The Priority of Soul-Winning: A Critical Discussion of the Theology and Practice of Evangelism for Contemporary Western Culture.

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Andrew Hammond

Cliff College

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Abstract

'Let us use every opportunity, and every means possible to spread the word about who Jesus is, while we show people where they can find him so that they, too, can have a saving personal relationship with the living Christ' (Peddle, 2019, p.17)**.** "Yes, but how?" could perhaps be an understandable response because 'most [western] churches (with a few exceptions) are dying' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.28). In response, this dissertation critically discusses the theology and practice of evangelism for contemporary western culture in order to offer holistic soul-winning evangelistic practice principles.

Firstly, we briefly consider the context surrounding our study. In particular, we discuss the implications of soul-winning language, the priority claim for soul-winning, the reality that most western churches are in decline, and the diversity of definitions of evangelism.

Secondly, theological foundations for soul-winning evangelistic practice are critically discussed. Significant implications include the partnering relationship with God, the developmental process nature of conversion and evangelism, the assimilation of insight, and turning in repentance and faith.

Thirdly, we argue that churches need to understand their particular western cultural context. Relevant contemporary western cultural facets that may influence evangelistic practice are explored. In particular, we critically discuss the transitional and diverse nature of cultural change, perceptions of the church, trust and truth, and awareness of the Christian story.

Fourthly, by coalescing identified theological foundations with cultural implications, we argue for holistic principles for soul-winning evangelistic practice. Significant implications include connectedness to God, evangelistic strategy practice and culture, insight progression and God's invitation call.

We conclude that soul-winning evangelistic practice should be a holistic developmental relational process, exemplifying the love of the Great Commandment

with the purposeful nature of the Great Commission, culminating in presenting God's invitation call.

Declaration

I declare that the dissertation is my own original work unless referenced clearly to the contrary, that no portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Dedications

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and partner in God's mission, Nicola.

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God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For strength and grace to stay the course.

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Introduction – Passion, Problems, Priority and Plan.

0.1   Why This Study? – Passion and Covenant.

'The goal of evangelism is to help others discover who Jesus is, and that Jesus is the way back to God, and then to see them respond to Jesus in love and commitment' (Peace, 1999, p.310). In agreement with Peace, my passion is to help people discover who Jesus is and help them to respond to him in repentance, love and commitment. In doing so, I have freely chosen to covenant, as a recently ordained Salvation Army Officer, 'to live to win souls and make their salvation the first purpose of my life… Done in the strength of my Lord and Saviour' (The Salvation Army, 2010, p.322).

0.2   Revivalist Language - A Cautionary Acknowledgement.

Revivalist origin terms such as 'win souls', in some respects, could be misleading (Smith, 2010, pp.12-13). Arguably, revivalists, such as Charles Finney, over-emphasised evangelistic 'method and formula' for soul-winning (Smith, 2010, p.13). Perhaps, this mindset unknowingly diminished the reality that 'there is only one who brings people to Christ: it is the Spirit' (Smith, 2010, p.13). This study agrees with and notes Smith's cautionary sentiment. Although the revivalist tones of the Officer's Covenant could give an inaccurate impression using phrases such as 'to win souls', it does highlight that participation is exclusively, 'done in the strength of my Lord and Saviour' (The Salvation Army, 2010, p.322). Therefore, this dissertation enters into critical discussion, with explicit recognition that: a) 'salvation is the work of God' (Smith, 2010, p.4), and b) '[God] has mandated the use of means through his church to reach the world with the gospel' (Terry and Payne, 2013, p.25). Accordingly, 'our evangelistic labour, is really only the extension of the evangelistic work of the triune God' (Strain, 2017).

0.3   Statement of Problem and the Example of The Salvation Army.

Globally, 'about a million people a week are becoming Christians' (Anderson and Goss, 2017, p.15). In particular, there has been 'explosive growth' of Christianity within non-Western locations throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Keller, 2020, p.54). However, concerningly 'most [western] churches (with a few

exceptions) are dying' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.28). Indeed, 'there are more Anglicans in Nigeria alone than in all of the U.S. and the U.K.' (Keller, 2020, p.54). We may also note that according to The Brierley Consultancy Group, church attendance in Great Britain has declined from 6.5 million in 1980 to 3.1 million in 2015 (Faith Survey, no date).

To use The Salvation Army as an example, over the past twenty years its global membership (which includes a declaration of faith) has increased by 20% to over 1.8 million (The Salvation Army, 1999, p.37; The Salvation Army, 2019, p.36). However, by 2019 membership within the United Kingdom and Ireland Territory had declined to 34,601, a decrease of 43% over the past twenty years (The Salvation Army, 1999, p.228; The Salvation Army, 2019, p.269). In 2019, membership in the United Kingdom (the founding country) was less than 2% of global membership.

Emphasising the priority of soul-winning, William Booth, founder of The Salvation Army, stated, '"I wish I could dangle every convert over hell for 30 minutes so they could know what they are saving people from!"' (Taylor, 2005, p.116). Conversely, Warren (2012a, p.294) encourages Christians to 'imagine the joy of greeting people in heaven whom you helped to get there'. Today, perhaps 'we have lost all concept of hell and eternity' (Taylor, 2005, p.116) and maybe 'soul-winning has dropped down its [the western church's] list of priorities' (Olutoye, 2019).

Therefore, overarchingly, aligning with the above claims, the presented data, and with reference to The Salvation Army as an example, it would appear that soul-winning evangelistic practice is often unfruitful across the western world.

