This is to certify that the
thesis entitled

GROWING GOD'S KINGDOM:
A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF A GROWING MIDWESTERN
CHURCH

presented by

ELSHIVO KEN HARMON SR.

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts	degree in	Sociology

Major Professor's Signature

12/12/07

Date

PLACE IN RETURN BOX to remove this checkout from your record.
TO AVOID FINES return on or before date due.
MAY BE RECALLED with earlier due date if requested.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE

6/07 p:/CIRC/DateDue.indd-p.1

GROWING GOD'S KINGDOM:
A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF A GROWING MIDWESTERN CHURCH

By

Elshivo Kenneth Harmon Sr.

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology

2007

ABSTRACT

GROWING GOD'S KINGDOM:
A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF A GROWING MIDWESTERN CHURCH

By

Elshivo Kenneth Harmon Sr.

This research studies the growth of Mount Zion Baptist Church located in Kalamazoo, Michigan. This paper will demonstrate that Mt. Zion's 5 'C' factors of church growth are founded upon creating a cultural atmosphere that it in fact reproduces itself. The motto of the church, "If you show up, you'll grow up" supports the literature that suggests that social interaction through religious affiliation is crucial to learned patterns of behavior and, inevitably, the reproduction of growth as a cultural phenomenon. Finally, utilizing both biblical doctrine and sociological frameworks it will be argued that sociology does not necessarily refute the biblical principles related to church growth, but provides sound scientific evidence, to expound and illuminate the biblical beliefs ● which Christians profess.

"being confident in this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6 - NIV).

"with God, nothing is impossible" (Luke 1:37).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His divine strength and inspiration to do what many (to include myself) deemed impossible. I thank my committee members, Toby Teneyck, Ralph Pyle and Steve Gold for your patience, time and talents. To my mentor and academic drill sergeant, Ruth Hamilton, in your passing, you are surely missed. I also would like to thank Reverend Addis Moore, my Pastor, friend and spiritual father for your many whippings, your continued encouragement and your willingness to pour so much of yourself in me. You will never know how much I appreciate you. Finally, I would like to thank my best friend, my helpmate suitable for me, my gift from God Himself, my wife Tracy La'Shonn Harmon for your continuous love and support of this project. You pushed me to produce a project worthy of the God we serve. Brownies for life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This paper began with a very simple question, what does the Christian interested in church growth have to gain by studying sociology? The question formulated in its theoretical framework asks 'what is the relationship between Christian biblical doctrine and basic sociological theories in church growth examination?' For many Christians, clergy, and theologians alike, Matthew 28:16-20[1] acts as the biblical directive for which all church growth phenomena occurs. It states:

> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Known as 'The Great Commission,' these passages of scripture proclaim church growth as a biblically fated -- thus God orchestrated -- phenomenon. Because of this, it often becomes difficult for clergy and theologians to subjugate biblical authority to scientific research, study and validation. For example, a fellow clergy screamed from the pulpit, "I don't know nothing but bible and don't want to know nothing but bible,"[2] in a perceptible refute to a recent discussion into the need for additional research meshing sociological theories and biblical doctrine in church growth studies. Apparently he did not agree with me. His statement, however, is typical of many who are apprehensive about applying or identifying a scientific approach to a biblical ordination in church growth studies.

---

[1] All biblical scriptural references will use the New International Version unless otherwise stated.
[2] Personal Note February 12, 2006

Like my fellow clergy, the question of coupling biblical doctrine and science plagued me for years and even led to my eventual departure from sociology and graduate school altogether. It appeared the more I developed my Christian beliefs, the more I struggled to comprehend, grasp and embrace many facets of sociology (e.g., a Marxist perspective). Often these varying viewpoints appeared to render nothing but criticism at organized religions. After an extensive hiatus from graduate school in which I found myself immersed in intense biblical research and study, I returned to sociology with a much sought after answer. So what does a Christian interested in the biblical dynamics of church growth have to gain by studying sociology? Upon further research and reflection, I came to the conclusion that when comparing and contrasting Christian biblical doctrine with sociological principles in identity formation there was a need for bringing both into a socio-biblical development for understanding church growth dynamics.

The generation and maintenance of beliefs in an institution is key to its sustainability and growth. Like most institutions, Mt. Zion, a Mid-western Baptist Church, must gain followers to continue its existence. Through a sociological examination of the biblical mandates concerning church growth, this research will address the need for church growth research as a byproduct of cultural production and reproduction through collective identity. By sociologically deconstructing what it calls its 5 "C" Principles to Church Growth (Cast, Catch, Commit, Carry and Complete), the data will show the members of Mt. Zion have internalized growth as part of their collective faith. So much so, it then manifests

itself externally producing a collective action whereby growth becomes a part of the expected cultural norm, not the exception.

Sociology and Theology

Since the founding of Sociology as a discipline, there has been, and continues to be substantial disparity in sociological and theological views of religious behavior. Talcott Parsons (Weber 1991: XXX) explained, "When he [Max Weber] turned his studies towards religion, his focus was not on religion "as such," as the theologian or church historian conceives it, but upon the relations between religious ideas and commitments and other aspects of human conduct...within a society." Little has changed since that time as there is still a considerable difference in the sociological and theological accounts on church growth.

While both sociology and theology are concerned with human conditions, these literatures often have very different frames of references (Inskeep 1993: 135; Mills 1980: 2). Moberg (1964: 334) stated that:

> At the root of the controversy are two different normative systems which have two different theories of knowledge, two different approaches to reality, two different methods of extending knowledge, and two different attitudes of mind. Only as doctrinal differences are reconciled can there be peace between science and religion.

For many who study the Sociology of Religion, the church is constructed primarily as a religious social institution and is studied as such. Gill (1980:105-6) described three sociological approaches to theological studies:

> *A Study of the Social Context of Theology:* Sociological analysis could provide incisive and rigorous tools for the theologian to understand better the social context within which he operates.
>
> *A Study of the Social Determinants of Theology:* The focus here is less upon the task of the theologian than upon theology itself. This approach assumes that as a human enterprise theology is socially determined. It suggests a correlation

between social structures and theology, regarding the latter as a product of the former. Theology, like all other ideologies and explications of beliefs, is viewed as a human product or as a social construction.

A Study of the Social Significance of Theology: Here the possibility is explored that theology, even as a product of society, may in turn have an influence upon that society. If the previous approach regards theology as a dependent variable within society, this one allows for the possibility that theology may also act as an independent variable. Overall, theology is seen as socially constructed and a social reality.

When examined together, it becomes evident that these three approaches offer a very academic means to studying theological and biblical scripture with the purpose of demonstrating patterns of social group dynamics through social interaction (Durkheim 1995), social structures (Dubois 1903; Durkheim 1995), or the social construction of reality (Berger 1967).

It is not surprising that this intellectual approach often attempts to debunk metaphysical or scriptural beliefs (Zukerman 2003:28-34; Perkins 1987; O'Dea 1966: 53). Table 1 illustrates the different religious orientations of scientists and the general public. If it is a true representation of US society, as reported by Wuthnow (1989: 144 - 5) and the data hold true, it is not unexpected then that scientists are more likely than others to discount theological explanations of why a church is growing.

Table 1 – Scientist Religious Beliefs		
Question:	Scientist%	Public%
Ever read the Bible	64	75
Am a religious person	50	74
Frequently felt God loved them	31	73
Prayed frequently	27	57
Made a personal commitment to Christ	18	47

My argument against secular explanations for religious behavior stems from the fact that there appears to be a continuous attempt to sociologically analyze some aspect of Christianity devoid of its written biblical doctrine and theological beliefs.

This approach devalues Christianity, does not give an accurate picture of the institution, and perhaps most important, does little to stimulate the novice Christian student into a deeper study of sociology.

