

Need-orientated

Part 1 - Introduction



This is the first part of a book which Monica Hill has written on need-orientated evangelism in 21st century Britain. As we publish further sections in future issues we are certain that you will find it of great value.

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How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
Romans 10:14

How to reach the unreached is a subject that constantly concerns all committed Christians who long to see others share in the blessings they enjoy as part of the family of God's people. Although in many ways those outside the church are now more open to the Gospel as they have become more disillusioned with the answers given by the secular world, at the same time those within the church are becoming more introverted.

22 Many Christians are finding that sharing the faith with people who are outside the church has become infinitely more difficult in the past two or three decades. The gap between the culture of church-goers and secular culture has widened to become almost a chasm. How can that gap be bridged? That is the subject we shall be examining.

'Remnant Mindset'

There are many churches in Britain today that are thriving, but many others that are in decline. The number in decline outweighs those that are growing, and for Christians who live in areas where there is no lively fellowship the future of the church often appears depressingly bleak. Many tiny congregations are afflicted by a kind of 'remnant mindset', seeing themselves as little islands of the faithful surrounded

by a hostile sea of secular forces threatening to overwhelm them. Believers in such fellowships huddle together for comfort often having no non-Christian friends so their communication with the outside world is almost non-existent.

Crisis of Communication

There are many congregations who are faced with a crisis of communication with an ageing membership and an ineffective leadership. The pastoral leaders may be perfectly faithful in carrying out their duties of caring for the congregation and in meeting the spiritual needs of the church members, but when faced with the task of communicating the faith with those beyond the membership of the church they have little or no idea what to do. The world outside the church is changing at an ever-increasing pace whereas many ministers have not moved beyond the world that existed when they did their theological training. They are imprisoned within the straight-jacket of tradition and therefore settle for the role of ministering to the faithful - the remnant of the world wherein the church once thrived and had strong social significance. It is hard for many Christians to accept that that world has gone for ever.

Keeping the Faith?

A friend of Bob's, knowing that he was a Christian who attended church regularly, asked him one day why he never talked to him about his faith. 'Do you believe that only Christians go to heaven?' he asked, 'and that those who don't know Christ are lost for eternity?' Bob



ted Evangelism



Withdrawing into Themselves

Older Christians who remember the days when most churches were full and when the opinions of church leaders made an impact in the life of the nation are bewildered by the changes that have taken place. In reaction to a situation they can neither understand nor cope with, they simply withdraw into the security of their own small group. This serves to widen the gap between the church and those outside its

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membership and thereby to increase the spiral of decline. This creates a spiritually incestuous situation which becomes a major barrier to evangelistic outreach. The longer such a situation is allowed to exist the more difficult it becomes to engage in any form of outreach. If the church fellowship decides to organise an event to

which members invite their non-Christian friends it is a salutary experience for many of them to discover that they do not have any non-Christian friends.

Loss of Fringe

Until recently every church had a 'fringe' which was its primary mission field and from which new members were drawn. The 'fringe' consisted of parents of Sunday School children, parents and other family members of children in uniformed organisations. These organisations themselves such as Scouts and Guides, Boys and Girls Brigades provided a training ground for young people to hear the Gospel, to receive Biblical teaching and to prepare them for church membership. Today, we are two generations away from the Sunday School - not only do children not go to Sunday School in large numbers, but their parents also have never been to Sunday School. The rapid decline in Sunday School attendance began in the late 1950s and ran right through the 1960s. For the past 25 years very few churches have had an afternoon Sunday School or a Junior Church which caters for children other than those who are members of their own congregation.

The Gap is Widening

The church 'fringe' provided a natural mission field. Doors were readily open to a church visitor or for the minister to call. Invitations to church functions would

regularly be sent to the 'fringe' who could be expected to support social functions and attend anniversaries, festivals and special services. With the disappearance of the 'fringe' the church has to work in an indifferent or even hostile mission field to reach people who may never have had any contact with the church and who may not even have had any basic biblical teaching at school. We are not only two generations away from the Sunday School but two generations away from biblically based religious education classes being a part of the National Curriculum for all school children of all ages.

Other Cultures

Many churches have yet to come to terms with the fact that Britain is now a post-Christian nation with a highly secularised culture. This has been made the more complex by the addition of multi-faith sections of the population through immigration from the Commonwealth over the past 40 years.

New Answers Needed

How can the church communicate the message of the gospel in such a complex social situation? There are still those Christians who believe that the answer is to

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organise a great evangelistic crusade similar to the 1950s Harringay meetings led by Billy Graham. But they are simply not living in the real world where the gap between secular and sacred is too great to make that kind of direct communication possible. The church has to find

new ways of reaching the unreached. It is in this situation that need orientated evangelism presents the opportunity to do just that.

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