation of the Church"[73] rather than to its fragmentation as is so often the case today.

There is no denying that denominationalism has become the "organizational form which (Christians) have accepted and assumed."[74] While the church must accept denominationalism as a reality and try to work as well as it can within an atmosphere of division, it should also make an effort to not divide the body of Christ any more than it already is. Unfortunately, denominationalism and other forms of division in the church have become common and even acceptable, which is unsurprising in a Christian culture dominated by hyper-individualism and characterized by a deficiency of sanctification.

The Development of Denominationalism

Beginning with the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century[75] and the sudden absence of the authoritarian Roman Catholic Church, Protestant Christians found that they suddenly had the freedom to divide the church, and divide they did. Four hundred years later, at the end of the nineteenth century, there were 1,900 Christian denominations,[76] but that was only the beginning. During the twentieth century, there was an unrestrained outbreak of division, so that by the end of the century there were more than 33,000 Christian denominations worldwide.[77]

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[73]Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Vol. 1, 1517-1948* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), 7.

[74]Sidney E. Mead, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America," *Church History 23*, no 4 (Dec. 1954): 291-320 [journal online]; available from: http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=8&hid= 104&sid=adaf3416-7a0b-4a72-a52c-9b0690b7b3f7@sessionmgr11; Internet; accessed September 20, 2009.

[75]A thorough study of the development of denominationalism would begin with the New Testament Christians and division that occurred therein, e.g., the division between the "Circumcision Group" and their adversaries. A scrupulous historical study would also discuss such divisions as the Arian controversy, the East-West division that created the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox denominations, and many more significant divisions which have occurred throughout church history. This study, however, is mostly concerned with the rampant division and denominationalism that has occurred since the time of the Protestant Reformation, and especially since the 20th century and will limit its historical survey to that period.

[76]David B. Barrett, et. al., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17.

[77]Ibid., 20.

After the Reformation, there was a certain amount of division in the new Protestant churches, often along national lines.[78] This was a manifestation of the reality of European state churches. "The Reformation, whatever else it did or did not do, subjected the Church to the State…(and made) the leaders in the Church dependent upon the King."[79] Thus, European Christians were not free to start a new denomination because, in general, each nation established a national church that everyone would join; often the Head of State was also the Head of the national church. In addition to this, few people would have wanted to start a new denomination because they needed the protection of a nation—political and sometimes even military protection—from the estranged Roman Catholic Church and the receding Holy Roman Empire.[80] The Anabaptists were the first significant group to test these murky waters. They established a group that was not a state church and taught that Christianity was not a political entity, but existed beyond national boundaries.[81] Unfortunately, their courage and convictions resulted in little more than persecution for many years.[82] Eventually, though, more and more Christian groups began identifying themselves as distinct from their national churches—the Mennonites, Puritans, Baptists, Quakers, and Methodists in England alone. Despite these small steps toward division, it was in America that denominationalism achieved its greatest success.[83]

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[78]A cursory glance at a list of denominations reveals the national and racial roots of many of them. E.g., Armenian Apostolic Church, Dutch Reformed, Evangelical Union of Bohemian and Moravian Brethren, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran National, the Moravian Church, German Reformed, Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Free Church Association, Norwegian Lutheran, Polish National Catholic Church, Swedish Evangelical Free Churches, Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant, United Danish Evangelical Lutheran, etc.

[79]C. Silvester Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales Memorial Hall, E.C., 1926), 6-7. Europe had, until recently, been ruled by the Holy Roman Empire, which was both the church and the state, but that Empire was fragmenting rapidly. In its wake, each European nation established its own state church. Thus, it was difficult to tell the difference between political, religious, and cultural philosophies, beliefs, and practices.

[80]David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Mary knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 275.

[81]Dieumeme Noelliste, "European Denominational Plurality and Christianity," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 3 (July 2003): 234-246, 237.

[82]This persecution was at times so heinous that Niebuhr called it "the Protestant Inquisition," which also serves to demonstrate the strength resolve of the state churches. Niebuhr, 39.

[83]Kevin Giles, *What on Earth is the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 200.

With the discovery and colonization of the New World, there began to be the idea of a "free church" which was "free" in the sense that it was not a state church and individual Christians were given the right to choose which form of Christianity they would follow.[84] Because of this new freedom, "the Christianity which developed in the United States…was unique. It displayed features which marked it as distinct from previous Christianity in any other land."[85] As various groups suddenly found themselves competing alongside one another and, with the state no longer controlling any church by coercive means, the colonial Christians discovered that they were not only free to exist, but they could divide and denominate freely with few serious repercussions.[86] They also found that dividing was a lot easier than resolving difficult doctrinal, political, or social conflicts. The freedom of the free churches ended up being the freedom to divide at will. Thus, "America was a denominational society before it became a nation."[87]

Denominationalism and Division

Niebuhr declared that "denominationalism thus represents the moral failure of Christianity"[88] and that "denominationalism in the Christian church is…an unacknowledged hypocrisy."[89] Pannenberg wrote that "denominations…are outmoded remnants of a hopelessly backward phase of Christian history."[90] These strong statements were prompted by the church's blatant disobedience of God's commands. God's desire *for* unity and *against* division are clear in the New Testament. Denominationalism is division and therefore, disobedience.

