

2-18-2016

Leaving Decline and Towards Growth: Discovering the Keys to Church Regeneration in South Wales

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

LEAVING DECLINE AND TOWARDS GROWTH:
DISCOVERING THE KEYS TO CHURCH REGENERATION IN SOUTH WALES.

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY ELIZABETH M. A. LINSSEN

PORTLAND, OREGON

MARCH 2016

George Fox Evangelical Seminary
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Elizabeth Linssen

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 18, 2016
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

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The scripture quotations contained herein are taken from the NIV Version of the Bible,
unless otherwise indicated.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many church leaders kindly gave of their time and wisdom during the process of this research, and to each individual, I owe you deep thanks. Without your insights and guidance, this paper would be lacking the understanding of what God is saying to the Church in Wales at this important time.

I would also like to thank my husband, Will, for his support in many ways, which helped make this project possible. I also appreciate the understanding and prayers of my friend Angel, who encouraged me in this work, and gave me grace in my work setting, allowing me the time to focus on research when needed.

Finally, I'd like to thank Colleen Butcher who spent hours scouring the pages of this dissertation with her professional editing skill, bringing this paper up to doctoral standard.

May God, in His kindness, call the Church in Wales to arise and bring life to the hills and valleys of dry bones.

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the current spiritual climate of Christianity in Wales today, calling for urgent attention to certain deficits within the Church. Section one begins by examining the claims of secularists who believe that Christianity is in a terminal condition in Britain, and whether that is an accurate view. We then progress by looking for signs of new life in UK churches and what it actually means to be a healthy church. From there, we turn to the great commission Jesus Christ entrusted to His church prior to His ascension, and look at the relationship between growing healthy disciples of Christ, and the formation of healthy churches.

In section two, we look further at the subject of growing healthy churches and disciples and whether growth models exist, past or present, that are suitable for stimulating church growth in Wales. We examine three different growth systems, their strengths and weaknesses, and consider whether any of these can be used to address the needs of the Church in Wales.

Section three shifts to an examination of the Welsh context, both spiritually and economically, and proposes an appropriate solution designed to address both the discipleship and leadership needs of churches in Wales. We also look at the marks of a healthy, growing church in light of the author's proposed solution.

Finally, sections five and six then move to an examination of the artefact created by the author of this research paper, *Disciple-makers: The Keys To Growth*, and how that could begin to reverse the declining tide of Christianity and churches in Wales.

SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM

Wales is the most secular nation in the United Kingdom with 78 per cent of the population either de-churched or un-churched and, demographically, the proportion of churchgoers increasing with age.¹ Port Talbot, a town in South Wales, is one of many which has seen little witness of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ in recent decades. Although there are a number of traditional churches in the town, most members are at least sixty years of age and feel ill-equipped to reach the local community. As a result, at least half of these remaining churches are on the brink of closure. Church leaders (where they exist) are discouraged and lack desire and knowledge on how to pursue church growth and outreach into their local communities.

Within the Presbyterian denomination in the town, Bridget, a Christian woman in her thirties, has been employed by five churches in an eleventh hour attempt to do something missional to prevent them from permanently closing. Two of these churches, with a combined congregation of fifteen people, worship together each Sunday, taking turns each month to use each other's church building for Sunday services, with the other building lying unused for that month. How much longer can they go on? Although Bridget has worked hard to successfully set up a Foodbank ministry within one of these church buildings, is it enough to stop the closure of all five churches?

As for those who live locally, most have never heard the gospel and talk of church simply conjures up ideas of old-fashioned religion that's irrelevant and ineffective. Unfortunately, Port Talbot's problem is not unique; it's a common picture throughout

¹ As concluded in surveys, *Churchgoing in the UK: A Research Report From Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK* (April 2007), *2001 Census in England and Wales*, and the *1995 Welsh Churches Survey*.

much of Wales. Most months a newly-closed church building arrives on the market for sale, either in the town itself or in the neighbouring villages. With building developers buying up closed church buildings and turning them into gyms, restaurants or homes, churches in Wales are indeed facing a huge challenge for survival.

Secularisation and Christianity in England and Wales

[T]he culture of Christianity has gone in the Britain of the new millennium. Britain is showing the world how religion as we have known it can die.²

According to Callum G. Brown, the bell toll of a dying Christianity is ringing throughout the UK. In Wales, some believe this ringing is more markedly so, for as Steve Bruce explains, Wales used to show more commitment to the Christian Church than did England. But now secularisation has taken root here just as in other parts of the UK. Brown states,

Two underlying trends – attendance falling faster than affiliation and a relative failure to recruit children – suggest that the two forces that [once] retarded secularization – peripheral remoteness and the strong role of religion in national identity – are rapidly weakening. Improved transport links, mass communication, the centralization of mass media, greater occupational mobility, regional development policies, the centralization of productive enterprises have all made everywhere in Britain more like everywhere else.³

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the figure for those who claim to hold to Christianity across all regions in these countries fell from 71.7 percent in

² Callum G. Brown, *The Death Of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800 – 2000*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 198.

³ Steve Bruce, “Religion In Rural Wales: Four Restudies,” *Contemporary Wales* 23 (2010): 237.

2001 to 59.3 percent in 2011.⁴ Even more dramatic is the sharp increase of those professing “no religion,” from 14.8 percent to 25.1 percent, a stark picture of a striking move away from Christianity towards unbelief. That’s one quarter of the English and Welsh population who claim to have no religion, with the highest proportion found in Wales. Conversely, there was an increase in all other main religions, with Muslims increasing the most from 3 percent to 4.8 percent in 2011.⁵ As Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, writes, “There is a move against organized religion – people still have their spiritual side but there is less trust in organized religion than there was.”⁶

This assessment would appear further confirmed by statistics produced by a number of Church denomination reports, including:

- The Church in Wales (Anglican) Membership and Finances Report for 2012⁷ found that Easter communicants, average Sunday attendance, and Electoral Roll membership have fallen close to 50 percent in the last twenty years.

⁴ Office for National Statistics. 2011. *Religion in England and Wales 2011*, 1. Paul Chambers argues that when people say that they are ‘Christian,’ this is largely a default position relating to white ethnicity, as opposed to truly believing in the Christian faith. Certainly further research is needed as to what people mean by their stated affiliation. Taken from “Out of Taste, Out Of Time: The Future of Nonconformist Religion in Wales in the Twenty-first Century,” *Contemporary Wales* 21 (2008): 89.

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ John Bingham, “Christianity Not ‘Fading Away’ Says Archbishop Ahead of Census Figures,” *Telegraph*, December 11, 2012, accessed April 18, 2014. As an interesting contrast, according to the 1851 Religious Census, out of a total population of 17,927,609 in Wales and England, 10,212,445 were attending church, with just over half from the Church of England, and just under half from the main Protestant Churches including the Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists. Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One 1829-1859* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1997), 365.

⁷ *Church in Wales: The Church in Wales Membership and Finances Report for 2012*, 3.

- The greatest number of church closures between 2005 and 2010 occurred in more traditional denominations: Methodist (-332), Presbyterian (-243) and Anglican (-204).⁸

The Deathblow of Secularisation

According to secularists such as Brown and Bruce, it was the secularisation of the twentieth century that slowly brought churches in England and Wales to their knees. For Bebbington, this adverse influence was felt from the opening decades:

Church membership had been falling since the 1920s, and, although the process was arrested in the wake of the Second World War, there was a catastrophic collapse in the 1960s. Adult church attendance dropped to a mere 11 per cent of the English population by 1979, to 13 per cent of the Welsh population by 1982 and to 17 per cent of the Scottish population by 1984. Religion was increasingly marginal in people's lives...The television and the motorcar dealt a drastic blow to Sunday School attendance in the 1950s.⁹

However for Brown, the real force of secularisation was most felt in the 1960's when Britain experienced more secularisation in that period than the preceding four centuries:

Never before had all of the numerical indicators of popular religiosity fallen simultaneously, and never before had their declension been so steep.... What happened in the late twentieth century has been unique and epoch forming. Since around 1963, Britain has been in the brave new world of secular secularisation – that is, the permanent decline of religion. This decline takes two main observable forms. It is the terminal decline of virtually all of the large, organized conventional Christian churches in Britain; and it is the permanent decline of the

⁸ *Evangelical Alliance*, "How Many Churches Have Opened or Closed," 2012, accessed April 18, 2014. <http://www.eauk.org/church/research-and-statistics/how-many-churches-have-opened-or-closed-in-recent-years.cfm>. Additionally, the 1980s and 1990s saw the closures of more than one church or chapel per week (-1.35 per cent) compared to the opening of more than one a week in the nineteenth century. Bible Society, (1997). "Challenge to Change: Results of the 1995 Welsh Churches Survey," Swindon, England: Bible Society, 8.

⁹ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to The 1980s* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1989), 250.

common and pervasive Christian culture to which most Britons had adhered most of the time to greater or lesser extents for centuries.¹⁰

For Brown, the 1960s saw a major transition in life and culture. He believes that the sixties constituted the most concentrated period of crisis for organized Christianity since the Reformation, with the very survival of Christian society and values perceived to be at stake in many places.¹¹

With secularists claiming that Christianity in Britain is close to extinction, official statistics showing an increase of population claiming “no religion,” a drop in people reporting to be Christian, and significant numbers of churches closing, the demise of Christianity in Britain does indeed appear inevitable. Church Growth consultant, Bob Jackson believes that the Anglican Church has lost the respect it once had as a pillar of institutional England. Many are growing up with no knowledge or experience of church, the Bible or Jesus Christ. Although people may appear interested in spirituality, they are losing interest in religion as they view Jesus as irrelevant to the modern world in which they live. He questions how the Church can do anything other than shrink and hang on by its fingernails.¹²

On the other hand, Sanderson states that although there has been a move against organized religion, people still have their spiritual side. Philosopher Charles Taylor would agree. According to Taylor, the battle of our time is

¹⁰ Callum G. Brown, “The Secularisation Decade: What The 1960s Have Done to the Study of Religious History,” in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750 – 2000*, eds. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29.

¹¹ Callum G. Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2012), 29.

¹² Bob Jackson, *Hope For The Church: Contemporary Strategies For Growth* (London, UK: Church House Publishing, 2003), 27.

between neo- and post-Durkheimian construals of our condition, between different forms of religion and spirituality. ... the gamut of beliefs in something beyond widens, fewer declaring belief in a personal God, while more hold to something like an impersonal force; in other words, a wider range of people express religious beliefs which move outside Christian orthodoxy. Following in this line of growth of non-Christian religions, particularly those in the Orient, and the proliferation of New Age modes of practice, of views which bridge the humanist/spiritual boundary, of practices which link spirituality and therapy. On top of all this more and more people adopt what would earlier have been seen as untenable positions, e.g., they consider themselves Catholic while not accepting many crucial dogmas, or they combine Christianity with Buddhism, or they pray while not being certain they believe.¹³

With the increase of mass communication and improved media in our secular age, a multiplication of spiritual choices also emerged. Christianity no longer became the only option for the quest towards spiritual fulfilment, for there are now many gods or paths to choose from. As Taylor explains,

the salient feature of the modern cosmic imaginary is not that it has fostered materialism, or enabled people to recover a spiritual outlook beyond materialism, to return as it were to religion, though it has done both these things. But the most important fact about it which is relevant to our enquiry here is that it has opened a space in which people can wander between and around all these options without having to land clearly and definitely in any one.¹⁴

Religion, it seems, has found its way to the buffet table.

¹³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (USA: Harvard Press, 2007), 510. Ironically, whilst the West has embraced 'non-Christian religions, particularly those in the Orient', large numbers in the Orient are embracing the Christian religion. In an article in The Telegraph, Tom Phillips explains how the growth of the underground Church in China is growing to such a degree that it is believed that China is on course to become the 'world's most Christian nation' within 15 years: "Officially, the People's Republic of China is an atheist country but that is changing fast as many of its 1.3 billion citizens seek meaning and spiritual comfort that neither communism nor capitalism seem to have supplied." He goes on, "Less than four decades later, some believe China is now poised to become not just the world's number one economy but also its most numerous Christian nation." Tom Phillips: "China on course to become world's 'most Christian nation' within 15 years," *Telegraph*, April 19, 2014, accessed September 18, 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10776023/China-on-course-to-become-worlds-most-Christian-nation-within-15-years.html>.

¹⁴ Ibid., 351.

Is The Church¹⁵ Truly Terminal?

For Brown, the decline of Christianity in Britain is a terminal condition. But is his view an accurate one? Although it is true that organized religion, especially within the larger denominations, has suffered the biggest loss in terms of attendance and church closures, that is not the entire demographic of church life and existence in the UK. Believing that the Church has declined beyond rejuvenation is a mistaken view that many church leaders have haplessly accepted according to Jackson, who explains how shoots of new life are breaking through the hardened ground of secularisation in many areas of Britain today, including Wales. Christianity is not necessarily on an irreversible slide to extinction as secularists claim, as signs of resurrection can be found in surprising areas.

Mike Breen, founder of the 3DM church movement, asks two pertinent questions in this discussion of church life in the UK: “What does the church of the future look like? And, how do we reach people who don’t know Jesus?”¹⁶ He, like many others, believe that the Church of the future cannot reach a twenty-first century generation using nineteenth or twentieth century language and style. Traditional church culture is foreign to the majority of post-Christian Britons and the Church needs to rise up to the enormous challenge of preaching the same gospel message to an entirely different culture, in a relevant way. Pockets of the Church in Britain is realising that it needs to change to survive.

¹⁵ Where I use ‘the Church’ in this dissertation, I am referring to the wider Body of Christ as a whole within the UK, which includes traditional denominations and contemporary forms of church such as Fresh Expressions.

¹⁶ Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3DM, 2011), 10.

Although some church denominations are indeed in decline and appear terminal, evidence exists of sustained growth that has been taking place all over Britain the last 30 years: “This growth is large-scale; it is occurring across a wide geographical range; it is highly multi-cultural in its social reach; and it shows no sign of slowing down.”¹⁷ Richard Burgess adds,

the 2005 English Church Census showed a steady decline in British church attendance over the previous seven years and the widespread closure of churches from the historic denominations. At the same time over 1,000 new churches were opened, a large proportion started by denominations or individuals from Africa.¹⁸

The fastest growing church (in terms of attendance) in Britain currently is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a Nigerian Pentecostal denomination which, according to Peter Brierley, has planted 296 new churches in the UK in the last five years, the largest number for any single denomination.¹⁹ Dr. Babatunde Adedibu, Research and Policy Officer at the RCCG, writes,

It is estimated that there are over 4,000 congregations and a membership of one million, the majority of them in urban cities as a result of the growth of these churches from the 1950s to 2008. The growth of these Black Majority Churches is a new phenomenon that has ushered in a distinctive era in Black church history.²⁰

In Jesus House alone, a London based RCCG Church, membership grew from 1,700 in 2000, to over 3,000 by 2012.²¹

¹⁷ David Goodhew, ed., *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), 3.