Church Growth and Decline

Church growth is often described as a movement within Christianity to aid and encourage the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As a discipline, church growth research is found in both Christian theological (McIntosh 2003; Rainer 1993; McGavran 1990) and sociological fields of study (Kelley 1972; Hoge and Roozen 1979; Hilliard 2006). For the purpose of this research, Rainer's attempt at an interdisciplinary approach to church growth will suffice. For Rainer (1993: 21), "Church growth is that discipline which seeks to understand, through biblical, sociological, historical and behavioral study why churches grow or decline."

There are there are three basic ways in which a church can grow (Rainer 1993: 22-23). These are biological, transfer and conversion. Biological Growth occurs each time a child is born to parent(s) who are already established as members. Transfer growth, often called 'sheep-swapping,' occurs when members leave one church to join another. Transfer growth has some extremely positive qualitative benefits to the individual leaving his/her former church such as better ministry opportunities or an increase in spiritual growth. The main problem in transfer growth, however, is as one church grows, others decline. In addition, most transfer growth seldom results in a more deeply committed Christian.

Transfer growth or sheep-swapping is significantly different than sheep-stealing. Sheep-stealing is when a pastor or church aggressively targets programs and efforts at another specific religious institution or denomination with the intent to remove or draw members from that church to their church (McGavran 1979: 16). Whereas sheep-stealing is targeted toward a specific church, sheep-swapping is simply producing a program that appeals to the general masses that are not receiving the spiritual nurturing they desire in their current church.

Conversion growth is the purest form of growth and will be addressed in more detail in the next section as I examine the ways in which Mt. Zion has sought to grow over the past few years. Conversion growth is a nonbeliever accepting Jesus in his/her life and agreeing to enter into an assimilation process. Mt. Zion's purpose both as a spiritual and social institution is to assist in the conversion process.

It is often quoted at Mt. Zion that "A stagnant church does not grow and anything that is not growing is probably dying." The decline or death of a church is generally described as one potential outcome of the process of institutionalization (Moberg 1964: 118-125). It is a process by which the activities, values, experiences and relationships of the group become formalized and stabilized so that relatively predictable behavior and more rigid organizational structures emerge. For a church, this can mean that it has ceased to function in the best interest of the original movement or the vision. Moberg (1964: 118-124) identified five stages in the church's life cycle that begins with a

"collective excitement" of the newly formed church that eventually ends with overinstitutionalization.

This occurs when church transitions from a place to worship God, to a religious institution (maintained primarily through traditionalism), to an institution which often serves the needs of cliques or those in positions of power (Moberg 1964: 291), while often overlooking the needs of its general parishioners. John 2:13-16 tells us that the Church had become a place of socialization, capital and cultural exchange. It states:

> When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!

This passage of scripture demonstrates that the power of overinstitutionalization in the destruction of a church is biblically recognized and cannot be emphasized enough. The end result produces disintegration, which produces division (e.g., church splits), which produces decline, which can ultimately produce the death of the church (Moberg 1964: 122).

Arn (1988:16) suggested that between 80 % - 85 % of all churches in America have reached platitude or are in decline. This data corresponds with a 2002 report *(Good News - The Christian Century)* that "Only 15 percent of American congregations have grown by even one person in the last five years." The report looks at demographic causes for this but comes to the conclusion that many churches simply do not have the necessary resources to grow. This is key to understanding why some churches grow while others do not. It is within a

cultural approach that we can make sense of this situation. For example, internal conflicts over cultural meanings associated with class divisions, generational splits or technological differences are apt to producing divisions that often push members out of the church towards other competing social institutions (Moberg 1964: 343). One of the major hurdles to overcome is producing a match between scripture and modern culture. I now turn to a discussion of one church which has set out to do this.

MT. Zion Baptist Church

Mt. Zion's considerable growth in both its membership and structure has caused substantial expansion in the social and structural edifice of the church to meet the needs of its members and the surrounding community. Ammerman (1997: 325) validated that a church unwilling to change to meet the needs of its members is socially and structurally doomed for failure. She explained:

> ...congregations whose strong attachment to their buildings [are] often out of touch with the church's current needs and uses. They return each week to buildings that hold sacred memories, rather than using their property as an asset for current needs. They have neither the resources to restore the buildings to their former glory nor to turn them into new centers for ministry activity. Old buildings directly affect the ability of congregations both to engage in certain activities and to imagine what those activities might be.

Since February 1995, when the Reverend Addis Moore accepted the call to lead and pastor, Mt. Zion has undertaken a $2.5 million expansion project that more than doubled the size of the existing facility. The development added a wing of classrooms, a larger conference room, a full chapel to serve as a separate Youth Church, a functional library and study center, additional seats in the sanctuary, a full court gym and fellowship hall, additional office space and a newly remodeled atrium area.

In addition to the building renovations, 2003 marked the beginning of a television broadcast ministry airing 23 times per week reaching millions of viewers. Growth continued in 2007 with the birthing of a full service physical fitness center. The Living Well Fitness Center embodies the vision of a holistic ministry and social gospel that serves both the spiritual and physical needs of not only its members, but the surrounding community as well. Targeted at an underserved population, The Living Well Fitness Center offers employment opportunities and provides physical fitness access in the heart of the inner-city with the intent to improve the various health issues affecting the predominantly African-American population of the area. Finally, mindful of future growth, the church initiated an Endowment Fund to provide support for the expected member escalation and sustainability of current members.

Membership comparisons of Mt. Zion to various popular giga-churches (10,000+ members) across the US shows that it is exceeding other similar institutions (see Table 2). For example, from January 1, 2006 to September 30, 2006, a total of 872 individuals have accepted Christ, joined or renewed their commitment to the church. Of the 872, 661 have united desiring to be members and agreeing to make Mt. Zion the church they will be attending on a regular basis.

Table 2 – Church Membership/City Population Ratio

	Potter's House	Crenshaw Christian Center	Lakewood Church	Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Membership	28,000	17,000	43,000	2,600
City Population	1,213,390 (Dallas TX)	3,900,000 (Los Angelos CA)	2,016,582 (Houston TX)	72,700 (Kalamazoo MI)
Ratio	1:43	1:217	1:47	1:28

This ability to gain new members is only complete, however, when an individual joins any biblically teaching church, which at Mt. Zion can be seen in the form of new and renewed membership. This can only occur by getting all members to believe that it is their responsibility to help grow the church, not just the select few who hold administrative or evangelistic positions.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Mt. Zion utilizes what it describes as its 5 "C" Vision Principles to nurture

and grow its members, thus its membership. Inspired through the senior pastor,

the 5 "C" Principles are:

1. **Cast** - Growth starts with leadership.
2. **Catch** - Growth is a process identity reformation.
3. **Commit** - Growth consists of putting faith to work.
4. **Carry** - Growth requires moving beyond the church.
5. **Complete** - Growth ends with assimilation.

The conclusions to these principles are actually echoed in Emile Durkheim's

extraordinary book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1995).

Durkheim argued that social interaction was the primary source and cause of

religion and thus religious behavior. Consequently understanding religious

behavior, or rather how individuals act and react within the religious group,

proves crucial in understanding the growth or decline of a church. The 5 "C"

Principles, as demonstrated in figure 1, theorizes that church growth occurs

when a process of social interaction is created, produced and recreated among

the actors or members of the congregation.

After careful sociological deconstruction of the 5 "C" Principles, what this

research has discovered and will demonstrate is that Mt. Zion's 5 "C" Principles

is the creation and embodiment of yet another C – Culture. For the purpose of

this paper, Christian culture is defined as Christian religious and spiritual beliefs,

values, behavior and material objects shared by a particular group of people

11

prescribing the plan, direction and behavior deemed acceptable or unacceptable (Macionis 1972; Goodenough 1981).

The 5 "C" Principles of Church Growth

Principle 5

COMPLETE: To make whole

Theological Principle: Romans 10:9

Sociological Analysis: Assimilation

Principle 1

CAST: Anointed to Grow.

Biblical Principle: Ephesians 4:11-12

Sociological Analysis: Charismatic Leader

Principle 4

CARRY: To take from one place to another.

Biblical Principle: Matthew 9:37

Sociological Analysis: Front-Stage Identification

Principle 2

CATCH: To take hold of.