Sometimes denominational Christians point out that "there are many good things that churches accomplish by participating in

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[84]Latourette sees the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which granted freedom of religion, as a significant part of this development because, for the first time, a national government allowed its citizens to practice any religion they chose. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 1045.

[85]Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Vol. 4* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1941), 424; in Mead, "Denominationalism," 291.

[86]Niebuhr, 201.

[87]Andrew M. Greeley, *The Denominational Society* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1972), 104.

[88] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: World Publishing, 1972), 6.

[89]Ibid., 24.

[90]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Church*, translated by Keith Crim (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983) , 70.

denominations"[91] and will typically list schools, mission agencies, benevolent organizations, etc. Others explain that denominationalism is not really sinful because it "does not necessarily violate the *spiritual* unity of the body of Christ."[92] These proponents of denominationalism emphatically say "that the body of Christ is not broken."[93] Some others emphasize that "It is union with God that creates the unity of God's people."[94] This is all true. The unity of the church, can and should be "conceived as a unity of spirit and purpose, of devotion to a common Master, of voluntary co-operation in carrying on His work, and of free fellowship among all His disciples."[95] But this argument is also a rhetorical evasion of the reality of divisions and reveals a characteristic of human nature. That is, "the human tendency to develop theoretical views that accommodate or make sense of our own personal experience."[96] There certainly is a great deal of friendship, fellowship, cooperation, and collaboration between Christians of different denominations, but that does not excuse the reality of the divisions that initiate and maintain those denominations. Furthermore, none of the so-called benefits of a denomination (schools, missions, etc.) are activities that a united church could not also provide.

Some will correctly point out that the church must sometimes be divided for practical reasons. Obviously, all of the Christians in the world cannot meet together in one place. Even within a single city it may be impractical for all of God's people to meet together in one location. Of course they must meet separately. The problem is not that they congregate in separate locations, the problem is that they emphasize their separateness—doctrinally, theologically, racially, etc.—from other groups of Christians.

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[91]Ra McLaughlin, "Denominationalism," Third Millennium Q & A Knowledge Base, http://www.thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/99853.qna/category/pt/page/questions/site/iiim, accessed September 19, 2009.

[92]D.O. Moberg, "Denominationalism," in Daniel G. Reid, ed., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990, 352.

[93]Erwin Lutzer, *The Doctrines that Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 16.

[94]Edmund P. Clowney, The Church, Gerald Bray, ed., Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 79.

[95]W.E. Garrison, "Disciples of Christ," in R. Newton Flew, ed., *The Nature of the Church: Papers Presented to the Theological Commission Appointed by the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952), 284.

[96]Steven Porter, "On the Renewal of Interest in the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Methodological Reminder," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 3 (Sept. 2002): 415-426, 415.

Sometimes the accomplishments of denominations is held up as proof of their legitimacy, but the fact that God uses denominations to accomplish his will does not give legitimacy to their creation. The achievements of denominations merely illustrates the amazing grace of God—that he uses denominations despite the divisions that initiate and perpetuate them. "Christendom has often achieved apparent success by ignoring the precepts of its founder...Denominationalism in the Christian Church is such an unacknowledged hypocrisy. It is a compromise, made far too lightly, between Christianity and the world. Yet it often regards itself as a Christian achievement."[97] Kik, for example, argues for the benefits of denominationalism based on the fact that "some denominations were formed with deep conviction of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with a price of suffering and blood."[98] Certainly, the conviction of godly Christians to leave one group and start another should not be judged by those who do not know or understand their circumstances, but to claim the guidance of the Holy Spirit when establishing a denomination which, by definition[99] is a division within the body of Christ, is presumptuous. The Holy Spirit has already given his guidance to God's people: "Let there be no divisions among you."[100] Also, to claim that the establishment of a new denomination is legitimate because the founders "suffered and bled" proves nothing.[101] Kik's own denomination, the Presbyterian Church, has split again and again into multiple groups, mostly as the result of quarrels.[102] It may be that some of these divisions were accomplished

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[97]H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Social Sources of Denominationalism," in Robert Bellah, et. al., eds. *Individualism & Commitment in American Life.* New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1987, 368.

[98]J. Marcellus Kik, *Ecumenism and the Evangelical* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1958), 20.

[99]Denominationalism is "the system and ideology founded on the *division* of the religious population into numerous ecclesiastical bodies, each stressing particular values or traditions and each competing with the other in the same community…" Emphasis added. Jerald C. Brauer, *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), s.v., "Denominationalism," 262-263.

[100]1 Corinthians 1:10 (NIV).

[101]E.g., The founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Joseph Smith, suffered and bled, but that does not give legitimacy to the sect he was forming. Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, *The God Makers* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1984), 173.