¹⁸ Richard Burgess, “African Pentecostal Growth: The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain,” in *Church Growth in Britain*, ed. David Goodhew (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), 127.

¹⁹ Peter Brierley, “UK Church Statistics No 2 2010-2020,” accessed November 28, 2014, <http://brierleyconsultancy.com/images/2014stats.pdf>.

²⁰ Babatunde Adedibu, *Coat Of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches To British Christianity* (UK: Wisdom Summit, 2012), 49.

²¹ [Ibid.](#), 101.

There also exists a real desire and pursuit for growth among some of the declining traditional denominations, together with additional new forms of churches appearing. Even within the long-standing traditional Anglican denomination, important signs of growth and the reversal of the terminal decline are evident. Indeed, great diversity of worship and missional expression now exists within this denomination. While some leaders still engage in the more traditional expressions of worship and church, there are others who have significantly departed from them in an attempt to become more relevant to the contemporary, unchurched culture. As George Lings explains, Anglicanism as a whole has lived through somewhat of a revolution since 1960. He writes,

Anglicanism then might be characterized as a Sunday gathering, conducted in a consecrated building, using the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), led by a full-time clergyman for people drawn from one parish. ... These landmarks have virtually disappeared as essential components of being Anglican. A group, from a network of people, might meet on Wednesday, in a pub, with a part-time, woman leader, drawing on many liturgical sources and yet still claim Anglican identity.²²

Of these new forms of church, or *Fresh Expressions*, 387 were begun in the Anglican denomination between 1999 and 2005 alone. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, described the English church as being “at a real watershed,” describing how, “there are many ways in which the reality of church can exist...we are going to have to live with variety.”²³ The Methodist denomination too has joined the Anglicans in pursuing fresh expressions of church.

Growth is also evident within the Baptist denomination. In 1984 growth in membership was the largest for 60 years, with baptisms that year were 1,900 more than

²² George Lings, “A History of Fresh Expressions and Church Planting in the Church of England,” in *Church Growth in Britain*, ed. David Goodhew (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), 161.

²³ Ibid., 173.

the previous year. A further increase in Baptist membership was reported in 1987 against a background of general decline in historic mainline denominations. So what caused this sudden spur of growth within this denomination? According to Paul Beasley-Murray, then minister of Altrincham Baptist Church and Principal of Spurgeon's College in London, "in the 1980s a new spirit of optimism and commitment to church growth and church planting emerged."²⁴ In his own church, he saw membership grow from 93 in 1971 to over 200 by 1980. Baptist involvement in the church growth movement, coupled with interest in church growth theories, and the influence of the charismatic renewal stirred the denomination. In a survey of 330 Baptist churches conducted by Beasley-Murray and Alan Wilkinson, a model for growth was created and published in *Turning the Tide*.²⁵ The result was a trend of evangelism and social action initiatives throughout the 1990s, including increased church planting, the use of the Alpha programme, and various mission-orientated community projects. The writer of this paper was a child of this Baptist movement.

Church attendance in Britain then is no longer on an unstoppable terminal decline; significant numbers are growing. The Church of the future, at least in some parts of Britain, is adapting in an attempt to survive the threat of secular strangulation. For Bruce and other secularists who primarily focus on statistical measures of religious belief and mainstream church membership, the existence of these new forms of church is not on

²⁴ Ian M. Randall, "Baptist Growth in England," in *Church Growth in Britain*, ed. David Goodhew (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), 60.

²⁵ Ibid.

their radar.²⁶ Yet it is a vibrant aspect of church growth that is too large to be ignored in post-Christian Britain. Jackson adds, “Postmodernism is all about diversity, about there being no single right way. We will together reach more people in our varied culture by being varied ourselves. We must encourage one another in our diversity – let a thousand flowers bloom.”²⁷ Diverse flowers of Christian Churches are blooming all over postmodern Britain.

Understanding Church Growth

While it is encouraging that new churches of various forms are springing up in England and Wales, do increased numbers alone constitute the whole picture of Church growth? Additionally, is secularisation entirely to blame for the demise of the Church in Britain?

Jim Collins, in *How The Mighty Fall*, explains that when it comes to growing an organisation, one needs to be very careful as to what kind of growth one exactly pursues. Does one focus on growing a company bigger, or on making a company better? He writes,

The greatest leaders do seek growth – growth in performance, growth in distinctive impact, growth in creativity, growth in people – but they do not succumb to growth that undermines long-term value. And they certainly do not confuse growth with excellence. Big does not equal great, and great does not equal big.²⁸

²⁶ Paul Chambers, “Economic Factors in Church Growth and Decline in South and South West Wales,” in *Church Growth in Britain*, ed. David Goodhew (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), 233.

²⁷ Jackson, 49.

²⁸ Jim Collins, *How The Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 54.

If we apply this to our church context, big churches do not necessarily equate to great churches. In other words, Church leaders need to be careful what kind of growth they pursue, ensuring they do not pursue numerical growth at the cost of other important areas of growth. Although numbers can be an indicator of good health, research shows that numbers alone do not equate to a healthy, growing church.

In interviews with church pastors within Wales and England, a reoccurring concern is knowing how to move beyond numerical growth and encourage spiritual growth within the lives of its members. Even when evangelism programmes, such as Alpha, have been successful in bringing in new members and converts into churches, the need to foster spiritual growth and maturity in their lives poses a huge challenge for many leaders. Knowing how to take new believers from new birth in Christ to maturity and life transformation is often neglected.

When it comes to growing churches then, it is clear that we must also take into consideration other important aspects of growth in addition to numeric.

The Commission to Make Disciples

In our quest to grow churches in Wales, it is useful to remind ourselves of the mission and task Jesus Christ entrusted to His Church. After all, how can churches embark on a plan of growth if we are not sure of Christ's Mission?

In Matthew 28, Jesus Christ, just prior to His ascension, entrusted His church with what became known as the *Great Commission*:

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.” ([Matthew 28:18-20](#))

Jesus Christ did not commission these followers to make converts to the Christian faith only, but to *make disciples*; to baptise and instruct new believers in the knowledge of and obedience to Christ’s teachings. But what exactly is a disciple? Is every person who walks through the doors of a twenty-first century church (whatever form it takes) considered a disciple? When a person signs a decision card to become a Christian or who prays the ‘salvation prayer’, is he or she then a disciple? Ogden provides a helpful definition of discipleship:

Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.²⁹

A reading of New Testament Scriptures reveal how Jesus Christ and the Early Church placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of disciple formation and not merely converts to the Christian faith. Indeed, Jesus had some very high standards for those who truly desire to be His disciples:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27)

In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

Jesus placed stringent terms on anyone desiring to become His disciple, which included a reorienting of priorities and the need to make sacrifices if needed. Had He softened the conditions of discipleship, imaginably the crowds would have swept along

²⁹ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 17.

behind him, but that was not His desire. He was looking for men and women of quality; mere quantity did not interest Him. In his message to the crowds concerning the conditions on which they could be his disciples, Jesus Christ employed two illustrations:

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ... Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? (Luke 14:28, 31)

Jesus employed these illustrations to demonstrate his disapproval of impulsive and ill-considered discipleship. Like the builder, He too is engaged in a building programme — “On this rock I will build my church.” (Matt 16:18) In this building and battling, Jesus Christ desired to have associated with Him disciples who are men and women of quality — those who will not turn back when the lighting grows fierce. The message Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship — not to faith alone but to faith and obedience. Jesus gave a solemn warning: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 7:21)

Evidently then, the mission that Christ has entrusted to His church is to make obedient disciples and not converts to the faith alone. He did not ask His followers to create buildings full of believers, but to focus on creating disciples full of God and His Kingdom mission. That is, to not only focus on quantitative growth (numbers), but on qualitative growth (maturity and service) too. His expectation was that future church communities were to comprise of obedient and mission-focused disciples.

That brings us to the question, how then does one make such quality disciples of Christ?

The Importance of Creating Quality Disciples

Unfortunately, throughout much of the twentieth century, this call to make disciples has largely been either misunderstood or neglected in Wales. With the Welsh Chapel model equating spiritual maturity with mere attendance, the Sunday preacher or the Sunday School teacher being the main and often, sole source of spiritual education and formation, it's not surprising how many churches in Wales have been in such spiritual decline, unable to withstand the powers of secularisation. Wales is not alone.

In a published document entitled, *The International Consultation on Discipleship*, the authors acknowledged how the Church is “marked by a paradox of growth without depth” and many converts to Christianity throughout the world fall away from the faith.³⁰ Contemporary evidence confirms that the beliefs and discipleship practices amongst Christians in the UK are not what they should be. Immediately following the ONC 2011 census, Professor Richard Dawkins conducted a further survey and found that only 32 percent of those who stated they were Christian in the census believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and only 35 percent could correctly answer the question, “What is the first book of the New Testament?”³¹ These are quite shocking statistics for people who profess Christian faith.

Further, in *Time for Discipleship?* a 2014 report produced by the Evangelical Alliance (EA), less than one third of those Evangelical Christians surveyed said they set aside a substantial period of time for daily prayer, with only eleven percent praying more than three hours per week. In addition, 50.5 percent of Christians said they engage with

³⁰ International Consultation on Discipleship, “The Eastbourne Consultation Joint Statement on Discipleship” (Eastbourne, England, September 24, 1999).

³¹ Richard Dawkins, “Census Shows that Christianity in Britain Is ‘On the Way Out’,” *Telegraph*, December 11, 2012, accessed April 18, 2014.

the Bible daily, and only 40 percent agree that their church does very well in discipling new believers (a mere eight percent in strong agreement). Furthermore, only 26 percent feel they have been well equipped to witness and share their faith with others. The survey also found that 31 percent feel that they had a good early experience in being taught good habits and disciplines for their prayer lives.³²

Despite the fact that a considerable number of those interviewed felt they were growing spiritually, it's clear that we have a discipleship deficit within churches in England and Wales as the 2014 Evangelical Alliance Conference, *21st Century Disciplemaking* further confirmed. At this conference, prominent British church leaders expressed their concern over a felt discipleship crisis, reflected in the census report and denominational statistics. One of the attendees, Dr. Lucy Peppiatt, Dean of Studies at Westminster Theological Centre, UK, writes, "There appears to be a corporate sense that the church has failed in some way in this area, and many are concerned that we recapture the truth that discipleship is at the heart of the gospel."³³ Alan Hirsch states it in bolder terms;

The Church in the West has largely forgotten the art of disciple-making and has largely reduced it to an intellectual assimilation of theological ideas. As a result, we have a rather anemic cultural Christianity highly susceptible to the lures of consumerism. This in turn works directly against a true following of Jesus. In our desire to be seeker-friendly and attractional, we have largely abandoned the vigorous kind of discipleship that characterised early Christianity and every significant Jesus movement since.³⁴

³² Evangelical Alliance, "Time for Discipleship? 21st Century Evangelicals: A Snapshot of the Beliefs and Habits of Evangelical Christians in the UK," 2014.

| ³³ Lucy Peppiatt, *The Disciple: On Becoming Truly Human* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), xiii.

| ³⁴ Alan Hirsch and Darryn Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide For Developing Missional Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 64.

Hirsch lays a strong indictment at the door of the Church, which cannot be ignored if churches in Wales are to grow out of their anemic state. This felt discipleship crisis calls for a re-examination of the processes and importance of discipleship if the Church is to prosper and see [holistic](#) growth in the coming decades. Welsh churches can no longer afford to neglect the formation of quality disciples who are not only strong enough to resist the force of secularisation, but who are also mission-minded.

For philosopher James K.A. Smith, Christian education, which encourages the formation of quality disciples who desire and love God and his Kingdom, must be the kind that focuses on the reformation of the heart.³⁵ Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* warned of the danger of reducing the formation of disciples to merely to an intellectual assimilation of theological ideas alone. Smith agrees. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is not merely about what we can learn with our intellect; it's about how we can become different people. Anything less than that results in failed discipleship formation.³⁶

Smith explains how as humans, we are more than merely thinking beings; we are embodied actors in our culture. Prioritizing practices over ideas will result in more effective and lasting discipleship formation.³⁷ He writes,

the distorted understanding of worldview that dominates current models [of Christian education] assumes a rationalist, intellectualist, cognitivist model of the human person; as a result, it fails to honor the fact that we are embodied, material, fundamentally *desiring* animals who are, whether we recognize it or not (and perhaps most when we don't recognize it), every day being formed by the

³⁵ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 2009), 126.

³⁶ James Smith, interview by Trevin Wax from The Gospel Coalition, January 12, 2010, "Spiritual Formation Through Desire: An Interview with James K.A. Smith," accessed August 23, 2015. <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2010/01/12/spiritual-formation-through-desire-an-interview-with-james-k-a-smith/> accessed.

³⁷ Smith, 35.

material liturgies of other pedagogies – at the mall, at the stadium, on television, and so forth. As such, Christian education becomes a missed opportunity because it fails to actually counter the cultural liturgies that are forming us every day. An important part of revisioning Christian education is to see it as a mode of counter-formation.”³⁸

He has a valuable point. Discipleship formation, whatever format it takes, must be done with the intention of capturing a love and desire for God. It’s not simply a question of cognitive formation, but heart formation too, and for Smith, that takes place through engaging in practices, which he believes will shape the heart and mind of the growing disciple.³⁹ In other words, discipleship that seeks to redirect one’s passion and desire towards God. By educating students of Christ into a Christian worldview alone, we end up making well-educated Christians who don’t look too different to their secular counterparts. In the end, we dull the gospel and fail to make radical disciples.⁴⁰

One also needs to safeguard against the danger of educating Christians only in matters of the heart, as this could produce disciples too weak to withstand the secular environment. Rob Warner outlines to how membership with the Evangelical Alliance and attendance at Spring Harvest conferences skyrocketed during the charismatic renewal in the 1970s and 80s in the UK, but how this apparent injection of spiritual enthusiasm didn’t last.⁴¹ He explains how in the 1990s the Evangelical boom was over, and hopes of

³⁸ Ibid., 33.

³⁹ Ibid., 80. These practices could include liturgies, routines and rituals that “inscribe particular ongoing habits into our character, such that they become second nature” to the disciple.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 35. Although Smith primarily focuses on Christian education that takes places in universities and colleges in his book, we share the same goal: the formation of radical disciples that represent Christ in this world: “The core intuitions I’ll unpack in this book are germane to the task of discipleship broadly conceived.”

