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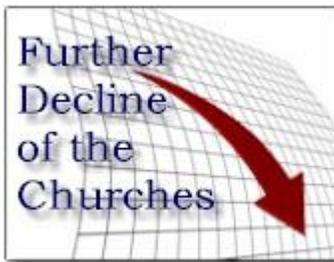
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## Further Decline of the Churches

by David Sielaff, May 2006

Edited and Expanded, January 2019

Read the "[January 2019 Newsletter](#)"



This article updates my April 2002 Commentary, "[The Decline of the Churches](#)."<sup>1</sup> Churches around the world are increasingly in trouble. Fewer people are attending, financial support has declined, and facilities are closing at an increasing rate. This is occurring in churches of all sizes, from congregations with dozens of worshippers to huge organizations with tens of thousands attending. In a long-term trend, churches are declining more and more each year.

Of course, major authors on the subject of church growth (or negative church growth) are alarmed by this frightening and increasing problem. These long-term changes are causing independent churches, small denominations, large international denominations, and even the Roman Catholic Church to go into crisis mode to formulate solutions to problems that began decades ago. Recent data indicates that the problems of severe "negative growth" are occurring at an increasing rate. What is the reason for this decline? In December 2008 ASK published "[Why Churches Fall Apart](#)" from a 1996 audiotape by Dr. Ernest Martin. The information in that article is still applicable to the current decline. In fact, a Wikipedia page titled "[Decline of Christianity](#)" began in July 2018. At the end of this article I list several ASK articles that address not only the current decline but also the eventual collapse and dissolution of traditional Christian organizations.

### *Decline of the Churches in the United States — Accelerating*

The declining trend of church attendance and church closures is worsening according to an article titled "[America's Epidemic of Empty Churches](#)" in the November 25, 2018 issue of *The Atlantic Magazine* by author Jonathan Merritt:

**"Many of our nation's churches can no longer afford to maintain their structures — 6,000 to 10,000 churches die each year in America — and that number will likely grow. Though more than 70 percent of our citizens still claim to be Christian, congregational participation is less central to many Americans' faith than it once was.**

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<sup>1</sup> That Commentary is more relevant today than when originally written.

**Most denominations are declining as a share of the overall population, and donations to congregations have been falling for decades. Meanwhile, religiously unaffiliated Americans, nicknamed the “nones,” are growing as a share of the U.S. population.”**

What is causing this decline? In December 2017 the Pew Research Center American Trends Panel (ATP) published results of a study of 4,729 people interviewed on a range of questions about their attitudes on religion and worship. The results were released in an August 2018 Pew Research article, “[Why Americans Go \(and Don’t Go\) to Religious Services.](#)”<sup>2</sup> The most important reason for attending was, for 81% of respondents, they “**wanted to become closer to God.**” That is a high percentage. Of course, the reason getting “closer to God” declines with those who attend less often.

<b>Changing U.S. Religious Landscape<sup>3</sup></b>			
	<b>2007</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>% change</b>
Evangelical Protestants	26.3 %	25.4 %	- 0.9
<b>Unaffiliated</b>	<b>16.1 %</b>	<b>22.8 %</b>	<b>+ 6.7</b>
Catholic	23.9 %	20.8 %	- 3.1
Mainline Protestant	18.1 %	14.7 %	- 3.4
<b>Non-Christian faith</b>	<b>4.7 %</b>	<b>5.9 %</b>	<b>+ 1.2</b>
<i>No response or no change</i>	<i>10.9 %</i>	<i>10.4 %</i>	<i>- 0.5</i>

Source: “[America’s Changing Religious Landscape](#),” Pew Research, May 12, 2015

Note the highlighted rows. “Unaffiliated” are people who removed themselves from organized churches yet still identify themselves as Christians. This is a large change in 7 years. Have these numbers changed since 2014? Nothing seems to have changed to think the trend reversed from 2014 to December 2019. Pew Research noted a decrease of people who considered themselves to be Christian at all:

**“Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing, ... these changes are taking place across the religious landscape, affecting all regions of the country and many demographic groups. While the drop in Christian affiliation is particularly pronounced among young adults, it is occurring among Americans of all ages. The same trends are seen among whites, blacks and Latinos; among both college graduates and adults with only a high school education; and among women as well as men. ...**

**To be sure, the United States remains home to more Christians than any other country in the world, and a large majority of Americans — roughly seven-in-ten — continue to identify with some branch of the Christian faith.”**