[102]E.g., Presbyterians in the United States have split over marriage, abortion, humanism, slavery, missionary programs, political controversies, racial issues, Armenianism versus Calvinism, and Fundamentalism versus Modernism. Daniel G. Reid, Ed., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), s.v. "Presbyterian Church in America," 929-932.

through bloodshed and suffering, but that does not legitimize them as Kik asserts. Furthermore, "the purpose of the Gospel is to bring people into the church of Jesus Christ—his body. But if that body is split into many different sects and denominations, then it represents, at best, only a portion of the will of God…The proclamation of the Gospel, apart from the unity of the church, is a theological absurdity."[103]

Once denominations are formed, it is true that they can accomplish much good and, after a time of consolidation, they usually see themselves not as the only Christians, but as one group within the body of Christ, accepting believers in different denominations as Christian brothers and sisters. However, the creation of a new denomination, especially if it is the result of conflict, is disobedient to the clear biblical commands not to divide. Then, once they are established, most denominations remain divisions within the body of Christ, even those who do their best to recognize "their responsibility for the whole of society…(expecting) to cooperate in freedom and mutual respect with other denominations."[104] A denomination, then, is a group of Christians who have given themselves a distinct name for the purpose of differentiating themselves from all other Christians and submitting to no ecclesial authority beyond their own organizational hierarchy. Regardless of the clever use of euphemisms and sanguine descriptions, denominations are, in fact, divisions within the body of Christ.

The twentieth century could be called the "Century of Denominationalism" in the church, but the twenty-first century may see Christians choosing a different path. The church statistician, David Barrett, reports that the biggest shift in Christianity since 1983 "is the emergence of the 386 million 'independents' as the second biggest category, after the 1 billion Roman Catholics…The independents are forming networks somewhat like traditional denominations but style themselves as 'post-denominational."[105] If Christians are beginning to realize that they can exist as local congregations who cooperate

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[103]Jamie Buckingham, "Introduction," in Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Call to Discipleship*, as told to Jamie Buckingham (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1975) , xiii.

[104]Winthrop S. Hudson, "Denominationalism as a Basis for Ecumenicity," in Russell E. Richey, ed., *Denominationalism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1977), 22. This author thinks that this attitude is not as common as Mr. Hudson asserts.

[105] Richard N. Ostling, "Researcher Tabulates World's Believers," Associated Press, 19 May 2001, http://christianity.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=christianity&cdn=religion&tm=36&f=10&tt=11&bt=0&bts=0&st=31&zu=http%3A//www.adherents.com/misc/WCE.html (accessed September 1, 2011).

together in regional collaboration without the necessity of a denominational structure, it may be that denominations will lose their dominance and non-denominational Christianity will become the norm. If this is the case, then the church must also rid itself of the hyper-individualism that has accompanied denominationalism. If the church moves beyond denominationalism, it must do so in an attitude of being a community in a biblical sense, rejecting hyper-individualism to be what the Lord desires in his bride: unity as a body, a family, a nation and a community. The way out of denominationalism is not "privatized," or "patchwork" pluralistic Christianity. The way out of denominationalism is true, biblical community—the church as it was meant to be.

Division and Pentecostalism

The tendency to divide the body of Christ has reached an embarrassing level in the twenty-first century, and while nearly all of Christendom is to blame in some way, Pentecostals have contributed much to the present condition of the church. This is tragic because the Pentecostal movement began and has been defined as a movement that, by its nature, ought to bring unity to the church, not division.[106] In fact, "the earliest expectations for the Pentecostal revival were that it had been sent to bring unity to Christians around the world."[107] Seymour, one of the founders of the modern Pentecostal Movement, "in the first issue of his periodical *Apostolic Faith* stated that the movement stood for 'Christian unity everywhere.'"[108] The expectation that Pentecostals would bring unity to the church makes sense even insofar as Luke, the New Testament spokesman for Pentecostalism, saw the unity of the church as one of its most central and basic keystones.[109] Certainly, for

[106]See Allan Anderson, "Diversity in the Definition of 'Pentecostal/Charismatic,'" a paper presented at the 31st Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lakeland, Florida, March 14-16, 2002, 731-747.

[107]Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Name and Glory: the Ecumenical Challenge," in Harold D. Hunter, ed., *Pastoral Problems in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement* (Cleveland, TN: The Society for Pentecostal Studies, manuscripts distributed at the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, n.d.), 10.

[108]Allan Anderson, "Pentecostals, Healing and Ecumenism," *International Review of Mission* 93, nos. 370-371 (July/Oct., 2004): 486-496, 488.

