# C.S. Lewis as Evangelist

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides an insightful examination of how legendary Christian author C.S. Lewis used his writing to invite his readers to put their faith in Jesus Christ.*

## Lewis and Evangelism

"C. S. Lewis never invited unbelievers to come to Jesus. He was a very successful evangelist." So begins Michael Ward's essay "Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depictions of Conversion." Ward follows up this provocative comment with others like it. For example, "Einstein failed his entrance exam to the Federal Polytechnic. He was a very successful physicist."{1} What is Ward wanting us to see here?



While he recognizes that his initial statement about Lewis needs some qualification, he's nonetheless put his finger on something very important about Lewis's evangelistic style. For while Lewis had a heart for evangelism, and desired to see men and women surrender their lives to Christ, he's not the sort of person one would typically think of when hearing the term "evangelist." One might readily describe Lewis as a Christian apologist or imaginative storyteller, a literary scholar or skillful debater, but "evangelist" would probably not top the list. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that Lewis engaged in evangelistic activity in a variety of ways. While he was certainly not a "preaching" or "revivalistic" sort of evangelist, he was a "very successful evangelist" all the same.

Philip Ryken has helpfully described Lewis as a "teaching

evangelist," a "praying evangelist," and a "discipling evangelist." Most important of all, however, he refers to Lewis as a "writing" or "literary evangelist." And this is surely correct, for Lewis's greatest "evangelistic impact" has been felt through his books and essays.{2}

Not long before his death, Lewis was interviewed by Sherwood Wirt of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. When asked if the aim of Christian writing (including his own writing) was to bring about an encounter between the reader and Jesus Christ, Lewis responded by saying, "That is not my language, yet it is the purpose I have in view."{3} Moreover, in his "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," Lewis frankly confesses that most of his popular Christian books "are evangelistic" in character, and addressed to those outside the Christian faith.{4}

Of course, Lewis was not *merely* a "literary evangelist." While such terminology captures the fundamental way in which Lewis shared his faith, it was certainly not the only way. Moreover, evangelism was not something Lewis did simply because he enjoyed it. He felt an obligation, even a burden, to make Christ known to others.{5} And as we'll see later, these evangelistic concerns and motivations came with a very real cost to Lewis in terms of his professional career and friendships.{6}

## The Significance of Lewis's Conversion

If there's one thing Lewis makes clear about his *own* conversion, first to theism and then to Christianity, it's that he felt himself to have been *pursued* by God and *drawn* into relationship with Him. While in one sense he saw his conversion as arising from a "wholly free choice" on his part, he also saw it as resulting from a kind of Divine necessity.{7} Lewis makes this clear in his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy.*

Consider the description of his conversion to Theism: "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet." Eventually, Lewis tells us, he "gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed," describing himself as "perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."{8}

Interestingly, before this, Lewis had described God as offering him "a moment of wholly free choice"—an opportunity to either "open the door or keep it shut." He tells us that he chose to open it, but almost immediately relates that "it did not really seem possible to do the opposite." He goes on to speculate that perhaps "necessity" is not "the opposite of freedom."{9} All of this reveals how significant Lewis found God's involvement in his conversion to actually be.

His conversion to Christianity is similarly, if less dramatically, narrated. He writes of feeling "a resistance almost as strong as" his "previous resistance to Theism."{10} But having been through something similar already, the resistance was "shorter-lived." While being driven to Whipsnade Zoo, Lewis came to believe "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He once again speculates about whether this momentous event resulted from freedom or necessity and concludes that maybe the difference in such a case is inconsequential.{11}

But why is this important for a discussion of Lewis and evangelism? Because it helps us understand how Lewis (on the one hand) could work tirelessly for the salvation of others, while also (on the other) recognizing that God was so powerfully involved in the conversion of a human soul that he (i.e., Lewis) need never worry that such weighty matters depended solely on him. He could thus be a relaxed evangelist, using his gifts to point others to Christ, while also recognizing that salvation is ultimately a work of God.

## The Importance of "Translation" in Lewis's Evangelistic Work

So far, we've seen that the most important of Lewis's evangelism was through his writings. Indeed, the first book Lewis wrote, after becoming a Christian, was *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Published in 1933, the book bears the rather lengthy subtitle: "An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Romanticism, and Reason." And as with so many of the books that followed Lewis's conversion, it was concerned to commend Christianity to others.

In 1938, Lewis published the first volume of his "Cosmic Trilogy," titled *Out of the Silent Planet*.{12} In this book, Lewis communicates elements of Christian theology within the context of a science-fiction adventure story. In 1940, he published *The Problem of Pain*, a work of Christian apologetics concerned to address the problem of evil and suffering. As I've noted elsewhere, this book "attracted the attention of James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the . . . BBC."{13} Welch wrote to Lewis, asking if he might be willing to compose a series of broadcast talks for the BBC. Lewis accepted the invitation, and the talks he composed eventually became the first book of his now classic statement of basic theology, *Mere Christianity*.{14} These influential talks were delivered during the years of World War II.

In addition to these now-famous "broadcast talks," Lewis also spoke to the men and women of the Royal Air Force during the war. Such experiences helped teach Lewis the importance (and even necessity) of "translating" Christian doctrine into terms the average layperson could readily understand. Lewis wanted to communicate Christian truth to his audience, and he realized that to do so effectively, he needed to learn their language.{15} He thus described his task as "that of a *translator*—one turning Christian doctrine . . . into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could

understand."{16}

It was Lewis's skill as a "translator" that made him so successful as a "literary evangelist." Few writers have been so effective at communicating the essential truths of Christianity to a broad, general, and often unbelieving audience, as C. S. Lewis. Indeed, Lewis placed so much importance on "translating" Christian truth into the language of the average layperson that he thought every ordination exam ought to require that the examinee demonstrate an ability to do it.{17} And in *Mere Christianity* (along with other works), we get a glimpse of Lewis doing this very thing.

## Evangelism in Lewis's Fiction

In discussing the evangelistic work of C. S. Lewis, we've seen how Lewis's evangelistic concerns impacted his work as a popular Christian apologist. Now it's time to consider how these same concerns find expression in his fiction. In his essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said," Lewis discusses a major motivation for his fictional work. He tells us:

> "I wrote fairy tales because . . . I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could (OOW, 37).{18}

Through his fiction, Lewis helps his readers personally experience the potency of Christian truth. Consider *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* In that story, Edmund (one of the four Pevensie children who enter Narnia through the wardrobe) initially sides with the White Witch against the great lion Aslan. The Witch has all Narnia under her spell, making it "always winter and never Christmas."{19} In his desire to one day be king of Narnia, Edmund betrays his brother and sisters. According to the Deep Magic that governs Narnia, he thus deserves to die.{20}

But Aslan, the true king of Narnia, intercedes for Edmund, and the Witch renounces her claim on his life. The catch is that Aslan must give his own life in place of Edmund's. This he willingly does. But like Jesus in the Gospels, death cannot hold him in its power, and he returns to life again. According to one scholar, "the desired response" to this is not so much "to believe in the vicarious suffering of Christ, but to *taste* it."{21} Lewis thus used his fiction as a vehicle for evangelism, helping his readers to "taste" Christian truth in powerful (and even delightful) ways.

## The "Cost" of Lewis's Evangelistic Witness

Although Lewis was not the sort of person one would typically think of when hearing the term "evangelist," he nonetheless had a heart for evangelism and was motivated to labor for the conversion of others. In fact, Christopher Mitchell has observed that "Lewis perceived evangelism to be his lay vocation, and the means by which he expressed this evangelistic impulse were his speaking and writing."{22}

While Lewis was not the sort of person to preach a conventional "Come to Jesus" sort of evangelistic sermon, he was nonetheless (as Michael Ward has noted) "a very successful evangelist."{23} When one considers the vast literary output

of Lewis, so much of which had evangelistic intentions, combined with his speaking, preaching, and debating on issues of vital concern to the Christian faith, along with his many prayers for the conversion of others, and generous financial assistance rendered for the cause of Christ, it is clear that the whole tenor of Lewis's post-conversion life was driven by a strong evangelistic impulse for the salvation of souls. And this in spite of the very costly nature of this witness.

According to Mitchell, Lewis's evangelistic commitments fostered "ridicule and scorn . . . among his non-Christian colleagues" at Oxford.{24} Indeed, even some of Lewis's closest friends occasionally felt embarrassed by his "zeal for the conversion of unbelievers."{25} Many of his colleagues were scandalized by the fact that Lewis used his academic training to write popular-level books in theology and Christian apologetics. No doubt some were also jealous of his ever-increasing popularity with the general public, for Lewis had an uncanny ability to write one book after another that people actually wanted to buy and read.

So *why* did Lewis do it? That's the question Mitchell asks near the end of his essay on this topic.{26} Why did Lewis persist in evangelistic writing and speaking that aroused such scorn from academic colleagues, and occasional embarrassment from friends? Mitchell suggests that it likely had something to do with Lewis's conviction that "There are no *ordinary* people."{27} Hence, while his evangelistic activities created difficulties for him, difficulties that might easily have been avoided, Lewis was convinced that bringing glory to God through the saving of human souls was "the real business of life."{28} And whatever abuse, scorn, or discomfort this might cause him personally, he was apparently willing to endure it in order to be found faithful.

**Notes**

1. Michael Ward, "Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depictions of Conversion," in *Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The*

*Evangelistic Vision of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 143.
2. See Philip G. Ryken, "Winsome Evangelist: The Influence of C. S. Lewis," in *Lightbearer in the Shadowlands*, 62.
3. C. S. Lewis, "Cross-Examination," interview by Sherwood E. Wirt, in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 262.
4. C. S. Lewis, "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," in *God in the Dock*, 181.
5. This would seem to be implied by Lewis's remarks in his sermon, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1980), 18-19.
6. See Christopher W. Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C. S. Lewis's Witness," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: Eeerdmans, 1998), 3-14.
7. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 224-25.
8. Ibid., 228-29.
9. Ibid., 224-25.
10. Ibid., 237.
11. Ibid.
12. For readers interested in reading my prior article on this book, please see Michael Gleghorn, "Smuggling Theology into Out of the Silent Planet," Probe Ministries, October 29, 2023, probe.org/smuggling-theology-into-out-of-the-silent-planet/
13. Please see Michael Gleghorn, "C. S. Lewis, the BBC, and Mere Christianity," Probe Ministries, April 24, 2016, probe.org/c-s-lewis-the-bbc-and-mere-christianity/
14. For a helpful discussion of all the issues and concerns surrounding these events, please see Justin Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War: The World War II Broadcasts that Riveted a Nation and Became the Classic Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).
15. C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock*, 94, 98.

16. Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” in *God in the Dock*, 183.
17. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in *God in the Dock*, 98-99.
18. C. S. Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1975), 37.
19. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 16.
20. Ibid., 138-39.
21. Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), Kindle edition, loc. 2640.
22. Christopher W. Mitchell, “Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C. S. Lewis’s Witness,” in *The Pilgrim’s Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.
23. Ward, “Escape to Wallaby Wood,” 143.
24. Mitchell, “Bearing the Weight of Glory,” 7. Note: The whole of this paragraph is indebted to Mitchell’s discussion in this chapter.
25. Ibid., 6-7.
26. Ibid., 9-14.
27. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” 19.
28. C. S. Lewis, “Christianity and Culture,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 14.

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# Why Study Church History?