According to Ash (2010), The Salvation Army commenced with a soul-winning evangelistic focus which did humanitarian relief work but has now lost its soul-winning temperament. However, perhaps humanitarian acts are part of an intentional evangelistic practice? Although humanitarian acts are overtly evident, Peddle, The Salvation Army's world leader, disagrees with Ash and states:

> Let us use every opportunity, and every means possible to spread the word about who Jesus is, while we show people where they can find him so that they, too, can have a saving personal relationship with the living Christ. It's not just Good News, it's the best news. Let's share it (Peddle, 2019, p.17).

Peddle places soul-winning at the centre of The Salvation Army's mission. Accordingly, perhaps loss of competence in evangelistic strategy for fruitful soul-winning in western cultures is instead the issue.

0.4   The Priority of Soul-Winning – Four Reasons.

This study does not seek to engage in an extended discussion concerning why soul-winning should or should not be the priority. However, we may argue that 'New Testament teaching is that the mission of God is first and foremost to do evangelism that results in the birth [of Christians] and growth of churches… Jesus builds his church numerically as people are converted' (Terry and Payne, 2013, p.6). In doing so, we may offer four overarching reasons.

Firstly, there are eternal life implications (John 14:1-6; John 3:16) because there are 'two choices: eternity in heaven or eternity in hell' (Lucado, 2007, p.73). We may contend that lovingly showing and sharing with people how they can have their eternal life in heaven is the greatest thing you can do for them. To choose not to engage in soul-winning may be likened to knowing, but withholding, the life-saving information for a cancer cure (Ouellette, 2012).

Secondly, there is an earthly life implication. 'Jesus said the Kingdom is now. Our job is not simply to get people into the eternal Kingdom after they die' (Harlow, 2014, p.8). Therefore, when we commit our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit cleanses, indwells, conforms, teaches, and puts his nature in us (Stanley, 2005, pp.74-77). Consequently, supported through discipleship, Christians may start to live their earthly life under God's purposes and power.

Thirdly, there is an implication for God's character to be reflected in the world and for his church to perform good works. Spurgeon (1992, p.22) expresses, 'proof of the conquest of a soul for Christ will be found in a real change of life'. As Christians grow

in Christ-like character, they reflect the glory of God (2 Corinthians 3:18) in the world and perform good works (Ephesians 2:10). At its extreme, if churches entirely ignored soul-winning, it could be argued that eventually there would be no Christians. Consequently, missional acts through the church would cease, such as social action, social justice, and creation care. Conversely, it may be argued, 'if you can but get them saved everything else will come right in due time' (Spurgeon, 1992, p.214).

Fourthly, there is an obedience implication. 'Jesus' very first words to his disciples were Matthew 4:19, "Jesus called out, "Come follow me and I will show you how to fish for the souls of men""… if you're not fishing for men… you are not following Jesus' (Warren, 1999, p.23). Warren argues that to not engage in soul-winning indicates that someone is not following Jesus. Similarly, Gustafson (2019, p.60), with reference to 2 Corinthians 5:11 and John 14:15, stresses our love for God compels us to witness and 'our obedience demonstrates love for God'.

0.5   The Goal and Structure of this Thesis.

Noting the general decline of the church within western society, my overarching argument is that 'we certainly need to rethink some of the ways the church [has] engaged in evangelism' (Chan, 2018, p.112). Emphasising the importance of review, Stone (2007, p.10) states, 'rethinking and reconstructing evangelism is a task that must be taken up in every era' to practice it authentically and fruitfully. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to critically discuss the theology and practice of evangelism, in order to suggest key principles for authentic and fruitful holistic evangelistic practice within contemporary western culture. Recognising this study cannot focus on every facet of soul-winning evangelistic practice, our parameters will be limited to practices that small to medium-sized churches may reasonably take responsibility for within a community.

Time will firstly be given to engage critically with definitions and parameters of evangelism (chapter one) because it will be argued that how one defines evangelism impacts how fruitful it is in practice. Thereafter, this thesis will address three primary overarching themes. The first primary theme (chapter two) seeks to critically discuss underpinning mission and conversion theological foundations, in order to suggest

critical biblical principles for evangelistic practice. My argument is that biblical foundations are essential to undergird authentic evangelistic practice, rather than being founded on church tradition, contemporary culture or anything else.

Our second primary theme (chapter three) will critically discuss the contemporary western cultural context and its implications for soul-winning evangelistic practice. 'Christians need to understand their [cultural] context… and how the world has changed around them' (Beville, 2016, p.7), to authentically and fruitfully engage in evangelistic practice. Therefore, we will assess relevant influential cultural factors, including perceptions of the church.

The third primary theme (chapter four) seeks to suggest holistic soul-winning evangelistic principles for authentic and fruitful evangelism within contemporary western culture. Through critical engagement, practice principles will be argued for, with reference to the primary implications and outcomes identified from our discussions concerning biblical foundations (chapter two) and cultural context (chapter three).

In conclusion, we will seek to synthesise and summarise the critical issues for authentic and fruitful soul-winning evangelistic practice, offer insightful judgements and suggest areas for further exploration that may have consequently emerged from our study.

Chapter 1
Defining Evangelism – Implications for Soul-Winning Evangelistic Practice.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to critically discuss and argue that how someone defines evangelism will likely influence the fruitfulness of soul-winning evangelistic practice. Additionally, this chapter seeks to provide a broad framework, and limiting parameters, to enable critical engagement for this study.

