



The Archbishop of Canterbury has praised a new book on theology and church growth for asserting that Jesus Christ alone is the reason for growing churches.

In a foreword to 'Towards a Theology of Church Growth', Archbishop Justin Welby says church growth is not about "survival" but about Christians imitating God by reaching out to others and drawing them into relationship with Christ.

He also suggests the modern church growth movement is moving into a "second phrase" that doesn't focus primarily on formulae and techniques but on "the nature of God himself".

Edited by David Goodhew and including contributions from a wide range of theologians, the book explores the theological foundations of church growth.

In his foreword the Archbishop writes: "David Goodhew and those who have contributed to this excellent book have started, correctly, with the understanding that any commitment to church growth must be entirely divorced from questions about the survival of the Church."

He praises the book's long-term perspective on church history, which he says "demythologises any aspect of a "golden age" in Christendom."

"Instead, the reader is drawn back to the face of Christ, who alone is the reason for growing churches. Church growth begins with the fact that God reaches out to us in Jesus Christ. Having found us and captured our horizons, Jesus liberates us into a new world in which we are irresistibly drawn to imitate that reaching out."

The Archbishop also suggests that we are now in the "second phrase" of the current church growth movement.

"Twenty to thirty years ago when the notion was coined afresh in the modern era, it focused very much on matters of technique. To this day we are too easily tempted to follow some formulae which promise that our church will grow – rather than flying in the passion of love for Christ with every sinew of our being, and noting how the slipstream draws others into relationship with him and with all who belong to him."

The book demonstrates the importance of this second phase, he adds, which "focuses on the nature of God himself. Learning from its previous weaknesses, it recognises how growth is as fundamental as worship to the health of every tradition of the Church."

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**Source URL:** <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/archbishop-praises-new-book-theology-and-church-growth>