⁴¹ Rob Warner, “Ecstatic Spirituality and Entrepreneurial Revivalism: Reflections on the Toronto Blessing,” in *On Revival: A Critical Examination*, eds. A. Walker and K. J. Aune (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press), 221-38.

renewal and restorationism had failed to deliver. Far from enjoying burgeoning growth, Evangelical and charismatic churches were showing signs of late decline, although not as quick as other sectors of the Church. Enthusiasm and desire alone are not enough to produce strong and consistent disciples.

Smith therefore argues that Sunday liturgies are simply not enough. He suggests that what is needed to create disciples who love Christ and desire His Kingdom is an education that focuses on forming both the head and the heart:

[B]ecause we are more fundamentally creatures of love and desire than knowledge and beliefs, our discipleship – our formation in Christ – is more fundamentally a matter of precognitive education of the heart.⁴²

This is not a fleeting experience of emotion that Smith is talking about, but rather a devotion of the head and heart that is formed through the positive influence of time and regular spiritual exercise:

One of the most crucial things to appreciate about Christian formation is that it happens over time. It is not fostered by events or experiences; real formation cannot be effected by actions that are merely episodic. There must be a rhythm and a regularity to formative practices in order for them to sink in – in order for them to seep into our *kardia* and begin to be effectively inscribed in who we are, directing our passion to the kingdom of God and thus disposing us to action that reflects such a desire.⁴³

Healthier Disciples, Healthier Churches?

So far we've found that a discipleship deficit exists in the UK, including Wales, together with the importance of creating healthy disciples. This begs the question: Would

⁴² [Smith, 136.](#)

⁴³ Ibid. Examples of practices he suggests include the Eucharist, prayer, Scripture and sermon, song and so on.

reversing the paucity of discipleship and investment in people's spiritual growth have the power to reverse declining Christianity and churches?

Dallas Willard seems to think so. For him, the crux of the matter lies at what is going on *inside* the Church, in the spiritual lives of its members. He believes that most problems in contemporary Western churches can be explained by the fact that members have never decided to follow Christ as Lord in the first place.⁴⁴ Although it appears on the surface that attracting numbers may be the issue that needs attention, the issue behind the decline is deficiency of spiritual maturity in the lives of professed Christians. Willard writes,

For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship.⁴⁵

He agrees that the all-important Biblical mandate to make disciples has been lost, and churches in the West are reaping the consequences. It would seem that the growth of healthy churches cannot be separated from the growth of healthy disciples.

For Willard, this focus on the quality of life experienced by disciples of Jesus Christ is so important, because it is key to seeing churches prospering both spiritually *and* numerically.

Now, some might be shocked to hear that what the 'church' – the disciples gathered – really needs is not more people, more money, better buildings or programs, more education, or more prestige. Christ's gathered people, the church, has always been at its best when it had little or none of these. All it needs to fulfill Christ's purposes on earth is *the quality of life he makes real in the life of his*

⁴⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (Oxford, England: Monarch Books, 2006), 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

disciples. Given that quality, the church will prosper from everything that comes its way”.⁴⁶

He adds,

the greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as ‘Christians’ will become *disciples* – students, apprentices, practitioners – of *Jesus Christ*, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of Heaven into every corner of human existence.⁴⁷

Adedibu agrees. In his book, *Coat Of Many Colours*, he explains how the general (and mistaken) notion of some preachers is that the numerical growth of a church is synonymous with good health. The term ‘growth’ is used almost exclusively to mean numerical growth: “If the numbers don’t go up, the church is experiencing a ‘plateau,’ a buzzword for stagnation. If the numbers are going down it must be unhealthy and in a state of decline.”⁴⁸ Adedibu believes that a more healthy perspective of church growth emphasizes both numerical *and* spiritual growth for Christians.⁴⁹ It’s not simply a matter of getting people through the church doors and onto seats. His concern is that RCCG churches are not simply dotting the landscape in Britain, but are growing holistically. After all, Jesus didn’t call His church to simply make believers or to fill church buildings with people. If that were the case, then attention to numbers alone would suffice.

⁴⁶ Ibid., xiv.

⁴⁷ Ibid., xv.

⁴⁸ Adedibu, 99.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Components of Church Growth

If church leaders are to grow churches in Wales, the focus then needs to be placed on growing the people within, on making obedient disciples of Jesus Christ, not just filling church pews. Towards this end, Jackson believes there are three important components of church growth.⁵⁰

1. Numerical growth
2. Spiritual growth
3. Vitality growth (impact on community)⁵¹

He states that if any church focuses on one area to the neglect of others, the result is an unhealthy, imbalanced church.⁵² Currently, the Church of England is experiencing numerical growth, with 10 percent of people who attend Church of England services attending various Fresh Expressions of church within the denomination. In ten years time, Jackson expects that figure to rise to between 20 – 30 percent.⁵³ Good news perhaps? Yet Jackson also expects that these people will be less committed to church: “I can see the Church of England having more people but with lower average commitment.”⁵⁴

Despite the fact that Fresh Expression Churches have seen important quantitative growth, many leaders within this movement are also acknowledging difficulty in helping people to conversion and discipleship.⁵⁵ The Fresh Expression movement seems to be

⁵⁰ As explained by Rev. Bob Jackson at *Going for Growth Conference*, St. John’s College, Nottingham on February 15, 2015.

⁵¹ [These specific three terms of Jackson will be used by the author throughout this dissertation.](#)

⁵² Jackson at *Going for Growth Conference*, February 15, 2015.

⁵³ In a personal email to the author from Bob Jackson on February 26, 2015.

⁵⁴ [Ibid.](#)

⁵⁵ [Ibid.](#)

successful in increasing numerical growth, but this is not automatically leading to the formation of disciples. Although there has been a considerable amount of growth in the UK churches within the last three years from a numerical point of view, Jackson explains that this has not automatically translated into spiritual and vitality growth. Focusing on quantitative growth alone does not achieve qualitative growth within a church – focus on all three aspects of growth is needed. Church of England and Methodist churches admit this is one of the biggest challenges they are faced with today. As Jackson states, “If you want your church to grow numerically, don’t focus on growing numerically. Focus on becoming better.”⁵⁶ From Church planters and Church Consultants to Researchers and Pastors, this priority is a growing realisation.

This realisation is not isolated to these denominations alone. Robert Warren, author of *Developing Healthy Churches*,⁵⁷ agrees that the primary issue in growing healthy churches in the UK is not about focusing on attracting greater numbers and new converts. For him, the key to growing churches lies with the need to grow people, the greatest asset in the life of the Church. It’s not a question of creating great programmes to attract new numbers of people, but rather a matter of “growing people into the fullness of their humanity.”⁵⁸ This then needs to be at the heart of church growth. Warren adds,

Our calling is to nurture a loving relationship to God, to one another within the church and to the world around. It certainly calls for faith, sacrifice and ‘sheer dogged endurance’, yet it constitutes a clear and straightforward agenda for the Church expressed in the three dimensions of ‘Up’ to God, ‘In’ to one another and

⁵⁶ Jackson at *Going for Growth Conference*, February 15, 2015.

⁵⁷ Robert Warren, *Developing Healthy Churches: Returning To The Heart Of Mission and Ministry* (London, UK: Church House Publishing, 2012), 32.

⁵⁸ [Ibid.](#)

‘Out’ to the world. Such an agenda constitutes a recall to the heart of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and its outworking in the life of the Church today.”⁵⁹

If we heed what both Warren and Willard assert, building healthy churches is not just a call to make converts to the Christian faith. It’s not even just a call to make true disciples of Jesus Christ. It’s a call to make disciples who live out God’s mission ‘out to the world.’ Churches may well succeed in producing mature disciples, but unless they are taught how to obey Christ’s commands and serve those in need, they are in danger of being spiritually corpulent yet sedentary disciples.

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph. 2:10)

The way forward then is in finding ways of forming healthy disciples of Jesus Christ who live out God’s purposes on earth. Growth that focuses on encouraging people into the fullness of their humanity, disciples reformed in heart and mind, who fulfil Christ’s agenda in this world.

Summary

As we have seen, a few denominations in the UK have been experiencing a significant amount of numeric growth within their churches in recent years. For the RCCG church, one of the reasons for this explosion of numerical growth includes migration and support with assimilation into British culture, but that is not the whole picture. As we have seen, other denominations are experiencing numerical growth too.

For Adedibu, the pursuit of holistic church growth “all starts with the DNA of the organisation.”⁶⁰ For churches to grow, the right culture must be created by the leadership

⁵⁹ Ibid., 11.

of the organization. According to Peter Brierley, the RCCG church does this well, describing Agu Irukwu, pastor of the largest RCCG church, Jesus House for All Nations, Brent, as a “strategic genius.” The church is successfully growing because they have a

clear vision of what they want to do, and how they intend to do it. They set goals for the future, two or three years or more ahead, and usually find they are more successful than expected. In the forthcoming second edition of *UK Church Statistics* I have them down as having 62,000 members in 2008 in the UK, and an expected 120,000 by 2015. . . I have estimated they will grow to 156,000 by 2020.⁶¹

Yinka Oduwole, Public Affairs Managers at RCCG, UK, reveals a bit more about their methodology:

Our approach is to establish churches in communities where we feel led by God to do so. These RCCG parishes focus on the improvement of the spiritual and social welfare of the people, working in partnership with other Christian denominations and like-minded organisations such as Hope Together UK. Our mission is to communicate the love of Jesus Christ through word and deed.⁶²

RCCG churches focus on developing people numerically, spiritually and in doing good works. Their churches seek to meet social needs, and provide educational seminars on topics such as business management, investment, immigration issues, marriage and health awareness. They also host a variety of interest groups for youth, women, men, lone parents, childless couples and business people.⁶³ Indeed, research figures show that 85 percent of RCCG members said they were attracted to the church because of its problem-solving approach. At the same time, they are not neglecting growing their members spiritually. In an interview with Adedibu, the author witnessed a strong desire to see

⁶⁰ As stated by Dr. Adedibu in interview with the author on November 20, 2014.

⁶¹ Ruth Gledhill, “How Reverse Missionaries Built the UK’s Fastest-Growing Church,” *Christianity Today*, June 5, 2014.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ [Burgess](#), 132.

conversion growth among both African and non-African British nationals, and learned how the RCCG have established a discipleship school to foster numerical and spiritual growth. It's no wonder the RCCG church are experiencing significant numerical growth.

Adedibu admits that a proper evaluation of the measure of conversion growth is not so easy to ascertain within the RCCG as there is an absence of statistical figures in terms of conversions and membership of all Black Majority Churches in Britain. Despite this, there is nevertheless evidence of spiritual growth. For example, in his research, Burgess found that the presence of RCCG congregations has increased the religiosity of Nigerian immigrants. In a survey, Burgess discovered that 86 percent stated that since joining the RCCG they attend church more often, and 87 percent stated they pray more often, with 48 percent evangelizing more often.⁶⁴ RCCG churches then, it would seem, are succeeding in producing some level of holistic growth within its churches.

We can confidently conclude that churches that desire to see holistic growth must place their attention beyond increasing the numbers alone. Focus needs to be placed on creating mature disciples of Jesus Christ who love God and their neighbour, serve those in the world in which they live, and seek to share the Gospel. Graham Maidstone writes, "Discipleship may well prove to be the most critical issue. The long-term value of any expression of church, inherited or fresh, is to be judged by the sort of disciples it makes."⁶⁵ Churches in Wales need to find ways of making this kind of quality disciples.

Although the crisis of Christianity and Church life in the UK is plainly recognizable in terms of declining numbers in attendance and church closures, a major

⁶⁴ [Ibid.](#), 131.

⁶⁵ Graham Maidstone, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church In A Changing Context* (London, UK: Church House Publishing, 2012), ix.

source of this problem has been the quality of disciples churches have produced. If Christians had been stronger in their spiritual lives and faith, would the Church have declined and weakened as much as it did in the twentieth century? Could it be that the Church's omission of producing vigorous disciples strong enough to resist the lures of consumerism, and to serve God's purposes in this world, has contributed to the demise of the Christian Church in England and Wales? It would appear so. As Kandiah adds, "The fact that the Church is at best flatlining in its numbers is a sign that we have not adequately disciplined the Church to live out and speak out the gospel."⁶⁶

Churches in Wales are not only struggling to survive the suffocating atmosphere of secularisation, but have failed to understand how to make strong disciples that can overcome the powerful tides of secularisation. With weak discipleship practices among believers in churches that could serve to strengthen their faith, and equip them to face the furore of the current climate, something clearly needs to positively and qualitatively change within churches. Finding ways to develop disciples in Jackson's three areas of growth is a hopeful way forward. In the next section we will evaluate a number of processes that focus on church growth.

⁶⁶ Krish Kandiah, "Why Discipleship Matters?" accessed April 18, 2014, <https://www.eauk.org/church/campaigns/discipleship/why-discipleship-matters.cfm>.

SECTION TWO: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

You are the salt of the earth.
But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?
— Jesus

Quality is always important. As Jesus teaches in this Scripture, the benefits of salt can only be appreciated if its quality is maintained. If that salt should lose its ability to affect and season, then it has become worthless. Sadly, the Church within Wales has lost much of its saltiness. Empty church buildings scatter the landscape; others are getting sold off for uses other than godly worship, while still other churches and chapels barely manage to keep [their](#) doors open. Many churches in Wales have neglected the processes of growth and discipleship and are reaping the consequences.

Through the first section, we [made](#) the following [conclusions](#):

1. Numerical growth should not be the primary consideration when growing healthy Churches.
2. What goes on inside churches significantly impacts the overall health and effectiveness of a church.
3. A huge discipleship deficit exists within Welsh churches, which has constrained churches not only from being able to withstand the rising force of secularisation, but has also hindered churches from reaching beyond [their](#) walls to share the Gospel.
4. To see churches growing again in Wales will necessitate a focus on spiritual and vitality growth, as well as numerical.

So where do we go from here? As we saw in section one, the key to growing churches lies with the need to grow people into the fullness of their humanity, the greatest asset in the life of the Church. For Jackson,⁶⁷ that requires a focus on the afore-mentioned three areas of growth. How do church leaders rise to such a challenge?

Marks of a Healthy Church

In *The Healthy Churches' Handbook*, Robert Warren outlines seven marks of a healthy church⁶⁸ as outlined in the following chart.

