

Discipleship and Mission for the Modern World: How to make it happen in church

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Summary

In the Western world today religion is generally regarded as a marginalised affair of little or no relevance to public life. This paper argues that this assessment accurately describes the reality of Western culture, reflecting a massive failure of Christian discipleship and mission. Many churches have been so influenced by modern worldliness that they have lost key elements of Gospel distinctiveness. The paper examines both the secular influences and Biblical teaching in order to suggest first steps towards a re-establishment of effective Christian discipleship and mission.

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PART 1: MODERN WORLDLINESS

1 Introduction: The Failure of Discipleship and Mission

1.1 The title of this paper may seem paradoxical. Where else could discipleship and mission be birthed and developed except in Church? But we must remember our cultural context. Christianity has been in catastrophic decline almost everywhere in the Western world (Brierley 2000, Brown 2001, Bruce 2002, Petre 2005, Voas 2005,¹). Unsurprisingly, religion is now generally regarded as a marginalised affair of little or no relevance to public life:

most nominally Christian societies have already downgraded religion to a matter of minor importance towards which there was no danger in exercising toleration. (John Rex, 1985, page 11)

1.2 Christian churches are seen as promoting neither a viable alternative, nor any significant challenge to modern secular life. Sadly, even I, as a Christian, must concede that this assessment is largely true and reflects a massive failure of Christian discipleship and mission.

1.3 Given the reality of our present situation, the crucial question is “How can our churches become places where discipleship and mission will be fully understood and flourish?”

2 Key Facets of Modern Worldliness

2.1 Many of us have been so effectively influenced by modern worldliness that we have lost key elements of Gospel distinctiveness.

Once upon a time in the West worldliness and separation were code words among gospel people. Worldliness meant smoking, drinking, ball-room dancing, novel reading, theatre- and movie-going, makeup for women, deodorant for men, mixed bathing for adults and late nights for children. ... There is far more to worldliness today than was dreamed of at the fag-end of the Christendom culture of the West fifty years ago, and a far more radical view of separation from the world has now to be thought out. (James I. Packer, 1998, pages ix-x)

2.1 Modern worldliness has three key facets (**Figure 1**):

Figure 1 Modern Worldliness

- **Secularism** – living as if God does not exist
- **Individualism** – my individual choice is the moral priority
- **Consumerism** – creating my identity and self image

The undergirding requirement for personal holiness is too foundational to the Gospel ever to be outdated. But an *exclusive* focus on the kind of issues mentioned by Packer fails to recognise that a practical atheism has been built into modern life and modern institutions (see Gay 1998). The most insidious temptation to 'worldliness' today comes in the form of an all-pervasive suggestion that it is normal and expedient *to live as if God doesn't exist and as if faith is not relevant to everyday life*. We can be non-smoking, non-drinking, non-drug-taking, and virtuous, but still live as if there is no God. Living as if there is no God is fundamentally what *secularism* is all about and – whatever our confession of faith – that is how most of us live. Those Muslims have a point, who comment that they do not see Christians, but only secular, materialistic, individualists who happen to go to religious meetings!

... it now seems the rationalistic world view of Western man has almost totally devoured Christianity. ... there is hardly any difference between the attitudes and morals of most Christians and those of the liberal secularists ... this means that Muslims have to take Christians not as their friends, but as a part of the disease that is – at least for them – the fundamental problem of our time. (Ziauddin Sardar, 1991, pages 60-61)

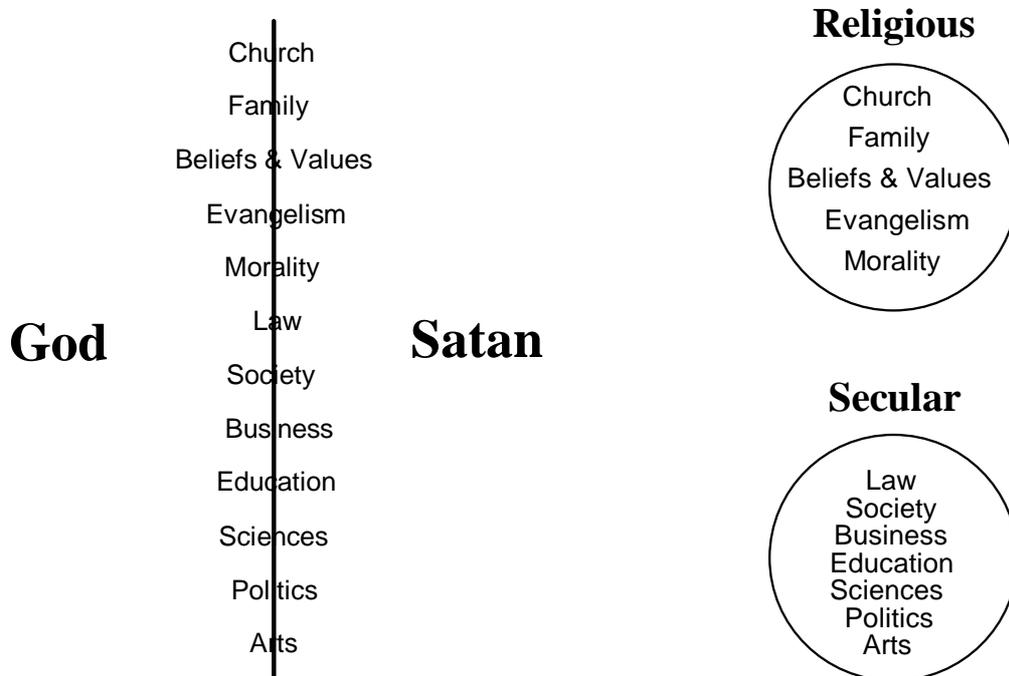
2.2 In our Western world individualism rules. My autonomous right to choose is almost unquestioned, *i.e.* communal responsibility, let alone God-given requirements and standards, are ignored. Furthermore, our whole society functions on the assumption that my foundational choice will be towards optimal consumption – that it is through my choice of consumer goods and experiences that I will create my identity and image, realise my potential, and pursue my self-interests.

