

# EKKLESIA

REDISCOVERING  
GOD'S INSTRUMENT  
FOR GLOBAL  
TRANSFORMATION

DR. ED  
SILVOSO



**Chosen**

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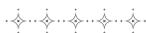
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To Ray Pinson, an anointed marketplace minister, dear friend and spiritual son who has faithfully and generously served as chairman of our board for over two decades. And to Ruth, the love of my life, who lovingly and patiently sat by me while I wrote, praying, advising and encouraging me.



This book is also dedicated to pastors and marketplace ministers, who together make up the enterprise that Jesus labeled “the Ekklesia.” It is my fervent prayer and intense desire that the scriptural truths and inspiring prototypes presented in this book will strengthen their hands and rekindle their passion to see people and nations transformed *in this generation*.

# Contents

- Gratitude 11
- Introduction: *Questions That Brought This Book into Being* 13
1. Church: A Radical Proposition 19  
*From “Something Wrong” to “Something More”*
  2. Transformation Is a Journey 29  
*From Dawn to Full Day*
  3. A Fuller Understanding of the Gates of Hades 40  
*From Enslaving Ignorance to Liberating Understanding*
  4. A Fuller Understanding of the Gospel 51  
*From the Law and the Prophets to the Gospel of the Kingdom*
  5. A Fuller Understanding of Proclamation 58  
*From Words to Deeds*
  6. A Fuller Understanding of the Cross 68  
*From an Icon of Death to a Fountain of Life*
  7. A Fuller Understanding of the Great Commission 78  
*From Saving Souls to Discipling Nations*
  8. A Fuller Understanding of Cooperation with God 86  
*From Contemplation to Partnership*

9. A Fuller Understanding of New Testament Baptisms 105  
*From Religious Ceremonies to Power Encounters*
10. A New Understanding of Baptizing Nations 123  
*From Dipping to Dripping*
11. A Fuller Understanding of *How* to Baptize a Nation 130  
*From the Sacrament to Societal Transformation*
12. A Fuller Understanding of the Ekklesia’s Social Agenda 139  
*From the Pew to the City Square*
13. A Fuller Understanding of the Incarnation 167  
*From Ethereal to Entrepreneurial*
14. A Fuller Understanding of What God Loves the Most 180  
*From “Out-reach” to “In-reach”*
15. A Fuller Understanding of Spiritual Authority 189  
*From Commiserating in Private to Legislating in Public*
16. A Fuller Understanding of the Ekklesia’s Operational  
Methodology 207  
*From the Swamp to the River*
17. The Way Forward 233  
*From Doing Church to Being the Ekklesia*
- Notes 263

# Gratitude

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# Introduction

## *Questions That Brought This Book into Being*

If the Church is so important, why did Jesus mention it only twice in the gospels?

And why is there neither a command nor instructions in the Bible on how to plant one?

These are intriguing questions that beg new questions, such as how was the New Testament Church able not just to survive, but also to radically transform the hostile social and political environs into which it was born? How did it set in motion a process that impacted nations in a relatively short time, *without buildings, professional clergy, religious freedom or social status*?

And why, in comparison, does it appear that the Church's influence on social matters today is progressively diminishing? How can this be the case if Jesus assured His followers of two dynamic truths: that when He is lifted up, all men will be drawn to Him, and that we will do greater works than He did? Could it be that in our generation the fullness of the *real* Jesus has yet to be discovered, as well as the actual depth of our call as ministers?

Why are we not experiencing the evangelistic growth reported in the gospels, where everybody was “forcing his way” into the Kingdom

(Luke 16:16)? Could it be that instead of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, we are preaching the Law and the Prophets?

Why does there seem to be a major disconnect between what we read in the book of Acts and what we see nowadays? Why don't we see God performing extraordinary miracles, as He did through the hands of Paul while Paul was manufacturing tents—miracles that resulted in everybody who lived in Asia hearing the word of the Lord (see Acts 19:10)? That was over a million people evangelized by a movement anchored in a tent-making shop!

