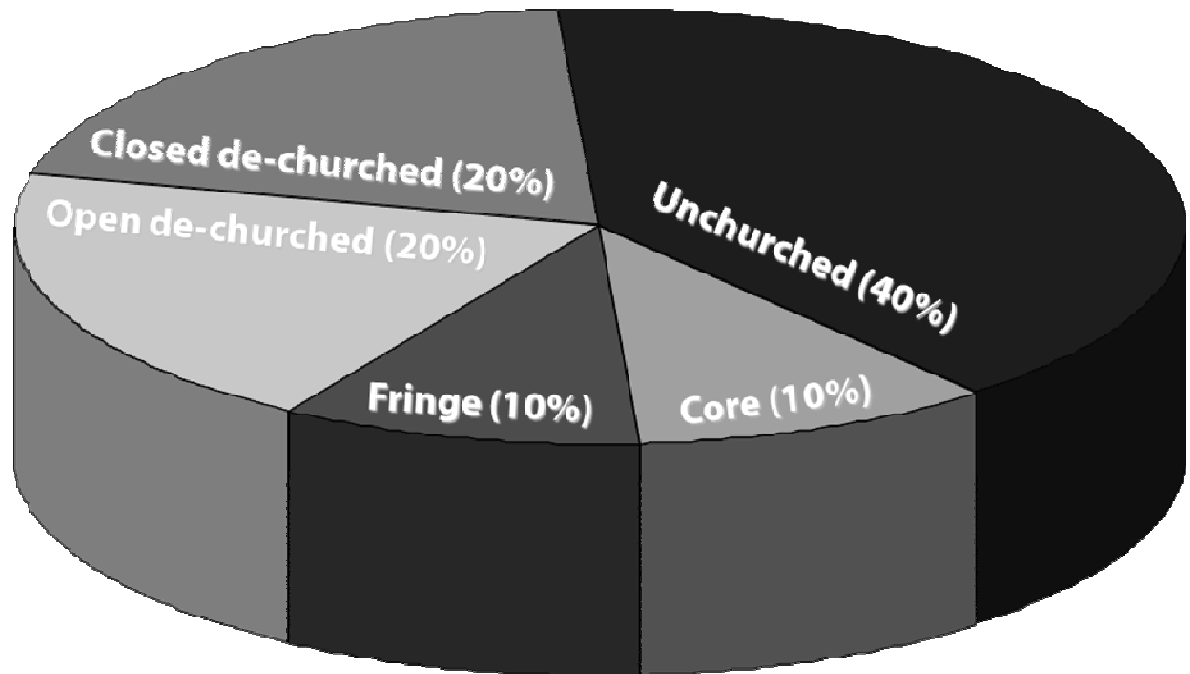


Session Four—“I See You Are Very Religious”: Mission in a Postmodern World

The context

Church attendance is an obvious, though not necessarily reliable, indicator of the health of the church. However, it is clear that attendances have been steadily declining in the West since the beginning of the 20th century. In 1998 Philip Richter and Leslie Francis published a book which looked at patterns of church attendance. Their findings are summarised in the chart below:



The categories are as follows:

Core—Attend about 5-8 times in a two month period

Fringe—Attend about 1-3 times in a two month period

Open dechurched—Those who have left church but are open to return if suitably contacted and invited.

Closed dechurched—Those who left church damaged or disillusioned and have no intention of returning.

Unchurched—Those who have no contact with the church except perhaps for the occasional wedding or funeral. The unchurched slice of the pie is getting bigger with each passing year.

(The recent Tearfund survey (Ashworth & Farthing 2007) gives a more complete breakdown of religious observance—see the notes to this session.)

The great commission today

There are several versions of the 'great commission' in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19-20, John 20:21-22 and Acts 1:8). George Lings (2006) of the Church Army has an interesting perspective on the commission from Acts. He notes the categories used by Richter and Francis and argues that this offers us a helpful model with which to understand the Acts 1:5 commission for our own time:

...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Jerusalem	All Judea	Samaria	Ends of the Earth
Core	Fringe	Dechurched	Unchurched

Lings argues that most of the *Fresh Expressions* movement concentrates on the fringe and the open dechurched. Important though this work is, there is a danger that the unchurched are simply ignored. Yet this is the sector which is growing and so in the rest of this session we will focus especially on how we might connect with the unchurched in ways which are accessible to them and authentic to the gospel.