3 Secular Dualism in the Church

3.1 The main way in which secularism seduces us as Christians is through a particular form of **dualism**. In place of the Biblical diagnosis that two *regimes* (of God & of Satan) are contending for the whole (every part) of creation, we tacitly accept the secular version that there is a struggle between two *realms* within creation. This version accepts a division between *private* and *public* areas of life and between *religious* (or *sacred*) and *secular* (or *profane*) activities (**Figure 2**). In Biblical terms, we have accepted the lie that only certain parts of the world have been affected by the Fall and thus only those parts need to be redeemed.

Figure 2 Two Regimes or Two Realms?

Two Regimes Contesting Everything? or Two Realms of Christian Life?



3.2 Christians and churches influenced by this pagan dualism restrict their Christian activities and teaching to the private and religious areas of life (as defined, of course, by secularism). Tacitly they accept the myth that the public and secular realms of life are religiously neutral – neither for nor against Christ. In contrast, the Bible teaches us that *faith is foundational to everything*² If we withdraw Christian faith from any areas of our lives, then those areas will become entirely shaped and controlled by other, idolatrous, faiths. And, rather obviously, a Christian faith that presents itself as irrelevant to life in the workplace, education, the arts and sciences, and politics, and to the development and transmission of our culture in general, is hardly real Christianity. It is a different faith to that set forth in the Bible.

3.3 Since secular media and secular schools are the dominant influences in today's culture, it is little wonder that many Christians and many churches have been heavily influenced by secularism. In **Part 3** (Section 10) there are some simple tests which I have developed to help churches assess how far they may have become worldly. The reality is that for many decades in the 20th century, under the onslaught of secularism, Christians and churches throughout the Western world withdrew from engagement in public life into a privatised religiosity focusing almost entirely on personal morality and personal evangelism. In his much-acclaimed book, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (4th edn 2006) John Stott (1921-2011) followed the American historian, Timothy Smith, in aptly calling this period of Evangelical history 'the Great Reversal' (Stott, 2006, page 28). And those familiar with the writings of the late Bishop Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998)³ will remember that his prophetic challenge was

for Christians to reclaim the gospel as *public truth* and cease living as if it was only private opinion.

PART 2 WHAT IS CHURCH?⁴

4 Recognising the Church

4.1 Church is not buildings, but *people*. And it is not just any group of people, but *people-in-covenanted-community*. They are sharing and working out together a commitment to Christ. Church is not community restricted to a private realm separated from the world, but *community in the world, proclaiming the gospel as public truth, and taking responsibility in every area of true human life*. We are the church in our local neighbourhood as much when we are 'scattered' in our homes and workplaces as when we are 'gathered' in church meetings.

4.2 Yet the church is a paradox. On the one hand it doesn't belong. It exists on the margins of the modern world, 'outside the camp',⁵ an alien and pilgrim community.⁶ But it is also the new humanity, the first fruits of the new creation appearing in the midst of the old, the witness to the nations.⁷ It is marginalised simply because the gospel is resisted and opposed by the world. The Church cannot but be an alternative community engaged in mission to the world in which it exists. To be anything else is a denial of the truth of the gospel.

5 Recognising Church Servants (following the New Testament emphasis, my preferred title for Church 'leaders')⁸

5.1 If the role of church servants is to see to it that *every* member is equipped for *every* good work,⁹ then why do we regard our ministry in the workplace as less holy than that of the minister and our work of little or no interest to God? Why do we regard work in the home as a third-rate choice?

5.2 On average, UK Christians spend 65% of their waking time in the workplace. David Clark's seminal survey (1993) found that the overwhelming majority of Christians in Britain (of all denominations) feel that they get no support through prayer, teaching, preaching, worship, housegroup fellowships, or pastoral support for their time at work. Many simply wanted to be asked about it. Similarly, Mark Greene's research¹⁰ into what evangelicals feel about the preaching they have received reveals that of the four main life areas he identified – work, home, church, and personal/spiritual – Christians feel that ministers have helped them least in the area of work. More specifically, 50% have never heard a sermon on work, 75% have never been given a Christian perspective on vocation, and only 25% have been encouraged to minister in their workplace. Since these respondents were drawn from highly motivated groups the reality is almost certainly much worse!