*James Detrich provides five reasons to study church history and allow our knowledge to build our confidence in our faith.*

When I was in college, we had to do what was called

“evangelism night.” It was a night in which a group of us would pile into someone’s old, broken-down car (we were all poor back then) and skirt downtown to the city’s walking bridge, a large half-mile overpass extending over the Chattanooga River. We were always sure that plenty of people would be there that needed our message. One night I began talking to a man about Christ and he quickly cut me off, “I am a Christian,” he exclaimed. “Great,” I replied. As we continue talking, though, I soon discovered that he was a “different” Christian than me. He said he believed in an expansive New Testament that contained many more books than the twenty-seven I was accustomed to, and he had six or seven Gospels, where I only had four. When I told him that I didn’t think he was right, that the New Testament only contained twenty-seven books and four Gospels, he asked me an important question, “How do you know that there are only four Gospels? Maybe there are more books to the Bible than you think!” I stood there, knowing that he was wrong. But I didn’t know *why* he was wrong. I had no idea of how to combat him—I didn’t know church history well enough in order to provide, as 1 Peter 3:15 says, an account of the assurance that lies within me.



This is one of the great reasons why we as Christians need to study church history. In this article I am going to make a passionate plea for the study of church history and give five reasons why I believe it is essential for every follower of Christ. Alister McGrath said that “Studying church history . . . is like being at a Bible study with a great company of people who thought about those questions that were bothering you and others.”{1} These bothering questions, much like the one I could not answer on the walking bridge, oftentimes can be answered through learning the stories and lessons of history. It was Martin

Luther, the great reformer, who cried out: “History is the mother of truth.” This is the first reason why Christians need to study history, so that we can become better skilled to answer the nagging questions that either critics ask or that we ourselves are wrestling with. It would have been a tremendous help that day on the bridge to know that in the second and third centuries, the time right after Jesus and the apostles, that church pastors and theologians were exclaiming and defending the truth that we only possess four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If I had only known of this rich tradition, if I had only known my church history, I would have been able to give a reasonable account of that hope that lies within me.

## Church History Provides Comfort

The first reason why Christians should study church history is that it helps Christians provide a more reasonable account of what we believe. The second reason is that Christians, just like any other people, go through many times of loneliness and despair. The book of Psalms reveals multiple times where various psalmists reveal that they feel as though God has left them, that their enemies are closing in, and that no one, including God, really cares. Suffice it to say that this often leads to a crisis of faith. Many of us suffer that same crisis from time to time, and the one thing that usually helps to be encouraged is to get around God’s people. When we are with others who believe as we do, it helps to stabilize, and to build, our faith. There is a sense in those moments of being with other Christians that our faith is bigger and more expansive—that it is communal, not merely individual.

Studying church history is about being with the community of faith. Reading the stories, learning the truths, examining the insights of these faithful men and women down through the centuries gives to us the sense that our faith is not shallow, but as the song used to say, it is “deep and wide.” Church

historian John Hannah claims that studying Christian heritage "dispels the sense of loneliness and isolation in an era that stresses the peripheral and sensational."{2} It breaks us away from this modern culture that emphasizes the glitz and the glamour of the here and now, and helps us to establish confidence in the faith by examining the beliefs central to our faith that have been developed over a long period of time. Christian theology does not invent beliefs; it finds beliefs already among Christians and critically examines them. The excavation site for Christian theology is not merely in the pages of Scripture, though that is the starting point, but it expands from there into the many centuries as we find the Holy Spirit leading His church. For us today, it gives us the ability to live each day absolutely sure that what we are believing in actually is true; to know and understand that for over 2000 years men and women have been worshipping, praising, and glorifying the same God that we do today.

It's similar to those grand, majestic churches, the cathedrals that overwhelm you with the sense of transcendence. The expansive ceilings, high walls, and stained glass leaves the impression that our faith, our Christian heritage, is not small but large. Entering into a contemplation of our faith's history is like going into one of those churches. It takes away the loneliness, the isolation, and reminds us of the greatness of our faith.

## Church History Solidifies Our Faith

The third reason for studying church history takes us to the task of theology. Have you ever wondered if something you heard being preached in church was essential? Maybe you've asked, Is this really so important to my faith? Understanding and articulating what is most important to Christianity is one of the crucial tasks that theology performs. This task is developed from a historical viewpoint. It asks the question, What has always been crucially important to Christians in each

stage of church history? Over the centuries, Christian theologians have developed three main categories for Christian beliefs: dogma, doctrine, and opinion.{3} A belief considered as dogma is deemed to be essential to the gospel; rejecting it would entail apostasy and heresy. Doctrines are developed within a particular church or denomination that help to guide that group in belief. What a church believes is found in its doctrine. Lastly, beliefs relegated to opinion are always interesting, but they are not important in the overall faith of the church. But dogma is important and history tells the story of how the church receives these important truths. It tells the story of how the church came to understand that God is three and one, the received truth of the Trinity; or how they came to understand that Jesus was both human and divine, the received truth of the Person of Christ. In examining these things, you begin to understand what is most essential and what is less important.

This is the same question that was being asked in the early fourth century. Some folks calling themselves Christians were going around proclaiming that Jesus Christ was different from God the Father, that even though He was deserving of worship, there was a time when He was created by the Father. Other Christians rose up and declared that to be heretical. They claimed that the words and actions of Christ as recorded in the Scripture clearly affirms Him to be equal with the Father. The Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 sided with the latter group, claiming that Jesus was indeed equal with His Father. The exact wording of the council's conclusion is that Jesus is "of the same substance" with His Father. That dogmatic decision is reflected in the church's doctrinal beliefs and it demonstrates its crucial importance for Christianity.

History is indeed the treasure chest of truth. Open it up. Discover the riches within it. Find out what is there and what is not—what is important and what is not!

# Church History Helps Us Interpret the Bible

Why should we study church history? The answers already given are that it provides perspective in answering tough questions, gives a sense that our faith has gravitas, delineates that which is important; the fourth reason is that the study of church history helps us to interpret the Bible. You might been inclined to say, “We don’t need church history, all we need is the Bible.” But we must remember that people interpret the Bible in many and various ways. For instance, do you know that the largest meeting in North America that discusses the Bible is called the Society of Biblical Literature. It meets every year and boasts of having thousands of members. Among those within the society, only an astonishing 30% of them are evangelicals, or people who would have a more conservative interpretation of Scripture. People all over are reading the Bible, but they are reading it in different ways.

So, how do we know how to interpret the Bible? We believe that a certain interpretation or tradition of the text goes all the way back to Jesus and His apostles. Thus, Scripture must be interpreted in light of this tradition—the way that the early community of believers read the various texts of Scripture as they recognized its authority in matters of faith and practice. They recognized that these texts supported, explained, and gave evidence to the belief system that they held dear. For us, going back and reading the early church fathers is profitable for our understanding of the broader cultural and theological framework so that we can better understand what Scripture is saying. For instance, as we discovered above, the Trinity is a crucial dogma of the church. Therefore, any interpretation of the Bible that contradicts that basic belief would be inadequate. History helps to paint the lines that we must stay within and it helps to construct the boundaries for a faithful reading of the text. Examining what was important to the apostles, and the

generation that followed, and then the next generation, gives a basic tradition, a framework, of values and beliefs, that must guide our faith today. The study of church history helps us to develop that basic framework.

It was a second-century pastor that complained that the heretics of his day read the same Bible as he did, yet they twist it into something else. He equated it someone taking a beautiful picture of a king constructed with precious jewels and rearranging those jewels so that the picture now resembles a dog.{4} We would contest ruining such a beautiful piece of art! This is exactly what happens when the beauty of the Bible is misinterpreted. To keep that from happening, we must study church history and find out what the precious jewels actually are that construct the beauty of the Bible.

## Church History Demonstrates the Working of God

We have listed four reasons to study church history: it helps answering questions, it presents a faith that is deep and wide, it delineates what is important, and it helps us to interpret the Bible. The fifth reason why we should study church history is that it demonstrates the working of God. More specifically, it gives evidence that the Holy Spirit is working through and among His people, the church of God. It is the same Spirit that was working in that early Christian community that is still at work today in the community of faith. In other words, history provides a further resource for understanding the movement of God in the entire community of faith. We affirm that there is continuity between the early Christian community and the community today, because we serve one God and are the one people of that God. Hence, every sector of church history is valuable, because it is the same Spirit moving through every stage of history. Church history is His story and it tells of God’s faithfulness to the

community of believers as they have carried forth His truth and have given animation to His character. Just as Christ is the image of the invisible God, the church, through the Son and by the Spirit, is also the image of the invisible God. Church history is the story of how the community reflects that invisible God.

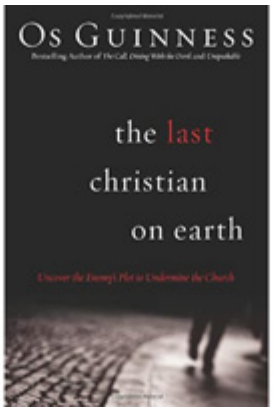
This is the concept that brings all the others into a connected whole. The reason why studying church history can provide answers to crucial questions of faith is due to the fact that the Spirit has been moving in the hearts of men and women down throughout history, aiding them in their questions of faith and the fruit of that work has been preserved for us today. The reason why studying church history can show us what is important to the faith is because the Spirit has been at work guiding the church into truth. The reason why studying church history can help us interpret the Bible is because the Spirit has illuminated the path for understanding the Bible for centuries. This is what is fascinating about church history: it is a study of His Story. He is there, just as Jesus said He would be. Remember it was Jesus who said that He was going away, but that He would send a Comforter. And this One would guide us in all truth. Church history is the story of that illuminated path where the God of the church guides His people into all truth. History is where He is.

**Notes**

1. Alister McGrath, “The State of the Church Before the Reformation” in *Modern Reformation* [January/February 1994]: 11.
2. John D. Hannah, “Notes on the Church to the Modern Era” (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary), 2.
3. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *Who Needs Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 73.
4. This is a metaphor presented by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*, 1.8.1.

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# Digging Our Own Grave: The Secular Captivity of the Church



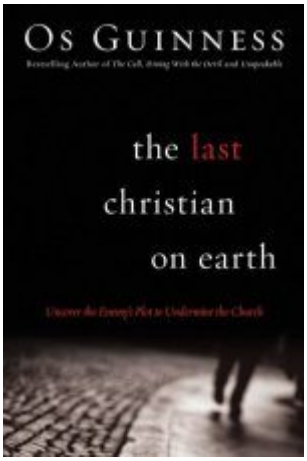

*Rick Wade provides an overview of how the Christian church has become captive to the godless values and perspective of the surrounding culture, based on Os Guinness' book* The Last Christian on Earth.

## Our Real Enemy

If memory serves me correctly, it was my introduction to such concepts as secularization and pluralization. I'm speaking of the book *The Gravedigger Files* written by Os Guinness in the early 1980s. The subtitle of *The Gravedigger Files* is *Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church.* The book is a fictional dialogue between two members of a council which has as its purpose the undermining of the Christian church.

The Deputy Director of the Central Security Council gives one of his subordinates advice on how to accomplish their goal in his area.

In 2010, Guinness published a revised and updated version of *Gravedigger Files.* He gave it the new title *The Last Christian on Earth.* The titled was inspired in part by Luke 18:8: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"




What Guinness wanted to do in *Gravedigger* and the updated version was to show how the church in America is being undermined from within. We concern ourselves so much about outside enemies without realizing that we are at times our *own* worst enemies. He wrote: "*The Christian faith contributed decisively to the rise of the modern world, but it has been undermined decisively by the modern world it helped to create. The Christian faith has become its own gravedigger.*"{1}

The primary focus of Probe Ministries now is what's been called the cultural captivity of the church. All too many of us are influenced more by our culture than by the Bible. It's impossible to separate oneself from one's surrounding culture, to be sure, but when there is conflict, we are called to follow Christ. Cultural captivity is subtle. It slowly creeps up on us, and, before we know it, it has soaked into our pores and infected much of what we think and do. "Subversion works best when the process is slow and subtle," Guinness's Deputy Director says. "Subtle compromise is always better than sudden captivity."{2}

This book is helpful for seeing ourselves in a clearer light, and for understanding why some of the things we do, which seem so harmless, are really very harmful to our own Christian lives and to the church.