Evangelising Athens



Mars Hill (The Areopagus) in Athens

If the unchurched really do correspond to 'the ends of the earth' as Lings suggests, how are we to go about engaging with them. A good place to start is to look at how the apostle Paul went about things. Luke offers us two glimpses of Paul in action as an evangelist. The first is amongst the Jews of Antioch (Acts 13:14-43), the other amongst the pagans of Athens (Acts 17:16-34). In each case he used a very different approach but adopted a similar principle—*start where the people are*. So for the Jews of Antioch he started with the Bible, building on their knowledge of the faith and challenging them to

grow as disciples.

The situation in Athens was different. Here Paul was the stranger in a strange land. He was, to use today's jargon, among the unchurched and what he did there can offer us an approach to presenting the gospel to the unchurched today. By taking a careful look at Luke's account it is possible to discern a number of key components in what Paul did in Athens which are relevant to us.

Listen and research

Paul is waiting in Athens and he observes the idols [v16]. Athens was renowned for having more gods than anywhere else in Greece. Paul has studied their art and culture and knows how the Athenians liked to spend their time.

Engage with the culture

Debate was the Athenians' preferred mode of discourse [21]. By adopting it Paul attempts to communicate with them in a way which was culturally relevant to them.

Avoid judgement

Paul is deeply distressed by the idols he sees [16] but he does not condemn the Athenians. Instead he saw that the abundance of idol worship was a way to engage them and a chance to build on where they were.

Show respect

Paul could have condemned the Athenians—he probably wanted to—but instead he says, “I see you are very religious.” [22]

Sacralise the culture

In his speech on the Areopagus Paul quotes two Greek poets, both of whom were speaking of Zeus rather than Yahweh: “In him [Zeus] we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his [Zeus] offspring.’” [28].

Don’t mention ‘religion’

At Antioch, Paul gives a long exposition of Biblical salvation history because that is what his listeners know. In Athens there is no mention of Moses or the scriptures (nor, for that matter, of sin or the cross).

Offer a new perspective

Paul takes an aspect of Athenian spiritual life, the unknown God, and offers a new interpretation [23-27]. It provides him with a way in which both acknowledges the prevailing culture and allows him to engage with it creatively.

When appropriate, challenge

Having acknowledged the strengths of Athenian spirituality and offered some new perspectives on it, Paul now introduces the ideas of repentance and resurrection, mentioning Jesus, though not by name [30-31].

Be prepared for ridicule and hostility

Resurrection is a step too far for many of Paul’s listeners but he is well prepared for their negative reaction. He knew that, if he was prepared to engage respectfully with them, some would listen and want to know more [32].

Christianity Rediscovered

A series of events which had profound implications for the working out of this Pauline approach started in May 1966 when Vincent Donovan, a Catholic missionary in Africa, wrote to his Bishop:

Dear Bishop,

I wonder if I could make some comments on the mission. There are four well-run, well-looked-after, expensive, non-aided schools attached to the mission. There is a small chapel. There is a hospital, extremely well built, fairly well attended, bringing in some mission revenue. The hospital and school take up an enormous amount of time, especially the hospital. It is common practice for the mission car, when it is called for, to pick up sick people at a distance and to bring them to the hospital, expenses being paid by the sick. This is happening on the average of once a week, with one of the priests in the mission doing the driving. In our four schools, religious instruction is for all students in the school.... The influence of the Catholic Mission is

very strong in the whole Loliondo area...But the relationships with the Masai people have to do with schools, hospitals, or cattle. Many of the Masai have been helped materially by the mission. There are many instances of strong friendship-relationship between the Masai and the priests in the mission.

Masai kraals are visited very often...But never, or almost never, is religion mentioned on any of these visits. The best way to describe realistically the state of this Christian mission is the number zero. As of this month, in the seventh year of this mission's existence, there are no adult Masai practicing Christians from Loliondo mission.

The relationship with the Masai, in my opinion, is dismal, time consuming, wearying, expensive, and materialistic. There is no probability that one can speak with the Masai, even with those who are our friends, about God. And there is no likelihood that one could actually interest them to the point of their wanting to discuss or accept Christianity. In other words, the relationship with the Masai, except the school children, goes into every area except that very one area which is most dear to the heart of the missionary. On this one important point, there is no common ground with the Masai. It looks as if such a situation will go on forever.

Looking at these people around me, at these true pagans, I am suddenly weary of the discussions that have been going on for years in the mission circles of Europe and America, as to the meaning of missionary work, weary of the meetings and seminars devoted to missionary strategy.

