A New Evangelistic Paradigm: Using Foundational Theology Issues as an Apologetic Instrument for Evangelism in a Secular World

David E. Thomas
Andrews University

This research is a product of the graduate program in Doctor of Ministry DMin at Andrews University. Find out more about the program.

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/129

This Project Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Project Documents by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.
Thank you for your interest in the

Andrews University Digital Library
of Dissertations and Theses.

Please honor the copyright of this document by not duplicating or distributing additional copies in any form without the author’s express written permission. Thanks for your cooperation.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI®

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ABSTRACT

A NEW EVANGELISTIC PARADIGM: USING FOUNDATIONAL
THEOLOGY ISSUES AS AN APOLOGETIC INSTRUMENT
FOR EVANGELISM IN A SECULAR WORLD

by

David E. Thomas

Adviser: Benjamin D. Schoun
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Doctoral Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A NEW EVANGELISTIC PARADIGM: USING FOUNDATIONAL THEOLOGY ISSUES AS AN APOLOGETIC INSTRUMENT FOR EVANGELISM IN A SECULAR WORLD

Name of researcher: David E. Thomas

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Benjamin D. Schoun, D.Min.

Date completed: June 1999

The Topic

The topic of this project is evangelistic theory. Because of the large-scale secularization of Western society, the evangelistic method that has prevailed for decades is becoming less and less effective. Some adjustment to evangelistic process must be made if it is to remain effective in speaking to thinking, sophisticated moderns.

The Purpose

This project was to experiment with evangelistic theory, proposing and testing a new paradigm for speaking to secular people that uses a philosophical strategy.
The Sources

The original source for this project was material presented in a doctoral class. It was augmented with pertinent literature from both books and periodicals. Data were also gathered from various testing procedures, and from several experiments with groups and individuals using the central ideas. Feedback was also obtained subsequent to the implementation of the new paradigm in a public setting.

Conclusions

Conclusions about the effectiveness of this new paradigm in general public evangelistic endeavor are unclear. More work is needed before conclusions can be accurately drawn. An unanticipated and happy conclusion is that this new paradigm shows good evidence of being an effective method of affirming and solidifying the commitments of educated, questioning people of faith, both young and old.
A NEW EVANGELISTIC PARADIGM: USING FOUNDATIONAL THEOLOGY ISSUES AS AN APOLOGETIC INSTRUMENT FOR EVANGELISM IN A SECULAR WORLD

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
David E. Thomas
June 1999
A NEW EVANGELISTIC PARADIGM: USING FOUNDATIONAL THEOLOGY ISSUES AS AN APOLOGETIC INSTRUMENT FOR EVANGELISM IN A SECULAR WORLD

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

David E. Thomas

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Adviser,
Benjamin D. Schoun

Fernando Canale

Russell L. Staples

Director of D.Min. Program
Ricardo Norton

Dean, SDA Theological Seminary
Werner K. Vyhmeister

Date approved
# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... v

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT ................................................................. 1
   The Purpose of the Project ......................................................................................... 9
   Justification of the Project ....................................................................................... 14
   Description of Methodology .................................................................................... 22
   Limitations of the Project ......................................................................................... 24

2. ANALYSIS OF THE PREVAILING EVANGELISTIC METHOD ...................... 28
   A Historical Review of the Current Method ......................................................... 28
   Analysis of the Current Method .............................................................................. 33

3. TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM ................................................................... 45
   Introduction ............................................................................................................. 45
   Changes in Society .................................................................................................. 46
   Analysis of the Current Situation .......................................................................... 57
   Suggesting a New Paradigm .................................................................................... 62
   Justification for an Intellectual Approach ......................................................... 63
   Selecting a Starting Point ....................................................................................... 69
   Developing the New Evangelistic Process ............................................................. 74
   Conclusions Concerning the New Process ............................................................ 94

4. TESTING THE NEW PARADIGM ................................................................ 99
   Testing Instruments ............................................................................................... 99
   Testing Methodology .............................................................................................. 99
   Reporting the Findings ........................................................................................... 104

5. PRESENTING THE LECTURES ACCORDING TO THE NEW PARADIGM 111
   Selecting a Format .................................................................................................. 111
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is always true in an endeavor such as this project that it is not something done alone. I would like here to acknowledge the help and interest of several entities and people who were of considerable help to me in the completion of this project: first, to the various conference officials who arranged for me to pursue this degree, and who also paid the costs of my education; second, to several of my teachers who provided ideas, support, and encouragement. I will particularly mention Dr. Benjamin D. Schoun, a teacher (and my project adviser) who, though he changed occupations during the process of the project, offered to stay on as my adviser to the point of its completion. Also, thanks to Dr. Fernando Canale whose class on the Theology and the Practice of Ministry proved very inspiring to me, and who also graciously allowed me liberty to experiment with some concepts he has detailed. I want to thank Lynelle Childs-Ellis, whose interest in this project was sufficient that she invested many hours in superintending the videotaping of the public presentations, and Genevieve Johnson, a retired nurse and educator, who took this project almost as her own, who voluntarily spent countless hours reading it, editing it, and amending it according to the various standards of written work, gently prodding me toward the completion of the project. I am in debt also to Mr. Harley Vixie, who provided technical support and computer literacy to one whose knowledge of such things is rudimentary. Lastly, I must thank the members of my family who put up with the loss of a lot of discretionary time in order to see this project done.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

Those who have worked in the arena of public evangelism and given any thought to evangelistic methods at all know that, in the Western world, Christian public evangelism is built largely around a single evangelistic method. This paradigm consists of advertising, drawing a crowd to a mass meeting, using Christian music and prayer, preaching a series of sermons on various topics of Christian doctrine in a carefully crafted sequence, making invitations to the public to "accept Christ," and then encouraging new believers to ally themselves with some group of Christian believers. As an evangelistic method, this paradigm has been around and used by the Christian community for a long, long time, as much as two hundred years.

It is also clear to those interested in evangelistic work that, while this method has been almost entirely ineffective in some countries (most notably Muslim ones), in the countries open to a Christian world-view, it has served well. It has been adopted by thousands of Christian evangelists the world over, many of whom have given themselves full-time to public evangelism. Under their labors, the use of this method has brought untold numbers of unbelievers to faith.

In spite of the obvious successes of the current strategy, and its wide spread use, there are evidences that the paradigm is not working as well as it once did. In the
countries where it has had little effect, it remains ineffective. But in other countries, where it has proven to be effective over time, there are indications that the prevailing method is becoming less and less so. This is particularly true in the West, among educated, secularized, affluent people who make up an ever growing and influential segment of civilization. Here is reason for grave concern, for it portends the prospect for Christian evangelists that their method, which is reaching an ever smaller segment of society now, will be reaching a still smaller segment in the future. The long-term prospect, barring some significant change, is that public Christian evangelism will lose its effectiveness. Since this method is the predominant method of Christian evangelism, Christianity risks losing its chief apologetic voice. That would make future prospects grim. If the trend continues, the influence and voice of Christianity will become marginalized in the very regions of earth where, for almost two millennia, it has predominated.

An analysis of the situation reveals that one of the problems is that while the evangelistic method has remained fairly constant, society has changed dramatically, so dramatically that the world we look out upon is very much unlike the one into which the predominant evangelistic method was born. There are, of course, still many similarities between yesterday and today, but the differences have become so massive that the current method is no longer finding a common point from which to start an evangelistic conversation. Without a shared starting point, the whole process appears to lack credibility in the eyes of secular people.

It could be said that the problem is with society, that society has changed. On the other hand, it could be said that the problem is with the evangelistic method, that it has not
changed, but has remained locked in a rigid format devised in past times. I shall not argue the pros or cons of these positions for they do not materially affect the basic issue.

Important to this project is the fact that there has come a disconnection between public evangelistic method and significant elements in society. The thinking, sophisticated individuals who usually determine the direction of society, its mores, its dictums and its ideals, are no longer listening to traditional evangelistic talk.

Because of this situation, from an apologetic viewpoint, Christianity faces a very serious situation indeed. While I offer no empirical evidence, experience does suggest that what the philosophers and educated people believe and hold to, in time, filters down to the general populace as commonly accepted truth and knowledge. This process has certainly occurred in the twentieth century. Ideas that had their origin in the minds of philosophers, in time, came to be the domain of the general populace. For example, Communism, a form of government, was an outgrowth of Marxism, an ideology. Liberalism, which pervades life in the United States, is a product of ideals hatched in the minds of thinkers earlier in the century. Philosophically speaking then, that which is believed on the street usually had origins in the halls of academia, or somewhere among the prominent, thinking persons of society.

If this "trickle-down" theory of ideas is true, it follows that thought leaders and academics play a very significant role in society, especially in a society that prizes formal

---

1 Dennis McCallum supports this idea when he speaks of "academicians, the thought-shapers who teach in our colleges and universities--whose opinions sooner or later influence the rest of society." The Death of Truth (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers. 1996), 13.
education. The process of formal education places the pliable young of society into the orbit of the academics and philosophers and their ideas. These ideas are absorbed by the young, adopted, and then disseminated as fact and reality. In this way, what is believed and propounded by the thought leaders eventually becomes the belief of the general population.

It is an obvious thing to contend that if the leaders are accepting and supportive of Christianity, the general population, which is often uncritical in its adoption of positions, will likely follow. If leaders, on the other hand, are hostile and demeaning of Christian belief, it will not be too long before that attitude is picked up on and espoused by the general population.

Here late in the twentieth century, particularly in the West, the thinkers, academics, and thought leaders are rejecting Christianity in droves. More correctly, they no longer see the Christian faith as something intellectually tenable. They are openly mocking and deriding the Christian faith. This is not something new in history as some societal leaders have always ridiculed and rejected Christianity. But the intensity of this eventuality, the degree of departure from Christian beliefs, the public nature of the disagreement, and the numbers of thought leaders who are involved now are greater than it has been in many decades. Christians are not even getting the attention of thinkers today, let alone persuading them to become believers.

These antagonistic attitudes and beliefs have percolated down to the general population. Things are at a point now where Christians and the things dear to them are openly mocked and derided in the entertainment media with impunity, even approbation.
While other subgroups in society have risen from positions of despite to enjoy almost sacrosanct status (the homosexual community, for example), Christians, and things dear to them, are now become the acceptable stuff of jokes and derision. People are finding it more and more difficult to view the claims of Christianity as credible.

Concrete evidence for this assertion is emerging. In a recent article titled "Can Americans Still Hear the Good News?" William Dymness wrote that "evidence is mounting that many Americans, especially those with the most education and cultural influence, no longer think of themselves as Christian in any deep sense." Several polls done by both George Gallup, Jr., and George Barna indicate that while religion is said to have high priority among Americans, it is to a large extent superficial. Stephen Lang has pointed out that the doctrinal acumen of the average church goer is abysmal, bordering on ignorance. These are significant evidences that Christianity is losing ground. It has less and less viable apologetic, especially among the thought leaders.

If this process continues unabated, society will reach a point where Christianity will be seen, even by common people, as something entirely intellectually faulty, naive, benign at best, stupid, even sinister at worst, not something to give any attention to, let alone guide and govern life by. This situation, brought about by forces in the modern (some would say postmodern) world, makes it a matter of considerable urgency for the

---


2This study has been so widely quoted as to be treated as common knowledge here.

Christian community to search out some new ways of getting an audience with modern man. Failure to do this will result in the abrogation of the Great Commission. Modern mankind will be lost. Clearly, if Christianity is to retain an effective witness, particularly in Western society, some way must be found to influence these thought leaders and those who follow them so unthinkingly.

Anyone wanting to address this current situation should notice there are at least two dimensions of this issue to consider. First, there is the matter of influencing the thought leaders themselves. This is a crucial issue that needs to be explored and discussed. If thought leaders in society do indeed lead the parade of thought, then, if they can be persuaded of Christianity, the public will be inclined to follow. But how does one influence thought leaders for any cause, let alone Christianity? This is a question of considerable urgency, and not just to Christians. Business and government have a huge interest in it, as do other entities.

For the church, influencing thought leaders is a particularly difficult issue because the current prevailing evangelistic method, while prized and applauded, has a fatal flaw that makes it almost entirely a failure in speaking to them. Consider that opinion leaders already view the church as anachronistic and lacking in credibility. The current method expects them then to come to a church sponsored meeting to have its credibility restored. To expect success by this method is ludicrous. People, especially leaders, simply do not go to places that, in their minds, lack credibility in order to have credibility restored.

Important as this issue is, it will be touched on only incidentally in this project. It is a topic well worth careful study and experimentation. I suspect, after doing some study
and work, that the church must give up its expectation that public evangelism as it has been known will ever affect modern secular leaders at all. I am convinced some other methodologies must be found if thought leaders are once again to espouse Christianity.

Second is the issue of reaching those who fall under the influence of thought leaders. I am persuaded that, while the masses follow the thought leaders, they often do it uncritically.1 Certainly, people are not robots. They are not without the capacity to think and discern on their own. They do not of necessity adopt the positions of leaders. But, critical thinking is hard work. Most people are not trained to think carefully, and prefer not to do it. The default position is that people who do not think critically end up following along rather automatically, absorbing whatever dictums happen to be popular. Such people need to have their thinking challenged by careful Christian effort, too. I believe many of these can be saved for Christianity with careful work. They can be persuaded, salvaged from the flow of ideas that is currently coming forth from leaders in secular society. It is to this issue this project will devote its best efforts.

It must be kept in mind that the fundamental battle facing Christianity is one of intellectual credibility. Christianity must find a way to establish itself once again as a credible description of life. The old reasons and explanations will no longer do. Christian evangelists must understand very clearly that before they can accomplish their task, they must get a hearing. That hearing must be a sympathetic one. Getting such a hearing with

---

1While traveling recently I fell into the company of a woman who dismissed the whole of organized Christianity because of the great wrongs done by the church. She had never stopped to consider the woes done by godless ideologies, such as Communism. She had merely accepted the criticism of the church unthinkingly because it seemed to make sense.
modern and sophisticated people is a difficult thing to do. Merely getting a sympathetic audience is in itself an achievement. Things are at a point where Christians must understand that the evangelist who does succeed in getting the listening ear of sophisticated modern people has accomplished something many will never do. Difficult as it may be, getting that audience is precisely what must be done. Without it, Christianity has little to no evangelistic voice amidst a critical element of society. I believe a revised methodology can put the public voice of Christianity before a secular public with some success, even though the academics and thought leaders themselves may not listen.

The question of the place of public evangelism in a secularized society may rightfully be raised. This project looks at the design of public evangelism. In this regard, it is a theoretical enterprise. For the past two hundred years or so, Christians have acted as if there were only one acceptable methodology, that of conducting public meetings of persuasion, when there are actually many. Within the Christian community, there is evangelism through teaching. There is effective personal influence, personal Bible study, the publication of printed material, evangelism via the electronic media. to say nothing of the arts, which large segments of the church have studiously avoided. Public evangelism is only one method among many. It is, nevertheless, a significant one. And it still has a place.

It is important to remember that evangelism is a process. If the goal is to influence thought leaders, public evangelism will prove largely ineffective. Merely assembling an audience from the general public does little or nothing to influence academics and thought leaders, unless that assembly somehow gains significant power. On the other hand, if the
goal is to persuade the general public, to redeem them from the thoughtless drift of modern society, then there is reason to hope for some success. Persuasion can take place in public forums. And, there is still a great reservoir of good will toward the church, a perceived place for it in the lives of the general population. This good will and perceived value may be exploited for good cause.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project, then, simply stated, is to make one modest attempt at addressing the complex and demanding, but potentially rewarding, issue of evangelizing modern, thinking people. It will first propose an alternative theoretical construct for evangelism. It will then experiment with a new paradigm for public evangelism, arising out of the proposed theory, that focuses specifically on reaching the educated, thinking people of our day. The new paradigm will attempt evangelism via a philosophical construct that addresses issues commonly associated with what it sometimes called "foundational" theology, things like the concept of world-view, the role of religion in life, and questions about the existence of God.

To be more specific, this project will focus on researching a new paradigm, testing it, then preparing a series of lectures that fit the new paradigm, and delivering them while at the same time recording and producing them for broadcast on television. The goal is to end up not only with a new methodology but also with a tested body of material that those in public evangelism may use in their attempts to get an audience with modern men and women.
The project purposes to work through several levels. It will start by addressing some issues that surround the beginning of the evangelistic process. This will be done by suggesting and experimenting with a starting point that will interest un-evangelized modern people. One of the project's stated objectives is to devise a method that will allow Christian apologists to get an audience with the modern public, a credible audience. It will attempt to create a situation that allows for a Christian apology to be heard. This is work that begins the process of coming to faith.

The project will then progress to matters in the middle of the evangelistic process, those that involve persuading people for Christ. A number of specific audiences are in mind. First, there are unchurched people, those who ascribe little or no credibility to the Christian faith. Second, this project will attempt to speak to the secular people already within the orbit of the church. Not all secular, sceptical people are outside the church. Many are within its fellowship. It is important to recognize that a significant number of those who hold membership in Christian churches today continue to do so for reasons other than personal faith in Christian teachings. Some grew up in congregations and do not leave because of social connection; some hold positions of power and influence that they are not ready to relinquish; some see churches as good places for their families. A lot of these secularized church members are unsure of the intellectual viability of what they grew up believing. They are asking questions and raising issues that are entirely ignored by the current evangelistic method. That does not make the questions and issues go away. It tends only to diminish the grasp faith has on their lives, and it also diminishes the credibility of those doing evangelism by the usual means.
Another audience is young adult people. Because of the changes in society, the length of the adolescent years is now much prolonged. If the completion of basic education, marriage, and the taking up of a life’s work may be used as indicators of the end of adolescence, then a case could be made that adolescence in our society does not end until people are close to thirty years of age, perhaps more. Since adolescence is usually the period of life in which people take charge of their lives, it is also the time in which they form their personal belief systems. This used to take place in the high school years. It now takes place during college years and beyond. Because the academic environment is particularly hostile toward Christianity at present, many of these young people are not adopting the Christian faith.

It is very important not to under-estimate the degree to which the academic world is hostile to Christianity. Two articles, one by R. Albert Mohler, Jr., in World, the second by Jacob Neusner in the National Review, illustrate just how hostile the environment on college campuses now is. Mohler, referring to a speech made by Dartmouth College’s president, in which he made reference to the need to purge the college of its legacy of "bigotry" and of the "ghosts of its past," noted that a central part of that legacy is Dartmouth’s manifestly Christian origins. If the president’s remarks are to be taken at face value, "the very Christian roots of the schools are cause for head hanging shame inside the ivy-covered walls of the elite academy."¹ Mohler goes on to draw the following conclusion:

The result of the radical secular transformation of American colleges and universities is the virtual banishment of authentic Christianity. Anything else—indeed everything else—is welcome and has a place on the campus, in the curriculum, and in the culture.¹

Neusner’s comments are similar. Blaming Protestantism and secularism jointly for the shift, Neusner says:

What students learn about religion [in the universities] is that it is self-evidently a matter of theological conviction, which is personal. Religion at most, therefore, measures a dimension of conscience and character; more likely, it forms an entity altogether unimportant—or else a danger to rational order in society. Thus students learn about religion exactly the opposite of the truth.²

If a method could be discovered that could make a credible case for Christianity to college age youth, there is a good chance they would inculcate into their own codes of life Christian beliefs that would remain there to guide them for the rest of their lives. By this the Christian community would be greatly benefited.

This project hopes to make a contribution by developing an evangelistic paradigm that speaks to the groups here mentioned. Addressing the target audiences will be accomplished by starting the evangelistic process at a point different from the one currently in vogue, and by including in the progression of topics some of the issues they wrestle with that are not touched on in the traditional method. If the issues they are wrestling with can be spoken to in a manner they deem credible, personal faith may be engendered or revived, and the tenor of their Christianity deepened.

This project will attempt to address some of the issues that may be said to

¹Ibid.

materialize near the end of the evangelistic process, too. By this I mean it will help confirm the faith of those who have come to believe. There is a lot of intellectual ferment about truth and its nature, even about its existence. By establishing in people’s minds the fact that Christianity is well-founded philosophically, the faith of those who come to believe will be confirmed. This is something much needed in the church today.

The grand purpose of this project then, is singular—to discover and experiment with a new evangelistic paradigm, one that suggests a change in the traditional starting point of evangelism, and also in the content and arrangement of the various subjects in the hope of speaking to a segment of society that is not now listening.

Whatever criticisms of the method are here offered, they do not include suggestions of doing away with public speaking itself. There are some who are disinclined to continue with public meetings. I do not suppose, given the nature of human beings, the history and effectiveness of public meetings, and the nature of the process of persuasion, that there will ever be a time when gathering an audience and speaking to it will be out of vogue. Nor do I anticipate a time when speaking, publicly persuading individuals, will ever be ineffective or passe'. It seems clear that by its very nature, persuasion thrives on such forums.\footnote{While persuasion may thrive on such forums, it does not require them. An interesting and pertinent matter is that of informal, word of mouth communication. There is evidence this may be the most effective means of persuasion.} They are part of the fabric of human society, used by many different disciplines. So the focus here will not be on the advisability or inadvisability of using public forums, but rather on two essential elements of the public persuasion process, the first being the matter of the starting point of the evangelistic
conversation, the second the content of the subjects themselves.

After a review and brief assessment of the current evangelistic paradigm, the project will end with a series of lectures set to a new order designed to speak to the issues that concern modern man. These lectures will be in videotape format, not written, and they will be produced for showing on television. There is also the possibility that the tapes could be marketed to be used as instigators of discussions on topics that lead to faith.

The task here is considerable. Given the complexity and cynicism of our times, and the range and scope of the topics that must be touched on to make this effort a success, the task is enormous. But it must be done. A method of speaking to modern man must be carved out if we are to be faithful to the Great Commission. And it can be.

Justification for the Project

Whenever an attempt is made to adjust or replace something tried and true, some kind of justification is in order. It would be foolish indeed to charge out on a new proposed course without first offering some deliberate reason for the new course, especially when discussing evangelism. Therefore, what justifications can be offered for undertaking this project?

The first justification to be considered is a general one, and basic. It could be said that this whole project arises from a single consideration: that society, especially in the last thirty years, has changed so radically and is now so very much unlike the one into which the current prevailing evangelistic paradigm was born, that the traditional methods of
evangelism are no longer reaching educated, thinking people. Evidence for this assertion will be offered in greater detail later.

A second justification arises from church acquisition statistics that suggest traditional methods of evangelism are effective among immigrant groups and Third World peoples, but not very effective among established groups, and the landed and affluent. It is not within the scope of this project to explore the specifics of this matter in detail, but knowledge of this eventuality is broad enough to allow unsubstantiated mention of it here.

I have served enough on various church committees at various levels of church government to know that current evangelistic methods are bringing in many from the uneducated and immigrant groups, but they are hardly touching the established Western Anglo populations at all. For example, in the Atlantic Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, a territory that encompasses the New England States and New York, the various immigrant and minority groups, while remaining a minority in terms of general population, have grown to be a majority in the church, while the established Anglo populations appear to have been largely untouched in terms of evangelism.

Another justification is in the form of anecdotal and experiential observation. This project first came to mind because of personal experience in public meetings. In the process of conducting a number of public meetings, it became clear that people are not responding to traditional methods as they once did. I well recall one series of public meetings in a major city in which 38,000 invitations, couched in a biblical context, were bulk-mailed by a professional advertising organization netting a response of fourteen non-churched people at the meetings. And, not all those came as a result of the advertising.
Some had been invited by friends. This experience stands in marked contrast to reports from evangelists several generations ago that reveal vastly different statistics. Even as late as the early 1960s, evangelists could go into a city, advertise, and count on getting a full audience. A realization of these changes fueled an interest in a project such as this. While there may certainly be other factors affecting this, evangelistic method is one of them.

Another justifying issue for this project is the observation that secularism—the whole idea of existence without reference to God—has affected the church quite significantly. There are, within the embrace of the church, many people who have been affected by the secularist mode. They have world-views that are influenced by the secular ideologies. I would offer, by way of example, the appearance of the idea of theistic evolution. Without passing judgment on the concept, surely it arose because of the effect of the secularist idea of evolution.

For people in the church who have been affected by secularism, traditional methods of evangelism and persuasion are trite, shallow, sensational, and deemed unworthy of their attention, let alone their endorsement. They are embarrassed by what they hear and see going on, the simplistic and exclusive explanations. They resist inviting their friends to evangelistic meetings set in the prevailing evangelistic paradigm. (I am not sure this can be documented by any published studies, but there is plenty of pastoral experience that attests to it.) In their minds and communities, educated people risk losing credibility if they subscribe to such evangelistic methods. It does not seem right for the church to ignore their needs and pleas. They wrestle with legitimate questions and issues. They need some kind of viable evangelistic instrument that they can be affected by, and
which they can use in touching their fellows.

Further justification for this project lies in the fact that there appears now to be a window of opportunity for evangelizing secular people. This opportunity is manifested in several ways. For example, right in the domain of academics there is plenty of material very critical of the effects of this great following after the myths of Western liberalism. Liberalism has left a great moral void of meaning in society that the intelligentsia are unable to fill. We are now at a point where science has not delivered on its grandiose promises made several generations ago. The tenets and assertions of Darwinism that have provided society with a "Godless creation story" are now in serious doubt. We are at a point where the concepts of the material universe and the theories that have governed astronomers for generations are in a state of ferment. Society itself is suffering from near gridlock because of the absence of commonly accepted morals and a concept of what constitutes the common good. Evil things, such as children shooting children, are occurring regularly. Diseases and pestilences that were once beaten by modern medicine are now reappearing in resistant strains. Totally new and sinister diseases are materializing in faraway places, with the prospect of spreading rapidly. There seems to be nothing fixed. Even marriage and home are disappearing as stable entities. These things are causing people to be afraid and unsettled. In the words of Leon Morris, "the tragedy of much modern life is that the abandonment of the knowledge of God means that futility has taken over."\(^1\) Strange as it may seem, this ferment may afford evangelism an opportunity.

When people are unsettled, they begin to search for answers, including the possibility of searching out religious ones. People are unsettled enough now to pause a moment to listen. Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias wrote:

As evil becomes more hideous and ruthless, the shape of the future seems more fearsome and dreadful. Yet for the gospel message this may be the most significant moment in history, for the message of Christ provides the only hope--a supernatural hope--of a changed heart and life.¹

Some evangelistic method should be found that takes advantage of the unsettled state of human minds.

Justification for this project may also come from the fact that there is currently a great deal of interest in spirituality--this somewhat mystical capacity or quality of the human psyche that exists in every person. John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, the premier trend forecasters of this era, document a rising interest in religious matters. They point to a great resurgence of religion across a wide spectrum of belief and geography.² Even the unchurched are more religious than they were just a few years ago. It is important to notice that Naisbitt and Aburdene further refine their findings to state that the resurgence of religious fervor is more correctly classified as an interest in "spirituality" rather than in organized religion.³ It is more and more believed and stated that every human being has a "spiritual" capacity, a domain of the mind that houses religious beliefs.

³Ibid., 275.
Christian faith in apposition to other faiths. But as the Christian faith became less acceptable to people, the concept of being openly spiritual became unattractive. That is now changing. Prominent people are quite open about their spirituality. It is not considered deleterious to declare one's spirituality anymore. Dyrness contends that this quest for spiritual fulfillment ranks as the most urgent of our day. Says he, "The end of this century has come to be characterized as a new age of spirituality. While traditional religion is often in decline, the hunger for spiritual fulfillment is, if anything, more pervasive than ever." He goes on to point out that this desire has always been a part of society, expressed in the Great Awakenings, in the growth of Methodism, and, in his opinion, in the Azusa Street revival that birthed Pentecostalism. Most of this resurgent interest in spirituality, the keeping alive of the sense of the spiritual, is not now focused on the Christian faith. Eastern religions, the realm of the psychic, or strange personal syncretistic conglomerations are in vogue. But whatever the case, the interest in spirituality is keen. It seems this interest and openness does give opportunity for a case for Christianity to be made. While it may not be at the top of the list, at least Christian apologists should be able to bring something to the table for discussion in favor of their faith.

Still further justification arises from personal observation that there are vast numbers of people in society, both inside and outside the church, who are largely ignorant of the basics of Christianity. Particularly important is that they are ignorant of the great

^Dyrness. 34.
philosophical and presuppositional truths that inform the Christian faith.\footnote{Some may contend that these issues have been the domain of philosophers and theologians exclusively. That may have been true in the past, but not any more. It is precisely these issues that are now raising barriers to Christian belief.} For many, Christianity is seen to be juvenile, something for children. Though it may sound harsh to say it, in reality, their opinions and conclusions are made in ignorance, for those who made them lack knowledge of the foundational presuppositions that undergird Christianity. This means they have, in fact, never made informed decisions about their faith. Others have grown up in faith communities that prize tradition, or that are more socially oriented than "truth" oriented. Some are, in consequence, without informed religious training or context. They have the trappings of religious belief and some of the language by which it was historically expressed, but they have no idea of its essence. For all these, to hear an explication of some of the great, satisfying, intellectually challenging undergirdings of the Christian faith would serve to deepen the level and sophistication of their belief. For those outside the church, presentation of the facts in a passionate and cogent manner might prove persuasive.

This project may also be justified by the fact that there has been, in recent years, the resurgence of credible Christian apologetics. In the recent past, the word "apologetics" has been despised. It was equated with indoctrination. That has changed. People such as John R.W. Stott, Jacob Neusner, Ravi Zacharias, the late Lesslie Newbigin, Josh McDowell, Anthony Campolo, and others, all people with notable minds, have devoted considerable effort to reestablishing a credible apologetic for Christianity.
Their materials, and those of others like them, should be popularized and put before the public.

Another justification arises from some personal experiences in experimenting over the past few years with some of the elements and ideas expressed here. On several occasions I have shared, while working with educated, thinking people, some of the concepts that make up this project. Their responses helped drive this project. While not scientific or quantifiable empirically, several anecdotes are worth including. The first is the experience of a young, aspiring academic with tentative Christian connections. Discussion on some of the great foundational facts supporting the Christian faith brought about a deepening commitment in the woman, and the taking up of an active association with a believing community. She came to realize that the faith she only dabbled in had solid and deep foundations. That made it possible for her to invest trust and life in it without intellectual sacrifice.