Source: Pew Research Center, April 2015 report “[The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050](#)”

<sup>2</sup> The trend of declining church participation was shown by earlier research. One study done from 1998 to 2006, concluded in the 2007 article, “[Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline.](#)” Dr. Richard J. Krejcir of the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development gives the conclusions of the study:

**“Most of the statistics tell us that nearly 50% of Americans have no church home. In the 1980s, membership in the church had dropped almost 10%; then, in the 1990s, it worsened by another 12% drop — some denominations reporting a 40% drop in their membership. And now, over half way through the first decade of the 21st century, we are seeing the figures drop even more! ... Every year more than 4000 churches close their doors compared to just over 1000 new church starts!”**

<sup>3</sup> The numbers in the bottom row represent groups that did not answer or the change was insignificant. For all data see the Pew Research Center study *America’s Changing Religious Landscape*, “[Chapter 1: The Changing Religious Composition of the U.S.](#)”

The downward trends for Christians are across all demographics in the United States, and have been slow but steady. Churches are declining because there are fewer committed Christians. So why are the Christians leaving the churches? It is because members of congregations are not being fed spiritual food, and that comes from the Holy Scriptures and no where else — not from experience and not from non-biblical traditions or dogma.<sup>4</sup>

I wrote in the past about surveys conducted by a mega-church called Willow Creek Community Church in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. The surveys were made available to other churches for them to give to their congregations. The results were staggering. The current version of the survey called “[Reveal for Church, Spiritual Life Survey](#).” They claim for more than a decade to have surveyed 2,000 churches and 500,000 people, and the project continues today. It is operated by survey professionals which itself has become a large enterprise. Its goal is to help large and small churches gain and retain members, and hopefully regain those who have left.

Russ Rainey notes in his March 2009 “[Willow Creek Reveal Study – a Summary](#)” that the bottom line of these multi-year surveys of 200 churches indicated that the organizations (small, medium and mega-churches) were able to bring people in the front door, but quickly became bored, and went out the back door. Even worse, the churches suffered the most when the “spiritually mature” members left the church out of boredom. The decline is then hard to stop and alarming membership shrinkage begins. Reporter David Haskell points out, “**Fewer members not only means fewer souls saved, a frightening thought for some clergy members, but also less income for churches, further ensuring their decline**” in “[Liberal churches are dying. But conservative churches are thriving](#),” *Washington Post*, January 4, 2017. Other data indicates that conservative churches are also declining but at a slower rate than liberal churches.

One alarming finding was that the spiritual mature members were leaving. These members were those who “built the church” by taking unpaid or part-time leadership roles week after week, month after month, year after year. Churches focused on gaining new members, feeding everyone “milk” and neglected to feed their foundational and solid core members the spiritual “meat” they craved and needed. Do not confuse the desire for spiritual “meat” (Hebrews 5:12–14) with “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3). People begin to leave when the riches of the Holy Scriptures were not taught in depth.

### ***What on Earth Is Happening?***

I suggest that the churches of this world have denied the power of God. Even the patriarch Job knew that a child of Adam must seek God to begin to find the deep things, the hidden things God has done:

**“I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which [Who] does great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.”**

• *Job 5:8–9*

The great and marvelous things about God cannot be known, they are unsearchable by human beings. They can only be learned by God making them known to us through His Word. God through Moses said He would reveal secrets to the Israelites when they entered the promised land — if they were faithful and obedient:

**“The secret [concealed] things belong unto YHWH our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever [to the eon], that we may do all the words of this law.”**

• *Deuteronomy 29:29*

Solomon wrote that kings have power and luxury to investigate hidden things, not just things about men but things about God’s creation and His interaction with mankind: **“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing:**

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<sup>4</sup> Severe decline in Canadian churches is also occurring at perhaps a faster rate than in the United States according to a 2013 Pew Research study, “[Canada’s Changing Religious Landscape](#), between 1971 and 2013:

**“The percentage of Canadians who identify as Catholic has dropped from 47% to 39% over the last four decades, while the share that identifies as Protestant has fallen even more steeply, from 41% to 27%.”**

**but the honor of kings is to search out a matter”** (Proverbs 25:2).

As I have written before, we believers are children of God and we are much more than kings. It is our right to search out the secret things of God. **“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:32). Believers have **“the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows him: but you know him; for he dwells with you, and shall be in you”** (John 14:17). We cannot begin to do so until we acknowledge God’s existence, His primacy in our lives, His work through us by the Gospel:

**“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”**

• **Romans 1:16**

There is one other reason the churches are declining. Most all churches try to do a good job of teaching from Scripture on how to get along with our neighbors. Found particularly in the writings of Paul, he always begins with doctrinal teaching, with information usually new to his audience. Then, based on what he just taught, how should we conduct ourselves toward other people. If churches present unbiblical teachings, then the teaching about conduct will also be wrong. Now let’s look at the decline of churches around the world.