1. Energized by faith	Worship and sacramental life Motivation to serve God and one another Engages with Scripture Nurtures faith in Christ
2. Outward-looking focus	Deeply rooted in local community Passionate about justice and peace Makes connections between faith and daily living Responds to needs through loving service
3. Seeks to find out what God wants	Vocation – seeks God's will Vision – develops and communicates where it's going Mission priorities Able to call for and make sacrifices
4. Faces the cost of change and growth	Takes on new ways of doing things Takes risks Crises – responds creatively to challenges Positive experiences are affirmed and built on

⁶⁷ [Rev. Bob Jackson at Going for Growth Conference, St. John's College, Nottingham on February 15, 2015.](#)

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47-8.

5. Operates as a community	Relationships are nurtured so people can help each other grow in faith and service Leadership – work together to develop all seven marks of a healthy church Lay ministry – people’s gifts are valued and given expression
6. Makes room for all	Welcomes newcomers into life of the church Children and youth are nurtured in their faith Enquirers are encouraged in exploring faith in Christ Diversity in backgrounds and abilities seen as a strength
7. Does a few things well	Does the basics well: worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration Being good news as a church in attitude and works Enjoys what it does Occasional offices – baptisms, weddings, funerals are done well and thoughtfully.

For Warren, if a church focuses on each of these seven areas, this will lead in time to overall church growth, including numerical growth as a by-product. Warren’s research on Anglican and Fresh Expression churches that are growing numerically in the UK confirms that those churches which focus on growing people and making disciples see holistic growth as a result:

It quickly became clear that, for all the churches involved, the present good state of health was the result of a long journey of discipleship and discovery. Indeed, a commitment to making that journey towards health was not only a distinguishing mark of these churches but also an important signpost for others to strengthen the life of their church. Making a long-term commitment to develop the quality and vitality of a church is the key to health.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Warren, 2.

An Examination of Processes of Growth

As Warren states, any journey towards health does not happen by itself, but begins with a commitment to growth and development. Any decision made by a church needs to be accompanied by a plan of growth, some kind of framework that guides and enables a church to get to where it desires to be. What therefore follows in this second section, is an examination of three spiritual growth processes designed to do just that, to create healthy, growing disciples and churches. Firstly, we shall examine a growth process offered by Robert E. Webber, an American theologian known for his work on the Early Church and worship practices. He proposes that the primary context for spiritual growth and discipleship be the Christian community. Next, we shall examine John Wesley's systems of growth, an eighteenth century Methodist framework once renowned for producing robust disciples. Finally, we shall consider Christian A. Schwarz's *Natural Church Development*, a contemporary church growth model. It is hoped that through examining these three growth models, we will discover useful principles or practices that can be used to spur Church growth and renewal in Wales.

1) Robert E. Webber – Faith-forming Communities

When reading the New Testament, there are a number of passages that seem to infer that its writers expected growth and development in the lives of converts to the Christian faith:

“Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.”
([Hebrews 6:1](#))

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call.’ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ Those who

accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” [\(Acts 2:38-42\)](#)

In this previous passage, several thousand made the decision to follow Jesus Christ. But what exactly did the apostles do with all these converts? How did the apostles manage to gather all those people together to create this devoted fellowship? And what exactly happened in the time period between verse 41 and 42? Verse 42 seems to imply that there must have been some form of discipleship formation, teaching the new converts how to mature in their faith. Jesus Christ had been clear about [this](#) necessity, for His own disciples had heard Him talk about discipleship many times. These apostles knew Christ’s standards and what He expected from His followers. They understood that once someone has chosen to follow Christ, their lives should never be the same. [They also knew the importance of living forward — spiritual multiplication through intentionally influencing a few people at a time. By concentrating on a few faithful men and women they would leave behind them a legacy of people whose influence would extend beyond a generation or two.](#)

Robert E. Webber in *Ancient-Future Evangelism* offers a thesis of spiritual formation grounded within this historical lens of classical Christian formation and worship. He explains how within the Early Church, the process of formation was not left to mere hope that the converts would mature by themselves. The approach of the Early church was to take new converts by the hand and walk them through an intentional, life-giving process of formation that assured they believed the faith handed down by the

apostolic community.⁷⁰ For Webber, this process of formation is largely missing from the contemporary church:

The problem we are dealing with is not only the problem of individual Christians who don't grow but the problem of local churches that don't have a process for nurturing and growing new Christians into mature disciples.⁷¹

He therefore appeals to his readers to return to a more substantive grasp of the faith and meaning of church and worship as modelled upon the historical church, and offers a fourfold process towards that goal:

1. Conversion
2. Discipleship
3. Spiritual Formation
4. Christian Vocation

Webber proposes that numerical, spiritual and vitality church growth should all take place within the context of church community, and his fourfold framework is the process employed towards that goal. He explains how the church community needs to be the primary setting of growth because it is the reality of God made present, the womb for disciple-making and even evangelism.⁷²

When a new disciple is submerged in the communal life of the church – in its story, its values, its perspective – the countercultural nature of the faith is caught and the disciple begins to be formed by immersion in the ways of the community.⁷³

⁷⁰ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 24.

⁷¹ [Ibid.](#), 43.

⁷² [Ibid.](#), 74.

⁷³ [Ibid.](#), 75.

This fourfold framework is expressed within the context of community as follows:

1. A missional church evangelizes primarily by immersing the unchurched in the experience of community. There they see, hear, and feel the reality of the faith and ‘catch the faith’ (**Conversion**);⁷⁴
2. New Christians are disciplined through an immersion in community through participation in worship, through the formative power of preaching, personal mentoring and small group accountability (**Discipleship**);⁷⁵
3. The work of the church is to train the new Christian in the practice of living in the pattern of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Specifically, through embracing the image of baptism, preaching, prayer, and the internalization of the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer (**Spiritual Formation**);⁷⁶
4. Christians are called to be servants to each other and to the world. He explains how every new Christian has a gift that needs to be released in ministry to the entire body: “We are to help new Christians find and use their gifts, to find their place in the family.” (**Christian Vocation**)⁷⁷

For Webber, each of these four growth processes should take place within the

context of church community:

[T]he church is the habitation of God's dwelling in the world, the instrument of God's voice to witness to God's mission for the world. Here among these people is a people where the lost can be in touch with God's provision for them in Jesus

⁷⁴ [Ibid.](#), 62.

⁷⁵ [Ibid.](#), 85.

⁷⁶ [Ibid.](#), 89.

⁷⁷ [Ibid.](#), 106.

Christ. Here God's vision for their relationships, values, and vocation are learned.⁷⁸

He believes that by focusing on strengthening and forming disciples within the context of church community, numerical, spiritual and vitality church growth take place.

The importance of Christian community as the context to foster each element of church growth is further supported by church in antiquity researcher, Antonia Tripolitis.

She describes how the early Christian community gave its members a true sense of belonging and a sense of security. They were concerned for every aspect of the lives of their new members, ready to freely give whatever help was needed, including to the poor and hungry outside of the community. In fact, she credits this powerful, caring community as the primary reason for the growth and promotion of Christianity.

Christianity's sense of community and its universal charity were a major reason, if not the most important single reason, for its growth and subsequent victory over the empire.⁷⁹

This kind of supportive and nurturing community are, for Webber and Tripolitis, of utmost importance when it comes to discipleship and overall church growth.

Evaluation

In examining Webber's thesis, there is much that is helpful. One appreciates his creation of a spiritual formation paradigm and how he places that within a Biblical and historical setting. One also gains an appreciation of the importance of church community as a context for each of aspect of growth within his fourfold framework: the church can be an important scene for the growth of its members, and in turn, for its overall numerical

⁷⁸ Ibid., 155.

⁷⁹ Antonia Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 116-7.

growth. As Tripolitis explains, Christianity's close-knit community, bound together in fellowship and love, had strong universal appeal during the Hellenistic-Roman period, and Webber agrees it still has this quality today.⁸⁰ For Webber, it's all about building a powerful, forming, and welcoming community:

In the post-Christian, postmodern world in which we live, the most crucial witness to the world is a vital, Spirit-filled local church that is animated by the message of God's mission. Nothing is more important for evangelism and discipleship than a community of people who have been evangelized by the message of God's mission to the world and who, through a deep commitment to God and each other, seek to live out their lives in obedience to God.⁸¹

Moreover, several of Warren's marks of a healthy church can be found within Webber's framework, specifically operating as a community and making room for all within the life of the church. These are admirable strengths of Webber's framework.

Yet another strength of Webber's process is that it encourages creativity. He suggests tools such as passage rites between each of the four elements of his framework (rites of conversion, baptism, covenant, welcome and confirmation), and explains how practices (such as Eucharist, mentoring) have the power to shape the heart and mind of the believer within the formation process. One can discern echoes of Smith's thesis, practices that encourage the formation and energizing of one's faith in God.

Despite the afore-mentioned strengths, several concerns present themselves. As admirable as it is to accommodate discipleship within a community setting, making community such a strong priority can lead to the danger of neglecting discipleship formation through personal spiritual disciplines. With the church community context being such a strong arena for the growth and spiritual formation of its members, could

⁸⁰ Ibid., 97.

⁸¹ Ibid., 160.

this lead to overlooking one's relationship with God? Could it even cause some believers to mistake their relationship with the church with their relationship with God? I believe that is possible. Whilst such a focus might strengthen the quality of church community, it may not produce the strongest disciples.

Secondly, Webber explains how the Christian's identity is primarily grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, little, if any, mention is made of the believer's identity as a son or daughter of God, and of one's relationship with God.⁸²

A final concern is an anemic outward-looking focus. For Webber, evangelism is primarily done within the church community where the unconverted are encouraged to come in and 'catch the faith.' Examples of this could include being invited to a neighbourhood community fellowship of Christians or to a church service. Again, the idea is that the gospel is embodied in community and rehearsed in worship.⁸³ Whilst this is a commendable method on numerous levels, including a focus on establishing relationships with those outside the church, what if the non-Christian does not want to attend a Christian community event? Or what if their personal circumstances prevent them from being able to attend? One wonders just how outward-looking this method of evangelism really is. Certainly in secular and post-Christian Wales, many individuals who are unconverted or dechurched would be very uncomfortable in attending a Christian community venue or event.

Overall, Webber's community-based context for discipleship and evangelism is perhaps not the most suitable choice as a church growth model for South Wales.

⁸² This contrasts quite strongly with Smith who believes that as humans we are fundamentally lovers – lovers of God and of His Kingdom. In other words, one's relationship with God and identity with Him as His child is given due importance.

⁸³ Webber, 67.

Nevertheless, it is inspiring in many ways including in its focus on community strength, its focus on using practices to stimulate spiritual formation, and its emphasis on promoting Christian vocation.

2) Wesleyan Discipleship

Discipleship with the Church in Britain has not always been [as ailing](#) as it has been this past century. One example of an effective spiritual formation process that succeeded in extending beyond intellectual and cognitive assimilation alone was the Wesleyan Model of the Methodist denomination. Founded by brothers John and Charles Wesley in the eighteenth century, the Methodist Movement had exceptional systems of education and training that fostered spiritual growth, maturity and holiness among its adherents. John Wesley's methodology comprised several well thought out interlocking group techniques that formed a ladder of personal, spiritual progress. Each rung of the ladder comprised societies, class meetings, and bands, each of which were designed to achieve specific purposes of development amongst its members:

- A. **The Society: Cognitive Mode** – almost synonymous with the term 'congregation', it was the focal point of group identification, the hub of all other functions. Its primary function was cognitive instruction, an educational channel by which the tenets of Methodism were presented.⁸⁴
- B. **Class Meeting: Behavioural Mode** – the most influential instructional unit in Methodism. It was a group of ten to twelve people who met weekly for personal supervision of their spiritual growth, with a leader guiding meetings. Every

⁸⁴ D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Anderson, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), 84.

Methodist was required to become a member of a class or else they were no longer a member of the society.⁸⁵

- C. **Bands: Affective Mode** – A homogeneous grouping by gender, age and marital status. Its aim was affective redirection. It's central function was 'close conversation' by which Wesley meant soul-searching examination, not so much of behaviour and ideas, but motives and heartfelt impressions.⁸⁶
- D. **Select Society: Training Mode** – A select company of men and women hand-picked by Wesley, who had worked their way up through the ranks of class meeting, society and bands, and who were considered standard-bearers of the movement.⁸⁷
- E. **Penitent Bands: Rehabilitative Mode** – Specially designed for those who lacked the will power or personal discipline to live up to the behavioural demands of the class meeting but who still had a desire to overcome their personal problems, such as alcoholism.⁸⁸

Wesley's discipleship formation aimed to transform the whole person into a disciple of Jesus Christ, who in turn would live [a life](#) worthy of their calling. Of this discipleship system, renowned nineteenth-century revivalist, Dwight L. Moody, once said, "The Methodist class-meetings are the best institutions for training converts the world ever saw."⁸⁹ This discipleship system, coupled with the vast volumes of literature

⁸⁵ Ibid., 95.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 121.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 125.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 93.

and hymns that the brothers produced, is credited with bringing spiritual renewal among eighteenth-century England and Wales, together with the personal transformation among tens of thousands of Christian disciples, the impact of which was felt and admired

throughout society. Davies and Rupp make this commendable observation [about](#)

[Methodism:](#)

In a hundred ways the life of the chapel and class-meeting was an exercise in self-government and an education in social responsibility... In a rapidly expanding industrial society, strict Methodists were much sought after by employers anxious to find a reliable man for a position of trust... Sir Robert Peel the elder declared in 1787: 'I have left most of my works in Lancashire under the management of Methodists and they serve me excellently well.'⁹⁰

Evaluation

Perhaps what is most helpful in examining Wesley's spiritual formation system is that it displays the usefulness of employing a strong discipleship strategy. The groups, societies and bands Wesley put in place did indeed reap rewards in the spiritual lives and characters of their members, so much so that Methodists were even sought after for positions of employment because of their reliability and integrity.

Another strength of Wesley's structure of discipleship and leadership training was that it was exceptionally rigorous, and one of the more effective discipleship growth systems in modern times. He was a pioneer and led the way in the formation of spiritual and vitality growth, and is even credited as an important leader of the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival. His spiritual formation system was certainly focused on developing maturity in the lives of new converts, albeit with strict discipline and regularity, and

⁹⁰ Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (London, UK: Epworth Press, 1965), 312.

provided additional pastoral accountability and support for those who struggled more than others.

A third strength is that it encouraged the use and development of one's spiritual gifts, encouraging lay leaders to take positions of responsibility within the connexion.⁹¹ In other words, laity were encouraged to become spiritual guides and pastors within the flock, and were provided with the necessary training through the Select Society.