DeYoung and Gilbert (2011, p.18) stress that for rigorous critical engagement 'theology will not go far without careful attention to distinctions and definitions'. Their words appear fitting for a study of evangelism. Bosch (2011, p.418) highlights that there is 'a plethora of definitions' for evangelism. Similarly, my review of evangelism literature suggests that there are several opinions and a general lack of consensus concerning its definition. Klaiber (1997, p.15), writing twenty-three years ago concluded, 'a brief survey of theologians and non-theologians would show quite clearly that the word evangelism is used with a wide variety of meaning'. More recently, Chan (2018, p.14) similarly acknowledges, 'what counts as evangelism?' and concludes that there is lack of agreement because evangelism '[carries] a lot of baggage, tradition, and emotion'. Chan is suggesting that a particular theological leaning, church tradition, and a variety of past experiences (baggage) influences interpretation, and therefore attitudes towards evangelistic practice. Chapter three includes critical engagement of evangelistic 'baggage' (Chan, 2018, p.14) that perhaps may compromise the authenticity and fruitfulness of soul-winning evangelistic practice.

For some people, evangelism is narrowly limited to a select group of tasks which are events in nature (Peace, 1999, pp.330-331). Conversely, others view evangelism as a long-term process of connecting with people (Fields, 1998, p.104). Exploration will develop in this area within proceeding chapters by critically discussing mission and conversion theology, and evangelistic practice. Chan (2018, p.24) leans towards evangelism being relationship-focused but widens the discussion by introducing a further variable. Chan (2018, p.24) observes that, for some, evangelism involves proclaiming 'that Jesus Christ is Lord' to Christians and non-Christians, while others

narrow the definition to non-Christians. Abraham (1989, p.95) limits evangelistic practice to the point of regeneration. In contrast, Tomlin, (2014, pp.87-88) includes sanctification, whereby the Christian 'increasingly bears the image of Christ, living her life shaped by Christ, under God's rule'. Broadly, Abraham's and Tomlin's theological positions closely align, concerning regeneration and sanctification. The difference is simply concerned with the breadth of definition assigned to evangelistic practice.

However, a broad definition of evangelism that includes the on-going spiritual formation of Christians perhaps has implications for focused soul-winning evangelistic practice. Arguably, soul-winning evangelistic practice could become less focused. Indeed, perhaps some church members may believe that they are participating in evangelistic practice, even though it does not include soul-winning, because their focus is on supporting spiritual maturity. Warren (1995, pp.88-89) cautions against broad definitional parameters, expressing, 'focused light has tremendous power. Diffused light has no power at all… the principle of concentration works… like a laser beam, the more focused your church becomes, the more impact it will have on society'. Therefore, although recognising that there is a spiritual continuum, Warren (1995, pp.137-149) classifies evangelism to be relationships and activities that concern engagement with non-Christians. Concerning engagement with Christians, for their spiritual maturity, Warren classifies this as discipleship. Arguably evangelism definitions that include a Christian's on-going spiritual formation potentially weakens the fruitfulness of soul-winning evangelistic practice. In alignment with Warren, but acknowledging the importance of sanctification following spiritual birth, our study of soul-winning evangelistic practice is limited to engagement with non-Christians, up to and including their spiritual birth.

From further investigation, some authors, such as Thiessen (2018, pp.15-16), narrowly define evangelism to verbal proclamation. In contrast, Bosch (1991, p.11) widens evangelism to 'word and deed, proclamation and presence, explanation and example'. In diametrical contrast to Thiessen, Arpin-Ricci (2013) suggests that many people hold to the idea that evangelism should epitomise St. Francis of Assisi's alleged statement, "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words".

Conversely, Stetzer (2016) expresses that this commonly held view is 'really bad theology… [it] is a bit like saying, "Feed the hungry at all times; if necessary, use food."' Several authors hold that soul-winning evangelistic practice combines actions and words into a holistic strategy. For example, Newbigin (1982, p.146) states 'the deed without the word is dumb, and the word without the deed is empty', suggesting that both ends of the verbal to non-verbal spectrum are unacceptable. Similarly, Gumbel (2016, pp.13-29) contends that evangelism involves prayer, living out the Christian faith in community, seeking to persuade by sharing our testimony, explaining the gospel and demonstrations of God's power. Therefore, we may argue that soul-winning evangelistic practice should holistically combine words and deeds.

Reviewing the above opinions, many practices could be evangelistic, but perhaps it is wise to acknowledge Peace's (1999, p.333) caution, 'When everything we do is evangelism, then nothing we do is evangelism'. However, Peace (1999, p.333) acknowledges that 'people need to be helped to see the evangelistic potential in what they do'. From Peace, we identify that it is important to assess every facet of the church, to understand its purpose and evangelistic potential. However, arguably, even knowing its potential could be compromised if each aspect is considered in isolation, without understanding the inter-dependencies within a framework for evangelistic practice. From this position, we may argue that 'we can best improve our thinking on evangelism by conceiving it as that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time' (Abraham, 1989, p.95). Abraham is emphasising the importance of intentionality of purpose, goal and inter-connectedness between evangelistic practices.

Aligning with Abraham's stated purpose of evangelistic practice, Peace (1999, p.310) states that 'the goal of evangelism is to help others discover who Jesus is and that Jesus is the way back to God, and then to see them respond to Jesus in love and commitment'. Similarly, Terry and Payne (2013, p.6) express that, 'New Testament teaching is that the mission of God is first and foremost to do evangelism that results in the birth [of Christians] and growth of churches… Jesus builds his church numerically as people are converted'. For the purpose of critical engagement for this dissertation, we will align with Abraham's (1989, p.95) definition for the practice of

evangelism, Peace's definition for the goal of evangelism and the sentiment expressed by Terry and Payne. For Abraham, for something to be soul-winning evangelistic practice, it needs to demonstrate intentionality and a contribution towards the goal of evangelism within a holistic paradigm. In doing so, the goal is to help people discover who Jesus is, through to a response of repentance, love and commitment to Jesus. Our critical discussion will proceed on this premise.