A final justification comes from the experience of sharing some of these concepts, over a period of months, with a group of young educated adults, the result of which was great excitement and the growth of confidence on their part. There was a stated deepening of confidence in Christianity. There were also expressions of interest in their bringing friends and peers to further meetings. Their excitement and the expressions of support have lent considerable impetus to this project idea.

All of the things cited above offer justification for this project. There is need, there is opportunity now, there is interest, and there is material available. The development of a new paradigm can be done, and should be done. The achievement of these objectives is a
fervent hope. Their attainment would bring to the Christian community more than it has had for several generations. It may allow for a credible hearing for disciplined Christian evangelists. That goal, if achieved, would be marvelous indeed.

**Description of Methodology**

A few words about methodology are in order. This project sets out to experiment with a new idea. It begins with the contention that the current evangelistic paradigm is aging, and that it is no longer addressing the educated segments of society. I do not spend a lot of time substantiating this assertion, believing it is well enough known to careful observers to be accepted.\(^1\) This assertion should not be taken as a suggestion that the current paradigm be abandoned. Clearly, it is still reaching many people under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. The point I am trying to make is that it is not reaching educated, sophisticated, thinking people. With this beginning assertion established, the project then moves on to propose a new paradigm, one that begins at a different place than what is currently being done. Because this new paradigm will occupy a significant portion of this project, it is not detailed here. After its initial development, the proposed paradigm was shared with two experienced evangelists and teachers for their review, their input as to the viability of the idea, and in the hopes of obtaining some suggestions for improvement. It should be noted right here that the idea of this new paradigm did not originate with me. The seed idea and the basic paradigm were taken from a seminary teacher, with his agreement, of course, then adapted as necessary. It was a case in which

\(^1\)No doubt those who are heavily invested in the status quo will resist these assertions.
a student saw some evangelistic possibilities in a body of class material presented. The teacher, Dr. Fernando Canale of Andrews University, had not thought of evangelistic possibilities, but was happy to see experimentation with the ideas planned. To be sure, the basic ideas were modified and expanded on in preparation for the lectures given.

With the basic paradigm established, the focus of the project then shifts to the development of a series of lectures that fit the new paradigm. Because of the breadth of the material to be presented and covered, not all the material of the lectures is my original work. The material, in embryonic form, was again borrowed from the seminary class mentioned above. But it was mulled over, added to, and simplified to be more easily understood by nontheologians. In some areas it was greatly expanded. Proper credit is given at the various appropriate places in the project. It is also true that some parts are original. New material was researched and developed.

After discussing the development of the lectures, the lecture contents were shared with a small focus group. This group was selected by stating publicly in church that, in preparation for the advertised meetings, a small group was needed who would interact on a weekly basis with the speaker. Interested people applied. The group that was formed had a good cross section between young adults and senior citizens. It also had a great range in terms of formal education, some having basic college degrees, others (at least two) had earned doctorates.

Before any of the lectures were presented to the public, each one was shared with the focus group in order to test its understandability. Suggestions were made that were incorporated into the lectures. This proved to be a looser and more difficult process than
envisioned at the time the proposal for this project was made. The basic reason for this had to do with the amount of material that had to be reviewed. It simply proved impossible to go over all the lectures at one time in advance of their presentation, so they were reviewed two at a time. This meant the early lectures were being presented before the final ones had been adjusted by the opinions of the focus group. In consequence the section on testing the methodology is weaker than was first anticipated. To make up for this shortcoming, an evaluation document was prepared that was given to the audience at the conclusion of the meetings. This evaluation sheet produced data that were very helpful and they are reported on in the conclusion.

After interaction with the focus group, the lectures were presented to the public and taped for television broadcast. There is a whole section in the project detailing this process.

Finally, there is a conclusion and the reporting of some data. The conclusion includes some suggestions and ideas that might be useful to anyone wanting to experiment with this idea further.

**Limitations of the Project**

A number of limitations to this project should be kept in mind. First, extensive research into the origins and development of the current prevailing evangelistic paradigm was not undertaken. It is a subject too broad to be part of this project, but may be of sufficient magnitude to warrant exploration of its own. If the assessment of the current paradigm is not accurate, then this project is weakened, if not rendered irrelevant.
This project faces some limitations by virtue of the data used in it, and by the data gathering mechanisms chosen. To begin with, the type of data used in this project, to guide it and adjust its presentations, is what might be called opinion data, more subjective than objective, people sharing their opinions about the subject at hand. In other words, this is a qualitative study rather than a quantitative one. There is not hard, scientific, analytical data. Therefore, rather than having refined, precise statistical data, the data are more general, over a wide range. It consists of the drawing together of people’s opinions and suggestions. It is pliable, at times recording hunches. That is not to suggest such information is without value, only that it is not as precise as other types of data may be. It seems, however, that when dealing with matters of apologetics, this type of "pliable" data is of considerable value, for it does measure opinions rather nicely. Furthermore, the data gathering mechanisms were imprecise when compared with clinical studies. This project was not carried out in a clinical environment, but in the rough and tumble of the imprecise world of evangelism. As much as an idealistic seminarian might like to believe, evangelism is not a clean process as much as it is the coming together of a host of factors that end up persuading someone to adopt a position of faith. If the reader is looking for clinical data, this project will disappoint.

There are further limitations placed on this project because of its experimental nature. It is an attempt to try something new, something different in evangelism. Few, if any, similar projects were found. The only endeavor I found that comes close is the work of Ravi Ministries, led by apologist Ravi Zacharias, a convert to Christianity from
Hinduism. His level of learning, expertise, and experience would eclipse this project by a wide margin. but the idea infusing it is similar. This project, at least within Adventism, is something uncommon, if not entirely new. Presuming that to be the case, this project amounts to experimentation. As with all experiments, it faces the prospect of missing its target entirely. It may result in the discovery that this idea is not worth pursuing; that the hypothesis was incorrect: that the hunches played were wrong. Those reading it should take its suggestions with care. being especially careful not to extrapolate from this one project across the board. to suggest it is applicable in every situation. Until some evangelistic method. tried and tested. is found that does reach the secular minded of the world, one can ill afford to act as if this were the last word.

It occurs to me there might be some limitations imposed on this project by virtue of the expectations that commonly surround evangelistic endeavors. There is very much the idea extant that evangelism should produce immediate results. Also, that exceptional evangelism produces exceptional results. This is certainly the expectation that surrounds the prevailing method. In my experience, evangelizing educated, critical people does not proceed so quickly. The work done according to the paradigm suggested in this project is longer term. The observation of Elton Trueblood to this point is striking:

> The value of intellectual inquiry lies not in its ability to tell us what we ought to do, but rather in its ability to surmount the barriers that hinder our doing. The careful study of the philosophy of religion is helpful, not because in most instances it brings

---

1The address is Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, 4725 Peachtree Corners Circle, Suite 250, Norcross, GA 30092.

2It is worth noting that Mr. Zacharias has spoken to packed houses on numerous university campuses. That demonstrates considerable interest.
men to God, but because it fulfils the humbler role of removing barriers to requisite commitment.  

This quotation from Trueblood is so important to this project it will appear again later. Here it serves to point out something those who would engage in evangelizing modern critical people must keep constantly in mind, that the first work they have to do is a humble one. It involves removing the barriers that prevent commitment. This work is usually very quiet and unspectacular. It is usually slow, even tedious work. The evangelist who undertakes it must not expect immediate, grand numerical successes. Barriers to belief often come down slowly. Those reading this project expecting to find a way to spectacular successes at reaching secular man are forewarned to adjust their expectations.

There is one other limitation to be mentioned here. This project is set within the context of North America. Evangelism is something being done on a global basis. This project does not pretend to speak to the global issues. Its focus is narrow. Its area of experimentation is almost exclusively focused toward secular Americans. Extrapolations across the board are not appropriate. Wherever circumstances and audience are similar, of course, extrapolations may be made.

In spite of the limitations discussed, the project is still worth trying. At the very least it will tell what not to do. At most it will reveal a new method of evangelism that may go a long way to establishing evangelistic endeavor before the secular public.

---

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF THE PREVAILING EVANGELISTIC METHOD

A Historical Review of the Current Method

The first step toward the development of a new paradigm must be a review of the old one. As mentioned in the introduction, the review of the current prevailing evangelistic paradigm here is not exhaustive. Rather, this review is undertaken only to the point necessary to understand the issues enough to be able to establish justification for developing a new paradigm.

The current prevailing evangelistic paradigm is one that is very familiar to Christians. The process consists basically of drawing a crowd together by some means of advertising, to a public place, followed by the preaching of a series of sermons along a progression of topics determined by the speaker, all with the intent of persuading members of the audience to become Christian, to ally themselves with a body of believers with the hope they will then stay attached and active.

The origins of this methodology are obscure. Certainly, the idea of gathering a crowd together, of speaking to them in a manner designed to convey information, of using a public gathering as an occasion for persuasion, is something as old as human history itself. It is a part of the nature of life.

During the Christian era, this method is one that has been widely used. Given the
technology (or absence of it) of past times, there were no other viable options. That Jesus Himself used public persuasion is many times demonstrated in the Gospels. Even a cursory reading of them reveals that Jesus was constantly in the press of the crowd, people flocking after Him, pressing in on Him from every side. And whenever He had the inclination, He stopped and taught them. They listened as He spoke. He publicly persuaded and taught them. The result was the conveyance of information that led to belief.

The evangelistic practice of speaking in public, persuading people to be Christian, was widely used by the apostles and early Christians. One only need think of the missionary efforts of the Apostle Paul to realize that his standard method was to gather audiences together at every opportunity and to publicly preach to them a series of sermons or lectures. That preaching resulted in many coming into the kingdom of God. Without doubt, public preaching and speaking have been carried on throughout all the ages of the Christian era, right up to modern times, with little change to the method.

For the preponderance of Christian history, then, the public evangelistic method remained unchanged. It is with the coming of modern times that this time-tested method has seen considerable refinement. The basic technique of speaking publicly has become something of a science. There has grown up around the basic practice of public speaking a host of carefully refined ideas and practices. For instance, advertising strategies have become specific and sophisticated. In apostolic times, advertising, we must assume, was by word of mouth. (It is worth noting that word of mouth advertising is still the most effective.) A standard strategy for an evangelist was to find a place where people were
apt to assemble for discussion. It could be a synagogue or a market place. There the evangelist would try to enter into dialogue with those assembled. The Apostle Paul's experience at Mars' Hill falls into this last mentioned category.

After the invention of the printing press, it became increasingly common to put up broadside notices of intended meetings. In American Colonial times, for example, evangelistic advertising consisted of going into a town, posting some kind of notice that there was going to be an evangelistic endeavor, then waiting for people to assemble. Typically, in the time between the going up of the broadside and the actual meetings, whole towns would be informed by word of mouth and would turn out to listen. As printing and advertising techniques became more advanced, word of mouth advertising and broadside notices gave way to printed advertising in newspapers and flyers. Now the process has evolved to the place where the whole process is precise and sophisticated. There are glossy brochures created by advertising specialists, bulk-mailed to home addresses, slick advertising signs that are put up, even short clips on television and radio. Public speaking is now surrounded by very sophisticated advertising techniques, and all this at a time when some voices in the advertising world are saying that mass media is dead, that it has so jaded the general public that they resist it routinely.¹

In modern times, there have been a host of technological advancements that have produced many small adjustments to the evangelistic method. Past times have seen the use of giant pictures, or papier mache' beasts run out on stage upon little trolleys.

¹This type of advertising is also very much incongruent with word of mouth advertising, which is still the most effective method.
Techniques were developed that allowed painted posters to drop from the ceiling. There was a time when glass slides were the rage, then film slides, projecting images and text onto a screen. These have carried on into current times, but are now being superseded by computer generated graphics of various types. Videotape is in use in some quarters. Some of the visual aids have become quite ingenious, all evidences of sophisticated techniques developed to surround public speaking. And this is only discussion of the technology that touches on visual aids. Who can speak of the public address systems, and the various techniques evangelists use for tracking attendance, each of these significant technological advances themselves?

The methods of getting people to make decisions have also become well-developed and sophisticated. It used to be that at the conclusion of a meeting a simple request would be pressed upon the audience. Evangelistic calls involved asking listeners to come down to the “mourners’ bench,” usually the front one. People under conviction would leave their seats in the audience to go down to the front pew, there to meet with the speaker or his assistants. Now the process of simply asking has become something of a science. Attached to the simple question are various techniques for getting people to come to decision. Some evangelists have developed a system of handing out cards with questions on them to which people are asked to respond. The questions themselves are often carefully crafted, sometimes to the point of being obscurantist. And the manner and sequence in which they are asked is carefully laid out. Open attempts are made to soften
and minimize the act of decision-making.¹

The sequence in which the various topics are presented is also carefully detailed and monitored now. Evangelists have experimented with and carefully recorded the effects of particular sequences of topics, the sequence by which they explain “truth.” By this experimentation, they have determined certain sequences to be more advantageous than others, more conducive to getting people to make decisions. Young evangelists copy the veterans. There are schools of evangelism today where the methods and techniques of proven evangelists are taught and emulated. All this is evidence that the whole idea of speaking publicly for Christ has become quite precise, even scientific in our day.

At this point, enough history has been recited to be able to allow a clarification. All through this project, reference is repeatedly made to the “current evangelistic methodology.” or to the “current paradigm.” It is the merging of the old practice of speaking publicly to persuade, with the precise and sophisticated methods that have evolved in modern times, that makes up what I have been referring to as “the prevailing evangelistic methodology.”

In modern times, the evolution of this prevailing methodology can be traced at least as far back as the great Methodist revivals and the public meetings now known as

¹A prominent example of this type of work worth noting here is that of Kembleton S. Wiggins in his book Soul Winning Made Easier (Mountain View, CA, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1975), 80. There is one chapter titled “How to Get More Decisions,” and another titled “Advanced Techniques for Securing More Decisions in Public Evangelism.” In the latter chapter are some rather sophisticated suggestions, including one that people be asked to make partial responses. There is another suggestion that decisions on big issues be aided by having people respond to related small issues. One example given obscures a decision for baptism behind a decision as to who will provide the towel for the ceremony.
“camp meetings.” Central to those great revivals were public meetings at which preachers held forth on various topics, persuading people to come to faith. Meetings were often advertised by public notices. Those meetings were so effective they set the format and parameters for evangelistic preaching and efforts for years to come. Over time, the paradigm established was refined, and refined again. But, the adjustments and changes excepted, the basic method remained untouched. The evangelists, new technology or not, sophisticated techniques or not, all gathered audiences by some means of advertising, then preached to persuade them of truth. And they did it in very much the same kind of setting, with similar presuppositions and ideas.¹

**Analysis of the Current Method**

With this brief historical vignette in mind, it is now time to turn a more critical eye onto the matter of evangelistic method. It has been already noted that there are evidences the current paradigm is aging, reaching a smaller and smaller segment of society, and, in particular, failing of reaching the thought leaders of Western culture at all. An analysis of the method will bring to light several causes for this eventuality.

As I have thought of how best to conduct this analysis, it seems one of the very first things that must be scrutinized is the starting point for the evangelistic process. The

¹It is worth noting here that some of the stagnation in evangelistic method may well be because of the long-standing practice of “borrowing” among evangelists. It is not uncommon for evangelists to publish their sermons, and give them out, including to novices, who use them as is. I have been given sermons by working evangelists and told I should use them as they are, for they are proven to be effective. Why do work already done? While this practice may have some value, it has a downside. There is not as much creative energy abroad in evangelistic circles as there would be if each evangelist wrote his or her own sermons.
subject of the starting point is critical in a very fundamental way to the persuasion process and to this project. It is, in fact, the threshold issue for the discussion of a paradigm shift that is here being suggested.

Clearly, every evangelistic conversation has to have a starting point. That starting point is pivotal because it forms the beginning of a process that will, hopefully, lead an unbeliever to the point of belief. The starting point is therefore critical, because everything flows from it. If the process of persuasion is even to have the chance to begin, let alone work, the starting point must be seen as credible. It must be credible to both the speaker and the listener. It must be credible to the listener because the process of persuasion will be seen as faulty if it does not begin at a solid point. It must be credible to the speaker in order to preserve and protect his or her integrity. Of these two factors, primary importance must be given to the position of the listener, for it is the listener who has to be persuaded, who will end up making the changes.

Whenever one is dealing with starting points, it is essential to bear in mind that, as a matter of necessity, the question of assumptions and presuppositions comes up. Starting points are always surrounded by presuppositions de facto. There is no type of conversation (nor is there any established body of knowledge) but is preceded by an assembly of presuppositions. Many times these presuppositions are unspoken, even unrecognized. People do not often stop to think that the very makeup of knowledge is predicated upon the existence of presuppositions. Data of any kind cannot be interpreted unless and until some grid of presuppositions is brought up against it to classify it and make sense of it.
This fact has a bearing on evangelistic process. Evangelist Billy Sunday is quoted as saying, “What we see as we go through life always depends upon where we stand to look.” Whenever a speaker stands to the desk, or whenever a listener offers interest and attention, behind the process of persuasion can be found an assembly of presuppositions and assumptions held by both parties. If it happens that the assumptions of the two parties are shared, then the process is apt to work well. If they are actually divergent, then the process struggles for it is held suspect. It may actually break down entirely.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of this point. What is being said here is that, in order for the process of persuasion to function optimally, the evangelist must begin at a point where the set of presuppositions he or she operates from is one held in common with the audience. The audience must have confidence in the starting point. If not, then those being persuaded may eventually see the whole process as flawed and the process of persuasion will lose its power.

The evangelist, too, must have confidence in the starting point in order to preserve integrity and honesty. If the evangelist does not genuinely believe in the veracity of the starting point, then integrity is lost. The evangelist becomes expedient, one willing to use even suspect means to obtain a desired end. In my opinion, such a thing in the evangelistic process is hypocritical, and bad for both the process and the evangelist. The evangelist becomes dishonest, and the audience may sense the process is nothing more than a

---

technique, rather than a genuine, passionate appeal. In the long run, the cause of God is not benefited by such duplicity.

Though such actions may well produce decisions and baptisms, there is also the prospect that those who were persuaded under duplicitous methods may later learn the truth of things and become disillusioned, and go on to turn from the church to do it more harm than good. So, clearly, the starting point of the evangelistic process is critical. If it is not acceptable, not seen as credible by all parties, the whole process ends up being un-compelling, and the evangelistic process is short-circuited.

It does not require much work or thought to describe the starting point of the current method and the presuppositions that undergird it. The current methodology begins with the presumption that the audience subscribes to a Christian world-view. In modern times, the starting point of the evangelist has always been, and continues to be, the presumption that the audience accepts the viability of a basic Christian construct of reality, or world-view. Evangelists have been able to presume there is little or no argument about the way Christians order the universe. For example, evangelists have been able to assume the audience believes in God. And not just any god, but God as the Christian believes in Him, a supernatural, all-wise, beneficent Sovereign, Creator of the universe. Nowhere in the current schema of public evangelism do you find anything different. The topic of the existence of God is never brought up for discussion. Evangelists have been able to assume it to be a well-established and well-accepted idea.

Evangelists have also been able to presume the audience accepts the Scriptures as credible and reliable revelation from and about God. Evangelists presume people are
agreed that God has revealed Himself to humankind, and that He has superintended a process by which that revelation was distilled into a book called the Bible. Nowhere in the current paradigm does one find significant time and discussion of the process of revelation and inspiration, also inscripturation, and illumination.

These facts become quite clear when a study of the works and various topics presented by evangelists in public meetings is undertaken. For purposes of this project, I surveyed the presentations of a number of evangelists. The survey revealed they all, without exception, hold as a starting presupposition the idea that a Christian world-view is accepted by the general audiences they draw. In not a single instance was any time given by any evangelist to the discussion of some of the subjects that precede and undergird a Christian world-view, the belief in the existence of God, for example.

The survey also revealed that in every case, the Bible was presumed to be a document of accepted credibility. From the point of advertising onward, the Bible is presumed by evangelists working within the current paradigm to be a document accepted as credible by the audience. In every case, right from the beginning of the persuasion process, the Bible is set before the audience as the accepted authority to which the evangelist may appeal.

Not only are the subjects of the existence of God and the process of revelation ignored and given no time, but there was no occasion found in which discussion was given to any of the other major presuppositions that undergird the Christian faith—Can we know anything at all? How do faith and reason interact? Is there such a thing as “truth?”

My survey of current evangelistic literature made this abundantly clear. For
example, the opening subject advertised by one evangelist was "Countdown to Eternity," a sermon on the second coming of Christ.¹ This topic presumes the acceptance of a Christian world-view; it presumes the audience accepts that there is a God in heaven, and that the Bible has credence. In another instance, the initial presentation was titled "Our Day in the Light of Bible Prophecy,"² obviously a topic that presumes acceptance of the Bible and the existence of God. A survey of the sermons of evangelist Herman Bauman, who rose to some prominence in the 1960s, demonstrates the same. In his book of evangelistic sermons, only the traditional topics appear.³ The method of current evangelist Dan Bentzinger, whose lectures are advertised as "The Amazing Discoveries in Bible Prophecy,"⁴ is cast in the same mold. While he speaks of attracting and addressing secular minded individuals, he operates very much from the presumption of a Christian world-view.

These same presumptions undergird the work of past evangelists, too. A journey back in time to the writings of R. A. Torrey reveals he also worked within similar context. In his book How to Work for Christ, Torrey includes sermons for both the saved and the

¹Mark Finley, Countdown to Eternity, Discoveries in Prophecy Series, prod. and dir. Terry Woods, 30 min., Hart Research Center, 1995, videocassette.


³Herman Bauman, Evangelistic Messages (N.p.: Privately published by Herman Bauman, June 1967).

⁴Dan Bentzinger is associated with It Is Written, P.O. Box 0, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360.
unsaved. In both cases, all his material is biblically established. And Charles G. Finney, the great reviver of the past century, set his lectures in the same mode. He was very concerned to work for the ungodly, but a review of his book titled *Revivals of Religion* shows the whole to be set in the context of a Christian society. The basic presuppositions of Christianity are not examined, as they are assumed accepted by any audience, including the "ungodly."

Verification for this starting point is also easily had when attending evangelistic meetings. Evangelists are fond of appealing to the Bible as their authority. On a rather frequent basis, they use the well tried phrase, sometimes shouted out in stentorian tones: "The Bible says...!" This appeal is the last word. Everything advocated and believed must pass muster with the Bible. The Bible is held out at every turn as the last court of appeal. It is the great arbitrator of all disputes from the beginning of the evangelistic endeavor to the end. Nobody asks about the credibility of Scripture. Nobody asks about the existence of God. What if the Bible is not seen as credible? What if the audience does not believe in the existence of God? All this evidences my conclusion that the current prevailing paradigm of public evangelism takes as its starting point the acceptance of a Christian world-view.

In addition to an analysis of the starting point of the evangelistic process itself, there is the matter of the content and sequence of the presentations made under the

---

prevailing paradigm that must be critiqued. A survey of the sermons of the evangelists already mentioned reveals all the subjects to be Bible based. Evangelists using the current method deal with biblical topics exclusively. Nowhere did I find any presentations dealing with what might be called "pre-biblical" issues, with philosophical questions, with presuppositional questions. The whole of the evangelistic message is based on acceptance of the Bible. It is constructed so as to persuade the audience of particular Christian doctrines. The process does not involve exploration of the presuppositions of the Christian faith. It is assumed the audience has assented to those presuppositions already.

So it has been for well over two centuries, perhaps beyond, that evangelists have been able to take as their evangelistic starting point the idea that everyone accepts the veracity of a Christian world-view. Evangelists have been able to presume that the general population, while perhaps not practicing in matters of faith, at least tacitly accepted the Christian basics, the principle presuppositions that undergird the faith. They have been able to begin the evangelistic process presuming that people believe in God, that He has made Himself known to humans, that the Bible is the revelation of God, and that the universe is of God's creation. James W. Sire is correct when he says:

In the Western world, up to the end of the seventeenth century, the theistic world-view was clearly dominant. Intellectual squabbles . . . were mostly family squabbles . . . but all these parties subscribed to the same set of basic presuppositions. The triune personal God of the Bible existed; He had revealed Himself to us and could be known; the universe was His creation; human beings were His special creation.¹

And in places where Christianity has been a minority faith, there has been, at the very

least, the influence of the West on the culture, suggesting the superiority of a Christian belief if through no other means than technological superiority. Evangelists have been able to begin the evangelistic process at basically the same point, with the presumption that the fundamental presuppositions of Christianity are accepted as credible by the audience at hand. This has been a great advantage. Because of it, the prevailing method has enjoyed considerable success. This success is at least partly due to the situation Sire describes:

Christianity had so penetrated the Western world that, whether people believed in Christ or acted as Christians should, they all lived in a context of ideas influenced and informed by the Christian faith. Even those who rejected the faith often lived in the fear of hellfire or the pangs of purgatory. Bad people may have rejected Christian goodness, but they knew themselves to be bad by basically Christian standards. . . . The theistic presuppositions which lay behind their values came with their mother's milk.¹

One of the consequences of this situation is that the task of evangelism has often been little more than the persuading of undecided and inactive people to make faith active. In many cases it has consisted merely of getting people to shift theological positions and church loyalties. The evangelist could shout out: “The Bible says . . .!” and people would be persuaded and held by the arguments. For the last several hundred years, evangelism has not involved Christian apologetics in the same sense it did in the early days of Christianity.

All these observations raise now a critical point. What if something in the life and experience of the audience changes so they are no longer accepting of the basic Christian world-view? What happens to the effectiveness of the current evangelistic method if the

¹Ibid., 22.
general public no longer accepts its starting point as credible, nor the contents of its lectures relevant? Clearly, if the beliefs and opinions of society shift away from a Christian world-view, then the current method is damaged and rendered less effective. In order for evangelistic method to be effective, it must reach people where they are and bring them to where they need to be, rather than trying to reach them where they used to be, or where the church thinks they should be.

It is the contention of this project that the two items mentioned above—the starting point of the evangelistic conversation, and the substance of topics presented—no longer represent accepted common ground between the Christian evangelist and the thinking general public. Change has come. Subsequent to his comments about the way Christianity infused the Western world, Sire goes on to make another statement very much on the mark: "This, of course, is no longer true." Massive change has come, much more than the average evangelist imagines, enough to cause the current method to stumble with larger and larger portions of modem society. Because this assertion about change is so significant, some space must be given to exploring and detailing it.

Any alert observer can readily see that the Western world is now no longer what it used to be. As little as forty years ago, the Western world was quite monolithic in its world-view. It is no longer that way. It is now flooded with many and various and competing world-views. John Stewart's observation is apropos:

In the past, answers to questions about life's purpose and meaning were readily available from a limited number of established world-views. But just as the Ptolemaic

\[1\] Ibid.
solar system gave way to the Copernican, so also simple, traditional answers to life's questions have given way to modern, complex, and sophisticated responses.\textsuperscript{1}

Stewart continues that "the world has become a fragmented place with people pulling in different directions."\textsuperscript{2} He concludes that "these contemporary solutions are of great concern to God-fearing people because the need for God has been virtually eliminated."\textsuperscript{3}

This change has been so dramatic that Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, in their book titled \textit{Resident Aliens}, state that "Sometime between 1960 and 1980, an old . . . world ended. and a fresh new world began."\textsuperscript{4} They mean by this that Christianity is no longer to be presumed dominant.

Yet, with all the evidence of change, to date there is little evidence that any evangelists have moved to adjust their methods to accommodate the change in the audience. Until they do, the current paradigm will continue to lose effectiveness. Evangelists must come to realize that society has changed enough that the common starting point, viable for so long, is now no longer so. The cultural consensus that allowed the prevailing evangelistic method such success for so long is gone. The assumptions and presuppositions that were commonly shared several generations ago are no longer shared.

In an editorial reflecting on the current state of affairs facing Christian mission,

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{1}] John Stewart. \textit{God in the Chaos} (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 10.
  \item[\textsuperscript{2}] Ibid., 11.
  \item[\textsuperscript{3}] Ibid., 10.
\end{itemize}
about how Christians are to relate to the world. Richard A. Kaufman observed:

The person asking the question was right about the shift that has come about in the influence of Christianity on our culture. Truth telling, promise keeping, sexual purity, and marital fidelity were all assumed in the environment in which I was reared. Only "worldly" folk worked on Sundays. But there are few such enclaves anymore like the one in which I was reared. And we cannot look to the culture at large to support our values.¹

If evangelists want to speak to educated modern man, they will have to come to grips with what David Wells refers to as the "extraordinary changes that modernity has wrought in our world."² Wells, speaking of the intersection between the world and the church, and of the intermediaries—theologians, pastors (I would add evangelists)—who bridge between them, argues that the "intersection is now sundered and that these worlds are not only disengaging from one another but even breaking down within themselves."³ If the modern Christian evangelist wants to speak to the educated, sophisticated secular minded people who more and more inhabit our society, another starting point must be found, and some adjustment made to subject matter. If all the talk about massive change is true, one is constrained to wonder how the modern evangelist will speak to modern man at all. It seems that even under the best of scenarios it will not be very well. But I contend there is a chance for public evangelistic conversation if a more deliberate and contemporary paradigm for evangelism is forged. It is to this the project now turns.


³Ibid.
CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM

Introduction

The suggestion of a new paradigm for evangelism could, I suppose, begin at any one of a number of points. I have chosen to begin this discussion at the same place the analysis of the old paradigm began in the previous chapter—with the matter of the starting point. The starting point is important here because the whole process flows from it. The credibility of the evangelistic process is very much affected by the credibility of the starting point chosen.

It has already been noted that the process of evangelization must begin at a point that is held in common between the evangelist and the unbeliever. If an evangelistic method is to be effective, the starting point of the evangelist must be one that enjoys the acceptance of the audience. With no agreed upon point present, the process risks being seen as lacking in credibility with the audience. No conversation can be effective without this point of contact. People today are unlikely to be persuaded and guided by what they see as faulty process.

In order to establish a new starting point for the evangelistic process, one that would allow for the forging out of an effective new paradigm for public evangelism, it is necessary to catalog quite specifically some of the more significant changes that have
overtaken society. If it is these changes that have made the evangelistic method less effective, it is necessary to understand them so as to work around them. I am struck by the veracity of the observation made of John the Baptist by Ellen White in her book *The Desire of Ages*: “From his quiet retreat he watched the unfolding of events. With vision illuminated by the divine Spirit he studied the characters of men, *that he might understand how to reach their hearts with the message of heaven.*” (Emphasis mine).¹ This principle must be put to use now. Not only must the basic process now in use be adjusted, but it can be, so as to make Christianity more appealing once more to some of the influential segments of society that now spurn it. So, to the changes.