### ***Decline of Churches in the United Kingdom***

In November 2013 in a *Daily Mail* newspaper, the former Archbishop of Canterbury Reverend Dr. George Carey said about the Church of England, **“Church ‘is on the brink of extinction’: Ex-Archbishop George Carey warns of Christianity crisis.”** Rev. Carey said church leaders failed young people and the Church of England is **“one generation away from extinction.”** Carey added **“Recent census figures have shown a decline of more than 10 per cent in a decade in numbers of people who call themselves Christian.”**

In a March 2018 *Guardian* newspaper article, **“Christianity as default is gone: the rise of a non-Christian Europe,”** data from a St Mary's University, Twickenham in the United Kingdom found a majority of young adults in 12 countries have no faith. The article highlighted these facts about current beliefs:

- **“70% of young people in the UK identify with no religion,”**
- **“59% of young people in the UK never attend religious services,”** and
- **“Nearly two-thirds of young people in the UK never pray.”**

### ***Decline of Christian Churches in Europe***

Robert Herguth wrote in the April 15, 2018 *Chicago Tribune* in his article **“Researcher finds a dramatic decline of Christianity in Europe”**:

**“In Europe, the decline of Christianity is so stark that the author of the new report from St. Mary’s University in London was quoted as saying Christianity, ‘as a default, as a norm, is gone, and probably gone for good – or at least for the next 100 years.’”**

Among the findings:

- Up to 91 percent of those 16 to 29 years old in the Czech Republic have no religious affiliation.
- Just 7 percent of young adults in the United Kingdom identify as Anglican, 6 percent are Muslim.
- Most young adults in a dozen European nations say they have no religious affiliation.

### ***Continuing Decline in the Catholic Church, Four Observations***

(1) While finishing this article, there appeared in the December 19, 2018 *Chicago Tribune*, this headline: **“More than 500 priests accused of sexual abuse not yet publicly identified by Catholic church, Illinois attorney general finds.”** It seems the Roman Catholic Church resisted identifying priests publicly accused of child abuse and the statute of limitations in Illinois has expired in many of those cases. Beside the 500, 185 more priests were named. According to the article **“Catholic officials have publicly identified only 185 clergy with**

**credible allegations against them.”** There seems to be a problem in the Catholic Churches in Illinois.

(2) In my August 17, 2018 Commentary [“New Child Abuse Charges”](#) I cited an August 14, 2018 *Wall Street Journal* article:

**“[Pennsylvania Report Alleges Child Sex Abuse by More Than 300 Priests](#)” within six of eight Roman Catholic Pennsylvania dioceses dating back to the 1940s. The report was made public by the office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General. Much of the report is based on data from the Catholic Church’s own records. Earlier grand jury reports told of similar abuse of children in the other two Philadelphia and Altoona-Johnstown dioceses.”**

No one can even begin to guess how many children were abused if hundreds of priests were involved in the past 70+ years.<sup>5</sup>

(3) Earlier this December 2018 another problem arose for the Catholic Church. The third ranking person in the Catholic Church was convicted by a unanimous jury in Australia of sexual child abuse. In the December 18, 2018 *National Catholic Register*, Ed Condon of the Catholic News Agency wrote from the Vatican:

**“[The Case Against Cardinal George Pell: New Details Emerge.](#) Cardinal Pell was found guilty Dec. 11 on five charges of sexual abuse of minors, following accusations that he sexually assaulted two former members of the Melbourne cathedral choir.”**

It is unclear whether Pell will return to Australia or will refuse to return and be subject to extradition proceedings. Pell was subsequently removed as the Treasurer of Vatican finances.<sup>6</sup>

On another abuse-related issue, an article from *lifesitenews.com* August 25, 2018, [“Pope Francis covered up McCarrick abuse, former US nuncio testifies \(OFFICIAL TEXT\)”](#), an allegation was made that Pope Francis and other high Catholic officials covered up charges against Archbishop McCarrick, an American Cardinal who served as Archbishop of Washington D.C. from 2001 to 2006 (elevated to the cardinalate in 2001). Some high ranking Catholic prelates are trying to root out such perpetrators. The cover-up charges came out when a different Catholic Archbishop of Washington D.C. made his statement before an ecclesiastical court.