## Stages of Subversion

Rather than directly attacking the church, the enemy finds it more profitable to try to undermine it. "Subversion" is the word Os Guinness's Deputy Director uses in the book *The Last Christian on Earth*. How does this happen?

This process of undermining comes in various stages. Three of them are demoralization, subversion, and defection.{3}

*Demoralization* is the softening up of the church through such things as hypocrisy and public scandals. Morale drops, and our ability to resist the devil's advances decreases.

*Subversion* comes about from winning over key church leaders who begin to trumpet "radical" and "daring" ideas (better words for this, Guinness says, may be "revisionist" and "unfaithful"{4}).

*Defection* comes when prominent members abandon the church, such as when former fundamentalists publicly deny the divine authority of the Bible.

Faithfulness, which once was understood as being committed to God, now has a new focus. The desire to be "in the world but not of the world" is realigned. The church's commitment to the world turns into attachment, and worldliness settles in. "Worldliness" is a term once used by fundamentalists to describe being too attached to the world, but it went out of favor because of the excesses of separationism. It was a word to be snickered at by evangelicals who were adept—or thought they were adept—at being in the world without becoming its servant. This snickering, however, doesn't hide the fact that

the evangelical sub-culture exhibits a significant degree of being of the world, or worldly.

Moving through these stages, the Deputy Director says, has led the church deeper and deeper into cultural captivity. The church becomes so identified with the culture that it no longer can act independently of it. Then it finds itself living with the consequences of its choices. Says the Deputy Director, "Our supreme prize at this level is the complete devastation of the Church by getting the Adversary [or God] to judge her himself. "Here, in a stroke," he continues, "is the beauty of subversion through worldliness and its infinite superiority to persecution. . . . if the Adversary is to judge his own people, who are we to complain?"{5}

## Forces of Modernism

In *The Last Christian,* Os Guinness describes three challenges of modernity which aid in the subversion of the church. They are secularization, privatization, and pluralization. These forces work to squeeze us into the mold of modernistic culture. To too great an extent, they have been successful.

*Secularization* is the process of separating religious ideas and institutions from the public sphere. Guinness's Deputy Director speaks of society being "freed" from religious influence.{6} This is how secularists see the separation. Religion is seen as restrictive and oppressive and harmful, and the public square needs to be free of it. All ideas and beliefs are welcome as long as they aren't explicitly grounded in religious belief. Because of the influence of the public arena in our lives, Guinness points out that "*Secularization ensures that ordinary reality is not just the official reality but also the only reality*. Beyond what modern people can see, touch, taste and smell is quite simply nothing that matters."{7}

If religion is removed from the public square, the immediate result is *privatization*, the restriction of religion to our private worlds. This can be the small communities of our churches or it can mean our own individual lives. Guinness writes that "today, where religion still survives in the modern world, no matter how passionate or committed the believer, it amounts to little more than a private preference, a spare-time hobby, and a leisure pursuit."{8}

The third force is *pluralization*. With the meeting of many cultures comes the awareness that there are many options with regard to food, dress, relationships, entertainment, religion, and other aspects of life. The number of options multiplies in all areas, "especially," notes Guinness, "at the level of worldviews, faiths and ideologies."{9} Choosing isn't a simple matter anymore since it's so widely believed that there *is* no truth in such matters. In fact, choosing is what counts. Guinness writes, "what matters is no longer good choice or right choice or wise choice, but simply choice."{10}

## Some Characteristics of Subversion

What are some characteristics of a subverted church? Os Guinness discusses several in his book *The Last Christian on Earth*.

One result of being pushed into our own private worlds by secularization is that we construct our own sub-culture and attempt to keep a distance. But then we turn around and model our sub-culture after the wider culture. For example, it's no secret that evangelical Christianity is heavily commercialized. Our Christianity becomes our style reflected in plenty of Christian kitsch and in being surrounded by the latest in fashions. The depth of our captivity to things—even Christian-ish things—becomes a measure of the shallowness of our Christianity. Compared to what Jesus and the apostles offered, which included sacrifice and suffering, says

Guinness, “today’s spiritual diet . . . is refined and processed. All the cost, sacrifice and demand are removed.”{11}

Another pitfall is rationalization, when we have to weigh and measure everything in modernistic ways. We’re guided by “measurable outcomes” and “best practices” more than by the leading of the Spirit.{12}

Feeling forced to keep our Christian lives separate from the wider culture—the sacred/secular split, it’s been called—reduces Christianity in size. We don’t know how to apply it to the larger world (apart from excursion-style evangelism). “Many Christians,” Guinness writes, “have so personal a theology and so private a morality that they lack the criteria by which to judge society from a Christian perspective.”{13} Lacking the ability to even make sound judgments about contemporary issues from a distinctly Christian perspective, we’re unable to speak in a way that commands attention. Christianity is thought at best to be “socially irrelevant, even if privately engaging,” as someone said.{14}

A really sad result of the reshaping of Christianity is that people wonder why they should want it at all. The church is the pillar of truth, Paul says (1 Tim. 3:15). The plausibility of Christianity rises and falls with the condition of the church. If the church is weak, Christianity will seem weak. Is this the message we want to convey?

## A Wrong Way to Respond

In the face of the pressures of the modern world on us, the conservative church has responded in varying ways in the wider culture.

Os Guinness describes what he calls the *push* and *pull* phases of public involvement by conservatives. The push phase comes

when conservatives realize how much influence they have lost. For much of the nineteenth century, evangelical Christianity was dominant in public life. Over the last century that has been stripped away, and conservatives have seen what they held near and dear taken away. This loss of respect and position in our society has resulted in insecurity.{15}

In response, conservative Christians push for power by means of political action and influence in education and the mass media. “But, since the drive for power is born of social impotence rather than spiritual authority,” Guinness writes, “the final result will be compromise and disillusionment.” They fall “for the delusion of power without authority.”{16}

When they recognize the loss of purity and principles in their actions, they begin to pull back and disentangle themselves from the centers of power. There is a return to the authority of the gospel without, however, a sense of the *power* of the gospel. Standing on the outside, as it were, they resort to “theologies stressing prophetic detachment, not constructive involvement.”{17} This is the phase of “hypercritical separatism.”

Then comes a third phase, the enemies’ coup de grâce. Standing back to view all this, some Christians experience what Guinness’s Deputy Director gloatingly describes as “a fleeting moment when they feel so isolated in their inner judgments that they wonder if they are the last Christian left.” There is left “a residue of part self-pity, part discouragement, and part shame that unnerves the best of them.”{18} But these are the few. The many are simply kept asleep, the Director is happy to report, unaware of what has happened.

This article has given only a taste of Os Guinness’s message to us. The hope for the church is a return to the gospel in all its purity and power. I invite you to read *The Last Christian on Earth* and get a fuller picture of the situation and what we can do to bring about change.

**Notes**

1. Os Guinness, *The Last Christian on Earth: Uncover the Enemy's Plot to Undermine the Church* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 2010), 11.
2. Ibid., 51, 52.
3. Ibid., 28.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 32-34.
6. Ibid., 57.
7. Ibid., 63.
8. Ibid., 72.
9. Ibid., 92.
10. Ibid., 97.
11. Ibid., 159.
12. Ibid., 138.
13. Ibid., 155.
14. Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (New York: Doubleday, 1973,), 449; quoted in Guinness, *Last Christian*, 79.
15. Guinness, *Last Christian*, 166.
16. Ibid., 213.
17. Ibid., 214.
18. Ibid.

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# A Christian Purpose for Life – Proclaiming the Glory of

# Christ

*Steve Cable answers the question, Why does God leave Christians on earth after we are saved?*

## Misconceptions and Our Identity

Examining the beliefs and behavior of born-again emerging adults over the last few years, one common deficiency is a misunderstanding of their relationship to eternity. Many believers either have not thought about the question of "Why did God leave me here on earth once I was saved?" or they harbor misconceptions about the answer. Let's begin by considering some common misconceptions.



The first misconception is being purposeless. These people believe that thinking about their eternal purpose is a waste of time. Just live for the moment. My eternal destiny is secure so why bother myself with asking, "Why am I still here? I'll worry about the things of heaven after I die." This viewpoint devalues the sacrifice of Christ. He did not give His life for us so that we can be unconcerned about what concerns Him.{1}

The second misconception is focusing on this life's pleasures. Many young people say things like "I don't want Jesus to return until after I have traveled, married, had children, gotten that promotion, etc." They assume these things are of ultimate importance in their lives. Yet, the Bible teaches us that this attitude will choke out God's fruit in our lives. As Jesus said, "[T]he worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things, enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful."{2}

A third misconception is becoming prepared for heaven. Some think that God needs to get our character up to some entrance

level requirement before we are ready to move on to heaven. Most people with this view are not really working hard to match their lifestyle to a biblical standard, but they figure at some point they will. However, since our righteousness is not our own, but rather that of Jesus',{3} we don't need to get more righteous to enter heaven. In fact, when we see Him then we will be like Him.{4} The fastest way to make us completely mature is to take us out of this world.

One final misconception is providing for one's family. Caring for our family is certainly part of God's desire for our lives. However, if our sole purpose is to provide for our own family and our children have the same purpose and so on, the church will be limited to us and our progeny—and no one else.

These common misconceptions as to our purpose fall under the warning Paul gave us in Philippians,

> For many walk, of whom I often told you, . . . that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, . . . whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.{5}

Paul goes on to explain, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ . . ."{6}

We are to live our lives constantly aware of our heavenly citizenship, eagerly awaiting the return of our Lord. In this article, we examine the book of 1 Peter to see what Peter has to say about our purpose in life and how we are to live it out.

## Called to a Critical Mission

Peter begins the book of 1 Peter by reminding us what Christ has done for us. Let's read the first few verses of this amazing letter.

According to his great mercy, [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Through the resurrection of Jesus we are born again and are looking forward to an eternal inheritance kept in heaven for us to be revealed in the last time. What a wonderful truth helping us to realize that we are already living in eternity as we wait for our inheritance to be revealed. In the meantime, we are living on this earth in a temporary "earthsuit" called to fulfill God's purpose for our lives.

In the remainder of his letter to the churches, Peter addresses what we are to do while we are living on this earth. He first tells us that we are likely to encounter trials and suffering in this world. Then, beginning with verse 13 of chapter 1, Peter conveys to us the importance of our mission, giving us instructions we would expect a military commander to give before sending his team out on a dangerous and critical mission. He tells us to:

> *Prepare our minds for action* – we are to be action oriented, not passively waiting for our life to pass by.
>
> *Be alert and focused on the mission* – we are to keep our minds focused on God's purpose for our life on this earth.
>
> *Keep a long term perspective* – don't be deceived into putting your thoughts and your hope on the temporary temptations of the world, and
>
> *Realize God has entrusted you with the priceless resource of time* – Peter tells us that we are to conduct ourselves in the fear of the Lord while we are on this earth.

In the latter parts of chapter 1, Peter reminds us that we

have been redeemed at a very high cost, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. We owe a tremendous debt which motivates us to desire to faithfully carry out our mission on this earth.