**Changes in Society**

Without question, the major changes that have occurred in Western society began back in the 1700s. While the forces that have brought change began in the 1700s, and have been evolving to the present time, it is not until the last thirty to thirty-five years that change has become dramatic. During the last three decades in particular, the changes have been very rapid and far-reaching.

Perhaps the best way to approach this subject is by reference to the divisions often used by others today under the terms “modernism” and “postmodernism.” Modernism and postmodernism are terms used quite frequently now for describing philosophical constructs that are widely espoused and regarded as being the ruling philosophies of life in the Western world.

Modernism, as a philosophy, is older than postmodernism. It has been described as “the cultural outlook that puts its faith in optimism, progress, the pursuit of objective knowledge, and science.”¹ It arose around the time of the Industrial Revolution when people began to realize that the human capacity to reason and invent was capable of bringing considerable benefit to humanity. This realization produced an optimism that was almost boundless, increasing as science and education advanced. People came to believe that education would remove prejudice, that science would provide the solution to all the problems, and there would come a near utopian situation on this earth. They believed that nature had finally been conquered. One need only bring to mind the details of the building and sinking of the Titanic to get a sense of the pervasive optimism that exuded from the various segments of society. It is incredible to think that people actually believed the ship unsinkable! All this optimism led to an unrealistic opinion of science, and it elevated human reason to almost absolute status. Hence the shock at the sinking of the vessel reflected in the huge interest in the recent movie Titanic, an indication that society has yet to recover completely from the shock of that event.

What is clear now to people is that modernism was too optimistic. It was not able to deliver on its promises, and the expectations it created were disappointed. Rising up out of the pile of disillusionment produced by the demise of modernism has come a new and very strange philosophy called “Postmodernism.” Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. It is the antithesis of modernism. Its chief attribute is skepticism and

negation. In a brief but cogent article, David L. Goetz defines postmodernism as "the mother of all negation."\footnote{Ibid., 53.} It has at its center skepticism, cynicism, doubt, and negativism. It does not put much stock in the idea of progress for mankind, and it sees science and all knowledge as biased and flawed. It does not view the future with a sense of hope. Postmodernism has resulted in a rather pervasive pessimism, "detected [for example] in a crippling cynicism of politicians and the political process, revealed in the voter apathy in the recent presidential election."\footnote{Ibid., 55.} Of course, such pessimism extends way beyond the political process to include all lines of life, not the least of which are education and law. The level of cynicism encountered is sometimes quite astonishing. People view themselves as consumers, and they are tired of hype. They want substance. Until they are sure they have found some genuine article, they are skeptical. For a belief system founded on faith, this spells trouble.

It is a truism that evangelism is always done in the climate immediate to its audience. It follows that anyone wanting to evangelize modern man will have to do so in a climate that is manifestly hostile, not in a physical sense, for moderns tend to be quite tolerant and accepting of differences, but hostile in an intellectual setting. The dominance of postmodern philosophy dictates that the initial reaction to evangelistic efforts in the West today will be suspicion and cynicism.

Though it might be viewed by some as being tangential to this project, I think it is important to notice right here that it is within the halls of academia that this cynicism
flourishes most. And it is from the institutions of higher learning that this cynicism floods out to pervade society. We live in an interdependent society, in which economics, politics, business, and work all have a part in shaping values and perceptions. College and university are an integral part of modern life. They are, in fact, seen as the gateways to success. For some reason, postmodernism has found its stronghold in academia. With so many people bent on gaining college education for themselves, then taking up the more respectable positions and roles in society, the effect of cynicism and disbelief inhabiting the halls of academia is magnified. It looms ever larger on the horizon of evangelistic endeavor.

It is not a secret that in many academic circles Christianity is regarded as something intellectually flawed, a quaint anachronism left over from a more primitive time, even something stupid. In academic circles, Christianity is widely believed to be lacking in intellectual credibility, to be contrary to and stultifying toward science, and satisfying only for the uneducated to consider. At best, religion in the academic community is seen as a strictly private matter that has no place in public life or discussion. The cumulative effect of all this is to see Christian belief marginalized, pushed to the perimeter of life.

This marginalization of religion has come as a result of several factors, some of them involving religion itself. Jacob Neusner contended that the place of religion in society has been diminished and constricted by a conspiracy between secularism and Protestantism. He says:

Especially in the two hundred years since the Enlightenment, Protestant theology and militant secularism have jointly formed a phalanx to drive religion from its paramount
position in culture and politics back into the corners of private life.¹

Speaking specifically of the situation in which religion is excluded from the schools,

Neusner says:

This exclusion teaches young people the lesson that religion does not exist in the world, but only in private corners of the world. . . . What students learn about religion is that it is self-evidently a matter of theological conviction, which is personal at best. Religion at most, therefore, measures a dimension of conscience and character; more likely, it forms an entity altogether unimportant—or else a danger to rational order in society.²

George Marsden, Professor of the History of Christianity at Notre Dame University, and the greatest chronicler of modern academic drift, in his several books, has traced convincingly the way many modern universities that had their beginnings in religious communities, and which, therefore, reflected religious commitment, have drifted away to the point where many of them see their religious heritages as burdens from the past they must find a way to be rid of.³ It is not that religion is not studied in modern universities. There is plenty of opportunity to study religion. But it is done in a "dispassionate and quasi-scientific manner. . . . One simply wants to learn about some of the things that once made the world go round and the reasons why people once held such curious beliefs about human destiny."⁴ In the process of being educated, students today are taught that Christian belief

¹Neusner. 41.

²Ibid.

³As an illustration I would offer the comments made by the president of Dartmouth College, referred to previously in the introduction to this project, p. 11.

and intellectual credibility are incompatible. They cannot exist in the same person.

Education must be done in a “value-free” environment. That is understood to be exclusively the domain of the secular. Marsden in the introduction to the book titled The Secularization of the Academy, speaks rather pointedly to this issue. He says of the opinion held by a majority of academics and by the population in general that:

... it just seems obvious that university education must be secular, that it ought to be free from religiously informed influences. Academics themselves are often particularly zealous on this point, since they see it as a matter of academic freedom. When it comes to discussion of religious perspectives, they will still typically allude to an ideal of detached impartiality, despite many intellectual trends that question that ideal. University education and intellectual inquiry associated with it, they typically believe, by its very nature excludes religiously informed points of view. To suggest anything else is academic heresy.1

Marsden goes on to make a telling comment:

Christianity, which played a leading role in Western education until a century ago, [has] now become not only entirely peripheral to higher education but has also often come to be considered absolutely alien to whatever is important in the enterprise.2

James W. Sire, commenting on the results of surveys conducted on many university campuses that indicate students seldom if ever mention the Bible as a reason for holding on to religious belief, says:

I can only speculate as to the reason for this. Perhaps it’s because the academic world is so secular, so insistent that religious reasons have no place in the university. . . . When Christians cite the Bible as an authority even in religion classes, they are often ridiculed (usually mildly) by the professor and other students.3


2Ibid., 11.

Here is represented the level of irrelevance, even hostility, accorded Christianity in academic circles. It is quite astonishing, as Marsden says, to realize that we, in this century, have seen the "transformation from an era when organized Christianity and explicitly Christian ideals had a major role in the leading institutions of higher education to an era when they have almost none."¹

These comments by Neusner, Marsden, and Sire reflect the hostility of the environment into which those who would evangelize educated modern man will have to immerse themselves. The intellectual hostility toward Christianity has spilled out over society. While postmodernism originated in academia, while it still thrives there, it has not stayed there. "In the last two decades, this outlook, or intellectual mood, has become as diffuse in popular culture as smog in Los Angeles."² The net effect of all this change and cynicism is that there is no longer a cultural consensus in the Western world. As David Wells so aptly put it, the center of life has been fractured:

> Whatever else one may say about modernization, one of its principal effects has been to break apart the unity of human understanding and disperse the multitude of interests and undertakings away from the center, in relation to which they have gathered their meaning, pushing them to the edges, where they have no easy relation to one another at all. It has done this by breaking down the central core so that there is nothing to which thought and life returns. It has eroded those ideas and convictions, that truth which precisely because it arose in God and was mediated by him, stood as an unchanging sentinel amid changing circumstances. And it is this flight to the edges, this dispersion from the center, that has . . . disordered the warp and woof of contemporary life.³

Here is an observation that not only is the arena for evangelism hostile, but the

¹Marsden and Longfield, 5.
²Goetz, 54.
³Wells, 7.
whole core of society is now fractured. There is no common consensus. People are no longer agreed in matters of truth and what constitutes the common good. A fractured center to life leaves an evangelist with little to which he or she may appeal, especially when using the prevailing methodology.

The implications of this are clear. Any evangelist who wants to enjoy credibility with educated moderns cannot dare to begin where the prevailing method now begins. Such a starting point immediately engenders scorn. Modern life is now too fractured to allow such a consensus to be presumed. An evangelistic conversation will not even get started.

The intellectual hostility of the modern climate, and the fractured nature of life are very significant issues. But they are not the only ones. There are other issues that must also be understood if a new evangelistic method is to be fashioned. There are other changes produced in society that must come under scrutiny by any would-be evangelists. Changes so profound they have effectively made the modern world a very different place from the world into which the current evangelism methodology was born.

One of the major effects of postmodernism has been the privatization of religion. There has grown up the idea that religion is a totally private matter. It is something created in the mind of the believer and is so strictly personal that it has no place in public discussion. Alfred Kazin has written: “Among the intellectual leaders of American society a deeply personal belief in God is tolerated as harmlessly personal, like a taste in food or a loyalty to the Red Sox.”¹ Because religion is perceived to be a private matter, it is also widely


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
believed inappropriate for any person to engage in religious persuasion. Gene Veith, Jr.,

observes:

Today, any attempt at religious or moral persuasion . . . often meets with the furious
response: “You don’t have the right to impose your beliefs on anyone else!”
Postmodernists, whether they be academics or the neighbors down the street, really
believe that the truth and moral structures of a culture are constructions of the people in
power. Therefore, every attempt at persuasion really is an act of power, an effort to
“impose” belief.¹

The evangelist engaging in religious persuasion that targets educated and thinking people
will encounter this adverse reaction. There is likely to be an attitude of resistance toward
the very legitimacy of evangelistic process itself.

Furthermore, postmodernism and its cohorts have produced a total transformation of
the concept of “truth.” In past times, people held very much to the concept of “absolutes.”
They believed that “out there” somewhere was a body of fact and information that
constituted something called “truth.” They believed this “truth” could be found, and that life
derived its meaning from the pursuit of “truth.” This truth was perceived to have universal
application, and it could be found in whatever sphere of endeavor one was concerned with.
whether it be science, or law, or theology. Though it be might hard to find, it was out there

to be found. There was one truth.² All else was less than true, therefore classified as error.

This was true even where modernist philosophy prevailed. That is no longer the case.
Postmodernism has changed the concept of truth. Truth is now relative, constructed by
each person based on the information they have at hand, information governed by situation,


²This concept of the existence of truth is what underlies the whole judicial system.
Judges and juries bend themselves to find the “truth” of what occurred.
feeling, and instinct. Truth is perceived to be very personal and situational. One is to find one's "own truth" by following one's feelings and instincts.

This particular change is now the property of the man on the street. There is plenty of evidence to show that a majority of Americans no longer hold to an absolute concept of truth. In a recent survey of the next generation, published in 1995, George Barna reported that among them the concept of truth has undergone very significant adjustment. Discovered was the fact that "about three-quarters of all adults reject the notion that there are absolute moral truths. Most Americans believe that all truth is relative to the situation and the individuals involved."

Barna found that most teenagers' beliefs fall in line with the adults here, but they go further: "Not only do more than three out of four teenagers say there is no absolute moral truth. four out of five also claim that nobody can know for certain whether or not they actually know what truth is."

Gene Veith, Jr., in his book Postmodern Times, notes that "universities no longer operate under the modernist assumption that one objective, rational truth exists." In the place of absolute truth, relativism is espoused. There are many truths, and many ways to find those truths. Here is reflected a radical change from times past where the concept of


2Ibid., 31.


4Charles Colson tells an experience of conversing with a friend on the subject of Christ and a unique salvation, to be met with a response suggesting Jesus was but one way that worked. Consulting crystals and channeling work, too. The Bible was not regarded as being of any spiritual authority. Charles Colson, "Reaching the Pagan Mind,"
absolutes was the norm. The past forty years have brought us to the point where the prevailing intellectual philosophy tells us “there is no fixed truth, no final good, no ultimate meaning and purpose.”¹ Humanists today “prefer arguments which point out the uncertainty of knowledge and emphasize the fundamental impossibility of logic to confirm one world-view over any others.”² Contemporary man will not even listen to the beginnings of absolute statements.³ They are regarded as proceeding from bigotry or ignorance, neither of which is to be admired.

Another consequence of postmodernism and its love for relativism is that moderns have become very syncretistic in the discovery and expression of beliefs. Without question, every human has a “spiritual” dimension, a cognitive zone in which a system of belief is constructed and held, to be used to guide and direct life. Whereas the evangelist contends there is only one legitimate, absolute, authoritative source for properly informing this belief system, contemporary man believes there are many sources available, none of them absolute. One might be tempted to believe that as the concept of a central source of truth fades, people will go on to believe less and less. “But the reverse has happened. A

Christianity Today, November 9, 1992, 112.


³Ibid. Carlson makes a revealing comment: “My respect for their [various religious groups] right to worship is absolute, but please do not ask me to respect the substance of their beliefs because I cannot. Respecting irrationality goes against my very nature.”
culture for whom God is no longer present believes everything.⁴ As a result, a contemporary belief system may have elements drawn from Christianity, from animistic religions, Eastern religions, from science, and any other source deemed reliable.² Contemporary man does not live with the idea of the Bible being a singular document possessing authority, let alone any final authority. At best, it may be one place to look for advisement.

**Analysis of the Current Situation**

These changes represent a shift of gargantuan proportions, one that has profound implications for the Christian evangelist working in postmodern times. The prevailing methodology is based on the assumption that people everywhere accept the concept of absolutes, that there is such a thing as “objective, rational truth,” that there is a universal authority, that revelation has brought us truth from God. Evangelism, as traditionally practiced, has been predicated on the assumption that the great quest of the spiritual life is to find and hold onto that ultimate thing called “truth.” The idea of the existence of truth is no longer common ground for the evangelist and the modern to stand on. Since such a concept of truth is now lost, any evangelistic method based on it is significantly weakened.

It is also true that the absence of any common source of authority produces a host of complications for the evangelist. With no common source of authority, persuasive

---

¹Wells, 9.

²Some years ago, while engaged in public evangelism, I met a young man whose belief system was a composite of Christianity, astrology, Buddhism, “pyramidology,” and a few other unidentifiable elements. Persuading him of the veracity of Christianity proved ineffective.
conversation is difficult. The observation of Charles Colson in this regard is quite to the point:

What good does it do for us to say . . . "The Bible says . . .," if two-thirds of our listeners don't believe the Bible is true? What good does it do for us to say Jesus is the truth if two-thirds of the American people believe there is no such thing as truth?¹

Here is a great problem facing evangelists who would work by the current method, a problem that did not plague peers of yesterday. All the evidence I have surveyed from the current evangelistic paradigm indicates that this problem remains unaddressed, if not unacknowledged and unrecognized entirely.

There is a further dimension to the problem facing the evangelist. The great belief in relativism and the inclination toward syncretism has brought people to the point where they are not concerned by doctrinal differences anymore. People have become accustomed to living with discrepancies. They expect them to exist. In fact, the belief has grown up that differences are things to be prized and admired. They are seen merely to represent different ways to truth, or they are seen to evidence the fact that truth is not absolute. People simply do not see doctrinal differences as items worthy of discussion, let alone resolution. So the sometimes complicated, even convoluted doctrinal arguments of the evangelist appear irrelevant at best, absurd at worst. An evangelist who majors in fine doctrinal points is not likely to be accorded credibility by educated moderns.

Postmodernism has also radically altered the popular concept of "God." In times past, God was believed to be a supreme celestial personage possessed of omnipotence.

omniscience, even omnipresence. To God was ascribed absolute sovereignty. When an evangelist stood to the desk to speak on behalf of God, he or she commanded the attention of the multitudes. That is no longer the case. Postmodernism has brought society to the point where there is the belief that “the idea of a living God is a primitive illusion.”¹ This is descriptive of a belief that the very idea of God is something of human construct, that “God” was invented by man as a necessary convenience back in primitive times. Consider the statement of Shawn Carlson:

The many human qualities we ascribe to our gods strongly suggest that they are the creations of our collective psyche—projections, if you will, of ourselves onto our world. . . . To maintain that a creature exists which is capable of bringing all creation into being and at the same time is very much like us (it made us in its image) seems to me to be the ultimate in our very human vanity.²

Carlson goes on to contend that because the physical universe is all that exists, and God cannot be scientifically identified by any standard evidence, He does not, in fact, exist. With the current knowledge and power of science in hand, “God” may be dispensed with as a primitive illusion, the unnecessary product of a more primitive past. This is a big shift with considerable implications for those who would engage in Christian evangelism.

A moment of summary here is very sobering. At this point in time, while the evangelistic paradigm and methodology have remained virtually unchanged, society has changed almost indescribably. When the current prevailing methodology was crafted, belief in a sovereign, divine being called “God” was well-nigh universal in the West, even among thinking, sophisticated people. Some of the greatest minds the West has produced

¹Henry, x.
²Carlson, 43.
were theists. There was a universal belief in a thing called “truth.” Western society had a cohesive core. The Scriptures enjoyed common veracity in the eyes of the public. All that is no longer the case. Modernism and postmodernism have brought about the loss of the concept of truth: the Scriptures have come to be regarded not as words from God, but as culturally driven human documents; pluralism is idealized; the idea of absolutes existing is laughed at; skepticism is held to be one of the chief virtues. We are at a time when even society itself, to say nothing of the church, is wrestling with the difficulties of government in a situation where a common consensus is all but nonexistent. At the most fundamental level, life is different now than when the prevailing evangelistic paradigm was birthed.

Perhaps nowhere is the effect of change or the current situation better summed up than in the words of Rodney Clapp, who points out that for the first time in well over a millennium the Western church finds itself in an environment hostile and antagonistic, in which the church is regarded as irrelevant, anachronistic. I will quote Clapp at some length, here:

For the better part of recorded history, the church has been the sponsor of western civilization. . . . Western civilization has been so powerful economically, militarily, technologically and culturally that the church, in sponsoring it, has seemed close to the center not merely of a few men’s and women’s lives but of history itself.

Yet exactly at this point the irony intrudes. Just when the Western inventions of capitalism, democracy and modernity reign over or are aspired to throughout the world; just when some declare that the West has won and history has reached its goal; just when America, the leading and pioneering capitalist, democratic and modern nation, becomes the world’s sole superpower—just now the church is informed that its sponsorship is no longer needed or wanted. Western civilization (or more accurately, Western civilizations) is no longer content with a single religious sponsor. Quite a few
influential people, in fact, think they can do without any sort of religious sponsorship at all.\footnote{Rodney Clapp, \textit{A Peculiar People} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 17, 18.}

So here is the problem. Since the predominant evangelistic method presumes a certain consensus, the absence of that consensus raises serious questions about its current viability, and even more serious concerns about its effectiveness into the future. It is because of these changes that the prevailing evangelistic methodology is in grave danger of becoming ever more ineffective, even damaging, among thinking moderns. There is the prospect that, in the circles of thinking people, the very ones who determine the tenor of society, Christianity will have lost its hold and its entire apologetic.

If we are to believe Dwight Ozard, we are virtually at that point right now:

\footnote{Dwight Ozard, “The Last Great Missions Frontier,” \textit{Prism Magazine}, July/August 1996, 5.}

\ldots the greatest mission field we face is not in some faraway land. The strange and foreign culture \ldots is not across the ocean. It’s barely across the street. The culture most lost to the gospel is our own--our children and neighbors. It’s a culture that can’t say two sentences without referencing a TV show or a pop song, and that can’t remember what it was like to have to \textit{get up} to change channels. It is a culture more likely to have a body part pierced than it is to know why Sara laughed.\footnote{William S. Bennett, quoted in “Reflections, Classic and Contemporary Excerpts,” \textit{Christianity Today}, October 27, 1997, 84.}

William Bennett, during an interview on the McNeil-Lehrer News Hour, gave his assessment of the current situation by saying, “We have become the kind of societies that civilized countries used to send missionaries to.”\footnote{William S. Bennett, quoted in “Reflections, Classic and Contemporary Excerpts,” \textit{Christianity Today}, October 27, 1997, 84.} Such conditions jeopardize the Great
Commission given by Jesus to His disciples. From the Christian perspective, it puts a whole society in jeopardy of being lost.

While the prospects of evangelizing modern man via the prevailing paradigm are grim (and getting grimmer), there are some indications that if a new methodology could be found—one that begins with some point of contact still held in common by the Christian and contemporary man—then there is again the chance of meaningful dialogue again. It is toward this end that serious effort must be made. If the status quo is allowed to prevail, the light of Christianity in the West will wane, barring some kind of unusual occurrence such as the appearance of a divinely driven revival.

**Suggesting a New Paradigm**

Any evangelist who wants to maintain an effective method by which to address modern people will have to recognize that change has come, not so much to the tried and true method, but to society, to the evangelistic audience. This change has brought both problem and opportunity. The problems are significant. But so are the opportunities. If a way can be found to put Christianity before the educated masses in a credible manner, what effect it might have! Moderns are in need of hearing the gospel in a manner that will not be rejected out of hand. They need to see its reasonableness and viability.

In looking for a starting point for a new paradigm for evangelism, one must look not only to the problems brought by change, but also to the opportunities. In our time there are several reasons for hope, maybe even for cautious optimism. It is from the arena of these optimistic evidences that I believe a new starting point can be created.
Before making my own suggestion, however, I would like to observe several attempts toward a new evangelistic strategy that have been tried. One effective effort has been built around small group dynamics, creating small forums where people can connect individually. This has proven to be an effective strategy. Other efforts have been built around the strategy of significantly altering the worship hour of the church so it does not seem so foreign to those who do not go to church. Still others have gone off to emphasize the grace of God to the exclusion of most other Christian doctrines, making God and Christianity into some kind of cloak for human foibles. Their hope has been to “de-fang” God, so people are more inclined to come to Him. All these strategies have met with various degrees of success. However, none of them have replaced the prevailing paradigm. In this project, I would like to suggest still another strategy, one that has not been used very much in recent times. one that follows a more intellectual than relational track.

Justification for an Intellectual Approach

In Christian circles, just as soon as the issue of an intellectual approach gets suggested, there arises an old issue about the value of intellectual approaches to evangelism. There is the argument that the gospel should be preached, and when it is preached, it will speak for itself. I do not want to despoil that position, for, as anyone who has done evangelism knows, the gospel does have power resident in it, and the Holy Spirit often blesses efforts that intellectually driven people cringe over. But that eventuality does not mitigate against another method. Tailoring a presentation to fit an audience, as long as it does not surrender principle, is not a bad thing, but a prudent and
wise thing. It is my contention that well-educated, thinking people would appreciate more intellectual content to evangelistic presentations. I believe they would respond to it, too.

Whenever there is discussion of using an intellectual approach, the matter of the Apostle Paul’s experience on Mar’s Hill in Athens always seems to surface. Paul’s experience on Mar’s Hill is well known, recorded in Acts 17. There is an anti-intellectual school of thought that contends Acts 17 records a significant failure in the experience of the Apostle Paul, that he tried an intellectual approach to the intelligentsia of Athens, and failed. This idea is buttressed by the fact that Paul went from Athens to Corinth in fear and trembling. He recorded later that he came to Corinth in fear and trembling, "determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). To those who object to approaches with high intellectual content, this statement is taken as something of a statement of repentance by the apostle, that he rebuked himself for his attempts in Athens, that he saw them as his own design, not God’s, so reverted to simple preaching when he went to Corinth. This line of thought has caused many Christians to avoid intellectual approaches to evangelism. In the face of all this, a project suggesting an intellectual approach needs some justification.

The first thing I would like to offer in favor of using an intellectual approach is not an argument as much as it is a qualification. I am quite certain that an intellectual approach will probably never become the primary method of evangelism. The best method undoubtedly involves forming trust relationships with other people.¹ These trust relationships are crucial for establishing credibility and trust, which are essential for effective communication. However, an intellectual approach can complement these relationships by providing a deeper understanding of the message. It can help in addressing questions and concerns that arise, thereby strengthening the relationship.

¹I was very much taken by a story related in Moody by Evangelist Luis Palau where he told of two neighbors, men, Dan and Al, one--Al--being a policeman. They became acquainted at a school function, and Al invited Dan to ride with him some work...
relationships then become the avenues over which the gospel may travel without prejudice. This is by far, the best evangelistic strategy. Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli are entirely correct when, in speaking of epistemological approaches, they say, “All the arguments in this book, and in all the books on apologetics ever written, are worth less in the eyes of God than a single act of love to him or to your neighbor.”¹ So, there is no hope on my part that this new paradigm will ever become primary. In addition, because of the residues of pervasive Christianity yet in society, I expect the current paradigm will remain effective in some quarters for a good while yet. I expect that any intellectual approach to evangelism will be effective only if it is finely focused toward educated, thoughtful people, and I am doubtful it will ever become the primary method of evangelism.

But this is not to suggest an intellectual approach is of no value. Note again the opinions of Kreeft and Tacelli:

Most people scorn or ignore apologetics because it seems very intellectual, abstract and rational. They contend that life and love and morality and sanctity are much more important than reason.

Those who reason this way are right; they just don’t notice that they are

reasoning. We can’t avoid doing it, we can only avoid doing it well.¹

Here is the main justifying point for attempting an intellectual approach. Intellect and reason are an unavoidable part of life, especially for those who are well-educated and thoughtful. Everybody uses reason and argument to justify their actions and positions. Even those who argue against an intellectual approach are actually using intellect and reason (and argument) to substantiate their position. I am entirely persuaded by W. Jay Wood’s contention that “the issues epistemology wrestles with are far from being mere ivory-tower academic concerns. They are deeply important issues that confront us in the routine contexts of our lives.”² Wood observes, further, that:

Behind many objections to religious belief is an epistemological viewpoint detailing, among other things, what requirements a person must satisfy in order to have knowledge about anything, what steps must be taken to avoid accusations of intellectual wrongdoing, and what conditions must be satisfied before I could be said to have a genuine experience with God.³

It is simply not possible to hold religious belief, to live even, without using reason and argument. The question is not “Shall we use reason or not?” but “Will we do it well, or poorly?” In this day and age, because of the high level of education and skepticism in the general populace, it must be done well. And the arena of reason and argument is most certainly the domain of an intellectual approach.

It is worth pursuing some other arguments Wood offers in favor of intellectual

¹Ibid., 20, 21.


³Ibid., 12.
content. He points out that, within Christianity, there is an old philosophical tradition that views "epistemological excellence as an indispensable ingredient for a well-lived life." He says, "We achieve excellence in the intellectual life, according to this tradition, when we form within ourselves qualities like wisdom, prudence, understanding, intellectual humility, love of truth and similar traits—in short, as we embody intellectual virtues."  

Wood also points out that exercising care over the intellect is not a purely academic pursuit, but also a spiritual one. He points out that "the Bible is unequivocally clear that Christians are to superintend the life of the mind." It is worth quoting Wood at some length here:

Scores of injunctions to pursue intellectual virtues dot the pages of Scripture. We are urged to be attentive, wise, discerning, prudent, circumspect, understanding, teachable, lovers of truth, intellectually humble and intellectually tenacious, along with many other positive intellectual traits. We are also directed to be able to defend our faith, to instruct others in the faith, to confute those who oppose true doctrine, and so on. On the other hand, warnings abound against laziness of thought, folly, immaturity in our thinking, being easily duped or gullible ("blown about by every wind of doctrine...." Eph 4:14), engaging in idle speculation, intellectual arrogance or vicious curiosity ("for the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth." 2 Tim 4:3-4).

Wood’s concluding thought on this matter is not to be missed:

According to the Christian tradition, to forge virtuous habits of moral and intellectual character is part of what is required for us to grow to the full stature of all that God intends for humans to be. Becoming virtuous is part of what makes us fit residents for

---

1Ibid., 16.
2Ibid.
3Ibid., 18.
4Ibid., 19.
the kingdom of heaven, ready to do God’s work now and in the age to come.\footnote{Ibid.}

The preceding comments offer ample justification for the use of an intellectual approach. It seems, because of the relatively high level of education and sophistication in the West today, a witness that is intellectually cogent is very important. People today deal in ideas. With Scripture adding indorsement, there is no impediment to pursuing this method. As a capstone, it should be added that the Holy Spirit will bless all efforts at evangelism, including intellectual ones. In fact, as all who engage in evangelism are keenly aware, the Holy Spirit is the primary functionary in evangelistic efforts. Whatever the approach, the Holy Spirit’s influence is primary in the converting of any soul. This remains just as true in approaches that are more intellectually driven than the current prevailing methodology is.

It would be well to note, as a final consideration in this matter, that not all biblical commentators accept the idea that Paul failed in Athens, and left shaken by his attempt to use an intellectual approach. For example, C. K. Barrett points out that “rational talk” and “wordy cleverness” were not “preeminent in Paul’s evangelism, but were kept in the background.”\footnote{C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries, ed., Henry Chadwick (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 63.} He refers to the idea of Paul’s moving to Corinth because his attempt to marry the gospel to Greek philosophy failed, as an “imaginative picture [for which] there is no evidence whatever.”\footnote{Ibid.} He goes on to state, “He [Paul] is not contrasting his
evangelistic method in Corinth with that which he employed elsewhere, but with what others employed in Corinth.\textsuperscript{1} Given all this, any serious objections to attempting a new evangelistic approach that begins at a higher intellectual level than is normally used, that wrestles with some of the philosophical issues, fall away.