[109]Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Quest for Unity in the New Testament Church: A Study in Paul and Acts* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 75-78.

the first Pentecostals, "forming new denominations…was the last thing on their minds."[110]

Despite this commendable attitude at its inception, in the past century Pentecostals have not only divided repeatedly, their "missionary programs have perpetuated (those) divisions and spread them worldwide."[111] It would be appropriate, therefore, if the Pentecostals not only worked to stop the out-of-control division within the church, but would actually return to one of their original tenets, becoming an agency for unity in the body of Christ. Unfortunately the early expectation of the Pentecostal founders has gradually given way to a situation where "most Pentecostal leaders have a limited vision for the potential benefits that engagement with the larger church might bring to them."[112] This attitude is extremely disappointing because it indicates a lack of desire to restore unity even in places where it might be possible.[113]

Dissention, disunity and the resulting division appears to be part of human nature. C.S. Lewis understood our contentious nature: "When two Christians of different denominations start arguing, it is usually not long before one asks whether such-and-such a point 'really matters' and the other replies: 'Matter? Why, it's absolutely essential.'"[114] Pentecostals are not exempt from such attitudes and the division they inevitably cause. In fact, according to Robeck, they excel at it:

> The Pentecostal movement has managed, in just less than a century, to contribute to nearly as many different divisions as it took the rest of the church a millennium to produce. By ignoring lessons which could have been learned from the historic churches, the Pentecostal movement has not lived up to its potential, nor has it achieved the

[110]Gary B. McGee, "'More than Evangelical:' The Challenge of the Evolving Theological Identity of the Assemblies of God," *Pneuma* 25, no. 2 (Fall, 2003): 289-300, 290.

[111]Robeck, "Pentecostals and Christian Unity," 309.

[112]Ibid., 319.

[113]E.g., early in the history of the Pentecostal Movement, the Pentecostal Church of God split from the newly-formed Assemblies of God over the issue of whether the denomination should have a statement of faith. The Pentecostal Church of God thought that such statements were unbiblical and the Assemblies of God thought they were undesirable but necessary. Later, when the Pentecostal Church of God denomination decided that they actually *did* need a statement of faith, they did not reconcile with the Assemblies of God, but remained a separate denomination. Vinson Synan, ed., *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal 1901-2001* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 138-139.

[114]C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 8.

> hopes and dreams of its pioneers. Like the Christians it often criticizes, it has contributed to the fragmentation and pluralization of the Christian portion of the contemporary global context.[115]

Part of this problem is that the century that Robeck is describing—the twentieth—was a century of unrestrained division in the entire worldwide church. Pentecostalism, being a product of the twentieth century, could not help but be influenced by the pandemic of division in the church. This does not excuse the division, but perhaps it shows that no matter how well-intentioned a group of Christians are at their beginning, human sinful nature will almost always find a way to cause discord, conflict and division.

The Church's Affected Ecclesiology

It is difficult to discuss *the* ecclesiology of the church, as if there were only one. In fact, there are many ecclesiologies since each difference of interpretation or opinion could be classified as a separate ecclesiology. Obviously, there are different ecclesiologies among Christians from differing theological backgrounds, so each sect or denomination has an ecclesiology that is somewhat different than the others. But even within these divisions, there are different ecclesiologies—not only differing opinions on theology,[116] but there is also often a gap between theology and practice, between what the academicians are writing and what the local pastors and members are teaching and doing. Therefore, when discussing ecclesiology, one can discuss it in terms of either theology or praxis, but frequently these two cannot be discussed as the same.

In considering the effect of division on ecclesiology, it is important to note that rarely has any "official" ecclesiology been affected. Throughout the twentieth century and before, theologians and writers from various denominations have been decrying division and denominationalism. It is at the local level that the church's ecclesiology has been affected. The evidence for this is more than 38,000

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[115]Robeck, "*Pentecostals and Ecumenism*," 340-341.

[116]E.g., Macchia discusses the experience of global Pentecostalism and the existence, theologically, of "separate Pentecostalisms" because even the most basic characteristics of Pentecostalism differ in understanding and importance in different parts of the world and between different Pentecostal denominations. Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 33-38.

denominations that exist in the body of Christ today.[117] Obviously, regardless of the pleas of theologians and biblical scholars for unity, Christians in local churches and denominations feel free to divide the body of Christ.

Hyper-individualism in the church contributed to a decrease in sanctification in the church which, in turn, led to rampant division. That division was opposed to existing ecclesiologies within the body of Christ and led some Christians to work diligently to halt division and restore unity.[118] Conversely, it also led many Christians to modify their ecclesiology, allowing for divisiveness and justifying it in books and literature.[119]

God's people are well aware of biblical commands against division, which creates a problem. Christians must either admit their guilt in dividing the body of Christ and be reconciled to those they have

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[117] Mary Fairchild, "Christianity Today - General Statistics and Facts of Christianity," About.com Guide, http://christianity.about.com/od/denominations/p/christiantoday.htm, accessed September 20, 2009.

[118] The Ecumenical Movement is one such movement, but its efficacy is weakened by the fact that it is mainly a "bureaucratic and scholarly rather than a grass-roots movement" and the average Christian does not seem to have much interest in it. Andrew M. Greeley, *The Denominational Society* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1972), 247. Another unity movement was the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, whose founder Alexander Campbell proclaimed, "We have pledged ourselves to union." Alexander Campbell, "Signs of the Times," *Millennial Harbinger* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1861): 42. Unfortunately, this movement has not only been relatively unsuccessful in bringing unity to the body of Christ, it has experienced several significant divisions within itself. Douglas A. Foster, et. al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 755.