Whilst in many ways Wesley's rigorous discipleship system is admirable, one possible weakness is that it could be said that Wesley's expectations of his members were at times too demanding. For example, a number of Wesley's 'ordinances' included the mandatory attendance of the ministry of the Word every morning at 5am, reading and mediating on the Scriptures at every available hour, and observing every Friday as a day of fasting or abstinence.⁹² Many Christians today would struggle to keep up with such a demanding schedule of personal disciplines.

At the very least, Wesley teaches us the importance of discipleship systems, and if quantitative growth is considered as an indicator of qualitative growth, then Wesley's development system surely saw success. Over time, his societies developed into what later became known as the Methodist denomination. There are not many spiritual growth systems which are so successful that they produce an entire^{ly} new denomination.

In addition, a number of Warren's marks of a healthy church can be detected: the movement was energized by faith, outward-looking, operated as a community, made room for all kinds of individuals, and certainly did a few things very well.

⁹¹ Henderson, 154. John Wesley called his system a 'connection,' by which he meant an organization of uniform local units held together by a common constitution and a central authority.

⁹² Gordon Stevens Wakefield, "Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: John Wesley and the Methodist System," *The Way* 31 (1991): 74-75.

Methodism Today

The processes of spiritual formation and discipleship that the Wesley brothers put in place were effective and fruitful. Tens of thousands of lives experienced spiritual growth, and vast numbers of seekers and new believers were drawn in and disciplined. However, in the twenty-first century, this picture of vigorous disciple making within the Methodist denomination has significantly changed. As figures from the Evangelical Alliance Report show⁹³, the Methodist denomination saw the highest number of church closures among all other church denominations throughout the UK between 2005 and 2010. The Methodist denomination, once known for its structures of discipleship formation throughout the connexion, is no longer the discipleship movement it once was.

So what happened to this system? Henderson explains the process of enculturation:

as the Church continued to develop through the centuries, outside influences began to dilute and diminish its initial impetus. The tight focus on ‘making disciples’ was lost, and many other activities gained priority. The task of maintaining Church institutions began to usurp the role that was originally assigned to making disciples, and the once-dynamic Christian movement began to fossilize from within.⁹⁴

Probably the most significant factor is how the classes and bands have largely disappeared⁹⁵ “and with them the key elements of disciple-making.”⁹⁶ This lack of

⁹³ Evangelical Alliance “How Many Churches Have Opened or Closed,” 2012, accessed April 18, 2014. <http://www.eauk.org/church/research-and-statistics/how-many-churches-have-opened-or-closed-in-recent-years.cfm>

⁹⁴ Henderson, 14. Historically, by the mid-19th century, just sixty years following Wesley’s death, the Methodist denomination had already suffered much disunity within the leadership of the Connexion, schisms and criticism. In the following century, focus had clearly switched from making disciples to placing one’s energies in maintaining the church institution and buildings, a contributing factor to the demise of this once great Christian movement.

⁹⁵ Martyn Atkins, *Discipleship and the People Called Methodists* (UK: Methodist Publishing, 2010), 14.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 19.

disciple-making structures, coupled with the fact that many Methodist churches do not have a minister overseeing single churches, but have various itinerant ministers preaching on Sundays, all contribute to the discipleship crisis this denomination is currently experiencing, and in turn, the steep number of church closures.

Although new models of small groups are slowly emerging within Methodism, Wesley's historic discipleship system has not been sufficiently replaced. Martyn Atkins, General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Britain, writes,

A desire to be a Christian disciple clearly shaped the early structures of Methodism. It's probably unsurprising then that the divine disquiet some Methodists experience today stems from the fact that they feel Methodism is no longer best structured and shaped to enable Christian discipleship.⁹⁷

Although a firm advocate for growth structures, Atkins recognizes they are currently lacking within this once structurally robust denomination. In response to this, the Methodist Connexional Team initiated a six-month research project by the

Discipleship Group to answer the [following](#) questions:

- What enables and what inhibits the making and nurturing of disciples and discipleship in a local church context?
- What empowers and what restricts individuals as they attempt to do this?

[A](#) selection of churches and focus groups were visited and semi-structured interviews conducted. [The report summarizes their findings:](#)

1. Where an inward-looking mentality with little thought given to spiritual development was seen to exist in churches, it was often felt to be the result of an historic lack of focus on discipleship, which only then further inhibits discipleship.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 15.

2. In churches that struggle with discipleship, there is little engagement or understanding of the subject.
3. In these same churches, focus is solely on Sunday worship attendance, participating in meetings and maintaining buildings (a factor also seen in the Church in Wales denomination, as their 2012 report shows).
4. The unstructured style of the preaching plan among itinerant ministers inhibits spiritual growth and discipleship.
5. Good small groups were identified as playing a crucial role in discipleship.
6. The role of Local Preachers was consistently identified as important, and concerns were raised about their quality and continuing development.
7. Leadership was found to be a key factor in discipleship and change within local churches. Although change is largely initiated by the minister, strong churches grow and encourage leaders so that the minister ultimately fills the role of visionary leader rather than manager.⁹⁸

Many of these findings by the Discipleship Group further confirm a number of conclusions drawn from Section One of this research paper. That is, the presence of a discipleship deficit in the UK today; how what goes on inside churches significantly impacts the overall health and effectiveness of a church; and the importance of good small groups in effective discipleship training.

Methodism is an unfortunate example of what can happen to effective spiritual and numerical growth structures when the focus of making disciples is lost, just as

⁹⁸ Methodist Church Report, “What enables and what inhibits the making and nurturing of disciples and discipleship in a local church context? What empowers and what restricts individuals as they attempt to do this?” Accessed April 18, 2014. www.methodist.org.uk.

Henderson explained. When the focus shifts from being outward-looking to inward-looking, from focusing on reaching and developing people to maintaining buildings and numbers, church decline and decay is the result. Although they once exemplified the power of effective numerical and spiritual growth structures, sadly Methodism has the greatest numbers of church closures in the UK today. Although Wesley's system once accomplished much in the transformation and spiritual formation of thousands of lives, Moody's statement about the Methodist class-meetings as being 'the best institutions for training converts the world ever saw' is difficult to support in light of the significant decline of this once great denomination.

Fortunately, a number of Warren's marks of a healthy church are beginning to emerge again in this struggling denomination. Leadership within the connexion are beginning to face the question and cost of change and growth and are seeking to find out what God wants. However, whether they are able to take risks and embark on new ways of doing things, only time will tell.

Although Wesley's community and discipleship groups once succeeded in embracing many of Warren's marks of a healthy church, the Methodists regrettably lost their focus. One hopes this is not a permanent condition. Even so, as mentioned earlier, there are valuable lessons we can learn from their past seasons of success that is helpful in developing healthy disciples and churches in South Wales today.

3) *Natural Church Development (NCD)*

The final growth system we shall consider in this section is that created by Church growth consultant, Christian A. Schwarz. In *Natural Church Development (NCD)*,⁹⁹ Schwarz explains how just as God has placed ‘biotic potential’¹⁰⁰ in His creation for growth and reproduction, so God has placed this same potential for growth within His Church. He explains how in nature, if the correct elements and environment are in place (good topsoil, water, air and sunlight), and hindrances removed (rocks, debris, fences in place), then growth and reproduction naturally result. In the same way, he believes that every church has the inherent divinely-given potential to grow, qualitatively and quantitatively:

When we are dealing with natural processes, it is important for this inherent potential to have free rein. The difference between the biotic potential and the empirical growth... is called ‘environmental resistance.’ While it is clear that growth cannot be ‘made’ or forced, it is important to keep the environmental resistance to a minimum in order to create the best possible conditions for growth. The same is true for church development. We should not attempt to ‘manufacture’ church growth, but rather to release the biotic potential which God has put into every church. It is our task to minimise the obstacles to growth – both inside and outside the church.¹⁰¹

Releasing this biotic potential for growth is encouraged through the implementation of the following eight ‘quality characteristics:’

⁹⁹ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide To Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., [10](#).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

1. **Empowering leadership** (Empowerment) – Leaders of growing churches place importance on empowering others. They support, equip, motivate and mentor individuals to become all that God wants them to be.¹⁰²
2. **Gift-oriented ministry** (Gift-activation) – Church leaders help members identify their spiritual gifts and find or create ministries that match them inside or outside the church. Their research found that no factor influences the sense of joy in life more than [gift-activation](#).¹⁰³
3. **Passionate spirituality** (Passion) – Not a church’s style but the degree to which faith is lived out with commitment, passion and enthusiasm.¹⁰⁴
4. **Functional structures** (Effectiveness) – [Structures](#) that are focused on upward, inward and outward growth.¹⁰⁵
5. **Inspiring worship service** (Inspiration) – He asks, is the worship service an inspiring experience for those who attend?¹⁰⁶ [Schwarz explains that whenever the Holy Spirit is truly at work, He will have a concrete effect upon the way a worship service is conducted, including the atmosphere of a gathering.](#)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Christian A. Schwarz, *Color Your World with Natural Church Development* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2005), 106. Or as Warren puts it, “growing people into the fullness of their humanity”.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 108

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 110.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 114.

¹⁰⁷ [Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 31.](#)

6. **Holistic small groups** (Community) – Growing churches develop a system of small groups where individual believers can find intimate community, practical help, and intense spiritual interaction.¹⁰⁸
7. **Need-oriented evangelism** (Need-relief) – Creating evangelistic opportunities and serving those in need through one’s spiritual gifts [and](#) expressing God’s love in the church and in the world.¹⁰⁹
8. **Loving relationships** (Love) – Growing churches display a higher ‘love quotient’ than declining ones. Authentic love endows a church with a much greater marketing power than traditional marketing efforts.¹¹⁰

Perhaps what stands out immediately is that Schwarz’s process is more than a discipleship process alone. Although the formation of strong disciples is most certainly present, Schwarz is concerned with the bigger picture of church growth reflected in his eight characteristics.

What these eight characteristics all have in common is that they focus on cultivating qualitative growth with the assumption that quantitative growth will follow. As the research of the NCD Institute has discovered and proved, developing the eight characteristics in turn stimulates numerical growth.¹¹¹ For Schwarz, when it comes to church life, there is no distinction between personal development and church development. One develops the church by developing people; increase in the quality of

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 116.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 118.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹¹¹ Global research conducted by the NCD Institute reveals that any church, in whatever culture, that embraces these eight essential qualities has a 99.4 percent chance of numerical growth.

the church is achieved by increasing the quality of people. One facilitates the health of the church by facilitating the health of people.¹¹² According to Schwarz, a healthy church should be able to say

[t]his is a church in which the leadership is committed heart and soul to church growth; in which nearly every Christian is using his or her gifts to edify the church; in which most members are living out the faith with power and contagious enthusiasm; in which church structures are evaluated on whether they serve the growth of the church or not; in which worship services are a high point of the week for the majority of the congregation; in which the loving and healing power of Christian fellowship can be experienced in small groups; in which nearly all Christians, according to their gifts, help to fulfil the Great Commission; in which the love of Christ permeates almost all church activities.¹¹³

Although Schwarz agrees that no individual or church can ‘manufacture’ growth, there is nonetheless a relationship between divine and human involvement. He refers to 1 Corinthians 3:6 where the Apostle Paul wrote how Apollos watered the seed, but it was God who gave the growth. For Schwarz, diligence in planting and watering has an influence upon the subsequent harvest.¹¹⁴

Evaluation

Schwarz’s growth characteristics and tools are the most comprehensive among the models studied. He not only focuses on developing strong disciples of Christ, but does so within the context of encouraging overall qualitative and quantitative church growth. That is, his principles fit well alongside Jackson’s three-fold focus on numerical, spiritual and vitality growth for churches.

¹¹² Christian A. Schwarz, *The All By Itself Principle* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2015), 22.

¹¹³ Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 40.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

NCD focuses on nurturing qualitative growth of Christians first rather than on majoring on numerical growth. Jackson, Warren and Willard all agree that this is where one needs to place one's primary focus for overall church growth.

By nurturing qualitative growth, Schwarz has statistical evidence that numerical growth will follow (as Jackson agrees).

NCD uses measuring tools and statistical evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of the application of its growth characteristics. That is, the NCD church survey produces specific percentages in each of the eight areas, as opposed to a number from just one to six in Warren's Healthy Church profile. For example, NCD can talk about the leadership of a church being rated at 59.4 percent, whereas Warren's framework does not provide any quantifiable measure. Incorporating specific measurement tools can be most helpful in tracking growth progress.

As quantifiable measures [begin](#) to show that a church has specifically grown in a given area, this can generate joy and greater motivation among church leaders and members, encouraging the church to persevere in its journey to growth.

At the commencement of one's church growth plan, the NCD programme encourages church leaders to start with strengthening the weakest area(s) of church life first. This will likely lead to churches seeing their biggest percentage improvements early on, generating much-needed encouragement in the growth process.

The NCD process encourages a drilling down on specific activities rather than on conceptual values alone. For example, if a church discovered that their greatest weakness was the eighth characteristic, Loving Relationships, then the church would create and implement a specific plan towards improving in that area. That could include ideas such

as selecting greeters to welcome people with a smile as they arrive, or encouraging members to invite newcomers to sit next to them in service, or to have members invite each other for a meal or coffee during the week.

Any church that decides to embark on holistic growth using Schwarz's NCD process will automatically be embarking on all seven of Warren's marks of a healthy church, including seeking to find out what God wants, facing the cost of change and growth, doing a few things well, and operating as a community. As a church sees measurable growth, it will also be energized by faith as a result.

Finally, Schwarz's model is transferable. In other words, one can take Schwarz's NCD process and apply it to any context. This flexibility is most important in seeking a church growth model suitable for the Welsh context, which we shall further examine in Section Three.

Overall, Schwarz's NCD principles have much to offer in our consideration of effective church growth processes. However, one weakness is that it may not be not suitable for every church. Any church that seeks to embark on a journey of growth utilising the NCD principles is taking on no small challenge, and would be committing themselves to several years of hard work. Schwarz's detailed framework with its measurement tools and assessments could be just too overwhelming for some smaller, ailing churches. Only those with strong leadership, and members determined to grow, would be able to rise to the challenge. For those who do, Schwarz is convinced that growth is pretty much guaranteed.