**Selecting a Starting Point**

In setting out to suggest a starting point for a new paradigm, several possibilities come to mind. One possibility comes from the growing body of information now becoming apparent to contemporary man that the ideas and dictums of postmodernism do not make for a viable society. There is massive disillusionment today, disillusionment that may actually provide the evangelist with an opportunity to make a powerful impact. Consider the observation made by David Goetz:

Postmodernism has rightly shown us that all ideas, beliefs, and convictions about life—even science—do arise in a context. Postmodernism has stuck a needle in the ballooned arrogance of the Enlightenment. Science and technology, we've learned, are not God.\textsuperscript{2}

Given the near absolute hold science has had on Western civilization for the last century, this is not a small thing. If it is true that this arrogance is shattered, and unsettled, then there is the prospect of people lending listening ears to other ideologies that make credible cases for themselves.

A second possibility emerges from the increasing awareness that there is such a thing as objective or absolute truth. It might not be possible for humans to describe

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., 64.

\textsuperscript{2}Goetz, 56.
absolute truth, but human attempts at describing it should not be confused with the existence of objective truth itself. Not everything is relative. While those who prosecute a living in the legal world may not act like it is so, the whole legal system is predicated on the idea of objective truth. When a jury sits down to listen to evidence, it has in mind that there is a body of information about a case that is true and objective, able to be referred to as “the truth” about the situation. If this is not so, then legal proceedings, particularly the pursuit of justice, are in vain. It is all a game of win or lose. Beyond that, there is also the realization that the statement “There is no such thing as truth” is in itself an absolute statement. If there is no such thing as “truth,” any statement against it cannot be absolute. This recognition of the possibility of objective truth, embryonic as it now is, portends an opportunity for the church. Postmodernism and the recognition of its failure could bring about a situation where people come to see that “the church may be the only venue left where truth is proclaimed confidently.”

A third, and powerful idea, emerges from the fact that postmodernism, because of its insistence on relativism, has failed quite dramatically as a mechanism to help people make sense out of life. It fails to explain the great questions of life. It has failed to deliver anything permanent into people’s lives to which they can hold. I do not want to suggest that the issue of finding meaning in life is an urgent matter for everyone, but it is an urgent matter for many, particularly those who are reflective and educated, who form the main target group for this project. In the minds of such people, the issue of finding significance in life is acute because the mechanisms that have historically provided meaning in the

\[1\] Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Western world are now deemed defunct and obsolete. So, all easily ends in despair. "The 'eternal truths of reason,' requiring no faith, doubting everything but what can be measured and proved, end in nihilism (as Nietzsche predicted, and as our age plainly demonstrates)."¹ And this situation is one that reflective humans cannot abide, for one of the greatest fears of thinking humans is to come to the end of life and discover one was never able to make any sense of it. This vacancy in modernism has produced hordes of people who are desperately searching for meaning and significance in life. They are trying everything, and believing almost anything. Sad as that may be from a Christian perspective, in a way it is also good news, for it may also provide an opportunity to infuse something definite into life.²

A fourth possibility is that there is, in relevant literature now, a considerable amount of information that can be drawn together to make a case for Christian belief. Secularists are not without their Achilles heel. Nor are they without their faults and flaws in belief. Paul Marshall has pointed out that "many secular circles in North America are small, parochial worlds wherein many of the great struggles of human life are unknown, trivialized or forgotten."³ In many ways secularists are more dogmatic than Christians.


²A very interesting study, "Defecting Baby Boomers," was reported by The Christian Century, in "Events and People" demonstrating that "baby boomers who have left main-line Protestant churches have done so mostly because of confusion over their religious beliefs." The Christian Century, July 15-22, 1992, 673.

though they mutter and fume at any such suggestion. A significant amount of material of sufficient intellectual stature is in existence to make an appealing case for Christianity to moderns, educated and skeptical though they be.

This opportunity to make an appealing case for Christianity must not be squandered. Futurist Faith Popcorn, who has charted many of the trends up-coming in society from which big business profits, who makes no profession of Christian belief, has said to the church: “You have ten years to prove yourselves. This is a great time for you. Do you feel it?”

After consideration of all of these options. I have settled on the third one, the one connected with finding meaning in life, as the most promising. I think a case can be made that the need or drive to find meaning in life is perhaps, the most basic of all human drives. Viktor Frankl, the famed psychiatrist who endured the rigors of the World War II death camps, wrote out of his experience that this need for meaning is perhaps the most basic of all human needs, barring those that physically sustain life itself. He makes a good case for it. He observed in the death camps that long after the concentration camp experience had stilled all other drives, the drive for meaning burned bright, enabling many to survive unspeakable treatment. Those who found meaning, survived longer. Those who found none, surrendered much more quickly to the forces that brought demise. This need he


found as fundamental in all people, both believers and nonbelievers.

No doubt, this drive to find meaning in life, while it is present in all lives, is particularly keen in the experiences of educated, thoughtful people. Such people are driven to establish some meaning for their existence. Daniel Taylor, in writing about reflective people, has written that “the most important and desirable things in the human experience have no physical existence. One of these is ‘meaning’.” Writing about meaning, he continues:

Whatever it is, it offers one of the most powerful reasons for continuing the human experiment. Its possibility is, simply, a reason to live--its absence, a reason to give up living. Our appetite for meaning is insatiable, our anxiety over its elusiveness never ending.2

Since this appears to be a most basic need in human experience, and since it is particularly keen in reflective people, and since modern society is not providing any real answer to the question of meaning in life, it seems the confluence of these eventualities makes an opportunity for the Christian faith to fill the gap.

The power of this suggestion comes more fully to light when it is put in its historical perspective. Over its history, Christianity has proven to be a powerful force in helping people make sense out of life. It is a powerful ideology that establishes a viable framework for life. It offers cogent answers to the big questions of life. It would certainly assist moderns in filling the vacuum in their lives if it could be presented in a manner intellectually credible to them.


2Ibid.
So, my proposal is to build a new paradigm in which the evangelistic conversation begins with the question of finding meaning in life. In advertising for public meetings, evangelists would play upon this keenly felt need. The advertising could be built around questions like. “Life! What’s it all about?” or. “Do you ever wonder about life’s meaning?” Such questions would prove intriguing enough to many modern people that a goodly number of them would come to hear what was being said. (Of course, having raised the issue, an evangelist would have to deliver on the answer, or face hostility for advertising falsely.) The issue of meaning would be a good starting point because it is a credible issue with moderns. It is also a credible issue with evangelists, and it is nonvolatile. And, best of all, the question of meaning also provides a very nice, non-pejorative, noncritical bridge into issues of spirituality, which can then allow for a discussion of Christianity on an equal footing with other religions. If that position could be attained, it would give an evangelist something he or she does not now have.

**Developing the New Evangelistic Process**

The evangelistic conversation would begin, then, with some discussion about the importance of finding meaning in life. Some of the examples Frankl discusses are very powerful. But the discussion would move quickly to issues of spirituality. The reason for this is that it is our spirituality that enables us to make sense of life. This fact can be rather easily established by taking a look at what spirituality is, how it works, and what it provides in life. The work of Kurt Lewin, who has brought forth a very attractive and descriptive name for what is commonly called the “spiritual” dimension, is an excellent
place to start such a discussion. William Collins, reflecting on Lewin's work and opinions, says:

Religious we may or may not be, but we all have a highly personalized "life space" in which we live and express our own unique spirituality—a space which is filled with all the ideas, assumptions, behaviours, beliefs and attitudes we have constructed.¹

I find this description of spirituality as "life space," coined by Lewin, quite exciting. This little appellation is accurately descriptive. Inside of every person is some "space" in which the person conducts "life." prosecuting the essential things necessary to live on this planet. Collins adds more precision to the discussion when he describes the contents of this domain as being:

Highly personal, intrinsic beliefs about life—beliefs about our identity, sexuality, beliefs about our family of origin, expectations of self and others, our attitude toward personal risk-taking concerning life goals and relationships, and the nature and quality of our personal hopes and dreams.²

This is a description of the most basic "stuff" of life. Collins and Lewin are laying bare the most elemental issues of life. It is these things that reside in the spiritual domain, over which it has charge. Decisions on these matters very much determine, barring some unexpected intrusion from somewhere, how life will be lived, whether it will have meaning or not. All this goes on in an inner dimension which, unseen by human eyes, governs the essential issues of life.

The essential truth to draw from the foregoing discussion is that every person has an inner dimension in which there is a collection of dictums, or "first truths," that form a


²Ibid., 4.
system of belief. While there is not space in this project to spend a lot of time discussing it, the manner in which belief systems are created is quite fascinating. Wood has pointed out that:

Typically, we don’t decide what to believe, but rather find ourselves believing as we do as a result of various life experiences, early training, the testimony of authorities, other forms of social conditioning and so forth, long before we come to think critically about the sources of our beliefs.¹

This is not to suggest that people do not evaluate their beliefs. They do, especially when entering early adulthood, though this process is often indirect, almost subconscious. (It is usually done "either by working on good habits of mind or by engaging in behaviors such as investigating a body of evidence, undergoing experiences of various sorts, or considering the opinions of others.")² Whatever the case, people absorb various dictums and beliefs, presuppositions, that then form a grid by which experience is tested and evaluated. Experiences and potential experiences are classified as good or bad, desirable or undesirable, safe or dangerous, by virtue of judgment made by evaluating them in light of the beliefs held in the spiritual dimension. It is by testing our experiences against our "grid" of truth that we quantify and interpret and understand experience, thereby giving, or robbing, the significance of life. (Modems will not argue against this concept).

The function of this belief system in life, then, is very important. It is the actual mechanism that enables us to make sense of life. It allows the comparison and integration

¹Wood, 27.
²Ibid., 27, 28.

The search for meaning in our lives entails sorting out and classifying experience, and this process is possible only if we distinguish between good and evil, truth and falsehood, profundity and superficiality, logic and illogic, reality and illusion, excellence and mediocrity, knowledge and ignorance, wisdom and foolishness.\(^1\)

This kind of thing can only be done in the spiritual arena. It is by the beliefs we hold, that we make the determinations about good and bad.

When discussing spirituality, it is important to make a link with something commonly known as "world-view." A world-view is essentially a picture of how reality is believed to be construed, an idea, personal or corporate, of how the world and universe are organized. A "world-view" is a structure that emerges from the assembly of beliefs to lend form to the beliefs. It is a construct, a picture that holds the "grid" of beliefs through which we filter all experience and potential experience together. If a world-view is complex and substantial enough to give cogent answers to the big questions of life, then the person holding that particular world-view is able to make sense out of life. If not, then there is confusion.

This process of filtering or evaluating experience so as to make sense out of life has about it a great sense of urgency, because as human beings, we seem to know instinctively that we are very vulnerable as we go through life. Taylor makes a cogent observation in this regard:

From our earliest moment to our last we are vulnerable. Destruction--physical,

mental, emotional, spiritual—threatens us at all times. A fall from a curb, a lost job, a bitter word, a public humiliation—at every point we feel the hazards of life. The great bulk of human activity of every kind aims at lessening that vulnerability. Making money, seeking love or accomplishment, buying insurance, courting power, wearing the right shoes, writing books, having children, reading books, not having children, not reading books—all these and countless other daily activities are ways of protecting ourselves from the myriad threats to our sense of personal safety and well-being.¹

The great need to limit vulnerability gives world-views enormous seriousness. People live and die by, and for, their world-views. They hold to their world-views tenaciously, until, or unless, they find some better construct to serve them.²

Perhaps one more observation about world-views is in order. They all tend to be self-verifying and self-sustaining. They are not necessarily reasonable, nor are they always carefully constructed. Like the beliefs that are an essential ingredient in them, they are often absorbed from significant other persons, and from society. They can even be made of fantasy. And, as Taylor observes, “once in operation, a belief system processes all information, all evidence, in its own terms, appropriating that which verifies its outlook and defusing or ignoring anything else.”³ or, as John G. Stackhouse, Jr., put it “whenever the historical evidence fails to fit the preconceived theory, the evidence has to give way.”⁴ Once a world-view is established, all data are interpreted to fit its context.

¹Taylor, 22, 23.

²It is worth noting that it is precisely at this point that evangelism functions. It persuades people to change world-views. The goal IS to get people to change world-views.

³Taylor, 23.

The question of the relationship of all this information to the evangelistic process rightfully arises. Simply put, this information on spirituality and world-view effectively establishes a nonpejorative foundation or platform from which to make a case for the Christian faith. It makes it possible for Christianity to stand on at least a par with other belief systems. If one is willing to accept the fact that all persons have spiritual dimensions and that they use the contents of those dimensions as the mechanisms by which to make sense of life, then Christianity becomes only one of the many religions that occupies the same niche in human experience. Because of the way spirituality functions, at this point in the evangelistic conversation it is not possible to say Christianity is better or worse than other religions. It is only possible to say it is a religion. As such, it must be accorded the same credibility given to other religions. Admittedly, there will still be some struggle here, as most secular people have never given any significant credence to the Christian faith. Hopefully, seeing it in the same niche as other religions will give them cause to withhold judgment a little while. Unless an audience is very prejudiced, it will have to allow for the inclusion of Christianity as a viable form of spiritual expression.

This discussion of the makeup and function of spirituality, coupled with the current openness toward issues of spirituality, should give evangelists the prospect of a non-hostile hearing. If the question of making sense of life is absolutely tied to spirituality, and that is accepted by the audience, then why should not evangelists speak to this subject? Everybody else seems to be taking their turn.

1Some of the deepest spiritual values held today, such as hope, peace, love, integrity, are all well-established and well-connected to Christianity. Some of them have their roots in the Christian faith.
It might be a good thing here to draw some distinction between "religion" and "spirituality." I would contend that spirituality is a region of the human psyche, a place where the capacity for belief resides. The contents of the spiritual dimension inform a set of practices. Living out these practices is what constitutes religion.

This definition or explanation fuels some interesting understandings. By it, anything that absorbs the affections, that calls for ardent devotion (worship), that guides and gives meaning to life can rightly be called religion. Many ideologies would qualify here. Christianity would definitely qualify, but so would secular things like Communism, atheism, devotion to evolutionary theory, even professional sports! Without any stretching of imagination or credibility, one can speak of the "faithful" gathering in the "holy places." to engage in "worship" and the adoration of the sporting "gods!"

Knowing these facts about spirituality and world-view gives opportunity to talk about religion without prejudice. Discussion of the spiritual dimension, and what it consists of, should bring about the realization that nobody is without a system of belief, not atheists, not secularists, not Communists. The belief being held may not be Christian, but it is belief nevertheless. Given the climate of current hostility, even disdain, exhibited toward Christianity, I contend this point is one of great significance. If all humans are spiritual, and if the way they live out their spirituality constitutes their religion, then Christianity cannot be denigrated without first evaluating the evidence upon which it stands. It begins at the same level as any other thing that might be called religion, and it

---

1I have in my possession an advertisement for an organization named Fastball.com, the lead line of which says, "Baseball is our religion. The stadium's our temple. The beer and peanuts, our sacrament."
occupies the same niche. If moderns are willing to give other religions a chance, they must, in all fairness, allow Christianity to make its case, too.

Perhaps one last item about spirituality should be mentioned. In this domain of the spiritual, people function in dead earnest. There may be an outside facade, but reality remains inside. Collins makes a very significant observation:

Since spirituality encompasses what we believe about God and religion, as well as our everyday values and behaviors both secular and sacred, it may be a more accurate reflector of our true faith than our publicly shared religious beliefs and practices.¹

So, in a new paradigm, an evangelist would begin with the matter of finding meaning in life, then progress to a discussion of the existence and function of the spiritual dimension in human experience, all with the purpose of allowing Christianity to stand on an equal platform with all other religious systems.

With the starting point clearly established, then, the process of evangelism must move on to the next phase. In this new paradigm, I am suggesting a path quite different from the one used by the current prevailing method. In the current method, the path goes immediately to a discussion of biblical matters. In the new paradigm, rather than going immediately to biblical topics, the evangelist would first spend some time delving into what might be termed "pre-biblical" issues. These are issues that precede the acceptance of the Bible.

The rationale for this suggestion is simple that, as was noted in an earlier section of this project, that one of the reasons why the current method of evangelism is faltering among thinking people is that it does not deal with what I am calling the "pre-biblical"

¹Collins, 5.
issues. At the same time it is these very issues, the philosophical and presuppositional ones, that are in question today. The turmoil surrounding these questions is having a profound impact on moderns. Stewart contends that:

When the basic assumptions of life—such as the existence of God and a divine purpose for our lives—are not only challenged but criticized, rejected, and condemned, the emotional, psychological, and spiritual repercussions have the effect of a "life-quake."!

Something of the magnitude of a "life-quake" cannot be ignored! An evangelistic method that would impact moderns must then take up the discussion of some of these basic assumptions that are in question if it aims to touch them. It must at least speak to them, or else the barriers that now prevent people from coming to belief will not come down. If they do not come down, the evangelistic process will end.

The new paradigm being suggested in this project has, thus far, brought people to the point where they understand that spirituality and religion are what enable people to make sense out of life. Given this fact, it seems prudent, then, for the next step in the process to be a more detailed discussion about the structure of religious life. Here again, this is not a discussion of Christian religious life, but religious life in a more nonparticular or general sense.

The best information on this subject I have ever come across is the work of Dr. Fernando Canale, a professor of theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Dr. Canale has observed that in the realm

---

1Stewart. 11.
of religious life there are three levels. First, there is the level of practice. This is the most obvious and superficial level of religious life that consists of all the actions people do, or do not do, in living out their beliefs. It is called superficial because it is as the surface of life. It is the most visible level. Because of the obvious visibility of this level, it is the primary level of witness. People watch to see if there is integrity between belief and practice.

The second level is the level of doctrine. The level of doctrine is made up of the various belief formulations people have that they use to inform the level of practice. This level can be, and often is, quite complicated and involved, sometimes even hard to explain (Seventh-day Adventists have twenty-seven complex formulations of doctrine). But it is crucial, for it supports the level of practice. If the level of doctrine becomes unclear, or if a religious community ceases to proclaim the "doctrines," or if a religious community fails to reconstitute the formulations of doctrine for a new generation, then whatever practice an item of doctrine supports, loses its justification, and it falls away.

Most religious activity and conversation take place at these first two levels. The vast majority of believers in any "religion" do not know there is a third level that is the most fundamental, therefore the most critical, the most determinative. Canale refers to the third level as the level of presupposition. This level is quite abstract and philosophical. It


2In Seventh-day Adventism, just such a thing has happened over the past several decades on the issue of going to movies. The prohibitions against it have not been deemed persuasive by new generations, so the practice of not going has fallen away almost entirely.
consists essentially of a framework produced by a collection of “first principles,” or presuppositions that have been assembled by a particular person (or religious system). This framework is used as a system by which any data that come to hand can be interpreted. (This equates with the information on spirituality given earlier.) These first principles are not all provable. There may be good evidence to support them, there may not be. Nevertheless, they may be part of a system. Because they are not provable, their inclusion at the level of presupposition requires an element of “faith” or belief. In other words, it requires the exercise of trust for a person or religious system to hold or take in an unprovable presupposition. This is not some carefully reasoned action. It is more instinctive. One cannot hold presuppositions without exercising faith. That is part of the nature of presupposition. It is because of this belief element that they are called “presuppositions.” Without them, there is no grid of belief.

Admittedly, this material is challenging. It is particularly challenging to think of trying to explain it to a general audience. But it is necessary. If presuppositions are not dealt with, the barriers to belief will not come down.

When talking about presuppositions, it does not take very long before one comes upon the primordial philosophical issue of epistemology, the question of knowledge, its origin and function. To speak of presuppositions is to raise this matter. By what method or process is knowledge produced? Any credible discussion of presuppositions and their influence on meaning has at some point, to come up against the question of knowledge itself, how it is produced.

Canale has pointed out that all knowledge is derived from the same sort of
equation. On the one hand, there is objective data—facts, figures, prose. But data themselves do not produce knowledge. They must be acted upon by some system of interpretation. Without intersection with some system of interpretation, data may well be useless.

In our time, people are almost totally captivated by the data side of the equation. Few stop to recognize that there is a subjective side, that Canale calls the "system" side. This system side is every bit as significant as the data side. It is where the collection of "first principles." assembled to form a grid through which any data are screened, resides and functions. It is the system side that is the catalyst that acts on the data, thereby producing knowledge. This interaction between "data" and "system" is what produces knowledge.

Abstract and obscure as this issue is, I believe it has great implications for the evangelistic process today because, if it can be even rudimentarily understood, it will effectively put Christian knowledge on a par with other kinds of knowledge. It will give thinking people cause to stop and look at the merits of Christian belief instead of just dismissing it out of hand. When they see that all knowledge is produced by the same equation, in which presuppositions play a guiding role, they might come to understand that no system of interpretation is automatically better than another. Scientific systems are not to be presumed better than religious systems. Religious ones are not to be presumed automatically better than scientific ones. Their various forms of knowledge are produced by the same equation, the interaction of a system of interpretation and a body of data. If this is understood, then the issue becomes one of discussing and evaluating the various
data, and the system of interpretation that produces a particular body of knowledge.

Thinking people will come to see that conclusions about belief systems can be fairly drawn only after there has been an examination of the system side, and also, of the data side. I contend that if secular minded people understand the equation by which knowledge is derived, they will at least be willing for the competing systems to be discussed. That is far better than the current default position of society that relegates Christian belief to second- or third-class status.

In the evangelistic process, the data side of the equation can be dismissed quite quickly. The concerns on the data side are not very hard to understand. There are concerns about the reliability of the data, the sample size, the integrity of the process by which the data were produced. At some point in the process of persuasion, the issues of data must be satisfied. For Christianity, this would involve discussion of the many pieces of data that inform the faith: things like the process of revelation and inspiration; like the transmission of the Bible; like the credibility of the eyewitnesses who recorded the things of God.

The system side of this knowledge equation is more complicated. Central to its function are two active ingredients—faith and reason. Faith is easily understood as trust. In the knowledge process, faith is evidenced by people trusting in various dictums or presuppositions. But the role of reason is more complicated, especially when reason is held in such high esteem today. Reason plays a very large role in the knowledge systems in modern times. In fact, it has come to be widely believed that reason is the way to find truth. Modern people tend to view reason as a very mechanistic, predictable process by
which to evaluate data and work to conclusions. Taylor correctly describes the common perception—that reason is “some transcendent, immutable faculty to which all thinking people have access and which can be employed at will to separate truth from error.”¹

In truth, reason is not so pure. Taylor continues:

It [reason] is more like Saturday’s soup made out of the week’s leftovers. It is the nice neat name we give to a mishmash of interrelated forces which includes personality traits and idiosyncracies, prejudice, emotions, intellectual fads, felt needs, cultural conditioning, and, at times, indigestion.²

This is not descriptive of some pure and predictable process. It is not descriptive of an objective process, but of a very subjective one. In other words, the human power of reason can be bent. In truth, there is plenty of evidence that reason may serve the interests of error just as ably as that of truth. It is very much in the service of the person who uses it. One is almost amused at Taylor’s observation that reason “is the genie in the bottle, willing to do whatever its master bids—and, like the genie, not caring particularly who the master is.”³

Complicated as this issue is, I think it is important to expose it to modern people because their near-absolute trust in reason must be unsettled if the evangelistic process is to be successful. Sophisticated people must realize their almost implicit trust in the capacities of reason, are too optimistic. Because of the almost implicit trust placed in reason today, reason is often enlisted against Christianity, so it is important, I think, as

¹Taylor, 50.
²Ibid.
³Ibid., 69.
part of an effective evangelistic process. to engender some healthy distrust in the capacities of reason. By “healthy distrust.” I am referring to removing the absolute abilities often thoughtlessly granted to reason. By doing this, an evangelist may open the prospect of trust in the process of revelation. It might also be well to point out that if a fixed point of reference could be found somewhere, the problems of the system side of things, and the foibles of reason, could be surmounted, and humans could actually find truth. But this requires some humility.

This material does not sound very exciting, nor persuasive. It is certainly not going to win over a host of converts. Perhaps that is why it is not within the common evangelistic method. But it is worth remembering Trueblood’s words, quoted earlier, that suggest the first task of evangelism today is that of removing barriers to faith. This is a humble work that precedes the work currently done by the prevailing evangelistic method. This work is also clearly in the domain of philosophical endeavor.

I am very aware that these matters are quite abstract and involved, to say nothing of how foreign they are to the current method. But I am firmly persuaded they are of utmost importance. They must be discussed in some manner. Given the effects of postmodernism on the concept of truth and knowledge, these issues are unavoidable to any modern process that wants to be credible. I am also persuaded that thinking moderns will sit to listen to such discussion. In my own experience, this has proven true on

\[1\] Here is the great advantage of Christianity, that it has revelation from outside human experience to rely on. If this revelation is credible, it must be taken seriously.
numerous occasions. It is possible to reduce this material to a format that makes it interesting to the average person.

Of absolute importance here is the explanation that there is no such thing as "pure, unbiased" knowledge. Knowledge, by its very nature, consists of two parts: one being objective data; the other, some system of interpreting the data. One might argue that the data is unbiased and objective, but the system of interpretation is not, as it has, of necessity, as an integral part of it, presupposition. Every body of knowledge has some things undergirding it that cannot be proven. They have to be believed, not willy-nilly, but because of evidence; but they are articles of belief, nevertheless. Moderns need to know that is true even of their cherished positions which they think are derived purely by reason.

The consequence of the epistemological question, or the implication of it, in our age is vital. It is that no body of information, from whatever field, which is based on good evidence, is of any lesser standing than knowledge from any other field, provided the data supporting it are credible. That means that the conclusions of the scientist are not to be presumed of greater credibility than those of the theologian. It means Christianity is the intellectual equal of any other body of knowledge, because the process by which knowledge is derived for the theologian is the same as that by which knowledge for the scientist is derived. In both cases, some body of data is acted upon by some system of interpretation, which has as an integral part of it a series of unprovable presuppositions.
There is, then, no room for the intellectual demeaning of Christianity without first examining its supporting data.¹

Though the epistemological questions are the hard ones, it is absolutely essential to any credible evangelistic paradigm that the issue be laid out and explained. It will be a challenge to the speaker, and a challenge to the audience, but there is perhaps no greater matter before modern man, nothing so calculated to humble human arrogance, nothing so capable of opening the door to faith, than the open discussion of the question of how it is that we know anything at all.

So far, the new paradigm being suggested has offered a credible starting point. It has provided a bridge from the need to find meaning to spirituality, and it has offered a philosophical platform by which to level the field of discussion with non-Christians. It seems now that, having discussed these foundational issues, an effective new paradigm would do well to move on to discuss the question of the existence of God. The reason for this is that if there is a God, the basic problem of epistemology is significantly altered. Humans no longer have to rely on knowledge inalterably tainted by their presuppositions. We can access a fixed point of reference out beyond ourselves.

The question of the existence of God is one that every person and every worldview must face. “Is there a God?” or “Is there not a God?” There are only two

¹There is a consideration upholding Christianity to which the scientist may have to bow. Scientific data is derived by human observation. The data of Christian belief are derived through a process of revelation and inspiration, superintended by a Divine hand. It is data that comes from outside human experience. If one is at all believing in a Supreme Being, it becomes very quickly necessary to cause even scientific knowledge to bow before that which is revealed.
possibilities. But, while the possibilities are only two, the implications are many. This question about God is so basic it affects the whole construction of any system of understanding life. If God exists, then one set of presuppositions prevails. If He does not exist, then another whole series may. Because of the foundational nature of this issue, it should be addressed as part of a credible evangelistic process.

The question of the existence or non-existence of God should also be discussed because it is a question under considerable discussion now. so will not surprise a secular audience. Even secularists are interested in the topic, not from an apologetic stance, but from a pejorative one. Several of the modern world-views require the eradication or minimization of God if they are to succeed entirely, so those propounding them must take up the issue of God. The question of the existence or non-existence of God is one that should be part of any effective evangelistic methodology today. After all, how can secularists be persuaded of Christianity without discussion of God? Such discussions have been part of the Christian apologetic through major portions of Christian history. It should become so again. The existence of God should not be merely presumed.

It is amazing how, under the prevailing paradigm, this question is routinely presumed or ignored. The audience, whether made up of unbelievers or believers, is never exposed to some of the great and cogent arguments that surround and support belief in the existence of God. This is a sadly curious eventuality, as this question has challenged some of the greatest minds the Western world has ever produced. It has resulted in some of the most profound arguments with which the human mind can grapple. Even if all the arguments cannot be laid out, it would be well for an audience to be challenged by their
magnitude. To be sure, there is no way to prove empirically that God exists. At the same time, there is no way to prove that He does not. In the final analysis, the answer accepted is driven by the way a person treats the evidence offered.

In the new paradigm, then, the evangelist would devote some time to the discussion of some of the arguments in favor of the existence of God. I would suggest using some of arguments that are readily understood, like the Argument from Design, and some of the Moral Arguments, like the Argument from Conscience.¹

Once the issue of God is opened and closed, (and decided in favor of theism), the paradigm must shift again. The acceptance of theism does not bring one automatically to Christianity. Rather, it leaves an evangelist confronting a host of theistic religions. I shall not try to name them here, but in the face of all these theistic religions, there is the pressing question. “Why is Christianity to be preferred over the others?” Given the current climate of popularity other theistic religions enjoy, the issue of preferring Christianity is one that cannot be ignored. At the same time, as anyone who has grappled with these issues knows, it is not an easy one with which to deal. For one thing, the selection of one religion to the exclusion of others, smacks of exclusivity. And exclusivity, or even the suggestion of it, is much frowned upon in this society so taken by pluralism. Even to suggest the superiority of Christianity as a system is to risk ire. Beyond that, making a case for the Christian faith in apposition to the other theistic faith systems is quite challenging as well. Nevertheless, a credible case must be quickly made as part of a

¹A good compendium of arguments in favor of the existence of God may be found in Kreeft and Tacelli’s book, Handbook of Christian Apologetics, Chapter 3.
paradigm that hopes to be effective in speaking to inquiring people of this age.

My suggestion is to make the case by appealing to the process of revelation in history, and its product, the Bible. To my mind, the evidence is persuasive. There is no other faith system that can point to the actions of God (or even gods) in history, preserved over time in a holy book, as Christianity can. It can be quite persuasive to speak of some of the details of God's activity in history, and also of the preservation of that record. To be sure, all there is to rely on is the testimony of those who saw it happen. If they cannot be regarded as credible, then neither can any other historian, which leaves us with nothing from history that can be counted reliable.