Biblical Principle: Proverbs 22:6

Sociological Analysis: Socialization

Principle 3

COMMIT: To entrust a pledge of faith.

Biblical Principle: James 2:20
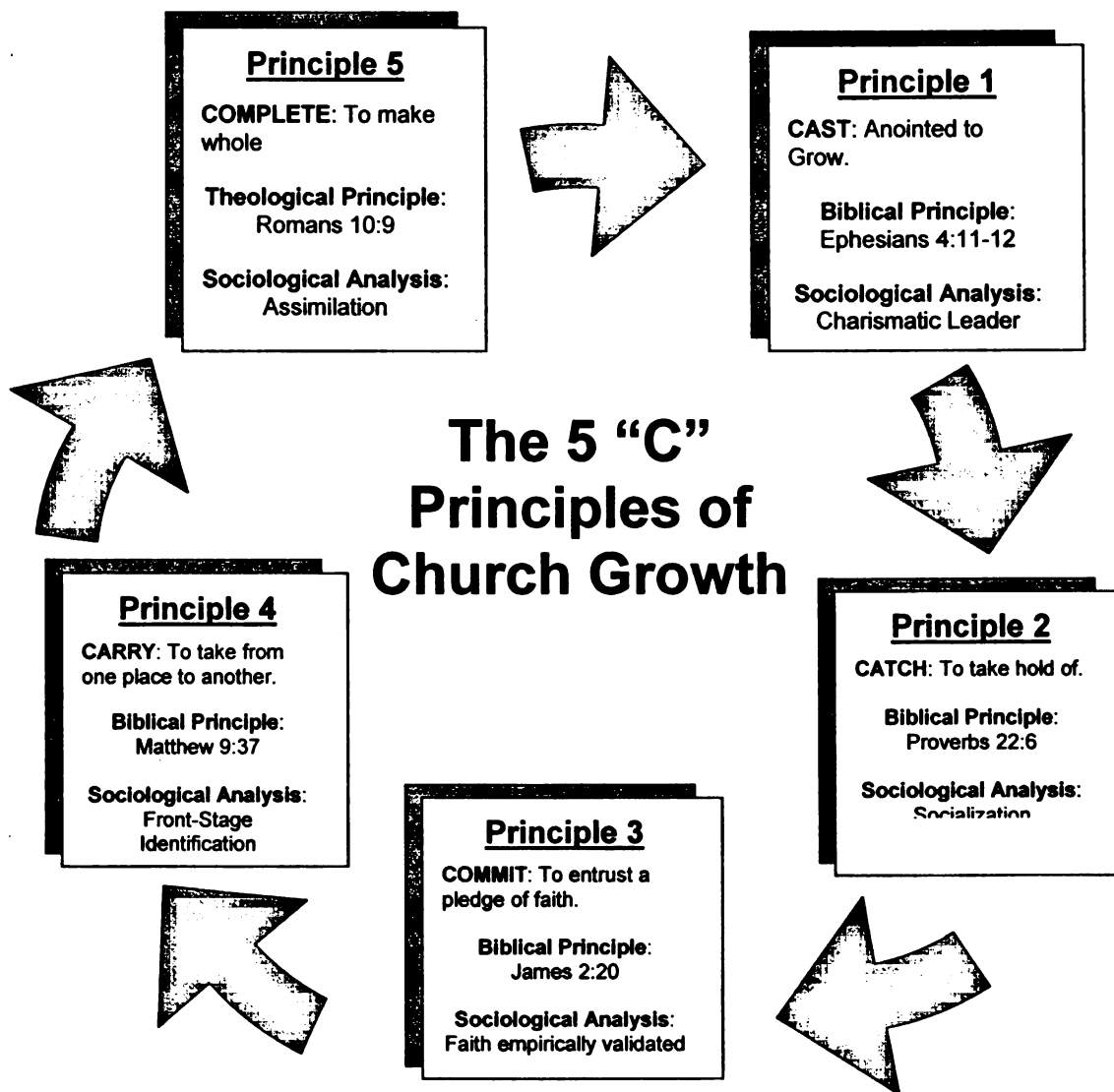
Sociological Analysis: Faith empirically validated

Figure 1. Growth Reproduction Model

"Religion, as a central element in culture, provides form and direction to human thought, feeling, and action...It stabilizes human orientation, values aspirations and ego-ideals" (O'Dea, 1966: 116). Christian culture is 'a way of life' (Williams 1958: 4) for the many members of Mt. Zion. Wuthnow (1988: 49 - 67) went on to define culture as the "symbolic expressive aspect of social behavior." The beliefs and values formulated through various symbols produce a system of 'meaning'

whereby members within the church create, store, and use this meaning to organize their day-to-day affairs (Turner 1985: 63). As a result, Christian culture prescribes a 'way of life' by giving direction to what is true, false, right or wrong for the members of Mt. Zion.

At times, the research in this writing proved somewhat complicated as "Researchers in the social sciences typically conduct research based on human subjects" (Berg 2001: 28). This paper will prove typical for the non-believer as cross referencing biblical doctrine with sociological theory is nothing more than simple 'literature review' (Berg 2001: 19 - 21). There is nothing wrong with this view of biblical doctrine for the non-believer, however for the Christian, biblical doctrine goes beyond simple literature review. Quoting scripture proves atypical for the Christian researcher as the primary interviewee is God Himself. As a Christian and minister of the gospel, I believe that all biblical scripture is the infallible spoken word of God recorded in written form through men (2nd Timothy 3:16). In other words, God inspired men to record both prophetic and historical events as they were to occur, were occurring or had occurred. Thus, for this researcher, juxtaposing biblical scripture and sociological theory goes beyond biblical principles as a simple cross literature review (Berg 2001: 19).

In its theological sense, it is asking what God (through biblical scripture) has to say in reference to the pre or proceeding sociological theory or statement. Berg went on to say that, "Usually, interviewing is defined simply as a conversation with a purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information" (Berg 2001:66). One definition of 'conversation' is "association or social

13

intercourse" whereby 'intercourse' is the exchange of ideas, thoughts or feelings through communication (Random House 2006). If prayer is talking to God (Psalm 66:19, Psalm 54:2), this paper presupposes that biblical reference is God talking back to the believer.

Finally, while I will be presenting the empirical data, a high level of generalizations will be referenced utilizing as little technical jargon as possible. This is based on my concern with studying the ways in which Christians (and Christianity) can use sociology to better understand their own situation and the ways in which they could help build relationships with the purpose of strengthening and growing the church.

CHAPTER III

5 'C' PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GROWTH

CASTING THE VISION: The Charismatic Leader

While The Great Commission ordains church growth, it does not happen in a vacuum. In addition, although important and imperative, church growth does not necessarily occur simply because of prayer. This research demonstrates that a church's institutional growth happens because of and through leadership not only believing and envisioning growth as a crucial aspect of the church, but moreover, implementing measures needed to bring it into existence.

A church atmosphere conducive to growth starts with senior leadership believing, desiring, embracing and promoting growth throughout his or her church. For example, senior leadership implementation of a growth mission and vision statement has acted as a catalyst and key to Mt. Zion's expansion. All social, institutional and structural recommendations are filtered through the mission statement, "Growing God's Kingdom According to His Word." Furthermore, if the mission statement is the 'what,' Mt. Zion's vision statement, "A Church Living in Obedience to God's Word" acts as the 'how' growth should be manifested. A biblically based vision assures that scriptural doctrine and values are not lost in the mission growth objectives by eliminating the possibility of 'institutionalization' as previously mentioned in Chapter 1, *Church Growth and Decline.*

Biblical doctrine suggests God calls, anoints, and equips the leader to do what He has commissioned them to do. The anointing is defined as divine

intervention and empowerment by God himself on those that He has called to leadership. Exodus 28:41 states, "After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me [God] as priests." Understand, when an individual is anointed by another individual, it is simply a symbolic representation of what has taken place on the inside by God. According to the Tanakh, the Jewish Bible, whenever someone received the anointing, the Spirit of God came upon this person, to qualify him or her for a God-given task.