How was it that Paul planted churches with such capable *local* leadership that their rapid expansion soon left him with no more room to minister between Jerusalem and modern-day Croatia—all of Asia Minor? (see Romans 15:19).

Why is it that when Jesus comes to judge the nations, those who thought they were “in” will end up “out,” and vice versa?

More intriguingly, why were those who appealed Jesus' decision on the basis that they had cast out demons, prophesied and performed miracles told, “Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23)?

Does that mean that miracles, prophecies and deliverance are wrong? Since it is impossible to contemplate such a possibility because the New Testament's narrative testifies to the validity of those ministries, how do we reconcile that with what we do in church today? And what about all the other discrepancies we see between the New Testament Church and the Church of today?

Could it be that we have confined to four walls once a week what is designed to be a 24/7 people movement out in the marketplace, transforming our cities and nations? And could it be that we have restricted ministry to professionally trained specialists, instead of ministry being the work of all the saints?

The Church Jesus launched is meant to be expansive, like salt, water, light or leaven—metaphors He used to describe the Kingdom of God—none of which is effective if contained or controlled. Salt left in a shaker is useless. Stale water turns putrid. Light that is blocked results in darkness. Leaven in a container remains inert.

Jesus was very clear when He introduced the Church. He stated unequivocally that the Gates of Hades would not prevail against it. There is no question that those Gates are deeply entrenched in our cities and nations—where we work, live, go to school. *But so is the Church!* In fact, the Church is the only institution on earth that has a branch in every city and a representative in every neighborhood. So why is there an impression that it is losing?

The issue is not so much what we are doing wrong, but rather what is missing that is keeping Jesus' stated objectives from materializing? As we know, the enemy of the "best" is not so much the "worst," which is usually very evident to us. Rather, the enemy is the "good," because by being so satisfying, it deprives us of hunger for the "much more" that in this case God has in store.

If that is the case, what is missing and how can we find it?

The Ekklesia, Jesus' Church, was never meant to resemble a prisoner-of-war camp waiting to be liberated. On the contrary! God has a hope and a future for each one of its members. His plans are for good and not for evil. Furthermore, the Bible states with no ambiguity whatsoever that the saints, the Church, will overcome the devil and his demons here on earth (see Revelation 12:11). Not to believe this means not to preach it, and not to preach it means to resign ourselves to mere subsistence. This would not only be tragic, but would constitute a dereliction of spiritual duty.

The Ekklesia that Jesus is building is equipped (as the old hymn states) with a story to tell, not just to individuals but also to the nations, that will turn their hearts to the Lord. And more than that, the Ekklesia is specifically empowered to disciple and to transform them. In the worldwide movement Transform Our World that I had the privilege of founding with my wife, Ruth, we have been blessed with some of the most promising prototypes of societal transformation. Businesses, schools and governments, injected with the leaven of the Kingdom of God, are experiencing what until now was conceived as possible only inside the four walls of the Church. These models look like a church, walk like a church and do the things that a church does, *but in the marketplace*. Could it be that they are churches indeed?

These challenging questions, combined with these and other extraordinary experiences that I will expand on later, have led me into the most stimulating Bible research I have ever been on: a comparative survey of scriptural phenomena and contemporary examples to rediscover the Church as Jesus *really* designed it to be. This book is the result.

I offer answers here not as the final word—since so much is still in process—but as field notes and observations submitted with a humility forced on me by the magnitude of the task and the awareness of my own limitations. This is why I have titled chapters dealing with key doctrinal issues as “A *Fuller* Understanding of . . .”

What I share in the following pages is meant to be revolutionary, but not rebellious. When I address the shortcomings of the modern-day Church, I do so with the utmost respect for its leaders and members. I also do it with the unshakable conviction that Jesus is still building His Church, because I know that “He who began a good work in you [us] will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

To that effect, I aspire to see replicated today the metrics that characterized the Ekklesia (Church) in the book of Acts (see Acts 2:41–47; 5:12): (1) members being devoted to their leaders’ teaching; (2) individual and corporate prosperity to provide for every need inside and outside their circles; (3) daily additions (numerical growth) happening; (4) ongoing and expanding favor with outsiders, especially those in authority in their city; and (5) signs and wonders being performed at the modern equivalent of Solomon’s Portico—that is, in the public arena.