I suddenly feel the urgent need to cast aside all theories and discussions, all efforts at strategy--and simply go to these people and do the work among them for which I came to Africa.

I would propose cutting myself off from the schools and the hospital, as far as these people are concerned—as well as the socializing with them—and just go and talk to them about God and the Christian message.

(...)

Outside of this, I have no theory, no plan, no strategy, no gimmicks—no idea of what will come. I feel rather naked. I will begin as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Vince Donovan (1982:14ff)

So Donovan went to the Masai elders and asked if he could come and speak to them about God. He told them that he wanted nothing from them, not even their children for the mission school, and that he had nothing to give them, not even medicine for their sick. He had simply come to speak about God. Their response was, "If that is why you came here, why did you wait so long to come to us?"

It was slow patient work. He had no training but he learned to start from where they were, as did Paul in Antioch & Athens, and to learn from them and to work with them to develop a theology which was true to both the gospel and their experience. He learned the importance of understanding and operating through the culture of the Masai rather than the culture of the US from whence he came.

Donovan's experience is crucial to an understanding of the issues facing those who would work with the unchurched in our culture. The unchurched can think of no reason why they should come to church; why they should join a body with values, rituals, music

and cultural assumptions which are completely different to theirs—so they don't come. If there is to be mission amongst them it requires the missionary to go to them, listen to them, learn their culture and work with them to discover how to express the gospel in ways which are both culturally relevant and an authentic expression of the good news of Jesus.

The problem of sin

It is interesting that Paul did not mention sin in his Athens address (or, more accurately, if he did, Luke did not choose to tell us). The doctrine of sin has been at the heart of the church since the beginning—in his letters Paul makes much of it. It has been the driving force behind many a conversion. But today, the notion of sin seems to have lost much of its meaning. John Finney wanted to know if consciousness of sin had played a major part in people's conversion experience. So he asked a number of Christians:

During the period when you came to faith, which of the following describes how you felt:

- (a) I felt a general sense of guilt*
- (b) I felt guilt or shame about something in particular*
- (c) I had no sense of guilt or shame*
- (d) Don't know*

Of those asked, 61% had no sense of guilt or shame. Of the remainder, 18% had felt guilty about something specific and 21% had a general sense of guilt. There was no difference between the sexes, and the older the respondent, the less likely they were to feel guilty (Finney 2004:49).

Finney also asked people to think about the time when they were in the process of becoming a Christian: "Did you find any parts of the Christian message particularly appealing?" Respondents could write in one thing of their choice. The answers are revealing:

God's love	14%
Particular Bible passages	13%
Forgiveness	13%
Death of Christ	8%
Life after death	8%
Helping other people	7%
God always there	6%
Jesus' life and example	5%
The resurrection	2%
Nothing in particular	16%

Again, he notes that only 21% mentioned sin or the cross, yet many of them came from evangelical churches. Four-fifths of those who came to faith did not mention the cross or forgiveness as most significant for them. Because of this, Finney argues that any approach to evangelism which majors on guilt or sin is likely to be ineffective today. Instead, the church should concentrate, as Paul did in Athens, on matters which resonate with the spirit of the age. He suggests that we would be better off concentrating on topics such as:

- *God as creator*—the invitation to worship with thanksgiving.
- *The God of hospitality*—the invitation to enjoy his company.
- *The God of mystery*—the invitation to explore that mystery.

- *The God of service*—the invitation to join in his work in a suffering world.
- *The God of laughter*—the invitation to enjoy life in him.
- *The God of ministry*—the invitation to let him work through us to others.
- *The God of glory*—the invitation to let him touch our lives with his glory.
- *The God of healing*—the invitation to let him touch our wounds.