6 All of Life is Mission

6.1 The clear lesson of *Acts* is that the Holy Spirit is a *missionary* Spirit and that *all* whom He fills are called to be missionaries *all the time*. The Spirit-birthing and Spirit-filled church was to continue Jesus' ministry (*Acts* 1:1) as the light of the world¹¹, starting in Jerusalem and then moving out to the ends of the earth (*Acts* 1:8). This did not primarily mean 'first to your own neighbours and nation and then to foreigners', but, in conformity to the Biblical pattern, 'first develop a true Christian community life (church) where you are – which, in Jerusalem, already included people from diverse cultural and language backgrounds (*Acts* 2:5-12) – and then go and see that it is reproduced throughout the world'¹². We are all called to serve and worship God in every part of daily life and work, witnessing to the truth of the gospel of Christ in word and deed, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

6.2 Of course there is much more in the Bible about mission than just *Acts*. Summarising his 2006 book, *The Mission of God*, Christopher Wright wrote that his argument is that

... all the great sections of the canon of Scripture, all the great episodes of the Bible story, all the great doctrines of the biblical faith, cohere around the Bible's central character – the living God and his grand plan and purpose for the whole of creation. The mission of God is what unifies the Bible from creation to new creation. (Wright, 2010, page 17; see also Goheen, 2011)

... unless God's people walk in God's way, there is no visible mission to the nations. The need for the church to be a "contrast society", a community that attracts the world to God by the sheer, surprising power of missional holiness, remains one of the greatest challenges that a biblical theology of the mission of God's lays before the church. (Wright, 2010, page 283)

Basically, the New Testament was written by disciples, for disciples, to make disciples. ... the making of disciples, and the discipling of those who have formerly been evangelized, are tasks that go on through multiple lives and generations. (Wright, 2010, pages 284-285)

6.3 Christian mission takes place wherever we are. It is not something that only takes place overseas. Yet the 'overseas' assumption is so prevalent that it powerfully thwarts much vital missionary work. To give just one example, when we returned from South Asia in 1987, to work amongst the *same South Asian people* in the UK, our financial support steadily fell (no longer being overseas, we weren't real missionaries any more!). We found that in the town we were called to, many thousands of pounds annually was going from the churches to support mission work in India, Nepal and Pakistan, but after 30 years of South Asian presence in their own town (by then nearly 20% of the population!) not one Christian worker was adequately supported (and very little of the support was locally generated).

6.4 Mission does – and must – take place in every profession and occupation. Here is Christopher Wright again:

Your daily work matters because it matters to God. It has its own intrinsic value and worth. If it contributes in any way to the needs of society, the service of others, the stewardship of the earth's resources, then it has some place in God's plans for this creation and in the new creation. And if you do it conscientiously as a disciple of Jesus, bearing witness to him, being always ready to give an answer to those who enquire about your faith, and being willing to suffer for Christ if called to – then he will enable your life to bear fruit in ways you may never be aware of. You are engaged in the mission of God's people.

(Wright, 2010, pages 242-243)

All of life is religion, but not all is church-related (in the institutional sense of 'church'). The missionary character of the church does not refer just to activities such as the preaching of the gospel in evangelistic meetings. Rather it refers to the entire presence and action of the church in the world. Yet the 'church' assumption is another one that significantly undermines mission. Much vital UK Christian work in the professions and public life is unsupported by churches. This is, of course, one reason for the enormous growth in 'parachurch' organisations. That growth has created enormous pastoral problems (see 7 below). By their very nature, parachurch organisations are specialised and don't deal with Christian life as a whole. Consequently, when trouble comes there may be no-one to pick up the pieces. In a deep sense they tend to lack integrity. Yet their growth has been a (necessary?) response to the retreat of churches into privatised religiosity.

6.5 Mission is not just about personal morality and personal evangelism. It is also about the nature and practices of our daily life and work. Even Christians – and even 'overseas missionaries' – can, in their work practices, be effective witnesses for the 'practical atheism' of Western secular idolatries, rather than for the gospel of Christ.

We are all witnessing all the time, and all converting all the time ... The only question is, what is it we witness and convert to? Is it our own culture, our own lifestyle, our own sense of superiority or sense of failure? Or is it Jesus Christ? As a missionary, did I spend more time witnessing unconsciously to the "atheistic" culture of Europe inculcated in me by school, university and even theological college, than I did consciously preaching and teaching about Christ?

(Dan Beeby, 1990, page 1)

7 Sharing the Burdens

7.1 All Christians need and should receive mission(ary) support. Many Christians are able to work at these issues in their normal home or work context. The support they need from their church is that of insightful and challenging teaching (*2 Timothy* 3:16-17) and prayer support. It hardly needs saying that we all need to be in a context, and in pastoral relationships, where such (mutual) support is available.

7.2 But much more than that may be needed.

Stories about job stress occur regularly in Christian magazines and books. They come from every kind of workplace and profession. They are deeply upsetting, not simply because of the trauma and stress suffered by those involved, but even more from the terrible inadequacy of the usual Christian response. We'll consider two such stories. The first is about a Christian teacher (Todd 2005)

The teacher had been in the profession for 27 years when she became Deputy Head of an inner city primary school. The problems were immense. The Head was not coping and the teaching staff were uncooperative, working against the management. There were many difficult children and horrendous family situations. At the beginning of the Deputy's second year in the school, the Head suddenly left and never returned. The Deputy was propelled into Acting Headship. Immediately before Christmas she was notified of a full OFSTED inspection in February. She was working 60-70 hours a week, physically exhausted, and spending most of her holidays ill or sleeping. And so the story unfolds until eventually her body gave up.

