

Analyzing Factors Inhibiting the Growth of the Church According to the Apostles and their Relevance to the Challenges of the Church Today

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Abstract

Church growth is a phenomenon that is very commonly discussed by people, especially in the Christian world. Often church growth is seen from the quantity (the number of congregations growing rapidly and many) without regard to the quality of the congregation. Although the Bible does not specifically talk about church growth, the principle of church growth is understood in the words of Jesus "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overpower it", (Matt. 16:18), the church can live and grow even though the number of membership / attendance do not change. According to Rick Warren, healthy church growth is multi-dimensional growth, namely a church that grows closer to each other through fellowship, grows more earnestly through discipleship, and grows stronger through worship (Warren, 2019). He further said that the growth of the church is the result of a healthy natural where the preaching of the Bible and the mission carried out are balanced. In the church there are factors that inhibit church growth, namely: quantitative factors, qualitative factors, organic factors, historical trauma factors, theological misunderstanding factors, religious factors. For this reason, the Church must experience changes in dealing with any situation and influence the world. The church can not only rotate in one place. The church must make a difficult change, namely by preaching the gospel of salvation to those in need, in order to be saved. The church must make new breakthroughs in an increasingly changing world.

I. Introduction

The principle that is fundamental to all life is that living organisms grow. Growth is natural, as a spontaneous expression of life. The only way to stop growth is disease or death. Likewise with the Christian church, Ron Jenson and Jim Stevens (1996) assess, that the church pulsates with the life of Christ, so we expect the church to grow, unless its growth is hampered by disease.

With the preaching of the gospel, it is certain that the church has grown. The church also cannot be separated from the thing called the gospel or the good news. The presence of the gospel in the midst of society has an impact on the world, and has a greater influence, and can provide answers to society and the world. In addition to answering physical needs, the gospel is also able to answer the spiritual needs of mankind, in dealing with their lives (Setiawan, 2019). The main obstacle to the church's growth was misplaced targets. A truly growing church is a church that is able to put its main goals in place. The church must be a serving church, by placing Jesus Christ as the head of the church because He is a silent instrument in the midst of the church, to be able to reach souls.

It is recommended that the Churches of God today, need to enter and take an active and concrete part in the current growth of this Church for the implementation of the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20. (Takaliuang, 2012) The growth of the church biologically or because of the displacement of church members or because of the conversion of new souls occurs at all times and places. The growth of the church in terms of quality, quantity and complexity of its organization is the result of its evangelism. The church is always renewed by the gospel and therefore the church is constantly growing. Evangelism is the key to church growth. (Saptono, 2019).

In this paper, the first part of the author describes the notion of church growth. The second part describes the factors inhibiting church growth and closes with conclusions and recommendations

II. Research Methods

In this study, the method used by the author is a qualitative method (library study), the author uses a literature study which is a series of activities related to the methods of collecting library data, taking notes, reading and managing data. These sources are derived from textbooks, journals, and also social media.

III. Discussion

Problems in the Early Church

Resistance from Outside

Resistance from the Government

The resistance occurred because of the bold preaching and testimony that brought people's conversion to Jesus Christ. The background is the event of the healing of the lame man (3:1-10). In Acts 3:1-26 is a confrontation of Peter's sermon which contains, Jesus Christ who was killed on the cross is the Messiah. "You gave up in order to be killed-Pilate wanted to release him, you rejected the Holy and the Righteous-wanted a murderer as your reward, you killed the Leader to life-God raised Him up."

Religious Opposition (4:1-22)

Religious resistance was expressed by arresting Peter and John. The arrests were

because the Sadducees were not happy with the testimony. On the other hand, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. In the New Testament, the Sadducees and Pharisees always appear; even these occupy important positions in religion. Their main objection was that the two apostles taught.

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Hatred and envy became a strong impetus for the High Priest and the people of the Sadducees, to put the apostles in the city prison. They saw that Christianity in Jerusalem was growing rapidly and this would be a threat to the stability of the authority of their government.

Peter and John were brought before the Religious Court which would judge them. Displeased they asked, "By what power did you heal. Peter and John answered and at the same time witnessed the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. Salvation is only in Jesus (4:12). Obedience to God exceeds obedience to humans, that is the attitude of the Apostle Peter even though the consequence was that the Apostle Peter had to be willing to suffer torture.

Resistance from within lies in the Church

The early church is a beautiful example of church growth, but that doesn't mean the early church didn't have problems. There is a lie committed by Ananias and Sapphira's family. It begins by writing about the fine example of Barnabas, "He sold his field. Then he took the money and put it at the apostles' feet (4:36-37).