The calls to action listed above must be accompanied by two critical components to be effective in this life. Specifically, Peter calls on us to purify our hearts not conforming to our former lusts and to love other believers not only as a friend, but also with sacrificial love by which Jesus loves you. The actions listed above are not our purpose on this earth, but rather activities we need to address if we are fulfill our purpose.

## Our Purpose: To Proclaim His Excellencies

Why does God leaves us on this earth after we are saved? In the second chapter of his letter, Peter begins by reminding us that we are living stones, part of the holy building God is building on the cornerstone Jesus Christ. This building made up of the lives of Christians is to be a beacon proclaiming the glory of God and the good news of redemption in Jesus.

In verses 9 and 10 of Chapter 2, Paul clearly states the purpose of our lives and of the church when he writes:

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

We are a special people on this earth, God’s own people. Peter uses the terms used by Yahweh of the Israelites in the wilderness where God told them through Moses,

> Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all

> the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.{7}

The Israelites discovered that they could not obey His voice or keep His covenant even when ruled by kings who desired to serve the Lord. Jesus Christ had to "become sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God through Him."{8} In Jesus' righteousness, we now become the special people of God given His purposes to accomplish on this earth.

We are left here so that we may proclaim His excellencies. We are to proclaim more than just the general attributes of our Creator. We are to let people know that our Creator is prepared to deliver them out of darkness and let them live in His marvelous light. God has entrusted us with His glory, His light. We have the privilege of proclaiming His glory and offering His grace.  At a basic level, we proclaim His excellencies by obeying His commands to proclaim Christ, make disciples, and be available for God to use us on this earth.

If we are to proclaim the glories of Christ and the gospel of redemption to eternal life, how are we to accomplish this wonderful goal?

## Fulfilling Our Purpose Through Excellent Behavior and Right Relationships

In this article we have been looking at the question, "What purpose does God have for my life as a Christian here on planet Earth?" We have seen that God leaves us here primarily for the purpose of bringing others into His kingdom. As Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain . . . if I am to remain on in the flesh if will mean fruitful labor for me."{9} In his letter to the Colossians, Paul stated, "We proclaim [Christ] by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ."{10} The apostle Peter put it this way, "[You are] a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the

one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."{11}

If we are to proclaim Christ in this world, the next obvious question is, how are we to do this? Is the best approach to rent a large electronic bull horn and drive the streets preaching the good news? Or in today's world perhaps we can start a Facebook page or send out a tweet with John 3:16? These techniques may be appropriate in some circumstances, but that is not where the apostle Peter says we should begin.

Peter follows his statement that we are called to proclaim Christ with this interesting instruction:

> Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.{12}

Instead of following this primary purpose with instructions on how to best verbalize our faith, he first focuses on how we live out our faith. He clearly points out that our behavior if kept excellent in purity and good deeds will attract the attention of non-Christians, of evil doers, causing them to consider the work of Christ in this world. We see that the reason God calls us to excellent behavior is not so that we will be good enough to get into His heaven, but rather to convict others of their need for a savior.

Peter continues to address ways in which we should proclaim Christ in the remainder of the second chapter. He points out that having godly relationships is an important way of proclaiming Christ. What types of relationships does Peter address? He specifically calls out our relationships with unbelievers, government authorities, our bosses, our co-workers, husbands and wives, other believers and the elders He

has placed over us.

Relationships are the biggest part of life. As people observe your relationships, they can see that they are different because you offer supernatural love, and your eternal perspective allows you to approach them with a servant's heart. As Christians, our relationships are not about getting what we deserve, but rather about giving to others the same way Jesus has given to us.

## Fulfilling Your Purpose Through Your Testimony and Your Prayers

Above we have seen that our post-salvation purpose of life on earth is to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus Christ through the gospel. We also looked at the first two ways that we should use to proclaim Christ in this world. The first way is through excellent behavior lived out before an unbelieving world. The second is through living out right relationships with those with whom we deal in this world. As you can see, these first two ways that Peter addresses do not require us to explain our faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, they draw unbeliever's attention to our lives, building up questions in their minds.

For example, in 1 Peter 2:18-19, Peter tells us,

> Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.  For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

Having a good attitude toward our boss even in those times when they are unreasonable finds favor with God and testifies to others of our different perspective.

After dealing with a comprehensive list of life relationships,

from the government to our husbands and wives, Peter brings up our spoken testimony as well. In 3:15, he says:

> Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

Not only are we to live our lives in ways that proclaim the glories of our Savior, we are to be prepared to give an account for the hope that is in us. We know from the first chapter of 1 Peter that the hope that is in us is the hope that comes from being born again and knowing that we have obtained an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. We need to be prepared to share with others that through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ they too can share in this same hope that drives our lives. The phrase in the verse, to make a defense, is a translation of the Greek world *apologia* from which we obtain our English word “apologetics.”

It is important to note the context in which this call to apologetics is placed. First, it is to be done with gentleness and reverence, not with arrogance and self-righteousness. The object is not to demonstrate you are right, but rather to help the questioner come to grips with the truth of grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, Peter reiterates his instruction found in 2:12, reminding us that we are to focus on living sanctified lives so that even those who slander us know in their hearts of our good behavior in Christ.

Finally, in 1 Peter 4:7, we are called to be “of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” If we are to be effective in proclaiming Christ in this world we must be consistently praying about the people and the obstacles we face.

Peter makes it clear that our purpose as a church on this earth is to proclaim the goodness of Christ who delivered us out of the domain of darkness and into the eternal kingdom of God. Proclaiming Christ in this way involves our excellent behavior, our right relationships, our gentle defense of the gospel, and a commitment to prayer. Let us examine our lives to see how this call is being lived out in us.

**Notes**

1. 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 1 Peter 1:13-17

2. Mark 4:19

3. Philippians 3:9-10, 2 Corinthians 5:21

4. 1 John 3:3

5. Philippians 3:18-19

6. Philippians 3:20-21

7. Exodus 19:5-6

8. 2 Corinthians 5:20

9. Philippians 1:21-23

10. Colossians 1:28 NET Bible

11. 1 Peter 2:9b NET Bible

12. 1 Peter 2:11-12

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# Secularization and the Church in Europe

*Christian beliefs and church attendance are playing a much smaller role in Europeans' lives in general than in the past. Rick Wade gives a snapshot of the place and nature of Christianity in Europe.*

At the end of a talk about the state of the evangelical mind in America, the subject turned to Europe, and a man said with great confidence, "The churches in Europe are all empty!" I've heard that said before. It makes for a good missions sermon; however, it doesn't quite do justice to the situation. Not *all* the churches in Europe are empty! The situation isn't like in Dallas, Texas, where churches dot the landscape, but there are thriving churches across the continent.



That said, however, there is more than just a grain of truth in the claim. Church attendance in Europe *is* down. Traditional Christian beliefs *are* less widely held.

It's important to know what the situation is in Europe for a few reasons.

First, we have a tendency to write Europe off in a way we don't other parts of the world. The church is struggling there, but it isn't a lost cause by any means! Maybe we can even *learn* from the thinking and life's experience of believers across the Atlantic.

Second, learning about the church around the world is good because it broadens our understanding of the interaction of Christianity and society. This should be of interest to us here in America.

Let's look at a few numbers in the area of church attendance.

To provide a contrast with the situation today, the best estimate for church attendance in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century was between forty and sixty percent of the adult population.{1} By contrast, in 2007, ten percent attended church at least weekly. About a quarter of those (about two million people) self-identify as evangelicals.{2} Although there has been large growth in so-called "new churches," that growth hasn't offset the loss across other denominations, especially the Church of England.

What about some other countries? In 2004, Gallup reported that "weekly attendance at religious services is below 10% in France and Germany, while in Belgium, the Netherlands, [and] Luxembourg . . . between 10% and 15% of citizens are regular churchgoers. . . . Only in Roman Catholic Ireland do a majority of residents (54%) still go to church weekly."{3}

As we'll see later, reduced numbers in church doesn't mean all religious belief—even Christian—is lost.

## The Golden Age of Faith

There is a story of the prominence and demise of religion in Europe that has become standard fare for understanding the history of Christianity in the modern world. The story goes that Europe was once a Christian civilization; that everyone was a Christian, and that the state churches ensured that society as a whole was Christian. This was the so-called "golden age of faith." With the shift in thinking in the Enlightenment which put man at the center of knowledge, and which saw the rise of science, it became clear to some that religion was really just a form of superstition that gave pre-modern people an explanation of the world in which they lived and gave them hope.{4}

This story has come under a lot of fire in recent decades.{5} Although the churches had political and social power, there

was no uniform religious belief across Europe. In fact, it's been shown that there was a significant amount of paganism and folk magic mixed in with Christian beliefs.{6} Many priests had the barest notions of Christian theology; a lot of them couldn't even read.{7} Sociologist Philip Gorski says that it's more accurate to call it an Age of Magic or an Age of Ritual than an Age of Belief.{8}

On the other side of this debate are scholars such as Steve Bruce who say that, no matter the content or nature of religious belief in the Middle Ages, people were still *religious* even if not uniformly *Christian*; they believed in the supernatural and their religious beliefs colored their entire lives. "The English peasants may have often disappointed the guardians of Christian orthodoxy," Bruce writes, "but they were indubitably religious."{9}

So what changed? Was there a loss of Christianity or a loss of religion in general, or just some kind of shift? Historian Timothy Larson believes that what has been lost is Christendom.{10} The term *Christendom* is typically used to refer to the West when it was dominated by Christianity. The change wasn't really from religion to irreligion but from the dominance of Christianity to its demise as a dominant force.

Religion has come back with significant force in recent decades even in such deeply secular countries as France, primarily because of the influx of Muslims.{11} Although the state Christian churches are faltering, some founded by immigrants are doing well, such as those founded by Afro-Caribbean immigrants in England. It seems that critics sounded the death knell on religion too soon.

## European Distinctives

Although Christian belief is on the demise in general in Europe, the institutional church—the state church

specifically—still has a valuable place in society.

In Europe's past, the church was a major part of people's lives. Everyone was baptized, married, and buried in the church. That tradition is still such a part of the social psyche that people fully expect that the church will be there for them even if they don't attend. Sociologist Grace Davie describes the church in this respect as a *public utility*. "A public utility," she writes, "is available to the population as a whole at the point of need and is funded through the tax system."{12} Fewer people are being married in churches now, and far fewer are being baptized. However, there's still a sense of need for the church at the time of death along with the expectation that it will be there for them.

Another term that characterizes religion in Europe is *vicarious religion*. Vicarious religion is "religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who . . . understand [and] approve of what the minority is doing." Church leaders are expected to believe certain things, perform religious rituals, and embody a high moral code. "English bishops," Davie writes, "are rebuked . . . if they doubt in public; it is, after all, their 'job' to believe." She reports an incident where a bishop was thought to have spoken derogatorily about the resurrection of Jesus. He was "widely pilloried" for that, she writes. Soon after his consecration as bishop, his church was struck by lightning. That was seen by some as a rebuke by God!{13}

Another indicator of the importance of the church in European life is the fact that, in some countries, people still pay church tax, even countries that are very secular. Germany is one example. People can opt out, but a surprisingly high number don't, including some who are not religiously affiliated. Reasons include the possibility of needing the church sometime later in life, having a place to provide moral guidance for children, and the church's role in positively influencing the moral fabric of society in general.{14}

## From Doctrine to Spirituality

I described above two concepts that characterize religious life in parts of Europe: *public utility* and *vicarious religion*. There's a third phrase sociologists use which points to the shift in emphasis from what one gets through the institutional church to personal spiritual experience. The phrase is "believing without belonging."

