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Introduction to World Religions

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Christianity: An Outdated Past

Due to an outdated ideology, the popularity of Christianity as a whole is steadily declining as society becomes more accepting of previously radical ideas. Over the past few decades, church attendance, membership and support have steadily decreased. Churches that have garnered support for thousands of years are losing significant membership numbers and falling backwards into a downward spiral. Scholars have long studied religious membership trends and their connection to modern society. The issue ex-members have with the current Church, is its inability to stay up to speed on social opinions that are viewed differently today than they were fifty years ago. Issues such as homosexuality in the Church, the role of women, religions place in school, interfaith marriages, abortion and outdated practices have plagued the church since society's opinion began to evolve, and the Church refused to budge on its own positions.

In the year 2015, the term "gay" is considered offensive. The proper term is said to be "homosexual," and anyone who stoops even lower than the derogatory term "gay," can be expected to be bombarded with dirty looks and snarky comments by social justice warriors who believe they will call out everyone who is unaccepting of homosexuals - one person at a time. The same is happening to the Church. Many denominations of the Christian Church, even in 2015, are not accepting of people that are not of heterosexual origin. This lack of acceptance is

driving members away, as people become more accepting of the LGBTQ lifestyle. Many Churches are standing by the idea that homosexual practice is forbidden and is considered a sin by both the Old, and the New Testaments (Howard 5). Different denominations have different policies, some more extreme than others. Catholics condemn homosexuality, however, other groups such as Southern Baptist go as far to believe that the individual is just confused and can be cured through “reparative therapy” (Paul XI). While different denominations have views of varying acceptance, the overall majority believe homosexuality is a sin, and their lack of acceptance is leading to their loss of members.

In addition to homosexual and LGBTQ involvement in the Church, another group that is routinely seen as inferior, and prohibited from holding certain elevated positions in the Church is women. Women have historically played a significant role in the Bible, however, they continue to be prohibited from playing a significant role in most churches. Since the 1900’s, the role of women in society has grown and developed significantly. Women fought for and received the right to vote, took over men’s jobs during the Second World War, and have distanced themselves from the idea that the woman’s sole role is to be a housewife and attend to the children. Women now hold prominent positions in government, and have taken the reins to lead some Fortune 500 companies. Woman’s acceptance of these new jobs, responsibilities and rights shows society’s changing perspective and opinion toward them. The Church, however, has not followed suit. Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox, who make up nearly eighty-five percent of Christians, do not allow women equal rights or opportunities to be eligible for ordination (Fetcher 90). The Catholic Church excludes women from holding a position such as deacon, priest, or bishop; all three orders of the ministry. Some denominations are known to be even more extreme. The Amish Church has long been criticized for their view on a woman’s place. With feminism

gathering major strength in recent years, it is only going to get worse. “Feminist and Ex-Amish have portrayed Amish wives as second class citizens who are dominated by their husbands” (Charles & McConnell 90). When people in your congregation look at women as inferior, it pushes away prospective members and causes current members to switch to a more accepting religion. The Church expects women to be equal members of the congregation, donate at equal levels to the Church as their male counterparts, and worship the same God, however, all hell breaks loose if they want to devote their life to it. Public opinion has greatly changed over the last several hundred years. Women are no longer viewed as second-rate members of society. Until the Church accepts that idea and affords them the same rights as men, they can expect women to change to a faith that does.

Religion in school has also led to the downfall in support for the Church. In 1962, school-wide prayer was abolished from the public school system following the monumental Supreme Court case, *Engle v. Vitale* (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts). This case not only removed religion from the school setting, but demonstrated that the public no longer thought it was a necessary aspect of everyday life. In addition to the removal of prayer in public schools, the religious creation story of Adam and Eve was no longer taught in public schools. This story has since been replaced with the more socially-accepted theory of evolution. The removal of the story of Adam and Eve teaches children of Christian faith something different in school as opposed to what they learn in church; which leads some to question their faith and distance themselves completely from the church. Private Schools still legally teach religion and the creation story of Adam and Eve, however, their lack of acceptance toward the scientific theory of evolution has some parents removing their children from private schools and opting for public school. Once in public school, these children are subject to no exposure to religion during