Shame not sin

John Finney put guilt and shame together in his research questionnaire and then related them to sin. John Watson contrasts shame and guilt:

Shame (Focus on the self)	Guilt (Focus on the act)
What is wrong?	
Failure to meet expectations	Offence against legal expectations
Personal reaction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Embarrassment/disgrace ● Self-deprecation ● Fear of abandonment ● Resentment ● Self-isolation ● Alienation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Condemnation/remorse ● Self-accusation ● Fear of punishment ● Anger ● Self-justification ● Hostility
Reaction of others	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Exclude and ridicule ● Disgrace and hold in contempt ● Disapprove and reproach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blame and hold responsible ● Accuse and condemn ● Punish and retaliate
How to remedy the state/feeling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn to see 'who I am' in relation to others <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Love banishes shame</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pay the price, then you will be restored <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Justification banishes guilt</i></p>

(Watson 2005:10)

Atonement for a 'Sinless' Society

Alan Mann argues that postmodern people have been able to push away the notion of sin at the expense of a consequent emphasis on the self and its inadequacies, which he identifies as shame. Mann explores the notion of shame at some length, reviewing the literature. He brings out the sense of disconnectedness and alienation felt by someone suffering from shame:

The shamed person does not feel like a person because he or she does not feel connected, not only with 'Others' but, more importantly, within themselves. The shamed virtually terrorize themselves, convinced that not only have they not 'lived up to their own standards and ideals but actually experience themselves as embodying the anti-ideal'. (2005:39—the quote is from Pattison 2000:77)

Mann focuses on the importance of story-telling in a postmodern age—especially the stories we tell about ourselves. He looks at narrative therapy which aims to help people tell a different story about themselves and suggests that Jesus is the ultimate narrative therapist, offering everyone the chance to participate in a radically new story in which shame is replaced by a sense of being loved and being lovable.

The kingdom kerygma

Focusing on shame rather than sin might be part of the answer but what else should be part of our message to the unchurched? Each age is called upon to present the gospel in a way which both fits and challenges that age. This gives rise to a double-bind: if the fit is too great, the gospel will get lost in a comfortable conformation to the world; if the challenge is too great the message will never be heard and it will not be possible to transform the world (Ro 12:2).

The emerging church is the movement which is doing most to engage directly with contemporary culture. Its main message is focused around what we might term the kerygma of kingdom. Kerygma is the Biblical Greek term usually translated as preaching or proclamation. Biblical scholars also use it to describe the content or message which is preached.

The New Testament scholar, C. H. Dodd, reconstructed what he saw as the kerygma of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles. In outline it looks like this:

The prophecies are fulfilled, and the new Age is inaugurated by the coming of Christ.

He was born of the seed of David.

He died according to the Scriptures, to deliver us out of the present evil age.

He was buried.

He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.

He is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and Lord of quick and dead.

He will come again as Judge and Saviour of men. (Dodd 1964)

Today's emerging church follows a number of distinguished scholars in making a focus on Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God (Matthew has 'kingdom of heaven', John has 'eternal life'). They would not dissent from Dodd's exposition, above, but would want to change some of the emphases. For instance, there is nothing in Dodd's summary between the birth and death of Jesus. This may have been appropriate in the apostolic age but today the kerygma needs to be emphasised differently.

Many in the emerging church, for instance, would start with the fact of Jesus' incarnation and perhaps impute to that event the start of Christ's mission to "deliver us out of the present evil age". They would certainly want to focus on Jesus' life and teaching—the unspoken 'gap' between his birth and death in the apostolic kerygma (note how it is largely missing from the apostolic epistles).

By focusing on Jesus' programme of revolutionary revolution (not just a revolution but a different kind of revolution) they would aim to set forth his teachings in ways which challenge and engage contemporary sensibilities.

In conversation with Jonny Baker of *Grace*, an emerging church in Ealing, we agreed that the emerging church kerygma would also focus on creation, Jesus' table fellowship with outsiders and an emphasis on 'actualising' the kingdom by trying to live as Jesus commanded. It is also unlikely to have a neat linear form such as that suggested by Dodd.

Happiness

We saw in session three that Savage, Collins and Mayo discovered what they call a 'happy midi-narrative' prevalent amongst Generation-Y people they interviewed. The importance of happiness goes way beyond those born after 1975. "As long as it makes you happy" is a phrase heard time and again in popular drama, especially soaps.

What is the church's response to this? By and large it is to disparage the quest for happiness as 'superficial' or 'conformed to the world' (how many sermons have you heard, or even preached, about the evils of the 'commercialisation of Christmas?'). After all, goes the argument, the gospel is not about success or 'feeling good', it is about salvation to eternal life; the world's pursuit of happiness is just selfish materialism.

Not only is this hardly in the spirit of, "I see you are very religious", it also misunderstands both the nature of happiness and, perhaps, what Jesus had in mind when he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom.

Yet, if so many people are seeking happiness, the implication is that they have not found it. Most people can distinguish between happiness and transitory pleasure and they are usually looking for something more than a short-term emotional high. What they actually seek could often be better described by words such as *joy* or *peace* (look in the visitors' book of any open church—you will find words like *peace, tranquillity, calm* and so on).