Chapter 2

Underpinning Theological Foundations of Mission and Conversion for Authentic and Fruitful Soul-Winning Evangelistic Practice.

2.1   Biblical Foundations for Soul-Winning Evangelistic Practice.

'There are those [within western culture] who express incredulity towards anything which claims to be foundational' (Wild-Wood and Rajkumar, 2013, p.10). In contrast, in Luke 6:46-49, 'Christ uses a metaphor of solid foundations when he calls people to act on his words' (Wild-Wood and Rajkumar, 2013, p.9). Similarly, the letter to the Ephesians calls on the church to understand its foundations (Sproul, 2016). These statements assert that authentic mission participation is founded on the Triune God, on God's Word. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a biblical foundation to undergird soul-winning evangelistic practice. In doing so, we seek to avoid founding evangelistic practice on church tradition, contemporary western culture or anything else. Theological foundations are critically discussed in four areas: a) essential principles for authentic mission participation and the initiation of soul-winning evangelistic practice, b) the process and event nature of conversion, c) the provision of insight for conversion, and d) turning in repentance and faith to Christ.

2.2   Essential Principles for Authentic Mission and the
Commencement of Soul-Winning Evangelistic Practice.

For some churches, soul-winning begins with tasks committed to by the church (Bowen 2012, p.11). For example, when the congregation is in decline sometimes the suggested necessary thing to do is 'a week or so of frenzied [soul-winning] activity' in the community (Green, 2012, p.351). In this example, the demonstrated 'operant theology' (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54) focuses on initiating tasks in response to church decline. Green's example of so-called soul-winning evangelistic practice appears to be something the church starts and performs. However, does this behaviour align with theological foundations?

In contrast, theologians and practitioners outline a different theological position concerning principles for authentic mission and the commencement of soul-winning evangelistic practice.

The '*missio Dei* [mission of God] speaks of the overflowing of the love of God's being and nature into God's purposeful activity in the world' (Avis, 2005, p.5). From this position, *missio Dei* doctrine 'expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world' (Bosch, 2011, p.399). Biblical justification for this position includes, 'as the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21), 'apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15:5), the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and 'the Spirit enabled them' (Acts 2:4). From the above, we may identify key facets of the soul-winning process.

Firstly, soul-winning is 'initiated by God and is completed by God' (Cardoza-Orlandi, 2002, p.48). Archbishop of Canterbury, Williams (2003) states, mission is 'finding out what God is doing and joining in'. Williams asserts that God chooses the location and is already at work. In response, the church needs to join in with God, in that location, with soul-winning evangelistic practice. Similarly, Warren (1995, p.13) cautions against church initiated evangelistic practice that 'try to manufacture the wave of God's spirit, using gimmicks, programmes or marketing techniques'. Warren is asserting that soul-winning is initiated by God and cannot be artificially created using western cultural techniques.

Secondly, God commands the participation of his church in soul-winning. 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21) is an example verse confirming a participatory role. However, Christians are 'to be instruments in the hands of God' (Spurgeon, 1992, p.128). Spurgeon is highlighting that soul-winning is a partnership, but not one of equals. Accordingly, the church should obediently participate, 'as God's people… in God's own mission' (Wright, 2006, pp.22-23).

Thirdly, soul-winning includes being sent by God (Acts 1:8). 'Jesus' command to us was to *go* and be his witnesses' (Greear, 2011, p.290). Greear's sentiment is move 'out of the holy huddle… go engage your community with the gospel' (DeYoung and Gilbert, 2011, p.21). Therefore, soul-winning evangelistic practice requires engagement with non-Christians in the community.

Fourthly, soul-winning participation recognises that connectedness to God is required. Jesus states, 'If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). Similarly, Jesus instructed the apostles to wait for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:6). Jack (2018, p.45) states that 'prayer is the bedrock of evangelism', which demonstrates connectedness, provided this is entered into authentically. Without remaining in Christ, the source for soul-winning is removed.

Finally, soul-winning participation recognises that God's 'nature is the foundation of the mission and that his triune life is the pattern' (Ashford, 2011, p.1). Wakefield, (2014, p.22), stresses, 'the character of the messenger must be consistent with the message… those who are more Christlike will be better able to witness to others about the love of God' (see Ephesians 4:11-16). Similarly, Spurgeon (1992, p.31), with reference to Isaiah 52:11 expresses, 'a soul-winner must have holiness of character… [because] God will not go to work with instruments which would compromise His own character'. Accordingly, we argue that soul-winning participation requires Christians to seek to reflect Christ's character qualities in their lifestyle (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The above theological critical discussion provides a holistic overview of foundational facets for authentic and fruitful soul-winning evangelistic participation. It will be used to inform critical discussion in chapters three and four.

2.3   The Process and Event Nature of Conversion.

We may now critically discuss the theological nature of conversion. This is important because 'our understanding of conversion will shape our practice of evangelism' (Tomlin, 2014, p.89).

In order to consider 'turning in repentance from whatever false self-centred and self-serving story they are living in and putting their faith in Jesus for salvation' (Wright, 2015, p.14) people need a reason to be motivated to turn (Van Schooten, 2017). Therefore, a 'propositional knowing that includes knowledge and understanding of facts' (Chan, 2018, pp.29-30) is required. However, conversion only takes place

when someone decides to respond to God's invitation to put their 'trust in Jesus – that is necessary for salvation (John 3:16)' (Chan, 2018, p.30). Accordingly, for someone to repent and commit to Jesus, there are broadly two stages, the provision of insight, and the decision to respond to God's call. The nature of both insight and turning will be discussed in greater depth. However, the above prelude is provided to frame our critical discussion concerning the theological nature of conversion.

