

## Book Review

*Mission Shaped Evangelism: The Gospel in Contemporary Culture*

**Steve Hollinghurst**

(Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2010) 192 pages

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Although framed mainly for the UK context, Hollinghurst has produced a well informed investigation into the sometimes complex and often confusing issues surrounding the evangelistic motives and efforts of modern churches to increasingly secular, post-Christian cultures. This is a work any Western missiologist and/or church planter will highly value.

Hollinghurst opens the book by recognizing the contributions of writers such as John Hull, David Bosch, Steve Chalke, and Brian McLaren, who he feels have collectively framed the situation and defined the issues at play in the postmodern, post-Christian context of the U.S. and Western Europe.

He then describes the dilemma facing Western Christianity by creating a very helpful and insightful parable. In his story Hollinghurst describes how a community, which has successfully fished a nearby lake for centuries, must now face the effects of a deep, seismic shift that has simultaneously altered and threatened the viability of their once productive fishing grounds. Thus the community is forced to probe for new ways to not simply survive but also thrive. This, in Hollinghurst's view, is a status of the modern church. The lake represents the once productive pool of 'Christianized,' indoctrinated, but recently de-churched, ex-Anglicans, ex-evangelicals, etc. who modern Christians for centuries have been able to

successfully re-converted back into the arms of mother church. Thus their evangelistic tactics were aimed at reaching a somewhat "willing" prospect back into the fold. However, with the advent of the paradigm shift of postmodernism, old tactics are no longer as effective. Therefore new techniques, tailored to different conditions, must be considered.

Hollinghurst sees the modern church dejected and confused by postmodernity. Thus, rather than reconsidering previous methods, modern church leaders are simply attempting to double existing efforts. However, if modern churches remain only effective in evangelizing the "de-churched" and are ineffective with the "un-churched" population, ironically, every evangelistic effort only more quickly speeds the inevitable. Therefore, Hollinghurst appropriately encourages church leaders to recognize the reality of their situation and accept the inevitability of adaption while congregations still have the resources and energy to do so.

The chapters describing the modern-postmodern move are well written and concise, describing in overview form the move from Enlightenment-Cartesian thought, through Nietzsche, moving into the application of the postmodern philosophy of Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault. This section is not an academic or scholarly critique, but

provides good insight into current trends within popular culture. One critique would be that some of the research is surprisingly dated in the discussion of postmodernity and the corresponding new forms of spirituality. The Gen X and Y data has been well combed by previous authors.

However, this book may be a much better text for the laity. It is very readable and often makes insightful illustrations about texts/hyper-texts, narrative shifts, consumerism, and individualization that will put meat on the often-illusory postmodern epistemological bones. Without doubt, Hollinghurst has done his homework, with a myriad of studies weaved together to bolster his claims—one of which supports a theory as to the rise of conservatism concomitant within an increasingly postmodern pluralistic culture. The increase of conservatism amidst the postmodern move has perplexed this reader for some time, and Hollinghurst puts forth a very plausible explanation in his chapter on secularization (ch. 5).

In discussing his Christology and ecclesiology, Hollinghurst shares much of the same theology as evangelicals such as Dallas Willard and N.T. Wright. Although the notations and references are at times sparse, one assumes Hollinghurst is skimming quickly to get to the meat of his argument. I would assert that his Christology and ecclesiology represent the meat of this work; they provide the place where he connects how evangelism in a postmodern context should evolve. In short, Hollinghurst argues that what an individual believes about the person and mission of Christ will affect his or her expectation and objective of discipleship. This understanding also will equally determine one's vision of evangelism and thus the means of

evangelistic outreach. Hollinghurst notes that evangelism should flow directly into discipleship and from discipleship. Thus discipleship and evangelism are symbiotic; one is equally informed and funded by the other. Thus the kind and quality of disciples determines what kind of evangelism is employed and therefore effectively forms the "DNA" of the church.

Hollinghurst states in his chapter on *Mission in Today's Temples and Market Places* that evangelism should be considered the discipleship of not-yet Christians. Such a prospect is an interesting and hopeful, faith based idea to postmodern, emerging church proponents. Evangelism, he suggests, is not bringing the lost to a church service or even a special evangelistic meeting (246). It is disciples, who are already in the world, having been matured in the church community, who naturally and effortlessly shine their light and lay their salt on their world as a result of knowing and living with Christ in his Kingdom. Hence, discipleship, not evangelism, was Jesus' church growth plan.

Hollinghurst does an excellent job of coalescing the many different theologies and praxes developing within contemporary Christianity into a coherent ideology and theology for evangelistic effort. This is a great service to those seeking to understand the postmodern/emerging church movement but also to those wondering if such a movement is sound, biblical, and Christian. Hollinghurst states Christ is now seeking after the lost, as He has in the past, looking down whatever road He must travel. He will thus be found working in and through the postmodern, post-structuralist and post-foundationalist proclivities of our diverse, multi-cultural world.