Ephesians 4:11-12 notes, "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body [church] of Christ may be built up..." As scripture makes this clear that God assigns leaders to a church to grow the church, why then do many churches fail to grow their congregation? While the reasons vary, many fail to recognize the power of a leader's anointing.

Weber described the importance and power of this anointing through his use of the framework 'charisma.' If the anointing is a God ordained empowerment placed on a leader, a specified gift or talent, then, in many cases, charisma is the tool of choice. Weber (1947: 358 - 359) explained charisma as:

> ...a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.

If charisma is a 'divine' anointing given to a few select leaders, its power is measured by its ability to socially influence, either directly or indirectly affecting the thoughts, actions, or feelings of its followers (Turner 1999). Weber further clarified that this influence cannot be taught or learned, but must be 'awakened.'

Mathew 7:28 - 29 recognizes the power of a charismatically anointed leader to influence his or her followers. It states, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority [power], and not as their teachers of the law [the educated]." For churches seeking leadership to grow their church, it cannot be stated any clearer that the charismatically anointed leader is an absolute force in the church growth process.

The importance and the power of a charismatically charged leader can be seen in every day life. Conversations with parishioners frustrated with their church leaders have show me that academic or seminary degrees do not replace charismatic leadership based on a calling. I have realized just how important identifying the anointing is in the leader for church growth to take place. If pastoral leadership cannot recognize their own gifts and talents needed and used to influence and grow the congregation, how then can the people recognize these gifts and, perhaps most importantly, be willing to adhere?

Deeper discussions of this has made it became evident that many parishioners are confusing academic degrees with divine empowerment. The Apostle Paul (1st Corinthians 2:1 - 4) spoke of this when he addressed the church of Corinth. Paul states:

> When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom
> as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing
> while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in
> weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching
> were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's
> power.

The strength of this statement is that Paul studied under the renowned scholar Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), who was then reputed as one of the greatest teachers of the annals of Judaism. Despite his exceptional academic credentials, Paul reminds the church that the power of the anointing is not originated through academic credentials. He reminds the church that while education is important, it is only useful as a tool in addition to the anointed empowerment of the leader. Websites are filled with hundreds of extremely educated men and women seeking leadership positions in churches but, perhaps, lack the charismatic influence of the anointing to do so.

The challenge for sociologists is that no one sees 'anointing' or 'charisma.' What is witnessed are the social consequences derived from the perceived power and authority cast on the anointed or charismatically appointed leader. It is not the leader's anointing per se that creates a strong cultural atmosphere, this is simply the catalyst; the evidence of a leader's anointing or charismatic authority is found solely in the willingness of the led to subject themselves to that authority. Weber (1994: 33) explained that:

> ...the relevant quality might be "objectively" assessed from an ethical, aesthetic,
> or any other point of view is obviously immaterial: of sole importance is how the
> charismatically ruled (i.e., the "followers"), assess this quality...It is recognition on
> the part of the ruled which is decisive for the validity of charisma.

The charismatically anointed leader can cast the vision, but it is the follower's choice as to whether they catch the vision[3] or reject it.[4] It is noteworthy to mention that rejection of the leader's vision does not refute his or her anointing, or as Weber (1994: 33) puts it, "No prophet has ever considered his qualification dependent upon the opinion of the masses...".

Those entering Mt. Zion for the first time may have arrived through various means and measures. Perhaps a loss of a family member, job, or simply they were invited. Whatever the case, it is evident that the perceived 'charismatic' power and authority of Mt. Zion's Pastor draws the individual into the call of conversion. O'Dea (1966:23) summed up the extraordinary aspects of the charismatically anointed leader in the church growth process:

> Charismatic phenomena, though associated with actual persons, convey to the beholder who is sensitive to their appeal, supraempirical aspects and implications. Charisma issues a call, and those who for whatever reasons can hear this call respond with conviction. These followers feel that "it is the duty of those who have been called to a charismatic mission to recognize its quality and to act accordingly." Charismatic leadership is specifically outside their realm of everyday routine and the profane sphere.

"There is little doubt that leadership in general and pastoral leadership in particular is a major factor in the church growth process" (Rainer 1993: 185). If the vision conveyed through the anointing of the leader is interpreted as 'God ordained,' members in turn recognize it as their duty to respond accordingly.

Church growth starts with a clear mission and vision initially cast through the leader. Proverbs 29:18 states, *"[w]ithout vision, the people perish."* Vision is the ability to see growth beyond the present situation. It is an awareness of what

---

[3] This will be further elaborated on in principle number two, "Catching the Vision."
[4] Weber (1963) furthers elaborates on this subject in "The Religious Congregation, Preaching and Pastoral Care."

can and is to become, seeing the possible through the impossible. The vision is designed to give members a goal and objective and motivate them to strive to reach that objective. Casting the vision to the member is done by the leader with the recognition by the followers that it is of divine origin. If members do not recognize the anointing, leaders will have a difficult time growing their church. Mt. Zion' members recognize the charismatic influential power of their pastor is not from or for him alone, but for them. This leadership is recognized and acknowledged through anointing, and influences members to desire to see church growth come to pass and act in a manner to ensure its success.

CATCHING THE VISION: Growth is a Learned Behavior

New members at Mt. Zion who are willing to accept or catch the vision immediately enter into a process of socialization. Socialization, in general, is the process by which people learn the characteristics of their group. This includes the attitudes, values, and actions considered appropriate by the group. Earlier research (Davis 1940, 1947; Elkin and Handel 1972) demonstrated that the process of socialization begins early in human development and takes into account that an individual's social environment influences the way an individual views the world.

Biblical evidence to the importance of early childhood socialization is clearly stated in Proverbs 22:6. This scripture gives significant direction into this process by stating, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." While this scripture is often used in youth development, it can and should be applied to those new members unfamiliar with church doctrine

and etiquette. Like any parent with a new child, Mt. Zion[5] quickly enters into and commits to the nurturing and development of its new members. If a church is to grow its members qualitatively, which in turn will grow the church quantitavely, a church must look beyond itself simply as a place of worship and fully embrace and commit to the parental nurturing of its members.

One of the key components of socialization is the teaching of boundaries. Mt. Zion recognizes, like any parent, its purpose is to shape and teach, according to biblical scripture, what is deemed acceptable behavior while simultaneously teaching what is considered deviant or unacceptable behavior to the members operating within the group. The bible as an instructional manual for everyday living is replete with examples of acceptable and unacceptable behavior and the consequences and rewards of that behavior.

The difficulty of learning these lessons can be found in conversations with students struggling with their Christian faith when entering academics. In cases where I have casually asked others, how do they feel about your conversion to Christianity, the tension becomes thick and utterly resentful. I will admit this was my own thinking of Christianity and sociology at one point primarily because conversion, in the nonacademic sense, tends to be affiliated with cults. However, when I asked, "how do you feel about acceptance and maturing in your Christian beliefs," the reaction was overwhelmingly positive. For the sociologist, conversion is a personal reorganization and realignment process brought about

---

[5] Ephesians 3:10 states, "His [God's] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known..."

by the need to identify with the new group and its values (O'Dea 1966; Stark and Fink 2000). Durkheim (1995: 36 - 37) explains the conversion process as:

> The sacred [in the case of Christianity, that deemed holy] and the profane [that deemed secular, carnal and of the world] are always and everywhere...as two worlds with nothing in common...This is not to say that a being can never pass from one of these worlds to the other. But when this passage occurs, the manner in which it occurs demonstrates the fundamental duality of the two realms. For it implies a true metamorphosis. This change of status is conceived not as a mere development of preexisting seeds but as a transformation *totius substantiae* (of the whole essence). At that moment, the young man is said to die, and the existence of the particular person he was, to cease-instantaneously to be replaced by another. He is born again in a new form.

