



Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World

RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS SPIRITUALITY IN THE WESTERN WORLD (“New Age”)

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“A New Vision, a New Heart, a Renewed Call”

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The context for the production of the Lausanne Occasional Papers

The Lausanne Movement is an international movement committed to energising
“the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.”

With roots going back to the historical conferences in Edinburgh (1910) and Berlin (1966), the Lausanne Movement was born out of the First International Congress on World Evangelization called by evangelist Billy Graham held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in July 1974. The landmark outcome of this Congress was the **Lausanne Covenant** supported by the 2,430 participants from 150 nations. The covenant proclaims the substance of the Christian faith as historically declared in the creeds and adds a clear missional dimension to our faith. Many activities have emerged from the Lausanne Congress and from the second congress held in Manila in 1989. The Covenant (in a number of languages), and details about the many regional events and specialised conferences which have been undertaken in the name of Lausanne, may be examined online at www.lausanne.org.

The Lausanne International Committee believed it was led by the Holy Spirit to hold another conference which would bring together Christian leaders from around the world. This time the Committee planned to have younger emerging leaders involved and sought funds to enable it to bring a significant contingent from those parts of the world where the church is rapidly growing today. It decided to call the conference a **Forum**. As a Forum its structure would allow people to come and participate if they had something to contribute to one of 31 issues (around which were formed Issue Groups). These issues were chosen through a global research programme seeking to identify the most significant issues in the world today which are of concern in our task to take the *good news* to the world.

This Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) is the report that has emerged from one of these Issue Groups. LOPs have been produced for each of the Issue Groups and information on these and other publications may be obtained online at www.lausanne.org.

The theme of the Forum for World Evangelization held in 2004 was **“A new vision, a new heart, a renewed call.”** This Forum was held in Pattaya, Thailand from September 29 to October 5, 2004. 1,530 participants came from 130 countries to work in one of the 31 Issue Groups.

The Affirmations at the conclusion of the Forum stated:

“There has been a spirit of working together in serious dialogue and prayerful reflection. Representatives from a wide spectrum of cultures and virtually all parts of the world have come together to learn from one another and to seek new direction from the Holy Spirit for world evangelization. They committed themselves to joint action under divine guidance.

The dramatic change in the political and economic landscape in recent years has raised new challenges in evangelization for the church. The polarization between east and west makes it imperative that the church seek God’s direction for the appropriate responses to the present challenges.

In the 31 Issue Groups these new realities were taken into consideration, including the HIV pandemic, terrorism, globalization, the global role of media, poverty, persecution of Christians, fragmented families, political and religious nationalism, post-modern mind set, oppression of children, urbanization, neglect of the disabled and others.

Great progress was made in these groups as they grappled for solutions to the key challenges of world evangelization. As these groups focused on making specific recommendations, larger strategic themes came to the forefront.

There was affirmation that major efforts of the church must be directed toward those who have no access to the gospel. The commitment to help establish self sustaining churches within 6,000 remaining unreached people groups remains a central priority.

Secondly, the words of our Lord call us to love our neighbour as ourselves. In this we have failed greatly. We renew our commitment to reach out in love and compassion to those who are marginalised because of disabilities or who have different lifestyles and spiritual perspectives. We commit to reach out to children and young people who constitute a majority of the world's population, many of whom are being abused, forced into slavery, armies and child labour.

A third stream of a strategic nature acknowledges that the growth of the church is now accelerating outside of the western world. Through the participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America, we recognise the dynamic nature and rapid growth of the church in the *South*. Church leaders from the *South* are increasingly providing exemplary leadership in world evangelization.

Fourthly, we acknowledge the reality that much of the world is made up of oral learners who understand best when information comes to them by means of stories. A large proportion of the world's populations are either unable to or unwilling to absorb information through written communications. Therefore, a need exists to share the "Good News" and to disciple new Christians in story form and parables.

Fifthly, we call on the church to use media to effectively engage the culture in ways that draw non-believers toward spiritual truth and to proclaim Jesus Christ in culturally relevant ways.

Finally, we affirm the priesthood of all believers and call on the church to equip, encourage and empower women, men and youth to fulfil their calling as witnesses and co-labourers in the world wide task of evangelization.

Transformation was a theme which emerged from the working groups. We acknowledge our own need to be continually transformed, to continue to open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to the challenges of God's word and to grow in Christ together with fellow Christians in ways that result in social and economic transformation. We acknowledge that the scope of the gospel and building the Kingdom of God involves, body, mind, soul and spirit. Therefore we call for increasing integration of service to society and proclamation of the gospel.

We pray for those around the world who are being persecuted for their faith and for those who live in constant fear of their lives. We uphold our brothers and sisters who are suffering. We recognize that the reality of the persecuted church needs to be increasingly on the agenda of the whole Body of Christ. At the same time, we also acknowledge the importance of loving and doing good to our enemies while we fight for the right of freedom of conscience everywhere.

We are deeply moved by the onslaught of the HIV/AIDS pandemic – the greatest human emergency in history. The Lausanne movement calls all churches everywhere to prayer and holistic response to this plague.

"9/11," the war in Iraq, the war on terror and its reprisals compel us to state that we must not allow the gospel or the Christian faith to be captive to any one geo-political entity. We affirm that the Christian faith is above all political entities.

We are concerned and mourn the death and destruction caused by all conflicts, terrorism and war. We call for Christians to pray for peace, to be proactively involved in reconciliation and avoid all attempts to turn any conflict into a religious war. Christian mission in this context lies in becoming peacemakers.

We pray for peace and reconciliation and God's guidance in how to bring about peace through our work of evangelization. We pray for God to work in the affairs of nations to open doors of opportunity for the gospel. We call on the church to mobilize every believer to focus specific consistent prayer for the evangelization of their communities and the world.

In this Forum we have experienced the partnership of men and women working together. We call on the church around the world to work towards full partnership of men and women in the work of world evangelism by maximising the gifts of all.

We also recognize the need for greater intentionality in developing future leaders. We call on the church to find creative ways to release emerging leaders to serve effectively.”

Numerous practical recommendations for local churches to consider were offered. These will be available on the Lausanne website and in the Lausanne Occasional Papers. It is our prayer that these many case studies and action plans will be used of God to mobilise the church to share a clear and relevant message using a variety of methods to reach the most neglected or resistant groups so that everyone will have the opportunity to hear the gospel message and be able to respond to this good news in faith.

We express our gratitude to the Thai Church which has hosted us and to their welcoming presentation to the Forum. We are profoundly grateful to God for the privilege of being able to gather here from the four corners of the earth. We have developed new partnerships, made new friends and encouraged one another in our various ministries. Notwithstanding the resistance to the gospel in many places and the richness of an inherited religious and cultural tradition we here at the Forum have accepted afresh the renewed call to be obedient to the mandate of Christ. We commit ourselves to making His saving love known so that the whole world may have opportunity to accept God’s gift of salvation through Christ.”

These affirmations indicate the response of the participants to the Forum outcomes and their longing that the whole church may be motivated by the outcomes of the Forum to strengthen its determination to be obedient to God’s calling.

May the case studies and the practical suggestions in this and the other LOPs be of great help to you and your church as you seek to find new ways and a renewed call to proclaim the saving love of Jesus Christ

David Claydon

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1. PREFACE

In the Western world there is a growing sense of need to have some spiritual orientation in life. However, those who pursue this quest for spirituality are uncomfortable with institutionalised religion. They are also disturbed by explanations of life that are based on scientific reductionism, as well as the consumerist tenets of society. As a result many Westerners have adopted practices and worldviews from other religious and spiritual traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism as well as from the Pagan past of Europe and from various shamanic traditions.

In 1980 the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation published ***The Thailand Report on New Religious Movements*** (LOP #11). The important insight of this document was to view “mystics and cultists” as unreached people groups who need to hear the gospel and become disciples of Jesus. We are grateful to our predecessors for recognising and communicating this. However, this insight is still to be appreciated and acted on by most evangelical Christians. There has been little actual meeting with spiritual seekers and participants in the new spiritual and holistic movements, sometimes popularly called New Age.

In the years since that 1980 Lausanne conference, the challenge of new religions and the rise of Alternate Spiritualities have accelerated. As a result the Lausanne 2004 Forum created an Issue Group to examine “religious and non-religious spirituality in the Western world.”

Since 1980 there has been much debate on the encounter between Christians and the New Spiritualities. The dominant method for meeting the New Spiritualities has been grounded in apologetics by confronting and refuting their teachings. While we are heirs to this heritage, we suggest a fresh pathway. We are not abandoning the tool of apologetics but incorporating it into another way of doing outreach. *We are urging the church to reconsider relying solely on confrontational apologetic methods when responding to new religious movements and alternative spiritualities. Our call entails shifting confrontational styles to a relational form of outreach that missiologists call a critical incarnational approach.*

As we will explain in this paper, we look for ways of translating the gospel so that people within this spiritual quest can understand and respond to a message that they both hear and understand. A biblical example for meeting people of the new spiritual quest is seen in Paul’s witness to the Greeks in Athens (Acts 17), and in his words:

“I am a free man and own no master; but I have made myself every man’s servant, to win as many as possible. To Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; as they are subject to the Law of Moses, I put myself under that law to win them although I am not myself subject to it. To win Gentiles, who are outside the Law, I made myself like one of them, although I am not in truth outside God’s law, being under the Law of Christ. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. Indeed, I have become everything in turn to men of every sort, so that in one way or another I may save some. All this I do for the sake of the Gospel, to bear my part in proclaiming it”. (1 Corinthians 9.19-23).

2. BACKGROUND & FOUNDATION

We begin this paper by briefly reviewing the phenomena of new religions. Then we assess the contributions of the evangelical countercult movement and review the paper prepared at the 1980 Lausanne consultation. The rest of the paper comprises our investigation into new and alternate spiritualities, with discussion about how and why missional forms of outreach to followers of these spiritualities must be developed. We then illustrate missional approaches with various case studies in outreach from different parts of the Western world (which we will define as Western Europe, Great Britain, North America, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand) and conclude with recommendations for the Church to implement.

A. The Phenomena of New Religions

In modern times new religions — or cults as they are popularly branded — have been the subject of much controversy. We prefer to use the scholarly term “new religions” instead of the more sensational word “cult.” This is because the word cult has degenerated into a term of abuse, and is often used in a sensational manner. In this paper the words “new religions” and “cults” will sometimes be used interchangeably. We commend to the Church the term “new religions” for future usage, to avoid creating obstacles in communication with these groups.

Our perceptions of new religions are often shaped through television and other kinds of mass media. We might think that new religions are a recent problem, but they did not suddenly appear in the 1960s when the Beatles turned to the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi for spiritual guidance. Sociologists observe that new religions arise and flourish when major social upheavals and technological innovations occur. Some groups may protest at society, others hope to reform it, while others look forward to a better world or realm of existence. Put simply, new religions have their own subtle characteristics and differing complexity, and it is a mistake to treat them as if they are clones of one another reducing matters to simplistic “patterns in the cults.”

Often churches struggle to adjust during times of great change and along the way lose members. Some people who are disappointed by the church will listen to teachers of new religions. When the Church neglects areas of theology and praxis she creates a vacuum into which spiritual alternatives will flourish.

Some Historical Background

The lessons of history show that new religions are not new. About five hundred years ago Europe’s social, religious and political systems were reshaped in the Renaissance and Reformation. At the same time the printing press was invented, which allowed the rapid publication of books. While the Church renovated its theology and practice, unofficial folk religious activities carried on in alchemy, astrology and magic. The Kabbalah, which originated in Jewish mysticism, became popular. It was during the Renaissance that an ancient set of tracts, called the Hermetica, attributed to an ancient mythic figure Hermes Trismegistus, was rediscovered. These tracts reflect ancient Greek ideas about secret spiritual knowledge as the way of salvation. The hermetic way of viewing divine revelation offered an alternative to the orthodox Christian way and flourished in the Post-Reformation era in Europe and England as well as in colonial American times.

With the upheavals of the French Revolution, the Church was scorned while new religious ideas based in magic and the occult became attractive to the French intelligentsia. Scathing criticisms of orthodox Christianity came from writers like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson who promoted Deism on both sides of the Atlantic. Others, like Emanuel Swedenborg, reinterpreted Christian belief through hermetic myths and

included contact with angelic and deceased spirits. Some intellectuals developed their own nature-based beliefs after exploring the ancient Greco-Roman religions.

The Industrial Revolution brought a wide host of social and technological changes to Europe and North America and many new religions sprang up offering new visions of life. New religions formed around the claims of spiritualist mediums and around new prophets like Joseph Smith who founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mary Baker Eddy started Christian Science with healing as its prime emphasis. Madame Blavatsky established the Theosophical Society with the ascended spiritual masters who channelled ultimate truth. Both Blavatsky's Theosophy and Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy presented their teachings using the concept of evolution. Christianity was dismissed as pre-scientific, while these new teachings appeared as "science."

New religions continued to emerge alongside the social, political and technological upheavals of the twentieth century. Some began in the Roaring Twenties and Great Depression. The collapse of Imperial Japan in 1945 became fertile soil for dozens of new Shinto and Buddhist movements, which have since gained followers in South and North America. Groups like the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON/Hare Krishna), Transcendental Meditation, and The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (Unification Church) started in East and Southeast Asia and spread to the Western world in the 1960s. Other traditions, like Santeria and Voodoo, have sprung from Africa and developed among African-American people groups in South and North America. A diverse spectrum of new religions of Asian, American, and European origins can be found throughout the former Soviet bloc.

The simple lesson for us is this: all over the world Christians are meeting followers of new religions and world religions at a time when new technologies and social changes abound. Once Western Christian missionaries met these faiths only in Asia and Africa. Now Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic believers meet us in all Western countries. As evangelical scholars like Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe have indicated, the new religions form global sub-cultures of unreached people groups. The broad brushstrokes of modern history suggest to us that here we have a fresh missional challenge that cannot be avoided. This is a new frontier for missions.

B. Opposition to New Religions

When new religions appear they are often opposed. This happens in social panics and through organised forms of resistance. There are two parallel but different organised movements opposing new religions: a secular non-Christian “anti-cult” movement, and a Christian countercult movement. We can learn lessons by briefly looking at social panics and then secular anti-cult movements. This is the prelude to reviewing the Christian countercult movement.

Social Panics

Social panics occur in times of turbulence and uncertainty. When groups of people either feel powerless or do not understand social reforms, discontent builds up. Those who are upset can blame social change on a scapegoat like a new religion. There are many cases of social panics about new religions, like the brief anti-Masonic social panic in America in the 1820s when many feared Freemasons were conspiring to take over the nation. The same pattern recurred when Mormons were suspected of plotting to control America.

During the late 1980s several Western nations had outbreaks of social panics about satanic groups ritually abusing young children. The Satanic Ritual Abuse scares can be understood as a modern day counterpart to late medieval witch-hunts. When Christians instigate social panics, those who are made the scapegoats lose all respect for the Church, and the gospel is brought into disrepute.

Secular Anti-Cult Movements

An organised form of opposition to new religions is found in what scholars call “anti-cult” movements. An anti-cult movement organises opposition to cults based on non-doctrinal grounds. Anti-cultists prefer to use the word cult instead of new religion. When the word cult is used in these circles it tends to invoke images of religious fanaticism and control.

During the late 1960s some concerned American parents began to organise against groups like the Children of God and ISKCON. During the 1970s, the momentum grew as parents, ex-members, journalists, alarmed citizens and a few psychologists, formed specific anti-cult organisations. New religions were accused of manipulating America’s youth, and as members quit it became common to say that cults brainwashed followers. This American experience of anti-cultism was repeated in France, Germany and Russia in the late 1990s.

In general, anti-cult critics argue that cults are guilty of consumer fraud. It is alleged that cults hide their teachings from the public and engage in dubious fund raising. The other complaint is that new religions indoctrinate followers by controlling their thoughts and behaviour. So cults are typecast by their critics as fraudulent religions.

Brainwashing and Deprogramming

The most controversial anti-cult counter-measure is called deprogramming. As many believed that adherents were brainwashed, deprogramming became a form of counter-indoctrination. Deprogrammers intervened on behalf of concerned relatives to rescue cult disciples. While groups like the Unification Church were the primary targets, occasionally staff members of evangelical ministries like Jews for Jesus were sometimes abducted. These activities led to many court cases, as deprogrammers were charged with kidnapping. Although most practitioners were secular people, a few Christians did support or participate in deprogramming. While deprogramming largely fell into disrepute in the 1980s, a few deprogrammers still operate today.