Sociologist Peter Berger believes that, as America is less religious than it seems, Europe is less secular than it seems. "A lot goes on under the radar," he writes.{15}

A phrase often heard *there* is heard more and more frequently in the States: "I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual." This could mean the person is into New Age thinking, or is interested in more conventional religion but doesn't feel at home in a church or in organized religion, or just prefers to choose what to believe him- or herself. A term some use to characterize this way of thinking is "patchwork religion."

One frequently finds a greater acceptance of religion in Europe when religion in *general* is the subject and not particular, creedal religions. Davie notes that "[generally speaking] if you ask European populations . . . do you believe in God, and you're not terribly specific about the God in question, you'll get about 70 percent saying yes, depending where you are. If you say, do you believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God, you'll get a much lower number. In other words, if you turn your question into a creedal statement, the percentages go down." A "cerebral" kind of belief doesn't hold much appeal to the young. The essence of religious experience isn't so much what you learn as it is simply taking part. "It's the fact that you're lifted out of yourself that counts."{16}

The loss of authority in the state church hasn't resulted in the triumph of secular rationalism among young people, which

is rather surprising. They experiment with religious beliefs. “The rise occurred right across Europe,” Davie notes, “but is most marked in those parts of Europe where the institutional churches are at their weakest.” This isn’t seen, however, “where the church is still strong and seen as a disciplinary force and is therefore rejected by young people.”{17}

## Some Closing Thoughts

Allow me to make some observations about the subject of secularization and the church in Europe.

Here are a few things to keep in mind as we face a Western culture that is increasingly hostile to the Gospel. First, we routinely hear the charge from people that religious people are living in the past, that they need to catch up to modern times. Such people simply assume as obviously true the long-held theory that secularization necessarily follows from modernization. This theory is sharply disputed today. Europe’s history isn’t the history of the rest of the world. Modernization appears in different forms around the world, including some that have room for religious belief and practice. America is a prime example. It isn’t the backward exception to the rule, as haughty critics would have us believe. Some say it’s *Europe* that is the exception with its strong secularity.{18} In fact, I think a case can be made that the modern propensity to separate our spiritual side from our material one is artificial; it violates our nature. But that’s a subject for another time. What we can be sure of is that the condescending attitude of people who want Christians to catch up to modern times is without basis. There is no necessary connection between modernity and secularity.{19}

A second thing to keep in mind is that the church doesn’t require a Christian society around it in order to grow. Christianity didn’t have its beginnings in a Christian society, but it grew nonetheless. The wide-spread social

acceptance of Christian beliefs and morality is not the power of God unto salvation. It is the word of the cross.

Third, religion per se will not disappear because we are made in God's image and He has put eternity in our hearts (Eccl. 3:11). Christianity in particular will not die either, for the One who rose from the dead said even the gates of hell won't prevail against it (a much more serious adversary than the new atheists!).

What should we do? The same things Christian have always been called to do: continue in sound, biblical teaching, and learn and practice consistent Christian living. It is the way we live that, for many people, makes our beliefs plausible in the first place. And proclaim the gospel. Despite any constraints society may put on us, the Word of God is not bound.

**Notes**

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3. Robert Manchin, "Religion in Europe: Trust Not Filling the Pews," Sept. 21, 2004, www.gallup.com/poll/13117/religion-europe-trust-filling-pews.aspx.
4. Kevin M. Schulz, "Secularization: A Bibliographic Essay," *The Hedgehog Review*, vol. 8, nos.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2006), 171. Online at www.virginia.edu/iasc/HHR_Archives/AfterSecularization/8.12RBibliography.pdf.
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6. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, England: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 41; quoted in Philip S. Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Feb. 2000), 144.
7. Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P."
8. Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate": 146.
9. Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 47.
10. Timothy Larsen, "Dechristendomization As an Alternative to Secularization: Theology, History, and Sociology in Conversation," *Pro Ecclesia*, Vol. XV, No. 3.
11. See Jean-Paul Williame, "The Cultural Turn in the Sociology of Religion in France," *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 373-389.
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15. Charles T. Mathewes, "An Interview with Peter Berger," *The Hedgehog Review*, vol. 8, nos.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2006):155. Online at www.virginia.edu/iasc/HHR_Archives/AfterSecularization/8.12PBerger.pdf
16. "Believing Without Belonging: Just How Secular Is Europe?" A discussion with Grace Davie at the Pew Forum's biannual Faith Angle Conference on religion, politics and public life, December 2005. pewforum.org/events/?EventID=97.
17. Ibid.
18. Berger, Davie, and Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?*.
19. Sociologist Christian Smith edited a volume titled *The*

*Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (UC Press, 2003) in which the case was argued that secularization became so powerful here because of a concerted effort by people who wanted it, not because of some natural, teleological progression.

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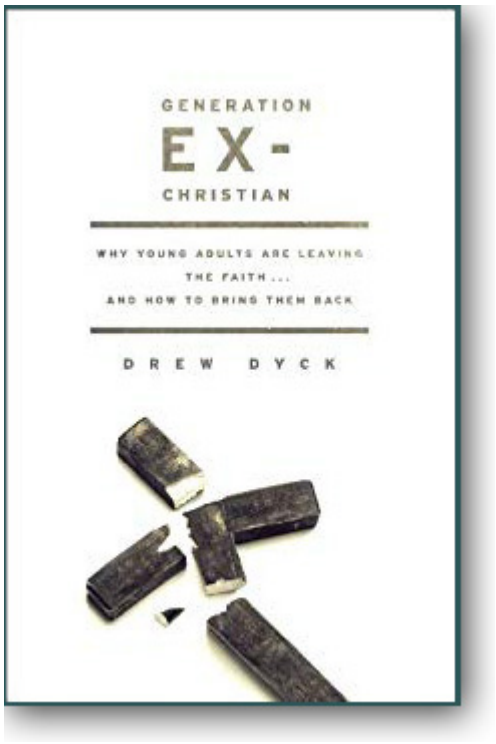
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# Ex-Christians: Ways to Bring Back the Leavers

*Steve Cable provides an overview of why young people leave the church based on Drew Dyck's book* Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back.



Over the last several years, Probe has been reporting on a changing young adult society that is marginalizing the church at an increasing rate. When we analyzed relevant survey data and our own survey taken of 18- to 40-year-old, born again Christians, the data revealed that even among Evangelicals, cultural captivity was the norm for the vast majority of Christians. One result of culturally captive Christians is that their children often become "leavers," leaving the faith entirely once they are out on their own.




Are there others who are seeing the same degree of disconnect with the truths of Scripture in the life styles and life choices of young, adult Americans? I want to look at one such prominent voice speaking out about these same concerns. Drew Dyck is the author of *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back*{1} and managing editor of *Leadership Journal*.

## Six Types of Leavers

Dyck's book is not primarily driven by general survey data. Instead, it tells a more personal story. He connected with people who had left their Christian upbringing. He talked with them about their life choices *and* he attempted to share Christ in a way that would be meaningful in the context of their personal journeys. As a result of this experience, he felt that those leaving their Christian influenced youth to enter into adulthood without a total faith in Christ could be placed into one of six different categories. He entitled these categories:

- Postmodern leavers – those adopting a postmodern view where no meta-narrative is to be trusted
- Modern leavers – those who believe only what they can prove and Neo-Darwinism seems more provable
- Neo-pagan leavers – those who gravitate to an earth-based religion where they are essentially their own gods
- Rebel leavers – those for whom a sinful lifestyle appears more appealing or who don't want to "give in" to God

- Recoilers – leavers who withdraw because of an emotional hurt associated with people claiming to represent Christianity, and
- Drifters – perhaps the largest group of leavers who gradually drift away because their faith was never that deep to begin with.

Each category of leaver creates a different challenge for one who desires to lead them into a true knowledge of Jesus. Just as Paul used different approaches to share the gospel in the synagogue, the marketplace and the philosopher's meeting place in Athens, so we need to tailor our approach to communicate effectively with our audience. In what follows, we will consider each of these categories and some of the ways one can best share with them.

## Postmodern and Modern Leavers

Postmodern thinking is becoming the cultural norm for young adults. The postmodern view holds that there is no objective truth applying to all, but rather each person or group of people defines their own truth. As J. P. Moreland puts it, "In a postmodernist view, there is no such thing as objective truth, reality, value, reason and so forth."{2} Yet, many young adults still adopt modernity, the dominant view throughout the twentieth century. Those with a modern view believe linear thinking and rational thought can lead us to objective truths valid for all. In his book *Generation Ex-Christian*, Drew Dyck finds both of these viewpoints create stumbling blocks for belief.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is true for all people in every age. This view runs counter to the "true for you but not for me" mentality of the postmodern generation. Many young adults influenced by postmodern thought have a difficult time accepting the all-encompassing, meta-narrative of the gospel. These leavers believe that Christianity is too narrow and

judgmental to be a part of their own truth sphere.

Dyck points out that those with a postmodern perspective are not really interested in hearing your apologetic arguments. Even if you weave a compelling logical argument, they will nod, smile, and ignore you. They need to see the impact of the truth of Jesus lived out in your life before them. Invite them to participate with you in serving others, creating an opportunity to share your story. They are, initially, more interested in your personal story. How has Jesus Christ made a difference in your life?

Conversely, those with a modern perspective are not as interested in your personal story. With moderns, ask questions to understand how they decide if something is true. Model a concern for the truth before laying "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" on their plate. Focus on the truth of the gospel, not letting ourselves get sidetracked into other arenas. How satisfying is their alternative view, and what are the consequences if they are wrong in their perception of truth?

Many modernists report that most Christians hastened their departure from the church through trite, unhelpful answers to the questions they were asking. Be willing to do the research to answer their questions thoughtfully and with confidence. Remember, there are good cogent explanations to their questions and their objections.

As Dyck discovered, effectively sharing with a leaver today requires us to know whether their general thought process is more shaped by modernism or postmodernism. Their answer determines whether we start with our personal experience or with the total truth of the gospel.

## Neo-Pagans and Rebels

Two more groups of leavers Dyck labels Neo-pagans and Rebels.

Dyck discovered a surprisingly large number of Neo-pagan leavers. Neo-pagans have gravitated to the beliefs that they are ultimately gods living in a society where the earth is to be nourished and women are as important, if not more so, than men. One common example of this religious view is Wicca.{3} Another example is Oprah's mishmash of Eastern mysticism.{4}

As with other leavers, begin by asking them questions to understand what they believe and what attracted them to it. With Neo-pagans, Dyck suggests starting by sharing with them our appreciation for nature and our sense of responsibility to care for it as God commanded. We also can share the honor that Christ and the church gave to women. They need to understand that women are "fellow heirs," not maidservants in Christ's kingdom. Upon earning a listening ear, we can share how we have experienced God's presence in our midst. Share our spiritual experiences with them. Above all, recognize that you are engaging in a spiritual battle that must include fervent pray on their behalf.

As he examined his relationships with different types of leavers, Dyck realized that some of them leave not to follow after a different belief system but, instead, to rebel against their view of a creator who is attempting to limit their self expression. Some rebels are motivated by a desire to do their own thing and participate fully in the short-lived pleasures of this world. Others are motivated by a desire to spit in the face of God, declaring their independence.

To effectively reach out to spiritual rebels, we need to let them know we care about them as persons. The world is already showing them that in their rebellion they are not really free. Everybody serves something. Get them to talk about what they are serving, whether it is money, success, clothes, power, etc. Then share with them how you experience true freedom as a captive of the source of all true freedom, Jesus Christ. As Paul tells us in Galatians, "For you were called to freedom, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the

flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

## Drifters and Recoilers

Drifters and Recoilers are two more kinds of leavers.