7.3 The focus in this article, as in most Christian articles on extreme job stress, was on issues of personal discipleship – in order to encourage others who may find themselves in similar situations. The problem is that, seen only as tales of personal discipleship, the stories tell us that Christians should look to God to rescue them out of these oppressive jobs into better ones. The faulty theology behind this response is highlighted by Christopher Wright:

The Bible begins and ends with creation. It opens with the words, “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), and its final great vision opens with the words, “Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth’” (Rev. 21:1). The trouble is that some Christians seem to have Bibles that begin at Genesis 3 and end at Revelation 20. They know all about sin from the story of the fall, and they know that God has solved the sin problem through Christ, and that they will be safe on the great day of judgment. The story of creation for them is no more than a backdrop for the story of salvation, and the Bible's grand climax speaks to them only of going to heaven when they die (even though the last chapters of the Bible say nothing about us going anywhere, but eagerly anticipate God's coming here).

But a Bible stripped of its beginning and ending will produce a concept of mission that is distorted in the same way. We will imagine that God's only concern, and therefore ours too, is to save people from sin and judgment. Now of course, there can be no doubting that the Bible gives enormous attention to that issue, and no doubt also that it must be at the heart of our mission in God's name. But it's not the whole story. It's not the whole story of the Bible, and it should not be the whole story of our mission.

The Bible's story is that the God who created the universe, only to see it ravaged by evil and sin, has committed himself to the total redemption and restoration of the whole creation, has accomplished it in advance through the

cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and will bring it to glorious completion in the new creation when Christ returns. In between the great poles of the original creation and the new creation, the Bible has a great deal more to say about creation.

In fact, creation is one of the major themes in biblical theology. So it would be amazing if it did *not* have a significant place within a biblical theology of mission. And indeed it *is* astonishing, and very sad, that it has such an insignificant, virtually nonexistent, place in the mission theology and practice of so many Christians who like to claim that they are “biblical” in all things. (Wright, 2010, pages 48-49)

7.4 Before we explore what this might mean for our first example, let me offer another story that at least takes the Christian response further (Vandervelde 1996):

Some time ago an acquaintance of ours had increasingly greater qualms about his daily work. He worked in Canada at an international oil company. As he worked there over the years and became more aware of the destructive effect of the company's policies on the environment and on the economies of third world countries, he wondered whether he could continue to work there. He realised that simply going to another oil company would help little, for the policies would be very similar. Moreover, he had trained all his life for this work. He started sharing his concerns with members of his church community. Some of these members became convinced that he should leave his job and told him so. This advice was no doubt given with the best of intentions. It lacked only one thing. To their advice for him to quit his job they should have added this phrase, "And we will pool our resources to make it possible for you and your family to sort all this out." The advice of his friends lacks Christian integrity, if it is not born in and borne by Christian community. (George Vandervelde (1939-2007) 1996, page 9)

People in these situations may need our financial support as well as our fellowship and prayers. George Vandervelde's example provides a good example of this point and our church's mission(ary) support must anticipate and provide cover for such situations. That alone is quite a challenge to traditional Christian thinking about mission support! But it is still not enough. Neither example addresses the biblical theology of creation highlighted by Christopher Wright.

7.5 Our original and on-going human task is one of responsibility for a creation God has committed to our care, a responsibility to steward its rich resources – human and material – for the loving service of our neighbour and to the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom. The larger message of the Bible is that the Fall hindered and subverted our cultural task and that it will now be fulfilled in Christ. We await the full revelation of that fulfilment, but we are called to fill the earth with signs and tasters of that fulfilment. It is in that soil that the Gospel bears its most abundant fruit. The two stories recounted above should certainly stir compassion for the victims, but also provoke shame at our emasculation of the Bible and the Gospel. As

noted above, when seen as tales of personal discipleship, the stories tell us only that Christians should look to God for rescue and escape.

But what about the work situations themselves? If they remain unchallenged and unchanged, then someone else – maybe another Christian! – will face the same situation from which we have been released. Having known the truth of the situation, do we not bear Gospel responsibility to challenge and change it? (see Olasky, 2009-10)

7.6 How, then, is our mission task transformed if we re-evaluate it in the light of our creation task? We are witnesses in our society and culture today to God’s creation purposes for His world. That means, on the one hand, exposing and condemning the evil of systems of unrighteousness that place people under such intolerable stress and witnessing against those who create and maintain those systems, and, on the other hand, providing appropriate mission support. These situations then become issues of concern to the whole church, which will almost certainly require a communal response, not simply from our church, but from several churches acting together. If we provide the lead, we will often receive support from others “who promote peace (*shalom*)” (*Luke 10: 6*). Doesn’t obedience to the gospel of Christ demand this? Are we equipping and supporting our young people to tackle these crucial issues of workaday life? Are we warning our congregations that Christian obedience is likely to be costly? It may provoke persecution (which should be expected ¹³). It may also be amazingly evangelistic. Do we really believe the Gospel we profess?

7.7 Discipleship, mission and ministry are not, first and foremost, *activities*, but a *way of life*, a life of faith-obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ in every area and detail of daily life, wherever we happen to be. In and through this life of service and mission, we are called to build up the community (‘Body’) of His Church, advance His kingdom and bring glory and honour to the Father.

**Discipleship and mission are not, first and foremost,
activities, but a way of life.**

7.8 In the light of this discussion, *Mission(ary) Support Committees* should have two main roles:

1. Their **first** and **general** role is that of ensuring that the church programme trains a missionary congregation, equipping and motivating church members for lives of discipleship and mission.
2. Their **second** and **specific** role is that of responsibility for ensuring prayer and practical support for those in the frontline of mission, especially for those called to challenge and reform situations of injustice and unrighteousness.