This is in stark contrast to what Ananias and Sapphira did (Acts 5:1-11). Ananias saw that Barnabas had great merit and earned him the respect of many. So that Ananias and Sapphira also had a desire to be respected just like Barnabas. But he did not want to sacrifice all his property as he said (contrast with Barnabas).

A man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of land. The money was given to the apostles, but not all of it. Some of them endure. Of course you can't, unless you say it out loud. Usually the person who sells the land or house gives all the money he receives. Thus Ananias and Sapphira acted as if the money had all been given. Therein lays the sin. (HVD Brink commentary)

If Ananias and Sapphira had been honest with the apostles, that they had kept some of the money from the sale of land for themselves, this would not have been a problem. But it turns out they lied. They lie not to men but to the Holy Spirit. As a result, they were rebuked by Peter, "why has the devil possessed your heart, so that you deceived the Holy Spirit and withheld some of the proceeds from the sale of the land?" (5:3) The word

“controlled” means “controlled” by Satan. *πλερωο* (pleroo) the same word used to describe “the fullness of the Holy Spirit.”

When Ananias heard the rebuke of the Apostle Peter, he immediately died. In this case, it was not Peter who sentenced Ananias to death, but God himself who condemned him. The same situation was experienced by Ananias' wife, Sapphira. About three hours after Ananias' death, Sapphira came to meet the Apostle Peter. Sapphira did not know about what happened to her husband. Sapphira commits the same lie as Ananias did. Peter rebuked him sharply and immediately Sapphira's life was cut off.

The sin was not because of the holding of the money, but because they lied (v. 4). Ananias and Sapphira lied to the apostles, but in fact they not only lied to the apostles but lied to Allah. Humans can be lied to, but an All-Knowing God cannot be lied to. And as a result there is a severe punishment from God. Ananias and Sapphira were executed. The death of Ananias and Sapphira was not because the apostles were cruel but God intended to purify the young church that was growing.

Disputes among the Churches (6:1-7)

Problems also began to arise when the number of followers increased, causing disputes among the congregation. The problem arose not because of the aspect of growth but because some people or groups were dissatisfied with the existing service, as recorded in Acts 6:1: “In those days, when the number of disciples increased, there was a murmuring of the Greek-speaking Jews against the Hebrews, because their division of widows was good in the daily ministry.”

The difficulties that existed were not because of the crisis of love in the early church, but because of the increasing number of followers so that the leaders were overwhelmed, as David W. Ray put it this way: “Because the believers were separated from the Jews, the poor among them did not get help anymore, from members of the Jewish congregation. So another way of help was created. But some of the poor (Greek-speaking widows) felt that they were not cared for properly. That's why Peter chose seven well-known people, full of Spirit and wisdom (6:3) to serve the deacon (social) ministry. The seven chosen were: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas (Acts 6:5).

Talking about the church cannot be separated from the *missio*, because the church is only really a church if it is a missionary church. According to Ranto G, Simamora (2006) "The church must participate in continuing what God is doing, which is seeking life, the church must also recognize the importance of mutuality". The kingdom of God is also the main of the true mission of the church, so that the mission of the church becomes a mission that extends, and reaches all areas of mankind and returns them from sin to eternal life.

The first church growth in the book of Acts as a guide for the church today in a growth and evangelism to reach the world, Acts 1:8 can be understood as a belief in us that is given by God and believes that He will build His church. The church is a place of fellowship

of believers; the church is also sometimes used as a profitable thing in the midst of uncertainty. The church must be able to anticipate the challenges that will be faced with open eyes, namely changes in every era, the church must be able to evaluate itself as a ministry in the changes it faces, to be able to reach the world in giving the truth of God's word. The church mostly prioritizes doctrine compared to the practices and teachings that Jesus taught and they forget the great commission, the church also often thinks of wealth or assets owned, and the large number of congregations, large church buildings, make the benchmark that the church has experienced growth, and the more dangerous the church is made private property, the church mostly relies on what they have, which should be a barrier for the congregation to enter the presence of God. (Panjaitan, 2018)

Through the gospel, believing mankind can be saved from the judgment of God's wrath. It is impossible for humans to save themselves, in this way when the gospel is given they can restore human relationships with the creator, namely Jesus Christ to be saved. The helpless man who tries to escape from sin must go through the process of being born again, by accepting the gospel of salvation, namely Jesus Christ himself (Setiawan, 2019). This is the task of the church where the church must be able to continue to proclaim the truth of God's word to those who need it.