Conversion is a process of changing from one function, purpose and position into another.[6] In doing so, the old or former ways of thinking are eradicated and a new or different way of thinking emerges or as 2 Corinthians 5:17 puts it, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

For a church to grow it must take on a parental characteristic and the conversion process must be aggressively embraced, as a central part of its Christian culture, fully understood and put into order. This proves crucial if a church is to continuously reproduce itself understanding that the primary obstacles in the conversion process are social, (McGavran 1990: 156) or institutional (Hoge and Roozen 1979: 328) not theological or spiritual.

Social Institutions in the Reproductive Process

It is assumed by most theologians, clergy, and scholars that man is a social being. As social creations, we need to subsist in culture if we are to survive, develop properly and fulfill our potential and purpose. This was

---

[6] Similarly, Romans 12:2 urges the church, "not [to] conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

recognized very early in scripture in Genesis chapter two as God set into play the desire of humanity to be in the presence of others. "The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." Scripture goes on to say, "I will make a helper suitable for him." This statement proves instrumental in understanding the first ordained social institution as it is through social institutions that groups meet the basic needs, of its members. While this research recognizes that we are both spiritual and social creatures, it also recognizes and acknowledges the fact that religious behavior occurs through patterns of learned behavior (Finney 1978: 19-35; Chalfant and LeBeff 1991) formulated through such institutions.

Biblical doctrine also recognizes the influence social institutions have on shaping, directing and redirecting human behavior throughout the text. Jeremiah 10:2 asserts, *"This is what the Lord says: do not learn the ways of the nations...for the customs of people are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel"* [italics added]. In other words, the ways of the organization shapes the overall thinking, of the group. The thinking of the group formulates a group dynamic that now shapes the overall behavior of that group. The accepted behavior of the group becomes its recognized culture.

The foundation of Mt. Zion's socialization process is channeled through the teachings of its Christian Education Program. As McGavran stated earlier, a lack of such programs is a social impediment to the growth of the church. Mt. Zion defines this program as, "the process and programs designed to assist in the assimilation, nurturing, teaching and equipping of its members to become

fully devoted and mature Disciples of Christ." This program, divided into two specific categories, Adults and Youth, consists of, but is not limited to:

- **Mentoring:** New members desiring to unite as members with Mt. Zion are immediately assigned a mentor to counsel, teach, and guide them in the rules and expectations of the church. Mentors also befriend, inspire and motivate new members in all aspects of their new Christian walk.

- **New Member Class:** Held every Tuesday, this eight week course is designed to discuss church doctrine and fundamental Christian beliefs as well as answer any foundational questions governing salvation, Christianity, baptism, tithing, etc. Because this class has proven imperative to the initial understanding and essential elements of Christianity, on most occasions the pastor teaches it himself. Furthermore, this allows members personal access to the pastor and proves crucial to the relationship building process. As I sat in on one particular class, the pastor announced that because of a four day holiday, the next week's class would not be held. The new members begged him to come in on his off day to teach the class (for which he agreed).

- **Fulfillment Hour:** Often called Sunday school at many churches, Fulfillment Hour has a different connotation at Mt. Zion. Designed to complement the preaching or other teachings occurring within the educational framework of the church. If the preaching is considered the 'main course,' Fulfillment Hour would be considered the 'salad.' This course is designed to fulfill, complete or complement the rest of the church's curriculum by providing small group dynamics that promotes and encourages discussion within the group which further aids the socialization process. Mt. Zion's Fulfillment Hour lessons are so strong and vibrant, on any given Sunday the church regularly averages between 650 – 700 individuals in approximately 32 classes; this is a phenomenal attendance for a church of any size.

- **Evangelical Training Association[7] (ETA):** The primary calling of ETA is to provide programs, materials, and services which assist churches in equipping lay leaders for ministry within the local church. ETA classes offered through Mt. Zion have been readily used to not only equip its members and leaders, but the surrounding community as well. Dozens of churches and denominations have taken advantage of the courses offered at Mt. Zion.

- **Youth Education Programs:** A specific youth church for grades 1-6, a teen church catering to grades 7 – 12, an after school program at no cost to members or nonmembers that assist in homework and childcare, a summer academic program, a summer vacation bible study that regularly averages over 900 individuals, Powerhouse Bible Study, and over 20 youth oriented ministries designed to meet the inreach/outreach needs of the members and surrounding communities.

Recent literature (Hardy 1999: 91-92; Mcintosh 2003: 109; Wilkins 2005: 59) further demonstrates and validates the importance of a solid Christian education

---

[7] <www.etaworld.org>

program similar to the one established at Mt. Zion which places biblical doctrine and teachings at the heart of the growth program and is crucial in the socialization progression of its members.

Ephesians 3:10 recognizes the importance of church as a social institution and the role of that institution in the nurturing of its members. Catching the vision at Mt. Zion is an aggressive process of socializing its members to accept growth as a part of their collective identity and proves crucial to the very definition of what it means to be a Christian. The reformation process requires reshaping oneself to be like Christ and the role of Mt. Zion, as a spiritual, religious and social institution, is to assure that "the manifold wisdom of God [be] made known" to all those needing assistance in their Christian development and identity.

How 'Playing Church' Hinders the Growth Process

While not necessarily 'Absolutism' (Kelley 1972: 78-79),[8] the success of Mt. Zion's 5 "C" Principles lies in its ability to formulate a Christian cultural atmosphere strong enough to transcend 'playing-church.' The term "playing-church" describes those individuals that choose to 'act' a certain way when attending church and church functions while acting another way in the presence of nonmembers or nonchristians. This 'role' switching often causes an individual to abandon, struggle with or suppress the teachings, values and attitude that defines them as a part of the dominant Christian culture.

It is not my intention to provide an in-depth analysis of 'playing-church,' however it should be mentioned that this can best be understood through a

---

[8] Kelley argues that in 'absolutism,' "One would think that knowledge began with them, that all other attempts to explain life are sadly in error and hardly worthy of notice, let alone respect or credence." He goes on to explain, "it is a closed system."

25

dramaturgical theoretical framework. Dramaturgy suggests that a person's identity is not stable and independent, but is constantly remade as the person interacts with others. Erving Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* describes social life as viewed like a play or drama. Individuals move from stage (social settings and environments) to stage and adjust their 'acting' or roles to confirm, conform or present a certain image of themselves or to provoke a certain response from others. Some individuals are often seen as a subculture to the dominant Christian culture as they often follow the appropriate scripts within the church, but act outside these conventions when in other settings. To state it simply, they talk-the-talk in church (knowing exactly where that 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah' should be placed during the sermon), but walk a different walk outside of the church. Members playing-church may be Christians by biblical definition (Roman 10:9) despite not adhering totally to Christian doctrine. The need to act one way with one audience and another way with others is often reflective of the immaturity in their beliefs and position as Christians.

This further points to the need to approach culture as non-monolithic. A church's culture can provide a set of scripts for members to shape and reshape their world and perhaps more importantly, the world around them. Recent sociological debate on power revolves around the issue of the ability to constrain or enable the actions of others. For this paper, power is the ability to place ones will over another. It then is a special form of influence with change as the intended effect (Dye 1993). Power, in its Christian cultural sense, is the ability to

create and establish a social atmosphere designed to produce an effect, change a given situation, or alter the behavior of another person (e.g., an immature or non-Christian) to align themselves with the dominant Christian culture and ultimately biblical doctrine. This is based on culture's ability to bring together a collective consciousness with a single purpose making it difficult for those 'playing-church' to continue seeking personal ambitions and desires.

It must be noted that Christianity and consequently Christian culture, in and of itself, is explicitly a human creation and a human choice for which some members adhere fully and some do not. However, a Christian playing-church by not acting in a way that is reflective of the Christian culture reduces the influential power of that culture especially to those outside the Christian faith. Influential power is power only so long as the non-Christian recognizes it as such. Because playing-church means not adhering, portraying or demonstrating the Christian cultural characteristics, particularly outside the church realm, it in turn reduces the influential power that lies in the Christian culture to reproduce and grow itself through conversion of the nonbeliever.