The biblical principles, validating testimonies and case studies in this book will inspire you and lead you to a victorious *lifestyle* in your own journey, in your family and in your sphere of influence. This progression will enrich you with faith to believe that not just individuals, but also nations will be saved (see Revelation 7:9; 21:24–27). And you will enter into a fascinating partnership with God to take His transforming power and presence everywhere, every day of your life.

For this to happen in a sustainable and expandable way, I have striven to offer a biblical rationale, validated by contemporary examples, so that pastors can find their Aquilas and Priscillas, and marketplace ministers

can find their Pauls. Once this happens, the former can serve as equippers “a la Ephesians 4” for the latter to take the presence of God, already resident in them, to the heart of the city—the marketplace—24/7.

Turn the page and join me on this journey. You will never be the same, but better yet, the world will never be the same!



# 1

## Church: A Radical Proposition

*From “Something Wrong” to “Something More”*

Jesus did not state, “I will build My Temple” or “I will build My synagogue,” the two most prominent Jewish religious institutions at the time. Instead, He chose a secular entity first developed by the Greeks when He said, “I will build My Ekklesia.” Why? The answer is fascinating, challenging and empowering.

Nowadays, when we hear the word *church*, we usually picture a solemn building with a cross on top, a pulpit, clergy, a choir, a worship leader and members.

I do not put such notions down, because they reflect cherished expressions of how and where most Christians teach or practice their faith today. During the days when Jesus walked this earth, however, *Ekklesia*—the Greek word translated into English as “church”—*was not religious in nature or connotation at all*. In fact, by the time He first uttered the word in the gospel of Matthew, it had been in use for centuries in both the Greek and Roman empires to refer to a secular institution operating in the marketplace in a governmental capacity.

When Jesus chose the word *Ekklesia* to introduce His redemptive agency, no one among His disciples would have conceived it as redeemable—as we will see later—since the existing *ekklesia* embodied a foreign stronghold. (Note that when I use the term *ekklesia* with a lowercase *e*, it refers to the secular institution. When I capitalize the term, I am referring to Jesus’ *Ekklesia* of Matthew 16:18.) Granted, the term *Ekklesia* is present in the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament to describe religious assemblies, but Jesus’ usage was related to the secular Greek version. So, how did this secular institution that Jesus was referencing evolve into the religious one we are so familiar with today? And more important yet, once the *Ekklesia* became Jesus’ redemptive agency, how did it mutate from the pivotal, pace-setting role in society that we read about in the Scriptures into its seemingly less relevant and more ethereal role of today?

### A Different Kind of Church

The New Testament examples of church are vastly different from the contemporary notion that it is a place where members go, usually once a week. Back then, church always referred to *people*, never to *buildings*, and it was made up of individuals who operated 24/7 “from house to house” all over town as a transforming organism, not as a static institution (Acts 2:46; 5:42). Its objective was the transformation of people *and of society*, rather than acting as a transfer station for saved souls bound for heaven.

In fact, the New Testament Church was so vibrant and expansive that it overcame the powerful political and religious establishments bent on stamping it out since its very inception. Its vitality is attested to by the fact that in a matter of weeks it filled Jerusalem—the city that crucified its founder—with its doctrine (see Acts 5:28), leading many thousands in just a few days to join its ranks by publicly confessing that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

Its capacity for growth was so dynamic that two years after Paul planted the *Ekklesia* in Ephesus, “all who lived in [the Roman province of] Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10), no small accomplishment since the population of that region exceeded a million people.