[119] In addition to published justifications in favor of denominationalism cited earlier, Greeley epitomizes them by arguing that denominationalism gives people a valuable sense of identity and meaning for their lives. He also argues that the existence of denominations gives stability to a society and vitality to Christianity. Andrew M. Greeley, *The Denominational Society* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1972), 251-254; See also John M. Buchanan, "Staying Together," *Christian Century* 128, issue 12 (June 2011): 3, 3, in which someone tried to convince Buchanan that denominations were a sign of "energy and diversity" in the body of Christ; Russell E. Richey, ed. *Denominationalism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1977), 19-21, 70-73; Ross P. Scherer, *American Denominational Organization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1980); J. Marcellus Kik, *Ecumenism and the Evangelical* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1958, 20-25; Nancy T. Ammerman, "New Life for Denominationalism," *Christian Century* 117, issue 9 (March 2000): 302-307; Ra McLaughlin, "Denominationalism," Third Millennium Q & A Knowledge Base. http://www.thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/99853.qna/category/pt/page/questions/site/iiim (accessed September 19, 2009); Sidney E. Mead, "Denominationalism: the Shape of Protestantism in America," *Church History* 23, no. 4 (Dec. 1954): 291-320. http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/ pdf?vid=8&hid=104&sid= adaf3416-7a0b-4a72-a52c-9b0690b7b3f7@sessionmgr11 (accessed September 20, 2009).

separated from, or find some justification or spiritual explanation for their divisions. It can be assumed that there are several subgroups within the body of Christ in regard to this issue. There are, no doubt, many Christians who believe that division is wrong. Within that group, there are those who are actively working for unity and those who are not. There are also many Christians who have worked faithfully to reconcile split churches and reunite divided denominations. Unfortunately, there is also a category of believers who are willing to divide the body of Christ for reasons they consider justified. In order to find justification for division, their ecclesiology must be modified so that it is more important to escape from or expel the perceived wrong than to remain united.

Regardless of the calls of scholars and theologians to stop dividing the body of Christ, the rest of the church obviously believes that division is an acceptable way to resolve conflict. In fact, division is not only acceptable but has been a common method of resolving conflict since the Reformation.[120] When Christians see conflict as "a contest or a chance to assert their rights, to control others, or to take advantage of their situation,"[121] many church and denominational divisions will naturally occur because both parties are trying to "win." Similar divisions will occur when Christians walk away from a conflict rather than try to resolve it. Many of those Christians who lose the fight

[120]In addition to countless church and organizational splits since the Reformation, many denominations were born out of conflict, including the Primitive Baptists, Southern Baptists, American Baptist Association, Independent Baptists, Bible Presbyterian Church, Brethren in Christ, Reformed Episcopal Church, African Orthodox Church, Disciples of Christ, Church of God (Anderson), Church of God of Prophecy, Church of God in Christ, Pentecostal Church of God, Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches, Freewill Baptists, Grace Brethren Churches, Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, Apostolic Lutheran Church, Church of the Lutheran Brethren, Church of the Lutheran Confession, (Old) Mennonite Church, (New) Mennonite Church, Southern Methodist Church, Free Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Particular Baptists, Presbyterian Church in America, Bible Presbyterian Church, Christian Reformed Church, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, etc. This list comes from a cursory survey of Daniel G. Reid, ed., *Dictionary of Christianity in America (*Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990). In fairness, there are also many denominations which were formed by the *merger* of two or more previously separated denominations, including the United Presbyterian Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, United Methodist Church, etc. Additionally, some denominations, such as the Assemblies of God, arose spontaneously out of a sense of camaraderie and solidarity. Although they were marginalized by other believers, the Assemblies of God denomination was not created in response to any specific conflict.

[121]Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, Revised and Updated (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 24.

or leave for some other reason will naturally start something new—a new church, a new organization, a new denomination—justifying the division as the result of circumstances. Despite the fact that it has become a common method of resolving conflict, few people recognize that division is not a manner of resolving conflict, it is a manner of avoiding conflict.[122] In hindsight, it is easy to see that as denominationalism grew more and more familiar, it perpetuated itself by creating an environment that "encouraged Christians to resolve conflicts by division rather than (by) compromise."[123]

This paper has now come full-circle in describing the downward spiral that the church is experiencing: The church's hyper-individualism has led to a decrease of sanctification, which has resulted in disunity and division. That division influenced the church's ecclesiology and encouraged Christians to develop a view of the church that further sanctions hyper-individualism, which further erodes sanctification and results in more division. For more than a century, the body of Christ has been spiraling downward through this cycle, but there is a way out. It is possible for the church to reverse this descent, through the intentional discipleship of believers.