The church seems ill-equipped to respond to this expressed need yet the gospel is all about well-being and happiness. If we live right and are in right relationship with God we will have deep joy and peace which will often, though not always, bubble up as happiness. Instead of disparaging the quest for happiness perhaps we should acknowledge its deep spiritual roots and start using this language in our conversations with others.

Is apologetic appropriate?

Deciding whether to focus on sin or shame is a decision about *content*. We also need to consider what sort of *style* of evangelism might be appropriate and effective with unchurched postmodern people. Apologetics, the systematic defence of a position, has been the mainstay of evangelistic style for many years. At its crudest form it goes something like this:

- All have sinned (Ro 3:23)
- The wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23)
- **Therefore**, all are destined for death
- **But**, all who believe in Jesus will have eternal life (Jn 3:16)
- You want to live, don't you?
- **So**, you must believe in Jesus. *QED*.

Of course, most evangelists are more subtle than this but the argument remains the same. We've seen there is a problem with the notion of sin but suppose we could reframe the basic argument in terms of shame, or something else which makes sense to contemporary unchurched people, just as Vince Donovan did with the Masai. Would apologetic then be an appropriate way of engaging with unchurched people? Something like this, perhaps:

- All feel shame
- The wages of shame is humiliation
- **Therefore**, all are destined for humiliation
- **But**, God so loved the world... (Jn 3:16)
- You want to be loved and valued, don't you?
- **So**, you must believe in Jesus. *QED*.

Peter Rollins, a philosophy lecturer and one of the leaders of Ikon, an emerging church in Belfast, argues (2006) that there is a more fundamental problem. He identifies two kinds of Christian apologetic, based on either word or wonder. The first is like my parody above,

attempting to build a watertight logical case to convince people that Christianity is compelling and must be accepted by any reasonable person. The second kind, based on wonder, builds a case based on miraculous healings and other forms of 'power evangelism'.

Rollins argues that the apologetic approach is both inappropriate for contemporary people, who have a mistrust of such "I know better than you" arguments and is also against the spirit of Paul's words to the church at Corinth:

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1Co 2:1-5)

Rollins continues:

Unlike the traditional mode of preaching, which seeks to persuade and clarify, this discourse maintains the object of communication as obscure and unobjectifiable. Instead of closing thought down—by telling people what they ought to think—this discourse opens up thought. Unlike the discourse of apologetics and the discourse of the miracle (which each attempt to forcibly bring people to their knees), the discourse of Paul acts as an aroma. (Rollins 2006:36)

Jesus, notes Rollins, was not philosophically consistent. He said different things to different people and refused to offer either word or sign to those who demanded them. His miracles were performed out of love rather than as demonstrations to convince the faithless. Jesus offers hints rather than directives, especially when he is speaking or acting in parables.

What did Jesus do?

So, if apologetic is not appropriate today, might Jesus offer us a model to follow? His proclamation of the gospel seems to have had a number of elements which we might do well to adopt:

- *Jesus told stories*—Jesus' use of parables was surely significant. One of the features of a parable is that it is 'parabolic'—the meaning is not closed and predictable (as it would be if it were circular or elliptical) but just as you think you've got close to it, it veers away. The parable invites people in, to explore its meaning with the teacher. It is not dogmatic, insisting on only one 'true' interpretation. It does not present 'the truth' but a glimpse of the truth. Worse still, it invites personal encounter and transformation rather than the transfer of head knowledge.
- *Jesus asked questions*—Jesus asked lots of provocative questions, especially when he was questioned. His questions were always designed to offer another perspective from the one the listener brought. Even when the dispute was at its fiercest his questions took things to a different level.
- *Jesus gave 'impossible' challenges*—the Sermon on the Mount contains lots of impossible challenges: never judge, love enemies, give to all who ask, and so on. Jesus surely was absolutely serious when he said these things but surely not naïve enough to believe that his listeners (ourselves included) would be able to put them into practice easily. Instead, we may think that he was offering us 'provocative propositions' which point the way to kingdom living. Yes, they are commandments, but like an icon, they point beyond themselves to reveal the nature of God's kingdom.