Once this work has been done, the new paradigm must shift once more, this time away from the data side of things, to the system side. It is very important that people listening understand that it is the interaction between "data" and "system" that produces knowledge, Christian knowledge included. With the data established, the next questions have to do with system.

Canale has suggested that within Christendom there can be found four basic systems of belief--Classical, Protestant, Liberal, and a fourth system not precisely named. This fourth system is driven much more by the Bible itself than by tradition, pagan philosophical constructs, or experience. I shall refer to this as the "Biblical" system.

There is no reason to lay out all the similarities and variances of these systems here, as they will be detailed in the lectures to be given. But I do want to point out that an effective evangelistic method would be one that calls people to work tirelessly to build their faith on the Biblical system. The great distinguishing mark of the Biblical system, is
that both its "system" side and its "data" side are derived from revealed material. The Classical system uses material borrowed from pagan philosophers; the Protestant system uses the same system as the Classical, but with the substitution of one Christian doctrine, the doctrine of Justification by Faith. The Liberal relies mostly on reason and experience, neither one of which are derived from Scripture. None of these systems can rightly be called biblical. If Christianity is a revealed religion, with a holy book believed to be derived from God Himself, it seems quite obvious that believers would want their faith to be built more on the Bible than on anything else. The evangelist, by the time he or she reaches this point, would be in an ideal situation to make an appeal to the audience to build their religion upon a biblical system, using biblical data, and nothing less.

It is my intention to stop the development of the new paradigm at this point because, if an evangelist were to use this new method, he or she would have brought the audience to the point of having faith in God and in the Bible. From that point, the current methodology used for so long among Christians may well prove effective again.

Conclusions Concerning the New Process

In concluding this section, it is important to point out that the questions that plague modern man come from a philosophical or theological base that precedes the point at which the current paradigm begins. Most evangelists begin their apologetic messages presuming several major Christian presuppositions. This means that when people who are wrestling with the basic philosophical questions receive the sometimes sensational advertising of the evangelists, or when they are invited to the presentation of biblical
topics when they have no interest as to the veracity of the Bible itself, nor any confidence
in the presuppositions of Christianity in general, the evangelistic conversation simply never
gets started. If the evangelist does not go back and deal with some of the larger
philosophical issues then the voice of Christianity becomes muted, even silenced. The
shifts suggested here in this new paradigm would remedy this fault.

I do not mean to suggest that people are all hostile to Christianity. It is just as true
that there are also large numbers of people today who are biblically illiterate; some
because of neglect, others because of considered opinions arrived at that are at variance
with Christianity. The conflict between "faith" and "science" has robbed Christian belief
of its hold on people. The great penchant for fun and entertainment has pushed the
Christian religion to the fringes. The predominant world-view has given way to a virtual
plethora of world-views, many of them decidedly unchristian. Because of all this disparity,
Christians and non-Christians are speaking past each other. The level of congruence
between the two groups is becoming smaller and smaller. Dialog, if it is to be credible,
must begin at the elemental level.

It is quite probable that anyone currently involved in public evangelism will face
the tendency to become very quickly critical of a process that has such detailed and
complicated material. Some will be critical of this new idea because it prolongs the
evangelistic process at a time when many are trying to shorten it. The only argument I can
advance in defense of this suggested new method is that it attempts to address precisely
the questions that face modern man. It is well to keep in mind the observations of John
Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, recently expressed, in a cogent manner:
In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, profound questions about the existence of God have been asked, about the nature of faith and about how we should interpret the Scriptures. These are difficult problems, which sometimes leave seminarians simply confused. Some end up feeling that seminary did little more than convince them they were not competent to interpret Scripture, at least by the standards expected. In reaction, some even say to themselves, implicitly if not explicitly, "If I can't interpret the Scriptures rightly, why bother to do so at all?"1

This statement is focused primarily on Seminarians. But, if they are put into a state of confusion by modern wranglings, what is to be said of the rest of the population? So, while I hear the voices of concern that this method does not streamline the evangelistic process, that it makes it considerably longer and more arduous. I remain convinced that somehow the foundational issues must be raised and spoken to. They cannot be avoided, not if the evangelistic process is to remain credible.

It is my contention that, if Christian evangelism would be effective in a modern setting, it must resort to the strategy that originally gave it success in a hostile, pagan world. It must be willing to take up the philosophical questions, and lay out credible answers—persuasive answers—to those questions. And it must do it in a way that the answers provided prove to be more cogent than those offered by modern science and modern education. If the foundational issues do not become part of the evangelistic process, Christian evangelism is headed for the margins of life, for the poor and outcast. Thinking, educated, curious people will ignore what the evangelists have to say. More and more, they are doing it already.

Perhaps this foundational work could be set up to continue over a longer term,

1John Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, Behind the Stained Glass Windows (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 1996), 158.
perhaps it would best be done by local pastors, or by laymen. It is doubtful it could all be
done as an addition to a traditional crusade. But it must be done. Hard as it may be to
bring this realization home to those embedded in the current evangelistic method, in our
time, people have become well-educated. They have become sophisticated. They have
imbibed at the fountain of skepticism to the point they exude it. People have asked some
hard questions about the very elemental things of Christianity, presuppositions that
believers seldom think of, and many don’t even know exist. Does God actually exist?
Can He be known? Can we really regard the Scriptures as viable word from God? Is not
the Bible the product of human action in history? Is God real, or is He the product of
historical human necessity? Is there really something called “truth?” All these questions,
and many more, are in circulation today. And they are all “pre-biblical” in the sense that
they arise from considerations that precede faith in the Bible and in the God of the Bible.
They are hard philosophical questions, all of which precede faith. Evangelistic method, in
order to be effective, must begin where the audience is, and it must deal with the issues the
audience has. Something has to take down the barriers to faith.

In spite of the problems confronting Christianity today, the intellectual ferment just
mentioned may be an indication that all is not bad. For one thing, Christians should
remind themselves that this is not the first age in which Christian apologists have faced
daunting odds. In the early part of the Christian era things were very difficult, probably
more so than currently, yet the Christian apologetic proved successful. If Christian
evangelists could be successful then, why not now? Especially when one recalls that at
least some of the effectiveness of the Christian world-view in those early years can be
traced to the apologetic writings of the early Christian Fathers, who made a credible case for Christian belief in the face of paganism. The possible impact of an evangelistic strategy that addresses some of the issues extant now has demonstrated a considerable capacity to confirm Christians in their faith.

To quote Marsden once more, we are at an opportune moment when “perhaps the recognition of the collapse of the old liberalism opens the way for the recognition that religious perspectives, if responsibly held and civilly presented, are as academically respectable as any other perspectives.” Here is a great point, and a hopeful one. To be able to have even the mere consent that religious ideas are at least as academically respectable as other ideas is the goal.

The popular priest and spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen, once wrote the following:

There was a time, not too long ago, when we felt like captains running our own ships, with a great sense of power and self-confidence. Now we are standing in the way. That is our lonely position: We are powerless, on the side... not taken very seriously when the weather is fine.

So much for the description and explanation and justification for the various elements in this proposed new paradigm. The focus will now turn to the experience of experimenting with these ideas in an orderly and public way.

1Marsden and Longfield, 7.

CHAPTER 4

TESTING THE NEW PARADIGM

Testing Instruments

The proposed testing devised for this project was originally set up in two phases. First, the basic paradigm would be described in detail to a number of veteran evangelists for their scrutiny and reaction. Second, prior to the actual public presentation of the lectures, each lecture would be shared with a focus group for its reaction with the anticipation that any suggested adjustments would be made prior to the actual public presentation.

In practice, these two modes of testing came off pretty well as planned. But it also became apparent that these methods were not very quantifiable. So, while the presentations were in process, a third idea was born, that of having the audience provide an evaluation at the conclusion of the lectures. A questionnaire was dutifully developed, given out, and gathered to be analyzed. This last step turned out to be the most formalized part of the evaluation process.

Testing Methodology

The pretesting of the paradigm proved to be, at the same time, relatively easy and relatively frustrating. I was able to consult with two veteran evangelists, Dr. Arnold Kurtz, of College Place, Washington, and Dr. Bruce Johnston, now retired in the Portland,
Oregon area. Both of these gentlemen have considerable evangelistic experience over whole lifetimes. They are credible judges of evangelistic method. Johnston, in particular, until very recently, has remained personally active in evangelistic endeavors, so could speak from current experience. These two gentlemen agreed to spend an afternoon reviewing the new ideas, then reacting to them. The plan was to have them submit written evaluations.

On the appointed day, the three of us met for open discussion. For several hours we went over the new methodology in detail. I laid out the whole schema to them. They listened with attention to the whole thing. They were then asked to respond.

A number of things came immediately to light. First of all, the two gentlemen were quite intrigued by the idea and thought it should be tried. They stated there is need for “young men with good minds” to try their hands at evangelism. They both recalled how, in times past, the brightest young men had aspirations to become evangelists. That is no longer the case. This they lamented. They were happy to see someone trying a new idea.

A second immediate return on the investment of time and effort was the realization that neither Kurtz nor Johnston had much to say about the proposed changes in method. Either the ideas were so novel they were surprised by them, and left them without comment, or else this proposal was so obvious a thing to try that they ended up offering no substantial suggestions for changes to the paradigm itself. The idea, in their minds, was cohesive enough that they both thought it needed to be tried. They both understood the fact that more attention needs to be paid to some of the foundational issues today. But,
when the discussion was over, they had no substantial suggestions to make as far as adjustments to the proposed method was concerned.¹ This eventuality made formal evaluation at this level impossible.

Yet, while neither Kurtz nor Johnston had any formal response to give, they did have some concerns and advice. Their comments were centered on one great issue that was of paramount importance to them—what techniques would be used at the end of the presentations to tie people to the church, to bring them “over the line.” to the point of baptism? They both strongly felt evangelistic efforts must end in bringing people into the church. Several times they raised this issue with me in conversation.

I took their concern to heart as valid and of great significance. And I find myself sympathetic to their concerns. Certainly, evangelism must end up bringing people not only to Christ, but also into the community of faith. But I see this issue as subsequent to the effort being made by this project. These lectures are specifically trying to open dialog with secular people, not conclude it. This project concludes where other forms of evangelism begin. The lectures end with an appeal for people to build a religious house on the truths of Scripture. So, while the concern of Kurtz and Johnston is a valid one, it is subsequent to this project. It has nothing to do directly with the actual development of a new paradigm. It offered little help in steering the experiment, so, noting the issue, I then left it alone.

The second phase of testing was more formalized and substantial. It consisted of

¹A consequence of this was they saw no need for any written evaluation or criticism.
drawing together a focus or interaction group, made up of interested parties, with whom the material substance of the lectures was shared, then reactions taken. This focus group consisted of ten to twelve individuals, from various walks of life, of various ages, who expressed interest in investing the necessary time and effort to help refine the presentations. No special screening or selection process was used. The need for the group was advertised to the church, and interested parties were contacted personally. A group was drawn in upon the expression of willing agreement to invest the time and effort necessary. At an initial meeting, expectations were clearly laid out to them, including a request that they provide some written feedback.

The original intent of this step was to create a process whereby I could get feedback prior to giving the lectures. The idea was to present all the lecture material to the group prior to the start of the public lectures, then have them respond to the thing as a whole. That would have allowed for adjustment well in advance of the public meetings. It would have allowed the group to have a complete overview of what was going to be attempted in detail.

In actuality, things did not work so ideally. As the dates for the presentations approached, two things became quite apparent. The body of material assembled was simply too great to be dealt with in one or two sittings in advance of the public meetings. And the focus group, with a couple of notable exceptions, was not well versed enough in the subject matter to offer any substantial correction to the overall scheme. It became necessary to adjust the process to fit the circumstances.

The first adjustment was to set up a weekly meeting of the focus group on the
Wednesday night before the weekend presentation. Since the plan was to have two half-hour lectures on each Friday night. I presented the material from those lectures for review by the focus group. Suggestions they made were incorporated into the final material.

The second adjustment was one of expectations. I gave up the idea of having the focus group critique the overall scheme. While they were good, intelligent, and interested, only one of them had sufficient understanding of evangelistic endeavors to be able to offer any constructive suggestions on the whole paradigm. The focus group simply had no opinions on the process as a whole. It became necessary for the new method to stand the test of experience with the hope of getting some information after the fact that might be used to adjust it for future use. I relied, then, on the focus group to evaluate the clarity and understandability of the material rather than on the viability of the whole new paradigm. The focus group met every Wednesday night during the period of the public lectures to go over the material and to have them respond to me as to its content and understandability. This arrangement allowed several days for the content of the upcoming lectures to be adjusted and refocused.

I have mentioned previously that in the actual process of these public lectures, it became apparent that a third system of gathering data for evaluative purposes would be advisable. A plan was developed to accomplish this, but since it was at the conclusion of the effort, it will be reported on later in the project.

---

This particular individual is a minister by training, now gone into other lines of work.
Reporting the Findings

Reporting on the findings of the various methods of evaluation will begin with the conclusions drawn from the open discussion with the two seasoned evangelists, Kurtz and Johnston.

I have already reported that this session did not turn out quite the way I had envisioned or planned. Rather than some formal procedure, it turned into a open and free-flowing discussion. Though I was not able to come away from the discussion with any quantifiable material, there was a valuable residue derived from the experience. For one thing, I came away from that afternoon with the very clear sense that this thing was worth trying. Two veteran evangelists had looked the idea over in detail. They saw no fatal flaws in it. Though they had not seen anything quite like it attempted, they definitely thought it was an idea well worth trying. Dr. Johnston observed that evangelistic method must be continually refined, and this was an idea that might prove to be a beneficial refinement. He thought it should be tested. He asked to be informed of the outcome. I took those sentiments as endorsement and pressed ahead.

Second, the afternoon discussion turned up no obvious flaws in process. Though it may be argued that silence makes for a poor endorsement, it can also be said that if Kurtz and Johnston had seen some obvious flaw they would most assuredly have said something about it. While it was initially frustrating to leave that meeting with no concrete criticisms, it became a source of encouragement to press on and try the new thing. So much for the initial attempt to refine the method.

The results from the second level of evaluation—the focus group—turned out to be
more precise. The number of people active in the group varied from eight to twelve.

Only six ever turned in some kind of written material for my use. The vast preponderance of that written material had to do with the way particular presentations had come across, items such as gestures I had used, illustrations, concepts that were not quite clear. Only two written evaluations had to do with the whole schema. The first was rather lengthy and detailed. It came very early in the process, so provided some valuable material. It is included at the end in appendix A as document 1. Reading it will readily show that the writer was quite enthusiastic about the whole idea. He had some constructive comments and criticisms to offer, yet was obviously looking forward to attending the series. The second response was a short, handwritten note that had some good suggestions and comments. It is included as document 2.

I would like to detail some of the comments and observations made by these two respondents who had something to say about the whole new paradigm.

The first respondent (I will designate him as Respondent 1) commented on a number of areas. Of primary interest to me was the fact that he liked the starting point of the project very much. He saw it as more advantageous when compared with the traditional point of beginning. He said, “The advantage of your starting point is that it attempts to meet the human being from the point of view of the common human experience.” That was very encouraging. It echoes my idea precisely, that the issue of finding meaning in life is urgent. It was nice to see another thoughtful person agreeing.

Respondent 1 raised some issues in connection with the discussion of

1Appendix A.
presuppositions. He agreed that the discussion of presuppositions was necessary, but questioned how well the common person would respond to such matters. He suggested that the focus should be directed toward the “common secular man,” a suggestion echoed later by Respondent 2.

Respondent 1 raised some issues with the “data” and “system” lecture. In his opinion, the “one [side] continually influences and is interdependent upon the other and both come from culturally influenced presuppositions.” He went on to wonder if there is any such thing as “pure ‘exegesis’.” I have given some thought to this refinement and have come to the conclusion that his position is probably correct. There is no entirely clean process of deriving knowledge. At the same time, this suggestion does not represent a major departure from the position I advocated.

All the suggestions reported thus far by Respondent 1 were helpful to me. A couple of final ones were a bit troubling and difficult. First, Respondent 1 took issue with the idea that special revelation provides information that is superior to what humans obtain via experience. I found that suggestion to be very troubling for a Bible-believing Christian. If the process of revelation does not provide information of a quality that is more to be relied on than any other, that it does not, in fact, produce something of a fixed point of reference outside human experience, then I am left wondering what remains of the Christian faith. I had to disregard this question almost out of hand because, if revelation does not provide information more “truthful” than what can be had from experience, there is no basis for Christian evangelism, so no reason or basis for this project. I do not accept this suggested position of Respondent 1, so I did not float the idea to my audience.
The second difficult issue raised by Respondent 1 had to do with the position I endorsed contending that Christianity is "unique," that it is a religion to be preferred above all others. The respondent took no argument with the basic premise itself, but he went on to suggest that the key to supporting this position might be found in the exploration of how the process of inspiration in Christianity works compared to the way such claims work in other religions. This was a good thought, one with which I tentatively agree. Indeed, the clarion claims of Christianity arise from the process of revelation and inspiration, how they played out in human history, leaving behind a residue in the form of a holy book. To my knowledge, no other religion can claim a process that even comes close to the credibility of the case Christianity offers. Christians claim a God who has been active over long periods of human history, leaving specific revelations of Himself at crucial junctures. There is a lot of cogent evidence of this activity. But the idea of having to explore the process of "inspiration" in all competing religions, unless it is cursory, strikes me as being more than is necessary. This project is set to offer justification for the Christian faith. To explore details of other faiths is more than I had interest in attempting in private, let alone before a public.

A second set of comments about schema came from another respondent, Respondent 2. His responses came in the form of a short, handwritten note, a copy of which is also included in appendix A as document 2. Respondent 2's initial concern had to do with the prospect of people staying by to wade through such involved material. He feared the material would be too complicated for the average person, causing them to lose interest. Thankfully, experience proved otherwise. Not only did people stay, they seemed
quite intrigued. This proved true for people of all age groups.

The second issue raised by Respondent 2 came in the form of a suggestion, that the philosophical part be abbreviated, and that more attention be given to the doctrines of the church, sort of like an Adventist version of *Mere Christianity*. He felt the philosophical material was too involved. That comment disappointed me at first, as I have invested countless hours in this effort with the express idea that the philosophical issues are paramount in our time. To hear his suggestion did not at first fall easily on my ears. But, with some reflection, my reaction has mellowed. This suggestion is still going around and around in my head. Though I think the presuppositional issues are the primary issues of our time, I am thinking more and more in favor of adjusting my method to be more along the suggested lines. It is probable that I am more interested and influenced by the presuppositional issues than the average person. It is quite possible there is more of a biblical residue out there than I have suspected. An adjustment such as the one suggested might better accommodate the concern voiced by Kurtz and Johnston about drawing people into the church community as a result of such public efforts.

With the comments on the whole proposed method spoken to, there is a second type of information derived from the focus group to report. These comments had to do with the refining of particular presentations. I shall not catalog all the suggestions in detail, for they are too many. They have largely to do with my mannerisms during the lectures—hand gestures, voice inflections, posture, etc.—some with content, but not with the method. Though I do not intend to catalog the details, I would like to state that the process, as it was set up, actually worked quite well in terms of helping refine the
presentations. I have acknowledged that the focus group meetings failed to give opportunity for the group to affect the overall schema, but there were a number of occasions where members of the group suggested changes to presentations that proved helpful. When something was not clear to them, or an illustration did not fit, they spoke up in the focus group meetings, and I was able to make changes and adjustments. This process was helpful to me. As I made the presentations in advance to them, I could see close up the reaction of the little audience. When I came to the end of the presentation, I could tell quite easily whether I had reached them or not. Beyond that, the focus group gave me opportunity to review my thoughts, often resulting in better organization of thought.

I think it is fair to say that these efforts, collectively, constituted the pretesting of this new evangelistic idea. When the various sessions were done, I had a significant amount of assurance that this new idea was worth trying. Many people saw its value, and urged me to attempt the meetings. They sensed a deeper level of discussion was necessary. And their assurances were not just words. About fifteen people donated time setting up the space, setting up camera and video equipment, then directing and editing the programs.

While the pretesting had value, it was not as substantial as I would have liked. It turned out to be less substantial than what I originally proposed. It did not provide me with the kind of feedback that I felt was necessary if the whole process was to be evaluated. The pretesting did not give me a sense of how the new paradigm would function.
Because of the difficulties associated with the pretesting process, the unexpected or unanticipated things that cropped up, I decided to add an additional evaluation element at the conclusion of the last presentation. Originally no evaluation by the audience was planned. But, in the end, a simple response instrument was devised and administered. It is also included in appendix A as document 3. Since it was not a part of the pretesting, discussion of the instrument and its findings is found later in the project.
CHAPTER 5

PRESENTING THE LECTURES ACCORDING TO THE NEW PARADIGM

Selecting a Format

A major part of the experimentation with the new paradigm that makes up this project was the presentation of the lectures to a public audience. In this section I report on that part of the endeavor.

With the basic idea formulated, the research work completed, and the lectures prepared, I came to the point of having to deliver the lectures in a public setting. The plan was to accomplish two ends at once. The first objective was to deliver the material to a live audience. The second was to videotape the presentations for broadcast on television. This second objective was very urgent in my own mind because of the unusual opportunity for almost unlimited access to local television. The church I pastor is a major player in the operation of a television station that produces some of its own programs as well as broadcasting material from the Three Angels’ Broadcasting Network (3ABN). The interest in local programming is considerable, and it is broadcast at no cost to the church. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that many people outside the church community watch the television station. This prospect seemed to me to be one that could not be passed by. I had in mind the idea that many people, secular people, would be available as an audience who would otherwise never darken the doors of a church.
The two goals just stated—a live audience and television production—were at variance. The interests of live audiences and taping crews are not very compatible. Live audiences are not particularly accommodating of the many and various technicalities associated with producing programs for television. A live audience obviously prefers presentations with no interference or interruptions. Taping programs for television, on the other hand, especially if it is done by a volunteer, amateur crew, is likely to have any number of interruptions. And the placement of cameras, and lighting, and the movement of camera personnel, along with a host of other little details, all affect the ambiance of the hall and the flow of the lectures.

A second factor to be considered was the location of the meetings. If I was to meet the second goal of taping the presentations, the only location that could be used was the church sanctuary. That is the only place where the equipment necessary to videotaping is to be had. My hopes and intentions were to speak to an audience that is not known for its church attendance, so the location was problematic to a live audience. The proposed audience would likely view the church building as a non-neutral place, and not be very inclined to come. So the decision about which goal would be given priority became crucial.

After deliberation, I finally decided to give the second goal priority. The decision was made to do the presentations in the church with the express hope of having the videos to broadcast later on television. This decision affected both the format to be used and the audience to be drawn in. The idea of doing the presentations conflicted with my goal of speaking to unchurched people in a live setting. It seemed hardly right to invite the general public into a series of lectures that were likely to be disrupted by technical
concerns. At the same time, an audience made up largely of church members and their friends and invitees could be assumed to be much more understanding. The decision was driven by the belief that it was better to get the programs on television than to do the presentations in some neutral place. If unchurched people would not come to the church, they might watch television. I saw in the open opportunity to broadcast the messages into the very homes of those I hoped to reach, a greater good than having a few come to the church for the lectures. The opportunity to put this material before a secular public via a medium they already use was not only exciting, it seemed almost too good to be true. Besides, live presentations would take place only once. Taped programs would be shown again and again. In all honesty, I anticipated some significant response from the television broadcasts.

With these issues decided, efforts turned toward the selection of a suitable format. Here the demands of television prevailed. Above all else, the format had to be suitable for television.

Because of the various considerations that pertain to television programs, considerable effort and conversation were invested in trying to determine a format for these lectures that would make them appealing to those who might watch. Because of my almost total lack of experience with television, I relied very much on Lynelle Childs, Station Manager for the local television station known as Blue Mountain Broadcasting Association, who happily agreed to be the producer-director of the video series.

The first decision to be made had to do with the length of the program. There were two basic choices: one hour, and half-hour. The producer-director and I quickly

---

1Lynelle Childs is now Lynelle Childs-Ellis.
settled on the half-hour time period. There were a couple of reasons for doing this. Most significantly, the half-hour format fitted the station's programming needs best. Most of the available time slots were half-hour ones. If I stayed to a half-hour, there would be a much greater prospect of the programs being aired frequently. There was also the issue of the nature of the material to be presented. It is quite complicated. Because of that, we decided that a half-hour at a time would be about all an audience would likely sit and listen to. Television, as a medium of communication, has the tendency to deactivate the thought processes. People give careful attention to programs for relatively short periods of time, unless the programs are particularly exciting.

The decision to go with the half-hour format immediately complicated the idea of having a live audience. Live audiences are accustomed to more than half-hour presentations. I was afraid if they came out and the program lasted only half an hour, they would lose interest. So we decided to try having two half-hour presentations every Friday evening, with an intermission between them. This decision was spurred on by the fact that the production crew was under some time constraints. The filming crew was all volunteer and when using a videotape format, filming and editing are quite time intensive. For every presentation the crew had to come early, set up lights and cameras, make all necessary adjustments, film the presentation, then dismantle all the equipment when the presentations were done. That is a lot of work for a half-hour production. Very quickly the idea of having two presentations every evening, back to back, with a brief break between them, thus allowing for the filming of two lectures for every setup, was met with great approval by the volunteer crew. They did not have thirteen or fourteen Friday evenings in which to do the filming, so appreciated the respect for their time.
I felt uncomfortable with this decision at first because I feared it would make the series seem a bit disjointed. But, faced with few other options, I adjusted to the idea. I decided, as a part of the advertising for a live audience, to be forthright about the format and the videotaping. In both the public announcements that were made, and in the printed sheet that was prepared, people were told that one of the main objectives of the lecture series was to record on video.

The decision was also made at this time to allow questions and comments during the intermission so that time, however long it proved to be, did not end up being dead time.

These decisions turned out to be good ones. As it turned out, the audience felt no discontinuity that I could detect. They were not estranged by the break, and they were quite ready to ask questions and make comments during the intermission. And, as a consequence of the half-hour format, the programs have been airing on the station almost continually.

Before pressing on to discuss other aspects of the format, let me discuss the desire to actually have a live audience present. One of the options was simply for me to speak to the camera, no audience present. This would have been logistically easier. But the producer-director and I opted for a live audience first of all for the sake of the speaker. The idea of conducting a series of meetings in which one had to speak to empty space, or to a camera lens, was not appealing to me at all. It would lend an element of the unreal to the presentations. I do not find the naked eye of the camera very friendly. To have to look out and see no gleam of intelligence in anyone’s eye would have made the dynamics of the presentations rather lifeless. Beyond that, the presence of a live audience could be
played upon by the cameras, thereby making for a more inclusive sense for the viewer. Shots of people at the presentations would help draw in viewers. There was also the realization that if this was an experiment, a live audience would be a whole lot easier to read and inquire of than a television one. All these reasons made it necessary to plan the format to include a live audience for all the presentations.

Returning to the subject of the format, the producer-director and I had another consideration to attend to. Would the setting be formal or informal? If the intended audience were thinking, unchurched people, the degree of formality would be significant. A formal setting would be one in which I would be formally dressed, stand to a podium, and, in essence, preach. I did not like that idea. On the other hand, a very informal setting would probably not fit the content of the presentations. It seemed the seriousness and the intellectual depth of the material to be offered required a certain level of formality to hold it. Laying out great philosophical issues is just not done best in too informal a setting. Educational opportunities seem to flourish best in middle ground.

After some discussion, the producer-director and I settled on a kind of semiformal context. We did not want the presentations to appear like preaching services. The audiences envisioned do not frequent church gatherings, so to have this look like a church gathering would defeat the purpose of the experiment. We talked for a time about the possibility of having a round-table, open discussion between a number of individuals on a given topic. But I would not be able to control the content in that kind of setting. The producer felt that a lecture format would best accommodate the experiment. There was, after all, a body of information to be communicated, so the decision to follow a
semiformal format was agreed upon, appropriate attire was selected, and a lecture format was finalized.

Part of this preparation involved the building of a "set" in which the lectures would be couched. I found that in television productions. sets are of considerable importance. The building of sets can very quickly become costly and elaborate. Because of my inexperience (and lack of artistic sense), I gave this whole issue away to the producer and crew. They chose to create a setting by arranging various plants and objects on a stage. A place was made for me to sit, walk, and talk. I negotiated for a small lectern and a stool. I wanted the lectern to keep some notes on, and the stool so I could sit down from time to time, partly because I knew I would get tired, and partly to make for a more approachable setting. In retrospect, the background proved too dark. There were too many dark bushes. It would have been better to lighten the background more. The stool proved to be a wonderful idea, not only for providing me relief when I got tired, but also because it made me seem more approachable.

A final consideration about format had to do with some type of visual aids for the presentations. Because television is a visual medium, the producer felt strongly that some visual aid devices needed to be prepared. It is not that exciting to have a talking head on the screen for half an hour at a time. And, because of the complicated and abstract nature of the material to be presented, some pains needed to be taken to develop some sort of visual aids that would aid comprehension and interest levels. Besides, television itself calls for frequent changes in screen pictures every few seconds. The producer needed material to switch to as we went along.

After casting around at a number of ideas, I came across the idea of setting up a
metal covered board to which various words, signs, and symbols--illustrations--could be held by magnetic attraction. There was a local sign company that had material made of flexible vinyl with magnetic properties. It came in various colors, and could be cut to whatever shape or design selected. These aids could be stuck to the board as the lecture progressed. The system took some planning, but it proved inexpensive, and also very effective. The act of putting the various illustrations on the board as the lecture progressed proved helpful to me and to the audience, to say nothing of the producer and crew. With all these things decided, attention turned to advertising.

Advertising Considerations

Whenever some sort of public effort is undertaken, the subject of advertising comes up. How do you advertise? How do you advertise so as to attract a particular audience?

In this experiment, the question of advertising was not easy. First of all, there was the matter of money. I did not have a large budget for advertising, certainly not enough to be able to do a large mailing. More significantly to me, I was not sure I wanted a large budget for advertising. To me, this effort was an experiment. I did not want to have a vast audience present for an experiment, especially not when I had never done anything like this before. What if it didn’t work well? Then I would be embarrassed, or be made to look foolish before a host of people. Even worse, in my mind, was the matter that if this experiment failed, the gospel cause would then appear even more foolish in the eyes of the very people who are already too skeptical. I am aware of the words of Saint Augustine, where he said:
It is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, while presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense. We should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn.