There are several biblical examples and parable illustrations of conversion. For example, the parable of the prodigal son (Luke, 15:11-32) illustrates someone repenting and returning in response to a 'radical crisis' (Chan, 2018, p.33). Timothy exemplifies someone born into a Christian family who was noted to have a 'sincere faith' (2 Timothy 1:5). Chan (2018, p.33) expresses that 'presumably [Timothy] had a saving faith in Jesus since infancy'. However, conceivably he could not pinpoint his moment of decision to respond to Jesus (Chan, 2018, p.33). 'The unfolding conversion of the Twelve [disciples]' (Peace, 1999, p.4) perhaps demonstrates that conversion is a long-term process of insight followed by a decision to respond in repentance and faith to Jesus. There are notable differences between the examples given above. Chan (2018, p.34) concludes from his survey of biblical conversions that 'the experience of conversion is not one size fits all'. However, reviewing the above examples, there is a process over time for insight to be assimilated, with God often providing insight via evangelists.

In contrast 'the Western church.. [has generally considered Saul's Damascus road experience (Acts 9:1-9) as the] model of true conversion' (Peace, 2008, p.196), characterising 'a sudden, overwhelming, experience of God' (Finney, 1996, p.40). However, to elevate this event to be the true model brings into question other biblically recorded conversions. We may note from the above conversion examples that insight is often assimilated over time, God often provides insight via people and often there is no overwhelming experience.

Smith (2010, p.5) suggests that those who rely on Saul's Damascus road experience as the true model of conversion, focus on the 'punctiliar' moment of turning in repentance and faith. The issue of conversion being punctiliar will be discussed in

section 2.5, 'Invitation, Turning in Repentance and Faith'. However, arguably the Damascus road narrative, taken in isolation, misses the overall process of Saul's conversion, because 'God's fingerprints are all over your past if you'll just look' (Warren, 1999, p.33). We argue 'that the events that precede and follow [Acts 9:1-9] are of incredible importance to the representation of what it means to convert to a faith in Christ' (Carter, 2008).

Firstly, Saul was a student of 'Gamaliel, the most famous and respected Rabbi of his time' (Harvey, 2005, p.33). Paul is quoted, 'I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today' (Acts 22:3). Arguably, Saul had insights through his in-depth scriptural knowledge, and he appeared eager to please God. Secondly, Saul witnessed Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7:54-8:2). 'Who knows what impact the martyrdom of Stephen had on his [Saul's] questioning mind' (Cottrell, 1998). Perhaps Stephen's conviction to witness was insightful for Saul. Thirdly, Saul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road perhaps is more accurately described as an insightful 'dramatic encounter' rather than his conversion (Wilson, 2013). The encounter 'left Saul without sight, without forgiveness… but crucially with the instruction to go into Damascus and receive further instructions' (Wilson, 2013). Arguably, rather than on the Damascus road, it was at Saul's meeting with Ananias where Saul's conversion took place. 'Ananias goes on to restore Saul's sight and solidify his faith in Christ [Acts 9:17-19]. Without Ananias, the conversion of Saul would not be complete' (Carter, 2008).

'[Saul] had a mystical experience, but for that event to change his life (conversion) he had to own his past (repentance) and affirm a new future (acceptance of his call to follow Jesus)' (Peace, 1999, pp.303-304). Therefore, we may argue Saul's conversion was a process over time, culminating in an event. In agreement with Smith (2010, p.9), we may conclude that we need 'a language of conversion that accounts for the process…only then can we develop an understanding of congregational life and evangelism that is congruent and consistent with the way that the Spirit is actually bringing… [people] to faith in Christ'.

2.4   The Provision of Insight.

Our discussion will now critically discuss the provision of insight for potential conversion. 'The Bible teaches that God grants the believer faith (Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 1:29)… [and] the evangelist's role is to urge the listener toward belief (John 20:31)' (Chan, 2018, p.32). Therefore, an interplay occurs between God, the evangelist, and the potential believer. Grudem (1994, p.709) stresses that God is the initiator of insight and interaction. This position is substantiated with reference to John 6:44. Similarly, the early church came to this conclusion, notably through Augustine's three main notions of God's grace (McGrath, 2011, p.356), the first two of which fall within the parameters of this study. Augustine 'spoke of "prevenient grace"… a starting grace by which God awakens the will [of a person] toward himself' (Johnson and Webber, 1993, p.218). There appears to be a generally agreed scriptural interpretation from both early church and present-day theologians that the conversion process begins with a movement from God. From this standpoint, the Lausanne Movement (2018), with reference to 1 Timothy 2:1-2 highlight the importance of prayer for God to initiate the conversion process.

Concerning the evangelist's role, there is general agreement that in most cases, God's insight and call are provided through people (Chan, 2018, p.32; Grudem, 1994, p.709). In particular, through Christians displaying God's nature (Ashford, 2011, p.1; 2 Corinthians 3:18). In this respect, soul-winning evangelistic practice becomes 'a way of life' (Payne, 2017), loving 'the people they are ministering to… demonstrated in both word and deed' (Wagner, 1988, p.120). Therefore, there is a need to reflect Christlikeness as part of the insight process, living out the Good News in action and loving explanation.

Gumbel (2016, p.14) argues that 'living out the Christian life is the most appropriate way of passing on the good news to those who live in very close proximity to us'. The supporting theological justification is Peter's belief that the non-believing husbands of Christian wives are persuaded by the behaviour and reverence in their lives (Gumbel, 2016, p.15, 1 Peter 3:1-2). Gumbel (2016, p.14) concludes, 'continually speaking about our faith may backfire. People are more likely to be affected by genuine love and concern – by living out the Christian faith'. However, Gumbel does not take the

position that verbal articulation of the Good News should be avoided, but rather argues the importance of identifying appropriate opportunities for its inclusion at later times (Gumbel, 2016, p.8).