Because social interaction are the actions and responses that transpire and transfers between individuals or groups, these actions and responses, overtime, formulate behavior that becomes the cultural norms for the group (Zuckerman 2003: 17). For example, originally the church was a center for learning and studying biblical scripture and doctrine long before Christianity as a religious movement was recognized and established. Acts 11:26 (Amplified Version) explains, "For a whole year they assembled together with and were

27

guests of the church and instructed a large number of people; and in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." Whereby the audience interprets or define the acting or actions of others and brand those actions symbolically through the use of names or labels (Bloomer 1962), the name "Christian" is then given as a symbolic representation based on the actions they were demonstrating.

COMMIT THE VISION: To Entrust a Pledge of Faith

As Meredith McGuire (1997: 7) observed, "What is relevant to the religious believer may be irrelelavant or inadmissible evidence to the sociologist [however] the sociological perspective, by definition, lacks a key religious quality-faith." Often quoted as the quintessential faith scripture, Hebrews 11:1 states that, "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Many Christians recognize this scripture as the definitive theological foundation of their Christian beliefs. It is used to commit to all that God has ordained of man through Biblical scriptures. If the foundation of Christianity is faith, it would seem that the foundation of Christian church growth must also start with the same premise, faith.

While faith proves essential in Mt. Zion's growth, this study will prove faith, in and of itself, is not enough to grow a church. Robin Gill (1980: 115) argued, "There can be no concern for theological validity at all." Metaphysical beliefs amongst the social scientists and academic elites have long been replaced with methods of empirical observations, data collection, formulation theories, and so forth. This becomes the central dilemma and problem with meshing biblical study and sociological principals particularly for the young Christian sociologist.

If faith is an unquestionable belief founded upon what cannot be seen (2 Corinthians 4:18a), how then does the social scientist attempt to study or validate it empirically? This question has proven difficult for many Christians to grasp primarily because faith is ethereal whereas social science is a systematic way of discovering, and understanding, how social realities arise, operate, and impact on individuals (Berg 2001: 10). How then is faith, particularly in relations to church growth, evaluated and verified scientifically? One approach is to argue that faith based beliefs produce human behavior and human behavior can be studied and validated. Moreover, as religious beliefs formulate religious behavior and religious behavior is human behavior, what can be studied are human beings as they behave in regards to the faith they proclaim (Vernon 1962).

While evaluating religious beliefs through human behavior is solid scientific methodology, the question that plagues many Christians is can or should it be applied to understanding church growth particularly through faith? In doing so, do Christians in fact present themselves as a 'watered down' social scientist? The answer lies in the fact that while faith is the intangible belief in the unseen, Mt. Zion's growth is the empirical results of that faith.

Should the Christian attempt to measure and validate God's Word and His commission to grow his kingdom? The answer, to an extent, is yes. Remember the social scientist is concerned with observing the empirical actions or results of a metaphysical belief, not the metaphysical belief itself. This paper demonstrates that the 'scientific' analysis of Church growth principles for which the sociologist embraces often have solid biblical principles. For example, Biblical doctrine

balances faith (arguably the foundation of Christianity) and empirical validation

(arguably the foundation of social sciences) in the book of James chapter 2

verses 14 - 26:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?
> Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily
> food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,"
> but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way,
> faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say,
> "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will
> show you my faith by what I do.

Upon reading this, it appears then that Biblical doctrine, like the sociologist, is

interested in an outward and empirical validation of faith. I have heard it

mentioned that it is the heart that matters. While the 'heart' does matter,[9] this is

not a construct that can be measured by scientist, nor is it solely the measure

used in Biblical doctrine to validate the Christians commitment to the faith they

profess.

For the social scientist, validity in faith is the manifestation of the 'unseen'

to the observable, whereas, for the Christian, it is the observable through the

'unseen.' Regardless, it is the 'behavior' for both the sociologist and the

Christian that determines the validity of a member's faith and true commitment to

the growth principles promoted through the leader's vision. Initially, a

commitment to hear and obey the message was limited or nonexistent for many

of the members but as they committed to hearing, they also matured in her faith;

this resulted in a deeper desire to do what they had been hearing.

Berger (1967) explained that society is a product of collective human

activity thus what one does, or does not do, will be real as elements of social

---

[9] 1st Samuel 16:7 - The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward
appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

reality only to the extent that s/he participates. With over 80 active ministries, faith put to works is demonstrated as Mt. Zion provides a forum that allows each member to work or participate in an area that will nurture their own faith and ultimately, their growth.

Faith as the Foundation of Language

Another of Mt. Zion's clichés is 'if you ain't talking bible, you ain't talking' and this is the primary reason I chose to include extensive Biblical doctrine in this sociological church growth analysis. If Christian culture consists of the norms, values, and beliefs that determine and dictates behavior as members of Mt. Zion, biblical language then proves the foundation of that culture (Goodenough 1981: 24-32) and is the motivator for its extraordinary growth. Many of Mt. Zion members wholeheartedly believe and respond to the language, doctrine and words of the Bible when encouraged to grow God's Kingdom.

Durkheim (1982) defined sociology as the scientific study of social facts which could be defined as the social norms accepted within the collective conscience or group which are often internalized as morals. More importantly, adhering to these morals inevitably constrains, controls and dictates behavior. Simplified, social facts are described as social phenomena or circumstances which attribute or produce a specific behavior in the individual. Mt. Zion recognizes that the language of Biblical doctrine is the underpinning of all Christian behavior which is the essence of its Christian culture. If individuals are to communicate meaningfully with each other, they have no choice but to use the grammar and vocabulary of a recognized language.

The Bible becomes that language thus representative as the primary force that holds and strengthens Mt. Zion together as a collective unit (Fraser and Campola 1992: 111-2). Durkheim (1982: 52) wrote, "it is indisputable today that most of our ideas and tendencies are not developed by ourselves, but come to us from outside [of us]." In addition, he argued that, "[w]hat constitutes social facts are the beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group taken collectively" (1982: 54). Social facts are extremely coercive in that individuals are seemingly obliged to act on them. If this is the case, faith then becomes a social fact.

Romans 10:17 explains that, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Thus faith is a social action originating from external processes. Acts16:30 - 32 specifically addresses the issue of listening as the initial requirement of obtaining faith and brings into the relevance of evangelism. A jailer asked Peter and Silas, disciples of Jesus, "What must I do to be saved?" They replied, "'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house." Prior to joining Mt. Zion, I believed in some infantile aspect of God. However my level of faith grew tremendously as I committed to consistently hearing the messages through the pastor and institutions of the church.

Faith is intangible, but clearly established, formulated and strengthened through the social discourse of language. What has become profoundly evident through my own self-examination as well as my observations of the members of Mt. Zion is that consistently hearing the Biblical message appears directly

correlated with the level of faith obtained. In its simplistic sense, the more one

hears, the more one believes; the more one believes, the more one attends; the

more one attends, the more one hears, so on and so forth.

Although faith in Christ is the end goal for Mt. Zion, listening sets it into

motion. Attendance in church schools (social institutions), submission to pastoral

teachings (leadership), and fellowshipping (socialization) with other Christians

proves imperative for the manifestation of faith as the language and doctrine of

the Bible is reinforced in conscious and spirit. Mt. Zion's mission statement is,

"Growing God's Kingdom according to His Word." This 'word' is the words of the

Bible and is the heart of all Mt. Zion's direction and growth. Mt. Zion contributes

its growth to the pragmatic deliverance and teaching of biblical doctrine, not the

production of faith itself.

CARRY AND COMPLETE THE VISION: To Make Whole by Taking from One
Place to Another

Mathew 9:37 states, "Then [Jesus] said to His disciples, "The harvest truly

is plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to

send out laborers into His harvest." Mt. Zion's Mission Statement is "Growing

God's Kingdom according to His Word" is a two-part process involving both

internal and external processes. Casting, catching and committing to the vision

of growth is an internal process primarily involving the cultivating and maturation

of the individual's Christian faith. This portion of the 5 "C" ministries is mainly

within the confines of the Church walls as members "learn their roles" (Hare

1988: 4). Carrying and completing the vision, however, takes on a totally

different connotation. Carrying the Vision is taking the message of Christianity

outside the walls of Mt. Zion through evangelism whereas the vision is only 'Completed' with the unbeliever's acceptance of Christ or recommitment to a local church.