8 Conclusion to Part 2

8.1 Gathering these points up we must affirm/insist that Christian mission:

- involves every Christian.
- is corporate as well as individual.
- occurs everywhere, not just overseas.
- takes place in every profession and occupation.
- is not just about personal morality and personal evangelism, but also about the nature and practices of our daily life and work.
- requires us to readjust our priorities in giving and receiving prayer and teaching support.
- is such that some Christians – both here and overseas – will need financial support.

PART 3: HOW WORLDLY IS THE CHURCH?

9 Introduction: What is a Christian School?

9.1 To clarify the issues, we can consider a different matter, that of Christian schooling. American education professor, John Van Dyk, has asked the question, 'Can Christian teachers really teach Christianly in a Christian school?' (Van Dyk, 1997, page 174).¹⁴ A seemingly absurd question, but Van Dyk had a serious point. If Christian teaching is the kind of teaching that guides our children towards knowledgeable and responsive Christian discipleship and mission, then some Christian schools may be structured and run in such a way that this goal is unattainable.

I have been in Christian schools where I seriously doubt genuine Christian teaching is possible. (John Van Dyk, 1997, page 174)

9.2 Let Van Dyk explain:

In many ways [Christian schools in the US] are identical to public schools, and in some ways they have not changed in a hundred years. I mean such things as short class periods, bells ringing, children mass taught while sitting in rows, teachers talking for more than 85% of the

time, grading, sorting, competition, and so on. What kind of discipleship can we really teach in such an environment?

Or look at the curriculum. You will find many a Christian school curriculum chopped up and fragmented into unrelated pieces. Talking about God here and there is not going to prevent our children from catching a fractured picture of what should be understood as a beautiful, coherent, interrelated creation. Think also about the appalling lack of community in numerous Christian schools, when teaching Christianly should mean, among other things, inducting our children into a real community. But what do we see? Individual teachers cooped up in their classrooms with hardly a moment to confer with a colleague, infighting and strife, contradictory philosophies, conflict between principal and staff or board. Moreover, some parents give only lip service to the talk about Christian discipleship; in actuality such talk is mere "warm fuzzies" to them, as in reality they look for schools to teach their children to be ambitious, success-seeking individuals, trained in the American way of consumerism.

Can you teach Christianly in a Christian school? Can you really teach the children to become radical, self-effacing disciples of the Lord, Christians who will be out to sacrifice themselves for the poor, the widow, and the orphan? Are we exciting graduates who, in fact, prophetically address the sinfulness of much of our cozy, comfortable, more-is-better style of life? Could you teach these values without running into serious trouble with the school authorities and parents?(Van Dyk, 1997, pages 174-175).

9.3 These are exactly the kinds of issue that we face in our churches. If our churches have become worldly – significantly conformed to the secular world and its values – then they will not be able to model Christian discipleship and mission, or provide proper contexts for its practice.

10 Assessing Churchly Worldliness

10.1 I have developed five simple questions to help churches assess how far their Christian faith may have been moulded by the secular world (**Figure 3**):

Figure 3 Five Serious Questions for Churches

1. In the life of our church, which professions and occupations are recognised and supported?

2. How is this support reflected in our church's services and prayer meetings?
 3. What are the testimonies given in our church's meetings about?
 4. Which Christian stories¹⁵ are told in our church and which aspects of Christian life are emphasised in those stories?
 5. Do we regularly recount the Christian history of our country, town and church (learning from the bad episodes as well as the good)?
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10.2 If there is a hierarchy of occupations implicit in our church life then we are thinking in worldly fashion. Numerous surveys show that most Christians place missionaries and pastors at the top¹⁶, other church programme leaders after them, then those in 'caring professions', education and political leadership, followed by those at the forefront of crisis situations, or who have the task of maintaining law and order. All others hardly ever feature at all. Prayer reflects these perceptions, only adding those who are ill, or in situations of serious need. The testimonies tend to be about personal moral or evangelistic successes, or failures, reflecting the same emphases in the stories we tell and in the books we recommend. Rather, we need to think of a spectrum of occupations and seek to understand what Christian discipleship means in each case.

10.3 John works in Munich. He was a town planner, but now works for a European mission in street evangelism. He visits his church in England several times a year and often gets a short slot in a Sunday service or in a midweek meeting. He produces a regular prayer letter, often with requests to pray for specific people by name. Those 'at home' will probably never meet any of them in this life. Andrew, in contrast, works in a local hospital. He is a housegroup leader, on the PCC, and occasionally preaches. But even his housegroup members do not know the name of anyone he works with and he has never shared about any of the active issues in his part of the National Health Service. He has not asked for prayer about issues that affect him, nor asked for prayer for the salvation of his work colleagues. Andrew prays about these things, but his church and housegroup don't. Why? Well, we all know why – John is regarded as a missionary and Andrew isn't. But is this true or right? Is it biblical? In whose situation is someone more likely to see the difference that Jesus makes to a life?

10.4 When, if ever, did we hear a testimony about:¹⁷

- the latest work of a Christian artist or musician?
- a business enterprise being refashioned into a caring Christian community?
- a Christian veterinary scientist explaining the debates over badger culling?
- a Christian executive seeking to reform 'grey area' business practices?
- a medical practice implementing a Christian vision of care and prevention?