And not long afterward, Paul was able to state with certitude that “from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel” (Romans 15:19). That was a surface area of around 300,000 square miles—leading Paul to set his evangelistic eyes on Spain, a place that stood some 3,600 miles by land from Jerusalem, the birthplace of Christianity (see verses 18–24).

What makes this stunningly remarkable is that Jesus’ Ekklesia accomplished all of this without military or governmental support. It was instead a massive *people movement* that swept region after region victoriously as the counterculture to the existing status quo.

The magnitude of the Church’s expansion in such a relatively short time is hard to imagine, much less conceive as the norm in our contemporary environs, since it was accomplished without seminaries, campuses, full-time staff or professional ministers. Furthermore, with the exception of some epistles that circulated regionally, it did not have the New Testament epistles and had only occasional access to Old Testament writings. Yet it was so healthy and powerful that rather than being an item on someone else’s agenda, the Ekklesia was the agenda setter!

### A Much-Needed Reality Check

These observations beg additional questions: Where is the influence of the Church today in the midst of the social, economic, political and moral upheaval that is wreaking havoc in the world? And how is it doing relative to the victorious climax that Revelation 21:24–27 describes, where, led by their rulers, a procession of *saved nations*—not just saved people—will bring their honor and glory as a wedding present to Jesus? In light of all this, I believe it is both *fair and necessary* to admit that there is something missing that we have not tapped into yet. If so, what is it?

I don’t despise, nor is it my intention to put down, the Church as we know it today. Ministers are among the most giving and sacrificial people on earth, folks whose lives are dedicated to helping others week after week. I am unconditionally committed to the Church as it is, both as a faithful member and a leader. This is why no one can join our ministry team unless they are full-fledged members of a local church.

I will never demean or disqualify the Church, but I would rather constructively point out that to fulfill the mission that Jesus assigned it, it



*There is something  
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not tapped into yet.*

*If so, what is it?*



must recover what worked so well back then and reinject what is missing into its mainstream.

This is why, instead of the word *Church*, with its rich religious and traditional connotations, I have chosen the one used in the original manuscripts—*Ekklesia*—for this quest to rediscover the meaning and function of the entity

that Jesus stated will both prevail against the Gates of Hades and cause not just individuals but also *nations* and their *rulers* to be saved. Furthermore, instead of spelling it *ecclesia*, I have deliberately used *Ekklesia* because most readers are bound to associate the former spelling with *ecclesiastical*, which is used to describe traditional religious activities.

## Jesus' Intriguing Silence about the Church

One would assume that during His years of public ministry, Jesus must have spent considerable time teaching about the Church, specifically about its nature and also how to plant and grow one. Get ready to be surprised, because as far as the four gospels are concerned, Jesus used the word translated “church” in our Bibles *only three times* (see Matthew 16:18; 18:17). That is the extent of His *recorded* teaching on the subject in the gospels.

Most Christian leaders, myself included, acknowledge the key role church planting has in fulfilling the Great Commission. It is perplexing that in the Scriptures, however, there is neither a command nor instructions on how to plant a church. This does not signify that churches were not planted, because in New Testament times they were established all over the interconnected world. Nor could it mean that the Church is not essential, because Paul described it as “the household of God . . . the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Furthermore, after planting quite a few churches, he taught extensively on how to govern them. Nevertheless, the questions remain, why did Jesus speak so little

about the Church, and why did neither He nor His apostles give *specific* instructions on how to plant a church?

The manner in which church elders were chosen and appointed in biblical times challenges us even further. Today, we consider epistles like those written to the Philippians and Thessalonians prime timber with which to build the theological furniture of the Church. But Paul, who planted those churches, spent less than a week in Philippi and not quite three weeks in Thessalonica. Yet by the time he left town, he had established dynamic churches in both cities, *with capable local leadership in place*.

Nowadays, we are so meticulous about planting a church, and even more so about appointing elders, that it usually takes years. I have no objection to being thorough about this, since in a passage dealing with the government of the Church Paul admonished us, “Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily” (1 Timothy 5:22). But the fact remains that not only was the premier New Testament church planter able to do it, complete with competent leadership, in a much shorter time than it takes us today, but also that the congregations under these local leaders’ oversight became models for us to emulate.