As previously mentioned, Dramaturgical theory suggests, like actors in a play, we interact and operate in various stages and adjust our roles as we move between these stages. Specifically, front- stage is the primary area our character, role or identity is displayed in front of a targeted audience; backstage, on the other hand, is the 'behind the curtain' area where the individual actor prepares for or learns his or her role (Hare 1988). Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate that whether a church grows or declines is a matter of determining where the front or back-stage resides.

Similar to Luke chapter 10, Figure 2 demonstrates that if a church is to grow, it must take what it has learned in the church to those outside the church. Luke 10:1 explains that, "[T]he Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place." For a church to grow, it is essential that the front-stage area be a specified audience of family, friends, neighbors and others. While evangelism consists of the methods and efforts used to disseminate the Gospel to others, I prefer to expound the terminology through the expression *front stage evangelism.* Front-stage evangelism prescribes those arenas or areas outside the church setting.

Figure 2. Dramaturgical Model of a Growing Church

A GROWING CHURCH

Figure 2. Dramaturgical Model of a Growing Church
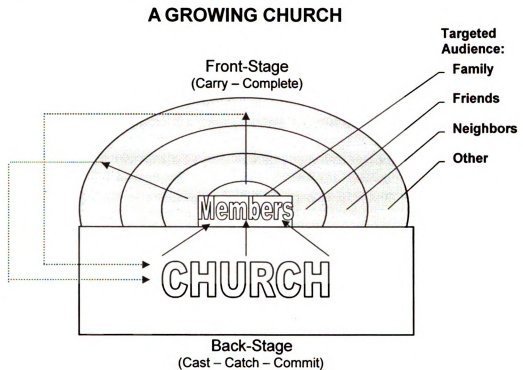
What Figure 2 also shows is that the stronger the social relationship the member has to the targeted audience, the more effective and stronger the evangelism effort will be.

The back-stage area in Figure 2 and 3 represents the training areas each member of the church receives through the many social institutions mentioned in previously section *Social Institutions in the Reproductive Process.* Although some evangelistic efforts can occur back stage (i.e., the hospitality shown to visitors or guest), Figure 3 shows that, unfortunately for many churches in decline, the church institution itself has become the targeted audience for our Christian role with little Christianity reaching the unbeliever and unchurched.

Figure 3. Dramaturgical Model of a Declining Church
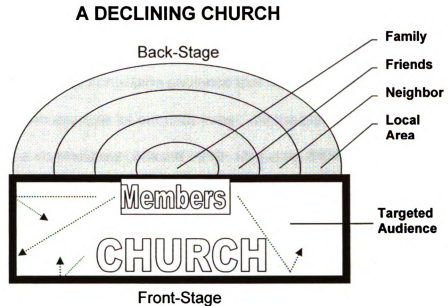
A DECLINING CHURCH

In a declining church, Christians 'act' Christian impressing fellow Christians with the precision of any academy award winning actor or actress. Because this is the case of many declining churches, our family, job, home, school, etc. then becomes the backstage setting allowing us to 'take off' our Christian identity and putting on the new role or character to impress the new audience. Instead of going out to the 'harvest' as figure 2 shows, growth is confined and limited because members fail to recognize that Ephesians 3:10 teaches that Church is a training ground, not (for lack of better words) a social club.

If The Great Commission is a Biblical mandate to grow the church, what makes Mt. Zion exemplary is it teaches Mathew 5:16[10] as the primary script demanding that front-stage audiences be all those outside Christianity, and the Christian church. Carrying the vision is to take and make the social settings outside the church the primary front-stage audience that observes the Christian Characteristics letting the example 'of our daily lives'[11] be the first social interaction shared by a non-believer (Brissett 1990: 18; Caine 2007). Figure 2 demonstrates that being an example is to act in a Christian mannerism that convinces the unbelieving front-stage audience that the Christian's identity is genuine, pure and real. This is not to suggest that Christian culture is something the believer can or should put on or take off, it is simply to grasp the magnitude and importance of front-stage witnessing to a non believing audience if a church is to grow. Back stage setting of the church is where members are taught that Casting, Catching and Committing proves irrelevant if they are unwilling to move Christianity to its true front-stage carrying the Gospel to those outside the church stage.

The vision finally and only becomes complete when a new member is added to the church membership roster, becomes active in church ministries, socializes and fellowships with church members. In doing so, the cultural persona of Mt. Zion gradually changes; thus, as with all cultures, Christian culture is fluid. Saunders (1988: 2) elaborated that the process is crucial to not only the

---

[10] "[L]et your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."
[11] Titus 2:7-8

personal transformation of the individual, but the transformation of the cultural

persona for which he or she will be transformed into:

> Christianity is of interest as a cultural system-that is, as a system of shared
> ideas, beliefs and values expressed in public symbols and ritual...Although the
> religion retains some constant features as it is transmitted from people to people
> or as it evolve within a single society, it is never a fixed, isolated or neatly bonded
> system. It is always open to modification and transformation.

What Saunders shows us is that changes in one aspect of culture bring changes

in another. Mt. Zion recognizes that new blood [members] keeps the church

fresh, updated and flourishing. Emphasis must be mentioned that he, like Marvin

Mayers (1974: 218), was not addressing transformation of the biblical doctrine of

Christianity, but moreover, the cultural atmosphere of the institution to meet the

needs of its members.

This individual contact is elaborated as Saunders (1988: 2) addresses four

types of transformations, contending that people become Christians through,

"[t]he modification of individual personality characteristics, cognitive style or

interpersonal behavior through contact with Christians" (Mead 1934: 152-164).

Carrying the vision and message through evangelism initiates the 'contact'

whereas his 'induction' analysis completes the vision. Saunder's fourth type of

transformation completes the cultural reproductive and growth process by adding

another individual into the foal.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Mt. Zion Baptist Church 5 "C" principles are biblically based upon the premise that Christian churches are mandated from God to grow. Ephesians 4:11-13 sums up the entire 5 "C" process as demonstrated in figure 1. It states, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers [Cast the Vision], to prepare God's people [Catching the Vision] for works of service [Commitment to the Vision], so that the body of Christ may be built up [Carry the Vision] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ [Completing the Vision].

Through my observations of this church, this research has attempted to present a more comprehensible and holistic study for clergy, evangelists, theologians, and social scientists interested in the dynamics of church growth. This paper has shown that it is absolutely essential that a culture of growth is cast from leadership. The charismatic anointing of leadership not only envisions growth as the goal, it influences the members to do so as well. Pastor Moore teaches, "The leader's goal of casting the vision is to get the people to go where they wouldn't normally go on their own because if they could go on their own, they probably wouldn't need a leader."

While casting the vision is a catalyst for a church to grow, no amount of charisma has relevance if the members are not willing to fully catch and embrace

a vision to grow. Until I found myself under the teachings of Mt. Zion, church growth was always construed as a missionary journey for a select few. In my observations, however, in order for a church to grow, it must understand and embrace growth as a central part of Christianity and establish learning institutions to educate and train its members. In addition, this requires a willingness of members to stop 'playing-church' and agree to the conversion process of learning what "thus sayeth the Lord" means with respect to growing His church.

Learning growth doctrine is one thing, committing to do it is altogether different. This is an act of faith based on the belief that what is written in the Bible and is passed on through leadership, is in fact from God Himself. If, as this research has shown, language is the foundation of culture, the Bible (God's written words) must act as the foundation to any aspect of Christianity, which includes growth. Once done, faith transpires from an ethereal entity, to a socially empirical fact that influences the actions of its members; thus growth is understood as the cultural norm of the institution, not the exception. Members put their faith into works by carrying the teachings of Christ to those outside the church. Figure 2 illustrates that by making family, friends and all those outside the church a priority, front-stage evangelism can occur with the desired outcome completed as the extrinsic (e.g., those outside the faith) becomes intrinsic (active members).