I was not afraid of the “vast ignorance” part, but of the possible presumption of talking nonsense. So I opted for a safe process. I decided to advertise to the congregation, and then ask them to bring with them friends and acquaintances who they thought might have interest in the material. Advertising was done by making announcements in church, as well as preparing a simple bulletin insert that listed the topics to be presented.

At first glance, this strategy may seem uncourageous. It might appear to be neglectful of the stated audience. In actuality, it worked quite well. On the first evening, over four hundred people turned out. Most of them were church members, but a significant number were not. A number of them were the work fellows of church members whom they felt free to invite on the account of the meetings being non-traditional in nature. I was gratified, and reminded that most people who become Christian do so because of the influence of a friend or acquaintance.

In retrospect, this is not a strategy I would pursue routinely in the future. It did not allow me to determine anything about those who attended. In the future, I would want to try for a more neutral place, and advertise directly to the open public. But I was quite satisfied with it as a starting strategy. It provided a safe initial audience, at the same time making it available to any interested parties, and it also allowed the videotaping to be done without hindrance. Remember that the real goal was to get a body of material onto

—

television where it could find its way into the homes of the intended audience. This made
the need to advertise openly to the public less urgent. Given the various considerations.
the advertising worked well.

Reflections on Presenting for Television

In this section, I share some reflections on what it was like to actually do the
presentations to a live audience while at the same time having them recorded for
 television. As will be noted, there were a number of difficulties, a number of surprises,
and a number of lessons learned.

Perhaps the most immediate and forcible lesson when dealing with television
productions had to do with the use of time. For those unacquainted with television
productions, television is time-driven to the extreme. Productions are not timed to the
minute, but to the second. This meant every presentation had to be made within very
precise time parameters. I found doing this much more difficult than expected for a
number of reasons. First, there were a host of individuals running equipment whose duty
and purpose it was to keep me to the precise time periods allowed. The location in time
was communicated via certain hand signals that had to be learned. But the process was
problematic in that the volunteers who kept the time clock were not always clear and
precise with their time signals. On several occasions, key time cues were missed either
because the timekeeper did not give them, or because I was so engrossed in the goings-on
that I missed them. On at least two occasions, these glitches were serious enough to
prevent proper conclusions being made to the presentations. The glitches caused me to
have to rush through some of the material, and, given the complexity and lack of
familiarity people had with the material, the listeners were, unfortunately, left with some
confusion. The only remedy I can see for this is for me to do more productions so I can
get to be at ease with the whole system.

Aside from the problem of missed time cues, it also proved quite difficult to tailor
remarks precisely to the second. I found it necessary to be thinking on two tracks the
whole time, one having to do with the subject matter, the other with how time was
progressing in relation to the material presented. This two-track thinking caused some
odd situations in the mind. I found myself sometimes presenting the material in a rather
mechanical, rote manner, working from memory more than from the interaction with the
live audience, while my active attention was being given to the timekeeper. That is a
situation that takes some getting used to. When active attention returns to the subject
matter, one is left wondering what was actually said in the interim.

On the three occasions when time signals were missed, it proved possible to
redeem the situation by running overtime for the sake of the live audience, then, later on,
editing the tape to reduce the presentation to the required time parameters. This is, of
course, standard operating procedure in videotaping sessions, but it is very time-
consuming for the television crew.

In some of the cases, the glitches were serious enough to make the retaking of
some presentations necessary. The producer decided, in view of the glitches, that it would
actually be easier and less time-consuming to retake the presentations rather than try to
edit the glitches out. This retaking was done in a single afternoon sitting, with but a very
few people present. For the sake of the production, the television crew stayed by for one whole afternoon marathon session. The results were good, not only technically, but also because the doing of several retakes one after the other allowed me to have a very real sense of continuity not afforded by the usual separation of one week between topics. Clearly, taping something over and over again helps make it smoother and more cohesive.

Another difficulty, or series of difficulties, arose because of technical problems with the television equipment itself. There were times when some of the equipment malfunctioned and everyone, including the live audience, had to wait until the technicians discovered the source of the problems and corrected them. In one case, that involved a twenty-minute wait before the meeting could even begin. With a live audience present, the wait proved very frustrating, even annoying for those involved in the production. Fortunately the audience was very patient and understanding. I explained the nature of the problem, and they seemed quite willing to adjust to the circumstances, waiting the whole time without complaint. On the particular evening mentioned, most of the audience consisted of church people. It may not have been so solicitous a crowd had it been mostly the general public, come expecting precision and order. The downtime ended up not being wasted as I engaged the audience in conversation, taking questions people had, and answering them.

Those contemplating producing something for television would be well advised to give some thought to the difficulties created by the intensity of the lights necessary for television camera operations. The matter of lighting does not sound like something of any great significance. But the very first occasion on which one stands under the lights will
bring home quite forcibly the nature of the problem. The lights generate considerable heat, even from some distance. To have to speak under that heat was not easy. In addition, the lights create enough glare that it is difficult to get a clear view of the audience. It is easy to feel like one is up on a stage, sectioned away from the audience, remote and entirely to one's self. It is especially hard to maintain any kind of meaningful eye contact with the audience under such intense light conditions.

There is one more issue that bears mention: the use of notes while speaking on television. I am of the opinion it would have been better had I not used any notes, if the material had been so well in mind as to make notes unnecessary. In my case, there was a small lectern provided upon which notes were placed, and behind which a stool was set for me to sit on. The danger of notes is that they are apt to interfere with eye contact with the audience, and there is danger of getting lost and confused. I used notes for every presentation, but it would have been better if the presentations could have been made without them.

Television productions have other complications, like producing graphics and credits, to say nothing of editing. I was fortunate not to have to get involved in any of that as the volunteer crew was able and willing to care for it all.

In spite of the difficulties and challenges, I am persuaded that the benefits of having the material on tape are considerable. For one thing, the effort of producing one series of lectures may be multiplied many times over. In the case of the series described for this project, the tapes have been shown continually in the local market, and are now being shown in one other market far from their point of origin. In addition, because of the...
technical nature of the presentations, there were a number of people who missed understanding some of the significant points the first time through. To have the material on tape allowed them opportunity to go over the material again and again. Even months later, individuals were reporting "ah-ha!" experiences. "Now I understand."

There is also the great benefit of being able, via the television, of entering the homes of people who would never otherwise show interest in Christian apologetics. Interest and attention of this kind is extremely difficult to determine, especially in a small market where the sophisticated tools of the big stations are absent. At the point of writing, there is no empirical evidence to cite telling of the impact of this series. But there are anecdotal instances that let me know the series is being watched all over the place.

With all these considerations decided, and the materials gathered, the crew formed, and the visual aids in hand, the advertising was undertaken and the dates set. The plan was to have one evening per week devoted to the actual lectures, and one evening a week given to interacting with the focus group. The series was spread out over six weeks. By the time it was over, there were six evenings used on presentations resulting in twelve episodes taped for television broadcast.

It was gratifying to see that the whole idea worked quite well. The live audience proved quite faithful and curious, interested in listening to the material presented. Attendance held at something a little over two hundred persons each evening until the last two weeks when there was a loss of about fifty people due, at least in part, to the ending of the local college school term. This live audience was not at all disturbed by the presence of the television cameras, nor was it disturbed by the strictures placed on the
format by the need to accommodate to television.

The flow of the presentations, the steady audience, and the expressed level of interest all suggest this experiment was a success. The live audience appreciated the meetings, evidenced by their continued attendance. It seems the decisions made were good ones.

**Final Evaluation**

In dealing with the evaluation of this series of lectures, there remains yet some discussion of the questionnaire administered at the final meeting. I have mentioned that the pre-testing did not go quite as anticipated. To make up for this, at the end of the series a questionnaire was created and given to the audience.

The questionnaire under discussion was made up without any assistance from a professional in the field. The idea was born in the heat of the moment. Necessity proved the mother of invention. Time did not allow for consultation. As a result, this questionnaire may be viewed by professionals as primitive. While the structure of the questionnaire is open to question, it did provide some interesting data to report.

On the evening on which the instrument was given to the audience, there were some 130 people present. This represents an audience smaller than the one that was usually present. I attribute the drop in attendance to the fact that the college school term was done, and students had gone home. Some of the regulars were not present. All people present in the audience were given a questionnaire, and asked to fill it out before
leaving. Of the approximately 130 individuals who received questionnaires, 56 responded.
That represents a return of 43 percent.

The questionnaire asked people to report the number of presentations they had
attended, their age, and whether or not they were Christian by persuasion prior to coming.
There were two questions asking about their interest in attending the series another time,
and whether or not they would be willing to bring non-Christian friends to such a meeting.
A third group of questions focused on their knowledge of the subject matter prior to
attending, the perceived clarity of the concepts presented, and, finally, what the
presentations did to increase their faith in God, the Bible, and the Christian faith. I will
report on these categories in order of personal preference.

In looking at the attendance figures, forty-one reported attendance at ten lectures
or more. One reported attendance at 9 1/2 lectures. That means 75 percent of those
reporting attended at least five of the six evenings. It would seem, then, that the
information from the questionnaire would accurately reflect what happened at the
meetings. Given the rate of return of questionnaires, and the percentage figures of the
number of lectures attended, it seems that, within its limitations, the data should be seen as
reliable.

The data on age reported on the returns are disappointing at first glance as one of
the stated objectives of this project was to speak to young, thinking people. The data
reflect that most of those who attended were in the ranks of the elderly. Fully 53.6
percent of those reporting were sixty-plus. Sixteen percent were between forty-six and
sixty years of age. I believe the raw data do not accurately reflect the whole picture of the
series for several reasons. First, the congregation where the meetings were held has a large segment of older people in it. These retired people are known to frequent any sort of religious meetings. Second, the school term had ended by the time the questionnaire was given, so the college students who had been in attendance had gone home. If the visual assessment of the audience counts for anything, it is clear there were considerably more young people during the earlier meetings than what the data report. Third, it is quite possible that the younger people did not go through the trouble of filling out and returning the questionnaire. For these reasons, I do not believe the raw data on this matter of age accurately reflect what happened.

Another disappointing statistic had to do with whether those attending were Christians or not. One hundred percent of those reporting counted themselves Christian prior to attending the lectures. In view of the stated objective of trying to speak to the secular and unchurched people of our time, this statistic was disturbing, at first. Upon some reflection, however, there are some mollifying considerations that may take some of the edge off. For one thing, the nature of the advertising was a mitigating factor. Advertising was done only to church people because of the desire to provide an atmosphere hospitable to the taping of the lectures. That decision was considered and deliberate. In consequence, the general public did not know about the series except through invitation from their churched friends. Given the maturity of the audience, and its churched nature, many of them, perhaps, do not even know people outside the church whom they might invite. A second factor was that it might have been hard for unchurched people to report themselves present. It might be any who were present were suspicious,
not wanting to give their addresses and opinions away. Nevertheless, these factors are only possible factors. The fact remains, this series did not draw unchurched people.

The data on how familiar people were with some of the subject matter of the presentations revealed the greatest spread of experience or opinion of all the questions. Ten of the fifty-six respondents (18 percent) indicated they were previously familiar with the subject matter. Twenty-five individuals (45 percent) indicated no previous familiarity with the material. and twenty (36 percent) reported that they were “somewhat familiar” with it. The significance of this question was to allow some clearer insight into how clear and persuasive the presentations were.

Regarding the matter of the clearness of the presentations, the overall consensus was that they were clear, in other words, understandable. The raw data revealed 73 percent (forty-one respondents) reported they found the material clearly presented. About 4 percent listed it as “confusing.” The remaining thirteen individuals provided some rather irregular responses, including some who marked both “clear,” and “confusing.” Then four individuals, while they did not mark one of the possible choices, went on to write a note in connection with this question.

The data on the question of willingness to attend a similar series again measured something of the interest people had in the material. The raw data showed 80 percent (forty-five individuals) reporting they would attend again. Three more persons said “maybe,” and none wrote they would not. This was gratifying as it does seem to support some of the assertions made in this project that the philosophical and presuppositional questions are of interest and concern today. It was fascinating to notice that this interest

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
extended even to those over sixty. Given the time commitment this series required, and
the concentration necessary to master the material, it seems to me safe to hold to the belief
that people are seriously interested in these foundational issues.

The last two areas of data described by the questionnaire were most gratifying.
The fourth question asked whether or not the series increased confidence in God, the
Bible, and the Christian faith, and the seventh question asked about people's willingness to
bring non-Christian friends to similar lectures. The data reveal an overwhelming
affirmation toward the meetings' effect on increasing confidence. In this case, fifty-one of
those reporting (91 percent), across all age groups, indicated the lectures did increase their
confidence in God, the Bible, and the faith. Only two individuals responded in the
negative. Here the raw data were gratifying. While there are no data to report on the
lectures' effect on secular people, at least it can be said they provided significant
affirmation of the faith of those who do already believe.

Then there is the matter of people inviting their friends to similar meetings. The
affirmative response to this question received the highest affirmation, 96 percent. Fifty-
four of the fifty-six people who returned questionnaires indicated they would bring non-
Christian friends. Only two responded negatively.

In addition to the specific questions, there was an open-ended one, simply asking
for additional comments to be made. This material, because of the open-ended nature of
the question, is the hardest to quantify. It is worth noting that thirty-two people took the
time to make additional comments. These responses came from across the whole range of
age groups. They were almost entirely positive, but are too diffuse to report on in this project.

While this final questionnaire was not part of the original plan, I am glad it was developed and used, as it made evident some information that would otherwise not have been available. In sum, I took it as reaffirming, considerable enough to encourage me to further pursue this whole idea of a new paradigm.1

Television Program Report

There is one other aspect of this project that should be reported on, that is the actual showing of the videos on television and any response to the broadcasts. At the time of this writing, the programs have been airing regularly on the local television station for about 1 ½ years. Without considerable funding and the use of sophisticated survey instruments such as are commonly used by rating organizations, it is not possible to assemble any hard data on the effect of the television programs. The only kind of data that can be reported on here are very soft data, in the form of stories and anecdotes that have come to me over the intervening time. While these, as data, are very soft, there is now enough of it to reveal that the lectures on television have caught the attention of a number of people who are not churchgoers. And, the indications are that the lectures have been not only thought-provoking, but helpful.

This anecdotal information tends to have come in unexpected ways. For example,

1Since the taping of the public presentations, I have had several opportunities to present the material at ministers' meetings, and it has also served as the basis for a college course I have taught. In all instances, the material has been met with considerable interest and appreciation, some students saying the material saved their faith in Christianity.
my wife was buying groceries one evening when the young woman at the cash register,
recognizing who she was, took a few moments to comment on how she had been
watching the presentations, and that they had been of great help to her in aiding her to
make some kind of sense out of life.

In another instance, I was eating in a restaurant when the owner recognized me
and took a few moments to comment on the value of the lectures. This particular woman
is not connected to a church, but indicated she watches the lectures frequently.

Without citing other particulars, it would be accurate to say there have been ten or
fifteen such encounters over the past year. It would be very interesting to be able to
obtain hard data on the effect of the television productions.

It must also be said that some of the people who have let it be known they are
watching also say the material is challenging. Most of them have told how they watched
the programs several times over in order to understand what was being said. It is clear to
me that the challenge of making the material “public-friendly” remains a significant issue
that I must find a way to address.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter is devoted to drawing some conclusions from this experiment. A number of lessons, conclusions, and suggestions may be drawn from this endeavor. I shall start with the disappointing conclusions first.

The first and most disturbing conclusion I have been forced to draw is that this series did not prove to be evangelistic, at least not in the traditional sense of winning converts. It did not bring even a single person to the point of baptism, if that is the presumed goal of evangelism. And, in the year during which the programs have been airing on television, not a single person has traced his or her conversion to these programs. This causes me to do some serious thinking about this sort of effort as an evangelistic methodology for the masses. The process is not as clean as I had originally anticipated or hoped.

At the same time, it can also be said that the way this series ended up being conducted was not really a test of its evangelistic ability because the live presentations did not, for the various reasons stated, include unchurched people. And, while they have been aired to unchurched people for some time, there is no way of ascertaining their effect. Nevertheless, the results of the discovery that no one came to the point of baptism does not cause me to even think of abandoning this process in the future. The reasons for this
are several. First is the stated recognition that this kind of philosophical work will, at best, only break down some of the barriers that people in modern society have erected, preventing them from belief. While I had hoped for results better than what I must report, at the same time these results are not a surprise. They were predictable. This series amounted to “philosophical warfare.” The probable outcome would be the dismantling of some of the walls and presuppositional barriers people had erected that prevented them from coming to faith, something that would not be measured by baptism necessarily.

From the beginning, there was not any stated expectation the meetings would result in baptisms. The hope was that they would knock down some of the barriers that prevent regular evangelism from taking hold. In this sense, these results, while disappointing, may be said to be predictable to a point. If this is granted, it may be said this series met expectations. I think it may be said it is not possible from this project to adequately measure the evangelistic potential of this proposed paradigm because it ended up not being tried on the open market. In the future, a more focused test must be given.

I believe there is potential for this method in the open market, but it must be kept in mind that the effects of dealing with presuppositional issues may be much longer term than what is being measured by this project. “Philosophical warfare” is often more drawn out than what traditional evangelistic endeavors are accustomed to. Results are seen down the road a fair piece.

There is also the matter of location. This series was set in a Christian church, a place where secular people are not accustomed to going. If the true potential of this type of meeting is to be properly measured, the experiment must be tried in a neutral location.
One idea that is forming is to try it on the campus of a secular college. Making these presentations might be combined with an idea currently being experimented with in the Upper Columbia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in which, on a secular campus, a few college students are invited to a series of lectures to serve as paid evaluators of the presentations. These student evaluators frequently become quite engaged with the material they are listening to, some of them actually coming to faith. It is conceivable that the philosophical and presuppositional material suggested in this new paradigm might grasp their attention more powerfully than the traditional method does. Were such an experiment to be tried, the fact that the students have no Christian context would mean that their reactions would produce more reliable data about the effectiveness of this approach that this project did. At the same time they would be exposed to the subject matter undergirding Christianity. It would be interesting to measure the effect of such a series on their opinions. If that kind of setting still produced no changes in thoughts or lives, then it might be well to conclude this sort of effort is not an effective evangelistic strategy for secular moderns.

Another context that might make this material more evangelistic is to combine it with some forum in which it is presented in the context of good personal relationships. There is an abundance of evidence that people are most persuaded by friends, and also by informal information. If this material could be set in a personalized context rather than in a quasi-academic one, perhaps the new paradigm would realize what I still think is good evangelistic potential. This idea grows more powerful when noting the high percentage of attendees who expressed a willingness to bring friends to such meetings. If their
friendship could be combined with discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of faith. There might be a power force for evangelism unleashed. This idea must be tried.

Doing this series of meetings has forced me to draw another conclusion that I do not particularly like, namely that I am apparently more interested in the philosophical and presuppositional issues than are most of the people on the street. That is not to say the people listening were not interested. Interest levels seemed high. But judging by some of the comments made by members of the focus groups, I got a bit more carried away with the philosophical issues than was necessary. The intellectual level was high, perhaps too high, or at least higher than what the average person in the audience felt comfortable with. The data from the survey indicated that while the material was clear to many, some struggled to catch on. Lowering the intellectual level and the level of abstraction, to some degree, may make this project a better tool.

I also have to consider the fact that most of the general public may not be as infected with hostility to the Bible as I might have first thought. While there is considerable hostility in a lot of academic settings, it may not have filtered out as much as I at first assumed. Certainly, the continued success of traditional methods indicates there is still a considerable residue of goodwill and acceptance of the Christian world-view. If I were to try this again, it would be with a more moderate intellectual tone about it, especially on the epistemological matters.

All these realizations have been disappointing. I had expected better. Nevertheless, in the midst of the disappointing findings is an exciting one. While this series did not prove to be evangelistic, it proved to have a considerable effect in
reaffirming existing faith. In fact, the data revealed the major accomplishment of the series was in increasing people's confidence in God, the Bible, and the Christian faith. If it cannot be said this material is evangelistic, it can be said it is faith-building. That is something very much needed and very much worth pursuing. It might be that the real benefit of this suggested paradigm would come from changing the focus from evangelism to affirmation. The subject matter of this series clearly resulted in the confirmation of people's faith, from young to old. It helped them make sense of their faith systems. They got to look behind the beliefs they hold to see the philosophical structures behind them. And they found those structures well formed and solid. If that is not primarily evangelistic, it is still valuable and should not be wasted.

A number of possible forums for exploiting this potential come to mind. One idea is the idea of a summer camp experience where young people (or people of all ages) are brought together for a week to be exposed to the material. There might be several hours of instruction every day, laying out the basis for faith. This would be an enjoyable format. And it might be a good place for people to bring their friends, an informal and non-threatening forum, where the barriers usually erected against the church and its beliefs would be low. The combination of informality, friendship, and content might be a winning one, perhaps evangelistically, but certainly for the affirmation of faith.

Another possible place for exploiting the faith-affirming potential of this material would be the development of some kind of a local church curriculum, for use in a small-group setting. A Sabbath school class could devote time to it, or a pastor's class.

A third forum might be to frame the material for a college-level class, to be taught
in the setting of a Christian college. The formative nature of college years and the presumed existence of faith might provide the ideal conditions for these ideas to reach full flower.

So this project concludes. From a personal perspective, it was well worth doing. While the amount of effort that went into it was considerable, the discipline and learning have been good for me. I have read a lot of books and become better informed with the details of some complicated but valuable subjects. The level of personal interest in the foundational issues of Christianity has grown, and my interest in sharing such information has grown, too. I continue to anticipate that the foundational issues will be the big issues into the future, and that more and more those who engage in evangelism will have to become conversant with them. To be sure, not all the anticipated outcomes proved true, but several others emerged that I intend to pursue into the foreseeable future. And, I hope, such continued efforts will result in the birth and affirmation of faith in the lives of a whole host of people, young and old.
APPENDIX A

EVALUATION MATERIALS
Hi David,
At lunch time I reviewed the abstracts of the ten lectures you will present in the coming weeks. I have just a few remarks and questions the answers to which I am afraid escape me:

Lecture 1. The "great challenge" is an interesting concept. Do we have any evidence outside our own culture and belief system that this great challenge as you describe it is the similar starting point for the secular person? In other words, what do secular men and women say is their "great challenge"? I'm not sure I know and I'm not sure we will find consensus on the answer to this question. Perhaps a writer somewhere has addressed this.

The advantage of your starting point is that it attempts to meet the human being from the point of view of the common human existence. While I personally like this starting point since it holds promise of providing the most meaningful setting for dialog with the secular mind, some conservative Christians may criticize because it does not begin with God. Also, while we might attempt to start from a common human existence point of view, it will be very difficult to achieve this since we all come to the discussion table with cultural, psychological, spiritual, physical, social, economic, political and a host of other influences already at work in our lives.

Lecture 2. I like your approach to identifying where the spiritual life comes from. It might be helpful for people to hear something of what is included in spirituality.

Lecture 3. I agree with your last statement regarding presuppositions. This is something I have believed for years. Reading it now brought to mind a new question for me: from the secular mind's perspective, what is the point of arguing about presuppositions? When we discuss with the secular man the presuppositions, what are we trying to accomplish? The traditional Christian objective, as I see it, is to show the secular mind that our presuppositions are better than his. But, as you say, since this type of discussion is so technical, is there an opportunity to reach the "common secular man"? Or should we be training ourselves to simply debate with the great minds? The gospel commission suggests that it is the common man we should be interested in.
Lectures 4. and 5. I view the "data" and the "system" as inseparable and integrated. One continually influences and is interdependent upon the other and both come from culturally influenced presuppositions. Can we ever find a person who is able to engage in pure "exegesis"? How can we ever avoid the traps of exegesis? Or, is it important to try to avoid these traps? Perhaps we should simply recognize the various elements that we bring to the data as we try to make sense out of it.

You refer to data from outside of the human experience and that is more reliable, superior, etc. I assume you are alluding to the Scriptures. If that assumption is correct, I don't agree that Christian scriptures come from outside the human experience. I think they were developed within the context of that experience. To say that there is a data source that is superior suggests a few questions: a) Why do we need to find the superior data source? b) How will we know that we have found it? c) How will I determine what "system" should be used to evaluate the data source. d) Where does this need on the part of Christians come from to have a superior data source and system? When I see the word superior I feel nervous that we are treading dangerously close to what Dr. Staples used to call "ethnocentrism".

Lecture 6. Where will you discuss the questions surrounding the issue of whether or not R is important to answer the question of the existence of God? I suspect that some secular minds are not concerned with that question even though it may be an important question to Christians. They may be asking different questions.

Lecture 7. You use the "uniqueness" argument as others have done. I assume that you don't mean "unusual". If you present this argument, you might want to spend some time showing how inspiration process for Christianity is unique compared with what other religions have asserted regarding their sacred writings.

Lecture 8-10. This will be a helpful series. Please spend some time demonstrating the historical transformation in human consciousness since the time of Christ. You might want to talk with Pastor (name withheld) at LLU SDA Church. He has recently completed this type of analysis. It is very revealing. And, although he has received some criticism for it, (name withheld) has done some study on this, too, I believe.

Can you conclude your series with short descriptions of the areas you feel provide the most promise when dialoguing with the secular minds? Also, can you suggest the types of forums or settings in which dialog might be acceptable for both Christians and secularists?

When I started this note, I didn't intend to be this long winded. Please accept my apologies. And, take my questions / comments as impure grains of salt compared with what the great thinkers have dreamed up over the years. You have tackled a huge project. I commend you for this and wish you well as you develop the material.

Thanks for letting me know about this series.
Dear,
I want to tell you how much I enjoyed working with you and your Committee. It is what church is all about in book. People from diverse backgrounds all sharing in a common goal of spreading the gospel.
I don't have any real suggestions. This was a learning experience for me. I will be interested in reactions to the TV programs. My one wonder is if people will follow all the way through. Not many people are really committed to such in-depth study. I would like to see you do a series where you shorten the first section of the book. Continued through the doctrine of the church in the same style. Something like a more Christian viewpoint. The themes could come quicker, so some would drop out because it is too Christian, but some might stick through just to see in a short time where your own position ends up at. Blessings. Thanks again!
Evaluation sheet for

“What's It All About?”

Please be so kind as to take a few minutes to respond to the questions below. Your assessment of the series is of great value.

1. How many presentations did you attend? _________

2. Were you previously familiar with the concepts and ideas presented?
   Yes  No

3. I found the presentations to be:
   1. clear  2. confusing  3. frustrating  4. irrelevant

4. This series increased my confidence in God, the Bible, and the Christian faith.
   Yes  No

5. Would you attend or watch this series again? Yes  No

6. Are you a Christian? Yes  No

7. Would you bring your non-Christian friends to a series like this?
   Yes  No

8. What is your age bracket?  1-15  16-20  21-30  31-45  46-60  60+

9. Please make additional comments below:
APPENDIX B

LECTURE OUTLINES
Appendix B

Lecture Notes

"WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?"

"MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE"

LECTURE 1.

Intro:
■ Hello, and welcome to "What's It All About?" a series of presentations that is going to focus on the question of making sense out of life.

■ I am Dave Thomas. I will be the host and presenter for this series. I would like you to see me as a fellow-traveler on life's road. Like many of you, my mind is active and inquisitive. It is prone to ask questions, to think, and meditate. Over the past 6-7 yrs. I have been drawn to wrestle with some of the fundamental questions surrounding human existence - What's It All About? "How do we as humans make sense out of life?"

■ I have been fortunate enough to find some very satisfying answers to these questions that I intend to share as we journey together. I hope you will join me for the journey.

Beginning:
■ Perhaps the best place to begin is with the observation that life here has a beginning, and it has an ending. This fact is obvious to even the most casual observer.

■ We all know we had a beginning. This process of beginnings is no longer shrouded in mystery. We know about:
  - conception.
  - gestation.
  - and birth.
This is one boundary of life.

■ At the other end, life is bounded by death. It is not something we like to think about, or talk about.

Nevertheless, we all face the prospect of a day when we will no longer be.

We may fend that day off a little, fudge & cajole few more yrs. than some, but the day will come. It is unavoidable.

■ Life on this planet us very uncertain. We realize at a very young age that we are vulnerable.

Experience makes it very clear to us that from the moment of conception to the moment of actual death, we are vulnerable, our lives are in constant jeopardy.
"From our earliest moment to our last we are vulnerable. Destruction - physical, mental, emotional, spiritual - threatens us at all times. A fall from a curb, a lost job, a bitter word, a public humiliation - at every point we feel the hazards of life. The great bulk of human activity of every kind aims at lessening that vulnerability. Making money, seeking love or accomplishment, buying insurance, courting power, wearing the right shoes, writing books, having children, reading books, not having children, not reading books - all these and countless other daily activities are ways of protecting ourselves from the myriad threats to our sense of personal safety and well-being." Daniel Taylor, p. 22.23.

The fact that life is:
- bracketed by a beginning and an ending,
- with vulnerability written all over the middle,
leisure urgency to existence.

We do not have life to waste. We are driven to make life count.

How terrible to come to the end of life to find,
we wasted the only life we have.

So every person is presented with a challenge

- to make sense out of life,
- to find some significance,
meaning.

If we fail in this quest,
life is lived in confusion.
it is wasted:

We end up struggling with:
- meaninglessness,
- emptiness,
- overtaken by cynicism,
- depression.
- even hopelessness.

DRIVE FOR MEANING:

- This urgent need to find meaning in life is, arguably, **the most fundamental drive in all human experience.**
  - (Freud argued that sex drive was, Adler said drive for power)
  - (Freud argued that sex drive was, Adler said drive for power)

- Austrian psychologist Viktor Frankl, in a very interesting book entitled "MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING," contends the drive for meaning is more fundamental than all others.

- Frankl's belief in this idea came as a result of
  - his experiences in the death camps of the Second World War.

In those camps were found, the worst of living conditions.

Those who came there were deprived of everything:
- freedom,
- dignity,
- food,
- intimacy.
The adversity of circumstance shut down other drives. But, Frankl observed, when all other drives were gone, the need to find significance and meaning continued.

He writes:

“Long after the concentration camp experience had stilled (all other drives), the drive for meaning burned bright, enabling many to survive unspeakable treatment.” (Quoted from “Warning: Nonsense is Destroying America, p. 45.)