This thought-provoking contrast between what Paul did so well and what we try to emulate with much less success triggers another challenging question: What kind of churches did Paul plant? For this I found the answer in the Church’s *secular roots*, which opened the door to see, in an unanticipated way, what Jesus had in mind when He introduced the Ekklesia. In fact, I was surprised to discover that His intention all along was to co-opt an existing secular concept and impregnate it with His Kingdom DNA.

Understanding the roots and function of the secular ekklesia—which predated Jesus’ use of the term—is crucial for us to rediscover the Church as it was really meant to be.



*When Jesus introduced the Ekklesia, His intention all along was to co-opt an existing secular concept and impregnate it with His Kingdom DNA.*



## The Genesis of the Ekklesia

At the time of Jesus' birth and all through His life on earth, there were three main institutions in Israel: the Temple, the synagogue and the ekklesia. It is usually assumed that all three were religious bodies, but only the Temple and the synagogue fit that description. The ekklesia was not religious at all, since it was first developed as a ruling assembly of citizens in the Grecian democracy to govern its city-states. It consisted of men eighteen years or older who had done two years of military service; in essence, people substantially committed to their city-state.

In a broader sense, ekklesia also came to mean an assembly of citizens duly convened. When the more hierarchical Romans replaced the Greeks in the imperial scene, the Romans assimilated the concept.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the general public in Jesus' day understood ekklesia to mean both the secular institution and the governmental system it represented.

We find an example of the Hellenistic ekklesia in the book of Acts, when Paul's associates Gaius and Aristarchus were dragged to the theater in Ephesus (a Roman colony) in response to a complaint brought by the local union of silversmiths. The word that is translated *assembly* in this instance is the same one rendered *church* elsewhere in the New Testament (see Acts 19:32, 39). Here ekklesia refers to the crowd twice, and a third time to the court itself, showing that the term was employed to describe a body of people assembled to conduct governmental business. In fact, when the town clerk "dismissed the assembly [ekklesia]" amidst warnings of illegality (Acts 19:41), the same noun translated *assembly* in that verse is translated *church* 112 times elsewhere in the New Testament. This assembly model is precisely the one that Jesus chose to emulate conceptually, as we will see in greater detail later.<sup>2</sup>

It is most revealing that Jesus did not say, "I will build My Temple" or "I will build My synagogue"—the two premier Jewish religious institutions. If He were thinking along those lines, He could have said, "I will restore and even surpass the former glory of the Temple so that heads of state will journey to Jerusalem, as the Queen of Sheba did, until every world ruler has bent his or her knee before the God worshiped here." He could have also said, "I will build My own worldwide



though geography separated them from the capital of the empire and the emperor, their coming together as fellow citizens automatically brought the power and presence of Rome into their midst. This was indeed the Roman ekklesia in a microcosm.<sup>3</sup>

We see an expression of this in Acts 16, when the Roman magistrates panicked at the realization that they had beaten and thrown in prison a fellow citizen (Paul) without the due process accorded to Romans. Later on, another centurion and his commander exhibited similar concerns after finding out that Paul, who they were about to punish, was also a Roman citizen (see Acts 22:24–29). Evidently, when two or more Roman citizens connected, the laws (and protection) of the emperor were in their midst.

This is relevant to our discussion because in Matthew 18, after describing the authority entrusted to His deputies as the Ekklesia to bind and release for the will of God to be done on earth, Jesus stated that this was possible because “where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (verse 20). That is exactly what the *conventus* did



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for the emperor. Jesus made His authority available to His Ekklesia in the same manner, but in a much greater dimension when He stipulated that “whatever you bind *on earth* shall have been bound *in heaven*; and whatever you loose *on earth* shall have been loosed *in heaven*” (Matthew 18:18, emphasis added).