Concerning the wider community, Gumbel (2016, p.15), with reference to Matthew 5:13-16, states that acts of 'good deeds' are more likely to provide helpful insight than verbal articulation in the early stages of spiritual receptivity. Indeed, Jesus' general approach to the provision of insight was by first ministering to a person's 'felt need' before ministering to their spiritual need through verbal articulation (Anderson, 2002, p.44). Furthermore, 'very few people who came to Jesus were looking for truth; they were looking for relief' (Warren, 1995, p.227). Warren (2014, p.77), supports his argument citing Jesus' encounters with 'the leper [Matthew 8:1-4), the tormented [Mark 5:1-16], the lame [Luke 5:17-26], the blind [Mark 8:22-26]…, the adulterers [John 7:53-8:11], the soldiers [Luke 7:1-10], the tax collectors and sinners [Matthew 9:10-13]'. Similarly, to increase the receptivity of the message, Jesus satisfied Peter's hunger and enjoyed fellowship with him, before spiritually restoring him (Wiersbe, 2001, p.397; John 21). Wiersbe (2001, p.397) concludes, 'this is a good example to us to follow… physical [care] can prepare the ways for spiritual ministry'.

With reference to the above examples of Jesus' practice, many authors make two overarching claims for soul-winning evangelistic practice. Firstly, 'people don't care what we know [about Jesus] until they know that we care [about them]' (Eastman *et al.*, 2002, p.34). Accordingly, in order to share the gospel message with someone, their attention must first be captured (Keller, 2020, p.18). Secondly, the presented felt need often indicates what spiritual truth claim the person first needs to hear (Keller, 2020, p.19; Warren, 1995, pp.224-228). Barna's (2006, p.51) observation is that the 'mind and heart of the non-Christian' is often captured when evangelistic practice ties their felt need with associated biblical truths. In doing so, the gospel message starts to gain credibility with the non-Christian.

Aligning with the above discussion, McKee (2004, p.65) succinctly states, 'Jesus was a master at relational evangelism, building a relationship, developing trust, and earning the right to be heard'. The above authors are stressing that there is a

sequential order – relationships are required to establish trust, and trust needs to be established to be receptively heard. From the above examples, we may identify that Jesus did not stop at providing insight through loving deeds. In each case, Jesus progressed to articulate the Good News verbally. Similarly, the early church was 'intensely sensitive to the felt needs of the listeners,… their aim nevertheless remained both simple and direct: to introduce others to Jesus' (Green, 2003, pp.383-384). Beers (2011, p.1895) highlights that 'eventually, we will have to explain the content, the *what and the how*' of the gospel message. Paul justifies verbally articulated insight, expressing that for someone to respond in repentance and faith, they first need to know about it and therefore someone needs to inform them (Romans 10:14).

Gumbel (2016, p.8) highlights, 'if the early Christians hadn't told people about Jesus, none of us today would know about him'. We may identify several verbal evangelistic practices recorded in the bible. Examples include, Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:32-38; Chan, 2018, p.66), Paul shared in testimony (Acts 26:9-23, Gumbel, 2016, p.24) and Peter emphasised the importance of testimony (1 Peter 3:15; Jones, 2003, p.74), Jesus explained truth using parable story-telling (Luke 15:11-32; White, 2019), Jesus entered into dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21; Ryan, 2019), seeker-friendly small groups took place (Acts 2:42-47; Smith, 2012), and Paul sought to persuade listeners (2 Corinthians 5:11; Gumbel, 2016, p.20). Critical discussion concerning forms of verbal evangelistic practice will be woven into proceeding chapters. However, at this stage, we may note that the above forms of verbal evangelistic practice are demonstrated in Scripture and resulted in fruitful soul-winning.

2.5 Invitation, Turning in Repentance and Faith.

The above discussion identified that insight is acquired in many ways. However, Walker (2006, pp.198-199) highlights that evangelistic practice is not 'soul-winning' if people, at the appropriate time, are not told how they may turn in repentance and faith to Jesus. Indeed, Jesus (Mark 1:15), Peter (Acts 3:19) and Paul (Acts 20:21) all saw the need to invite people and call for a decision to repent and put their trust in God (Jefferies, 2005, p.56).

Grudem (1994, p.696) states that through the invitation, proclaimed through humans, God addresses our 'intellects, our emotions, and our wills… to decide to turn from our sins and receive Christ as Saviour'. We may identify that: a) there is a decision to 'sincerely repent' (Grudem, 1994, p.709) and stop living for 'whatever false self-centred and self-serving story… [we] are living' (Wright, 2015, p.14), b) 'we turn to start living in a new way (as a follower of Jesus walking in the way of God)' (Peace, 1999, p.301), and in doing so, c) 'depend on Jesus to save me personally' (Grudem, 1994, p.710). With reference to Romans 3 to 6, Grudem (1994, p.694) stresses, 'anyone who comes to Christ for salvation must at least have a basic understanding of who Christ is and how he meets our need for salvation'. The implications of presenting such truth will be further discussed in proceeding chapters. However, we may note that people need an understanding, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, to make a decision to: a) know what they are turning from, b) what they are turning to, and c) how this is made possible.