- a philosophy teacher running a church programme that introduces members to the secular worldviews that shape modern life, and suggests appropriate Christian responses?
- a Christian craftsman demonstrating some of the skills involved in producing beautiful furniture from well-seasoned wood?
- a Christian financial services consultant explaining all the different financial products, but with discernment of the idolatries at work?
- a Church school teacher reporting a breakthrough in the development of a Christian geography, or foreign languages curriculum?
- a Christian biologist explaining some of the latest research that renders materialist theories of evolution so implausible?
- a Christian parent leading a discussion series on secular influences on home life?
- a Christian politician running 'Election Awareness' meetings which introduce people to a Christian perspective on current issues, publicise the known commitments of local candidates, and involve hustings events at which those candidates can be interrogated?
- a Christian soil scientist explaining her research into the design of soil and soil microbes and the harm caused by some common agricultural practices?
- a Christian social worker exploring new ways of tackling homelessness?
- a Christian management consultant critiquing the pagan assumptions and beliefs embodied in modern management training and practice?
- A Christian geologist explaining the issues behind the debates on fracking?
- a Christian agriculturist illuminating the controversy over the genetic modification of plants and animals?

If such testimonies are infrequent or rare, then how will our young people catch a motivating vision of what Christian discipleship and mission mean (and may cost) in all the different areas of modern life? And will it not mean that most of us will continue to leave (at least) 80% of ourselves at the church door (*i.e.* our daily lives)?

10.5 Which stories do we recount? When we tell, say, the story of William Carey taking the gospel to India (1793), do we tell of his work of cultural transformation?¹⁸ He became a great linguistic scholar, translating the whole Bible into six Indian languages and portions into 29 more. He was a professor of Bengali, Sanskrit and Marathi at *Fort William College*, Calcutta, for 29 years. He was so proficient in Bengali that he is known as the 'Father of Bengali Prose' for his grammars, dictionaries and translations. He founded *Serampore College* (1818) to train Indian Christians. The college (now university) was evangelical, but interdenominational, with open admission. The curriculum was wide and Carey himself lectured in botany and zoology as well as in divinity. He helped develop the great *Royal (now Indian) Botanic Garden* in Kolkata (Calcutta). Its great botanist was William Roxburgh, but it was Carey who edited and published Roxburgh's works at his Serampore press. Carey also led in the formation of the *Agricultural Society of India* (1820). He established a network of charity (free) schools and developed wide-ranging curricula (and this was nearly two centuries ago!). His press produced the school texts. In the preceding century in Britain, John Wesley founded schools, wrote popular books on a

wide range of 'secular' subjects for his Methodist bands and classes, and carried out several significant scientific experiments. Do we convey the richness of the stories, so that our children are envisioned to live by faith, live for Christ, in every area of their lives, public as well as private? Are we able to be such role models?

10.6 Do we discover and keep in church memory the Christian history of our country, town and church, again in all its breadth? Do we celebrate each year the key national and local events of Christian history? Christian history is no longer taught in the schools (perhaps the greatest thing we have lost by surrendering education to the secular world). I often put up a list of key Christian dates to see how many are known!¹⁹ Without the forging of those historical connections between the Bible and our lives today, we are rootless as Christians, and the development of Christian culture and community – of real gospel challenge in our society (and therefore persecution,²⁰) – will not happen.

11 Engaging with and Enriching Non-Christian Thought ²¹

11.1 The Bible expects us to think in explicitly Christian (biblical) ways in every area of life, in every profession and discipline (*cf. Isaiah 65:23, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 15:58, Colossians 3:17, and Ephesians 2:10* (doing good works/doing good) with *Ephesians 6:6-8, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Titus 2:14, 3:1,8,14*). But that does not mean that Christian thinking must always be antithetical to non-Christian thinking. As Andrew Basden has written, “all of us work and think within the same created cosmos so that even secular thinkers can possess what, from a Christian viewpoint, is genuine insight.” (Basden, 2008, page 132) From a Christian worldview perspective, we should expect to find – and value – genuine insight and truth in non-Christian thought. We should also expect to be able to account for, re-interpret, and enrich the world’s thinking by transplanting it from its original worldview location into (what we should argue is) the more fertile soil of a Christian worldview.

11.2 Non-Christians may be seduced by various idolatries and ideologies, but they cannot avoid bumping their heads on God’s creation and His law. To the extent that Christians stop listening to God’s Word and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, they, too, can be seduced by false ideologies and false teachings. Therefore, as Christians, we must be appreciatively willing to consider the ideas and contributions of the non-Christian world, but do so with critical discernment regarding the worldview roots and disposition. And, where Christians are not required to compromise their faith, they can work with non-Christians on matters of mutual interest (*cf. ‘a son of peace’ Luke 10:6 with Romans 12:17-18 and Hebrews 12:14*).

PART 4 REFOUNDING THE CHURCH

12 Church: It Isn't Working!

In today's Church, evangelism is singing outside Tesco's, it's sketch-boarding, it's acting in shopping centres, it's inviting friends to Seeker services, it's developing relationships with our neighbours. It's lots of things. But one thing it isn't – it isn't working.

(Mark Greene, 1999, page 12)

12.1 Without a visible local Christian community, the reality of church evaporates into a 'spiritual presence' (of regenerated individuals) that does not actually engage with the nitty-gritty of everyday life. It's mission focus tends to be set not on the here and now, but on the overseas and the hereafter.