There have been heated debates about whether religious conversions and indoctrination methods correlate to brainwashing or mind control. The debate has often spilled over into the political arena when anti-cult laws have been drafted. Those who support brainwashing and mind control theories argue that cult followers have suffered abuse and trauma. Opponents argue that even mainstream churches have used

intensive methods of indoctrination. Mind control theories are then rejected because they offer reductionist and even anti-religious explanations. Evangelical Christians are divided between those who support and those who reject mind control theories.

In some European countries anti-cult or anti-conversion laws have been used against Christian groups. Some Christians have been prosecuted through the courts of these nations, and then much later on have been declared innocent by the European Court of Human Rights. Existing laws can be used to counter any cases of fraud or violation of human rights, whatever the source of such crimes, without the creation of new laws that stifle religious freedom. The Church is ill advised in attempts to counter the growth of new spiritualities through "anti-cult" legislation. Our counsel to the Church is to reconsider any support of anti-cult legislation because it sets bad precedents for curtailing religious freedom generally. We suggest that Christians should support broad religious freedom. We can faithfully preach Jesus Christ as the unique Saviour and support religious freedom without endorsing non-Christian teachings.

C. Evangelical Countercult Ministry

Evangelical countercult ministries approach new religions on doctrinal grounds. Parallel apologetic approaches exist in Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox traditions. Evangelicals self-consciously call themselves “countercult apologists,” and scholars use the same term to differentiate it from the secular “anti-cult” movement.

Countercult apologists are concerned with defending Christian beliefs and concentrate on demonstrating that the new religions have heretical views about the person, nature, and saving work of Jesus Christ. These false beliefs are then refuted by apologetic arguments based on biblical passages. The conclusion then drawn is that new religions are spiritually dangerous and a form of satanic deception.

Evangelical countercult apologetics started when Christian churches were numerically dominant. In that Christianised context pioneering apologists relied on the familiar heritage of doctrinal analysis used by the Church Fathers and Reformers. Christianity is a religion where doctrines and creeds are very important, so it was “natural” for apologists to initially respond to groups on these grounds. The apologists’ strength has been their specialisation on doctrinal analyses.

We believe that the Church has been greatly encouraged by countercult ministries that have made the defence of orthodox doctrine a high priority. Many Christians have had their faith strengthened through countercult apologists and apologists have been instrumental in helping some disciples of new religions to have faith in Christ. For all these earnest labours we give thanks. However, the Issue Group believes that there are some weaknesses within countercult apologetics that should be acknowledged. In pointing out these weaknesses we are not dismissing the faithful ministry of apologists. Rather, we respectfully are calling our colleagues in ministry to have open hearts to listen and receive our passionate call for a missional response to new religions and New Spiritualities. It is in the apostolic spirit of speaking truthfully in love with gentleness and respect that we offer the following criticisms.

Models of Apologetics

In the evangelical response to both new religions and New Age at least three apologetic models have been used frequently: personal testimonies, spiritual warfare, and heresy-rationalist apologetics. We shall briefly describe each one of these, and consider their strengths and weaknesses.

Personal Testimonies

The use of personal testimonies in evangelism stretches from Scripture to the present time and has been frequently used in countercult ministry. The advantage of this approach is that today’s seeker values personal stories. A testimony goes from abstract belief to the real life journey of faith with which others can identify. However, there are some limitations to testimonies. First, a collection of testimonies of ex-members can be gathered for any religious movement. For every book describing an evangelical who has found faith after leaving the LDS Church or New Age, there is a corresponding book by former evangelicals who have joined a new religion.

Also, an alarming problem is that some Christians have built up ministries based on made-up testimonies, and when they are exposed their falsehoods bring the gospel into disrepute. We are not saying testimonies are irrelevant in outreach, but our counsel is for keen discernment about the integrity of those who retell their stories and to recognise the limitations of such tools for outreach.

Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare has, in some circles, become a panacea for dealing with new religions and New Age. New religions are understood as being primarily energised by Satan, and so the concept of spiritual deception is emphasised. Frank Peretti’s novels, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing The Darkness*, typify this outlook. Here the primary

task is identifying demonic influences over cities, people and religions, with prayer and exorcism being the remedies. On the positive side this model draws attention to biblical passages about spiritual warfare and the demonic. However, spiritual warfare is just one metaphor among many that characterises the Christian life. Biblical teaching reveals that the Christian life is centred in faithfulness not in power over demons. Some advocates of spiritual warfare seem to verge on turning prayer into a form of spell casting.

Critics have raised theological concerns that some spiritual warfare advocates exaggerate the power of the demonic and even verge on an animist view of spirits. We need to refocus on how Jesus secures the victory through the cross and the resurrection. Human beings are not puppets in a cosmic conflict. We are not denying or ignoring the demonic in our deliberations, but we urge the Church to have a balanced perspective. (See the Lausanne document *Deliver Us from Evil: Consultation Statement on Spiritual Warfare*. LCWE-MARC, 2002.) Our concern is that some have become so enthusiastic about clashing with demons, that devotees of new religions are typecast as enemies rather than seen as unreached people in need of God's grace.

Heresy-Rationalist Apologetics

Of all the apologetic models used, the principal one is the heresy-rationalist model. This model emphasises the test of correct doctrine, and so contrasts Bible passages about Jesus with misinterpretations of Him. Another focus is the use of philosophic, rational arguments to prove a new religion is false. Apologists who work from this perspective point to the many biblical injunctions about false teaching (Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Matthew 7:15ff; Acts 20:26-32; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 6:3ff; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3).

On the positive side, this model excels in assisting Christians to see the differences in belief. By clarifying both what we believe and why we believe it, heresy-rationalist apologetics equips Christians with skills of discernment. The Church must proclaim, explain and defend its teachings in each generation. This is a vital work that is necessary for building up believers in Christ. We commend our colleagues in countercult ministry for this good fruit.

Critical Issues of Understanding

In general, countercult apologists have not reflected on the relevancy of heresy-rationalist apologetic in a post-Christian context. Doctrinal analysis works well inside the Church because that is where Christians learn what they believe and why they believe. However, there are other areas where doctrinal analysis may not be the most suitable tool to use. Is it helpful for defining and understanding new religions? Is it appropriate for use as *the sole or primary method for evangelism*? Let us first note how doctrinal analysis can lead to misunderstandings of new religions.

Dynamic Sub-Cultures

- New religions form their own sub-cultures that are linked through ritual observances and the solidarity members feel.
- A sub-culture has its own subtle complexities in the way people behave and live. People express their lives in customs, rites and rituals. This is especially true if we notice what things they regard as important. The things that people feel makes them worthy are tied up with what things they will worship or believe in. A casual observer who only looks for doctrines could easily miss these subtle but important elements.
- As sub-cultures are dynamic and not static, an outsider cannot understand a new religion just by listing the followers' beliefs. A sub-culture consists of more than just beliefs. A chart of beliefs results in a one-dimensional portrait.

Not Doctrinally Based

- Most new and world religions centre the spiritual life in ritual observances and experiences.

- New religions that originate from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions are non-doctrinal and put the core of spiritual reality in correct ritual practices (like acts of devotion, meditative states, yoga, etc).
- New Age spirituality involves a do-it-yourself approach that is eclectic, individualistic, and constantly changing in ideas and trends.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) does not emphasise doctrines, creeds or systematic theology but has the core of faith and conversion grounded in an experience about Joseph Smith's visions.
- The fact that a guru quotes Jesus' words to illustrate his/her own beliefs does not mean the guru teaches a specific doctrine of Christ (Christology).

Followers Participate in Relationships

- Relationships and not intellectual assent to doctrine are central to sustaining faith commitments.
- A characteristic of those who join a new religion led by a guru is that they first place their trust in that guru and then the message is believed.
- Scholars have investigated the reasons why people are attracted to new religions and the evidence shows many followers primarily organise their life around new relationships, experiences and ritual observances offered through the group.

In light of these considerations we can summarise why doctrinal analysis is not an apt tool for defining and understanding new religions:

- New religions are sub-cultures that are generally not built on doctrine, while doctrinal analysis presupposes that religions are static and defined by creeds.
- Some apologists are keen to prove that gurus uphold a "counterfeit Jesus." The apologist uplifts quotes from the guru about Jesus. The forensic exercise is to then demonstrate this is an unorthodox Christology, but the apologist loses sight of the fact that most new religions do not claim to be Christian.
- By concentrating on doctrinal errors apologists largely overlook the reasons why people are exploring this spirituality rather than Christianity.
- Using Christian doctrine to understand a new religion's sub-culture is like a dentist extracting teeth with a hammer — the tool was not designed for that purpose.

Critical Shortcomings for Outreach with New Religions

The development of discernment skills about correct teaching is certainly important. However, this should not occur in isolation from the love of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, friendliness and sensitivity in relational communications and accountability to the community of faith. No relationship endures when the basis for communication is centred in argument. So, let us identify those elements that make doctrinal analysis unsuitable for use as *the sole or primary method for evangelism to new religions*.

Confrontational Style

- The heresy-rationalist apologetic generally operates on an argumentative and confrontational style of communication that is suited to debating, but is not appropriate for building confidence in the message and messenger.
- While there are contexts when courteous but firm disputations should occur, Christian missions and evangelism are not centred in argumentative rhetoric.

Wrong Context, Wrong Texts

- Those biblical passages that are foundational to this apologetic model, when read in context, are not dealing with evangelistic issues. These passages are directed at Christians where correct doctrine was in dispute.
- Texts refuting false prophets apply to contexts within the Church. Paul rebuked heretics who were inside the Church and his main complaint was against

teachers who believed that Gentile disciples should be circumcised. New religions are by definition located beyond the walls of the Church.

Criticising Sadducees

- Jesus' sharpest rebukes were directed at the Sadducees and Pharisees, who were "denominations" entrusted with teaching the Law, Prophets and Writings. What some countercult apologists appear to be doing is using Jesus' rebukes as a model of evangelistic communication with non-Christians, but this is to misunderstand the context in which Jesus delivered His rebukes.

Non-Relational Arguments

- Scriptural and logical refutations of the new religions and New Age do not equate with the praxis of biblical missions or evangelism. A written argument lacks many of the essential interpersonal elements required for evangelism and missions. An argument that negates beliefs does not necessarily mean that seekers have heard and understood the gospel. Seekers will be put off from considering Christianity by scathing remarks that disrespect their search.
- If we look to Jesus' way of communicating with people, He was relational with those He sought. If Jesus were visiting our churches He would probably rebuke us as He did the Pharisees, but He would treat a Mormon, a Wiccan and a New Age adherent in the same way He treated the woman at the well (John 4). Similarly, when Paul addressed the Athenian philosophers he did not commence his oration by branding them as either heretics or demonic emissaries (Acts 17).

Lack of Practical Advice

- Many apologetic books lack any practical field-tested examples on how to evangelise devotees, which reinforces the impression that apologists are armchair critics.
- Even those texts that present examples of "what to say when the cultist says such and such," many times lack sufficient depth, sensitivity and subtlety in how to communicate with people because the focus is on rebutting arguments.

Critical Issues for the Church

The Church should take notice of the problems besetting countercult ministries and make a conscientious effort to help apologists. First, apologists need to be recognised and commended for their efforts, especially their long and valid pleas for the Church to mobilise for evangelism toward new religions. It is a plea long neglected.

A major problem concerns their isolation from the mainstream life of the Church. Many lay countercult apologists operate para-church ministries without any formal recognition or support from denominational bodies. They are often unaware of the valuable insights, skills and methods they could apply in their ministries if tutored by other sections of the Church like the missions community, pastoral care and healing ministries, and youth ministries. Countercult ministries need stability, balance and depth which can come when apologists listen and learn from the accumulated wisdom of the Church in mission.

D. The 1980 Lausanne Report

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization had tremendous foresight to recognise that adherents of new religious movements are unreached peoples (Lausanne LOP #11). We acknowledge the positive commitment in the 1980 report to upholding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and the defence of biblical revelation. This paper had as its greatest strength a commitment to defending orthodox doctrine and encouraging the Church to equip Christians to know why they believe what they believe. However, as we have conferred, we have recognised some weaknesses in this 1980 report. In light of the present situation, we note three critical deficiencies in the paper:

- The paper did not benefit from the insights of the missions community at that time about how to contextually communicate the gospel to practitioners of new religions.
- The language and tone of the paper was powerfully shaped by metaphors of spiritual combat that generated an atmosphere of fear and typecast adherents of new religions as spiritual enemies.
- The principal model endorsed in the paper was a negative apologetic toward new religions, which had the major drawback of stifling any relational communication of the gospel.

As a consequence the Church was encouraged to erect defensive walls to resist false doctrine, but at the expense of becoming genuinely missional in reaching and discipling adherents.

This concurs with our observation in the 2004 Issue Group about literature and methodologies produced by evangelical countercult ministries working in the arena of new religions. The apologists' tremendous specialisation in doctrinal analysis is valuable for helping Christians to grow, but it has become their Achilles' heel in effective evangelism.

Apologetics alone is an inadequate method of reaching people in new religions. The new religions continue to flourish while very few adherents are brought into repentance and faith and discipleship in Christ. We believe that specialisation in countercult apologetics has isolated these ministries from learning from the missions community. Our plea is that apologists must study broadly across the theological and missiological disciplines to strengthen their ministries and avoid the weaknesses we have identified. In light of these problems, the 2004 Issue Group believes that a fresh approach is required, and we set out that approach later in this paper.

3. THE SPIRITUAL REALITY OF OUR CHANGED WORLD, POST-MODERNITY, PLURALISM, NEW SPIRITUALITIES, AND WHAT THEY ARE SAYING TO THE CHURCH.

We will now examine our current context, describe the New Spiritualities and consider their challenges to the Church.

E. The Challenge Facing the Church: Our World

As we look at our world in the twenty-first century, we must rejoice at the profound growth of God's Church, especially in Africa, Asia, and South America. However, the Church in the West is not meeting its missional challenge to reach people on its doorstep with the gospel. It is now in a state of serious and acute decline. To halt this downward slide and bring renewed growth, we must acknowledge our failure, seek to understand its causes, and respond with appropriate biblical methods.

Our Western world has changed over recent decades. Almost every assumption of society — our collective and individual worldviews, our ways of thinking and perceiving and our spirituality — has been altered. At least four major trends, namely post-modernism, advances in communication, secularism, and globalisation, have had enormous impact on every Western institution, including the Church.

The Declining Western Church

In most parts of the Western world the deterioration of the Church is clearly reflected in ageing and declining church gatherings. Mega-churches notwithstanding, poor attendance rates among people younger than forty are very noticeable in Europe, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. In the past, the United States has been an exception to this, however, strong signs of decline are now emerging. The demographic gap in younger age groups is foreboding, especially for the long-term viability of many local churches and their witness within their communities.

But the problems of the Western Church run deeper than declining numbers and ageing members. The sociological realities show an ever widening gulf between Church and society, which further frustrates effective mission. This cultural divide is multi-faceted with class and ethnic divisions and sub-cultural groups and networks untouched by any gospel witness. Attempts to grow the Kingdom by short-term "revival" remedies have and will continue to fail because Christian expectations of how to connect with non-Christians are unrealistic and disconnected from their experiences of life.

We are living in a time of enormous transition that touches the whole fabric of our societies. Until we understand our time and honestly reappraise some cherished assumptions about evangelism and apologetics, the Church will struggle to survive in the Western world.

From Modernity to Post-Modernity

Some commentators try to make sense out of our time by talking about two different outlooks. They will say that we have moved from modernity to post-modernity. These words can be confusing, so we shall try to simplify matters, but acknowledge there are scholarly technicalities we are unable to address in a paper of this format.

Commentators generally agree that the outlook called "modernity" dominated the era from which we are passing. Modernity refers to a view of reality that influenced the way we thought and lived over the past three hundred years. Its major assumptions were forged in the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. Back then many started questioning the credibility of Christian belief. Doubts were expressed about God's existence, the possibility of miracles, the historicity of biblical accounts and so on. These

things coincided with discoveries made in new sciences like astronomy and geology, and as the study of history was being critically refined. Many concluded that Christianity was not credible and so looked for other ways of understanding reality.

Among the new assumptions made were that human problems could be understood and solved in scientific, technological, and rationalist ways. The word rationalist meant much more than just the capacity to think coherently and logically, by equating certainty in truth with a non-theistic, non-religious view of reality. Its broad outlook viewed life and ultimate reality through grand scientific or economic theories and relied on methods of thinking based primarily in scepticism and doubt. The appeal was that human material progress was achievable without the need for religious or supernatural explanations. Although the big Christian story of reality — creation, fall, redemption in Christ, second advent — still held sway, there were many new non-theistic stories about reality that rested on these kinds of assumptions (like Secular Humanism, Marxism, and Capitalism).