Summary

Despite the fact the secularists and sociologists are painting a bleak picture on the future of the Church in Wales and England, the [models considered in this chapter](#) rouse hope for the future. Growth does not happen overnight, and as Collins asserts, no one single factor brings success in any organisation:

In building a great institution, there is no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no miracle moment... Rather, the process resembles relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough, and beyond.¹¹⁵

Each of these models that we have examined offer important strengths. However, as we discovered in Section One, leaders that seek to grow churches need to focus on developing people, and Schwarz's NCD model seems to be the most comprehensive towards that goal. As church leaders take up the challenge and put their shoulder to the flywheel, momentum will begin to build. Although it will take time to generate numerical, spiritual and vitality growth, as Schwarz's NCD research has found, when a church focuses primarily on the principles of qualitative growth, quantitative growth ensues. As Jackson writes,

[C]hurches that invest time and effort on a long-term basis in the renewal and articulation of the faith of church members, and in the sharing of that faith with enquirers to help them into discipleship, are more likely to grow than those that do not.¹¹⁶

In the section that follows, the author will describe a thesis that weaves together three important elements to seeing church growth in South Wales: Schwarz's growth model, the unique context of South Wales, and the creation of a discipleship tool.

¹¹⁵ Collins, 23, 34.

¹¹⁶ Jackson, *Hope For The Church*, 83.

SECTION THREE: THE THESIS

What goes on inside a church significantly impacts its overall health and effectiveness. As we have discovered, to see the tide of decline turn in Wales, leaders will need to focus on stimulating numerical, spiritual and vitality growth within churches, including paying critical attention to the discipleship deficit. Moreover, we have seen how the application of church growth principles and systems can nurture discipleship formation and overall church growth.

The key to growing any church is growing its people into the fullness of their humanity, especially developing believers into mature disciples of Jesus Christ. With increasing numbers of closed churches scattering the landscape, and others struggling for survival, urgent attention is required on the DNA of churches in Wales, and the kind of disciples they make. In my examination of the spiritual formation models in the previous section, despite the strengths each offered, we concluded they were not suitable to sufficiently address the particular ministry problem in Wales. What the author of this paper therefore proposes is the creation of a new tool, one that is both sympathetic to the ministry context, and effective in making robust disciples of Jesus Christ. The reasons this tool would be a good solution to the ministry problem include:

- It will train and equip new lay leaders within Welsh churches, thus helping to address the leadership deficit
- These new leaders will then be equipped to go and make mature disciples of Christ, addressing the discipleship deficit
- The content of the tool is tailored to the ministry context of Wales.

It needs to be noted that this tool is not intended to address every area of weakness a church might have. However, it can be used in conjunction with other tools, in particular, the results of an NCD assessment. As we found, NCD is a comprehensive and helpful paradigm for diagnosing a church's weaknesses, and the subsequent encouragement and monitoring of growth. Indeed, NCD is helpful in that it provides the diagnosis of ill-health within a church, and offers a prescription for the treatment necessary for church recovery. For example, if a church realizes that it needs to strengthen areas of empowering leadership, or holistic small groups, then the author's tool will provide an effective process of training and improvement in those areas.

However, whether a church chooses to use NCD or not, and regardless of what a NCD assessment may find if a church does, all churches will benefit from using the authors' training tool. After all, what this research paper has found is a significant discipleship deficit in Wales, and a lack of tools and structures to address this urgent ministry need. The commission to make disciples is essential to the health and growth of every church, and therefore all churches can benefit significantly from using this tool to train and raise up disciple-makers.

What now follows is the author's three-fold solution, designed to address the ministry problem uncovered through this research:

1. Appreciation of South Wales' contextual needs
2. Artefact – "Disciple-Makers: The Keys to Growth"
3. Application of Natural Church Development paradigm

This threefold solution, which I shall term the *Cymraeg*¹¹⁷ *Church Growth Synthesis (CCGS)*, will address the current spiritual and cultural challenges facing church leaders in South Wales. The author will begin by examining the first of these facets.

Appreciation of South Wales Contextual Needs

It is necessary at this juncture, to switch our focus from the mechanics of church health and discipleship, to the context in which this research is based. In our attempt to create a suitable church growth plan for South Wales, an understanding and appreciation of the culture is a necessity. It would be imprudent to attempt to employ a plan for growth without properly appreciating the context in which one finds oneself. The following is an examination of the cultural, social and economic context within which the author of this paper is seeking to foster church growth.

Not all Wales is the Same

According to *Waleswide*, a Christian think-tank based in Wales for the propagation of Christianity in Wales, the country comprises of a number of “Wales-es,”¹¹⁸ each representing unique traditions and culture:

- North and South
- East and West
- Welsh and English Language and Culture
- Rural and Urban
- Valleys and Vales

¹¹⁷ Welsh language for ‘Welsh’.

¹¹⁸ A term used by *Waleswide* board members.

- Socialist and Nationalist
- Traditional and Cool Cymru¹¹⁹

Political analyst, Dennis Balsom, further classified the various geographical and cultural regions of Wales into three a ‘Three Wales Model’ (1985):

1. *Y Fro Cymraeg* – the Welsh speaking heartland of North and West Wales
2. *Welsh Wales* – a consciously welsh, but not welsh-speaking ‘Welsh Wales’ in the South Wales Valleys
3. *British Wales* – a more ambivalent group making up the remainder, largely in the east and along the south coast

Through his research, Balsom focused his analysis on two key measures: whether or not someone spoke Welsh, and whether the individual identified him or herself as ‘Welsh,’ ‘British’ or something else.¹²⁰ Although Balsom’s model was originally formulated to better understand and categorize the political landscape of Wales, it is helpful for us in attempting to understand the cultural and religious context of South Wales under study. Balsom’s model reveals that not all of Wales is the same in terms of culture or economy.

Since the purpose of this research paper is focused on facilitating church growth in South Wales, we will focus on Balsom’s grouping of ‘Welsh Wales’ found within that particular geographical region. One large segment of Welsh Wales is the borough of

¹¹⁹ As proposed in *Where On Earth Is Wales?* Seminar, which took place on November 9, 2015, Cardiff.

¹²⁰ David C. Harvey, Rhys Jones, Neil McInroy and Christine Milligan, eds. *Celtic Geographies: Old Cultures, New Times* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2002), 80.

Neath Port Talbot (NPT). With a population of 139,812¹²¹ and a post-industrial culture, NPT holds the unfortunate distinction of being the most deprived Local Authority (LA) borough of Wales.¹²²

Economic Deprivation

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2005 (WIMD), a measure of deprivation for areas of Wales, ranks statistical geographies known as Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in terms of deprivation across various domains such as health and employment, as well as providing an overall deprivation rank. Neath Port Talbot has ninety-one LSOAs:

- seventeen LSOAs (19 percent) fall within the 10 percent most deprived LSOAs in the whole of Wales
- the majority (73 percent) of LSOAs are more deprived than the Wales average¹²³

In relation to Wales as a whole, this means that a relatively high proportion of areas in Neath Port Talbot are among the 10 percent most deprived, and overall the majority of areas fall within the more deprived half of Wales.¹²⁴ The following statistics further highlight the deprivation found within this region of ‘Welsh Wales’ (compared to the additional twenty-one LA’s in Wales):

¹²¹ Office for National Statistics, *Neighbourhood Statistics 2011*, accessed November 20, 2015. <http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=6275339&c=SA12+8AU&d=13&e=61&g=6493336&i=1001x1003x1032x1004&m=0&r=0&s=1448022302441&enc=1&dsFamilyId=2491>.

¹²² There are a total of 22 Local Authorities in Wales.

¹²³ National Assembly for Wales, *Key Statistics for Neath Port Talbot*, April 2008, 14.

¹²⁴ Key Statistics for Neath Port Talbot, 14.

1. Neath Port Talbot has eleven Communities First¹²⁵ government designated areas compared to ten in neighbouring Swansea, a borough four times bigger in population.
2. There is a lower life expectancy for men and women (2011-13) than the Welsh average (third lowest for men and fifth lowest for women)
3. It has the seventh lowest employment rate in Wales.¹²⁶
4. The percentage of fifteen-year-olds who reported drinking alcohol at least once a week is the third highest (according to the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey of forty-one countries, 2005/6).¹²⁷
5. The proportion of drug use in adults is 9.9 percent compared to 21.9 percent among young people (16 – 29 year olds).
6. Thirty-one percent of fifteen-year-olds had taken cannabis in their lifetime in Wales. Additionally, Wales is ranked third highest among forty-one countries where 31 percent of fifteen-year-olds had reported using cannabis.¹²⁸
7. This region has the highest number of drug and alcohol related hospital admissions per 100,000 people in all of Wales.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *Communities First* is a Welsh Government Community Focussed Tackling Poverty Programme. The programme supports the most disadvantaged people in the most deprived areas of Wales with the aim of contributing to the alleviation of persistent poverty.

¹²⁶ Welsh Government, *Local Area Summary Statistics*, Neath Port Talbot, December 16, 2014.

¹²⁷ National Assembly for Wales, *In Figures: Substance Misuse Research Paper*, July 2009. Paper Number 09/026.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6. The survey was entitled *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* (HBSC) survey.

¹²⁹ Points three to six taken from National Assembly for Wales, *In Figures: Substance Misuse Research Paper*, July 2009. Paper Number 09/026.

8. Qualifications held by working-age adults scored lowest for NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 in Wales compared to England and Scotland.¹³⁰ Of the working population, only 18.8 percent hold an educational qualification of NVQ4 or above, compared to 24.3 percent for the whole of Wales.¹³¹
9. Suicide rates in males are much higher in Neath Port Talbot than the Welsh national average: 32.6 per 100,000 compared to an average of 22.5 per 100,000.¹³²
10. NPT ranks first in binge alcohol consumption.¹³³

Evidently, significant amounts of deprivation and related societal problems exist within Welsh Wales. Moreover, as the leader of the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Counsellor A. Thomas reported, the health of the local people in Neath Port Talbot is, generally, poorer than the rest of Wales.¹³⁴ Additional deprivation is recognized within the Aberafan and Sandfields regions of Neath Port Talbot where the author of this paper ministers:

- Twenty-five percent of those living within these two neighbourhoods receive Incapacity Benefits, compared to 15 percent in Neath Port Talbot, and 10 percent in Wales.
- Forty percent of men and women of working age are claiming any kind of benefits compared to 26 percent in NPT and 20 percent in Wales.

¹³⁰ Office for National Statistics, Education and Training 2010, Social Trends 41, 5.

¹³¹ Key Statistics for Neath Port Talbot, 9.

¹³² Health Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy 2011-2014 (HSCWS), 15.

¹³³ Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan 2011-2016, *Health Topic Paper*, August 2013, 26.

¹³⁴ As quoted in Health Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy 2011-2014 (HSCWS), 3.

- Sandfields and parts of Aberavon hold among the highest mortality rates (of all causes) in the whole of Wales.¹³⁵

These statistics all reflect the current economic and contextual challenges faced by church leaders in this region as we grapple with the problem of reversing the decline of Christianity in South Wales. With such significant deprivation factors, including high proportion of alcohol and drug abuse, low education, a higher suicide rate than the rest of Wales, leaders are faced with significant practical as well as spiritual challenges when people from these backgrounds come to faith and seek to connect with a church and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. We need to ask two pertinent questions:

- How are church leaders to disciple and foster spiritual growth in South Wales?
- How is it possible to grow individuals with these backgrounds into the fullness of their humanity?

These are two questions that we shall address in this section.

Correlation between economic and religious health

Appreciating the levels of deprivation that exist in this region of Welsh Wales is imperative because according to Chambers,¹³⁶ an important relationship exists between economic and religious health and well-being. He explains how in this past century, Christian religion expanded into the newly industrialized regions and consolidated itself as an important part of Welsh identity, reaching a high point during the 1904-05 Welsh Religious Revival. However, subsequent economic decline in the twentieth century was paralleled by ensuing religious decline. He writes that

¹³⁵ Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan 2011-2016, *Health Topic Paper*, August 2013, 17.

¹³⁶ Chambers, 223.

[t]he year 1980 saw Britain move into economic recession and in Wales that year saw the laying off of almost 6,000 workers (half the workforce) at the British Steel Corporation plant in Port Talbot. Not only did this rip the economic heart out of the town, it significantly disrupted traditional social networks and identities, ultimately undermining customary notions of community and local institutions (including churches and chapels) that were predicated upon solidarity-based industrial communities.¹³⁷

This damage to traditional notions of community is not simply the result of postmodern values, but appears to have also arisen from economic troubles. Sandfields Estate, a local housing estate within Port Talbot, significantly declined when the Local Authority re-housed many ‘problem families’ into the area. What had once been an area of respectable working class families eventually became known as ‘Little Beirut.’¹³⁸ Economic deprivation rent the heart of this community and churches were not strong or capable enough to heal the breach. Unfortunately, Sandfields has not lost this reputation and now also carries an association of drug addiction and suicide among young adults.

For Chambers, congregational growth and decline cannot be separated from local socio-environmental factors. In conversations with Christian faith group leaders, Chambers has found that many of these leaders now see areas of South Wales as mission fields:

The collapse of local church and chapel affiliation has less to do with a turning away of local populations from religion *per se* and more with the preoccupation of people trying to cope with poverty, crime (especially that linked to heroin, alcohol and other drugs) and general social exclusion.¹³⁹

For Chambers, social and economic factors then are very much at work when it comes to reviving church growth in these areas, and asks: “are Christian congregations

¹³⁷ Ibid., 224.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 224.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 226.

able to step up to the mark?”¹⁴⁰ David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister, posed a similar challenge to Evangelical Christians in 2014, stating that Christians should be more evangelical about their faith and get out there and make a difference to people's lives. For Cameron, in an increasingly secular age Christians need to be even more confident and ambitious. He remarked how he had personally felt the healing power of the Church of England's pastoral care and highlighted its role in improving our society and the education of our children. He further added how he would like to see politics infused with Christian ideals and values such as responsibility, hard work, charity, compassion, humility and love. “I believe we should be more confident about our status as a Christian country, more ambitious about expanding the role of faith-based organisations, and, frankly, more evangelical about a faith that compels us to get out there and make a difference to people's lives.”¹⁴¹

Churches then have a huge task before them. Pockets of British, including Welsh, communities are straining under the weight of social deprivation, and the government believes that Evangelical churches need to do something about it. It's not just an issue of growing churches for the sake of benefitting its members. Welsh communities need Christian churches to step into the arena and make a positive difference to those in need, doing what they can to bring healing.

