

## Quality characteristic 3: Passionate spirituality

*"In churches which tend towards legalism, spiritual passion is usually below average."*

Our research indicated clearly that church development is dependent neither on spiritual persuasions (such as charismatic or noncharismatic) nor on specific spiritual practices (such as liturgical prayers or "spiritual warfare" etc.) which are cited by some groups as the cause of church growth within their ranks. The point separating growing and non-growing churches, those which are qualitatively above or below average, is a different one, namely: "Are the Christians in this church 'on fire?' Do they live committed lives and practice their faith with joy and enthusiasm?" Since there are significant differences in this area between growing and declining churches (of various "spiritual cultures"), we called this quality characteristic "passionate spirituality."

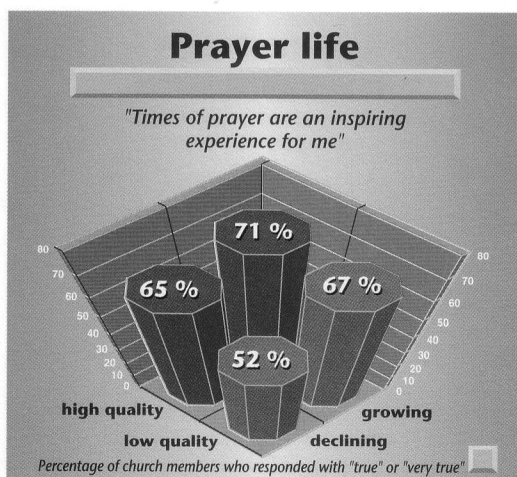
The concept of spiritual passion and the widespread notion of the walk of faith as "performing one's duty" seem to be mutually exclusive. We noticed that in churches which tend towards "legalism" (where being a Christian means having the right doctrine, moral code, church membership, etc.), spiritual passion is usually below average.

### Quality instead of quantity

The nature of this quality characteristic becomes evident by examining the prayer life of the Christians surveyed. While the amount of time (quantity) a Christian spends in prayer plays only

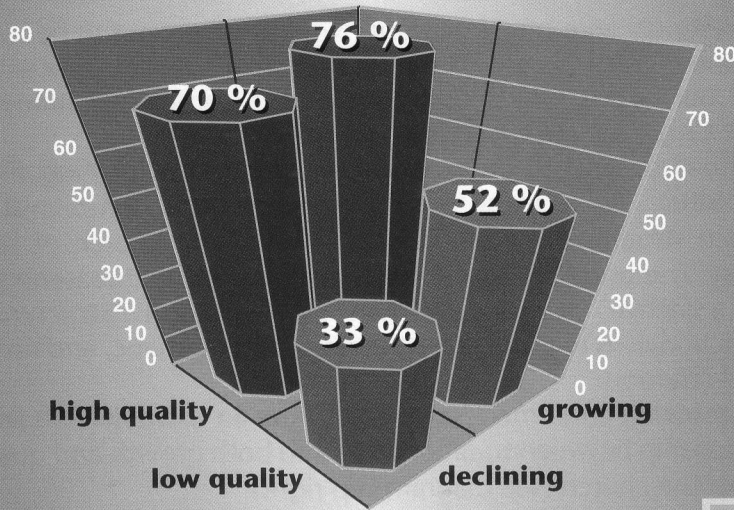
a minor role with regard to the quality and growth of a church, whether prayer is viewed as an "inspiring experience" or not has a significant relationship to the quality and quantity of the church (diagram left). Similar results were found with respect to personal use of the Bible and other factors affecting personal spirituality.

This quality characteristic has been widely criticized in the past: "Passion alone is no reflection of one's loyalty to the truth." Even sects, so the argument goes, are characterized by great enthusiasm. This observation is true, of course. I have not yet



# Enthusiasm

*"I am enthusiastic about my church"*



Percentage of church members who responded with "true" or "very true"

## Part 1: 8 quality characteristics

One of thirteen variables used in measuring the quality index for "passionate spirituality": Enthusiasm for the faith measured in churches with a high quality index nearly always correlates with enthusiasm for one's congregation.

researched the causes for growth among sects, but I suspect that their enthusiasm is likely a main reason for the impressive growth that some of these groups experience. This in no way validates the theological truth of their claims. Their doctrine remains theologically false, despite their enthusiasm and "successful" numerical growth.

On the other hand, "pure doctrine" alone, as countless examples illustrate, does not induce growth. A church, regardless of how orthodox its dogma and view of Scripture, can hardly expect to experience growth, as long as its members do not learn to live their faith with contagious enthusiasm and to share it with others.

Wherever a "defense of orthodoxy" replaces the expression of a passionate faith in Christ, a false paradigm is at work. On such ideological ground, rigid fanaticism, but no truly liberated passion, will flourish. The quality characteristic "passionate spirituality" demonstrates empirically the theological core of the matter in church growth: the life of faith as a genuine *relationship* with Jesus Christ.

## Orthodoxy and passion