Future analysis and follow up to this writing is needed. Case in point, during this research, I found it extremely interesting that small social groups, such as 'cliques,' develop within the church association and moreover, I was

struck by how these 'cliques' augment or deter church growth by embracing or rejecting possible new or potential members. A particular clique may have gossip as the social norm in one arena whereas for another staging area, gossip is eschewed and rejected. Gossip, as biblically hypocritical behavior, is observed by the new member, who then must decide whether adhere or reject the behavior. If they adhere to the behavior they are accepted by the clique, however, if they reject this group norm, they are ostracized from the group possibly leading to leaving church altogether. More on this is required in future research.

As it stands, one of the primary purposes of this study in church growth dynamics was designed to combine Biblical scriptures and doctrines with sociological theories to form a deeper, richer understanding of how a church can and should grow. Getting to this conclusion has been a long, personal, spiritual and academic journey for me both as a minister of the Gospel and student of sociology. This research, however, demonstrated that Christian biblical scripture and sociological theories can be studied side by side without antagonizing either the Christian's faith or refuting sociology as the premier scientific field in social human interaction.

Bibliography

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. 1997. Congregation & Community. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

Arn, Win. 1988. The Pastor's Manual for Effective Ministry. California: Church Growth Press.

Berg, Bruce L. 2001. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Berger, Peter L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion.* New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Bloomer, Herbert. 1962. "Society as Symbolic Interaction" in *Human Behavior and Social Processes* edited by Arnold M. Rose. Houghton Mifflin Company

Boden, Diedre. 1990. "People Are Talking: Conversation Analysis and Symbolic Interaction" in *Symbolic Interaction and Cultural Studies* edited by Howard S. Becker and Michal M. McCall. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Brissett, Dennis and Charles Edgley. 1990. "The Dramaturgical Perspective" in *Life as Theater: A Dramaturgical Sourcebook* edited by Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley. New York: Aldine de Gruyter

Caine, Christine. 2007. Stop Acting Like a Christian and be One. California: Regal Books.

Chalfant, Paul, and Emily LeBeff. 1991. *Understanding People and Social Life.* St. Paul: West Publishing.

Davis, Kingsley. 1940. "Extreme Social Isolation of a Child" in *The American Journal of Sociology* (XLV).

Davis, Kingsley. 1947. "A final Note on a Case of Extreme Isolation" *in the American Journal of Sociology* (52).

DuBois, W.E.B. 1903. *The Negro Church in America.* Georgia: Atlanta University Press.

Durkheim, Emile. 1982. *The Rules of the Sociological Method* trans. by W.D. Halls edited by Steven Lukes. New York: Free Press.

Durkheim, Emile. 1995. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* trans. by Karen E. Fields. New York: The Free Press

Dye, Thomas R. 1993. *Power and Society*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Finney, J.M. 1978. "A Theory of Religious Commitment" in Sociological Analysis (39).

Fraser, David A. and Tony Campolo. 1992. *Sociology through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishing.

Furnish, Brendan F. J. 1980 "The Scientific Approach to Social Research: Some Dilemmas for the Christian" in *A Reader in Sociology: Christian Perspectives* edited by Charles P. De Santo, Calvin Redekop, and William L. Smith-Hinds. Pennsylvania: Herald Press

Gill, Robin. 1980. "From Sociology to Theology" in *Sociology and Theology: Alliance and Conflict* edited by David Martin, John Orme Mills, and W.S.F. Pickering. Great Britain: The Harvester Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Goodenough, Ward H. 1981. *Culture, Language and Society*. California: The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, Inc.

"Good News." *The Christian Century*. Nov 20 - Dec 3, 119.24 (2002), pp. 5.

Hardy Jr., Roland G. 1999. "Christian Education: Making the Process Work" in *Evangelism and Discipleship in African-American Churches* edited by Lee N. June. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

Hare, Paul A., and Herbert H. Blumberg. 1988. *Dramaturgical Analysis of Social Interaction*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Hilliard Jr., Donald. 2006. *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*. Pennsylvania: Judson Press

Hoge, Dean R., and David A. Roozen. 1979. "Some Sociological Conclusions about Church Trends" in *Understanding Church Growth and Decline 1950 – 1978* edited by Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen. New York: The Pilgrim Press.

Inskeep, Kenneth. 1993. "A Short History of Church Growth Research" in *Church and Denominational Growth: What does (and does not) cause Growth or Decline* edited by David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

International Bible Society. 2002. *New International Version Study Bible.* Michigan: Zondervan

Kelley, Dean M., 1972. *Why Conservative Churches are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion.* New York: Harper and Rowe Publishers

King, Cheryl A., and Daniel S. Kirschenbaum. 1992. *Helping Young Children Develop Social Skills: The Social Growth Program.* California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company

Macionis, John J. 1992. *Society.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Malphurs, Aubrey. 2004. *Planting Growing Churches for the Twenty-First Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal.* Michigan: Baker Books

Malphurs, Aubrey. 1997. (2nd Ed) *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry.* Michigan: Baker Books

Mayers, Marvin K. 1974. Christianity Confronts Culture: A Strategy for Cross-Cultural Evangelism. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing

McGavran, Donald. 1979. "Sheep Stealing and Church Growth" in The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook edited by Win Arn. California: Church Growth Press

McGavran, Donald A. 1990. *Understanding Church Growth.* revised and edited by C. Peter Wagner. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.

McGuire, Meredith. 1997. *Religion: The Social Context.* California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

McIntosh, Gary L. 2003. *Biblical Church Growth.* Michigan: Baker Books.

Mead, George H. 1934. "Play, the Game, and the Generalized Other" in *Mind Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* edited by Charles W. Morris. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mills, John Orme. 1980. "Introduction of Two Minds" in *Sociology and Theology: Alliance and Conflict* edited by David Martin, John Orme Mills, and W.S.F. Pickering. Great Britain: The Harvester Press.

Moberg, David. 1964. The Church as a Social Institution. New Jersey: Pentice-Hall, Inc.

O'Dea, Thomas. 1966. *The Sociology of Religion.* New Jersey: Pentice-Hall, Inc.

Perkins, Richard. 1987. *Looking Both Ways: Exploring the Interface Between Christianity and Sociology.* Michigan: Baker Book House.

Rainer, Thom S. 1993. *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles.* Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers

Random House Unabridged Dictionary. 2006.

Stark, Rodney and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Saunders, George R. (ed.) 1988. *Culture and Christianity: The Dialectics of Transformation.* Conneticut: Greenwood Press.

Turner, John C. 1991. *Social Influence.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Turner, Jonathan H. 1985. *Sociology: The Science of Human Organization.* Chicago: Nelson-Hall Inc.

Toolin, Cynthia. 2001. "Socialization: A Theological Perspective" in *Science and Faith* edited by Gerald V. Bradley and Don Demarco. Indiana: St. Augustine's Press.

Vernon, Glenn M. 1962. *Sociology of Religion.* New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc.

Weber, Max. 1991. *The Sociology of Religion.* Trans. by Ephraim Fischoff. Boston: Beacon Press.

Weber, Max. 1947. "The Theory of Social and economic organization," trans. by A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. edited by Talcott Parsons. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weber, Max. 1994. "Charismatic Authority" trans. by Martin Black in *Max Weber: Sociological Writings* edited by Wolf Heydebrand. New York: Continuum Publishing.

Wilkins, Scott G. 2005. *Reach: A Team approach to Evangelism and Assimilation.* Michigan: Baker Books.

Williams, Raymond. 1958. "Culture is Ordinary" in Conviction edited by Norman McKenzie. London: MacGibbon and Kee

Wuthnow, Robert. and Marsha Witten "New Directions in the Study of Culture" in *Annual Reviews of Sociology* 14 (1988), pp. 49-67.

Wuthnow, Robert. 1989. *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals and Secularism.* Michigan: Baker Books.

Zucherman, Phil. 2003. *Invitation to the Sociology of Religion.* New York: Routledge.