- *Jesus acted out the new paradigm*—Jesus lived, and died, in the kingdom way. He ‘walked the talk’, as they say today. Such authenticity of living is what the church today is often accused of lacking. Whether or not the accusation is true, if we are to be effective in presenting the gospel we must do it with our whole lives and not just our lips. Part of Jesus’ ‘acting out’ included signs and wonders. Many of these seem to have had a parabolic nature—opening the ears of those who cannot hear or the eyes of those who cannot see, and so on. (For a further discussion of this approach to the miracles, see McLaren 2006: 55-66)

These four aspects of Jesus’ ministry offer a compelling approach to proclaiming the gospel to today’s unchurched generation. They offer a better chance of being effective than any traditional apologetic. To return to Peter Rollins:

In a world where people believe that they are not hungry, we must not offer food but rather an aroma that helps them desire the food that we cannot provide. We are a people who are born from a response to hints of the divine. Not only this, but we must embrace the idea that we are also called to be hints of the divine. (Rollins 2006:36)

How (not) to do evangelism

This leads to a radically different approach to evangelism. For instance, Bryan Webster, pastor of the Cottage Beck café church in Scunthorpe has a similar approach. The café is open from 11:00 to 18:00 three days a week and is specifically aimed at the closed dechurched, perhaps the hardest group to reach. The café started as a result of asking people in the neighbourhood what they needed. A meeting place seemed to best meet the needs.

They don’t advertise because they don’t want too many customers—their goal is to have time to build relationships with people. There is also a key rule in the café: it is forbidden to talk about God or religion. Bryan says,

The fact that we will not talk about God there annoys people. It annoys the unbelievers because they’ll ask a question and we’ll say, “Well we don’t really talk about God here.” And they’ve never had that before...and they’ll say, “Where can we?” and eventually they’ll persuade us to come to their home. And even then, if they say, “Will you come round?” I say, “Well, yes, some time...”

Peter Rollins (2006:53) tells of the way his emerging church, Icon, has set up an Evangelism Project. Groups of Icon members go to other groups, both within and outside the church, not to evangelise them but to learn and ‘be evangelised’. They go with no ‘message’ but find that their openness to others actually leads to more opportunities to share faith. Because there is no ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the encounter; because they asking rather than telling; learning rather than teaching, they find that they are better able to engage with others.

This approach may well resonate strongly with those exploring ‘alternative spiritualities’. For them, as we saw in session three, the sense of journey and inquiry is important. As long as the church is seen as arrogant, dogmatic and self-righteous it will not be heard or respected as summed up in this quote from a seeker:

A religious person uses God, a spiritual person enjoys God.

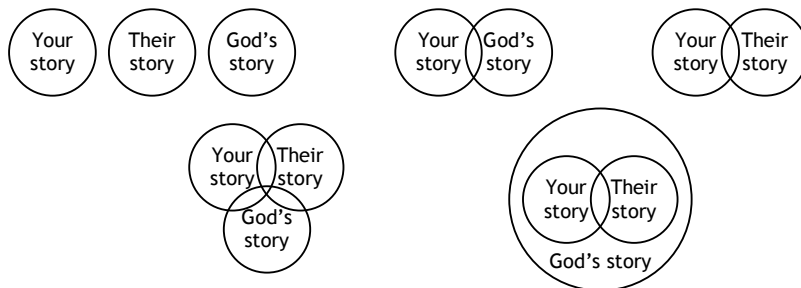
But an evangelism which is itself inquiring; which seeks to come alongside others in their journey in a position of powerlessness and service will not only be true to the gospel but will also stand a much better chance of connecting with the unchurched.

Relationship

One of the keys to effective mission is relationship building. In a postmodern world, as we have seen, appeals to authority are unlikely to be heeded. Instead, it is personal testimony which seems to hold weight. Roy Crowne and Bill Muir (2003) offer one approach to connecting which they call 'Three Story Living'. They argue that it can lead to a natural and authentic sharing of the gospel.

The three stories are 'my story', 'my friend's story' and 'God's story'. They argue that we must start by honestly sharing as much of our own story as seems appropriate. In time this will lead to a context of trust where our friend feels confident enough to share something of his or her own story. As this story unfolds hurts and longings will be exposed. It is into these that you will be able to share God's story with its message of hope and reconciliation.