Frankl observed this need to find meaning was the last thing to go.

The presence of meaning in life enabled survival. As long as someone had:
- a loved one to live for,
- an unfinished project in life,
- or a place waiting for them,
- (something to give meaning to life),
their survival rate was markedly higher than those who had nothing.

In Frankl’s mind, this was powerful evidence that the need to find meaning is the most basic drive, in human experience.

If Dr. Frankl is correct, (and I think he is.) then we may say about every human, ourselves, MUST make sense out of life, or it is:
- void of significance,
- wasted.

PROCESS:

- We can say with a high degree of certainty that the search for meaning is not an event, but a process.

It is not something that occurs in an instant, but over time.

It is essentially a process of: ‘sorting and classifying life experiences.” (Nonsense is Destroying America, p. 45.)

ILLUSTRATION:

In my garage is a can of screws, nuts, bolts, washers, misc. I tend to collect such items as valuable. Can is of little use because of its mixed up contents. One day, I lent order to it, dividing things up into categories, putting similar items in same place. Contents now more usable, therefore more valuable.

So with life.

This process of sorting and classifying life experience is, actually nothing more than distinguishing between, things like:
- truth and falsehood
- reality and illusion
- wisdom and foolishness.” (Ibid.)
- logic and illogic
- knowledge and ignorance
- excellence and mediocrity
- profundity and superficiality
- “good and evil” (Ibid.)
If we manage to find some process of classifying experience that works, then life is good. It makes sense.

If not, then life is:
- dreary,
- hopeless,
- miserable.

WORLD VIEW:

- The major instrument in the process of making sense out of life is something called “world-view.”

- World-view is essentially our picture of how the world, or cosmos, is constructed.

- An example might be the ANCIENT world-view, E.G. the Babylonians.
  - world was flat, domain for humans;
  - underneath was the nether world where the dead were.
  - above, separated from earth, were the heavens, the last of which was domain of the gods;
  - permanent separation.

A. Definition:

“A world view is a system or body of beliefs and assertions that explain the way things are.”

- A well-constructed world-view cuts down vulnerability by allowing for:
  1. Existence of understanding;
  2. Some ability to predict;
  3. Development of survival strategies;
  4. Co-operative strategies;
  5. Ability to preserve information, and pass it on to descendants.

ALL OF WHICH REPRESENTS ADVANTAGE, LESS VULNERABILITY.

CHARACTERISTICS of world-view:

- Largely unconscious to us.
- Seldom do we examine it.
- Thoughtlessly adopted/absorbed from cultural surroundings.

- Need not be:
  - logical,
  - defensible,
  - reasonable,
  - or consistent.

- Tend to be:
  - self-verifying,
  - self-sustaining.

- Some are destructive, even bizarre, E.G.
  - Nazism,
  - views of drug addicts, alcoholics, abusers.

Once in operation they process all information, and evidence in harmony with their own tenets, appropriating that which verifies their outlook,
and defusing, discrediting, and ignoring that which doesn’t.

- World views do not like opposition/challenge because it portends a change in the order of the universe “because by threatening our present understanding or reality they threaten our essential security.” Taylor, p. 25.

- techniques for fending off competition are varied: “These include ignoring their existence, belittling and caricaturing the enemy to make it unattractive, considering only selective evidence, threatening dissenters within one’s own group, appealing to tradition, ostracizing, and so on.” Taylor, p. 25.

- defense of a world view is instinctive. “When people defend their world view, they are not defending reason, or God, or an abstract system; they are defending their own fragile sense of security and self-respect. It is as instinctive as defending one’s own body from attack.” Taylor, p. 25.

OUR OWN WORLD VIEW IS THE PLACE WHERE OUR BELIEFS AND OUR INSTINCT FOR SELF-PRESERVATION SUBTLY INTERTWINE.

World-view is what we use to: - make sense out of life, - limit vulnerability.

- World-views are amongst the most powerful things in the world. We live and die by them.

- We build: - cultures - and sub-cultures around them.

CHALLENGE:

- It is here that we are confronted with a GREAT CHALLENGE, not just to find meaning, but to find authentic meaning, build a world-view on “truth.”

The basis of meaning must be sound, anchored in reality, not fable or fantasy, linked to the way things really are.

- The authenticity of this search is absolutely critical to the establishment of meaning in life. Observe the remarks of psychologist Chris Thurman:

“Most of our unhappiness and emotional struggles are caused by the lies we tell ourselves...and until we identify our lies and replace them with the truth, ...well-being is impossible.” (Ibid., p. 44)

SUMMARY:

- Life has a beginning and end;
- There is lots of vulnerability in between;
- We sense great urgency to make sense out of life.
- Work to build it on truth.
Lecture 2.

Connection Between World-View & Spirituality:

- Welcome back to "What's It All About?" I am your host and presenter, Dave Thomas. We are on a quest to understand how it is humans make sense out of life.

- In our last segment we talked about world-view. We described it as being an assembly of beliefs, presuppositions, ideas that we use to systematize experience.

- In this session I want to return to that subject, push the boundaries of our understanding by observing that there is a link between world-view & spirituality.

- There is a lot of talk about spirituality today. Our understandings of it are somewhat nebulous, but there are a number of things that we do know about spirituality.

**WE KNOW:**

- **Spirituality** is an inner dimension. Within the human psyche, hidden away inside, where few people can see it, and very carefully protected and preserved is this thing called "spiritual capacity."

- (Notice that we all have a public dimension that is readily seen by those who observe us. This dimension is connected to the inner one, but not directly. We are regularly hypocritical publicly, creating a facade behind which we safely hide.)

- I would define the inner spiritual dimension as an unavoidable capacity to worship found in every human being in every society.

- It is the capacity to have faith in something, to trust, to believe.

For some reason every human has this all but irresistible urge to:
- find something to worship,
- to attach themselves to, in order to find meaning and security.

- Along the way I have been fortunate enough to stumble on the writings of several researchers, psychologists, psychiatrists, who have devoted time and effort to exploring this inner dimension.
Allport & Ross, who speak of “intrinsic religion,” “private religion,” “personal spirituality.”

They describe the contents of this domain as consisting of highly personal beliefs about: life; identity and sexuality; family and origin; expectations of self and others; attitudes toward personal risk-taking; life goals and relationships; personal hopes and dreams; ideas we use to make sense out of life.

So-o-o we may say the spiritual dimension of life is essentially its INNER CORE, that contains an assembly of ideas and beliefs and hopes that: make up our identity, and provide us with reasons for living.

It is in the spiritual dimension that we: keep our code of life, keep our very selves.

The spiritual dimension is INTENSELY PRIVATE. We are extremely protective of this inner dimension. We hide it behind a facade. We only reveal it when we sense a high degree of safety.

Kurt Lewin
I was charmed some years ago to stumble across his writings; (I know very little about this man) but he has given this inner space a name I like a great deal “Life-space.”

Quote:
“...we all have a highly personalized “life space” in which we live and express our own unique spirituality - a space which is filled with all the ideas, assumptions, behaviors, beliefs and attitudes we have constructed."

SO-O-O-O, deep within the human psyche is a “space” where we keep a “code of life”, an assembly of ideas, assumptions, beliefs, that explain the universe to us.

It is these things that make up our worldview. They form a “grid,” a “filter” through which we pass the experiences of life.

It is these things we use to organize and explain life experience, thereby making sense out of life.

VERY IMPORTANT TO NOTICE: The inner dimension of life is PRIMARY.

Let me quote from Mr Lewin again:
“Since spirituality encompasses what we believe about God and religion, as well as our everyday values and behaviors both secular and sacred, it may be a more accurate reflector of our true faith than our publicly shared religious beliefs and practices.”

- His statement is too tentative.
- Without question the inner dimension drives the outer one.

We die for what is inside.
- seldom for what is outside.

E.G. Heaven’s Gate Cult graphic example.

- I would like to contend that at birth, the spiritual capacity is present, but largely empty.
- It is like a blank memory.
- The operating system is there, but no data.

- As you go through life, especially in childhood, you gather information from:
  - places of “authority”,
  - parents,
  - books,
  - teachers,
  - peers,
  - experience, to put inside.

- This inner assembly of beliefs and assumptions, coupled with the way you live out those beliefs, constitutes your religion.

NOTE:
- I am not here speaking about the Christian religion, but religion in general.

- Another way of saying this is, whatever you place in your spiritual dimension to idolize and adore, worship, along with the way you live that out, is your religion.
- Very broad definition.

- By this def.

- professional sports is a religion:
  - places of worship;
  - particular type of dress;
  - certain sources of authority;
  - fanatical adherents.
  - pilgrimages.

- entertainment:
  - “gods”
  - rituals
  - “holy places”
  - adoring, fanatical adherents.

- Patriotism

- Pursuit of pleasure.

- Cult of automobiles.

- Communism.

Let me conclude with a couple of observations:

- There is no human being without a religion.

- Your “religion” informs your world-view, creates the grid through which you filter life experience, thereby making sense out of life.
The great challenge is to have your inner dimension rightly, adequately, truthfully informed.

The religion you subscribe to is critical to meaning, and significance in life.
WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?:”
“MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE”

LECTURE 3.

■ WELCOME:

Hello. Welcome to “What’s It All About?” a series of presentations focused on the subject of making sense out of life. I am Dave Thomas, your host and presenter. I am glad you have joined us.

■ REVIEW

In our previous sessions, we talked about the all but irresistible urge we all have to find meaning in life. We have to find a way to classify experience in order to make some kind of sense out of life. Failure to do so leads to disillusionment, even despair.

■ The major instrument by which we make sense out of life is something called world-view, a collection of ideas, assumptions, beliefs, presuppositions we assemble, drawn from various sources of authority, that we use to create a picture of the cosmos.

■ The various elements of world-view form a grid through which we filter experience.

■ Our own world-views are intimately connected with our spiritual dimensions.” Inside every one of us is a place where we develop and keep our essential beliefs. Our “code of life,” the truths we actually live by. To us they are sacred, and we are careful to keep them safe and private.

■ These dictums, coupled with the way we live them out, form our religion. This def. is very broad, allowing for sports, patriotism, business pursuits, money, pursuit of pleasure - any strong ideology we are absorbed by, to qualify practically as religion.

NOTE:

■ YOUR “RELIGION” and the sensibleness of your life are inextricably intertwined. It is essentially true, that your religion IS WHAT ENABLES YOU TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF LIFE.

■ This is a very important item to understand!!! If this point escapes you, you will wander about a long time in confusion. Or. you may make the discovery by accident.

NEW FOCUS:

■ In this segment, I want to expand our understanding of religious life.

■ THREE LEVELS:

If you analyze religious life, you will come to see there are THREE levels to religious life. These are described in various ways by different people, but I have come to like very much the terminology of a certain Dr. Fernando Canale:
- Practice
- Doctrine
- Presupposition.

Let us look at each one in some detail.

LEVEL OF PRACTICE:

- This is the most obvious level, consisting of the observable things you and I do in living out our religions.

E.G.
- I might find you giving some of your money away, to certain organizations or projects.
- I might observe there are places you refuse to go, or things you would rather die than do.
- All these are visible, concrete, observable things you do in the practice of your religion, living it out where the world can see. This is the first level of religious life. It is the obvious level.

- Several things to note:

  1. This is the most superficial level. It is the “covering” of religion, on the surface.
  2. It is the level at which we are most easily hypocritical. We can “fake” practice for any number of reasons.
  3. It is significant for it is the place where we reveal the true level of commitment to our beliefs. The greater our devotion, the more ardent our practice.
  4. If the reason behind the practice becomes unclear, the practice is abandoned, lost, seen as ridiculous. E.G. Christians, and going to movies.

- I might find you wearing certain clothes, like some kind of a robe, or hat, or shoes, or jewelry, or some particular item identifying you with your objects of worship, like a Raiders Jacket, or “Air Jordan” Shoes, or a Saffron robe.

- I might observe that you eat certain foods, or refrain from eating certain foods, especially during certain seasons of the year.

- It might be you going to different gatherings of people, like football games, or car shows, or church services, rallies.

- You might adopt certain body postures at times, standing with arms raised, bowing down, kneeling, jumping, or even going into a frenzy!

- You might undergo certain rituals, like chanting a phrase over and over, being ritually washed as at Christian baptism, lighting candles, or take a solemn vow at some initiation ceremony as when you join the Marines or get sworn in as a judge.
LEVEL OF DOCTRINE:

- This level consists of the assembly of reasons that govern and explain our religious practices. We refer to these as "doctrines."

E.G.
- I might observe that when you go to worship at the shrine of your favorite sports team, you put a latex "hognose" over your own. I may regard that as entirely foolish, but you explain the nickname of your team's front line is "The Hogs." So, by wearing this latex hog-nose, you are making a statement of loyalty & support. The reason for the practice is a "doctrine."

- Perhaps you are seen meditating with a particular type of music attending your efforts. When I enquire, you explain the music is harmonically balanced, designed to help your mind prepare for life in a new age. That explanation is your "doctrine."

- You might be observed making a journey to a great city in the Saudi Arabian desert. Upon inquiry as to your travels, you explain your religion has the belief in order to fulfil religious obligations, at least once in your life you must make the journey. The reason is your "doctrine."

Several things to NOTE:

1. The level of doctrine undergirds the level of practice. It is there to provide solid, believable reasons behind practice.

2. The level of doctrine can be quite complicated. It may take a long time to fully master the complexities of the doctrines. In every religion there are "professionals" who devote whole lives to this pursuit.

3. There is at least a basic, "working" knowledge of doctrine in every believer. Any religion that fails to carry doctrine down to every person dies. A lot of effort is expended in teaching "doctrine."

4. Doctrine presumes some commonly accepted source of authority. E.G. "old story-teller in African society" Bible, or Tradition in Christianity Koran in Islam

5. The level of doctrine is very important because it is at this level that practice gets explained. If doctrine is not clear, practice appears foolish. The younger generation abandons the practice, causing a battle between generations.

LEVEL OF PRESUPPOSITIONS:

- Most of us deal only in levels 1 & 2. We never realize there is a THIRD level.

- Doctrine is not created out of thin air any more than practice comes into vogue without reason. Doctrine is built on something - presupposition.

- Def. "Presupposition"  
  "to suppose or assume beforehand"  
  "to take for granted in advance"  
  "to require as an antecedent condition"

- Suggesting/saying that underneath the level of doctrine, that is underneath the level of practice, is another level, made up of a collection of assumptions,
surmisings, maybe even conjectures that precede doctrine, form a foundation upon which knowledge is built.

- The level of **practice** is the easiest to understand. The level of **doctrine** more complex, and the level of **presupposition** is more complex still.

- This is a **very difficult level** to understand let alone master because it is **abstract**. It delves into philosophy, gets into some profound questions we are not accustomed to dealing with:
  - What is the process by which we know?
  - What is “Reason?”
  - How does it work?
  - What is the nature of knowledge?

**THINGS TO NOTE**

- Presupposition is the most basic level. Because it is most basic, presupposition is the **MOST IMPORTANT DIMENSION OF ANY RELIGIOUS SYSTEM**

- Because it is the most basic of levels, it affects the other two. If error, or foolishness is included in this level, the others will be faulty.

- Presuppositions cannot be “proved” or “disproved.” There is always an element of **FAITH**. This faith is not irrational. Evidence can be supplied to support it.

**appliances, accents, appurtenances.** You see how well it is kept, or how poorly. Equates to level of **practice**.

- Providing a place for all those things is the framework of the house, **walls, windows, trusses, beams**. It is because of these things & working jointly, that house exists. This equates to the level of **doctrine**.

- Finally, keeping all up and in place is the foundation, down under the ground, where it is seldom seen or worried about. This equates to the level of **presupposition**.

**FINAL NOTES:**

- Most significant arguments about practice, and doctrine are really a waste of time because they are actually issues that arise from the use of different presuppositions. E.G. Creation vs. evolution.

- Arguments that exist because of different presuppositions usually end up confirming people in their own opinions.

- If you want to understand how we make sense out of life, you have to work from the level of presupposition. You have to learn some things about how it works. To that we will turn in next presentation.

**SUMMARY:**

- So you have three levels. You might compare the whole system to a **house**.

- When you enter, you see the **furniture**,
"WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?:"

"MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE"

LECTURE 4.

WELCOME

■ Welcome once again to “What’s It All About.” I am your host and presenter. We are on a journey trying to understand how it is that we as humans make sense out of life.

■ In our last session we talked about the three levels of religious life - practice, doctrine, presupposition.

■ Practice is the most obvious, the least complex, consisting of all the things we do to live out our beliefs.

■ Doctrine is less obvious, but more complex, consisting of all the reasons and explanations that justify our practices.

■ And presupposition, while being virtually hidden, is the most abstract, consisting of an assembly of assumptions, beliefs, “first principles” we hold.

■ Unfortunately for us, if we want to understand how we make sense out of life, we have to delve into the level of presupposition.

■ I am going to move slowly so I can understand. Hopefully that will allow you, who have never before been on this journey, to follow along.

THE KNOWLEDGE EQUATION:

■ If we are going to understand presupposition, we MUST understand how knowledge comes into existence, how it is produced.

■ If you have been with us from the start of these presentations, you recall the great challenge is to have your world-view driven or informed by reality, not fable. Information you use to make up world-view must be “true.” You must obtain knowledge, and that knowledge must be connected to reality.

■ So the question we have to ask is, “By what process is knowledge produced?”

■ There IS a process by which knowledge comes into existence. This is true of all knowledge. Knowledge does not just appear out of a vacuum. It comes into existence by a process, by an EQUATION, if you please.

■ All knowledge, no matter the branch or type, arises from a MATRIX in which there are TWO elements: SUBJECTIVE OBJECTIVE

■ When a subject and an object come into relationship, then the possibility for knowing comes into being.

■ When there is INTERACTION between the SUBJECT AND the OBJECT, then knowledge is precipitated.
- Sort of like having a **good sentence**. Needs a **subject**, and a **predicate**. If not, then you have a phrase, or an assembly of words, but not a sentence.

- Like making a **box**. You have **boards**, and **nails**. When they come into a certain relationship with each other, a box is produced.

- **KNOWLEDGE** arises from the matrix in which there is interaction between the **subjective** and **objective**.

- I have on this **BOARD** a diagram that will help us understand.

**DETAIL EACH SIDE:**

**SUBJECTIVE:**
- soft
- dynamic
- capacity to evaluate
- capacity to manipulate
- quality
- **system**

**OBJECTIVE:**
- static
- facts,
- numbers
- quantity
- collection of things
- **data**

**CONSIDERATIONS** on the **OBJECTIVE/DATA** side:

- This consists of ideas, facts, numbers, observations, findings. This is the “**raw material**” that is run through the process.

- It is **hard**, **constant**, **unbiased**, **objective**. It is the domain of fact, not faith.

- Our great concerns are:
  - Was it obtained by reliable methods?
  - Is there an adequate sample?
  - Has the data been reliably preserved?
  - Is the data “raw” or “refined?”

- **DATA** may be of little value. even unintelligible without some system to understand it.

- **ILLUS:** Bob and C++ programming. **DATA**

**CONSIDERATIONS** on the **subjective/system** side:

- This side is “soft,” malleable. There is a “**FAITH ELEMENT**” here, and intersection between **faith and reason**. (more on that later).

- It consists of an assembly of **principles of interpretation**. These are certain **presuppositions** that individuals have adopted. They are “starting ideas”, **pre-established** opinions or positions.

- There is an element of “faith” or “trust.” Not everything here is provable.

- The presuppositions are **not illogical**, nor unreasonable. They are accepted because some evidence is found in their favor. They show promise of helping us understand.

- These “starting ideas” are then tested against the data. If they work, we keep them.
This "system" is just as important to the development of knowledge as data is. The "starting ideas" you put into the system side very definitely affect the knowledge produced. Our rationalistic society rebels against this idea.

ILLUS:
Back to Bob with emphasis on C++ language.

CONSIDERATIONS about knowledge:

- Knowledge is the "bits" of "treated data" that precipitate from the matrix.
- An accumulation of bits of knowledge form SUBJECT MATTER, an area of interest or study.

SUMMARY:

- Subjective/Objective
  System/Data

- Interaction between these produces knowledge, that forms subject matter which becomes part of world-view by which we make sense out of life.

ILLUS:
Carding Machine at Old Sturbridge Village
- wool = data
- machine = system
- clean wool = knowledge

ISSUE:

- This may seem all nice and neat, now.
  But there is a THORNY PROBLEM. Which side of the knowledge equation do you begin with? Data or System.
“WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?:”
“MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE”

LECTURE 5.

WELCOME:

Welcome once more to “What’s It All About?” This is a series of presentations that looks at how it is we as humans make sense out of life.

I am Dave Thomas, your host. If you are joining for the first time, please be aware you are joining in the middle of this series.

INTRO:

- Over the past FOUR presentations, we have been taking things apart: World-view, - the spiritual dimension, - levels of religious life, - and last time, the way knowledge is produced.

- During this session, I want to take ONE more thing apart. After that, we will begin to put things back together.

- Taking things apart is sometimes hard, but it is very beneficial. When you have things all apart, you then begin to understand how all the parts inter-relate.

ILLUS:

As a young boy at summer camp, taking an auto-mechanics class.
The teacher explained all the inner workings of the automobile. I sat fascinated.

After that class, the mystery of the machine was gone. I had the rudimentary ability to work on cars.

Relationship to cars forever changed; So with life.

KNOWLEDGE EQUATION:

- Let us go back to where we left off last time; been talking about the knowledge equation, the matrix from which knowledge is produced.

- The hope and goal is to find what we call “truth.” We are very afraid that if we never find “truth”, we will waste the only life we get here.

- OBJECTIVE side, made up of:
  - facts.
  - figures
  - hard data.

- SUBJECTIVE side, made up of:
  - presuppositions
  - assumptions
  - capacity to think, evaluate.

- INTERSECTION of the two precipitates knowledge, which is “processed data.”
  A collection of knowledge produces a subject matter.”

- Need to understand how equation works:
* body of data.  
- facts, information, figures, etc.

* system of interpretation.  
- presumptions.  
- based on evidence, but unprovable  
- the capacity to think, evaluate, decide.  
  the elements of system churn together, produce knowledge.

WHERE IS THE ACTION?

- DATA is static;

- Activity produced on system side;

  There can be found two “working agents”:
  - Faith  
  - Reason.

FAITH

- Faith is basically “trust,” the willingness to believe.

- Found at the level of presupposition:  
  - presups. are assumptions;  
  - pre-formed opinions;  
  - based on evidence;  
  - not provable empirically.  
  - calls for AN ELEMENT of “faith.”
  “belief.”

- In every system there is always an element of “belief,” “faith”

REASON

- Reason is the capacity to:  
  - think,  
  - compare,
  - evaluate,  
  - conclude,  
  - manipulate data.

- Both of these are on the SYSTEM side.

  * “Faith” is at work in the establishment of the presuppositions - we “believe” them,

  * and reason is at work as the process by which we interact with the data - we evaluate, think, conclude.

  - So:
    - the data is acted upon by a system of interpretation;  
    - system has two active agents  
      - faith and reason;  
    - if you have all the right elements in place,  
      - knowledge called TRUTH emerges,  
      - to be used in creation of authentic world-view,  
      - enables us to make sense of life with is the GOAL.

Quote:    Daniel Taylor

- “We engage in this process called reason, and we exercise this thing called faith..., and we hope to end up with something approximating what for many centuries we have called truth.”
  
  Taylor, p. 67.

Illus:

Washing machine:  
- clothes = data  
- soap = presupposition “faith”  
- water = “reason”
  churn it all, and it gets clean.
EXPLORE THESE TWO AGENTS
MORE:

FAITH:

- There is not much to be said about faith - it is basically "belief".
- the willingness to trust:
- based on evidence.

REASON:

- Reason is very different:
  There is a whole lot to say about

REASON:

- Def.
  It is the capacity of the mind to
  think, evaluate, draw conclusions - a
  PROCESS.

  "whole mental process of generating
  beliefs, opinions, points of view, and
daily explanations of our experiences
in the world.."  Taylor, p. 50.

- In our society we have a very high
  opinion of reason;
  The common perception is that it is:

  "some transcendent, immutable
  faculty to which all thinking
  people have access and which
can be employed at will to
separate truth from error.”  Taylor, p. 50.

- Widely thought of as being:
  - UNBIASED;
  - OBJECTIVE;
  - not influenced by what is outside it.
  - predictable.

- Believed, partic. in scientific world, that
  reason is
  “ the ultimate weapon in the battle
  for truth.”  Taylor, p. 51.

- ILLUSTRATIONS:
  - Bread-cutting machine
  - food processor

- IT is easy to go on and conclude that it is
  also the ultimate. if not ONLY, tool for
understanding human existence. p. 67.

IN TRUTH:
  this is a very optimistic,
  and unrealistic view of reason.
  and its capacities.

- The closest we ever get to this concept of
  reasoning is:
    when using logic,
    or when testing hypotheses via
scientific method.

REALITY is quite different:

- Reason is NOT:
  - "pure"
  - entirely objective;
  - as dominant as we think:
  - has some very significant limitations.

- E.G.
  * very inadequate when trying to describe
relationships.

(explain love)

* hopeless in matters of aesthetics.
(detail a piece of art)

- It is NOT a clean, unbiased instrument of
  process as we are given to believe. “It is
far from a pure and predictable process.” Taylor, p. 50.

Quotes:
■ “It is more like Saturday’s soup made out of the week’s leftovers. It is the nice neat name we give to a mishmash of interrelated forces which includes personality traits and idiosyncrasies, prejudice, emotions, intellectual fads, felt needs, cultural conditioning, and, at times, indigestion.” Ibid.
■ “It is only one part of a tangled complex of forces - ranging from idiosyncrasies of personality and experience to general cultural and historical conditioning - that help shape what we believe.” Taylor, p. 68.
■ “Our ‘reasoning’ is really (an) everything including -the-kitchen-sink process...”
■ Reason is morally and practically neutral, to be used as the user chooses.

It is what enables the user to draw evidence in from outside to the service of their presuppositions.

(that is why both sides in an argument may use the same evidence, but to support opposite sides.)

It may serve truth as well as error

Quote:
■ “The reasoning process does not first serve truth, but rather the needs of the person exercising it. It is the genie in the bottle, willing to do whatever its master bids - and, like the genie, not caring particularly who the master is. Do you have a position, and more importantly, a sense of security that needs defending? Call on reason and it will generate defenses ad infinitum. Have you changed your position? Nothing to worry bout, the reasoning process is infinitely adaptable.” Ibid., p. 69.

■ NONE of this is to suggest reason is useless. It is actually a very useful, powerful tool, used by everyone.

■ but it IS to suggest that:

* Reason is not infallible;

* It CANNOT resolve the basic epistemological problem.

■ Reason alone CANNOT FIND truth.

It is a process that enables us to:
- manipulate data,
- test presuppositions;
- may actually lead us in circles.
- does not solve the problem.

We all begin with presupposition.

CONCL:

■ What is clear here now, is that truth is found when you have:
- good data, and a good system.
“WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?:”
“MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE”

LECTURE 6.

Welcome:

- Welcome again to “What’s It All About?” If you have been journing with us all along the way, you know this is a series of presentations that is trying to look at how it is we make sense out of life.

- I am Dave Thomas, your host. If you are journing mid-way, please be aware we have covered a lot of ground previously. I hope you can follow along without much difficulty.

Intro:

- I promised last time to begin, with this presentation, to put things back together.

- We concluded our last session by recognizing a problem in the pursuit of “truth.”
  - knowledge equation
  - subjective
  - objective
  - reason & faith;
  - How do you avoid just going around in circles?

Reason alone will not do the job.
- It is only a process that serves the user, therefore governed by users starting opinions.

The solution would be to find, some FIXED POINT OF REFERENCE, a STARTING POINT, outside our equation, out beyond the limitations of human knowledge.

If we could do that, there would be:
- real hope of finding truth,
- that could be used to create a worldview,
- that approximates reality
- so we could make actual sense of life.

- For all of human history, humans have POSTULATED a starting point:
  - that out beyond us is another realm,
  - in which can be found deity,
  - God
  - many gods.

Until recently, humans have accepted limitations of human knowledge, and postulated there is deity.

- This position is now regarded as simplistic by many, suggested that those who believe it are:
  - naive,
  - unlearned
  - simple.

  that those who hold it are intellectually inferior.

  Such a position is motivated only by prejudice, by intellectual hubris, by ignorance of the limits of human knowledge.
Because of the way the knowledge equation works, all knowledge has underneath it presupposition, unprovable beliefs.

It is not just the believer who postulates a starting point. everyone does. therefore:

"There is no more spurious use of reason than to suggest that reason demonstrates that faith in God is irrational." Taylor, p. 70.

SO WE COME TO THE MOST BASIC ISSUE. the most fundamental question you can ask:
- Does God exist?
- or Does God NOT exist?"

Either you have an outside starting point, or you do not; all other knowledge begins with an answer, to this question.

IMPORTANT:
This is a matter of belief: - cannot prove it; - cannot dis-prove it.

What about evidence???

- Do not want to speak about characteristics of God, but about the evidences favoring HIS existence.

- Many cogent, powerful, mind-streching arguments.

Come across 28 of them, some more cogent than others.

- I cannot share them all; some of them would leave us quite confused, for their complexity & cogency.

TWO TYPES:
- COSMOLOGICAL - take data from outside
- PSYCHOLOGICAL - take data from within.

- Argument from time and contingency
- Argument from change
- Argument from efficient causality
- Argument from design - spend a little time here; - there is order and beauty around - from either chance or design; - cannot come from chance - univ. must be product of intelligent design - design comes only from designer

- Argument from truth - our limited minds can discover eternal truths about being. - truth properly resides in the mind - but the human mind is not eternal - therefore there must exist an eternal mind in which these truths reside.

I will not pretend to settle this issue with you;
but you must settle it for yourself;  
UNTIL YOU DO,  
YOU WILL NEVER  
MAKE SENSE OUT OF LIFE,  
because you have failed to  
answer its,  
most basic question.

■ It is only in the last several hundred years that,  
humans have postulated no God;

Adopting this presupposition has failed miserably, of enabling us to make sense of life.

This position finally boils down to,  
relativism,  
- no such thing as truth;  
- pluralism becomes deified;  
- left to wallow around in fatalism, nihilism.