Theologians tried to come to grips with the non-religious attitudes of modernity by emphasising empirical and rational proofs for Christianity. Some responded by agreeing with a lot of the scepticism of the Enlightenment, while others were convinced that absolute certainty could be found in some abstract philosophical statement of faith.

Now modernity is giving way to post-modernity. As we explore this outlook we must be careful to distinguish between two similar looking words: “**postmodern**” and “**post-modern**.” We will briefly look at each in turn.

Postmodern Mindset

The word “postmodern” refers to critical theories about truth, meaning, and narrative. These parallel theories have developed in certain schools of philosophy, sociology, literature, and law. Two key French thinkers who have developed these critical theories are Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault. They, and other academics, question the mindset of modernity in its quest for absolute certainty. Their critical theories basically suggest that big stories of reality — technically called meta-narratives — are not genuine representations of truth.

Meta-narratives are ideological stories told by those who hold power in society, while other stories held by those excluded from power are suppressed. Knowledge then becomes a tool used to ensure minority groups are powerless. Those who have had their voices excluded may include migrant groups, indigenous people, homosexual and lesbian people, women and so on.

Postmodern theorists argue then that meta-narratives must be probed for ideological uses against the powerless in society. This is done by deconstructing meta-narratives, which means stripping a story of its ideology. There are many other lines of inquiry concerned with the meaning and interpretation of literature.

This very academic field called **postmodernism** is not something that we have any more room to discuss. We recognise it is an issue for apologists in the academy to address. However, academic postmodernism is not a synonym for post-modernity, and so great care must be exercised.

Post-Modern and Post-Modernity

The words “post-modern” and “post-modernity” are distinguished from the word postmodern by the use of the hyphen. These words simply mean “after modernity.” Post-modernity is an elastic word that covers the current patterns within popular culture as the world’s cultures mix together.

Impact and Characteristics

We have said that we are in a time of transition. So what are the transitions that have taken place? Events following World War II have radically transformed all areas of our lives. Changes have been brought on by mass migration, jet transportation, and mass communication systems. Nations once kept apart by geographical barriers are

now connected through television and the Internet. Cultural, religious, and political beliefs are being distributed globally. People can maintain relationships via a host of electronic means and tend to unite based predominantly on their demographic similarities rather than their geographic proximity. Western societies have become highly fragmented and “sub-culturalised” in contrast to the “mono-culture” that previous generations experienced. No longer do our societies hold single macro or over-arching meta-stories that explain, maintain and sustain our individual identity. Instead, we find social fragmentation based on age, demography, common interests and spirituality.

Western economies have changed dramatically from being producers of goods to producers of services. We have an unprecedented high standard of living and life expectancy. We live in a world of “options.” We have a nearly unlimited amount of choice, from the food we eat to the career we pursue. Consumption defines much of what we are. It used to be, “I think, therefore I am.” Now it is, “I consume, therefore I am.” As national loyalties and boundaries lose their significance, consumption and brand loyalties have come to the fore.

Whereas in the past most people were expected to marry and have children, even this is now considered optional. The basic unit of society — the family — is getting smaller, as those who actually choose to procreate do so later and produce less offspring. In the past, the “family” was a fairly easy concept to define. However, as Western society has fragmented, we now find there are multiple options of what it can mean. The Western Church with its narrowly defined understanding of the nuclear family struggles to interact with a world whose experience of family is significantly different.

Our value base has changed from clearly understood higher-truth requirements such as the Ten Commandments, to fragmented and highly personal statements dependent on “how we feel.” In this age of the supremacy of the individual, people believe it is we, not society, who create and dictate our personal values. As a result many of the assumptions, values and morals our societies may have had in the past are now questioned. The Christian era is over. *The Church is no longer the respected centre of our culture. In an age of individual freewill and choice, many consider institutional Christianity irrelevant and outdated.*

Religious Decline — but “Spiritual” Increase

So does this mean that the West is rapidly becoming closed to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Ironically, even though interest in organised religion has progressively decreased, interest and active participation in spirituality has rapidly increased. Sociologists previously expected the secular processes of modernity to overcome religion, but that has not happened. Instead they have fuelled it! Modernity may have given us an enhanced physical quality of life, but its unrelenting emphasis on the material has actually increased our spiritual hunger and longing. This has created spiritual hunger in abounding measure.

While this spiritual openness is good news for evangelical Christians, it is not necessarily good news for the institutional Church. Unfortunately, existing forms of the Church are perceived as part of the problem, not the solution, by these spiritual seekers. These forms are seen as an extension of modernity: propositional, remote, material, and uncaring. While institutional forms of religion are rejected, unstructured person-centred, non-gendered, often nature-based forms of spirituality have dramatically expanded. *There are significant openings and opportunities for the gospel in the West. We just need our eyes opened to see them, and we need to be prepared to do things differently to meet this challenge.*

Sadly, since the Church has been unable to comprehend the trends, it stays inwardly focused. We have been reluctant to acknowledge that much of what is referred to as Alternative Spiritualities has arisen because of dissatisfaction with institutional Christianity. The desire for a “here and now” spirituality has arisen in part because of our inability to present God as being both transcendent (He is separate from and beyond the creation) and immanent (He is present and involved in all of the creation). How do we

interact with people who no longer base their outlook on rationalism, but base their spirituality primarily on intuition and self-exploration?

Models of church that revolve around geographic parishes are far less relevant for people who form relationships based on common interests. Forms of church and mission that entail monologues of propositional data are unintelligible to people who *feel* truth. The Church was used to being the dominant player in the West, but it now rubs shoulders with world religions and do-it-yourself spiritualities. Unfortunately, our incapacity to interact with this changed spiritual landscape further exacerbates the perception that the Church is irrelevant and fuels our inward focus. Today's Christian community needs to appreciate that major societal changes today demand a reassessment of our theology and praxis.

One particular area for reflection is that our model of outreach is very much a child of the modern world. We have operated on the model of "believe, then behave, then belong." Our evangelism functions on a cognitive model that requires acceptance of propositions and conformity to behavioural norms before a convert can belong. Our post-modern world challenges us to consider that this paradigm may need to be reversed. Conversion may no longer be a single event. It often needs to be a *process* or string of events, where people can experience Christian spirituality, fellowship, and intellectualism. They need time to be allowed to explore, feel and internalise the *telos* (the ultimate goal or end) that Jesus-centred spirituality is. Evangelical Christians may feel threatened by this statement, but it does need to be noted that Jesus said, "*Follow Me*", an invitation to journey with Him, more often than "*Believe in Me*", as a cognitive proposition of intellectual acceptance.

F. The World's Response: Alternative Spiritualities

We could say that in very broad terms the ideas of Hegel, Marx, Darwin and Freud dominated much of twentieth-century Western thought. Now it is the practitioners of New or Alternative Spiritualities who are influencing the twenty-first century, like Margot Adler, Helena Blavatsky, Peter and Eileen Caddy, Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer, Fiona Horne, Dalai Lama, Charles Leadbeater, Shirley Maclaine, James Redfield, Starhawk, Rudolf Steiner, Neale Donald Walsch, and Marianne Williamson.

New Age spirituality became popular in the 1980s, and in 1987, *Time* magazine produced a cover story about it. The article noted that New Age thinking arose from various sources including the 1960s counterculture, the influx of neo-Hindu and neo-Buddhist thought, Theosophy and Anthroposophy, the western magical traditions, neo-humanist psychology, Jungian analysis and alternative healing traditions. New Age had a strong appeal among the Baby Boomers and Generation X. Back in the 1980s seekers were happy to call themselves "New Age." While both scholars and Christian apologists retain this term, seekers have now discarded it. Many dislike the label "New Age" because it has overtones akin to the words "fundamentalist" and "cult."

Since the 1990s scholars have noticed that do-it-yourself spiritualities are more extensive than New Age. So the current umbrella term is New Spiritualities or Alternative Spiritualities. Throughout the rest of this paper we will use these terms more than New Age.

Before we describe the New Spiritualities, we should first get our bearings straight on a foundational point. We are not dealing with a single or organised movement when we speak about either the New Age or the New Spiritualities. The evidence does not support the allegations of a few Christian apologists who promoted the idea that New Age is a sinister plot.

It is far better to say that the New Spiritualities (including New Age) cover an eclectic collection of ideas and starting points where the themes of therapeutic healing and personal transformation loom large. It is mainstream in its acceptance and its impact on business, medicine, education, ecology, sport and human psychology. Applied to these areas, the New Spirituality often appears to lose its religious references and involves the search for personal meaning, wisdom and healing. Within this context, the purpose of life is to simply grow, learn and spiritually evolve.

At a popular or consumer level, it involves a "mix and match" approach that draws on a wide range of sources. While Jesus is very often a figure of respect and intrigue, the reliability of the Bible is questioned by relying on the claims of radical bible scholars (such as the group known as the *Jesus Seminar*) or conspiracy theories (*Holy Blood and Holy Grail*). Jesus' life is very often embellished with exotic travels to India and Tibet, and combined with myths about secret knowledge that He gave to His original followers. So the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour is ignored or denied. Spiritual inspiration can be drawn from existing religions, however, it is often drawn from the mystical streams such as Medieval Christian mystics, tantric Buddhism or Sufism (Islamic mysticism).

Practical religious expressions are an important component; for example, yoga, tantric sex, Chi energy systems, and the possible reorganisation of one's house based on the principles of Feng Shui. One may explore the latent power of the mind to envisage success in one's career and relationships. Popular reading may include [A Course in Miracles](#), [The Celestine Prophecy](#), [The Da Vinci Code](#), or even the Qur'an. UFO conspiratorial stories, science fiction myths, gothic tales about the undead, or celebrity worship may also be drawn into the mix. Rebellion against one's church upbringing may involve some La Veyan Satanism; one can worship the goddess within, aided by some of Fiona Horne's writings on Wicca or connect with nature through what is imagined to be pre-Christian Neo-Paganism. While much of this spiritual

experimentation occurs in the West, forms of it can also be found in countries like Nigeria and Japan.

The starting point for assessing “truth” is self. You assess your personal truth based on your experiences, not the opinion of a scientist, priest or expert. Often, something will seem plausible or “true” if it is perceived to have been repressed by the experts. *To fully understand a person’s spiritual world, we need them to describe their spirituality in their words, and we must take the time to listen to the journeys on which their spirituality has taken them.*

Problematic Christian Responses: The Need for New Apologetic Methods

Much of the current Christian response to alternative spiritualities is sidetracked by ill-informed debate over the rightness or wrongness of postmodernist thought, which in turn is tied up in arguing over the potential for absolute truth in the human worldview.

Unfortunately, it is at this abstract level where Christians denounce postmodernism. The result is that these arguments fail to connect with most people who, for *practical* not philosophical reasons, think as post-modern people. Ultimately, people of the Western world have adopted a “practical” post-modern worldview, not because they have read or even understood Derrida and Foucault, but simply because it is imperceptibly absorbed and internalised. Cultures interpenetrate each other in ways that most people do not comprehend and the pace of life does not leave much time for deep philosophical reflection. What matters to people is finding a workable, practical spirituality that relates to their daily experiences. This does not mean that truth is irrelevant to them, but that seekers want to know, “Does it work?” before they will experiment to see if “it is true.” *Not interacting with those whose worldview is shaped by “practical post-modernity” has been a weakness in the way the Church generally functions and this has created our missional failure.*

Seekers will ignore the arguments of Christian apologists whose primary emphasis is on exposing logical fallacies. People are no longer familiar with the big Christian story and biblical jargon, so we face a relational communications challenge. The Bible is often perceived as either untruthful in one extreme, or just as truthful as any other religious writings, in the other extreme. Correcting misunderstandings or misrepresentations about Christianity, without the context of a firm relationship, will only confirm to the seeker that Christianity is an arrogant and irrelevant religion.

On the specifics of the New Age, countercult apologists have highlighted philosophical and ethical problems, warned against occult tools, and criticised beliefs such as karma, reincarnation, and pantheism (all is God). This critical work is very helpful in keeping Christians away from suspect beliefs, and for this apologists are to be commended.

However, this approach is hindered by some apologists who use a simple formula to define and refute the New Age. New Age does not just equate to pantheism, karma, and reincarnation. Since New Age is not a creed-based spirituality, a “one size suits all” argument misses the point that seekers are eclectic. Very few apologists appear to field-test their arguments by meeting with seekers. The absence of field-research in the social contexts in which New Age seekers meet, makes the apologist’s arguments look artificial. It is easy for apologists to find the critical defects in New Age, but how often do apologists reflect on the New Age as “the unpaid bills of the church?”

We want the reader to be clear: we are certainly not arguing for an irrational faith or postmodernist apologetics that waters down truth. We are arguing for a Christianity which is simultaneously both intensely spiritual and intensely intellectually vigorous. *We are arguing for new forms of apologetics and missiology that are interactive, listening, journeying, creative and holistic. We are calling for an engagement that truly meets, dialogues and challenges people living in a culture known as post-modernity. We are asking evangelical Christians to acknowledge that our current witness and evangelistic methods are problematic, and we must be prepared to revise our approaches and methods.*

G. Alternative Spirituality: Points of Contact and Areas of Potential Conflict

Unlike organised religions, Alternative Spiritualities have a lot of informality and flexibility. So scholars have found it a challenge to make sense of the data. There are several theories on how to classify the alternative spiritualities. We believe that these theories are helpful in pinpointing important issues, but we do not want to overwhelm readers with technicalities. We shall summarise what scholars have observed and intersperse comments about issues Christians need to address. For precise details on the different theories consult the writings of Wouter Hanegraaff, Paul Heelas, Daren Kemp, Adam Possamai, Steven Sutcliffe and Michael York (see the bibliography).

New Spiritualities—The Re-enchantment of the West

One way of looking at the New Spiritualities is to see them as an attempt to fill the world with a new sense of spiritual wonder, mystery and vitality. Many feel disillusioned with the heartbeat of modernity-based ideas where the world is reduced to non-spiritual explanations.

Scholars find signs of re-enchantment in pop culture and point to the widespread interest in fantasy films and novels like *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. A common thread in many of these stories is heroic figures overthrowing evil powers and bringing healing and human redemption. Some scholars find parallels between these redemptive longings and the story of Christ.

Re-enchantment is also evident in magical religion. The Order of the Golden Dawn was a short-lived magical group in nineteenth century England. Many of its members (Samuel Mathers, Aleister Crowley, Arthur Waite and W. B. Yeats) aspired to become what they called a magus (a magician). In a Darwinian context where nature was despiritualised, they sought the divine spirit in the natural world. Their hopes for an enchanted world continue in today's New Spiritualities.

Many seekers who pursue the hermetic traditions believe that the universe has been constructed according to secret divine wisdom, and they want to decode its secrets. The enchanted pathway to transformation then involves using spiritual tools like alchemy and Kabbalah that assist in decoding the universe, accessing God's Spirit and healing the world. Essentially, today's re-enchantment trends reflect the search for a popular story or spiritual techniques that map out new meanings for life. The sources of inspiration include the world's myths, folktales and fairy stories and the magical traditions. *The challenge for evangelical Christians is to communicate the gospel in imaginative ways that interact with popular culture and embrace myth (as a powerful personal and cultural story that provides meaning) and meta-story.*

New Spiritualities—An Alternative Monist Culture

New Spiritualities are the offspring of modernity, but devotees reject some of its chief emphases, namely theories of life based in scientific reductionism and religious beliefs that emphasise a separation between Spirit and matter. So Western Christianity is perceived as making God remote from the creation and teaching dualism where God and humanity are separate. A common complaint is that Christianity is a rationalist otherworldly faith that is divorced from nature and practical daily living.

Some devotees oppose theories of life based on dualism, where reality is separated into many categories. The common thread then is holistic ways of viewing ultimate reality. In the New Spiritualities God is found in the universe, the earth and inside all creatures. So some seekers see God in everything (pantheism). Others see all things as being within God (panentheism), with the analogy that God and the universe are connected just like a mother carrying a foetus.

In rejecting dualism, many devotees embrace a concept called monism. Monism refers to the oneness of reality, but Christians need to be very precise because monist ideas mean different things in both Western and Eastern philosophies. In Western philosophy "attributive monism" means that there is only one real category of existence

(the universe) but there are many different objects in it. In Eastern philosophy “substantial monism” means that there is only one real substance. All objects are just transitional forms of the same substance. In technical terms, “substantial monism” is what we find in the New Spiritualities. Seekers feel the universe is interconnected, and all is one reality. However, not all forms of this spirituality uphold monist views.

