Research for 21st Century Scholarship

“The Decline of Influence in Mainline Churches”

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10/06//2024

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# The Decline of Influence in Mainline Churches

The influence of mainline liberal churches is declining. There are several reasons for this decline. Unfortunately, this decline has changed how people look at the mainline churches. For years, people have only seen the mainline churches arguing and fighting with each other. For years, conservative and conservative denominations accused the decline on liberal theology. There was an accusation that churches were moving away from Jesus and more toward society. Yet now those same conservative churches and denominations are experiencing the same decline. One of the problems is the mainline church has not lost its influence. For example, many mainline churches are open and affirming. However, there is a general misunderstanding how people as to how to evaluate if a church is open and affirming. For example, in the TV documentary about Hillsong, there was an interview that someone thought the church was open and affirming because it played contemporary music. They were surprised to find out that Hillsong was not (Johnstone, 2022). Part of the problem within mainline churches is that it lost its focus. This problem appears like the conservative accusation that they lost focus on Jesus but there are some differences. The mainline church did stop focusing on Jesus and started focusing on itself and its infrastructure. Unfortunately, the mainline church started living in denial and ignored the signs that it lost its focus. The mainline church pretended nothing was wrong and continued doing business as usual. Eventually, the mainline church started recognizing some decline and joined in the worship style debate, hoping that would help turn things around. Sadly, it did not. Instead, the influence of the church continued to decline because people started to shift toward a broader view of soteriology. What is interesting is that this does not seem to be a problem. Many mainline churches and its clergy also have a broad view of soteriology. Many churches no longer preach and teach the proverbial “hellfire and brimstone” teaching. However, within a broad view of soteriology is a problem with evangelism. How does a church that doesn’t exactly believe that people are saved from the pits of hell evangelize someone? Where is the good news? What is the good news? Unfortunately, many people within the mainline church do not know the answer to those questions and the church declines because no one hears the gospel anymore. Therefore, this essay will address three central areas of decline within the mainline liberal churches. The decline is based on it losing its focus, shifting toward internal infrastructure; ignoring the signs of decline; and losing its gospel. (Rainer, 2014)

## Changing the influence

The search terms that will be utilized to help change the mainline church’s influence are as follows:

* Mainline infrastructure
* Mainline decline
* Mainline growth
* Mainline problems
* Ignoring signs
* Churches living in denial
* Losing people
* Unbinding the gospel
* The new gospel
* Universalism
* Too late for mainline churches

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