**“Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, 77, claims that Pope Francis knew about strict canonical sanctions imposed on McCarrick by Pope Benedict XVI but chose to repeal them. ... Archbishop Viganò, who served as apostolic nuncio in Washington D.C. from 2011–2016, states that in the late 2000s, Benedict had ‘imposed on Cardinal McCarrick sanctions’ ..., and that Viganò personally spoke with Francis about the gravity of McCarrick’s abuse soon after his election in 2013.”**

This led to the resignation of the current papal nuncio (the Vatican ambassador to the U.S.): [“Washington Cardinal Wuerl going to Rome to discuss resignation with Pope.”](#) Allegations were that Wuerl covered up charges of sexual abuse of seminarians and priests by Archbishop McCarrick, Wuerl’s predecessor.

### ***The Problems Were Known for Decades***

What a disgusting mess. No wonder the Catholic Church is slowly dissolving, corrupted from the inside. Are incidents and charges a persecution of the Catholic Church? It is unlikely considering so many cases being revealed over decades. Vatican insider Malachi Martin (no relation of Ernest Martin) in his last novel *Windswept House: a Vatican Novel* (1996) portrayed high-ranking Catholic leaders as performing sex abuse of minors and even satanism, which would entail witchcraft, worshipping spirit entities, and even human sacrifice. Malachi Martin’s access to the Vatican stayed open until he died in 1999. The novel allowed him to vividly portray the evil that he spoke about in his 1990 non-fiction best-seller about geopolitics and the

<sup>5</sup> Read what Jesus said about those who “offend” one of the little children and little ones. Severe judgment will come (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2).

<sup>6</sup> **“Pell is essentially the treasurer of the Vatican and the Holy See in Rome, a high-ranking position that puts him third in charge after the pope,”** from the *Guardian* newspaper website, [“Who is Cardinal George Pell and what is he accused of?”](#)

Vatican, *The Keys of This Blood*, in which he wrote openly:

**“Most frighteningly for [Pope] John Paul [II], he had come up against the irremovable presence of a malign strength in his own Vatican and in certain bishops’ chanceries. It was what knowledgeable Churchmen called the ‘superforce.’ Rumors, always difficult to verify, tied its installation to the beginning of Pope Paul VI’s reign in 1963. Indeed Paul had alluded somberly to ‘the smoke of Satan which has entered the Sanctuary’ ... an oblique reference to an enthronement ceremony by Satanists in the Vatican. Besides, the incidence of Satanic pedophilia — rites and practices — was already documented among certain bishops and priests as widely dispersed as Turin, in Italy, and South Carolina, in the United States. The cultic acts of Satanic pedophilia are considered by professionals to be the culmination of the Fallen Archangel’s rites.”**

• **Malachi Martin, Vatican, The Keys of This Blood, p. 632**

Few Catholics want to give charitable contributions to an institution when their money will be used to pay reparations to victims of crimes committed by authorities of the institution.

In 1981 Malachi Martin authored a nonfiction book titled, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church* which put forth his perspective on the decline he saw coming then. David Carlin published in 2013, *Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America* (Sophia Institute Press). That institution’s problems have long been recognized by authors sympathetic to the Catholic Church.

### ***Catholic Doctrine Continuing Toward Universal Salvation***

The author of the Roman Catholic 2008 book *Jesus Christ: Salvation of All*,<sup>7</sup> was elevated to Cardinal in June 2018. Archbishop Luis Ladaria is 74 years old, considered a conservative and a major biblical and Catholic scholar. He retired as a professor at Catholic seminaries then was promoted in 2017 by Pope Francis to Prefect (head) of the “Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,” where for a long time he was the 2<sup>nd</sup> in command. So, Ladaria, who believes and teaches universal salvation, now heads the organization that determines what is correct and proper Catholic teaching, subject only to the Pope’s approval. That is not a problem because I presented in my April 2018 Commentary, “[Pope Francis Declares, ‘No Hell’](#)” clearly teaches universal salvation. So does the current Pope’s predecessor Pope Benedict as I show in my January 2011 Commentary, “[Melchizedek and Benedict the 16<sup>th</sup>](#).” Pope Benedict also taught universal salvation.<sup>8</sup>