New Spiritualities form an alternative culture, which rejects neither religion and spirituality nor science and rationality, but combines them in a higher synthesis. It is an alternative vision and way of life. *The challenge for evangelical Christians is to reaffirm that our faith moves far beyond the material as we worship a God who is transcendent and immanent.*

New Spiritualities and Neo-Paganism

Neo-Paganism fills a longing to connect with God in the natural world. Neo-Pagans look to ancient religions that were nature-based as a source of inspiration. Some are inspired by the ancient Norse traditions, while others look to ancient Celtic religions. There are those who feel inspired by the shamanic traditions of the North American Indians and Australian Aborigines. Some belong to Druidic groups whose historical links go back to the eighteenth century, but devotees romantically imagine they are linked to ancient Celtic priests. Other seekers, called techno-shamans, can be found participating in the worldwide youth dance cultures (like Rave). These spiritualities use rituals and liturgies that find the divine spirit in the natural world. Often their ethics involve them in anti-globalisation protests and ecological activism.

Although Neo-Pagans share common commitments to nature and spirit there is a diversity of beliefs and practices. Neo-Pagans generally see masculine and feminine poles within the Deity. Some believe a male god and female goddess really exist as twin deities. Others see the male-female polarity as a metaphor. Others emphasise devotion to a Mother Goddess. Some are atheists, others are polytheists (several gods exist), some are pantheists (all is God) and others are panentheists (all is in God). Neo-Pagan rituals and liturgy concerning their Wheel of the Year festivals present a cyclic redemptive story that clearly imitates key events from the life of Jesus. *Christians would do well to reassert creation liturgies, rediscover a creation theology and creation ethic, and become participants in environmental activism. Christians should reassert that God is both transcendent and immanent and find dialogical points of contact about Jesus via the Wheel of the Year myth.*

New Spiritualities and a New Anthropology

For many devotees life is a process of personal evolution. In this view humans share oneness with God, because ultimately God is energy and we are energy in a material form. The goal is to reunite with divine energy. This model of energy is often linked into theories of quantum physics and reappears in some theories of complementary medicine. So many devotees do not see themselves as creatures made in God’s image who have then fallen from grace. Instead they equate humans with already having a divine nature, but emphasise that we create our own realities.

This new view of humanity partly reflects a romantic reinterpretation of Asian religious wisdom by Blavatsky, Leadbeater, and Steiner. Classic Hindu or Buddhist precepts concerning the law of karma and reincarnation are reinterpreted to fit in with notions of spiritual evolution. Reincarnation becomes a positive dogma (unlike the dreadful meaning it carries in Hindu and Buddhist traditions). The view also draws on ideas developed by human potential teachers like Fritz Perls and Werner Erhard about envisioning success, health and wealth through the latent power of the mind.

Christians need to affirm that we do have a spark of the divine within us, because we are made in the image and likeness of God. However, this divine spark is not synonymous with what New Spirituality devotees affirm. We must repudiate the view that says, “We are God.” We must value the body because God created it, but reject the unreal optimism of this worldview, which is divorced from the reality of sin. *We need a*

new vocabulary about conversion that emphasises pilgrimage, journey and processes of spiritual growth. We need to move beyond a shopping list of itemised sins and speak about the confession of sin as liberation from guilt and the heavy weight of judgement which slows our personal development. We need to acknowledge that we sin against God and others and that others sin against us. We must affirm that to be truly human one must become more loving and link this to the power of God's Spirit. We should also reassert, as the apostles did, the importance of resurrection. Resurrection affirms that the whole person is important to God. Resurrection is radically at odds with reincarnation.

New Spiritualities—Feminine Lifestyle Spirituality

New Spiritualities, especially Wicca, affirm feminine qualities and images. Many women flock to psychic fairs and New Spirituality festivals because they find themselves affirmed, and discover a spirituality that places great value on intuitive abilities. A high percentage of both exhibitors and visitors in New Spirituality festivals are women, with many from the 20- to 40-age group. *When approaching Alternative Spirituality we must dialogue in a more relational manner, presenting ourselves as spiritual co-wanderers, sharing our experiences and testimonies whilst listening in a non-judgemental manner. We must eliminate the incorrect notion that God is male and show that both females and males are made in God's image and likeness. We are also challenged by the need for female evangelists and forms of worship that affirm women as God's servants.*

New Spiritualities - Esotericism and Perennial Gnosis

Some facets of the New Spiritualities emerge from the underground or hidden spiritual traditions of the West, which have often been termed occultism, but a better label is esotericism. The esoteric way emphasises that the universe is made up of symbols and powers that come from God. These symbols reflect ultimate reality and, in a miniature way, these same symbols are inside us. The esoteric tools for decoding the symbols and connecting with the divine include astrology, alchemy, Gnosticism, and the Kabbalah. Practitioners of esoteric ways may emphasise traditions concerned with inner knowledge.

Another perspective is what scholars call "perennial gnosis." This refers to the idea that there is a perennial philosophy or a secret doctrine that is expressed almost like different dialects in the world's religions. The pure form of perennial wisdom and truth is available beyond organised religions. Blavatsky presented Theosophy as the undiluted perennial truth. In her view, the world's religions have helped us to see facets of truth, but because each religion is a temporal product of culture it has only expressed small segments of the highest truth. The highest undiluted truth is available through channelling the deceased "ascended masters."

Evangelicals cannot avoid conflict here. First, the ascended masters' teachings clash with the uniqueness of Christ. We cannot refrain from correcting false ideas concerning the Bible, our doctrines or history. But this must be done in a constructive way without falling into the trap of demonising adherents of the new spiritualities. We need to uphold the rightness of their searching for truth, but do so in a way that positively points them towards the only trustworthy master who ascended into heaven.

Second, Christians find the notion of tolerance both threatening and difficult. We must be tolerant. This does not mean that we agree, but rather that we politely disagree, accepting differences while respecting the other person. Tolerance defends the dignity of the other person and their right to live according to their spirituality. However, this tolerance does not abstain from discussion, discernment and mission. As we see the image of God in every human person, we recognise a longing for God and a longing for unity. It is this longing and the *imago Dei* in humans that offer a starting point for dialogue and form a basis for tolerance and right human relations.

Third, we should appreciate that there is a significant difference between the potentially harmful influence of mediums and potentially helpful practices of

complementary healing methods. Demonising all new spiritual practices is neither true nor helpful.

H. The Challenge to Western Evangelical Christianity

“Cults are the unpaid bills of the Church.” This means that when the Church is weak in certain points of practice and doctrine, then a spiritual alternative arises to fill up the vacuum. Have we paused to reflect on the real possibility that the reason why the Alternative Spiritualities are popular is because of deficiencies in some areas of Christian theology and practice? It is not good enough to criticise the teachings of Alternative Spiritualities unless we are prepared to apply the same degree of critical self-reflection to ourselves. While evangelicals have been strong in preaching that Jesus is Saviour and Lord, perhaps we have neglected other biblical matters.

Throughout Church history, theology was articulated and developed as a result of the missional experience of the Church. We are arguing that such an experience is currently not happening and as a result the Church must address the deficiencies in some of our theology and practice. By interacting with some aspects of New Spirituality we have found the following “unpaid bills.” Our plea is that the Church will deal with these theological and ethical challenges.

Our Concept of God: We currently present and understand God in concrete, cognate, propositional terms, rather than in relational and trinitarian terms. We need to balance our understanding of God and communicate Him in more relational terms.

Spirit of God (pneumatology): Evangelicals acknowledge the work of the Spirit at Pentecost, but we fail to appreciate and declare the Spirit Who from creation hovers over and sustains all creation in an immanent manner. God is present throughout the universe. We need to recover a robust theology of the Spirit from the Old Testament. By neglecting what the Old Testament reveals, our theology of God is skewed towards transcendence (the fact that God exists apart from the universe), rather than holding transcendence and immanence in appropriate biblical balance.

General Revelation: Many evangelicals fail to acknowledge that God speaks, not only through the Bible (special revelation), but also through His creation (general revelation). Currently our doctrine of revelation is lopsided and deficient. By correcting this distortion we will regain the ability to communicate the gospel beginning with creation and then drawing upon popular culture and other forms, making our message more accessible. We need to affirm that it is only in Hell that one cannot find the fingerprint of God.

Creation Theology: Reflecting the influence of scientific materialism on our theology, Evangelicals have an appalling lack of regard for caring for God's creation and naming that environmental destruction as a sin. Within New Spiritualities there is a very strong element of environmental activism. This is a critical theological, ethical, and apologetic issue where we must work to regain lost ground and earn the right to communicate the gospel.

Animal Theology: While there is a biblical distinction between animals and humanity, animals have been neglected as members of God's created order. Christians would do well to consider the abundant biblical references to animals and their place in the new creation. Many adherents of New Spiritualities are opposed to the destruction of species, the treatment of animals as commodities, and medical experiments on animals, and seem to intuit that animals are important in the creation. Once again we face a theological, ethical and apologetic challenge.

Eschatology: Popular Christian eschatology has a destructive and negative view of creation, whereas a biblical view, and the longing of those in New Spirituality, is for an eschatology that rids creation of sin and evil and seeks a holistic creation. Again, evangelicals would do well to biblically rebalance our theology of eschatology and in doing so we will create bridges for followers of New Spirituality.

Fall and Creation: Western Christians completely fail to intelligently interact with the Eastern worldview that embraces karmic views of sin and suffering even though such concepts are discussed in the Bible at length. As a result, a major deficiency exists in

our apologetic understanding of theodicy (how a good God can allow evil), limiting our interaction with followers of New Spirituality. Many Alternative Spirituality seekers also know experientially they have been sinned against. Hence, we need to be more thorough in our theological content and balance our proclamation of the goodness of God by acknowledging that “all have sinned and others have hurt us by their sins.”

Wisdom and Guidance: Alternative Spirituality seems desirable because it offers practical, tangible and immediate ways of making decisions and determining Divine guidance. Evangelical Christians continue to have a profound failure in developing a practical theology of decision-making. While we do not deny the power and need of prayer, we must also acknowledge that pre-modern Christians engaged in other practical forms of decision-making.

Angelology: The Bible has numerous references to angels, yet modern evangelical praxis is totally devoid of a practical angelology. Angels fascinate some followers of New Spirituality, and the topic is very popular. This presents us with a significant point of contact and discussion.

Spirituality and Spiritual Disciplines: Meditation and other practical spiritual practices are found throughout the Bible, yet followers of New Spirituality see practical expressions of Christianity as inferior. Since seekers involved in New Spiritualities are far more likely to initially be engaged by practical expressions of Christianity than by dry, cognitive presentations, it is imperative that we realise the practical potential of such disciplines in enriching our faith and engaging people evangelistically.

Preaching: The context in which communications occur today is in multi-media, multi-sensory, interactive formats. The Church persists in preaching and evangelising primarily in monologues. While the gospel’s content does not change, the way we communicate it must change if we wish to be heard and understood.

Resurrection Theology: We completely affirm the evangelical concern of the centrality of Christ’s birth, life, death and bodily resurrection. However, when interacting with New Spiritualities, we need to recall the apostolic preaching emphasis in Acts on the power of the risen Christ. The resurrection should be the focal point of our witness in post-modernity. It is the resurrection which has far more power than reincarnation: the resurrection gives us the ultimate form of empowerment for our earthly lives, and the resurrection offers us the conclusive form of renewal and cosmic connectedness. We urge the evangelical church to focus first on the resurrection, not just the death of Christ, when facing the world of New Spiritualities.

Sexuality: Followers of New Spiritualities affirm the sacredness of sex and sexuality, yet in some evangelical sectors the subject is unmentionable, taboo or treated mainly from the perspective of sin. To aid interaction with New Spirituality, Christians would do well to have a far more holistic and biblical understanding of sex and sexuality. In this regard the Church needs to rediscover the positive biblical teachings about females and males in the original creation and in Jesus’ kingdom teachings.

Healing: Our evangelical understanding of healing and curing is closely aligned with modern medical practices. We need to be discerning about modern medical practices applauding what is fruitful and judging that which leads to ethical problems (like overuse of prescription medicine, drug experiments on animals, problems of vegetative patients, cloning, nano-technology, etc.). We need a holistic theology of healing grounded in Scripture and a balanced understanding about complementary methods of healing.

Vocation, Practical Ethics and Social Justice: The upsurge of interest in spirituality coincides with a genuine hunger to draw spiritual disciplines into the workplace and one’s vocation. Christians need to rediscover the Reformers’ emphasis on faith and vocation and recognise that God is interested in all vocations and not just those of professional theologians, clergy and overseas missionaries. New Spirituality devotees also lobby businesses and governments to pursue social justice for humans, animals and the planet generally. Alongside these trends we see some New

Spiritualities forming religious teachings based on ethical topics like cloning and nanotechnology. On all these fronts the voice of the Church needs to be heard. We should revisit the social justice message of the Old Testament prophets and the kingdom commissions of Jesus, all of which is consistent with the Lausanne Covenant of 1974 and the Manila Manifesto of 1989.

Church as Community: New Spirituality longs for genuine community in a world that is often alienating and uncaring. Sadly, there are Christians who look for what they can get out of Church, rather than what they can put into it, and many gatherings do not reflect the close-knit family we are meant to be.

4. THE CASE FOR INCARNATIONAL MISSION

So far we have reviewed both the broad spiritual setting of our time and the key features of the New Spiritualities. We have also examined the standard evangelical perspective on new religions and New Spiritualities, and the challenge we face.

I. Shift in Perspective

We have identified critical problems for outreach that relies exclusively on confrontational apologetics as the sole or primary method of evangelism. We are not dismissing countercult apologetics, nor are we calling on the Church to abandon apologetics as part of its toolkit in outreach. The Issue Group reiterates that apologetics has a positive role to play, but that it cannot be used to the exclusion of other tools. Our concern is that there are other valuable tools and methods that are being overlooked. So we are calling for a shift in perspective, and we want to encourage the Church to make use of these unused tools.

As we turn the discussion toward considering these tools — tools that have been used by missionaries worldwide — we realise that we are taking a risk. The risk lies in the common human reaction to new ideas or change. Those who feel threatened or have the most to lose can resist making changes.

It is likely that some who cherish apologetics the most will feel, “It isn’t broken, so don’t fix it.” In the Issue Group’s deliberations about the challenges facing the Western Church and particularly in the response to New Spiritualities, we maintain, “Something is broken, and it must be fixed.” So our plea is that the remainder of our discussion ought to be studied carefully and treated fairly.

The Church has two major ideological barriers to overcome: clinging to the word “cult” and treating doctrinal apologetics as untouchable “sacred cows.” This is understandably difficult when evangelicals have relied so much and so long on confrontational apologetic methods. Those who have invested their lives in countercult ministry may interpret our call as implying a rejection of the need for apologetic defences of doctrine and a commitment to a wishy-washy form of evangelism that compromises the gospel. *We want to underscore the point that we believe in the importance of sound biblical doctrine, and we are not abandoning apologetics.* Indeed, below we discuss the place of apologetics in the scheme of incarnational or contextual missions to new religions and New Spiritualities. Our call is for a profound, fundamental *shift in perspective* concerning new religions and New Spiritualities. We must shift from the standpoint that devotees are heretical enemies to treating them as genuinely unreached people groups living within Western nations. It means they are cultures not cults. It entails changing attitudes from ridicule or scorn to a view that sees them as people who need the Lord, and that moves from confrontation to cross-cultural missionary engagement.

When Christians begin to recognise that new religions are best comprehended as global sub-cultures, then the need for cross-cultural missions will start to make sense. To inhabit a sub-culture involves people in a network of relationships that interacts around shared customs, cuisine, rites and rituals, habits of daily living, beliefs and cosmologies. To reach inside the devotees’ world requires the same kind of cultural sensitivity and respect one should show when visiting another country. So for effective outreach to occur, Christians must be equipped in a number of skills, which takes us far beyond the art of debating beliefs. Some basic relational skills are essential. These include being able to listen and understand, and loving and respecting the other person even when there is strong disagreement.

Beyond that Christians need to learn from Scripture how to be effective communicators, particularly following the model of Jesus in the way He met people.

Studying other biblical characters and recognising how they coped when living in a culture with diverse religious beliefs, is also helpful for sharpening our relational and communication skills. The days of formulaic evangelism based on tent-meetings, mass rallies, and gospel tracts are fading away. The new era of contextual missions for the re-Christianising of the West has already begun.

Toward that end then we shall now explore the biblical, historical and theological basis for missions. This will entail exploring the critical contextualised approach to missions. This discussion will then be illustrated by some case studies that have been developed and were analysed at the 2004 Forum.

J. Biblical, Historical and Theological Basis

Defining Incarnation/Incarnational Missions

At the heart of the Christian revelation claim is Christ's coming into the world as Jesus of Nazareth. John's Gospel begins by declaring that "the Word became flesh." When the "Word became flesh," God's method was to communicate directly with people by becoming one of us. The incarnation of the Word was God's "self-expression" to us. "Incarnation" means that God the Son took on human nature — that Jesus was God in human flesh.

