



John Drane

Faith in a changing culture - creating churches for the next century

Marshall Pickering 1994 (repr of *Evangelism for a new age*, 1994)

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Good diagnosis of problem, no suggestions for solution; quite a lot of repetition.

Preface

Focus on overall approach to evangelism which can be transferred between cultures; about the attitudes of NT. Not prescriptive; dangers of trying to transplant blueprint from one church to another. [Weakness all the same; no use being right, which he mostly is, without a way forward]

1. Faith, culture and the 21st century

Opportunity of the millennium; people hoping for new beginning. *There is a growing feeling that things are slipping away, the Western world is in a crisis and the condition is probably terminal. The philosophies that have guided and controlled our thinking for the last 500 years have run their course.*

Enlightenment, etc. *It is not just that the Enlightenment vision has become dimmed, but that the foundational concepts on which the Enlightenment was based are themselves part of the problem.* Western culture founded on number of philosophical notions:

- rationalism: only things worth knowing are things you can think about; leaves people emotionally powerless
- materialism: only things worth thinking about are those you can see and touch; cuts us adrift from spiritual moorings
- reductionism: you understand things by taking them to pieces; leads to personal alienation and destruction of environment

No wonder our culture is in terminal crisis; the vision that inspired the past can never provide answers for the future, because it is itself part of the problem.

People want more spirituality and less materialism. But they don't expect to find it in the church, because the church is part of the institutionalized authority structure that helped create the mess in the first place. Insistent and growing belief that Christianity is irrelevant. Church has allowed itself to be taken over by secular values since Enlightenment, so will be seen as part of the problem and not as part of the solution. Christianity seen as part of the old order, to be discarded in favour of something new. So hospitals are looking for ways of including 'spirituality' in the healing process, but whatever that is (and they aren't sure), it certainly has nothing to do with hospital chaplains and organised religion..

Phenomenal growth in alternative spiritualities. Yet we ignore this massive spiritual search, label it New Age and wait for it to disappear. 20 years ago, a rationalist-materialist world view still dominated the lives of most people, and precluded possibility of belief in spiritual dimension; today alternative practitioners are everywhere.

Still more Christians in world than any other faith - 2b. Yet in Europe 7500 people leave the church every day. Centre of gravity now in the two thirds world. Obstacle of materialism in W; how to reach people who feel no need for God.

Story of river drying up, but to change course. That happening now. No use us sitting by the dry river bed waiting for the water to come back; it won't. Need to step out and discover where Spirit moving in today's world. To move away might mean dismantling our institutions or sacrificing sacred cows; but might mean rediscovery of gospel.

2. Where do we go from here?

Meeting with people in Dunblane. Church loves words, doctrines, rational arguments, statements about faith; but these are ceasing to be the tools of the people - symbols, emotions, pragmatic reality. *Could it be that we Christians are somehow imprisoned in a kind of cognitive captivity, which is inhibiting our mission?* We can't communicate the gospel to people on spiritual search if they don't do things the way we do - books, confessions of faith, liturgies, sermons. If the medium is words, then the most important things are going to be the things we think about; not intuition, experience and the concerns of the spirit. This is where people are at. *The marginalisation of feelings has been a key characteristic not just of Western Christianity, but through it of the whole of Western society* - so people have few tools with which to handle the emotional or relate to the spiritual.

Isolates 2 worldviews from history, dominant and submerged, scientific and poetic.

- Scientific: precise, reason/intellect, permanent, physical, absolute, science/technology, propositional, western culture, rational, men, literal, church, worship
- Poetic: imprecise, emotions/intuition, provisional, spiritual, ambiguous, values, approximate, ethnic worldviews, intuitive, women, symbolic, spiritual quest, personal needs.

Society moving from scientific to poetic; what is the church going to do? Even scientists are moving; closed-system universe is gone (Einstein, Hawking et al). Mod scientific spiritual commentators: Capra, Sheldrake, McWaters.