By selecting the ekklesia model over the Temple or the synagogue, Jesus chose an agency better suited to succeed everywhere—not just in Israel, where He ministered extensively, but also in the pagan societies where He would send His disciples. His ultimate objective was not to reproduce or expand religious institutions. It was to see nations disciplined by inserting the leaven of His Kingdom into their social fiber through His Ekklesia.

Once we understand that Jesus chose a concept with which His disciples and their contemporaries were already familiar in the secular arena, we can then see why He taught so few times about it: There was no need to explain

what everybody already knew. It was unnecessary to teach the obvious. To the people in the Roman Empire, including Israel, the *ekklesia* was as familiar a concept as the state assembly is to those living in a democracy, or the management team is to the employees in a corporation. There was no need for Jesus, or for the New Testament writers later on, to describe for their audiences what was already known as a decision-making, society-impacting people institution.

On the other hand, it *was* essential for Jesus to teach extensively about the Kingdom of God, or its equivalent, the Kingdom of heaven, as the new factor in the equation—so much so that He made reference to the Kingdom over a hundred times.

### Turning Tables into Pulpits

The super-rapid growth of the *Ekklesia* in the New Testament was possible because Jesus made it ride on social tracks *already in existence*—namely, meals. This is present in the first description of the *assembly* (*Ekklesia*) of His followers right after Pentecost, where they were seen “*continually* devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread [eating] and to prayer” (Acts 2:42, emphasis added). This was not a one-time or sporadic occurrence, since one of the most common examples of a church meeting in the New Testament is believers partaking of food, to which the addition of the doctrine of the apostles—to ascertain and to obey the will of God—upgraded it from a mere meal into an assembly. Those mealtimes constituted an inclusive forum (unlike the Temple or the synagogue), thus inserting the *Ekklesia* into everyday secular life instead of isolating it from it.

By making the *Ekklesia* run on existing social tracks (mealtimes), Jesus turned tables into pulpits and homes into assembly halls into which strangers were welcome, rendering them prime candidates for evangelism. No wonder His disciples’ archenemies accused them, just a few weeks after Pentecost, of having “filled Jerusalem with your doctrine” (Acts 5:28 NKJV). This was so, *not* because all of Jerusalem was trying to attend a church service, but because the *Ekklesia* had thoroughly permeated the city, so much so that people lined up their sick on sidewalks, awaiting

the shadow of Peter to heal them, something that turned Jerusalem into a citywide campus for the Ekklesia (see Acts 5:15–16).

This turned out to be the case—first, because Jesus did not confine the gathering of His followers to buildings or subject them to a rigid schedule of centralized meetings. Instead, it was people who constituted His Ekklesia (wherever and whenever as few as two or three gathered, with His manifest presence in their midst). And second, because Jesus' Ekklesia was not meant to be a sterile, sanitized holding tank into which His disciples were to store in isolation converts fished out of a turbulent and doomed sea, to await the arrival of a refrigerator ship for transfer to a heavenly port for final processing. Instead, His Ekklesia, whether in the embryonic expression of the *conventus* or in a more expansive version, was designed as the vehicle to inject the leaven of the Kingdom of God into the dough of society so that first people, and then cities and eventually nations, would be discipled (see Acts 1:8; 5:28; 19:10; Romans 15:22–24; Revelation 21:24–25).



*Jesus designed His Ekklesia to make its presence, power and culture known, but with a revolutionary caveat that gave it the upper hand.*



In the same manner that Rome made its presence, power and culture felt in the far reaches of its empire, Jesus designed His Ekklesia to make its presence, power and culture known, but with a revolutionary caveat that gave it the upper hand: It would have the authority to legislate in both the visible and invisible realms so that the Gates of Hades could not prevail in either realm.

At the heart of every cry for revival today, there is always a deep longing to find the way to the majestic, all-powerful Ekklesia that Jesus launched, free from any form of restraint or containment and overflowing with power. This is the journey we are on. Allow me to share with you next where we are now and how we got this far.