Although the active involvement of churches delivering services within local communities does not at all guarantee church growth, Chambers believes that at the very least, it nevertheless can establish and nurture the social networks that are a necessity for

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ *The Telegraph*, April 16, 2014, accessed June 12, 2014.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10770425/David-Cameron-says-Christians-should-be-more-evangelical.html>

church growth. From the perspective of local communities, churches should focus more on what they do than on what they preach.¹⁴² He writes that “quite often, non-churchgoers have a set of expectations based around ‘good works’ rather than theological niceties and around social capital rather than spiritual capital.”¹⁴³

This desire to see churches more actively involved in the needs of society is further supported by *Gweini, The Council of the Christian Voluntary Sector in Wales*, which encourages local churches to work towards becoming a transforming influence within their local communities. They report that engaging in social work can be an important component in the spiritual revival of communities.¹⁴⁴ Chambers further adds,

In my previous studies of church growth and decline in South West Wales, engagement or disengagement from local communities was largely dependent on the nature of social networks. Declining congregations tended to have weak or non-existent links to their local communities or these links mainly encompassed the elderly population. Without robust links, recruitment becomes unlikely and long-term increasingly insular. Where significant congregational growth is achieved it tends to be through the presence of robust, outward-looking networks. Mission is also dependent on actions, the careful auditing of needs among local populations, the setting of appropriate goals and a level of internal congregational resource capable of realizing these goals.¹⁴⁵

Evidence is emerging of this relationship between serving the needs of the local population and the spiritual recovery of churches. Despite the overall decline of institutional religion in Wales, there is increasing evidence of a leaner, fitter Church that is more attuned to emerging community needs. David Ollerton, founder of the *Waleswide* think-tank, agrees. Ollerton has spent the last three years researching churches in Wales

¹⁴² Chambers, 228.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 227.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 223.

that are experiencing pockets of overall growth. Through his research, he has discovered that such churches have two realities in common:

1. Growing churches are connecting and serving their local communities through projects such as Foodbank, Christians Against Poverty projects, meeting the needs of the elderly, the homeless, the provision of parenting classes, mum's and toddler groups, and so on.
2. There exist within such churches members with a vibrant faith in Jesus Christ who wish to share their faith with others.¹⁴⁶

In other words, churches that are outward-looking, focusing on meeting social and economic needs, whilst sharing their faith, are seeing numerical growth also take place. This is encouraging.

Summary

Given the fact that engaging in meeting social needs appears to be an important component in the spiritual revival of communities, and given the vast ocean of social and economic needs prevalent in Welsh Wales, any church seeking growth would be wise to engage with its own community to address these needs. As Chambers and *Gweini* contend, no church can grow holistically without engaging with the needs of its surrounding community. After all, that is the essence of vitality growth – impacting one's community. As a church actively engages with its locality, seeking to alleviate the deprivation it is surrounded by and grow people into true disciples of Jesus Christ, churches are placing the best elements and environment in place conducive for growth:

¹⁴⁶ As stated in *Where On Earth Is Wales?* Workshop November 9, 2015, Rhiwbina Baptist Church, Cardiff, South Wales.

numerical, spiritual and vitality. Any church in South Wales that desires to grow cannot divorce its mission to grow inwardly from its mission to impact outwardly.

The Artefact – “Disciple-Makers: The Keys to Growth”

As necessary as it is to understand and engage with the ministry context of South Wales and its needs, we are still faced with those two important questions asked earlier, namely:

- How are church leaders to disciple and foster spiritual growth in South Wales?
- How is it possible to grow individuals with these backgrounds into the fullness of their humanity?

To add to this, through the author’s research, one additional concern was unearthed: an urgent need for more leaders. Through interviews and workshops with church leaders in Wales, it became increasingly evident that discipleship is not the only deficit present in Welsh churches; there also exists a deficit of quality leaders.

In an interview with Pastor Nigel James of Elim City Temple Church, Cardiff, South Wales¹⁴⁷ (one of the biggest churches in Wales), he explained how he believes the greater concern that needs to be addressed before discipleship in Wales is for good quality leadership: “Leadership is the issue before discipleship. There is a lack of quality Welsh leaders. Most of the strongest leaders are not born in Wales.”¹⁴⁸ This was a realisation further corroborated through research undertaken by *Waleswide* founder, David Ollerton. During his sabbatical in 2004, Ollerton travelled 5,000 miles and

¹⁴⁷ Telephone interview with Pastor Nigel James on Monday July 20, 2015.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

interviewed seventy leaders, mostly in Wales, looking at the prospects for church planting and church renewal in Wales in the coming decade. One perspective he heard time and again from a number of these leaders was, “The prospects are only as good as potential leaders.”¹⁴⁹ He learned that there were very few people being trained and equipped for church renewal specifically for Wales, and that many of the most able young leaders were being drawn across the border into England. Although some of the stronger individual churches were found to be developing leaders, they were not doing so with Wales’ needs specifically in view. Ollerton also learned that training institutions in Wales generally have a low proportion of Welsh students.

Unfortunately, this need to train quality leaders still exists more than ten years on. To therefore help address this critical need, the author has created a training tool designed to not only make disciples, but to also train and equip the lay leaders. The programme, *Disciple-Makers: The Keys to Growth*, is a video series comprising five, ten-minute videos, that cover a number of important topics including:

- Slow death of Christianity in Wales?
- Healthy disciples; healthy churches
- Recovering the Great Commission
- Multiplication through mentoring
- Make a difference, make a small group

As a practical solution to this urgent ministry need, this training video series will address not only the importance and ‘how-to’ of discipleship, but will also take the context of Wales into consideration. Moreover, it seeks to address both deficits: the

¹⁴⁹ David Ollerton, Waleswide Church Planting Document, 2004.

equipping of leaders, plus contribute to the recovery of discipleship in Wales. The equipping of leaders does not only include church ministers, but also importantly, church members. In other words, this document's artefact focuses on equipping the Body of Christ in making disciples, raising up lay leaders from within churches. This serves several distinct advantages:

1. It is not necessary to rely on ministers alone to make disciples. There are far more members than ministers, so it is therefore the goal to train the wider body as lay leaders to make disciples;
2. Members from local churches usually have a good understanding of their local communities and can therefore more readily connect with those they disciple.
3. Encouraging members to become trained to disciple will likely have a positive effect upon their own faith experience as they learn to trust God to help them.

Through this training course, these 'disciple-makers' will be given the tools and knowledge they need to make disciples, whether through leading small groups, or through one-to-one discipleship relationships. It is hoped that through focusing on the formation of real disciples of Jesus Christ, this will help to prevent Christianity sliding into extinction as secularists are expecting.

Summary

The artefact is an important element of the solution towards overcoming the terminal decline of Churches in Wales. Although it is not intended to be an all-encompassing answer for church recovery, it will be an essential contribution towards it. Furthermore, as the chart in the following pages shows, additional training programmes

created by the author are needed in order to develop a comprehensive plan for church growth in South Wales.

- The *10 Steps to Knowing God* discipleship programme to enable new Christians to take their first steps in learning how to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ;
- The *Passion for Purpose* eight-week course, designed to assist Christians in finding and defining their purpose in life;
- The *Diploma in Christian Ministry and Leadership*, a two-year course that takes Christians further by training and equipping them into their unique ministry role according to their gifting. Church members apply to join this training course upon successful completion of a period of discipleship training, the completion of the *Passion for Purpose* course, and the receipt of two references.

All of these tools have been created by the author, and make up a more comprehensive picture for church growth in South Wales. More will be explained about the artefact in Section Four.

Application of Church Growth Characteristics

As we found in Section One, any leader who desires to see their church grow numerically needs to focus, not on growing numerically, but on becoming better. Big does not equal great and great does not equal big. For Jackson, by focusing on three areas of growth – numerical, spiritual and vitality – overall growth will likely take place. Indeed, a number of church leaders in Wales are experiencing this. By focusing on

sharing their faith, and serving the local community, both quantitative and qualitative growth has been found to be taking place.

To therefore provide a helpful framework for church leaders that will provide guidance and direction towards qualitative and quantitative church growth, the author suggests employing Schwarz's *Natural Church Development* paradigm as the third and final facet of the *Cymraeg Church Growth Synthesis (CCGS)*.

According to Schwarz, God has placed 'biotic potential' in His creation and in His church for growth and reproduction. Just as in nature, when the correct elements and environment are in place, and hindrances removed, growth and reproduction naturally takes place, so this same dynamic carries over into church growth. Schwarz's eight quality characteristics are the 'correct elements and environment' needed to be put in place for churches in Wales to reach their optimal growth potential.

Taking One's First steps

A church can begin its journey towards growth by first taking the NCD survey. Akin to a health assessment, the survey is designed to reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of a given church ministry. Thirty church members are invited to fill in a questionnaire, the answers of which are then inserted into a computer programme by NCD, which in turn produces a score for each of the eight quality characteristics, displayed in a bar graph.

The NCD survey is helpful in that it enables a church to recognise where it needs to place its initial focus for growth. After all, any church would find it most difficult to try to grow in all eight quality characteristics at the same time. A church has to begin somewhere, and the NCD survey reveals a church's 'minimum factor', their lowest-

scoring characteristic on the survey, which is where they need to start. For example, if a church finds that their lowest score was in the area of empowering leadership, then that is where they pour their efforts into improving first.

Schwarz's *Natural Church Development* paradigm offers churches in Wales a comprehensive stimulus for growth, complete with measurement tools and proven statistics of success in all three areas of church growth and can be used in conjunction with the author's artefact.

What follows in the chart below is a description of the solution offered by the author towards meeting the ministry needs of South Wales. This includes the author's new tool, Disciple-Makers, together with a number of additional tools created by the author. Finally, the reader will be able to see how Schwarz's NCD paradigm fits into all that.

Cymraeg Church Growth Synthesis (CCGS)

South Wales Ministry Problems	Natural Church Development Paradigm	Author's Growth Artefact (plus other tools)
Church members lack understanding in how to be genuine disciples of Christ, and how to fulfill His commission to make other disciples.	Passionate spirituality	<i>10 Steps to Knowing God</i> This is a discipleship programme for use within small groups. It is suitable for new believers and those who may have no previous Christian knowledge. This will teach new disciples how to grow in love for God and for their neighbour.
Churches need to assist believers in discerning and developing their primary gifts, that they may fulfill God's good works in the power of the Holy Spirit.	Gift-oriented ministry	<i>Passion for Purpose (P4P)</i> . This eight-week course enables disciples to find and define their purpose in life. Through P4P, people are assessed in their spiritual gifts, values, passion and strengths. In addition, they plan their first steps towards personal development and fulfillment. This course is a requirement for the Diploma.
Welsh chapels are often seen as boring and irrelevant. Chapels need to learn to allow the Holy Spirit to work and God's presence to be felt.	Inspiring worship service	Church members who exercise and develop their gifts within the church will in turn promote genuine expression of faith and worship within their congregations.
Churches should focus on economic and social needs of the local community. Churches could develop	Need-oriented evangelism	Following the <i>Passion for Purpose</i> course, leaders can then encourage members to exercise their gift whether

community networks to alleviate deprivation and display the gospel in deeds as well as word.		inside their church or in the local community, according to their gifts and the passion God has placed on their heart.
Discipleship and leadership deficits exist in churches. There are not enough church ministers to meet the needs of churches in Wales.	Holistic small groups	<i>Disciple-Makers: The Keys to Growth</i> This five-session course will train and equip new lay leaders in the art of leading small groups and making disciples.
Leaders need to equip and develop new leaders to serve in various aspects of church ministry, thus fulfilling their Christian vocation.	Functional structures	Once discipleship training and the P4P course are completed, disciples can join the two-year <i>Diploma in Christian Ministry and Leadership</i> . A two-year course designed to train disciples according to their God-given vocation.
Churches need training programmes to train and equip members that they might fulfill their God-given vocation.	Empowering leadership	<i>Disciple-Makers: The Keys to Growth</i> This resource is designed to train new lay leaders in the art of disciple making. <i>Diploma in Christian Ministry and Leadership</i> equips church members to serve God.
Non-Christians would like to see Christians not only talk about love, but display it inside and outside the church. Churches need to learn to exercise grace without judgment to those in the community, no matter what their background.	Loving relationships	Churches learn to welcome new converts from unchurched and / or deprived backgrounds and invest time in new converts for their spiritual growth. Through preaching and small groups, churchgoers learn to offer God's love and grace to all.

In engaging with the NCD paradigm, a church will be provided the direction and support by the NCD Institute, from the initial survey and discovery of its minimum factors, through to the strengthening of its ministry areas. Churches are encouraged by NCD to take the survey annually in order to track their progress and ascertain their next steps for growth.

What follows is a closer look at each of NCD's eight quality characteristics.

Empowering leadership

The Evangelical Alliance report¹⁵⁰ found that 60 percent of people believed the most inspiring and influential figure in their spiritual growth to be a church leader or minister, and 70 percent find attending large Christian conferences or conventions a real encouragement in their walk with God.¹⁵¹ What this points to is a remarkable opportunity for Christian leaders and educators to positively shape and influence their members. By finding ways to inspire and train church members, spiritual growth can be encouraged.

The Methodist Report also found this to be true:

Leadership is a key factor in discipleship and change within local churches. This is seen to begin with ordained leadership, and a minister focused on discipleship and strong in instituting change can play an important role.¹⁵²

However, as mentioned earlier, there exists a leadership deficit in Wales, and therefore an important area for churches in Wales to focus on strengthening. By providing training and education for disciples wishing to use and develop their spiritual

¹⁵⁰ Evangelical Alliance, "Time for Discipleship? 21st Century Evangelicals: A Snapshot of the Beliefs and Habits of Evangelical Christians in the UK," 2014.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² The Methodist Church, *Discipleship Group Report*, 3.

gifts and fulfill their God-given potential, churches will be raising up leaders from within, rather than depending on the minister alone.

Church members are encouraged to discover their spiritual gifts through the *Passion for Purpose* course. Following this course, they are encouraged to apply for the two-year Diploma in Christian Ministry and Leadership. For those who wish to specifically grow in discipleship and leadership, engagement with *Disciple-Makers: The Keys to Growth* is encouraged.

Gift-oriented ministry

Church leaders have an important role in empowering the members of their church. By using the *Passion for Purpose* course, an eight-week course designed to find and define one's purpose in life, members can discover and begin to develop their spiritual gifts and strengths. As Schwarz explains, "The role of church leadership is to help its members to identify their gifts and to integrate them into appropriate ministries."¹⁵³

Passionate Spirituality

According to the NCD principles, the question separating growing churches from non-growing ones is, "are the Christians in this church 'on fire'?" Do they live committed lives and practice their faith with joy and enthusiasm?¹⁵⁴ In other words, this principle demonstrates empirically the theological core of the matter in church growth: the life of faith developed through a genuine relationship with God. This is precisely what the *10 Steps to Knowing God* discipleship programme is designed to stimulate in the lives of

¹⁵³ Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 24.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

new converts – a passion for God and love for one’s neighbour. The ten sessions will take new and returning believers through the fundamentals of the Christian faith, encouraging them to know God and deepen their relationship with Him.