In recent times an understanding of the incarnation has led Christians to develop a concept in world missions called "incarnational missions." In different church traditions this expression is used with various shades of meaning. For evangelicals, incarnational missions entails an approach to outreach and ministry that is based on an understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Incarnational missions involves the Christian entering into the cultural context in which non-Christians live and bringing them the message of Jesus Christ in words, symbols and actions that honestly express the truth of the gospel in culturally relevant ways. The Christian is a messenger choosing to live in another person's culture, interacting with that culture, developing relationships and making a long-term commitment to building up disciples inside that cultural setting. The message is transmitted and understood inside that culture. Those who become followers of Christ are nurtured under the messenger's guidance to apply their faith to all aspects of life and thought in that culture and develop a worshipping community there.

Jesus' Relational Communications

Jesus is the first model of incarnation in mission. His work on earth involved much more than the twin acts of Jesus dying for the sins of the world and His resurrection. Jesus' incarnation was relational. His method was an important part of His message, and that method must be part of our means of communicating His message to a fallen world today. Jesus became one of us and was in relationship with those of His day. Jesus communicated as a part of His culture.

The life of Jesus involved a wide range of human experiences. He had the usual kind of relationships with His parents, relatives, and neighbours. He lived in a Palestinian Jewish community, learned a trade, observed the customs and religious festivals of that community and grew into adulthood. In the course of His itinerant ministry He interacted with crowds and individuals — conversing, healing, and teaching. In that historical and social context Jesus was a Jewish person living in a world influenced by the Law of Moses, the language and culture of the Greeks and the language, laws and politics of the Roman Empire.

Put simply, Jesus was a person who grew up in a particular culture. He behaved in ways relevant to His specific cultural context. As a Jewish male He was circumcised, ate the cuisine of His time, attended synagogue and Temple, and respected His parents and religious elders. He challenged the cultural norms and practices that were contrary to the desires of God. This is seen in the ways in which He treated women differently and His resistance to the corruption of Jewish religion. *The lesson for us is that Jesus participated in the culture of His day. So we need to participate in the cultures of those we are trying to reach.*

We also see that Jesus developed personal relationships throughout His life, but especially during his public ministry. He interacted with people in the synagogue and Temple, in villages, in households, on boats and in many other social settings. Central to His ministry was personal involvement in the lives and circumstances of those He met. The Son of Man befriended people and treated them courteously, while also exercising His teaching authority. He met people at the point of practical needs and did not turn

them away. He related to family and friends, with acquaintances and strangers, religious and political figures and especially with His enemies.

Jesus' closest relationships were with His disciples. At the start of His ministry Jesus invited each of the twelve disciples "to follow" and to "be with" Him. He did not begin relationships by inquiring what doctrines or creeds they knew and believed. The initial dynamic was personal and relational. As the disciples became better acquainted with Jesus and as they observed Him relating to others in meeting needs, they began to wonder "Who is this man?" The lesson is that Jesus involved Himself in the lives of other people and had deep relationships.

As we explore the details of Jesus' teaching and life we receive further clues that point us along the way to developing incarnational missions.

New Wine, New Wineskins

In the Gospels (Mark 2:22, Matthew 9:17 and Luke 5:38) Jesus spoke in parables about pouring "*new wine into fresh wineskins.*" The "*new wine*" Jesus referred to was His teaching about God's kingdom. The "*fresh wineskins*" referred to the forms and contexts into which Jesus' proclamation would be made. Jesus' "*new teaching*" (Mark 1:27) was related directly to the redemptive work of God in the Old Testament. The settings in which Jesus acted and spoke were the "*fresh wineskins*" into which he poured the "*new wine.*" The good news must be proclaimed in new contexts. So when the new wine and the new wineskins are allowed to properly interact with each other, the gospel goes forth powerfully.

However, as Matthew records, when either the new wine or the new wineskin is ignored then the gospel is spoiled and perverted because there will be no proper fermentation. Luke notes that some people will not like the new wine and will want the old instead. However, Jesus is adamant that the new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins.

The analogy of the wine and wineskins offers us a basic principle about evangelism: the messenger must present the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit in words and actions that are on the wave length of the audience. Incarnational missions must take note of the culture, customs, language and beliefs of the people we hope to persuade to follow Jesus. We must reframe the message so that it is transmitted across the cultural barriers without being watered down or perverted. The new wine and new wineskins show us we must translate the good news into new settings.

The Acts of the Apostles shows us the earliest instances where the good news was proclaimed in different cultural contexts: to Palestinian Jews (Acts 2-4), to Hellenic Jews (Acts 6), to a Samaritan (Acts 8), to an African (Acts 8), to a Greek and a Roman (Acts 10 onwards). In each case the gospel was proclaimed, but in a manner by which the message made sense to those hearing it. The apostles followed Jesus' command by pouring new wine into new wineskins wherever they went. They started incarnational ministries among Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

The challenge before the Church today is to continue to pursue pouring new wine into new wineskins. Perhaps those who struggle to do this will need to reflect on whether they actually prefer the "old wine" of their methods of evangelism and apologetics !

The Woman at the Well

An example of how Jesus ministered cross-culturally is found in His meeting with the Samaritan woman in John 4. We point to this encounter as an illustration of how Jesus met and interacted with someone who belonged to another culture and religion.

The Samaritans were culturally separated from the Jews because their origins went back to the Assyrian conquest of the northern tribes of Israel (722 BC). The Samaritans claimed kinship with Ephraim and Manasseh, while the Jews saw them as foreign descendants of the Assyrian colonists who were taught aspects of Israelite religion, but failed to live up to its precepts (2 Kings 17). The Samaritans had their own version of the Pentateuch, which differed significantly from the Hebrew version. So their

canon of Scripture was different from the Jews, as were their religious rituals. To the Jews from Ezra's time onwards, the Samaritans were despised heretics (Ezra 4; Nehemiah 4).

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman He crossed several barriers: racial-cultural, gender, social stigma and religion. Jesus entered into the woman's culture by being in her village. He engaged her in conversation by starting with a point of common contact, namely the water in the well. The woman partly understood and partly misunderstood what Jesus meant, until the conversation deepened and he pointed to her broken relationships. She then became the herald to her village, coaxing them to come and meet Jesus.

The focus of Jesus' conversation with the woman was on her need of redemption and forgiveness. Even when they discussed religious matters — such as the mountain and temple as proper places of worship — Jesus did not ridicule her beliefs; he did not treat her as a heretic or servant of the devil, but took her to the heart of the matter in a gentle and respectful way. The woman herself recognised Jesus was a Jew and expected to be vilified by Him for being a heretic. It is striking that the approach Jesus took with this "heretic" is opposite to the approach and manner in which many Christians today handle followers of heretical religion. The lesson for us is to find points of contact and engage with others.

Kingdom Commission

When Jesus rose from the dead He commissioned His disciples to be His messengers by saying, "*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you*" (John 20:21). In this short commission Jesus indicates that as He was sent by the Father into the world, now the disciples must go in like manner. Christ became human to communicate to us in vocabulary and actions we would understand. So we as Christ's Church are to go forth and incarnate the gospel to our culture and beyond to the nations. We must communicate in symbols, ideas, words and in those actions which people will understand — within the context of their specific cultures.

Paul's Incarnational Missionary Maxim

Paul is regarded as the greatest missionary of the early church. When he corresponded with the Corinthian Christians, Paul explained what his basic missionary method was: he became a Jew to the Jew and a Gentile to the Gentile (1Corinthians 9:19-23). This is incarnational ministry.

Paul's remark may appear somewhat enigmatic on first sight. How could Paul, who was born a Jew, become "a Jew to the Jews?" The answer to this can be gleaned from Luke's account of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts. When Paul met Jewish people he behaved according to their customs. Each Sabbath he went to the synagogue to preach (Acts 13:14, 14:1, 17:1-2, 18:4). He read from the Scriptures about the Messiah and then declared how Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (Acts 13:15). We also discover that Paul observed the Jewish customs and festivals (Acts 16:2, 18:18, 21:24-26). When Paul sought to evangelise Jews he joined their culture, visited their places of worship, observed the customs and religious rites and used these as an opportunity to preach and make disciples. In modern parlance, Paul went to the synagogues and held his "seeker services" among Jews and God-fearers who were acquainted with the Hebrew Bible. This audience was familiar with the contents of the Scriptures.

How did Paul become a Gentile to the Gentiles? From Luke's account we observe that Paul did not expect pagans to attend the synagogue service. He was aware that the Gentiles had not read the Bible and did not keep the Sabbath day. Paul went to where they met, and he lived among them as he taught about Jesus making Gentile disciples.

The classic case study of Paul's method with the Gentiles is found in Acts 17:16-34 when he visited Athens. The key points can be summarised as follows:

- When Paul arrived in Athens he was appalled by the idolatry, but it provoked him to share the good news (vv.16-17). He did not demonise or ridicule those with whom he talked.
- He did his Jewish “seeker service” in the synagogue and then went out to meet the pagans.
- Paul began by talking about Jesus and the resurrection (v.18) which intrigued his listeners and he was invited to speak before the Areopagus (v.19).
- In his formal presentation Paul acknowledged the Athenians as religious searchers (v.22), and he did not call them fools or heretics.
- He started his presentation by interacting with their cultural icons, namely the altar to the unknown god (v.23).
- He shared from the doctrine of creation as a basis of common ground (vv.24-28) to show God does not discriminate between the nations.
- When he referred to God not needing servants, Paul was showing his familiarity with their literature since there are parallel expressions in the writings of Plato and Euripides.
- Paul used quotes from the Stoic philosophers (v.28) Epimenides (“In him we live and move and have our being”) and Aratus and Cleanthes (“for we are also his offspring”). Paul understood their beliefs.
- Paul called for repentance (v.30), spoke of Jesus, judgement and the resurrection.
- The response was threefold: some sneered, some wanted to know more, and others believed (v.34).

The lesson for us is that Paul must have taken the time to familiarise himself with their culture so that he could pour new wine into fresh wineskins. This is evident from his allusions to their beliefs and literature. He found points of contact inside their culture and beliefs, used the creation as a springboard and managed to communicate the essence of the gospel to a group that had never read the Bible. This situation provides a model for us as we seek to reach out in contextually relevant ways.

Witness of Daniel

One can also find examples of cross-cultural witness before the birth of Jesus. The best case is the life and ministry of Daniel in Babylon. The context is that Daniel is a Jewish exile living under Nebuchadnezzar’s “pagan” kingship. Babylon was a multi-religious, multi-cultural empire (which might remind us somewhat of our current context). Daniel walks the line between faithful obedience to God’s commands and seizing the opportunity for strategic witness bearing (he is made chief of the astrologers/Magi, Daniel 2:48). The impact of Daniel’s witness bears fruit centuries later when the astrologers/Magi arrive in Jerusalem seeking the one born as king of the Jews (Matthew 2). Daniel offers us a case study on how to minister as a believer in a multi-religious setting and on how to point astrologers to Christ, the Creator and Ruler of the planets and stars.

Incarnational Missions and Church History

Throughout history the Church has been involved in incarnational forms of ministry and missions. Christians have sought to communicate the gospel and develop disciples and worshipping communities across the cultural divide. Church history can be a useful tool in teaching and helping us in our calling to reach the lost today.

Space precludes a lengthy discussion here, but the following conclusions have been noted by missiologists. Over the centuries of Church expansion methods and models have changed over time and according to context. The missional experiences of the Church are a dynamic work. The ever-present danger of our time is that we try to franchise methods of outreach in the absence of any critical reflection on method and the socio-cultural settings in which we find ourselves. When considering case studies in history we will find inspiring examples reflecting the brilliance of God’s servants, and also

appalling examples reflecting the fallen and complex mess that makes us fallible humans. We can always benefit from examining both the successes and failures of our forebears.

K. Critical Contextualisation

The development of an incarnational ministry necessarily involves certain processes of study and reflection about unreached people groups and how the gospel can be communicated effectively to them. Missiologists refer to these processes by the expression "critical contextualisation."

Contextualisation involves communicating the message about Christ in a manner that enables people in specific cultural settings to truly and honestly grasp what the gospel is about and to experience the risen Christ within that culture. In order to achieve that goal Christians must:

- Study and interpret the culture or receptor audience.
- Study and interpret the Scriptures.
- Appropriate new insights that will produce new ways of sharing the gospel.

So the task of critical contextualisation necessitates that the Christian messenger grapples with:

- God's revelation in Scripture.
- Incarnational forms of witness bearing.
- Translating the message and the life of faith into the culture.

The messenger must also reflect on his or her own home culture to avoid distorting the gospel by identifying it with the sending culture. An effective missionary is self-reflecting and critically aware of the cultural accretions of his or her parent culture. Without critical reflection the danger is that something will be added to the gospel: the message is that a person must adopt the messenger's home culture in order to become a Christian. That is ethnocentrism and not a true communication of the gospel.

L. Syncretism

Syncretism is the risk in any outreach endeavour. Syncretism is the incorporation of beliefs from other religions into our message, so that the gospel is watered down or becomes an unrecognisable hybrid.

It is the fear that the message will be corrupted that causes some Christians to stifle any innovative efforts in missions and evangelism. The danger here is that Christians make the Church irrelevant because of hypothetical fears that the message “might” be perverted. On the other side is the very real danger that the message will be compromised by the incorporation of false teachings and false practices because of lack of critical discernment. We must walk and talk a balanced and creative path through the leading of the Holy Spirit, accountability to the Church, scrutiny of our work under Scripture, and the collective wisdom of the Christian community.

M. Ancillary Apologetics and Missions

Apologetics, evangelism and mission are interconnected throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament Israel’s role was to be a light to the nations and the prophetic signs fulfilled in her history were related to her missional task. In the New Testament the link becomes more explicit as prophecy, miracles and personal testimonies amalgamate as apologetic proofs for the Christ-event. For example, this convergence is evident in Paul’s speech in Athens.

In different eras missionaries and evangelists have used apologetics in their outreach stratagems. We believe that apologetics belongs in the toolkit of every missionary and evangelist. However, a synergy between apologetics and missions has often been lacking in modern times in the West. In our call for incarnational missions we have emphasised that apologetics must not be discarded, but its role should not be the primary means of outreach. Its importance is in the discipleship process. The call to discipleship necessarily involves a prolonged process of explaining the gospel in humble reliance on the Holy Spirit. Those who are challenged to follow Christ will have intellectual questions or problems, and it is the function of apologetics to address them.

Two questions remain. What is the role of apologetics in missions to new religions and New Spiritualities? What apologetic styles are suitable?

Role of Apologetics

Harold Netland argues that apologists need to distinguish between trans-cultural and culture-specific apologetic issues. Trans-cultural means universally applicable issues above all cultures such as the biblical plot line of creation, fall, redemption, incarnation, resurrection and judgment. Culture-specific issues refer to those obstacles to the gospel that are peculiar to a given people group — so the barriers faced by a Jehovah’s Witness are very different from those faced by a Wiccan.

A crucial threshold for apologists to cross entails understanding the new religion or people group they hope to reach. Genuine understanding involves much more than drafting up a chart comparing the Bible with the group’s doctrines. Apologists cannot presume to start a dialogue about worldviews or even answer questions until some rapport with the people group is attained. We recommend the following practical steps for apologists:

- Establish rapport with adherents of a new religion by befriending them. Apologists must cultivate the art of listening and respecting the other person.
- Interview adherents to discover their hierarchy of needs and how the group meets those needs.

- Observe how adherents interact with each other, what social dynamics exist for mutual encouragement and supporting relationships, what behavioural protocols signify acceptance or exclusion from the group and what rituals or practical exercises do adherents perform as an expression of how they see the world.
- Ask adherents what kinds of questions or impressions they have concerning Christianity. All too often apologists deal with a set menu of questions they have thought up themselves. The danger is that the apologist can create a profile of another religion that does not correspond to reality.

Apologists must meet non-Christians and discover from them what culture-specific barriers may need addressing and they need to build bridges between the gospel and the culture and worldview of the non-Christian. We have noted good examples of respectful two-way conversations in the ministries of both Jesus and Paul. While there may be settings where formal speeches are delivered, apologists should allow the vulnerability that comes with deep relationships. Apologists must be able to converse with people; that means a dynamic form of two-way communication. Honest conversation builds up trust and mutual respect, while contrived conversations based on quick-fire “pat answers” do not persuade non-Christians.