Statement of how the problem is perceived:

Our present predicament is due to mistakes made by our forebears during the last 500 years or so. In particular, they so marginalized spiritual and personal values in favour of a mechanistic, rationalist, reductionist outlook that what once seemed to be the major strength of Western culture has now turned out to be its greatest liability. At the root of our problem is a loss of spiritual perception and sensitivity. Any effective resolution of the ideological crisis facing the West must therefore start by reversing that trend, and hence with the recovery of spirituality. Furthermore, if there is a way out of the mess, traditional Western sources of spiritual guidance will be of little help in finding it. As part of the old cultural establishment, the Church as we know it is incapable of playing any constructive role in redefining the future, because the defective Enlightenment world view was little more than the logical outcome of classical Christian beliefs and values. P 38-9

Church used to be seen as boring; now as unspiritual. People are now going to the following sources on their spiritual search:

- Eastern world views
- native spiritualities
- Celtic, neopagan spirituality
- psychotherapies; provide spirituality without dogma

Phases in history: premodern (superstition and mythology) → modern (Ren to Enlightenment; reason) → postmodern (whatever follows modern; as yet undefined)

There seems to be no doubt whatever that the Church, an essentially conservative institution, has so firmly and fully committed itself to the worldview of the Enlightenment... that it is being left behind by the pace of change, and is finding it increasingly difficult to be taken seriously by the new emerging mainstream Western culture. P44. Dean Inge: 'a church which is married to the spirit of its age will be a widow in the next'.

But caution. Not to jump on the next bandwagon either. For example, to bear witness to faith in a generation that is increasingly attracted to the irrational as an alternative to materialist rationalism might need to be started by underlining the importance of thinking; irrationality is not the only alternative to over-confident rationalism.

Church has by and large accepted forces of modernity. Consequence is that its theology and spirituality suffer from a cognitive captivity that inhibits the development of a truly holistic gospel that will speak authentically to the needs of people in a postmodern world. 46.

New opportunity to look for a Christianity that works, that produces real change in human nature; not for one which is words and teaching and philosophy. Today's Christians will be judged more by the quality of their spirituality than by the truth of their message. So far our apologetic has been directed towards proving the truth of the gospel using the tools of an essentially secular world view. Barna: spiritual journey of today's generation is based on desire to grow personally; want means to become a more whole individual. The religious faiths that will win are those which enhance relationships, not those which present as rules, traditions or punishments.

3. Back to the beginning

What do we do then; go back to NT? Tempting to think if we could do it as they did it everything would be fine. How to use Bible as tool for evangelism?

1. Affirmation that this is God's world and God is in it.
2. Bible stories
3. Personal stories; listen to theirs and share yours.

Effective evangelism takes place where these three intersect.

The Great Commission

'Go into all the world'. Needs of the world, not concerns of Church, are key. We need to go to where people are, not get them to come to where we are (in church). 'Whenever Christians think of mission they invariably adopt models of in-drag rather than out-reach' [!].

Communication. 'A survey of British church-goers discovered that some 42% of them admitted to falling asleep in church. More than a third looked at their watch in church every Sunday, and an amazing 10% owned up to putting their watch to their ear and shaking it, because they thought it must have stopped. Though only 4% always wished they had stayed in bed on a Sunday morning, 67% said they often felt that way' p.76.

Can't open the lid and pour a pre-prepared gospel in. People filter out 'church' as being about joining an institution. Gospel seen not so much as inadequate as irrelevant. It isn't gospel unless it speaks to the needs of ordinary people.

Etc

4. The call to follow Christ

Crisis conversion vs gradual. Those who pour scorn on former usually have no contact with the unchurched; but even they often need process not event. *Finding faith today* survey (John Finney 1992, Bible Society) concludes average time taken is 4 years.

Conversion = change

Division between social activists (liberals) and preachers of gospel (evangelicals) is tragic. *The social activists need to remember that without the proclamation of a message about Jesus, then there is little difference between Christian do-gooders and their secular counterparts. And the proclaimers need to remember that doing good is neither an optional extra, nor something that should be used as a carrot to attract people to the 'real thing'... It is the real thing.* 89. Gospel is repent (do) and believe (think). Not to be separated.

Peter as model of faith

6 stages in his discipleship.

1. 'I believe in God' - brought up as Jew
2. Call to discipleship Mk 1.14-20 - Jesus offers something big enough to change his life for (no evidence of personal guilt, confession of sin, prayers of commitment, forgiveness, acceptance of theol. Dogmas, admission to church etc. By focussing on a single crisis experience, modern evangelism has trivialised the gospel..)
3. Conversion of the mind Mk 8.27-30 - who do you say that I am?
4. Feelings in crisis Jn 18.15-27; 21.1-23 - emotional commitment to Jesus in Gethsemane; emotions had hitherto remained untouched
5. Worldview conversion Acts 10.1-48 - who is God, who am I, what is it all about? How we see the world has to be affected by gospel too, after personal implications. Challenge now to the whole framework of cultural, political, economic and racial assumptions on which he had based his life. Provoked by Cornelius ep.
6. Sharing self and faith - rest of his life till death in Rome.