Dyck identifies the Drifters as the largest group of leavers, exhibiting "that entrenched human defect—the tendency to drift from God."{5} They did not set out to walk away from the faith of their parents. Over time it became less important to them, until it played no real role in their lives. As Dyck put it, "the biggest danger to Christianity is Christians."{6}

Recent surveys showed 18- to 29-year-olds who indicated they had no religion growing from 11 percent in 1990 to 22 percent in 2008.{7} Of these young adults, two-thirds of them were leavers from an earlier point in their life where they considered themselves Christians. Their most common reason for leaving was not some intellectual epiphany, but rather they "just gradually drifted away from the religion."{8}

Drifters are not driven by specific intellectual objections. They may have no real objections or arguments against Christian beliefs. Instead, they are apathetic toward it. It just is not important in their life.

To reach Drifters, one must redefine their perception that a Christian life is not worth pursuing. They need to see us loving Jesus because of who He is and not because of what He can do for us. It is not about getting God to do something for us. It is about the opportunity for eternal fellowship with the One who created us all.

The Drifters need to be connected with older adults who are living with an eternal perspective. Who are "redeeming the time because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). We need to raise the bar on the Christian life. It is more than the sterile, play-acting game they may have seen from their parents. You

cannot call them back to a watered down Christianity that was unable to hold their allegiance in the first place. Instead, we need to live out before them the radical lifestyle of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

The final group of leavers are the ones Dyck calls the Recoilers. These people are a special case. Their lives have been marred by significant pain. They relate the source of this pain to their Christian experience. For the Recoilers, it is typically only in the context of a relationship that healing can take place. On the one hand, we need to empathize with them, while, on the other, they need to see the joy our faith brings to our lives. Gradually, we may be able to help them delineate between God who loves them and the people who hurt them.

## Reaching This Generation

In *Generation Ex-Christian*, Drew Dyck identified six different types of faith leavers: Postmoderns, Moderns, Neo-pagans, Spiritual Rebels, Drifters, and Recoilers. Recognizing that we are called to be "all things to all men so that we may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22), we can tailor our approach to more effectively reach each type of leaver.

Let's consider five aspects that need to be consistent regardless of which type of leaver you are dealing with.

*Listen to them to understand* which type they may be. If we jump into sharing without knowing, we run the risk they will tune us out permanently.

*Articulate why we believe what we believe*. We need to have a good basic understanding of why we believe the gospel is true. If we have a good grasp of the basics, we can tailor our approach to the type of leaver we are addressing.

*Enter into relationship with the long view in mind*. Don't

expect to reverse their dismissal of Christianity overnight. Over time we want clear away some of the obstacles standing between them and a vibrant faith. Be prepared for this effort to take time.

*Focus on forging loving relationships*. All the intelligent words in the world won't matter if they view us as hired guns adding another notch to our tally. Paul reminded Timothy, "The aim of our instruction is love proceeding from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). Demonstrating Christian love makes them more willing to sincerely listen to us.

*Consistently pray for the leavers in our lives*. As Dyck put it, "We can give our loved ones who have strayed no greater gift than time spent in the presence of God on their behalf. Plead, ramble, cry, rage—but don't stop." Pray that "God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ . . . that we may make it clear in the way we ought to speak" (Col. 4:2). If we are not bringing God into the relationship through prayer, we are not speaking with His effectiveness.

I don't believe the God who "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4) would at the same time desire a large portion of our young adults to leave behind faith in Jesus Christ. We are not to throw up our hands in surrender, but rather to dedicate ourselves to sharing Christ in ways that communicate the truth to different sets of ears. Let's commit together to reach out and bring these leavers into an eternal relationship with Christ.

**Notes**

1. Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back* (Moody Publishers, 2010), Kindle edition.
2. Ibid., Chapter 2.

3. See Michael Gleghorn, “Wicca: A Biblical Critique,” Probe Ministries, 2002, probe.org/wicca-a-biblical-critique/.
4. See Steve Cable, “Oprah’s Spirituality: Exploring A New Earth,” Probe Ministries, 2008, probe.org/oprahs-spirituality-exploring-a-new-earth/.
5. Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, chapter 16.
6. Ibid.
7. Kosmin & Keysar, *American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population, A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008*, commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/NONES_08.pdf, “Highlights.”
8. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U.S., 2009, www.pewforum.org/Faith-in-Flux-Changes-in-Religious-Affiliation-in-the-US.aspx

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# Crossing the Worldview Divide: Sharing Christ with Other Faiths

*Christians need to introduce the gospel differently to people with different worldviews. Steve Cable provides ways to talk to Muslims, Hindus, Mormons and postmoderns.*

## Changing Worldview Landscape

Growing up in the sixties and seventies, I had very limited exposure to other worldviews significantly different from my own. Raised in a small town in New Mexico, I was exposed to a

number of Hispanic Catholics, and I knew at least two families that were Mormons. Frankly, I never had either of those groups share their worldview with me. But, by and large, most people appeared to have a pretty conventional Christian worldview, answering the basic worldview questions as follows:

- *What about God? God is the creator and sustainer of this universe.*
- *What about man? Mankind is separated from God's provision by our sin nature.*
- *What about salvation? Jesus Christ is God's answer to our desperate need, offering redemption through faith in Him. When people die, those who have put their faith in Jesus will go to heaven while those who refuse will be relegated to hell.*
- *What about history? History is a linear progression culminating in the creation of a new heavens and new earth.*



Since leaving the college campus in 1977, I have lived in suburbs of major metropolitan cities. Over the last thirty-five years, the makeup of those suburbs has changed significantly. I worked as an electrical engineer with several Indian Hindus and Jains. I teach English as a Second Language to a group of Muslims, Hindus, Baha'is, atheists and Latin American Catholics. From 2000 to 2010, the Muslim population of my area grew by 220%. All of these groups have a worldview significantly different from my own. In sharing Christ with them, I cannot appeal to the Bible stories they learned in vacation Bible school as a child. I need to be aware that what I say is being processed through their worldview filter. So that what they hear may not be what I meant to say.

The apostle Paul was very much aware of the issue of worldview filters. While on his missionary journeys, he preached the

gospel

- *in synagogues established by Jews living away from Israel,{1}*
- *in market places containing Gentiles with a common Greek worldview,{2} and*
- *in front of Greek philosophers at the forefront of creating new worldviews.{3}*

In each of these environments, he preached the same truth: Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead for our sins. But he entered that subject from a verbal starting point that made sense to the audience he was speaking to. For example, in Athens he began by drawing their attention to an idol dedicated to the unknown god and he quoted some of their poets. Was he doing this because the idol was really a Christian idol or because their poets were speaking a Christian message? Of course not. He was bridging the worldview divide between their thought patterns and those of Judaism. Having done that, he finished by saying, "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."{4}

In the same way, if we want to share effectively with those from different worldviews, we need to make the effort to know how to share in a way that makes sense from their worldview perspective. We want to shake up their worldview, but we have to be able to communicate first. In the remainder of this article, we will consider the differences with and ways to share the gospel with people from four different worldview perspectives: Islam, Hindu, Mormon, and popular postmodernism.

# Bridging Across to a Muslim Worldview

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with about 1.5 billion adherents or over 20% of the world population. In America, there are over 2.6 million Muslims with most of them located in major metropolitan areas accounting for 3-4% of the population in those areas. If you live in a metropolitan area, you are probably aware of several mosques in your area.

How can I share Christ with my Muslim acquaintances in a way they can understand? To answer this question, we need to understand how their worldview differs from our own and what communication issues may come into play. Let's begin by considering the four worldview questions introduced earlier:

- *What about God? Christians believe that a transcendent, loving God created the universe and mankind. Muslims believe that a transcendent, unknowable Allah created the universe and mankind.*

- *What about man? A Christian believes man is created in the image of God, but mankind is now fallen and separated from God by our sin nature. Muslims believe that, although weak and prone to error, man is basically good and is fully capable of obeying Allah.*

- *What about salvation? For a Christian, the answer to our problem is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to reunite with God through grace. Muslims must focus on good works to earn their way into heaven. They have no instruction as to what level of goodness is required. Certainly, they must pay attention to the five pillars of Islam: reciting the creed (the shahada), daily prayers, giving 2.5% of one's income to the poor or to the spread of Islam, a pilgrimage to Mecca, and fasting during Ramadan.*

- *What about history? For a Christian, the world is moving*

*through time, not repeating itself, to reach the end God has prepared for it. For a Muslim time is a linear progression as well and it is moving forward exactly as Allah has willed.*

The key difference between our worldviews lies in the way to redemption: by faith through God's grace *or* as a reward for our good works.

How can you share effectively with Muslim friends and acquaintances? First, there are some important issues and confusing terms that will sidetrack your discussion in their minds. These include:

- ***The high cost****: in most Muslim families and societies, converting from Islam is a terrible offense, resulting in expulsion and sometimes death. Most Muslims will not enter into a conversation if they know the intent of it is to convert them to another faith.*

- ***The Trinity,*** *including Jesus as God's Son: Muslims are told that Christians worship three gods when there is only one. This area is especially problematic in thinking that God could be born to a woman and be crucified.*

- ***Belittling Mohammed*** *will offend most Muslims, causing them to cease listening to you.*

- ***Using corrupt Scripture*** *by quoting from the New Testament which they have been taught has been changed and corrupted. An interesting note on this argument for Islam and against Christianity: a study of recently discovered early copies of the Quran show that current Aramaic copies of the Quran are only consistent with the early copies 88% of the time; while similar studies of the New Testament show a 98% reliability between current translations and the earliest documents.*

Let's be clear. We are not saying that you don't need at some time to address the Trinity, the role of Mohammed as a false

prophet, and veracity of Scripture. But first, you need to be able to communicate the gospel to them in a way that they will hear it.

To share with a Muslim, you must begin with prayer for your Muslim acquaintances who are captive to powerful social ties and equally powerful demonic lies. Pray that God will work to prepare their hearts. God has been working in powerful ways preparing Muslims to listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ.{5}

Start your conversation with their most important need. Ask them, "How can you be sure that you have done enough to get into heaven?" Listen to their thoughts on this important question. Point out that the gospels say, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."{6} Are they that good? God loves us and knows that we cannot do it on our own. For this reason Jesus came to pay our penalty through His death and bring us into God's household through His resurrection.

In some Islamic countries, a good way to begin the discussion is to look at what the Koran says about Jesus to draw their attention to the specialness of Jesus. If they show an interest, you move quickly to the Bible as the true source of information on Jesus and eternal life. For more information on this approach, check out *The Camel Training Manual* by Kevin Greeson.

## Bridging Across to a Hindu Worldview

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world with about 900 million adherents. However, there are only about 1.2 million Hindus in the United States, about 0.4% of the population. Since they are mostly located in high tech, urban and suburban areas, the percentages are much higher in those areas, closer to 2% and growing. If you live in a major metropolitan area, you have probably seen one or more temples in your area.

How does the Hindu worldview compare with a Christian worldview on the four worldview questions introduced earlier?