12.2 Talk of Christian *community* does, however, raise a major problem: where is it in the modern Western world? The secularism, individualism and consumerism (section 1) of Western culture have so ravaged the church that it hardly exists as real community anywhere. Yet the palpable presence of the new creation turns on the reality of that community. If mission is discerning and living out the reign of Christ in every sphere of life, then without community, mission will play little or no role in the lives of most members of the church. Obedience to the gospel compels us to make every effort to recover real, functional Christian community.

13 11 O'clock Theology

13.1 A church's servanthip ('leadership' see 5 above) must have the concerns, needs and interests of all its members (and potential members) at heart. That demands a plurality of servant leaders that includes those who, in their daily affairs, are in the same world of work as the wider church membership. Needless to say such a plurality is plain in both the Old and New Testament patterns and implicit in the New Testament teaching.²² It entails the development and practice of what Mark Greene calls '11 o'clock theology'.²³ In all that they do in their ministry in the church, church servants should bring to bear the questions, 'When it is 11 o'clock on a Monday morning – in the home, factory, office, classroom, or ... – where are the people God has called me to serve? What issues are they facing right now? Am I equipping them to live Christianly *there*? Am I equipped help them live for Jesus where they are? Do/can I visit them in their workplaces?'

13.2 Whatever else has to be laid aside, church servants must spend time with people and engage in a great deal of listening and sensitive probing. That can be very difficult for both sides. People have imbibed the idea that they only go to church ministers when there's an emergency or crisis. They have to be trained to communicate the daily content and texture of their life. On the level of personal holiness, what is their relationship with their boss? What personal problems do they face? How do they deal with a pornographic or flirtatious environment, or with the

pressures to lie or be dishonest? What do they most enjoy about their work? What do they least enjoy? On the public level, what are the ideologies operating in their area of work? What are the issues that affect the wider Christian community and wider society? What is a Christian perspective on these issues? Are there other Christians in the same realm of work who can provide practical insight and support?

13.3 Many believers are on their own as Christians in daily life and the church must encourage regular conversations among people in similar or related areas of life – that they may share their joys and engage with their burdens. This calls for great wisdom and commitment. It will require churches not to be defensive with regard to alternative gatherings of the faithful (e.g. workplace Christian groups, district or regional Christian professional associations), especially if – as may well be necessary – they lead to sharing across church and parish boundaries. It requires of these groups that they do everything in their power not to become alternative churches that set themselves over against the overarching structures of the existing church. Such separation would only turn the groups into sects.

13.4 If church servants reflect on all that is learnt of their members' work and home situations in the light of Scripture, then it might swiftly and radically change the preaching, teaching, worship and prayer patterns of the church.

14 Preaching and Teaching – Comforting the Disturbed and Disturbing the Comfortable

14.1 The church teaching programme must connect Biblical doctrine with everyday life, so that the members are envisioned and guided.²⁴ What does this mean? If believers are to engage Christianly with their everyday life at home and work, this presupposes that they are sufficiently critically aware of the nature and idolatries of the surrounding culture, and of the ethical, legal and political (*etc.*) implications of their own Christian faith, to be able to do so. That is what the teaching programme must facilitate. This may seem a very tall order. Indeed it is and the task before us is immensely difficult. We are talking about a deep-reaching and long-term programme. But it is surely obvious that our present position highlights the malaise of the Western church. The task of discipling Christians to be witnesses to the gospel as public (as well as private) truth is one that cannot be evaded by biblically guided Christian servants.

14.2 Above all that goal requires a teaching programme that gives Christians the big picture of God's purposes and methods. We all need to learn to see every Bible character and event in the wider context of the great Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation story. In dealing with the details of the Old Testament laws, we need to understand them as aspects of an overall plan. God has given us there an example of how He would order a culture and its history in a fallen world. It holds many lessons for us today.²⁵

14.3 Too often we teach Scripture solely in relation to personal moral issues (and in so doing betray our captivity to the pietistic individualism of our age). We need to set our heroes back into their actual context. The Bible is full of relevant help for

everyone when we rescue its characters from Sunday school oblivion! Joseph and Daniel were holders of high political office in pagan empires. The Israelite midwives were state health workers subverting immoral practices. David, hunted by Saul, continued to respect the authority God had invested in Saul even while he sees his actions as unjust – lessons here for employees smarting under bad employers. Nehemiah, Naaman's servant girl, Esther, Lydia and many others can be helpfully interrogated.

14.4 One approach to facilitate an effective preaching/teaching programme is the All-Age Learning programme where, at various seasons of the year, the main Sunday service is condensed and the sermon replaced by an interactive seminar programme covering different areas of interest. One pattern is to have a 15-20 minute service followed by a ten-minute coffee break before an hour-long seminar. More radical alternatives should certainly be considered in due course.

15 Worship and Prayer: The Church at Work

15.1 Each Sunday a spokesperson for a special interest group could join the worship team to help prepare a service designed to highlight the challenges that face people in that area, e.g., of health care. In the service the spokesperson could help the congregation to understand the challenges peculiar to that field. This could be done through a short presentation, through prayer specifically for health care workers, or by asking the congregation to pray during the week in specified ways for the challenges in the health care sector. In this way it would become clear that being the body of Christ is not a part-time occupation; rather all are engaged in body-of-Christ ministry even when they have no other Christians alongside.²⁶ The experience of the body of Christ would become much more real through the congregation's prayers and through their expressions of interest and support. As George Vandervelde asks (1996, page 18), if our entire Christian life is ministry and mission, why should only those whom we know as 'missionaries' (because they work overseas) experience their work as body-of-Christ mission?