their school day, which may lead them to distance themselves from their faith. Aside from religious teachings, many religious advocates have fought for the removal of certain “objectional” books from school libraries. 484 books have been proposed to be removed from school libraries by religious organizations due to their “humanistic and antireligious” nature and nearly fifty percent of the proposals have been successful (June 1964). While the devote Christians may support this, many Christian parents still feel that the Church’s position is wrong and their children should be exposed to all books of scholarly nature. The removal of religion from public school together with the transfer of children from private schools into the public school system opens the door for the youth of today to make their own religious decisions in a vacuum, many of which lead to their separation from the Church.

In the present day, the number of interfaith marriages continues to grow as people no longer view religion as a major factor when picking a soul mate. In 1988, fifteen percent of marriages were considered interfaith, that number jumped to twenty-five percent in 2006. This upward trend of interfaith marriages demonstrates that religious preference is no longer a big deal to prospective couples. In the Catholic Church, which makes up over fifty percent of Christians, interfaith marriages are allowed, but only after a request for dispensation has been made to a priest with a “just and weighty reason” and both parties sign an agreement in writing to essentially say that the non-Catholic will not interfere with the Catholic’s beliefs and that any children will be raised in the Catholic faith. Several other denominations have similar policies as a whole, some being more restrictive, and others more lenient. Today, people often meet with no idea what the other person’s ideological beliefs are. This perspective couple may persist for several dates as they develop feelings and even fall in love - long before the topic of religion is brought up. By the Church telling a couple that has fallen in love that their marriage will not be

viewed as legitimate, because one partner is of a different faith, alienates members. Society has shown through gathered data that religion is no longer a major factor when finding a soul mate, and it is time that the Church does the same.

The fact that many practices and policies of the church are outdated and too difficult to comply with leads members to disassociate themselves from the church. Society has changed many of its day-to-day activities over the past hundred years leading to an increased rejection of religious ideas and practices. In the Catholic Church, members are asked to refrain from eating meat on Friday for the duration of Lent. This practice is often not followed simply because society is much busier now than it previously was. Sixty years ago, when meals were eaten at home because there was more downtime, this was a much easier task. People today are constantly in a rush, and what we eat often comes down to what is on the menu at the next drive through, and if that is against the fast, so be it. In addition to difficult fasts, practices such as waiting till marriage for sex are becoming increasingly difficult. Dating has been replaced by apps like “Tinder” by today’s generation, and the dating culture as a whole has been taken over by a hook-up culture. When the youth are hanging out with different members of the opposite sex nightly, as opposed to dating the same person for years, it becomes incredibly difficult to keep holding the sexual desire back; especially if the other person does not have the same views on abstinence as you. Other religions such as the Amish, refrain from using modern items such as electricity, motors, telephones and even rubber tires in some churches (Charles & McConnell 48). Business in 2015 is frequently done on an international level. It is difficult to stay afloat when your customer base is limited to the distance you can travel by a horse. In addition to struggling to provide, the Amish religion loses a significant amount of their youth following Rumspringa. Rumspringa is when the Amish youth are allowed to venture into the developed

world and experience it for themselves, with the idea it will confirm their religious beliefs upon seeing the corruption of society. This is a good plan in theory, however, many children leave the Amish household only to realize that they are living an outdated lifestyle and never return. Practices such as fasting, waiting till marriage, and living an outdated lifestyle, make it difficult for the Church to retain members as society keeps evolving.

While many churches are constantly losing members due to outdated ideas, some Churches are evolving and seeing positive results. Churches such as the Progressive Methodist Church, while losing members, are losing them at a less alarming rate, most likely because of their more progressive views and ability to adapt. The Progressive Methodist Church for example accepts remarriage, cremation, interfaith marriage, ordaining women and even homosexuals (The Connection Table). The fact that the Progressive Methodist Church is losing members at a less rapid rate shows the connection between society's more progressive ideas and the Church not budging on theirs. Until the Church decides to accept the beliefs many people share in the twenty-first century, they can expect to keep losing members at an alarming rate.

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