To help people to understand what they are turning to, Grudem (1994, p.695) further states, 'it is helpful to make explicit… [that] the gospel message is the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God [John 3:16; Romans 6:23]'. In slight contrast, Warren (2018) makes the point that conversion results in the person's 'past [being] forgiven, [they] get a purpose for living, and have a home in heaven'. Warren, in contrast to Grudem, augments the importance of informing the person that a decision to turn to Jesus also results in earthly benefits, 'a purpose for living'. Warren is explicitly highlighting that soul-winning recognises that the Kingdom of Heaven starts from the moment of conversion for the individual.

'Regeneration marks the moment and the means of our coming into union with Christ' (Milne, 1998, p.232). Grudem (1994, p.700) stresses, 'it is difficult to specify the exact relationship in time between regeneration and the human proclamation of the gospel call'. However, it is essential for the church to recognise that 'we play no active role at all. It is instead totally a work of God' (Grudem, 1994, p.699). Smith (2001, p.103) highlights that it is by God's grace that people are saved, not by the work of humans (both evangelist and convert), see Ephesians 2:8-9. Augustine

reflects this in his theology, the second notion of grace being, "operative grace", in which 'God effects the conversion of sinners without any assistance on their part' (McGrath, 2011, p.356). Scorgie (2007, p.85) perhaps helpfully states that at the regeneration moment, God (not evangelists) gave us a 'new spiritual DNA'. The evangelistic practice implication is that it is essential to recognise that, 'God saves people from their sins, the Holy Spirit enables people to believe, [therefore] we cannot force people to believe' (Chan, 2018, p.21). Consequently, we may argue that authentic and fruitful soul-winning evangelistic practice may seek to persuade, but not pressure (Gumbel, 2016, p.20) and 'trust[s] the Holy Spirit to do his work' (Shennan, 2014, p.81).

From the above discussion, we may identify that there is an 'instantaneous' (Grudem, 1994, p.701) moment 'in which he [God] imparts new spiritual life to us' (Grudem, 1994, p.699). However, for some people, that moment may be unknown. In particular, this could be the case for second-generation Christians, as the 'spiritual, social and emotional dynamics are profoundly different' (Smith, 2001, p.100) compared to their parents. Finney (1996, p.5) and Warren (2012a, p.174) develop this point with reference to Saul's Damascus road experience. Both authors highlight that an overwhelming experience does not necessarily demonstrate that conversion has taken place. Indeed, Spurgeon (1992, p.9) asserts that 'converts that are born in excitement die when the excitement is over' because it is not the overwhelming experience that saves them. Contrastingly, at the point of conversion, 'most of the time the Holy Spirit's power is released in your life in quiet, unassuming ways' (Warren, 2012a, p.174).

This chapter has critically discussed and argued that authentic soul-winning recognises that God initiates and completes the process. However, God commands the church to participate obediently in associated evangelistic practices. Critically, participants should reflect Christlike character in their interactions. We have also argued that conversion is a process of insights, culminating in an event to decide to turn in repentance and faith to Jesus. From this position, we argued that as conversion is a process, soul-winning evangelistic practice also needs to be viewed as a process. In doing so, we considered the progression of insight, with reference to

biblical examples. We identified that insight often commenced in response to felt needs from which trustworthy relationships developed. Thereafter, forms of spiritual truth dialogue were introduced. Nevertheless, insight alone is insufficient because the soul is only won when the person responds to God's call, to turn in repentance and faith to Jesus. Referring to biblical examples, we identified that often God's call is presented through humans. Accordingly, we should note that evangelists should 'trust the Holy Spirit to do his work' (Shennan, 2014, p.81). Our discussion now progresses to consider the contemporary western cultural landscape for evangelism. In doing so, the primary theological implications identified within this chapter will provide a foundation for critical engagement.

Chapter 3

Contemporary Western Culture – The Landscape for Evangelism.

3.1   The Necessity for Cultural Landscaping and Review of Evangelistic Practice.

We have identified and critically discussed foundational biblical principles for authentic and fruitful soul-winning evangelistic practice. However, without compromising the biblical foundation, 'the culture of unbelievers determines our [evangelistic practice] style' (Warren, 2014, p.79). Consequently, 'Christians need to understand their [cultural] context… [and] how the world has changed around them' (Beville, 2016, p.7). The evangelistic practice implication is that, to engage fruitfully within a given culture, churches need local community insight, including underpinning values and beliefs. Therefore, this chapter will critically discuss and assess key facets of contemporary western culture that may likely influence evangelistic practice.

In contrast to Warren and Beville, Stone (2007, p.12) states, 'saints who have taken up the way of the cross' are more important for soul-winning than 'cultural diplomats'. Perhaps Stone would question the importance of this chapter. However, arguably Stone is either misjudging or lessening a key issue concerning spiritual formation. We may argue that spiritual formation includes developing godly wisdom in order to contextually engage with non-Christians. 1 Peter 3:15 expresses, 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect'. Accordingly, we may argue that it is naïve for someone to believe they may engage sensitively (with gentleness and respect) in evangelistic practice without cultural insight.

In addition to gaining cultural insight, churches need to reflect upon past evangelistic practice because '[problems] arise when the world around us has changed, but we continue to live on the successes of the past' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.19). Bolsinger emphasises that circumstances change. Consequently, past fruitful evangelistic practice may not necessarily be appropriate within contemporary culture. Murray agrees with Bolsinger but further develops the issue. Murray (2018, p.168) highlights that some past so-called evangelistic attitudes and practices were inconsistent with the gospel message. Therefore, churches need to seek to understand the

implications that past evangelistic practice behaviours may have upon contemporary practice.

In critically assessing key facets of contemporary western culture that are likely to influence soul-winning evangelistic practice we will consider: a) epochal cultural change, transition and diversity, b) truth, trust and personal choice, and c) spirituality and awareness implications of the Christian story. In an interwoven approach with the above themes, we will also critically examine the implications of past evangelistic practice for contemporary practice.