15.2 Prayer meetings should provide space for all members to share their successes and failures, their problems and concerns. These meetings should be the exciting focus of church activity that nobody wants to miss, the briefing/debriefing meetings in the midst of battle. Here, or in the housegroups, situations may come to light that demand a corporate response. Then the church as a whole can provide the support that is needed and, with the Holy Spirit, anoint members to the task. But this is likely to be costly; perhaps we really are too comfortable with the way things are?

16 Conclusion

16.1 The local church is the show-case of Christ's reconciling and renewing presence. For Paul, the gospel mystery was made plain in the presence together in the church, on equal terms, of Jew and Gentile, of Pharisee and outcast ('sinner'), of

slave and master, of male and female.²⁷ If that reality of the gospel is not visible, then our public witness may be in vain.

16.2 The church is the *ecclesia* ('public assembly') of God that by its very presence ought to be an affront to the public religion (just as the NT church was an affront to the emperor idolatry of the Roman empire). How can we think that we should be any less of a public affront to the secular materialism of our Western societies? The church *is* a mission community and the offence of Christ (Saviour and Lord) is a demonstration that mission is truly underway.

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From 2010 to 2013 part-time Director, South Asia, *TeachBeyond* (an international Christian organization providing transformational education to children and adults, www.teachbeyond.org).

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From 2002-2009 he was Senior Tutor at the *West Yorkshire School of Christian Studies (WYSOCS)*, <http://www.wysocs.org.uk/> and co-Director (with Mark Roques) of *Reality Bites* (<http://www.realitybites.org.uk/>), a UK-based international Christian ministry helping people learn about God's kingdom in new, dynamic and engaging ways. *Reality Bites* offers training and fresh contemporary materials for youth workers, schools workers and all those involved in mission and education.

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A teaching career spanning 40 years has included ten years in India and Nepal, and the headship of the pioneering *Oak Hill Christian School* (Bristol, UK).

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Notes

- ¹ There is evidence that the decline in church attendance in the UK, whilst still occurring, has lessened significantly – see Brierley 2006, 2014 and Christian Research 2014.
- ² See, e.g., *Romans* 4, *Galatians* 3 and *Hebrews* 11.
- ³ E.g.. Newbigin, 1986, 1989A, 1989B, 1991, 1995, Newbigin, Sanneh & Taylor, 1998, Goheen, 2000, Weston, 2006.
- ⁴ There is a vast literature – see, e.g., Clapp, 1996, Clarke, 2000, O'Donovan, 1996, Simson, 2001, Stevens, 1999, Thwaites, 1999, 2002
- ⁵ *Hebrews* 13:13-14.
- ⁶ *Philippians* 3:20, *Hebrews* 11:13, *1 Peter* 1:17, 2:11.
- ⁷ *1 Corinthians* 15; *1 Peter* 2:9.
- ⁸ *Matthew* 18:1-4, 20:25-28; *Mark* 9:35, 10:41-45; *Luke* 22:24-27; *John* 13: 2-17. On Christian servanthood (better than 'leadership') – see Clarke, 2000 and Stevens, 1999. 'Servant leaders' ought to be an acceptable alternative, except that, in practice, those given, or owning this title, may show little evidence of a true servant's heart.
- ⁹ *Ephesians* 4:11-13.
- ¹⁰ See Greene, 1994, 1999, 2001, 2014.
- ¹¹ *John* 8:12 with *Matthew* 5:14.
- ¹² Cf. *Acts* 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16; 6:1-7.
- ¹³ *John* 16: 33; *Acts* 14: 22; *1 Thessalonians* 3: 2-4; *2 Timothy* 3: 12
- ¹⁴ This section is not an exposition of Christian education which is, of course, life-long and life-wide. It is far more than just schooling and need not (as in home education) involve schooling at all.
- ¹⁵ Whether non-fiction (e.g. missionary biographies & autobiographies) or fiction (e.g. Christian novels).
- ¹⁶ This may seem only right (see, e.g., *1 Timothy* 3:1-7; 5:17) and I would not disagree except to ask why (servant) leaders are assumed/expected to be only those who have trained specifically for church roles (as we have narrowly understood them) and who often have had little if any experience outside that church context (*contra* the criterion laid down by Paul in *1 Timothy* 3:7)?
- ¹⁷ These are all just samples; the list is as endless as the opportunities in modern life.
- ¹⁸ See Mangalwadi, 1999, 2009.
- ¹⁹ In case you wonder, usually none of the dates/events are known!
- ²⁰ See references in note **13** above.
- ²¹ See Basden 2008.
- ²² E.g. *Romans* 16:23 (*Acts* 19:22; *2 Timothy* 4:20); *Colossians* 4:14; *1 Timothy* 3:7; *Titus* 1:5; 3:13.
- ²³ Greene, 1999, p 14.
- ²⁴ *2 Timothy* 3:16-17.
- ²⁵ See Wright, 1983, 1990, 1992, 1995, 2004
- ²⁶ See Clark, 1997, for Christian insight into many areas of work.
- ²⁷ *1 Corinthians* 12:12-13; *Galatians* 3:26-29; *Ephesians* 2:14-22; *Colossians* 3:11.