Church growth also includes qualitative and quantitative and organic. Qualitative growth is not only able to win souls, but is able to become a congregation and be able to disciple the person and carry out spiritual training, so that he can make disciples again, become a responsible member of the congregation for the church. Growth must have a well-ignited purpose, it must fulfill its missionary vocation, and the church must develop to its fullest potential. There are several things behind the church not growing at this time, namely;

Church leaders who lose God's vision means that leadership is a conscious activity of people who believe that leading is a call from God (Lumintang, 2015). Church leaders who do not have a clear vision will be ineffective in their work and cannot derive a clear vision that will set clear goals to direct each congregation to God's purpose.

The focus of the church is wrong. Congregations that live by the program structure of the church will grow but not experience growth. Congregations and churches are busy with existing programs, but their goal of becoming God's church is almost nowhere to be found. The purpose of the church is to seek souls and make disciples of Jesus who do not believe, not to increase programs so that people are interested and the congregation does not get bored of going to church.

Unbiblical preaching. Preaching is the art of conveying the Word of God. The Word of God needs a good explanation and explanation so that the congregation can accept it easily, with the aim that the congregation will grow and experience knowledge in Jesus Christ.

Factors Inhibiting Church Growth

The inhibiting factors for church growth can be seen from quantitative factors,

qualitative factors, organic factors, historical trauma factors, theological misunderstanding factors, and certain religious factors.

Factor of Quantitative

The church considers that the community/environment is outside the church and is not part of the church. The community/environment should be part of the church and the church should be part of the community/environment in promoting the gospel must have biblical principles. the church in the midst of changing world-Quantitative Growth is the growth of the church in terms of increasing the number of organic or people who are in God's church, the church will not be called growing when the church does not show an increase in the number of congregation members even though the church has a large building, many money and various service activities, an expert studying growth strategies named Michel Griffiths said "we cannot build a new Temple without increasing the number of living stones."

So the indicator of the church growing quantitatively in carrying out the great commission of the Lord Jesus for us, can be seen from the increasing number of believers who have become survivors as a result of the Church's missionary service, even from Vergil Gerber's expression "even though this is not the only church growing, but success can be seen from the increasing number of congregations".(Gerber, 1973) So the biggest obstacle for the church in realizing growth in Quality, when the Church does not have a soul to win souls and does not consider increasing congregations to be an important thing, which should be done seriously by the mission field in a particular church. The problem of the church is not the size of the church building, but the problem of the church today is reach.

Factor of Qualitative

Christian descent the influence of other KTP Christians

Discipleship of a weak church

Lost the first love

Life's struggles and trials

An old view of life that has not undergone transformation.

Qualitative Growth is growth that results from a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. The quality of growth is very much seen in the love that arises from the fellowship of God's people in the missionary church.

Church Growth in Qualitative Terms

This can be seen spiritual maturity as evidenced by deeds, words and actions based on the character of Christ. The understanding of qualitative inhibiting factors for growth in the church will be seen when in the fellowship of God's people there is no shared love, even the most fatal inhibiting factor in qualitative terms of the congregation is very visible when in the thoughts, words and actions of God's congregation in it does not experience growth but decline. Qualitative growth can also be seen from the congregation's obedience to God

or the fear of the congregation and church leaders to God.

Factor of Organic

The Misunderstanding of Mission Essence Factor, this factor is a lack of a deep understanding of the mission for the church that is carried out by church leaders, a shallow understanding of the mission or the church does not facilitate everyone who is sent to the mission field (material and practice) will cause errors in the growth of the existing church, so that the existing congregation of God will be tired, and there is no attraction and no drive to have a mission, so that organically or quantitatively the congregation experiences a very low resistance. Church growth must be able to organize and be able to manage the congregations in it. When the organization in the church does not run automatically the church will experience a slowdown in mission service or growth.

Historical Trauma Factor

This actor returns to the correct understanding must be preached to the existing church, such as understanding the history of Christian missions to the world, the achievements that occurred in past in mission history, mission world and existing Zending or mission messenger, with the correct understanding, the church will develop a missionary spirit because of historical factors that right, so don't continue to understand the Mission side of Zending's failure or suffering only those who are persecuted. The church is mostly afraid or traumatized by the past where everyone who does evangelism is often persecuted and can even result in death, from this side the church is afraid to preach the gospel of salvation.

Church growth must also be based on the preaching of the gospel or mission done, by the church itself, the church was chosen by God to save the world, that the church is God's own property 1 Peter 2:9.