Reversing the Downward Spiral Through Intentional Discipleship

The downward spiral of hyper-individualism, worldliness, and division is just one of many problems that the church faces today, but it is a significant one. Fortunately, it is not an insurmountable problem. In fact, there is a simple solution—a way to reverse the downward spiral. Followers of Christ have been "called out of our narrow individualism and our small private world…(We must) allow ourselves to be 'turned around' by the allurement of God and to live for him, as Jesus did."[124] In other words, the way to reverse this downward spiral is simple, though difficult. The reversal will only occur through the intentional discipleship of God's people, teaching and training them to live for Christ, to correct their faulty ecclesiologies and to have a biblical attitude about unity, holiness and community.

Christian discipleship is ongoing training in christlikeness, which occurs after the new birth and results in spiritual maturity as

[122]Ibid., 23.

[123]William H. Gentz, ed., *The Dictionary of the Bible and Religion* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986), s.v., "Denominationalism," 263.

[124]Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, in Kauffman, "Discipleship," 57.

Christians grow in sanctification and in their relationship with Christ. Due in large part to the prominence of a hyper-individualistic attitude among Christians and the private faith that it encourages, the church today is not adequately discipling its members. The consequences of this neglect are seen in the downward spiral described in this paper.

The inattention to discipleship has been widely observed by church leaders. Hull, for example says that discipleship such as the early church practiced is today "uncommon" at best, but in reality is "unknown" and that the church's neglect of the "art of making disciples" is the reason why "the kingdom of God is not advancing as planned."[125] Compounding this problem is a concern that even where churches *are* practicing discipleship in some form, those programs are often characterized by a lack of intentionality in their implementation.[126] Recognizing this situation, Wilson gives a long and detailed evaluation of the church today and warns that "the conditions that caused the demise of disciple building and lay ministry in (the early church) are recurring in the modern church and pose the same threats."[127]

Willard expresses the importance of *intentionality* in discipleship: it should be "consciously implemented, to bring others to the point where they are daily learning from Jesus how to live their actual lives as he would live them if he were they.[128] Hadidian's model of Christian discipleship is a good example of intentional discipleship.[129] He compares spiritual development with biological parenting and argues that, just as a mother and father nurture their new baby, mature Christians must deliberately disciple new believers. Basler agrees: "If we want to be disciplemakers, then we must follow Jesus' example and intentionally seek out those who are waiting to grow…we need to be as intentional as mountain climbers are about reaching the summit."[130]

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[125] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 69.

[126] David Watson, *Discipleship* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 67-69.

[127] Carl Wilson, *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 19.

[128] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 302.

[129] Allen Hadidian, *Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 12-20. See also Dean Merrill and Marshall Shelley, eds., *Fresh ideas for Discipleship and Nurture* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, Inc., 1984), 13-14;

[130] J. Michael Basler, et. al., *Disciplemaker's Handbook*, Alice Fryling, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 25.

Intentional discipleship has the potential to reverse the downward spiral by countering the errant attitudes and beliefs that led the church downward in the first place. Willard believes that simple obedience to the command to Christ's command to make disciples would "soon transform everything among professing Christians as we know them.[131] Intentional discipleship, rooted in biblical teaching, will lead believers to attitudes and behaviors such as love,[132] obedience,[133] humility,[134] *koinonia*,[135] community,[136] unity,[137] holiness,[138] etc., all of which are values and characteristics of a spiritually mature believer. As these elements of a disciple's character are developed, the downward spiral will naturally be reversed in his or her life. If the whole church would grow and perfect these characteristics in their lives, the downward spiral would cease completely. People who claim to be disciples of Christ but whose lives do not demonstrate these characteristics in increasing measure are fooling themselves. Disciples of Christ cannot have an attitude of hyper-individualism when the Christian life is supposed to be characterized by love, *koinonia*, and humility. Disciples should be those who are growing in sanctification throughout their lifetimes. Division should *never* be an option for disciples who are obeying God's commands and whose lives are dedicated to the unity of Christ's body. The problem, therefore, is not the nature of the church or the nature of a disciple. The downward spiral has been perpetuated by nothing more than a lack of intentional discipleship and it can be reversed by nothing less.

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[131]Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 302.

[132] Carl Wilson, *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 187-188.

[133]Bill Bright, *Handbook for Christian Maturity* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1992), 221ff.

[134]Floyd McClung, *Basic Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 139ff.

[135]Ortiz, 99ff.

[136]Hull, 188ff.

[137] David Watson, *Discipleship* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 39ff.

[138] Vandenberg quotes Radner's assertion that "the doctrine of the incarnation as addressed by such figures as Clement of Alexandria and Athanasius made clear that 'the coming of the word in the flesh of Jesus took place precisely in order to transform human beings into vessels of righteousness *and holiness*, whose image conforms to that of God himself,'" (emphasis added). Ephraim Radner, *The Rule of Faith: Scripture, Canon, and Creed in a Critical Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1998), 16, in Vandenberg, Mary. "Bonhoeffer's Discipleship: Theology for the Purpose of Christian Formation." *Calvin Theological Journal 44*, no. 2 (Nov. 2009): 333-349.