Apologetic Styles

While there is certainly a time and place when false beliefs must be challenged, the winsomeness of the gospel can be blunted by an over reliance on debunking beliefs. The strength of doctrinal apologetics is in building up the faith of the Christian and in guarding against syncretism. However, countercult apologists need to broaden their horizons because apologetics encompasses much more than just the refutation of heresy. A balance needs to be reached between making positive apologetic arguments that commends the goodness of the gospel and Christian ethical position, alongside of arguments that refute false beliefs.

Some fruitful areas where apologetics and missional work might converge include:

- Balanced apologetics that draw out the nuances of the goodness and blessing of the original creation alongside an understanding of the fall.
- Creation-based apologetics that interact with contemporary ethical and ecological problems in light of Neo-Pagan spiritualities.
- Wisdom-based apologetics that draw on the wisdom books of Scripture and the concept of Christ as the wisdom of God, particularly in interactions with aspirants of neo-Buddhist spiritualities in the West.
- The Spirit of God as the unifying creator of community, the work of God’s Spirit in sustaining the creation, the apocalyptic healing of the nations at Pentecost (in contrast to the division of nations at Babel) and culminating in the Spirit’s witness to the uniqueness of Christ.
- Recovering a resurrection theology and apologetic that shows how the risen Christ empowers life and the resurrection confirms the deity of Christ.
- Acknowledging criticisms of the Church for all its “unpaid bills” is a very effective dialogical point with New Spirituality seekers.

5. CASE STUDIES AND TESTIMONIES

Now that we have examined the biblical and theological principles of incarnational missions we shall illustrate how these principles have been implemented in some case studies. We would counsel readers to reflect on their own cultural setting before attempting to imitate the case studies below. We begin with three case studies that are used in ways that might be described as *attractional* as it relates to the Church and we then follow this with two studies that might be described as *missional*. By this we mean that some evangelistic methods present the gospel in ways that seek to direct the Alternative Spirituality adherent to the church campus in order to encounter the gospel. These approaches hope to *attract* the seeker. By contrast, *missional* approaches seek to incarnate the gospel outside of the context of the church campus among the subcultures of the alternative spiritualities.

With the decline of the Christendom culture in the West, we believe that attractive evangelism will continue to have a place, but that the Church will need to increasingly utilize *missional* approaches. Again, the reader is encouraged to consider their own local context and to utilize culturally relevant approaches.

N. Salt Lake Theological Seminary and *Bridges*: Cross-Cultural Missions to Latter-day Saints

Salt Lake Theological Seminary has a passion for equipping Christians to reach Latter-day Saints (LDS) with the gospel. To this end, they have developed a video/DVD-based training tool entitled *Bridges: Helping Mormons Discover God's Grace*. *Bridges* was used with considerable success during the 2002 Olympic Winter Games, and continues to offer Christians an effective method of outreach to Mormons. The basic philosophy of the *Bridges* approach is built around three core beliefs. First, there is a commitment to relational evangelism rather than confrontational evangelism. Second, there is a commitment to understanding the unique culture of Latter-day Saints and finding points of contact within that culture in which the gospel can be heard and understood. Third, there is a commitment to church-based evangelism that seeks to lead LDS not only to a biblically-based faith in Jesus Christ but also to a strong commitment to the local church.

The essential and critical characteristic of this approach is the assumption that LDS should not be viewed as members of a "cult", but rather as members of a culture. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), Jesus commanded his disciples to take the gospel to all nations. We often read this as a command to take the gospel to nation-states, such as China or Nigeria. However, in the New Testament, the word that is translated "nations" is *ethne*. Its meaning is closer to what we now call ethnic groups. We shouldn't be surprised, therefore, to find that the [Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups](#) identifies "Mormons" as a unique ethnic group that emerged within the American context. Put simply, "ethnicity" is defined by a cluster of characteristics that leads a group to see itself as "us" and those outside to see the group as "them." Thus Jews, Armenians, and Gypsies fall within the category of ethnic groups — and so do the Latter-day Saints.

Barriers and Bridges

Once Mormons are seen as an ethnic group, the question arises as to which parts of this culture are important to those who seek to share the gospel with them. Specifically, what are the cultural barriers that keep them from hearing and what are the cultural bridges that make the Good News sound like good news to them? An example of an important barrier is persecution. Mormon people view themselves as a persecuted people and unless this is understood and taken seriously it will be very difficult or

impossible to communicate the gospel to them in a meaningful way. There are clear historical examples of Mormon persecution that Christians should sympathise with and take seriously. However, the Latter-day Saints, like most people, are selective readers of history. To the popular Mormon mind, the essence of LDS history is that they are a people who have endured great and undeserved persecution. Any fault that might be placed at the feet of the LDS Church is unrecognised, dismissed or ignored. Only particular fragments of history — those telling the story of Latter-day Saints as the victims of unjust persecution — remain in their collective memory. These stories are still very much alive for LDS people and their sense of being persecuted for their faith is an integral part of the Mormon psyche. This sense of being a persecuted people has a huge impact on how Latter-day Saints respond to comments about their Church, their beliefs, their culture, their history and their leaders. In addition, the LDS sense of what constitutes criticism generally has an extremely low threshold. This sensitivity is especially pronounced when such comments come from evangelical Christians, who are seen as their chief critics and persecutors. Ironically, this sense of being persecuted by traditional Christians confirms their LDS faith. The LDS syllogism goes like this: true Christians have always been persecuted; you are persecuting us; therefore, we must be true Christians.

The greatest antidote to this belief that they are a persecuted people is to get to know them as individuals and demonstrate that we like them. For example, one pastor in a solidly LDS city coaches a community youth football team. This single activity has opened countless doors with parents and young people because it communicates that he likes his neighbours and values their children. This involvement makes him, in the eyes of his LDS neighbours, a person who they will consider talking with about their spiritual concerns. The word also gets out in the tightly knit LDS community that here is a Christian who does not hate them.

Once a church is considered to be a place where they will be welcomed, many LDS will come like Nicodemus came to Jesus — discretely, hoping not to be found out by their fellow ward members. It is surprising how many Latter-day Saints are deeply dissatisfied with the LDS Church and beliefs. Churches that take this strategically low-key approach are experiencing rapid growth and seeing large numbers of Latter-day Saints confessing faith in Jesus through Christian baptism.

Bridges to Sharing the Gospel

A cultural bridge that allows us to make the Good News sound like good news to LDS people is found in the Mormon emphasis on personal experience. Ken Mulholland, one of the creators of *Bridges*, writes:

I first discovered this reality more than thirty years ago. As a young man, I had great confidence in the power of argument to persuade LDS that their truth claims were false. Eventually, I became convinced that I had found the unassailable argument that would overthrow any “reasonable” Mormon’s confidence in their doctrine. I shared this argument with two LDS men who listened with great interest. After I had finished what I thought to be a compelling presentation, I asked them for their response. They looked at me with sincerity and said thoughtfully that my argument was solid and good, but, in the final analysis, they could not accept its conclusion because they had both prayed about the Mormon faith and they had a “testimony” that it was true. It was at this point that I stopped trying to argue Latter-day Saints out of their belief in the LDS doctrine or leadership. Instead, I prayed that the Lord would open my eyes and my heart and show me how to communicate with LDS people in ways that they could, and would, hear.

The approach of the *Bridges* course further communicates the answer to Mulholland’s prayer.

The Fields Are White Unto Harvest

The traditional understanding of evangelism aimed at Latter-day Saints is that it is extremely difficult and one can expect to see little fruit. However, the Bridges approach flatly says that this is not true. Mormon people are spiritually hungry and many long to know that God can accept them, yet for many that spiritual hunger is not being satisfied with in the LDS Church. If we extend ourselves to them in genuine friendship, are respectful of their culture, demonstrate by our lives that we love and follow Jesus, then we will have their ears.

In the last decade a few evangelical churches in Utah experienced considerable growth and effectiveness in reaching Latter-day Saints. For example, Washington Heights Baptist Church in Ogden has 1,200 people attending on a typical Sunday, with over 400 of these being former Mormons. Christ Evangelical Church, located only a few miles from Brigham Young University, has 600 people attending weekly, with half coming from a LDS background. These two churches represent a growing number of Utah churches that have taken a fresh approach to reaching Mormon people and this approach — the one advocated by *Bridges* — is bearing considerable fruit.

For further information on *Bridges* see the website www.slts.edu.

O. Christina Riecke: e/motion

Christina Riecke is a prominent German evangelist, pastor and author. She has written a number of books concerned with the problems of youth evangelism, answering faith and apologetics questions from children and biblical and spiritual issues of concern to young women from African and European backgrounds. Several years ago she founded a women's group called "Sisterhood." It has become a small but growing movement with several groups throughout Germany.

Riecke and her colleagues are part of a growing trend in Germany, where there are an increasing number of evangelistic women's meetings. These often involve gatherings that are tailored to reaching women through women. For example, women will decorate their churches, cook enjoyable meals and invite female speakers who explore a holistic range of women's issues, including sharing the gospel. For those such as Riecke, the atmosphere of an event is very significant. For instance, when holding a Saturday meeting they will change their whole church and create a very warm environment.

Riecke and those she works with began by conducting wellness-weekends in idyllic nature settings. From the start there was an emphasis on hospitality. Women would invite others they knew along, whether friends, colleagues or neighbours. When they meet together they enjoy a creative atmosphere in creation. The arts are a significant aspect of their experience together. A typical gathering could involve one or more of the following: dancing, reading and writing poetry, singing, comedy, drawing and painting. They use symbol, story telling and elements of liturgy, and bibliodrama. Stories from the Bible are shared, which often concentrate on women's stories.

As Sisterhood has evolved, they have also begun holding meetings in public places such as in bookstores where they read poetry.

Founding of e/motion

Following the success of Sisterhood, Riecke and her colleagues planted a church called "e/motion." The founding of e/motion flowed out of their experience with Sisterhood. As a result, when e/motion was formed they adopted a lot of the experiences that had been incorporated into Sisterhood. One of the main differences between Sisterhood and the founding of e/motion is that e/motion involves both women and men.

Riecke planted e/motion in a rented room in the former coal-mine area of Essen. The location was intentional, as in recent times Essen has become a place for cultural events that especially attracts young adults, who visit concerts and other performances.

As with the Sisterhood meetings, e/motion employs a welcoming atmosphere, not only with people but also with the décor of the church. Though all are welcome, they intentionally seek to attract segments of society that would normally spend time in creative settings. Their church room has a wooden floor with an orange carpet. Indian fabrics, given to them by their partner church in India adorn portions of the church. A view of the church will present paintings, flowers, and candles. Symbols such as the rainbow and dove are included. Participants don't sit in rows, but in two big circles, so that people can look at each other. Good food is also a regular part of e/motion.

Those who visit and are a part of e/motion come from different backgrounds. Some have been brought up in an evangelical tradition, others from a variety of church backgrounds. Significantly, many are spiritual seekers. The majority are young adults between 20-35 years old; however, there are some teenagers, children and elderly people. Participants come from a variety of vocations. The church has attracted many from the healing professions, such as doctors, psychologists, nurses, social workers. There are also persons who are involved in the arts: artists, photographers and graphic designers.

Riecke says that seekers are asking holy questions. They might be interested in yoga, aromatherapy, Feng-Shui as well as environmental issues and questions of peace.

They might seek some inspiration from the Jesus story, as well as from the Dalai Lama. They are longing for meaning, for spiritual experiences and for personal growth.

They celebrate "SONday service" every Sunday night, at 7:30. The opening service begins with a liturgical greeting:

We celebrate Sunday because of God, the creator, who made the seventh day of creation a special day. We celebrate Sunday because on the first day of the week Jesus has risen from death.

We celebrate Sunday because the Holy Spirit still inspires life...

The e/motion service involves a lot of music (U2-like-popsongs, worships songs and some hymns), poetry, a time of prayer (prayer for healing, blessing, anointing with oil), movie scenes. The message is delivered in a storytelling way (very rarely with three points). Food and drinks are provided.

During the week they hold a variety of social events, prayer meetings, discussions on wellness, music, workshops and seminars on political questions. They also hold sisterhood and brotherhood meetings and a cooking course. A weekly newsletter shares about what is going on.

The church also involves various rites. For example, when a young woman moves out of her parent's house into her own place, other women will come and visit her and give a book to her (Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own). They read certain passages and encourage the young woman to find her own place, to take her space and to share it.

According to Riecke,

The whole thing is growing because of relationships. You feel welcome, you are encouraged to trust your questions, you belong, you bring others along, neighbours, relatives, friends, colleagues ... One challenge we are facing is that a lot of counselling is required and a lot of teaching and sharing of background information about the Christian faith. One could mistrust us because we are too orange, too political, too spiritual, charismatic, maybe even too female; but we don't find these labels helpful and don't feel they fit anyway.

Riecke and her colleagues are seeing men and women working side by side, equally encouraged to share their gifts. Seekers and Christians alike, share the inspiration and experience of e/motion.

For further information (all in German) see:

- The website www.cvjm-emotion.de/main.php.
- Christina Riecke, Gott, meine schwarze große Schwester: Frauen aus Afrika lesen die Bibel, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Aussaat-Verlag, 1997).
- Christina Riecke, Sisterhood — Was Frauen einander bedeuten, (Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 2002).
- Christina Riecke, Days of Grace: was Mädchen und junge Frauen bewegt; wie Mädchen und junge Frauen im Glauben Wachsen, (Gießen/Basel: Brunnen-Verlag, 2004).
- Christina Riecke and Gottfried Müller, Wer geht mit nach Ninive? Anstöße zur Jugendevangalisation, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Aussaat-Verlag, 2002).
- Monika Deitenbeck, Marcus C. Leitschuh, Christina Riecke, and Brother Paulus Terwitte, Konnte Jesus übers Wasser gehen? 153 Antworten auf Fragen rund um den Glauben, (Paderborn: Bonifatius/Moers: Brendow, 2004).

P. Mark Lewis and Gospel Choirs: Meeting Ground for Christians and New Spirituality Adherents

Over the past decade and a half the phenomenon of gospel music has taken on monumental proportions in countries such as Denmark, Norway, Germany and Poland and is likewise spreading beyond Europe and North America to places like Japan and China. Whether people join a choir or simply attend a number of worship services and concerts, the primary attraction is the experience of singing, clapping, and swaying to the rhythmic and energetic sounds of African-American gospel music. The texts of the songs convey a gospel message usually in English, but always in a relatively non-sophisticated language that is easily accessible to those for whom English is not their first language.

Although choir participants represent a wide demographic spectrum in terms of age, gender, religious affiliation, many who are drawn to this phenomenon are either actively or passively associated with the practices and convictions of New Spiritualities. This presents a unique opportunity for incarnational ministry, since the arena in which Christians and New Spirituality adherents are gathering is “home turf” for the church, yet generally unobtrusive for non-Christians. For example, in Denmark gospel choirs are beginning to impact the ecclesiological landscape, which has been beneficial to many churches that otherwise have struggled to engage in relevant contextual ministry. Yet the degree to which gospel choir participants generally connect the content of the texts with Christian faith is uncertain. Thus a main concern involves the extent to which gospel choirs constitute a missional outreach of the church, or loom as an example of the co-option of a Christian music form by the larger society, which consequently subverts the Christian foundation that it endeavours to proclaim in song. The outcome often hinges on leadership, which likewise can set the tone for the kind of encounter that occurs between committed Christians and New Spirituality adherents.

The discipling process among gospel choir participants has been a delicate matter, given the general presupposition that Christian faith and commitment are not prerequisites for participation. Generally speaking, choir members tend to support the activities of the choir, including singing at worship services and other Christian events, even if they hold personal convictions to the contrary. Yet there can be no compulsion to participate or even remain in the sanctuary during rehearsals when a devotional or time of prayer is held.

Nevertheless, conscientious efforts have been made on the part of many choirs to draw a deeper connection between the signs, symbols and rituals of gospel music and Christian faith. It cannot be overlooked that the primary task of missionaries to choirs is to establish trusting relationships. This cannot occur unless one is committed to participating in rehearsals and events with the same degree of enthusiasm and reliability as the other members. Evangelism works best when it is based on friendship and the discipling process can only proceed with integrity when those who share Christ are sharing themselves.

Another discipleship strategy involves the establishment of mentoring relationships. Mark Lewis is an American pastor serving in Denmark and he has been at the forefront of developing gospel choirs with New Age people. He writes:

As pastor, I experienced the fact that many in the choir were looking to me for honest answers, as well as some confirmation that the church's theology is commensurate with the degree to which it is lived out in the lives of church members, including the pastor. Since many seemed to be searching for some sort of “intimate” experience or relationship with “ultimate” meaning, choir members were interested in observing whether or not people were modelling faith. Other church members and myself, for example, often gave counselling and fielded questions that dealt with issues of faith and

life. It was not unusual for me to hear choir participants remark, 'I've never talked with a minister before,' or to rattle off similar comments to committed church members. This implies the importance of assuming the role of mentor for those who are seeking a deeper relationship with that which active Christians, in the most optimistic sense, are perceived to represent.