Functional structures

According to the NCD Institute research, an extremely negative relationship exists between churches that are tradition-bound and growth and quality within a church. However, when church leaders focus on creating structures within a church that promote multiplication of ministry leaders, dynamic growth can take place. For example, research through the NCD Institute has found that churches that have department heads for the individual areas of ministry in their church experience significantly higher growth and quality in their church life.¹⁵⁵ Any church that seeks to train and equip its members according to their gifts and calling, will in turn be strengthened in its ministries.

Inspiring worship service

This has certainly been a particular problem in Wales. With many chapels and churches closing or derelict, with an outdated format of service that is unconnected to the post-Christian generation, Christianity has been portrayed as boring and irrelevant.

Conversely, when worship is inspiring, it draws people to the services. It is this criterion that demonstrably separates growing churches from stagnant and declining ones according to the NCD Institute. As churches in Wales focus on developing their members spiritually, strengthening their faith and equipping them in their Christian vocation, it is hoped that this will have a positive effect with the worship experience within churches. Passionate disciples worship God passionately.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 28.

Holistic Small Groups

NCD research from all over the world has shown that the continuous multiplication of small groups is a universal church growth principle.¹⁵⁶ If churches of whatever denomination or group in South Wales are going to turn back the tide of church decline, then encouraging leaders in the formation of small groups in their churches will be a positive step forward. Training new lay leaders in how to lead small groups and make disciples will contribute to the overall growth within churches. The author's artifact, *Disciple-Makers: The Keys To Growth*, will contribute significantly to training lay leaders in the areas of discipleship, mentoring and leading a small group.

Need-oriented evangelism

Schwarz believes that it is the responsibility of every Christian to use his or her specific gifts in fulfilling the Great Commission. That is, not leaving evangelism alone to those with that particular gift. In addition to this, NCD research has found that in churches with a high quality index, the leadership recognises those individuals who possess the gift of evangelism and directs them to a corresponding area of ministry.¹⁵⁷

Moreover, for Schwarz, one of the keys to church growth is for local churches to focus its evangelistic efforts (vitality) on the questions and needs of non-Christians.¹⁵⁸

Loving relationships

NCD research has discovered that there exists a highly significant relationship between the ability of a church to demonstrate love and its long-term growth potential. Growing churches, on average, possess a measurably higher 'love quotient' than stagnant

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 32.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 35.

or declining churches. How often do members invite each other for a cup of coffee? How well is the church leader aware of the personal problems of church members? How much laughter is there in the church?

Essentially, people both inside and outside the church do not want to hear church leaders and members just talk about love; they want to experience how Christian love really works. Wherever there is a lack of love, evidence shows that church development is severely hindered.¹⁵⁹

Summary

When a church employs the training tools produced by the author, this will encourage and stimulate much needed church growth. The *Cymraeg Church Growth Synthesis* not only highlights the ministry needs of Welsh Wales, it also provides practical solutions to cultivate growth within churches.

The author's artefact is designed to be an important additional component to be used with NCD evaluations. These tools assist churches in strengthening the discipleship and lay leadership deficits uncovered in this research. Plus the additional tools, *Passion for Purpose*, *10 Steps to Knowing God*, and the *Diploma in Christian Ministry and Leadership*, have the capacity to further train and equip church members. The author of this paper has spent almost two years testing these three additional tools in her own church ministry context and has seen significant growth in the Christian lives and ministries of members. Individuals are beginning to grow into the fullness of their humanity.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 36.

SECTION FOUR: THE TRACK 02 ARTEFACT

The Diagnosis

A number of sober findings have emerged throughout this research on the needs of churches and Christians in South Wales. First, a serious discipleship deficit exists. Although it is encouraging that new forms of church expression are appearing all over the UK, and that some churches are seeing new converts to the faith, there also exists a growing awareness by leaders that a return to making authentic disciples of Jesus Christ is urgently needed. Indeed, weak discipleship and growth practices in the twentieth century have been a major factor in the decline of the Christian faith and closures among churches in Wales.

Alongside this issue, exists the problem of a shortage of quality leaders to lead churches into growth. Few churches are training new leaders, whilst other leaders are being tempted over the border into England.¹⁶⁰ Churches that desire to see overall growth will therefore need to find ways of training and raising up leaders from within.

Finally, the economic and religious contexts of South Wales pose considerable challenges for future church growth. Because there are many individuals from unchurched backgrounds who experience the social problems associated with deprivation in pockets of South Wales, any church that desires to see holistic growth will need to take these facts into consideration. Additional concerns include:

¹⁶⁰ A comment made by prominent Welsh church leaders in a Waleswide workshop, *Where On Earth Is Wales?* Rhiwbina Baptist Church, Cardiff, November 9, 2015.

- Whilst some church members may be keen to share the gospel with unbelievers, locals expect (and need) to see the gospel expressed in good deeds as well as in words.
- Many discipleship materials presume that the reader has a confident reading ability, or can maneuver through the contents of a Bible. However, the author has found that in certain deprived regions of South Wales these suppositions cannot be assumed.

Any plan for church growth will therefore need to accommodate these practical as well as spiritual challenges.

The Way Forward

Churches and communities in South Wales need transformation. When churches focus on creating quality disciples who live out the mission of the Kingdom of God, this has a direct and positive impact upon the overall spiritual, numerical and vitality growth of a church. Healthy church growth is not concerned primarily with bringing in increasing numbers of people into church buildings. Attention needs to be placed on the formation of true and passionate disciples of Jesus Christ who bring the message of the Gospel to those around them; the Gospel that can lead people into the fullness of their humanity.

On a positive note, we saw in section two how discipleship and growth processes fostered growth of church communities in the past (Methodist denomination) and how that is also taking place in the present (NCD). This offers hope that an effective growth process can work in Wales despite the paucity of the current spiritual climate. Healthy

growth processes that focus on developing the internal health of a church can positively impact its overall health and size.

Communities of disciples of Jesus Christ who take seriously the mandate to live the life of the Kingdom of Heaven are urgently needed in South Wales, as are leaders equipped to train others in the fundamentals of discipleship. This holds the power to transform lives and communities. On the importance of authentic discipleship, Kandiah writes,

Some Christians think that if we can just get people to pray the sinner's prayer, our job is done, but [the] words of Matthew's gospel cannot back this up. Evangelism is a vital part of our mission but it is only a part, just like a wedding ceremony is a vital part of a marriage but it can never be any more than just a part . . . Jesus is not primarily interested in whether we have said a prayer once upon a time. He is expecting to see allegiance, devotion and mission. Becoming a Christian is about the transforming power of the Holy Spirit turning us into people who are learning to obey all that Jesus commanded, and that involves how we pray, how we treat people from different races, our attitude to ambition, being willing to suffer in the name of Christ, being willing to step out of our comfort zone, being willing to be downwardly mobile in our social aspirations, being continually teachable and so much more.¹⁶¹

If church leaders will train and raise up disciple-makers who will in turn, go and make other disciples, and if leaders will implement an effective church growth process such as Schwarz's, that terminal sentence conferred by secularists upon the Christian Church may well have a chance of being averted.

Therefore, with all this in mind, the author has created an artefact, with two parts, to begin to address these urgent needs. The first part of the artefact is a video series named *Disciple-Makers: The Keys to Growth*. The series encompasses five videos with the following titles:

¹⁶¹ Krish Kandiah, *Dysciples: Why I Fall Asleep When I Pray, and Twelve Other Discipleship Dysfunctions* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2010), 203-4.

Video 1 – Slow Death of Christianity in Wales?

Video 2 – Healthy Disciples, Healthy Churches

Video 3 – Recovering The Great Commission

Video 4 – Multiplication Through Mentoring

Video 5 – Make a Difference, Make a Small Group

The second part of the artefact is an accompanying website created by the author, the domain of which is: <http://disciple-makers.co.uk>

On this website, these five videos will be made easily accessible for any church leader wishing to train disciple-makers. Moreover, the author will provide handouts on the website to accompany each of the five videos for trainees to use. These can easily be printed into a workbook. All of these resources are available at no cost to churches.

SECTION FIVE: TRACK 02 ARTEFACT SPECIFICATION

This section of the Written Statement follows the template for all other Track 02 Artefacts, provided by George Fox University Doctor of Ministry Department.

- 1) Title: Disciple-makers: The Keys to Growth**
- 2) Goals and Strategies**

Goals

My main goals for this artefact are:

1. To address the current discipleship crisis in Wales.
2. To produce a tool for the purpose of training and equipping lay leaders in making disciples.
3. To create an artefact that is easily reproducible and accessible to all church leaders.

I will test a 'beta-version' of the artefact through a disciple-maker training course I am running in my own church. To measure the success of the videos, I will ask for feedback from the course attendants.

I anticipate that this artefact will have a shelf life of at least three to five years, after which time I may need to produce an updated version of this training material.

Manuscript

The Written Statement comprises of 22,287 words.

Audience

The primary audience for this artefact is:

- Church ministers who are looking to train lay leaders in discipleship. This tool is not limited to any one denomination, but can be used by leaders from various backgrounds.
- Trainee lay-leaders who would like to learn how to disciple new converts.
- Church network leaders (e.g. from Waleswide and New Wine Cymru) who need a tool to offer to church leaders within their network.
- Church planters who need a tool for training lay leaders.
- Leaders from overseas with similar contextual challenges.

Artefact Scope and Content

My artefact comprises of two parts, the first being five, ten-minute videos, the chapter titles of which are as follows:

Video 1 – Slow Death of Christianity in Wales?

Video 2 – Healthy Disciples, Healthy Churches

Video 3 – Recovering The Great Commission

Video 4 – Multiplication Through Mentoring

Video 5 – Make a Difference, Make a Small Group

The second part of the artefact is a website on which the videos and accompanying video lessons will be available. I have created websites before and have found them to be a great ministry and teaching tool. Furthermore, the lessons will be

easily accessible for printing and making into a workbook for the trainees. The website domain is: <http://disciple-makers.co.uk>

I do not intend on producing a physical DVD. Rather, church leaders and trainees will be able to easily access, watch and download the materials directly from the website without charge.

Budget

Because these videos will be easily accessible on the artefact website, and do not require the production of DVD's or workbooks, the cost of production is not too high. The only costs incurred are for the payment of the videographer, the purchase of the domain name, website hosting and template. The total cost for the artefact is £600 (\$880).

Promotion and Post-graduate Considerations

I intend to promote these training tools through my social media networks, including ministry websites, Facebook, and Twitter, all of which are free. I will also inform my local church networks in Wales including *Waleswide* and *New Wine Cymru* of their availability. Making these resources available from a website means that they will be accessible to a wide audience, plus without cost to individuals.

Once I have tested this programme in my own church, I hope to make this available to people from other churches via Disciple-Maker workshops, which people from any denomination will be invited to attend or lead themselves in their own churches.

SECTION SIX: POSTSCRIPT

Early on in my first year of my Doctor of Ministry Degree, my personal circumstances shifted considerably. I had begun the course as a book writer, located in the busy city of Seoul, South Korea, on a sabbatical from pastoral ministry. I registered as a student with George Fox with the idea that the course would probably help me at some point in the distant future, but not realising just how important this research would soon become.

Within just a few months of the commencements of my studies, my husband and I relocated to the United Kingdom, to the small town of Port Talbot in South Wales. A few months following that move, I heard the call of God to plant a church in that same town, and before I knew it, found myself faced with ministry challenges previously foreign to me. It was quite a shock to find myself with what seemed enormous responsibility, and I felt the urgent need not only to learn how to lead a church, but how to grow a church in this post-Christian nation. Back in Seoul, my ministry sphere had been very different. My responsibilities had been limited to an associate pastoral ministry role, in a church of 60,000 members: a completely opposite context. There I ministered in a church with traffic jams to get into the church property every day of the week, but in Port Talbot, I found myself in a town full of derelict church buildings, with a Christianity gasping for breath, plus few resources to strengthen Welsh churches. It was a case of swinging from one Church extreme to the other.

In Wales, I quickly realised that Churches and Christianity were almost flatlining, and so what better opportunity to learn how to lead a church and undertake church growth research than through my Doctor of Ministry studies? That, in a nutshell, is the

background to this ambitious project in discovering the keys to growing churches in South Wales, and the reason for creating this artefact.

With regards to that artefact, it was a struggle to decide what exactly to create, as there is a great need for resources in Wales. Producing a written artefact seemed an automatic response at first. However, I later recognised that because of the particular challenges of my new ministry context, I concluded that producing videos and a website would make the resources more widely available for those wishing to be trained.

As for what kind of video series to produce, that also created a dilemma. I initially desired to create a video series that could be utilised in discipling new converts to the Christian faith in small groups contexts. However, after deliberation and helpful advice from my advisor, it was decided that a more compatible artefact would be to create a video series designed to train disciple-makers, who can then in turn do the much-needed discipleship work here in South Wales.

In terms of process, I wrote the entire Written Statement before creating the actual artefact, which turned out to be the correct decision. As my Written Statement progressed, it became clearer what my artefact needed to look like. That process also ensured that the artefact was an accurate reflection of the conclusions of the Written Statement.

As far as scope for future research, one important subject that came to light through this research is the need to learn how to transform communities. According to James D. Hunter, disciples need to be a ‘faithful presence’ in secular society; followers of Christ who can withstand the ‘education’ of secular liturgies and practices and who

can lovingly and actively convey Christ to those who don't yet know Him.¹⁶² The job of the Church is not necessarily to transform the world, but to simply be that 'faithful presence' of Kingdom-desiring disciples of Christ.¹⁶³ However, although the Church does need to be a 'faithful presence' in secular culture, an influence that can withstand the secular liturgies that abound, is that enough to truly transform communities? This would make for a helpful area of research.

Finally, it is the author's hope that the final artefact will be a useful product not only in her own ministry circles, but a helpful resource to other pastors and church leaders in Wales.

¹⁶² James D. Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 95-6.

¹⁶³ James D. Hunter agrees with this basic premise in *To Change the World*. For him, cultural change occurs through utilising important and influential power structures, essentially elite leaders, educational establishments and frameworks, coupled with the backing and support of the affluent and influential.

APPENDIX: ARTEFACT SCREENSHOT AND DESCRIPTION

This is the homepage of the website created for the artefact <http://disciple-makers.co.uk>. In the top menu bar, the content for the website is visible:

- About – An introduction to the project and overview of its purpose
- Welsh Faith – A description of the spiritual and economic climate in Wales
- Videos – The five videos as described in section five
- Lessons – Downloadable workbook accompanying the videos
- Resources – Additional help including recommended reading and PowerPoint presentation accompanying each of the five sessions.



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