Effectively Discipling Christians

"Luther borrowed from St. Bernard of Clairvaux the dictum that a Christian is always a beginner."[139] Thomas Merton spoke of spiritual growth similarly: "We do not want to be beginners. but let us be convinced of the fact that we will never be anything else but beginners all our life."[140] While understanding their hyperbole, this author disagrees. The New Testament unmistakably anticipates spiritual growth for a Christian and, in fact, chastises the Christian who is still a beginner after many years of being a disciple.[141] John clearly identifies stages of development as a Christian grows spiritually and uses language that expects spiritual maturity beyond the level of a "beginner."[142] Yancy correctly distinguishes between the "childlike faith" that Jesus desires of his followers and a "childish faith" that is nothing more than immaturity.[143] Despite all this, St. Bernard and Merton express the attitude that discourages many Christians from exerting the effort required to progress in their faith: "If I am always going to be a 'beginner' no matter how hard I try, then what motivation do I have to strive toward maturity?" It is difficult and discouraging to work toward any goal that is perceived as unattainable. Salvation is a clearly delineated event for most Christians. They can recall the progress they made that led to the moment when they received Christ and became his disciple. But spiritual growth following conversion has no distinct goal in this lifetime.[144] New believers are encouraged by word and example to "run the race"[145] and even to "finish the race"[146] and "win the prize,"[147] but when the finish line is in the next world, any progress at all can be said to be acceptable.

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[139]David C. Steinmetz, "Growing in Grace," *Christian Century* (October 30, 2007): 10-11, 10, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rlh&AN=27399998&site=ehost-live (accessed September 23, 2009).

[140]Thomas Merton in Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 2.

[141]E.g., Hebrews 5:11-14, 1 Corinthians 3:2, 1 Peter 2:2.

[142]1 John 2:12-14.

[143] Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 209-221.

[144]At least for those who do not believe in the doctrine of Entire Sanctification. As discussed above, one significant benefit of adhering to a Wesleyan theology is that there *is* a clear goal within this lifetime: Entire Sanctification.

[145] Hebrews 12:1.

[146]2 Timothy 4:7.

[147] Philippians 3:14.

A significant part of the problem is that growth is encouraged through church discipleship programs, but the stated goals of such programs are ambiguous because spiritual maturity is so difficult to assess. Adsit says that "growth, whether physical or spiritual, is dynamic."[148] He then describes a biblical evaluation system for gauging spiritual development and notes that "by knowing what should characterize a disciple at each level of growth, we get a better idea of how we can help that disciple…toward maturity."[149]

This situation should come as no surprise in our hyper-individualistic Christian world where believers arbitrarily determine their own spiritual finish line and individuals gauge their own progress toward maturity based on their own personal standards and goals. "Plenty of people in the church…have made up a 'Jesus' for themselves and have found that this invented character makes few real demands on them. He makes them feel happy from time to time but doesn't challenge them."[150] In other words, when the church is characterized by privatized Christianity, if individual believers set their goals low and remain relatively immature, that is their business alone. If other believers set their goals high and gain great spiritual maturity, good for them, but it has nothing to do with a believer who is not particularly interested in spiritual growth. This is the result when progress is encouraged by the church but not really expected. "The reason disciple-making often fails is that we don't expect it to reproduce."[151] Progress is not expected because there are no consequences for a member who has been saved for many years but is still spiritually immature.[152] In fact, many such people hold positions of leadership in the church.[153] Despite these significant difficulties, the church is finding that there is "a renewal of interest in 'Christian

[148]Christopher B. Adsit, *Personal Disciplemaking* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1989), 61.

[149]Ibid.

[150]N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), ix.

[151]Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 71.

[152]E.g., Williamson discusses the mistake the church makes when it focuses on a person's "intellectual understanding of the gospel without giving due attention to how he or she is living" Peter S. Williamson, "Radical Commitment to Christ" in John C. Blattner, ed., *Leading Christians to Maturity* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), 59.

[153]Kenneth Prior, *Perils of Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 11-26

spirituality' amongst Christian believers."[154] This interest creates an opportunity for the church to begin discipling its members in earnest.[155]

Most Christians would agree that "sanctification is both a completed action in Christ and an ongoing action of God in the life of believers."[156] If we think of it as "Initial Sanctification" and "Ongoing Sanctification," the "ongoing" part is what is lacking in the church today. Christians are too easily satisfied by a secular form of spirituality, sometimes called "counterfeit spirituality."[157] They have allowed as "acceptable" the development of a segregated Christian life in which spiritual life is separate from "normal" life. This is what Bulatao calls "split-level Christianity,"[158] in which Christianity and secularism co-exist within the same person as "two or more thought-and-behavior systems which are inconsistent with each other."[159] For example, the church frequently teaches people to begin their day with a time of "personal devotion," but neglects to train them to live *all* of their day in interaction with God. The implication, then, is that as long as they begin their day with a devotion, the rest of the day can be lived in a relatively worldly manner and the disciple will likely feel that he is doing pretty well spiritually. Only after years of split-level living might they ask, "Why am I not growing in my spiritual life?"