This open change of Catholic doctrine goes against 1,600+ years of the teaching of hell and eternal conscious torment. Many Catholics perhaps want people (perhaps even Catholic leaders who sexually abuse children) to burn in hell “forever.” God and Christ think differently. At least the Catholic Church gets that correct. None of this is a surprise and my understanding is proving to be correct — that universal salvation will be widely taught before Christ returns. All together, the entire Roman Catholic Church is riddled with moral corruption. In my opinion the Catholic Church will not only decline, but it will deflate to a shadow of its former size.

### ***Organizational Priorities*** (Material under this subhead was originally in “[The Decline of the Churches](#)”)

The Roman Catholic Church is one of the largest human organizations in the world, known for its huge bureaucratic structure, multiple offices, and global good works and charities. Every large organization has priorities, goals and duties and the Roman Catholic Church is no different. While the true priorities of organizations may differ from those told to the public, EVERY organization operates on these same priorities:

<sup>7</sup> I reviewed Ladaria’s 150-page book in my article “[Modern Recognition of Universal Salvation](#).” The book presents a strong biblical presentation of universal salvation, but it must come through the Roman Catholic Church. Ladaria says it will happen, but he does not know how. Catholic tradition is not biblical; it is made up of traditions of men and greatly paganized.

<sup>8</sup> Generations ago, this “Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith” was called “The Inquisition.” The heresy trials of Galileo were conducted by the Inquisition. Under Cardinal Ladaria, the Catholic Church will accept and allow universal salvation through Christ to be taught as Catholic doctrine, but perhaps not teach it proactively. Few top leaders of the Catholic Church oppose it.

- (1) The **First Priority** of every organization — whether a government, a corporation or a religious denomination — is the continued survival, health and growth of the organization.
- (2) The **Second Priority** is to maintain the flow of money, which is the life-blood of every human organization.
- (3) The **Third Priority** is to serve the best interests of the citizens, customers and their members (employees and volunteers) respectively, as viewed by that organization.
- (4) The **Fourth Priority** — is to tell the truth.

Be assured that Priorities 1 and 2 are near and dear to every leader of every organization. Such priorities create momentum of action in organizations to continue operating. These Priorities are the same at all levels of every business, of government, and most all human institutions outside the family.

### *What Is the Solution?*

The solution is not difficult. Feed people spiritual meat and not only milk. I wrote some aspects of a solution in my August 2012 doctrinal article “[What Is Important](#).” There are priorities of importance in what should be taught in the *ekklesias*. (In that article I begin with “The Four Priorities” and then give solutions.)

All Christian churches, all mega-churches, all denominations, and the largest, the Roman Catholic Church, most all are declining. They will fight, struggle, and will do just about anything to stop the decline, anything except doing the one thing that would solve their problem. The solution is for them to put the **Fourth Priority** — to tell the truth — as their first priority. But it would require Christian institutions to teach the full Word of God in the Scriptures. They cannot do so because their priorities are warped. Paul tells us in Romans 13:19 that he, “... **fully** (completely) **preached the gospel of Christ.**” Later Paul tells what must be taught now:

**“the mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; [to] present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”**

• *Colossians 1:26–28*

**“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”**

• *Colossians 2:2–3*

The treasures of the Word of God are for us to discover. They are inexhaustible in our lifetime: **“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”** (Romans 11:33) ... unless He reveals them to us through His Word. As God’s children we have the right and freedom to search anything in His Word to learn the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Starting with the Gospel (capsulized in 1 Corinthians 1:1–10), teaching the full word of God is the solution. Forget the trinity, forget the immortal soul, forget the eternal conscious torment of hell. (While the biblical teaching of universal salvation is not the Gospel, it will be the result and fulfillment of the Gospel). **“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17, quoting Psalm 19:14). That is how faith is formed in those God has chosen to receive His word.

### *I recommend these articles on the ASK website:*

[The Anatomy of a Church – Part 1](#)

[The Curse of Church Government](#)

[Female Sex Signs in Churches](#)

[The Anatomy of a Church – Part 2](#)

[The Deceptions of Satan the Devil](#)

[The Folly of Tradition](#)

[The Pagan Images of Christians Today](#)

[Chaos in the Churches](#)

David Sielaff, January 2019