It has failed miserably of making sense of life.

When applied to political doctrine.  
- produced the horrors of:  
  - mass murder.  
  - genocide.

Closing Statement
“WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?:”
“MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE”

LECTURE 7.

Welcome:

- Hello! Its a joy to welcome you back to “What’s It All About?”
  By this time you know this to be a series of presentations.
  focusing on the matter of how to make sense out of life.
  I am Dave Thomas.
  your host.

Intro:

- We are at a point in this series now.
  where we are putting things together:

At the beginning,
  we took a whole lot of things apart:
  - world-view;
  - spirituality;
  - religious life;
  - the Knowledge equation.

The goal or quest is to find “truth,”
  authentic information that:
  - describes reality,
  - may be used to build a world-view,
  - that we may enlist to make sense out of life,
  thereby avoiding the prospect of living life,
  coming to its end,
  only to discover life has been wasted.

What we found is that:

- because of the way knowledge itself is produced.
  reason alone cannot find truth for us:
  - reason has to be guided;
  - is guided by presuppositions, unprovable beliefs we hold first.

Presuppositions provide a starting point,
  - without some:
    - “starting point”
    - fixed point of reference,
    reason may serve error as readily as, it may serve truth.

- the way to truth ALWAYS involves “faith”,
  an element of belief.
  otherwise reason cannot function.

Quote:

“There are no unbiased people in the world. The ‘judicial’ attitude of mind does not mean a disinterested attitude. No man ever investigated anything without a predisposition in favor of something. This is well. Truth cannot be found otherwise. A being without a predisposition might indeed exist in the form of a petrified man, but not as flesh and blood.”

Quote again:

“In natural science and in religious and moral science there are ultimate beliefs which are not of such a nature that they ‘cannot be doubted,” and which
are nevertheless held tenaciously as truth.”

Mullins. p. 9.

- Reason is guided by presupposition;
  Evidence may be gathered in support of
  presupposition
  but presupposition ALWAYS has in it an element of belief;

- We all have to start somewhere.
  with some kind of:
  - assumption
  - presupposition;

God:

- During our last presentation I contended that
  the most basic issue to be decided, has to do with the EXISTENCE OF GOD.
  - does God exist?
  - does God NOT exist?

The way you answer this question,
  affects the way you:
  - answer every other question.
  - approach every other issue.

Quote:
(from Ravi Zacharias)

“The questions (about the existence & character of God) are impossible
to ignore, and even if they are not dealt with formally, their
implications filter down into everyday life. It is out of one’s belief or disbelief in God that all other convictions are formed.”

Can Man Live Without God?, p. 8

Quote:
(from Floyd E. Hamilton)
(writing about those who believe no God position)

“No matter how he may try to be unprejudiced, his assumption that there is no God enters all his reasoning processes. It is really impossible for an unbeliever to be neutral in theological discussion. He will view every argument from his anti-God point of view...” p. 16

(Of course, the converse is also just as true.)

- I opted for the “theistic” side,
  THE SIDE BELIEVING THAT GOD EXISTS.

I did so because there are:
  considerable
  and weighty,
  and intellectually satisfying evidences,
  supporting the belief in a Supreme Being.)

Having looked at the evidence,
and come to that conclusions,
there is established for us,
a fixed point of reference in life.

THE ISSUE:

Now the issue changes:

- Since:
  - God exists way out beyond the realm of humanity,
  - man is limited, finite,

IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW
ANYTHING ABOUT GOD?

(If God exists, but we cannot know anything about him, to us his existence if pointless.)

Obviously, if there is anything to be known, it must be because of God's initiative. God must be the one who acts, to make something about himself known; and He must do it in a way man can understand.

Question:

"Is there any place man may look, in order to find out about God?"

There are two possible places, suggestions.
- categories of revelation from God that might be suggested:

1. General:
   General in two senses:
   - universal, may be seen by all;
   - general in content, info. non-specific.

   Refers to God's self-manifestation in:
   - nature
   - history
   - inner being of the human person.

2. Special (specific):
   Specific in two senses:
   - given to particular persons at partic. times; - specific in content.

   Refers to God's:
   - particular self-manifestations made in,

   - particular times,
   - to particular people.

   Available now only by consulting, sacred writings.

I want to look at these two categories, in more detail.

GENERAL:

Creation:
- If God exists, and is therefore the Originator of things, some knowledge of him must be available through, the created physical order.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see that:
- What you make, tells something about you.
- So with God.

Illus:

Stool I'm sitting on I made;
- four of them
- you can learn something about me by looking (don't look too close)

So the person who:
- sits and observes a sunset;
- walks out in the forest;
- sits in biology class dissecting a frog, is exposed to some information of God.

History:
- Beyond that, if God is at work in the world, moving us toward some destiny, then, it should be possible to see within history, some evidences of His activity.
Here we must be very careful, as the evidence may be very soft, very much subject to personal interpretation.

but some people see in singular events, like:
- transition from one empire to another;
- the miraculous evacuation at Dunkirk;
- the unreasonable victory at Midway, evidence of God's preserving action.

Humanity
- We may look at man himself/herself. at his physical, and mental capacities, or better still, at her moral and spiritual capacities.

Look at human beings, and you see:
- conscience;
- a sense of right and wrong;
- the capacity to choose between them;
- spirituality;
- the existence of moral impulse, and moral consciousness.

Much of this is focused away from self-interest, suggesting prior existence.

Once you believe God exists, you can readily discern in each of these something about God.

NOTICE, the revelation that comes via these means is:
- general
- non-specific
- without particular detail.

It is possible to learn some GENERAL things:
- about the greatness of God;
- a God for whom precision is legendary;
- tremendous ability to design;
- lover of beauty
- possessed of intelligence.

IMPLICATIONS of Gen. Rev.
- This type of revelation offers explanation for the worldwide phenomenon of religion in the experience of man.
- No one is completely without the opportunity, to obtain some knowledge about God.
- What we refer to as "knowledge" is, not so much "something we discover," as it is something we "uncover." something built into the universe God made.

Whatever knowledge you find, is not original with you.

SPECIAL REVELATION:

Look at other category; "Special" "Particular" revelation, Can we find in any place, specific revelations of God, given:
- at particular times,
- to particular people,
- made of particular information?

Would have several necessary characteristics:
- It must be "anthropic"
understandable by human beings. 
- in human language;

Illus:
If you wanted to communicate with the ants, you would have to devise some method that used "ant language.

- Communications must be "analogical" there must be a "sameness" of concepts.
  E.G.
  When God speaks of "love" must be analogous to what man means.
  by "love" or there is no prospect of communication.

Given these two necessities, is there anywhere anything that gives evidence of being revelation from God?

You may find it necessary to search and research;
I am quite persuaded there is such evidence:
  recorded occasions when God, By:
  - in specific historical events;
  - Divine Speech;
  - celestial emissaries
  - visions & dreams 
  made Himself known.

There are, within history, human beings who have left record, of revelations from God.

There are many people who, at this point, object loudly, suggesting these people deluded, overtaken by fantasies.

I would remind you that:
if we cannot presume the basic integrity of people.
we have NOTHING trustworthy at all.
  from ancient times.
- no reliable records.
Is foolish to pre-suppose people in antiquity, were out to fool us now.

How many of us go around:
- falsifying documents,
  - obscuring facts
so we can fool those who 2,000 yrs from now might excavate our domains?

Where might you find record of such revelations?

There is considerable evidence you may find it in.
  the book commonly called.
  - the Bible
  - the Holy Bible.

You may want to search far and wide, but I am quite persuaded by the evidence.

EVIDENCES:

There are several I would offer:

- Its Age:
  - has ancient origins as holy book;
  - back to beginnings of history
  - age does not automatically make something holy,
    (unless you are an antique buff)
- claims pre-date whole lot of other claims.

■ Cohesiveness:
- written over period of some 1,600 yrs.
  - by many different authors
  - enormously cohesive;
  - similar thread runs through all.
  - all persuaded messages from God.

The common thread.
the belief that the revelations they received,
were from God.
is evidence in favor of the Bible.

■ Prediction and fulfilment:
- can be found in many places
  - refer to only by way of example
    - Jeremiah & Babylonian Captivity
  - made before hand
  - described the agent of captivity
  - laid out number of years.
  All proved true exactly.

■ Scope & power if its world-view:
- encompasses history & pre-history;
- explains origins;
- accounts for existence of evil & death;
- answers profound question of life & death.

■ Testimony of Community:
Through all of history,
there have been communities that have, held the Bible to be revelation from God.

Where its principles have been lived out,
there has been benefit.
People do not lose when principles of Scrip. are applied.

- 9 of 10 commandments on our law books!

JESUS:

There is the matter of Jesus Christ;
who claimed to be God come to earth,
the most precise revelation of God ever given.

To many this is foolish talk.
Jesus has been demeaned,
denigrated,
marginalized.

But you CANNOT ignore this issue;
You must wrestle with it;

I agree with C. S. Lewis,
you cannot hold Jesus to be just a good man:
  - either he was what he claimed,
  or he was a charlatan;
  (merely good men don’t make such claims)

The record of history,
that charts the effects of Jesus life,
rule out the possibility of him being a charlatan.

SUMMARY:

Can we know anything about God?
The cogent evidence says, “Yes”

- General Rev.
  - physical universe
  - history
- humanity.

Specific Rev.:
- at particular times.
- to particular people.
- God has given particular information;

Quote:
"God has taken the initiative to make himself known to us ... in a fashion appropriate to our understanding."
Erickson. p. 198.

"This revelation includes both the personal presence of God and informational truth."
Ibid.

CONCL
That's all we have time for right now;
Let these issues rest until we have the opportunity to converse again.
"WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?:" "MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE"

LECTURE 8.

Welcome:

- Hello! Here we are again at a presentation, that part of a series called "What's It All About?"

If you have joined us before, you know we are talking about how it is, we as humans make sense out of life.

That is something we are all very concerned over, as we do not want to live our lives, come to the end of them, only to discover that we, never figured things out, so wasted the only life we have.

I am Dave Thomas, your host; I am glad you have joined us, and hope you will stay with us for the next half hour.

Review:

- During our last session, I talked about Revelation from God, pointing out there IS revelation from God, come to us in two ways:
  - general;
  - specific, in a format readily understandable by humans

General comes through:
- physical universe;
- events in history
- study of man.

Specific comes via:
- specific acts;
- divine voice;
- visions:
- dreams
- person of Jesus Christ.

- In this half-hour, I want to press this matter of revelation further.

Whenever you obtain a body of information that you deem valuable, you are concerned to preserve it.

Revelation from God would certainly be, regarded as valuable, at least to the one who received it, and, hopefully to a much wider constituency.

Question:

Has rev. from God been preserved? If so, How so?

Revelation:

Def. "A act of God whereby he makes known to some human some fact, piece of information about himself otherwise unknowable."
When the process is complete, some human has some knowledge about God, specific, lodged clearly in mind.

E.G. Noah & the flood (elaborate)

We may say, in a limited sense, that revelation is preserved there.

But it is of dubious permanence, (person might die) and of not much benefit to others. (no one else knows of it)

Inspiration:

There is another process about which we must learn, “Inspiration.”

“All act of God whereby he enables the person who received the revelation to accurately convey it, communicate it, preserve it.”

NOTE:

Human language is involved.

Revelation describes super-human truths, so language struggles.

The analogical principle pertains. concepts must have congruence, words must have essentially the same meaning.

- God’s “run” approximate man’s “run.”

But the process works:

E.G. Noah preaching, speaking.

When the process of inspiration is done, the content of the revelation is delivered.

Those hearing Noah now knew of the flood.

- information was accurate:

Subsection of Inspiration,

Inscripturation:

“Process of writing down the revelation.”

Can be traced quite nicely:

Here I am going to use a Bible:

Jeremiah 30:1,2

Luke 1:1-4


Rev. 1:11

All evidences of revelations written down, therefore preserved:

- written down things good prospects:
- preserved from generation to generation;
- essentially without change.
- you and I may read it.

If you ever wondered what the Bible is, it is a collection of, many different kinds of writing, that were perceived as having to do with, revelations from God.
Preservation of this material is, notoriously reliable, and accurate.

DATA SIDE:

All this can be put on the DATA side of the knowledge equation.

A reliable, truthful body of data, come into the realm of humanity, by various acts of God.

It stands to reason, if you want to make sense out of life, it is a good body of data, upon which to build a world-view.

In these last few presentations, we have come a long way, from an epistemological conundrum, all the way to seeing the Bible as reliable data.

I have become a proponent of Christianity.

All Christians share this body of data:
   Why so many differences?

In the presentations ahead, I want to take up that issue:

Hint:

It has to do with the SYSTEM side.
"WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?:"

"MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE"

LECTURE 9.

Welcome:

■ Hello. I am Dave Thomas, the host of this series called "What's It All About?"

Let me take just a moment to welcome you to what, by my count is, the 9th episode in this series of presentations.

It has given me a lot of courage to notice, presentation after presentation, those of you who have come to hear.

■ We began some time ago to explore the question of how we as human beings, go about satisfying the great urge we have, to make sense out of life.

Because of the brevity, and uncertainty of life, we are driven to make sense of it, lest we come to the end to discover, we have wasted our time here.

Along the way, we have learned several things:

■ In a most fundamental way, we rely on our religious beliefs to make sense out of life.

■ def. of religion here very broad; Consists of:
  - an assembly of beliefs
  - the way we live them out.

  every human has this unavoidable urge to worship;
  - inside each of us is an inner "life-space" where we store:
    - ideas
    - dreams
    - hopes that we believe are true, that we idolize, govern life by.

We live by those beliefs We use them to sort and classify and evaluate, the experiences of life.

■ The GREAT CHALLENGE that faces us all, is to develop a "religious" system that, most nearly approximates reality.

There is need to build a "World-view" based on, what has long been called "truth"

In the last few episodes, I tried to make a case in favor of Christianity, as the most authentic system of belief.

■ There is the question of the existence of God.
  - most basic of all questions
- took position in favor of that belief
BECAUSE
of the many weighty,
intellectually satisfying arguments,
that lend credence to the view.

■ There is the question of knowing God:
- Revelation
- Communication
- and Preservation of information
from God

There is very credible evidence that
God.
in a GENERAL way,
and in a SPECIFIC way,
has left evidence.
even record of His person & activities.
within the arena of man's comprehension.

It is upon these evidences that,
Christianity is based.

■ Having studied these things myself.
I am not ashamed to tell you.
I am a Christian BY
INTELLIGENT CHOICE.
- not a system of belief built on:
- fable;
- intellectually wimpy constructs.

Many of the greatest minds in history,
ardently subscribed to its beliefs,
because the evidence is so cogent.

■ In our search for "truth,"
even if we accept the pre-suppositions of
Christianity,
we are confronted with the difficult task,
of deciding where WITHIN
Christianity to look.

It is this matter we explore further.

Data/System

■ The Christian world-view is based on,
a whole body of information,
KNOWLEDGE.

■ This knowledge is produced by the
same equation that produces all
knowledge:
- Objective/Subjective
- Data
- System.

■ All the talk about:
- revelation,
- written down information,
- facts,
- historical records.
sits on the DATA side;

■ Christians are pretty much agreed,
that the Bible makes up the DATA side
of the Christian Knowledge equation.

■ With so much commonality and
agreement.
as to the DATA of Christian belief,
Why all the differences in Christian
belief, and practice?

It would take many hours,
of diligent effort,
to encompass the differences in Christian:
- belief
- and practice.

Why all the difference, when the
DATA is the same?
The answer lies on the SYSTEM side.

■ If we are to understand this,
we need to look more closely at the
SYSTEM side.

System Components:

- We have already noted that the "System" is made up of presuppositions,
  - "starting ideas"
  - assumptions
  - pre-existent conclusions.
  - brought up to screen data.

- Presuppositions are in FOUR CATEGORIES:
  (put them on mag. board)
  - Being
  - Ontology
  - Metaphysics
  - Epistemology

(There are other names that can be used, but I have chosen to use these, borrowed from a teacher of mine.)

- These words are somewhat intimidating;
  - big and compound;
  - abstract;
  (I am very glad to tell you I didn’t invent them. You will have to blame the philosophers.)

- The words are intimidating, unfortunately what they mean.
  - the content;
  - what they describe,
  - is even more intimidating.

In actuality,
I face the greatest challenge of this series, in trying to describe these categories.

BEFORE I TRY,
I want you to know,

even if you don’t get the details,
If you know there re four categories, you can still understand how the systems work,

- Being:
  - deals with the "assumed characteristics of reality as a whole.
  - "Principle of Environment"

- Ontology:
  - deals with understanding the parts of reality.
  - "Principle of Reality"

- Metaphysics:
  - how the parts of reality are put together
  - "Principle of Articulation"

- Epistemology:
  - deals with the role of reason,
  - "Principle of Knowledge"

FOUR SYSTEMS:

- The play and counter-play of these "principles" has produced a number of Christian SYSTEMS;
  - emphasis on one aspect -System
  - emphasize another & system changes.

- There are FOUR major systems;
  (there might be as many as 6)
I will list them:
  - CLASSICAL
  - PROTESTANT
  - LIBERAL
  - BIBLICAL

Classical:
It is the oldest.
- goes back to early days of Christianity

The most pervasive.
- subscribed to by vast majority of Christians.

PROBLEM facing the early Christians:
- all kinds of data:
  - stories
  - testimonies
  - quotations
  - instructions
  - various practices.

- How to make it all cohesive?
- Had to find a SYSTEM.

Christian theologians noticed how well Greek philosophers had done in systematizing;
(theologians well versed in philosophy)
Went and borrowed the philosophers system.

Chief Ingredient was DUALISM:
- two realms of existence
- no "passing between them"
- one the reflection of the other.

BEING IS TIMELESS:
E.G. GOD:
- God beyond time;
- sees past, present, future at once;
- impasive;
- “Buddha”

Ontology is dualistic.
- the parts are dualistic:

Dualism of man

i.e. body and soul

the “Divine Institution”
- set up by God:
- presided over by “God’s Representative”
- Administers salvation
- cares for the mysteries
- your job is to stay under the umbrella.

Even the data cared for by the hierarchy.

“Go-betweens,”
- ordination concept

Very cohesive,
- provides answers to most questions;
- satisfying to vast numbers of people

Produced great Christian bodies:
- Roman Catholicism;
- Orthodox churches

PROBLEM:

If DATA inspired, how can you use a SYSTEM taken from pagan philosophy in a search for truth?
"WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?:"
"MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE"

LECTURE 10.

Welcome:

- Once more it is my privilege to welcome each one of you.
  to this series of presentations called.  
  "What's It All About?"

- In our last episode, we began talking about, 
  the various "systems" of interpretation. 
  that can be found in Christianity

- Note the great difference in outcome among those who all profess to believe 
  in the authority of the same data. The differences come because of different 
  "systems" of interpreting the data.

- Review the Classical system:
  - God is "timeless" 
    - all things known to Him simultaneously 
    - rather "un-impassioned" 
    - remote from humans, 
    - "unknowable" except by divine action.
  - There is "dualism" 
    - two realms of existence 
    - mysteries are the go-betweens
  - Church structure is central 
    - the agency God set on earth to administer His business 
    - super-natural powers to

  - leader is the "Vicar of Christ" 
  - salvation is in the structure
  - Reason is subservient to faith 
    - reason cannot by itself find truth 
    - there are many "mysteries"

Protestant System:

- Origins in Martin Luther and the Reformers
  - Experienced dis-satisfaction with the church of the Classical system.
  - They searched the Bible (data) for clues by which to resolve problems of Classical system
  - Luther discovered a cardinal truth in scripture that he saw as a replacement for the Church. It was the Doctrine of Justification by faith.

  - Important to note that Luther was not looking to begin another church, nor was he trying to initiate a new system. In consequence, the Protestant System is not far removed from the Classical.

Details:

- God is still timeless:
  - all knowledge contemporaneous 
  - God knows past, present, future 
  - paved the way for Calvin & predestination 
    - no real choice 
    - destiny best indicated by fruits of life 
    - led to meticulousness of the Swiss
- watches
- train schedules
- work ethic
- some took care-less route

Rasputin

- Dualism still prevails:
  - still two realms, body and soul
  - here Protestantism is like the Classical System

- Reason is still subservient to faith:
  - reason a valuable capacity
  - cannot find truth on its own.

- Justification by faith:
  - here is a great difference
  - does in Prot. what Church does in Classical
    - dominates all, is the main focus
    - OT not so valuable because no Justif. there
    - prophetic portions of Scrip. curiosities
      - sermons tend to focus on central theme
      - Jesus and the events of the cross determine relevance
      - dislike for the book of James
      - salvation comes to those who believe by faith.

Conclusions:

- Luther, though not intending to, produced a whole new system of interpreting the data of the bible.

- The new system, called “Protestant” has proven itself very powerful. It has affected the whole Western world. We know of the “Protestant work ethic,” something other systems of belief have not produced.

- Because Luther was not trying to leave the church, rather reform it, he did not deliberate on all the elements. He took only the urgent matter, the wrongs of the previous system, and substituted a biblical truth in an attempt to fix it. The protestant system differs only in one dimension - Justification by faith instead of salvation in the church.

Problem remains:

- If you see the data of Scripture as inspired, why use a system that has only one of its elements taken from scripture?

- Why not try to take all the elements of a system from the data?

Good-byes:

- I hope you are beginning to see how these systems work. It is complex, but, I hope, comprehensible.

- If we are to find truth, we must have both system and data properly informed.

- I hope to see you next time when we will talk of the Liberal System.
WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?:
“MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE”
LECTURE 11.
Welcome:

■ Once more it is my privilege to welcome each one of you. to this series of presentations called, “What’s It All About?”

■ We are nearing the end of this series; There are 12 presentations planned: This is the 11th.

■ The journey from the start to where we are near the finish, has been long, and in some ways, arduous, requiring disciplined thought.

■ We began by wondering how it is that we as humans make sense out of life, (we all sense the need to answer this Q.)

■ Our conclusion has been that, we use religion and religious belief, to make sense out of life, (religion broadly defined)

We have, each one, a system of beliefs buried inside us, through which we filter life experience, thereby making sense of it.

■ Because of its reliance on revelation from God, I have contended in favor of Christianity, putting it closer to truth, (an authentic description of reality,) than other belief systems.

■ In the last several episodes, I have been speaking of the different “systems” that can be found in Christianity; (there are FOUR at least):
   - Classical
   - Protestant
   - Liberal
   - Biblical.

We have looked at the Classical, and the Protestant. During this presentation, we are going to look at the Liberal system

Liberal System:

■ The terms “Liberal,” “Liberalism” are actually vague terms “descriptive of certain dominating trends in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology.” (Richards Dict. of Christ. Theo., p. 191.)

■ Has its roots in Post-Renaissance science, and in the Enlightenment:
   - great bursting forth of knowledge,
   - gained by “science”
   - not governed nor guided by religion.

■ The central claim was:

“Theology must be formulated in the light of advancing knowledge in philosophy, the sciences and other disciplines.” Ibid.

■ Those who propounded it became very critical of preceding theological
structures believing they had been formulated in "theological and ecclesiastical obscurantism" (to say nothing of scientific ignorance.)

In other words, they believed the explosion of new knowledge, rendered prior formulations suspect.

TWO MAJOR PLAYERS:

1. **Immanuel Kant (1794-1804)**
   - He launched a successful attack on metaphysical thinking, i.e. no such thing as the supernatural.
   - Elevated man to a transcendent position over nature.
     - a thinking and moral creature, triumphant over the natural.

   In this construct, reason and science dominated.

   People in those days had seen what reason, and scientific effort had produced without religious oversight, and it affected their view of how theology should be done.

   - Kant shifted the "locus" point of knowledge from the soul to the "mind or body."

2. **Friedreich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)**
   - He sought to "base Christian belief upon the universal, trans-subjective awareness of God rooted in man's inner aesthetic and religious response to reality..." Ibid., p.193.

   What this means is he shifted the base of knowledge from:
   - cognitive to non-cognitive base;
   - abstract to relational;

   - Revelation from God became connected to feelings, came through "encounters" with God.

   - The idea of having a "relationship with God", became very important:
     - looking for personal encounters, moments of illumination in which truth became known to you.

Prevalence:

- Liberalism very prominent today, especially in Academia; (resurgence of liberalism in 1960's) (many of 60's gen. profs. today)

- Filtered down to the streets; There is a lot of talk about:
  - "relationship with God"
  - tolerance
  - many ways to truth

EFFECTS of Liberalism:

- Human reason and experience became the great avenues to "truth."
  - God known through experience;
  - evaluated evidences by using reason.
  - scientific method used even for revelation

- Anything supernatural was discounted.
  - cannot be tested scientifically;
- knowledge limited to what humans can experience;

- **Truth became subjective:**
  - you know through your experience; that is truth for you;
  - I know by my experience, that is truth for me;
  - our truths may be different, but **be equally valid**;

This gives rise to the **GREAT TRUTH** of liberalism.
- "pluralism"
- "tolerance"

There are many ways to truth:
- you go by yours;
- I will go by mine;
- we will respect each other as we go.

- **Truth is always searched for, never "found."**
  - constantly in search of truth;
  - experience is subjective, so is truth. then;
  - never know for sure;
  - journey can be full of anguish

- **Christianity became one of the ways to truth.**

**HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS:**

- **Being** is no longer timeless:
  - argument going on here;
  - God certainly no longer remote;

- **Ontology** NOT dualistic,
  - there are not two dimension to life;
  - what you see is what is;
  - life is limited to what you can experience;

- **Metaphysical** dimension robbed of supernatural;
  - knowing limited to human realm
  - what you cannot test, you cannot know.
  - miracles are illusions, or attempts to deceive the public.

- **Epistemological** dimension predominates;
  - reason almost absolute, infallible
  - learn truth by "doubting"
  - skepticism a virtue.

**STRENGTHS/CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- Requires people to think;
- Forced careful analysis of data;
- Caused much wider acceptance of different opinions and views.

**SHORTCOMINGS:**

- Far too optimistic about man, human wisdom:
  - elevates human to god-like status;
  - rules over truth;

- Far too optimistic about capacities of reason:
  - remember knowledge equation?
  - reason alone cannot find truth;
  - amongst liberals it is nearly absolute;

- Statements of tolerance have high level of hypocrisy:
  - tolerates only forms of pluralism it accommodates;
  - test by making absolute statement;
  - will be vilified;
  - ignored;
  - marginalized.
- Makes even the revealed data subject to,
  the scrutiny of human reason & experience.
  - Bible subject to criticism;
  - no supernatural accepted, e.g. no miracles

FUNDAMENTALISM:

- Lest you think I am picking on liberals.
  let us look to the other side.
  to FUNDAMENTALISM:

- Not a theological system.
  but thought to be one;
  It is actually a defensive posture.
  very powerful today.

Characteristics:

- Afraid of change.
  - truth very structured;
  - some questions cannot be asked:
  - very focused on absolutes:
  - change always seen as loss.

- Anachronistic
  - works very hard to preserve what was in the past.
  - the past is almost sacred;

- Often a defensive posture,
  - retreat into simpler past;
  - a place of safety;
  - often un-thinking;
  - resorts readily to the use of force;
“WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?:”
“MAKING SENSE OUT OF LIFE”

LECTURE 12.

Welcome:

- Welcome to what is going to be the last episode of.
  “What’s It All About?”
- I am Dave Thomas:
  It has been my privilege to be your host:
- We have covered a lot of ground in this series,
  starting with:
    - world-view
    - how spiritual dimension contains beliefs;
      - beliefs form grid by which to gauge life expr.
Then we talked of:
  - three levels of religious life;
  - how knowledge is produced;
    - limitations of reason
After that,
  - evidences for the existence of God;
  - advocacy for Christianity

- In the last few episodes we have talked of, the various systems to be found in Christendom:
  - Classical
  - Protestant
  - Liberal

These systems have all had strengths, and they have had weaknesses:

* Classical borrowed system from philosophers
* Prot. has only one biblical element
* Liberal relies on human expr. & reason.

Because of their biases, they all do injustice to the data.

QUESTION:

If you accept the Bible as inspired data, is there not a system to be found, or made, that does not do injustice to the data?

IS IT NOT POSSIBLE TO DRAW THE SYSTEM FROM THE DATA?

- During this final episode.
  I want to try to carve out a system, from the data itself.
  If we can do that,
    then we have the best hope of finding truth.

What might it look like?

- BALANCE:
  - in all others one thing predominated:
    - Classical, Ontology
    - Protestant, metaphysics
    - Liberal, epistemology.

Biblical must be balanced.

- Being:
  - must no longer be timeless.
  - data shows God near, interested
  - Eden, came at eve.
  - Sanctuary, after sin.

- Ontology:
  - not dualistic;
- God is vastly different from man BUT there is connection between the realms:
  - God speaks in human terms:
  - man made in image of God.
  - we can know about God.

- your interest & response made it worth it.

- It is my sincere hope that these presentations will, assist those who see them, in their quest for truth.

- Metaphysical:
  - Prot. has Biblical element here;
  - too narrow;

- Share motto of a Seminary:

  "If you want to know the mind of God, you have to learn to use your own."

- I wish for each of you, a destination for your journey to truth.

- Epistemology:
  - reason God-given, but not absolute
  - must be respectful of limits in Knowledge Equation.

- It is time to say, “Good-bye”

- Express great urgency that people NEVER REST, until they are satisfied that, the “truths” they adopt, are produced by :
  - the right data;
  - the right system.

  If there is any real hope for truth, it lies right here.

Concl:

- In few minutes remaining, I want to express appreciation:
  - to live audience
  - those who worked to produce for television;
  - those who have encouraged me onward.

- This has been a lot of work,


Royce, Josiah. The Sources of Religious Insight. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940.


V I T A

David Edward Thomas was born in 1952 on the continent of Africa to missionary parents. He immigrated to the United States in 1971 to attend Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts. After graduating in 1975 with a B.A. degree in Theology, he attended the seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, earning a M.Div. degree in 1978. He entered pastoral ministry on January 1, 1978, as an intern in Stoneham, Massachusetts. After eight months, he was assigned the Amesbury-Haverhill district in northeastern Massachusetts. He has since pastored continuously, serving pastorates in Hartford, Connecticut, South Lancaster, Massachusetts, and College Place, Washington. He is married to Loralee Thomas, nee Minty, and has two sons, Matthew and Jonathan.