Split-Level Christianity is widespread in the church today due to our neglect of the ministry of sanctification and the resulting inattention to the discipleship of our members. Our spiritual development is not merely one segment of our lives to be developed in isolation from other parts such as our physical, emotional, social, educational, or moral development. Rather, our spirituality should

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[154]Steven L. Porter, "On the Renewal of Interest in the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Methodological Reminder," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 3 (Sept. 2002): 415-426, 415.

[155]The phrase "discipling its members" is, itself, indicative of a problem in the church. Juan Carlos Ortiz describes his search for the idea of church *membership* in the book of Acts: "I didn't even find the word 'member.' But reading the Acts I found another word that really revolutionized my life and the life of our church. The world was disciples." Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Call to Discipleship*, as told to Jamie Buckingham (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1975) , 67. Even the common understanding of Christians as "members," when the New Testament understands them as "disciples" shows a misunderstanding and neglect of the ministry of discipleship.

[156]Leggett, "The Assemblies of God Statement on Sanctification," 23.

[157]Timothy R. Phillips and Donald G. Bloesch, "Counterfeit Spirituality," in Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit, eds., *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 60-73.

[158]Jaime Bulatao, *Split-Level Christianity* (Manila, Philippines: Ateneo University Press, 1969), 2.

[159]Ibid.

affect all of our life development, so that *as* we develop physically and emotionally as students, workers, spouses, senior citizens, etc., it is all done in an integrated way with our spiritual development.

The neglect of Israel in discipling their children during the period of the Judges resulted in a nation where the chosen people of God were all but completely secular in their worldview. A similar chain of events is taking place in the church today as the church neglects the responsibility of guiding new Christians through their experience of ongoing sanctification. Christians are not adequately discipling new believers and are neglecting to train even their own children. The Barna Group, in a 2009 survey, found that although America has "the world's largest infrastructure for nurturing human spirituality, complete with hundreds of thousands of houses of worship, thousands of parachurch organizations and schools, and seemingly unlimited products, resources and experts…A new study [shows] there is little progress in helping people develop spiritually."[160] This is a regrettable situation for the church, but again, it is a situation that can easily be reversed. The church is already well prepared to offer discipleship programs. Most local congregations have teachers, classroom space, even discipleship materials. All that is necessary is for the discipleship to begin.

Conclusion

Any scenario in which individualism reaches an extreme in society will inevitably result in anarchy. As the people of God, we have a clear warning of this in the book of Judges. In Judges 17:6 and 21:25 we are told that the reason for the problems they were facing as a nation was that "eman did that which was right in his own eyes." When they entered the Promised Land, they were truly sanctified as a nation as seen in their commitment: "We will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:21). As their individualism grew, however, their sanctification declined. As a result, they stopped serving God and fell into idolatry and debauchery. Eventually, this resulted in disunity among the people of God and the tribes went to war with each other.[161]

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[160]N/a, "Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity," The Barna Group (May 2009). http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/264-many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity?q=spiritual+immaturity (accessed Oct. 1, 2011).

[161] E.g., Judges 12:1-7, chapters 20 and 21.

We would be foolish to ignore the parallel that exists today with the same cycle of increasing individualism resulting in a decrease of sanctification, which has in turn resulted in division and disunity. The Israelites never found their way out of this downward spiral which eventually led to their exile from the land that was promised. We shake our heads at the Israelites and their foolishness, but why can't we see that we are also trapped in the same downward spiral? Modifying our ecclesiology to justify our divisions will only lead us further down the spiral. The grease on the downward spiral is the lack of discipleship—for the Israelites and for us—and intentional discipleship is the way back to sanctification and unity. The Israelites never found their way back. Will we?

Ultimately, "The mission of the church on earth is not just to preach the gospel but to be the living expression of the gospel."[162] I believe that the Church is on the brink of a movement of unity that will heal many wounds and break down many walls. Pentecostals are poised to be one of the main catalysts for that movement. But something must be done quickly before our individualistic form of Christianity weakens the body of Christ any further. Somehow, for the sake of Christ Jesus our Lord, the division must stop because it goes against the desire of God and the nature of the church.

> The Body of Christ is nothing other than a fellowship of persons. It is 'the fellowship of Jesus Christ' or 'fellowship of the Holy Ghost' where fellowship or *koinonia* signifies a common participation, a togetherness, a community life. The faithful are bound to each other through their common sharing in Christ and in the Holy Ghost, but that which they have in common is precisely no 'thing,' no 'it,' but a 'he,' Christ and His Holy Spirit.[163]

We have, therefore, an unlimited resource to defeat individualism, to turn around our apathy for sanctification, to stop the division, and to correct our ecclesiology—the Holy Spirit—and his will is clear: that we live as a unified community, that we strive for holiness, and that we make as many disciples as possible until Christ returns.

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[162] Chan, "Mother Church," 208.

[163] Emil Brunner in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "The Church as the Fellowship of Persons," 1.