Therefore, the purpose of the church must be definite in carrying out God's will, functioning to reveal God's glory to this world. The evangelism that is carried out must avoid debate, this is one of the tendencies of people to reject the gospel that is conveyed, this must be avoided so that the gospel can enter properly. One way to win an argument is to avoid it. The gospel that is conveyed is the gospel that is able to answer or free people from captivity or the bondage of sin, and reconcile humans with God, as a growing church and as a church; the kingdom of God must be the basis in the midst of society. The kingdom of God must be the main goal of the church's mission, not be a church that just sits in place and doesn't want to step out (Artanto, 2015).

To be able to grow outward, the church must first grow from within, church growth must be based from within the church which means the church must be able to grow in terms of its spiritual discipline, to be able to reach many souls, the church must be able to correct itself whether it has grown in God or not, so that the church is able to reach the souls that have not been saved. The church must be able to change its attitude in dealing

with the changing world, meaning that the church must have a sense of concern for the people around it. Indeed, over time the church will experience difficulties if it does not proclaim the gospel to the world, the church will become dead and will not develop and grow, both in quantitative, qualitative and organizational terms.

Factors of Misunderstanding of Theology

In the 1960s, many people questioned whether the Church *should* grow? There has been doubt from some about whether the Church can benefit society as a whole. In certain circles for a while people used to say that we are now living in a post-Christian era. His suffering mission was revealed on the cross. Jesus was viewed differently by the people of His day. Jesus only called a few people to follow Him, Jesus prioritized quality not quantity.

People who view Jesus and His ministry in this way often reject the teaching about the development of the Church. To them, the enthusiasm and optimism inherent in the Church's growth movement appeared to be an exaggerated attitude of pride in success that was disproportionate to the Spirit of Christ. Some even consider it similar to this exaltation of numbers and numbers, it can easily become something bad and self-centered (Wagner, 2012). In the midst of all this He made a remarkable statement, *This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, after which the end will come* (Mk 24:14). Meanwhile, at that time the preaching of the Gospel was still limited to a small group of people on the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean, namely the Aramaic-speaking Jews of Galilee. But Jesus was able to look ahead and see that the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God would happen to all the nations of this earth.

Factor of Religion

The biggest, strongest and toughest stumbling block for people of certain religions in understanding and accepting Christianity is because they think and believe that Christian teachings about the Triune God and about Jesus Christ are unforgivable sins (sins of shirk). According to them, shirk or associating partners with God is an unforgivable sin (Amri, 1990).

Since childhood, adherents of certain religions have been taught that... *lam yalid lam yulod...* or *Allah is not begotten and not begotten* (Marantika, 1989). As a result, they cannot accept the view that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Also, they cannot call Jesus God because they have been taught *La ilaha illah* or *there is no god but Allah*. It is because of this that the assumption arises that Christians are guilty of this shirk for believing and teaching the doctrine of the Triune God.

Meanwhile, among Christians, especially in Indonesia, the problem of the sin of shirk is one of the reasons for the emergence of doubts in their minds. Moreover, the position of Christians when they are accused or slandered and even attacked by people belonging to certain religions. Therefore, in this situation, it is not uncommon for Christians not only to not grow, but in fact are in the process of dying of faith. And do not forget, the influence of certain religious teachings, has greatly influenced the legislation in Indonesia

since several decades ago. But for those of us who truly believe in God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as the Bible teaches, this is both a challenge and an opportunity to witness the saving gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:16-17).

I. Conclusion

A growing and growing church is a church that has a mission, which is able to reach souls that have not been saved, the church must have a sense of concern for the surrounding environment, the church must have a MISSION so that the church does not die or be disabled, the church should not only prioritize church facilities, but also able to proclaim the news of salvation to those who have not been saved, the church must have empathy for the world. The church is a spiritual place or place to bring souls to be saved and enter into fellowship with Jesus Christ. The church must be able to exist in every era of development. The gospel of the kingdom of God must be conveyed clearly and well, in situations and conditions that are not improving or bad.

Church growth and mission are God's tools that can be used to reach souls, able to answer every problem faced by every human being in the face of the times. The harvest of so many churches will not just stand still, many souls are waiting to be harvested, many of them need the help of missions and churches, and they also long for God's visit to happen to their lives. Church and mission must co-exist in proclaiming the kingdom of God to this world. When many souls are saved, the church must be able to make disciples again so that person can reach more souls and be able to make disciples again; this is the church's job.

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