Choir rehearsals themselves normally provide discipling opportunities. It should be noted that the attitude of the leaders sets the tone for the degree to which Christian influence is permitted to impact the choir. For example, directors, who do not share the same vision for connecting gospel music with its evangelical roots, are not inclined to incorporate prayer and devotionals into the overall agenda. However, discipling procedures are evident in choirs where pastors and leaders take the initiative in promoting a desire for gospel singers to commit themselves to that which they are singing about. As one of the leading innovators in the gospel music movement in Denmark, Peter Steinvig has created a sort of template for integrating bible readings, devotionals and prayer into each gathering. The devotionals tend to be highly illustrative and simple, often touching on middle level concerns and real life issues which confront urban dwellers, who comprise the overwhelming majority of gospel choir members.

In order to nurture a Christian identity in gospel choirs without compromising the strong appeal to non-Christians, including New Spirituality adherents, some choirs have offered Christian discipleship courses and other programs, with varying degrees of success. However, the primary Christian influence takes place as a result of the many conversations that are facilitated in the gospel arena, as well as the repetitive experience of practising and performing in gospel-related venues. Although actual discipling strategies may vary, the gospel music phenomenon is becoming recognised as a noteworthy grassroots Christian movement that is having a transforming effect, both on the church and gospel choir participants.

For further information see

- Mark W. Lewis, "Gospel Choirs: A Meeting Ground Between Christians and New Age Adherents". Paper available at www.areopagos.org/lausanne.

Q. Booth Ministry

Since the 1970s New Spirituality festivals and Alternative Spiritual cultural events have become commonplace in countries as diverse as Denmark, Germany, England, America, Israel, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. The Whole Life Expo, *ConFest* and the International Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit attract thousands of people. Some are serious practitioners of various New Spirituality paths; many are dabblers in yoga, Feng Shui and Tarot cards; still others attend out of curiosity with vague ideas about spirituality and lifestyle.

New Spirituality festivals include stage performances, lectures and interactive workshops. However, the most significant part of the festivals is the stalls that are set up by various spiritual or religious groups. New Spirituality festivals may appear like “spiritual supermarkets,” where attendees can taste, touch and feel the “produce.”

For Christians and churches that are serious about being missional in their own culture, New Spirituality festivals provide an obvious venue for outreach. Below are case studies concerning two Christian ministries, the Community of Hope and In The Master’s Light, that operate exhibitor’s booths in New Spirituality festivals in Australia and Denmark.

The Community of Hope

The Community of Hope began in Sydney in 1991 and Melbourne in 1996, as a ministry of outreach to the New Age community. It was co-founded by Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson who established an exhibitor’s booth in the bi-annual Mind-Body-Spirit festival in Sydney. Clifford is the Principal of Morling Baptist College. Johnson is the director of Global Apologetics and Mission, which incorporates the Community of Hope but also specialises in contextualised apologetics to new religions.

Clifford and Johnson first attended the Mind-Body-Spirit festival in 1990. Their aim was to understand the appeal of the festival and to consider how they might best reach New Spirituality adherents. Afterwards they debriefed about their experiences and observations. The festival brought alternate spiritualities to life for them in a way that the countercult literature simply could not do. It was easy to read about this from the safety of one’s armchair and entirely another thing to be face-to-face with devotees. They found themselves experiencing something akin to culture shock with unfamiliar sights, sounds, aromas and the sheer weight of the crowd. They agreed that this was certainly a spiritual marketplace which reminded them of Paul’s visit to Athens (Acts 17:16-34).

How should they respond to the festival? They initially toyed with being outside the venue offering tracts to visitors, but quickly concluded that this approach would be unfruitful. First, it engenders an “us versus them” adversarial stance and as Australians typically support the underdog, they understood that patrons would react unfavourably. Second, tracts distributed outside venues are usually discarded unread. Third, they realised that this was not the way Paul approached the pagan Gentiles in Athens — he was unafraid of entering their marketplace and conversing with them. The way forward was to establish an exhibitor’s booth inside the festival.

They applied to the organiser’s office for a booth and adopted the name “Community of Hope.” It was felt that rather than trying to represent a denomination or congregation it would be prudent to take a more generic title that reflects aspects of the faith, namely, Christians are supposed to constitute a new community, one based in the hope of Christ. After some initial prevarication from the organisers — largely due to their awareness that Christians are generally negative and hostile about New Age — they were accepted as a bona fide exhibitor. Prior to the exhibition they held a training seminar for fifty booth volunteers.

Johnson recalls:

In 1991 our evangelistic emphasis entailed a blending of standard gospel presentations and personal testimonies dovetailed with a rationalist debunking of New Age beliefs. We persisted with this as

our primary approach for the next festival after which time we critically assessed the outcomes. On the positive side of the agenda, we felt that we had faithfully presented the content of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. We had also distributed Bibles and Christian literature, and were pleasantly surprised to find that many seekers are quite prepared and open to hear about Jesus. On the downside, we reflected that our approach had often put people offside from seriously listening to us. Most took umbrage at our being dismissive of their search for meaning and our debunking style of argument. We felt that the problem was not so much the offence of the Cross. Rather we were not winsome because our attitude was adversarial and superior. Another acute problem was that we had failed to put in place any means for following-up people who might want to investigate Christianity further. We also noticed that our booth was hopelessly over staffed with male volunteers, while at least 70 percent of the festival patrons were female. As contemporary Australian women perceive the churches as patriarchal and with little scope for females to develop spiritually, we were simply reinforcing the negative image of the church as a place that is organised and controlled by men!

In the process of critical self-reflection they concluded that this milieu was not a static spirituality with fixed dogmas that could simply be debunked with some memorised apologetic arguments. Here was a sub-culture that had its own myths, cosmologies, customs, and traditions. The receptor group did not identify with the Christian jargon and so the new wine was not really poured into fresh wineskins.

Johnson remembers:

We had to rethink our methodology as we were dealing with an unreached people group — perhaps not quite identical with the people of the 10/40 Window, but a tribe nonetheless without Christ. Basically our paradigm had to be transformed from formulaic evangelism and a Christendom outlook to a biblically-informed approach to cross-cultural mission.

Booth ministry is not about a monologue but involves dialogue – a two-way process of communicating and understanding. Those Christians who wish to participate must have people-skills and be willing to listen first before talking about the gospel. The training of volunteers is a critical exercise. Some Christians have very fixed views about the New Age and about how evangelism works, and they can be temperamentally ill suited for such outreach. In booth ministry lay people and ordinands for ministry are trained in the art of evangelism and contextual ministry. The almost uniform feedback from volunteers is how this has enlivened their own walk with Christ, empowering them to minister more effectively.

After a festival a team debriefing is essential. What sorts of people attend these festivals? What age groups are represented? Why do these festivals appeal to women? What are they finding here that is possibly missing from the local churches? What are the exhibitors offering from their booths? How are their booths decorated and which ones seem to attract the most patronage? Have we achieved our objectives of opening up conversations with people about Christ? Did we convey the content of the gospel to people? Were we people of integrity demonstrating the love and compassion of Jesus to seekers? What stories can we encourage one another with about our interactions with searchers?

The booth needs to be colourful, with an eye-catching display and with activities that engage the seekers. Examples include: a crystal display that symbolically represents all the facets of life with Christ the rock at the centre, healing prayer chair, foot-washing using essential oils; an exercise based around Gary Chapman's Love

Languages for discovering God's unconditional love and offering samples of Margaret River Rain Water (considered to be the purest water available) linked to the theme of the living water Jesus offers.

Booth ministry operates at many levels depending on the kinds of people who visit. Some sneer, some want to hear more and some want to follow Jesus. The booth can be pre-evangelistic insofar as it can open up some individuals for the first time to any meaningful contact with the gospel. For others the encounter may deepen their existing awareness of the gospel. Still others accept literature and leave without desiring any further contact. For some the conversation leads to prayer as the person crosses the threshold of faith in Christ.

Perhaps the Achilles' heel in this model has been in the area of follow-up. Part of this difficulty lies in the stark reality that some Christians have deep prejudices and when New Spirituality seekers have been referred to a church they have then been treated as spiritual lepers. Another broader issue is the "unpaid bills of the church." These differences create a barrier for seekers who might otherwise have been interested in discovering more about Jesus' way.

Johnson notes:

We have not let the matter of follow-up drop. Apart from taking responsibility to make contact with seekers beyond the festival, we have tried convening post-festival seminars on topics concerning spirituality. Some people have participated in discipleship courses like Christianity Explained, but these courses have proven to be unsuitable, as the seekers want to explore questions these courses ignore. Our Melbourne colleagues have referred seekers into "recovery" workshops run by a para-church ministry known as Careforce. Recently we have begun to make use of a six-week interactive course called 'Essence' that Rob Frost devised in England. Booth ministry is not a panacea for mission and church growth, but it does offer one practical avenue for Christians who want to make disciples of those seekers.

Community of Hope – for further information see

- Philip Johnson, "Discipling New Age and Do-It-Yourself Seekers Through Booth Ministries," in Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach, edited by Irving Hexham, Stephen Rost and John W. Morehead II, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 227-242.

In The Master's Light

Ole Madsen is a Lutheran pastor serving in Denmark and since the late 1980s has developed a booth ministry with New Spirituality seekers.

Madsen briefly explains how the use of prayer has been an effective method of interacting with seekers:

Christians present at New Spirituality fairs may be the first positive contact for a spiritual seeker with the church. What would they be able to get from us for their spiritual pilgrimage? Very often they will ask for our prayer or counselling. What I share here is out of the experience of "I Mesterens Lys" ("In the Master's Light"), a bridge-building project between the Church and New Age. We listen to the seeker's story and we are careful not to react with judgements of their beliefs or spiritual practices. We may disagree with their stated viewpoints e.g. concerning God and human nature. They may identify God and their own Higher Self, and think that they create their own reality according to the maxim "energy follows thought." They may tell of past life experiences and believe in reincarnation. Nevertheless, in the counselling situation we will not be tempted to arguing on dogmatic issues. Prayer itself suggests in an inoffensive way another

understanding of the nature of God and the human person, inviting the seeker into our own faith relationship with God. If we are able under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead the seeker into a living relationship with Jesus Christ, or to deepen her or his existing understanding or experience of Christ this in its proper time will change the interpretation of past life experiences in other ways than reincarnation.

At New Age fairs many guests and fellow-exhibitors ask for our prayer or a blessing; in the last years we have prayed with about 2000 persons each year at these fairs. One form of prayer which we (IML) call "healing of the heart," understands the heart as the centre of the human person, our spirit, the place in which God speaks to us and in which the image of God is revealed. This understanding is equivalent to the function of the heart chakra in New Age psychology.

We pray that the Holy Spirit reveals the love of God, flowing from God's heart through the heart of Jesus into his/her heart, and that he/she may open his/her heart that it may be filled like a grail or cup. We pray that God heals the heart when the confidante receives God's love in the heart and that God speaks to him/her in the heart: you are more precious to God than all the treasures of the world; God will not allow anything to separate you from God; God has a deep delight in you ... We pray that the confidante may rest in a healed heart, in a whole heart knowing I am a loved one, I am a child of God, I am precious. We pray that this well being in the heart may influence the patterns of thought and feeling and heal the mind and thus be a source of inner healing. Sometimes the Holy Spirit reveals inner hurts that will then be healed during the prayer time, but of course this will only be a beginning of a healing process. We often add this prayer, that the confidante may see the face of Jesus in his/her heart, and if we sense a sorrow in the mind we pray that he/she will see Jesus with the crown of thorns, acknowledge His suffering and witness how his/her own suffering, pain and sorrow flows into the suffering of Christ Jesus, and that looking into His eyes they can recognise the love of God and experience how Love redeems this suffering, pain and sorrow in the power of the resurrection. The healing of the hearts is concluded with the blessing: "May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your heart and mind through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7).

With such an encounter we have already proved ourselves as fellow pilgrims. We have started to acknowledge the validity of the individual quest, or that the spiritual quest is one of personal development. In this quest it is important for everyone to meet or have fellowship with other seekers, but also to meet spiritual counsellors who respect the solitary path. No one will be of any spiritual help to another if he or she is not himself or herself in a process of transformation or have succeeded in some of the steps of the process. In Christian spirituality we will speak of sanctification. We also know the need for spiritual disciplines and the guidance of a spiritual director, a father/mother confessor, an older Christian brother or sister, a counsellor. This is not less important if we want to grow in spiritual perception through the faculty of *imaginatio* in a sound way. Christian spiritual tradition recommends several disciplines of spirituality. Dallas Willard in his classical book on the *Spirit of the Disciplines* outlines the following *disciplines of abstinence*: Solitude, silence, fasting, frugality,

chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice, and *disciplines of engagement*: study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession and submission.

In *The Master's Light* – for further information see

- The website in Danish www.imesterenslys.dk/.
- Ole Skjerbæk Madsen, "Theology in Dialogue with New Age or the Neospiritual Milieu," in *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue*, edited by Viggo Mortensen, (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 257-286.

Gospel Message via Tarot Cards

A provocative way of presenting the gospel in New Spirituality festivals is via tarot cards. John Drane, Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson have developed this approach. Understandably, most Christians will balk at the idea because tarot cards have occult connections. To properly argue why tarot cards could be used as a device for communicating the gospel would require a lengthy paper. A few basic points may be summarised, but readers should consult the literature listed below for more details. Many popular books by New Spirituality seekers and by Christian apologists on the subject of tarot present false historical data about their origins and purpose.

- Tarot cards originated in Renaissance Italy as an ordinary card game known as "Triumphs."
- The earliest surviving decks have portraits that show figures dressed in late medieval costumes, with the religious symbols of the Church. Many of the cards' symbols are traceable to illustrated manuscripts of the Book of Revelation.
- Scholars have shown that the tarot cards reflect late medieval society with a threefold symbolic message conveyed by the pictures: "know your place in society," "practise Christian virtues" and "trust in God." Some of the tarot characters appear in Cervantes' *Man of La Mancha – Don Quixote*.
- Tarot imagery appears to be influenced by church art and Dante's *Inferno*.
- The association of tarot cards with fortune telling occurs in nineteenth century France. The appropriation of the cards for divination does not disqualify the history of the cards' symbols originating from Christian sources — just as the misuse of the Bible to justify apartheid, slavery, and the heresies of Jehovah's Witnesses does not invalidate the Bible itself.

At the Mind-Body-Spirit festival, Clifford and Johnson have created an innovative and incarnational method of sharing the gospel through the use of tarot cards. They note, "We always indicate that divination from the cards is clearly contrary to Scripture, but that the classic A. E. Waite deck is full of biblical images." Ross Clifford briefly explains how in a conversation he pointed a seeker to Christ via the cards:

A conversation began with Sharon, who shared something of her own spiritual journey from fairly normal Catholicism to a commitment to Wicca. We discussed how upbringing, education, and external spiritual experiences had influenced her views on life and faith. I then shared about the influences that might colour my perceptions. Sharon, during the telling of her story, indicated that she appreciated Jesus, but her understanding of life was centred on reincarnation. She then briefly outlined some of her concerns about the church. She asked me, "Do you believe in reincarnation?" I said, "I believe in its understanding that there is more to life than death, but I find the message of the Resurrection more empowering." I then shared the strand of circumstantial evidence for the Resurrection, based on the testimony of changed lives. She listened to my story and others, including that of the apostle Paul, that linked their transformations to the resurrection of Christ. In the course of this apologetic discourse, Sharon indicated openness to the holistic character of the

Resurrection. Unlike the denial of the body inherent in reincarnation, the resurrection of Jesus encompasses mind, body, and spirit.

At the Community of Hope stall, we were also interacting with tarot readers and devotees. Sharon and I discussed how the cards mimic archetypes and symbols that reveal our common search for meaning. She had a real interest in the tarot. I explained that many of the images on the cards are taken from the Bible. The “Lovers” card (Genesis 1 and 2) depicts Adam and Eve before the “Cosmic Mountain” and “Cosmic Tree,” in harmony with themselves, the world and the numinous. The “Devil” card is where we confront the dark lord in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars*’ Darth Vader or Jung’s Shadow and it shows the same couple now in bondage to the devil, but still with fruits of the “Cosmic Tree” (image of God), though removed from the “Cosmic Mountain” (God’s presence). The “Death” card shows us that, whether king, pope, or child, we will confront the Grim Reaper and there appears to be no path to the eternal celestial city depicted on the card. The “Judgement” card portrays the archangel blowing the trumpet at the end of time and people rising from their graves in joy and on the pennant connected to the angel’s trumpet is a red cross, which is a universal symbol of hope and healing. I said, ‘Sharon, the image on the card is one of resurrection, not reincarnation.’