- *What about God? The Hindu believes that the universe is eternal and the concept of an impersonal god is contained in the universe.*

- *What about man? Hindus believe that our current state is a temporary illusion and our goal is to merge into the Brahman, the god nature of the universe.*

- *What about salvation? For a Christian the answer to our problem is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to become reunited with God. This salvation can begin now and will be fully realized in heaven. For a Hindu, the answer to our problem is to live a life in such a way as to merge with Brahman at death. Unfortunately, the vast majority will be reincarnated to suffer again as another living creature.*

- *What about history? For a Hindu, the universe is eternal and history repeats itself cyclically.*

As you can see, the worldview of a Hindu varies significantly from that of a Christian on almost every point. Salvation for a Hindu is to reach a state where they no longer exist. They are integrated into the universal god. Both Hindus and Christians believe that mankind faces the problem of being born into a world full of suffering and hardship. For Hindus, there are three paths that could lead one out of this situation into oneness: 1) performing appropriate good works, 2) reaching a state of knowledge that pierces through the deception of this existence, and 3) devoting oneself to service of one of the many gods.

Being aware of these worldview differences can sensitize us to some of the communication problems in sharing with a Hindu. First, when you share with them that Jesus is the Son of God

who came to earth in the flesh, they will probably agree with you wholeheartedly. This is exactly the response I received when sharing with a Hindu couple at a Starbucks in an exclusive shopping area. After all, there are many forms of god in the Hindu pantheon. Just because someone is a god, doesn't mean I should leave off worshipping my current gods to worship this new god exclusively.

How can I share with a Hindu in a way that helps be clearly explain the gospel in the context of their worldview? I would suggest two important aspects.

First, you can begin by asking this question: What if there were only one God who transcended His creation? We are not created to be subsumed back into God, but rather we were created in His image to be able to exist with and to worship our Creator. Our Creator does not want us to worship other gods which we have made up to satisfy our desire to understand our world. If you cannot get a Hindu to understand this basic premise, then other things you tell them about the gospel will be misinterpreted because of their existing worldview filter.

Second, you can tell them that you agree that the problems of this world can be seen in the pain and suffering of life on this planet. Man has tried for thousands of years and yet the pain and suffering continue. This state of despair is the direct result of man's rejection of the love of God. We can never do enough in this life through good works, special knowledge, or serving false gods to bridge the gap back to God. God was the only one who could fix this problem and it cost Him great anguish to achieve it through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.{7}

## Bridging Across to a Mormon Worldview

There are only about 15 million Mormons worldwide, but almost 45% of them live in the United States. They make up about 2%

of the population of the United States. Compared to Muslims and Hindus, their U.S. population has remained fairly constant as a percentage basis over the last few decades. Because of their young adult missionary teams, many Americans have had some exposure to the evangelistic message of Mormonism.

How do Mormons compare with Christians in answering the four worldview questions introduced on day one? First, we need to understand that not all Mormons believe the same things. The president of the Mormons can introduce new doctrine which may contradict prior doctrine. One prominent example is the Mormon doctrine on blacks which was changed in 1978. The statements below represent my understanding as to the current orthodox Mormon position:

- *What about God? Where a Christian believes that God is eternal and transcendent, Mormons believe God was once a man like us and ascended to godhood*

- *What about man? Where a Christian believes that man is born in sin and separated from God, Mormons believe men are born in sin, but have the potential to become gods in their own right*

- *What about salvation? Where Christians believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, Mormons believe salvation comes from putting our faith in Jesus and performing good works. The good works are intended to pay back Jesus for the price He paid for us. In addition, Jesus is not eternal but was born to God and one of His spirit wives.*

- *What about history? Both Christians and Mormons believe that history is linear, but Mormons believe it is leading to a day when they could be gods ruling their own planets.*

Even though some would like to consider Mormonism as a branch of Christianity, one can see there are significant differences

between the beliefs of Mormons and Christians.

In sharing your faith with a Mormon, there are terms and concepts you need to watch out for as they will be misinterpreted. First, you are relying on the Bible as the complete and only direct revelation from God. When you do that, you need to be aware that they will assume anything you say that they don't agree with is countered in the Book of Mormon or the Pearl of Great Price. Point out to them that the clear meanings of the Bible don't need reinterpretation. Also, you can tell them that the Bible written between 2,000 and 4,000 years ago has been consistently supported by archaeological findings while the Book of Mormon written 175 years ago has no historical or archaeological support.

When talking about God the Father, Jesus, Satan, and man, be sure to make it clear that God and Jesus are one kind of being, the transcendent God of the universe, that Satan is a created angelic being, and that men are created different from the angels. A Mormon will use those terms, but will normally group all four of those beings as made basically the same.

Be leery of expecting to win over Mormon missionaries on mission. If they are sharing with you, of course, you should try to share with them. However, normally they are too focused on fulfilling their mission to really listen to someone else. It is best to share with them when you introduce the topic.

In sharing with a Mormon, you may want to consider how good one would have to be to earn their way to eternal life. After all, Jesus said, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." If you can admit you are not perfect, then the only way to redemption is through God's grace.

Some of them may feel that in the matters of the church, they are keeping the faith in a sinless manner. What if a future president changes some criteria of behavior and you find out that you have now been sinning for years? Does it make sense

to you that God's criteria for righteousness should change?{8}

## Bridging Across to a Postmodern Worldview

Postmoderns may not seem as exotic as some of the world religions we have considered to this point. But they have a distinctly different worldview than do Christians and are the largest segment of non-Christians in today's America. An actual postmodern believes that absolute truth, if it does exist at all, is impossible to find. A Christian believes that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" and that "truth comes through Jesus Christ."{9} Jesus is truth applicable to every man in every situation. What do we need to understand about postmodernism to be better equipped to share the truth with them?

Popular postmodernity has a broadly defined identity, but they should resonate with this definition: postmodernity is "incredulity toward metanarratives."{10} In other words, they reject the possibility of anyone knowing truth about the basic questions of life; e.g., our worldview questions.

As before, we will begin with our four worldview questions. Keep in mind that we just said they don't think anyone can know the truth about these types of questions.

• *What about God?* Postmoderns believe that we can't really know where we came from but we probably evolved from nothing over millions of years.

• *What about man?* Postmoderns believe that humans are neither good nor bad and are shaped by the society around them which defines what is good and bad for them.

• *What about salvation?* For a Christian, the answer to our dilemma and hope for eternal life is the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's Son. For a postmodern, each group has their own answer that helps them get through the hard

times of life, but none of the answers can be counted on as true. What is important is not their truth, but their helpfulness in coping with life's challenges.

• *What about history?* For a postmodern, history is linear moving forward to whatever happens next. Hopefully, the future will be better than the past, but there is not grand plan or purpose for mankind. In any case, if there is a grand plan, we can't know it with any certainty.

It is hard to present Jesus Christ as the source of all grace and truth to someone who denies the existence of truth or at least our ability to know it. As Dave Kinnaman writes in his book *UnChristian*, "Even if you are able to weave a compelling logical argument, young people will nod, smile, and ignore you."{11} Constructing a rational argument for Christ may not be the place to start. As Drew Dyck reported hearing from one postmodern, "I don't really believe in all that rationality. Reason and logic come from the Western philosophical tradition. I don't think that's the only way to find truth." Dyck concluded, "They're not interested in philosophical proofs for God's existence or in the case for the resurrection."{12}

To begin the process, we need to develop their trust; be their friend. Possibly, invite them to serve alongside you in ministering to the needs of others, exposing them to the ministry of Christ to the world around them.

The postmodern should be interested in your personal story, the things you have found that work for you. But don't fall into the traditional testimony rut (i.e., I was bad, I was saved, now I am wonderful); make it real by sharing real issues you have dealt with. Then convey the gospel story in a winsome way, emphasizing Jesus concern for the marginalized around Him, realizing the gospel is a metanarrative providing a universal answer to a universal problem.

Share with them why you are compelled to commit to a universal truth. I cannot live my life without making a commitment to what I believe to be the Truth. Saying "it doesn't matter" is basically giving up on eternity. Admit that claiming to know the truth about God, creation, and eternity is crazy from man's perspective. It can only be true if it is truly revealed by God. From my perspective, Jesus is the Truth.{13}

We've taken a very brief look at four distinct worldviews, different from a Christian worldview and different from each other. A simple understanding of those worldviews helps us avoid confusing terminology. We can focus on bridging the gap from their fundamental misunderstanding to faith in Christ. Only God working through the Holy Spirit can bring them to true faith, but we can play an important role in making the gospel understandable when filtered through their worldview.{14}

**Notes**

1. Acts 17:1-2, 17 for example
2. Acts 17:17, 19:9ff for example.
3. Acts 17:18-32
4. Acts 17:30-31
5. See the web articles "Breaching the Barriers to Islam" by Steve Cable and "Islam in the Modern World" by Kerby Anderson. Both can be found at www.probe.org.
6. Matthew 5:48
7. For more information on Hinduism, you can access the article "Hinduism" by Rick Rood at www.probe.org.
8. For more information on Mormonism, please access "Understanding Our Mormon Neighbors" by Don Closson and "Examining the Book of Mormon" by Patrick Zukeran. Both can be found at www.probe.org.
9. John 1:17
10. Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans., Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

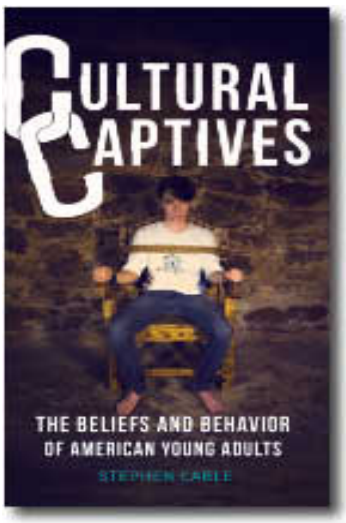
11. Dave Kinnaman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan), 2007.
12. Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2010
13. See the article "The Answer is the Resurrection" by Steve Cable at www.probe.org
14. For more information on postmodernism, you can access "Truth Decay" by Kerby Anderson and "Worldviews Part 2" by Rick Wade at www.probe.org.

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# Trend Indicates Over Half of Emerging Adults Will Identify as Non-Christian by 2020

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable




One of the dismaying trends I reported on in my book, *Cultural Captives*, was the significant increase in the percentage of people who indicated that their religion was atheist, agnostic, or nothing at all. I referred to this group collectively as the **"nones"** (those with "no religious affiliation"). The percentage of emerging adults (i.e., 18- to 29-year-olds) who self-identified as **"nones"** in 2008 was 25% of the population. This level is a tremendous increase from the 1990 level of 11%.

Now, we have later results from both the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Pew Research Center. Both surveys show another significant increase in the percentage of **"nones"** among this young adult group. In 2014, the GSS survey showed the **percentage of emerging adult "nones" was now up to 33% of the population**, an increase of eight percentage points. The Pew survey of over 35,000 Americans (an astounding number) came up with a similar result, tallying **35% of emerging adults identifying as "nones"** (an increase of nine percentage points over their 2007 survey).

When we consider the number who do not identify as either Protestant or Catholic (i.e., adding in other religions such as Islam and Hinduism), the percentage of emerging adults who do not identify as Christians increases to 43% of the population in both surveys.
If this trend continues at the same rate of growth it has been on since 1990, we will see **over half** of American emerging adults who do not self-identify as Christians by 2020. We will become, at least numerically, a post-Christian culture if things do not turn around.

Acknowledgments:
The General Social Survey 2014 data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Tom W. Smith and the National Opinion Research Center.
The Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study interactive tool, located at http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/ was the source of our data on the Pew survey

# The Church and the Social Media Revolution

*Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese examines social media's massive communication shift, with insights for the church.*

## What is Social Media?

Any media that uses two-way communication as opposed to one-way communication is *social media* rather than *mass media*, such as TV, radio, and print which deliver a message to a mass audience. Mass media is not personal like the telephone, or letter writing; it is directed to the crowd or to a particular niche in the crowd that does not allow for the audience to talk back, with some exceptions. Mass media is not social because it does not permit a conversation with its audience. Social media, such as social websites like Facebook, Twitter, and the new Youtoo Social TV website, allows for dialogue and two-way communication between speaker and audience. It is dialogue rather than monologue. Social media use is not limited to just the popular websites. Any form of electronic communication involving computers and cell phones is part of the social media revolution because these technologies offer the individual the ability to respond.