5. The call to worship

Worship hasn't been seen as evangelism but should be. [...]

George Ritzer: *The McDonaldization of Society*. Analysis of W culture; malaise seen as stemming from way rational systems have come to dominate the way we live. Q: does this include church? Are our forms of 'worship' so predictable and resistant to change that we are unable to engage with a spirituality that is more concerned with the content and less with the packaging? Do we offer spirituality, or religion? Does our worship leave space for people to engage with God? Churches which are growing without a renewal of worship are the exceptions which prove the rule'; and globally more people are attracted to discipleship by worship than any other factor. Worship needs to be holistic, engaging and using all the gifts, talents and insights of the people. Defined: 'worship is all that I am, responding to all that God is'.

Word became flesh; so we should resist the temptation to put it back into words again [!].

Key to authentic worship is the presence of authentic worshippers.

Worship not to be identified with church services. NT - it was interactive.

Relationship teaching/worship. W obsession with teaching and thinking; churches followed culture in becoming bookish.

Being Christian not just a cognitive experience, so don't need everything in words.

Children - to link faith to particular level of understanding is a secular rationalist sentiment.

Mystery and emotions should be legitimate ways of coming to faith. We fall in love with a person on an emotional level, not an intellectual one; why do emotions have to be excluded from our relationship with God?

Best chance is to combine insights of sacramental, evangelical and charismatic traditions.

6. The call to be church

Task of evangelism no harder for us than for Paul. Empire posed social, racial and religious barriers.

Need to identify key issues of the culture into which you are ministering - which will vary from one community to another.

Paul in Iconium, Acts 14 - Jewish communities. P went to synagogues.

Paul in Lystra. Romans, ex soldiers. Gospel spoken through healing of lame man.

What works in one church won't in the next, because of differing cultural and historical factors.

Paul: built bridges; was available; thought creatively.

Now - designer lifestyles. People want to contribute. Need new model for church, not one in which the church tries to market a religious product which people may take if they want (they usually don't), but one in which the church offers the gospel, which will change it as well as them. Calls these the traditional church vs the stakeholder church.

Paul established a whole network of churches with mission at their centre, by trusting his converts. Roland Allen, *Missionary method's - St Paul's or ours?* - one of most important books ever written on evangelism:

- Paul refused to transplant the law and customs of the Judean church into the Roman provinces where he worked
- he refused to set up a central administration
- he allowed others to take responsibility for selves
- he didn't establish tests for orthodoxy
- he did not insist on every church being the same

7. Redefining the faith

Historically, a culturally-facilitated discovery and re-emphasis of particular expressions of faith has often been at the cutting edge of renewal within the life of the Church. Time of Reformation - it was guilt, and Luther rediscovered the answer to it. Victorian era - it was death, and church spoke into that with hymns of eternal life. Changes in cultural climate (eg on slaves, women) have led to action by Christians. *It is in this context of ongoing historical development and cultural change that the time is now ripe for what I have called a redefinition of the faith. This will not be a redefinition that devalues and discards all that has gone before. Rather it will be motivated by asking what are the elements of Christian belief that we now need to rediscover and emphasize in new ways in order to call people into effective discipleship in the cultural circs in which we find ourselves.* 176.

John Finney's recent survey discovered virtually all converts defined Christian life in relational terms (God, others, self), not in terms of belief.

Bible. Brings change which influences whole political and social structure in areas where church is growing. Not here; opposite. Instead of being inspired by its message, people are turned off by it. Why? Reductionist, rationalist, Enlightenment approach uses Bible to extract principles; leaves no space for interaction of personal faith stories with the Bible stories (which would be subjective), or for intrusion of the spiritual or mystical (which would be unscientific). Rest of the world doesn't do this.

Theology of environment.

People and needs. People don't feel like sinners, but rather like victims; they experience sin from others - economic/political exploitation, abuse, violence, alienation. It isn't the gospel to demand repentance for sin from such people. Modern culture is full of victims.

Dichotomy of social gospel (shares love of Christ with those who are sinned against) and that which calls people to personal faith in Christ. For Jesus these are 2 sides of same coin. People sin, and are sinned against; we have a shallow view of sin as something that people do, rather than as a cosmic universal reality that affects everything.

P201 summary of inherited (transcendent) model of faith vs holistic (immanent) biblical model.

8. The personal touch

Allegedly secular people are more religious than for many generations; being religious used to be regarded as sign of weakness; now it's almost avant-garde to be engaged in the spiritual search. 205.

Appendix: conversion and faith development

Fowler etc.