The “Magician’s” card is more than the Jungian archetype of the wise man, because above his head is the symbol of infinity, which shows we need help from one beyond us. The dual sign of the wand in the magician’s hand raised toward heaven and the left hand pointing to the earth, is known as a source of grace drawn from above. The key card is the “Fool” which Campbell and Roberts (authorities on myth and New Spirituality) observe clearly symbolises the dying and resurrected sun god. The “Fool” is also an archetype for the sage or medieval jester, who is not a “natural” fool but an “artificial” fool, who by his antics disturbs the court of human arrogance and self-interest. It is by the dying and rising Christ, “Fool,” that one returns to the “Lover’s” paradise. ‘Sharon, this is our universal story.’

After a pause in the conversation there was a short dialogue about the other circumstantial evidence — in particular the fact of the empty tomb. Sharon quizzed me about the “swoon” theory. She then said, “but the account of the resurrection of Jesus is in your New Testament Gospels that are really pretty average stuff. Haven’t Barbara Thiering and Bishop Spong basically shown that?” I replied, “Sharon, you are not meant to ask such a cognitive question.” She laughed. The discourse then turned to the evidence for the Resurrection, including whether it had any historical and legal standing and whether the New Testament narratives could be trusted. The “stories” (testimonies of the apostles John and Paul) were highlighted. A basic historical — legal apologetic for reliability of the New Testament accounts of the Resurrection was fully outlined. Sharon was particularly interested in the role of the women in the Resurrection brief. Her response was to share again something of her own personal hurts and spiritual search. She asked for prayer for faith and healing and for further information on Jesus. She took a pamphlet that set out a list of recommended churches. Not an atypical apologetic discourse had taken place.

For further discussion see

- Ross Clifford, "Reframing a Traditional Apologetic to Reach 'New Spirituality' Seekers," in Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach, edited by Irving Hexham, Stephen Rost and John W. Morehead II, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 193-208.
- John Drane, Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson, Beyond Prediction: The Tarot and Your Spirituality, (Oxford: Lion, 2001).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Issue Group discussed the significance of the new spiritualities to the Church and missions in the West and around the world. As a result we present the following recommendations relevant to local churches, evangelical educational institutions, the missions community and the evangelical countercult movement.

R. Churches

Recognise New Religions as Unpaid Bills of the Church

The Church should consider how failures on our part have resulted in a spiritual vacuum in Western culture. When the Church fails to address important issues then new religions are all too quick to fill the void. The Church must develop the ability to be self-critical and to reflect carefully on the teachings and practices of the new religions and alternative spiritualities. Just as the ancient heresies provided an opportunity for the early Church to provide a greater clarity of teaching, the presence of the new spiritualities in response to our failings provides an opportunity for the Church to sharpen her confession and witness.

Develop incarnational ministries to new spiritualities

Churches are encouraged to understand and implement several features of incarnational ministries to new spiritualities. We suggest that churches:

1. Come to a balanced understanding of the New Spiritualities. We must listen and comprehend before we offer criticism.
2. Offer a holistic response that involves cross-cultural missions combined with contextual apologetics.
3. Develop new expressions of church that seek a culturally relevant missional presence in the midst of the New Spiritualities.
4. Reappropriate expressions of spirituality from the Christian past, including different forms of spiritual disciplines, pastoral care and spiritual direction. Also seek to develop new expressions of spirituality.
5. Create workshop-based and experientially-oriented introductions to Christian spirituality, discipleship, and faith.
6. Develop different forms of outreach such as booth ministries at New Age festivals and other forms of incarnational presence at neo-spiritual events.
7. Engage in forums (including the Internet) for conversations that are non-confrontational between well informed Christians and New Spirituality practitioners.

Prepare to be welcoming communities

In addition to developing incarnational ministries, churches are encouraged to prepare themselves to better serve as welcoming communities for spiritual seekers. We should:

1. Revise the theological agenda of the local church and Sunday school to include world and new religions as vital parts of the curriculum for the education of pastors and laypeople as a necessary part of living as Christians in the contemporary world.
2. Explore creative and experiential workshops and services to include topics such as meditation and healing.
3. Reformulate pastoral care and spiritual disciplines to address the insights gained from an interaction with the needs of those engaged in the new spiritual quest.

Encourage youth to have an inquiring faith

Local churches should develop contexts in which their youth are encouraged to explore questions and issues. Young people cannot have a robust faith if they are muzzled by an atmosphere that discourages them from asking questions. A fear that young people will stray from the Church if they ask questions show a lack of adult confidence in God. A church that stifles inquiry or tries to control youth with trite answers about other religions, will forfeit youth loyalty. Simplistic “pat answers” to questions about other religions or New Age must be avoided. As young people mature they can detect fake and shallow answers. Our youth need to be able to develop life skills in their faith that prepare them as adults to live in a multi-religious society. For some ways in which this could be implemented, we suggest churches:

1. Create discussion groups where the practical problems of life, faith and other beliefs can be explored without inhibitions, so that youth are empowered to discover for themselves how to live in a multi-religious world.
2. Explore the lives of biblical characters like Joseph, Ruth, Daniel and Paul, and discover how their faith survived and was strengthened by living in multi-religious contexts.
3. Invite returned or retired overseas missionaries to interact regularly with youth groups about how they lived in a different religious context and then explore ways in which those experiences help illuminate living in one’s homeland.
4. Foster genuine friendship with youth who follow other pathways (and not disingenuous social contact that is based on the unbiblical idea “I’ll only be your friend if you repent and follow Christ”).
5. Encourage suitably talented young people to pursue training in missions and mentor those who have a vision for contextual ministries in the community.

Churches also need to explore fresh ways in which the foundational beliefs of Christianity can be taught and reinforced to children and youth, while also teaching them appropriate ways to share their faith with their peers. In a religiously plural environment the Church must pass along the Christian faith to the young and nurture it, while also fostering evangelistic attitudes and styles that move beyond the defensive and confrontational approaches of the past.

S. Educational institutions

Move new religions studies to the centre

Hyper-specialisation in theological education has contributed to the continuing isolation of ministry to new religions. Disciplines like missiology and apologetics are kept apart and even within these twin subjects new religions are often relegated to the fringes of the curriculum. Students for ministry, therefore, are not obliged to study world religions and new religions as a compulsory component of their studies. This is highly problematic given the social reality of religious pluralism within most Western communities today. To adequately prepare future pastors and laity to live in a multi-religious context, we must relocate the subject from the fringes of denominational agendas and college curricula and bring it into the mainstream.

Renovate theological education

The advent of inter-disciplinary courses signals some dissatisfaction with the prevailing currents of hyper-specialisation in subjects. What would be helpful here is the emergence of some inter-disciplinary approaches to undergraduate theological studies. For example, a course on the book of Genesis would be approached in an integrated and inter-disciplinary fashion. Students would benefit from lecturers and insights provided from Old Testament studies, New Testament studies, church history, ethics, missiology and apologetics. Such a synthesis could prove to be invaluable to students, and with appropriate course offerings, it would help shift the subject of new religions from being an optional elective subject to integration into core studies in theology, apologetics, and missions.

Launch professional/academic conferences on new religions

Missions organisations (such as the American Society of Missiology and the Evangelical Missiological Society) and professional theological bodies (such as the Evangelical Theological Society) need to consider addressing new religions as regular features of their annual conferences. In addition to professional conferences operating within Christian circles, there is a profound need for Christians to participate in “secular” academic conferences. For example, Scholars of New Age (SONA) is an annual academic conference for secular scholars (sociologists, anthropologists, phenomenologists, historians, etc.). Other scholarly conferences include those sponsored by the Centre for the Study of New Religions (CESNUR), the Australian Association for Religion Studies (AASR), The American Academy of Religion (AAR), etc. The keen edge of secular scholarship can help refine and improve evangelical shortsightedness.

Expand essays in academic journals on this topic

From time to time essays dealing with new religions and alternative spiritualities have appeared in missions journals. However, this is an avenue that must be pursued in greater measure. In addition, there is a need for contributions to appear in theological journals. Evangelicals might also consider the creation of academic journals that deal exclusively with new religious movements.

T. Missions Community

Classify new religions as unreached peoples

New religious movements and alternative forms of spirituality have generally been typecast as heretical and rivals to the church in the quest for converts. One outcome of this thinking is that the new religions are seen as groups and movements that must be challenged and condemned. Unfortunately, there has been a corresponding unwillingness to view them as unreached people from whose ranks disciples should be made. The missions community can be of assistance here in recognising new religions as unreached peoples, just as Lausanne had the foresight to recognise in 1980. We encourage the missions community to reconceptualise new religions as unreached peoples which will then permit reflection on the application of lessons learned from missiology in other contexts to be appropriately applied to this religious context.

Involve missiologists in the study and response to new religions

Professionally trained theologians and missions specialists have not been prominent in the study of new religions. These specialists are the trainers of the church's next generation of leaders. By overlooking or marginalising the subject of new religions and world religions, the gulf between the local church's missional needs and the social realities of contemporary religious diversity grows ever wider. We encourage evangelical missiologists and theologians to address the new religions with the same legitimacy given to world religions.

Need for missiologists trained in religious studies

Following from the point above, there are few theologians and missiologists who have acquired formal credentials in secular universities specifically in the social sciences and religious studies where the subject of new religions is taught. We encourage training in this area so that the critical skills and insights from these academic disciplines might be integrated into our missional and apologetic endeavours. Of particular note is the great need for missiologists to be trained in Western Esotericism. Just as we have Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic experts among the missiologists, we need experts on esotericism.

Recognize new religions as frontier of missions

Current scholarship on new religions highlights that these groups form new global sub-cultures. The new religions represent the pioneering edges of the meeting place between Christianity and the world's major religious traditions (Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, etc.). Theologians and missiologists need to recognise that these frontiers set the context for the Church's missional engagement for the foreseeable future.

Develop new primer texts on missions

A basic but necessary way for combining missiology with new religions is to develop new introductory textbooks and case studies in missions that focus on new religious movements. As one example, a book might be developed that mirrors David Hesselgrave's Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally and Charles Kraft's Christianity in Culture, but where the illustrations all centre on the ethnography and missional communication with Mormons, New Age, Neo-Pagans, etc.

U. Countercult Ministries

In our previous discussion on the significance of the 1980 Lausanne consultation and paper, we noted that a significant amount of activity has been accomplished by evangelicals in countercult ministry in response to new religions and Alternative Spiritualities. We acknowledge the work of those who have come before us, and we seek to build upon the faithful labours of our predecessors. With this acknowledgement in mind we humbly present the following critical recommendations with the desire to improve the quality of ministry to the Church and the new spiritualities.

Examine attitudes

An examination of the materials produced by many evangelical countercult apologists reveals an overwhelmingly adversarial and confrontational attitude to the New Spiritualities. This confrontational attitude seems more interested in defeating spiritual foes than lovingly walking life's journey with seekers in the New Spiritualities while seeking to incarnate the gospel. Evangelicals are encouraged to foster attitudes that facilitate service as ambassadors of Christ.

Utilise holistic apologetics

As discussed above, the use of heresy-rationalist apologetics can result in an unbalanced approach that ignores the insights of a holistic understanding of Scripture, missiology, communication theory, human behaviour, the social sciences and pastoral care. In addition, apologetic approaches are often presented in monochrome fashion with little consideration for the cultural differences that have a bearing on the use of differing apologetic models. Evangelicals are encouraged to consider the use of culturally relevant apologetic approaches that are used holistically and in concert with other important disciplines such as missiology.

Pursue proper education

Lay countercult apologists generally lack any formal education or training in theology, missiology and apologetics. Thus, their ministry enterprises and written materials display an amateurish quality that in some cases is appalling and theologically embarrassing. Evangelicals working in the arena of the New Spiritualities are encouraged to secure the proper advanced education that will broaden the maturity and depth of their work.

Beware of false credentials

Some lay apologists claim theological credentials, but on closer inspection they have been derived from unaccredited colleges whose academic value is seriously questionable. This undermines the credibility of the countercult apologetic enterprise among both new religionists and academics and brings disrepute to the Church. Evangelicals are encouraged to stop using false credentials to give credibility to their work and to secure appropriate credentialing at accredited institutions with degrees relevant to work in the field of the new spiritualities.

Seek accountability

Many involved in lay ministry to new religions operate in isolation with very little formal connections or structures of accountability to local churches, denominational bodies or professional theological networks. This independence reflects a lack of proper biblical accountability. As a result, many ministries produce shallow work on the new spiritualities. At the same time ethical and behavioural problems among some countercult apologists go unchecked. While Evangelical Ministries to New Religions was created in the U.S. following the 1980 consultation in part to counter these problems, it has had minimal impact. Evangelicals are encouraged to participate in appropriate forms of accountability within the broader mainstream of evangelicalism.

Obtain peer review

Very little peer review of ministry and literature occurs, which ensures that the amateur features of countercult apologetic arguments and ministries are perpetuated and unchecked. This is reflected in the shoddy scholarship and illogical arguments used to oppose new religions in several sensationalist videos and books. Plagiarism is another problem that plagues the countercult community. Evangelicals are encouraged to put in place a legitimate peer review procedure to raise the quality of work and ministry. Peer review could certainly become a feature of future apologetics and missions conferences. Another suggestion is that evangelical publishers could confer with the Issue Group — or the academic missions community — about developing a system of blind peer review for future unpublished manuscripts. The purpose would be the development of some quality standards of writing and research to help and encourage both existing and prospective authors.

Revise research methodologies

A sizeable proportion of countercult materials are written with an “armchair critic” methodology that is the result of researchers repeating the assertions of other evangelicals about new religions. When this is done without the benefit of a sound research methodology including field research with adherents of the New Spiritualities, consulting primary sources and academic literature on the subject matter, then we have unhelpful assertions resulting in misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the new religions. This is a matter of no small concern when we remember the commandment about bearing false witness. Evangelicals are encouraged to revise research methodologies to improve understanding and to facilitate the creation of effective missions strategies.

7. FORUM FOLLOW UP

In the past, evangelicals have held conferences and consultations where many great ideas are enthusiastically discussed, but many times little continuing activity takes place at the conclusion of such events. It is the desire of Issue Group 16 to be involved in continuing activities that will not only pick up on the positive aspects of the 1980 gathering on new religions, but will continue to carry forward the strategy and methodologies discussed in this paper. This will include the following:

Establishment of a Network

Made up of countries from around the world, the participants in Issue Group 16 benefited from a common commitment to missional approaches to New Spiritualities. Great encouragement and synergy resulted from a time of cooperative sharing and strategy discussion. Our Issue Group plans on continuing to work together in an intentional way as a part of an international network of like-minded individuals committed to reaching the adherents of New and Alternative Spiritualities. Over time we will invite other individuals who share in our vision to participate in this network process.

Creation of a Web Portal

The Internet will serve as an important tool for linking together the participants in the proposed network. We plan to create a web portal that will provide a place for encouragement, the sharing of information as well as research and resources, raising questions and holding discussion and planning cooperative projects.

Cooperative Projects and Resource Production

The establishment of a network, whose work is facilitated in part through the Internet, will enable Evangelicals working in the area of the New Spiritualities to be aware of work being done around the world. This awareness will be helpful in facilitating cooperative projects resulting in the production of resources that will benefit from the varied perspectives of international contributors. Such awareness will also help avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts. These projects and resources may be created to meet various needs in a general way, with appropriate cultural modifications incorporated to meet the needs of differing cultural contexts.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Below is a list of publications by Christian and non-Christian authors that are sorted into topics. Many of the texts are by scholars from different disciplines. The bibliography is not exhaustive, nor does the inclusion of an item mean that the Issue Group agrees with the authors.

Due to space limitations our list does not include books by practitioners of alternative spiritualities. Anyone looking for primary sources can start with the reference books below and then look for publications by people such as: Margot Adler, Annie Besant, Helena Blavatsky, Peter and Eileen Caddy, Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer, Fiona Horne, Charles Leadbeater, Shirley Maclaine, James Redfield, Starhawk, Rudolf Steiner, Robert Thurman, Neale Donald Walsch and Marianne Williamson.

Lastly, in the "case studies" section several articles listed are temporarily stored at www.areopagos.org, but they will be moved to a different web site. If the reader cannot find the articles at **areopagos**, then please contact Lars Mollerup-Degn, e-mail: Imd@areopagos.dk. Alternatively, one may attempt a document search via Google.

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