It is estimated that one-third of the world is now connected to the internet. If you have an email address you are involved in social media. This sizeable amount constitutes a revolution in communication because it changes the *way* we communicate and it changes *what* we communicate. In calling social media a revolution we simply mean this is a new way of communicating. It does not mean mass media will be abolished.

Media, along with most technological progress, operates in a layering system where a new layer or technology builds on the old one rather than abolishing it. Mass media begins with the printing press. The telephone, radio, and TV come later. Television remains the most prominent mass medium; while the printed word has not disappeared, it is certainly not as central as it was in the nineteenth century. The computer adds another layer to our media and brings them all together. It will overshadow them all, but not abolish them.

With about a third of the actual world online or engaged in social media, it is necessary that the church, which is in the business of communication, makes sure its message is accurately represented there. But the task is not as easy as starting a new profile page since there are certain problems that must be addressed as we communicate.

## The Medium Is the Message

Close to 2,247,000,000 people use social media worldwide. This is a remarkable change in just a few years and easily qualifies as a new way of communicating, unprecedented in the history of the world. It is a revolution because it changes the way we communicate from face-to-face individual contact to an electronic mediation with certain advantages and disadvantages.

We have all heard the saying, "the medium is the message."{1} This means the way we say something is as important as what we say, or that the medium affects the content of what is said. Preaching is not unaffected by this principle. Simply because someone preaches the word of God does not mean immunity to the potential negative aspects of his chosen medium just as with radio, TV, and the internet. For example, radio and TV are effective in reaching a mass audience, but this usually must come at the expense of the quality of the message; it must be toned down to fit these media. Any subject with many ideas and

complex logic may work in a book format but not on TV. Telephones put you in touch with a disembodied voice, superior to not talking or letter writing, but still not as good as actually talking to someone in person. Anyone involved with persuasion in business deals where you absolutely must communicate a convincing point knows the importance of body language, tone of voice, eye contact, appearance, and attitude—all conveyed by personal presence but lost over the phone. The phone itself shapes what you say by how it is said. It reduces communication from all five senses to one: hearing. The results are predictable: the phone reduces communication compared to actually being there.

A basic law of media says the wider the audience the less substantive a message simply because it must appeal to the common denominator in the general audience. The more people you want to reach, the less of a message you will have, which means keep it simple when it comes to a general audience so the majority of people can understand it. This is the drawback of instant and mass communication. We sacrifice quality of thought and depth of analysis for instant access to a mass audience and for immediate applicability of a general principle. In other words, we are telling people what to do without reflection, which is time consuming, slow, and simply awkward. Analysis is meant for the personal level, and mass communication is not personal. The reductionist trend in media can be circumvented to some extent through niche audiences which many social media sites actually represent. This is a fair reflection of actual communities. What is society but the collection of smaller groups put into a whole?

## Disembodiment

Social media represents a disembodied form of community. This of course is the nature of long distance relationships and communication. The reduction of knowledge to its simplest forms brings with it the sense that knowledge or community is

simply information. The gospel can be communicated as information but it is more than that. The same is true with traditional forms of preaching, books, or even TV. We know after all has been said there still remains a side of the gospel that must be experienced or encountered in real people. The gospel must be embodied and not simply read about or talked about. This was the gist of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians: "you are a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3-4). We might as well say written not electronically on the transient screen with flickering pixels, but in flesh and blood and in one-to-one encounters with friends, family, and neighbors. Media, as good as it is, cannot substitute for personal experience of God and fellowship with others. This brings the idea of an online community, church or school into question. There is no doubt that people communicate effectively this way, even on Facebook, and they can learn through this medium just like any traditional means, but there is a doubt as to how qualitative one's learning or one's community will be if there is no personal encounter. Can long lasting bonds and relationships form strictly through electronic means?

Social media is excellent at giving you a wide audience just like TV and radio and even meeting new people, but it is not a replacement for face-to-face contact. Media technology may best be seen as an excellent supplement to relationships and community, but not a replacement. It can be used to stay in touch and keep people connected, but in cannot ultimately replace our community and social network of actual people. I think the goal of an online church should be to get people out from behind a computer and into contact and fellowship with others. Social media can facilitate friendship, but it cannot replace it. We are warm-blooded creatures and need other warm-blooded people to have community, something a computer screen cannot provide. Social media serves as a supplement to

community, not a substitute!

## Social Media and Privacy

What happens in Vegas stays on Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter. Privacy is dead. The computer killed it, and no one cares. Every step forward in technological progress has a price to pay. We have moved forward in creating social media which enables us to communicate with a wider audience, but society has paid a terrible price with the loss of privacy. The computer remembers everything. This reality should cause some pause and reflection on what we say simply because it can be potentially recalled and even used against us. Employers routinely check Facebook pages of potential employees. Creditors use Facebook to collect debts. The police use Facebook to find people and build cases against them. We think of social media as fun and games, much like a video game, when in fact it is much more serious. All social media communication such as email or texting exists in a nether world between an illusion of privacy and the potential public access by everyone. The user falsely assumes his message is private without realizing it may be available to anyone. Future generations will archive and access all that we say today.

Even more seriously, the NSA is currently building a supercomputer called the Utah Data Center scheduled to go online in 2013 that will monitor all your digital actions including email, cell phone calls, even Google searches.{2} It will be able to track all your purchases electronically. Whatever you do digitally will be available for scrutiny by the government. I know you wanted to hear how great social media is for communicating, evangelism, and so forth, and it is great, but there are pitfalls and dangers that we must also confront. Let’s not get so swept up with our enthusiasm for social media that we stick our head in the sand when it comes to the dangers. This is the greatest problem I see Christians

make when they analyze technology. They see only the advantages and positive sides of their technological involvement and refuse to consider what may go wrong. It will not create a damper to analyze the potential problems of our technology use, rather it will make us sober-minded as we are commanded to be (1 Peter 1:13, 4:7 and 5:8).

## Dialogue vs. Monologue

Social media does offer a great advantage over the traditional means of mass communication that the church has used in print, TV, and radio. Social media represents a democratization of media including TV. Mass media is traditionally one-sided communication or monologue where one powerful voice does all the speaking, especially on TV. Social media allows for multiple voices to be heard at once and in contrast with each other, allowing for a dialogue and conversation as opposed to the pedagogy of monologue. This is significant because, as we are told by media experts like Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul, propaganda is usually the result of only one voice being permitted in a discussion or the absence of dialogue, much like in a commercial where only one view point is promoted. McLuhan notes the importance of dialogue with media: "The environment as a processor of information is propaganda. Propaganda ends where dialogue begins. You must talk to the media, not to the programmer. To talk to the programmer is like complaining to a hot dog vendor at a ballpark about how badly your favorite team is playing."{3}

Really, for the first time in history does the general public have a chance to talk back to knowledge brokers and those creating information and to those creating faith. A few tell the many what to think through mass media; through social media an individual tells the mass what he thinks. Social media offers a multitude of voices on all topics. It may appear chaotic and directionless at times, and at other times there appears incisive wisdom. Social media reflects the

turmoil and sanity of its users. Social media is many things, but unlike its big brother mass media, social media is not propaganda. The church needs to soberly join this conversation.

**Notes**

1. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).

2. James Bamford, "The NSA is Building the Country's Biggest Spy Center (watch what you say)" in *Wired* March 17, 2012.

3. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam, 1967, 142); Jaques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

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# Expanding the Biblical Worldview of Christians in Myanmar

*Don Closson, who has taught Christian worldview on several continents, recently returned from Myanmar, which has in recent years been oppressed heavily by an atheistic regime. Representing his church Christ Fellowship in McKinney (TX), he shared with pastors and students a biblical perspective on world missions and how the Church there is both historically blessed and currently in a good position to reach their own nation (formerly known as Burma) with the gospel.*

Details of a trip can begin to fade even as the effects of jet lag seem to grow stronger. Fortunately, I do remember many wonderful aspects of my whirlwind eleven-day trip with friend and pastor Ken Stoneking to Myanmar (the U.S. still insists on calling it Burma), one of the poorest and most oppressed countries in Asia.

## Praise God for a Fruitful Trip

This was my most successful cross-cultural teaching experience to date. I say that for several reasons. First, the topic was timely and relevant to my audience of pastors and students at the Mandalay Bible Seminary. I spoke on God's Kingdom as it relates to world missions by breaking the topic down into four parts: the theological, historical, cultural and strategic perspectives. After I finished teaching the 20 hour class over five days, my host told me that he had been struggling with this very topic, particularly how to motivate the church leaders in Myanmar to play a greater role in missions. He expressed that many churches in Myanmar have an inward perspective and needed help seeing that believers have an obligation to be a blessing to those around us. He told me that my talks gave him a number of ideas to develop further after our visit.

## Myanmar's Uniqueness

My preparation for this class increased both my own understanding and appreciation for the task of world missions. As I put the lessons together, I got more and more excited about my opportunity to share with the pastors and students. I realized that they live in a strategic place to reach a part of the world limited to Americans. Myanmar is in the global *10/40 window* that defines the least evangelized segment of the globe. In fact, its capital city Yangon is listed as one of the 100 gateway cities to this 10/40 region, the rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north latitudes, according to The

Joshua Project. The population of the world is growing more Asian every year and Myanmar is centrally located to impact China, Thailand, and India!

## Connecting the Dots…

A serendipity was "connecting the dots" as I researched the relationship between the Church in Myanmar and the early Reformation—going all the way back to John Wycliffe in the 1300s. Wycliffe challenged the authority of the Pope and the refusal of the Church to put the Bible in of the language of the common people. His followers were known as Lollards, and they preached anti-clerical and biblically-centered reforms.

Jon Huss read the teachings of Wycliffe in the 15th century and attempted to reform the church in Bohemia and the adjacent area called Moravia. Gaining a wide following, the Hussites influenced the region around Prague, Czech Republic, including a group which became known as the Moravian church. Huss was eventually burned at the stake in the center of Old Town Square in Prague for challenging the official doctrines of the Catholic Church. However, the Moravian Brethren continued on and became a powerful force for evangelism in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Evangelist and church leader Count Zinzendorf was at the center of this movement during the late 1700s. He traveled to America and England meeting with Jonathan Edwards and other leaders of the Great Awakening that brought revival to both England and the Colonies in the 1730s and 40s.

In 1806 a group of college students at Williams College prayed that God would again bring revival to the country, sparking a movement among college students known as the Haystack Prayer Revival. These five students would help influence a young man named Adoniram Judson to commit his life to missions. Judson set sail for India with his wife in 1812, but the East India Company would not allow them to enter because they feared that

missionaries would stir up the Hindus. Taking the first boat East, Judson arrived in Rangoon (now Yangon) in 1813. After six years he had his first convert and when he died at age 62, after spending 38 years in Myanmar, it was estimated that there were over 200,000 Christians in the country. Judson was the first to translate the Bible into the Burmese language, a translation that was so good that it is still used today and preferred over recent translations because it is more theologically conservative.

## More Dots

The day after I left, an earthquake hit Myanmar. Thankfully, God spared the Mandalay Bible Seminary. Then our president visited for the first time in recognition of the political changes occurring there. Please pray for the Christians in this strategic country. They are standing boldly and are ready to be used of the Lord for the Great Commission.