In other words, until genuine trusting friendship is created, there is no point to sharing the gospel. Conversely, when trust has been established, it is wrong to withhold the gospel. Applied wrongly, this sort of approach can be mechanical and manipulative but by focusing on genuine relationship it highlights the importance of starting where people are and introduction Jesus as a 'third circle' which may in time overlap with both you and your friend (adapted from Crowne & Muir 2003:89):



Laurence Singlehurst offers a similar perspective: "In a postmodern world, people don't want to know our truth until they have had a glimpse of our hearts." (2006:13). He argues that there are three stages to evangelism: sowing, reaping and keeping. Each needs a different approach and each needs to be done in an appropriate way.

The language barrier

Finally, consider language. We are aware of the language barrier in church services. Many younger new Christians refuse to go to Book of Common Prayer services because the language is so alien to them. Similar barriers can exist when we try to have conversations with unchurched people. Sooner or later we will need to refer to the Bible. But what version should we use? Most modern translations are more concerned with accuracy than drama (that is, they tend towards formal equivalence rather than dynamic equivalence) and are thus harder for the unchurched to enter.

Paraphrases, such as Eugene Petersen's *The Message* or Rob Lacey's *the liberator* offer a much more accessible introduction to the message of the Bible. They might not be ideal for detailed study but they often convey the excitement of the text in ways which more standard translations can not. Be sensitive to those with whom you are engaging; which version would work best for them?

Consider a passage from the Sermon on the Plain (Lu 6:37-38):

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. (AV)

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back. (NRSV)

Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. (The Message)

*Don't sit in judgement over people. 'Cos soon enough, the tables will swivel and you'll be the one getting the verdict handed down. Don't set yourself up as a life and death critic 'cos soon enough someone will be writing the review from Hades on your precious lifework. Wipe the slate clean for others and you'll get the same treatment for **your** mess. Give and you'll get given—loads, compacted and piled into your lap, and then more on top so that it's spilling onto the floor. 'Cos it's very much in-the-style-of you: how you've been with people—you'll get the same treatment coming back round full circle." (the liberator)*

Four translations, each appropriate for a different audience. We do well to choose the one which will speak best to our listeners, regardless of whether it is our own personal choice. As an example, a baptism in Loddon corresponded with the end of a sermon series on stewardship. The vicar, Nigel Evans, decided to preach the stewardship sermon anyway. He chose Matthew 6:25-34 as one of his texts and read it from *The Message*. At the end of the service several of the baptism party (all unchurched) remarked on the power of the reading and asked him to send them a copy.

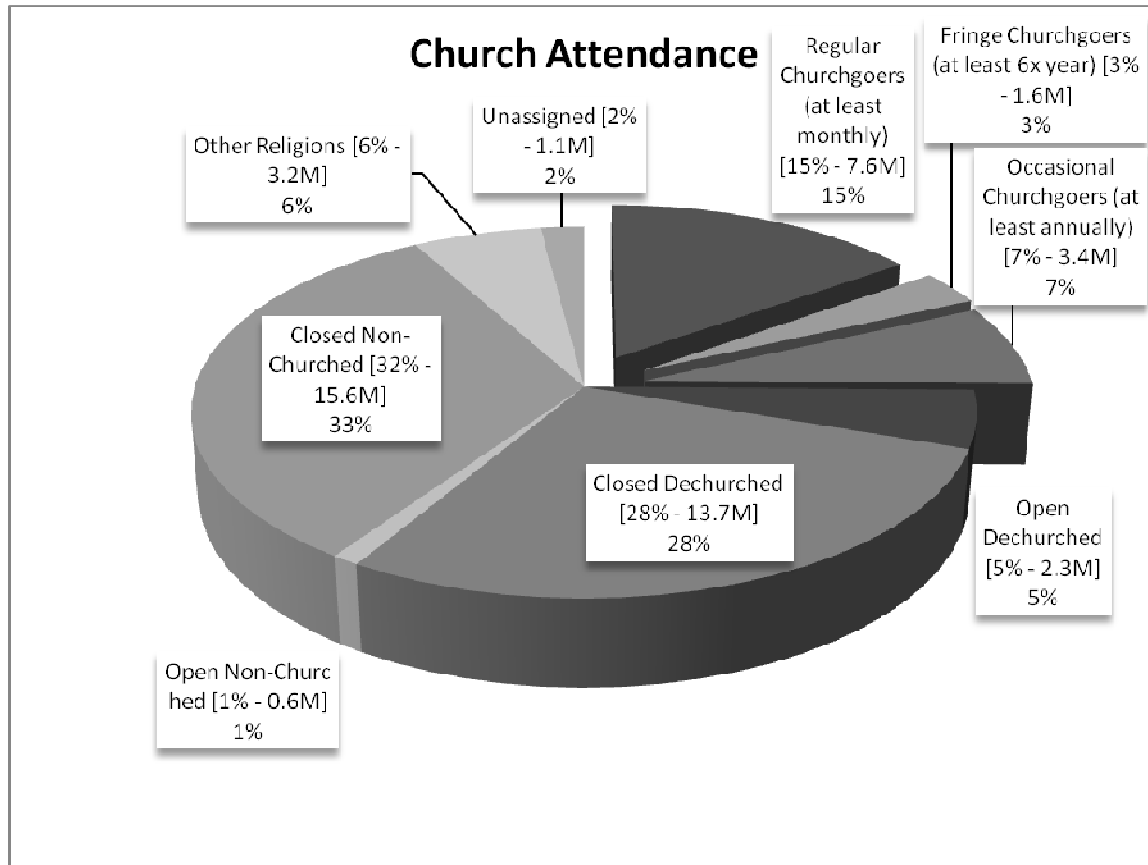
Summary

In this session we have looked at the importance of respectful inquiry in our approach to evangelism today. We have seen that some of the key categories in the traditional presentation of the faith no longer resonate with our listeners and that we might better engage with the unchurched if we emphasise creation, happiness, spirituality, incarnation and Jesus' call to a different way of life.

Session Four Notes—“I See You Are Very Religious”

Churchgoing Today

In 2007 Tearfund published a comprehensive survey of churchgoing and attitudes to church. Jacintha Ashworth & Ian Farthing interview 7000 people and classified them in a somewhat different way from Richter & Francis. Their results are summarised in the chart below:



Acts 1:5

The exegesis of Acts 1:5 can be found in Lings 2006, one of his *Encounters on the Edge* series, which is invaluable for keeping up with what is happening on the mission front in Britain at present. For £15 per annum you get four issues filled with case studies, good ideas and provocative insights into modern mission. See <http://www.encountersontheedge.org.uk/> for more details.

Evangelising Athens

Paul quotes from *Cretica*, a poem by Epimenides, the semi-mythical 6th century BCE poet. In it, Minos addresses Zeus:

*They fashioned a tomb for you, O holy and high one—
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!
But you are not dead: you live and abide forever,
For in you we live and move and have our being.*

Paul also quoted the Stoic philosopher Aratus of Soli (fl. 315 - 240 BCE)

*From Zeus let us begin;
him do we mortals never leave unnamed;
full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men;
full is the sea and the havens thereof; always we all have need of Zeus.
For we are also his offspring;
and he in his kindness unto men gives favourable signs
and wakens the people to work, reminding them of livelihood.
(Introduction to *Phenomena*)*

(For more, see <http://www.geocities.com/astrologysources/classicalgreece/phaenomena/>)

The problem of sin

Finney's research was published in *Finding Faith Today* (1996). The survey asked 511 Christians from all mainstream denominations a range of questions about their faith.

Narrative Therapy

For more on narrative therapy see this article by Michael White, one of the founders of narrative therapy: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/white.htm>

Kingdom Kerygma

The early church kerygma, as reconstructed by C. H. Dodd (1964) can also be found online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=539&C=606>

Happiness

An edition of the Bible Society's *The Bible in Transition* (Sunderland 2006) explores some of these issues in more depth.

A new apologetic?

Rollins, Peter 2006, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, London: SPCK.

The four aspects of Jesus' ministry were first proposed in this form in a talk on change in complex systems given at Ashridge Management College by Richard Seel in 1998.

Cottage Beck Café Church

The Bryan Webster interview can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ix6RI9Jm88k>

Further reading

Hunter 2000, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*—looks at the methods of missionaries like St Patrick, arguing that many of their methods are appropriate for a postmodern generation. Hunter shows the differences between the Celtic and Roman approaches and suggests that the Celts relied on hospitality and a group-based outreach. They were offering an atmosphere of constant prayer (though specific prayers for many of life's daily tasks), a radical understanding of the culture of those amongst whom they worked and an acknowledgement of the 'excluded middle' (from "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle" by Paul Heibert, *Missiology: An International Review* 10:1, 1982, which argues that enlightenment Christianity focuses only on earth (realm of reason) and heaven (realm of sacred) and ignores the middle ground (realm of superstition). Yet increasingly, the new age

is offering people solace here. The church should offer authentic comfort by engaging with people where they are now, just as the Celtic missionaries did.