3.2   A Culture of Epochal Change, Transition and Diversity.

Western cultural shifts in 'philosophy, science, and religion have all led to the now widespread agreement that we are amidst an epochal change' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.30). Therefore, an implication for soul-winning is that churches need to understand the issues and accordingly adjust for fruitful evangelistic practice. The overarching implication firstly concerns a transitioning philosophical framework, which is often referred to as, from modernity to post-modernity (Beville, 2016, pp.5-6). The second transition concerns the church's movement from the centre to the margins of society. This transition is often referred to as from Christendom to post-Christendom (Murray, 2018, p.22).

Oden (1992, p.32) dates modernity from 1789 to 1989, depicted by the fall of the Bastille and Berlin walls. Modernity is often characterised as 'a philosophical framework marked by rationalism' (Beville, 2016, pp.5-6), that 'uses the language of certainty and expects that truth can be known' (Kim, 2012, p.183). Today, according to Greear (2011, p.277), 'the most common descriptor of western culture is "post-modern"'. Broadly, in contrast to modernity, post-modernism asserts that there is no such thing as universal meta-narrative absolute truth (Chan, 2018, p.110). As a result, there is a loss of confidence in rationalism and science, and often mistrust in organisations known to proclaim absolute truth, such as the church (Greear, 2011, pp.278-280). Within contemporary western culture, no one is expected to abide by truth claims, and everyone is free 'to find a narrative that is meaningful to them… [using] existing narratives or create new ones' (Teasdale, 2016, p.23). Consequently,

with such a wide variety of personal worldviews within society, the argument is that diversity should be celebrated, and everyone's narrative is to be tolerated (Beville, 2016, p.116). Additionally, there has been a resurgence of interest in spirituality (Murray, 2018, p.14). The claimed transitional cultural shifts noted above may influence soul-winning evangelistic practice and will be explored. However, at this stage, what we may argue is that authors are noting that western culture has and continues to experience 'epochal change' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.30).

In contrast to Oden, who puts an end date on modernity, and Greear's statement that contemporary western culture is commonly described as post-modern, many authors caution against this, perhaps, over-simplification. Kim (2012, p.184) states that 'post-modernity has not superseded modernity; the two coexist in contemporary society'. The argument is that both modern and post-modern values are present within western culture, rather than one replacing the other. Murray (2018, p.4) further nuances the argument, with reference to the use of 'post-' words indicating that, 'we know things are not how they used to be… but we are unsure of what is approaching'. Murray argues that both archetypal mindsets are present within society, but there is recognition of continuous transitioning toward a post-modern philosophical framework. For example, although alternative medical practices are now available, Sholts (2020) highlights, concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, that 'the world needs more scientists who want to translate their expertise into effective communication'. Furthermore, world leaders are often accompanied by scientists, rather than alternative medicine specialists when giving COVID-19 briefings to enhance the credibility of information shared. We may identify the modernity mindset, to some extent, remains within western culture.

Western cultures are at various positions on the modern to post-modern spectrum (Beville, 2016, p.15). For example, the United Kingdom, France, Australia and some cities in the USA (New York and Los Angeles) are considered to be the 'main cultural driving forces' in a movement towards post-modernity (Beville, 2016, p.15). Therefore, other western countries and US regions would appear to be somewhat less transitioned. Similarly, movements from Christendom to post-Christendom may be variable across western cultures. For example, people in central London,

compared to Cornwall, are almost twice as likely to agree with the statement, 'all morals are grounded in religious teachings' (Clugston, 2019). There may be several factors that influence such findings, but what is claimed is that perceptions of morality founded on religious teaching differ across communities.

From the above discussion, we may firstly argue that soul-winning evangelistic practice needs to recognise that there are several blends of modern and post-modern mindset within contemporary western culture. However, contemporary western culture is most appropriately described as being in transition from modernity to post-modernity. Although the direction of travel is noted, there appears to be uncertainty and an inability to 'describe the reality taking shape' (Murray, 2018, p.4) signalled by the often used "post-" prefix.

Secondly, soul-winning evangelistic practice needs to take into account that western culture cannot be described in a precise and uniform way because we live in 'a pluriverse rather than a universe' (Beville, 2011, p.374). To suggest a uniform stylistic approach to evangelistic practice would appear inappropriate. Indeed, we may note that 'Jesus did not direct his evangelism to all persons in the same way' (Stone, 2007, p.84) but appropriately adjusted for personalised fruitful engagement. Accordingly, we may argue that western churches need to consider all kinds of evangelistic approaches to reach all kinds of people. Consequently, churches need to analyse their local culture to understand how to explain the gospel fruitfully to people within their community (Keller, 2020, p.14).

Thirdly, soul-winning evangelistic practice needs to recognise that 'western culture is amidst an epochal change' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.30). In response, Warren (2014, p.82) and Keller (2020, pp.19-20) observe that people are more likely to be spiritually receptive during times of transition, stress, tension and suffering. The overarching cultural movement from modernity to post-modernity appears to be characterised by transition, tensions and the unknown. Therefore, cultural shifts and present-day world issues, that perhaps are further shaping western culture, are likely to increase the receptivity and resurgence of interest in spirituality (Murray, 2018, p.14). Furthermore, recognising that people are more likely to become receptive to the

gospel during times of transition and tension, we may note that the COVID-19 pandemic may also be culturally influencing receptivity to the gospel. For example, Sherwood (2020) reports that a quarter of people in recent months have viewed or listened to a church service, and 20% of people have said they have prayed. Accordingly, we may argue that an implication for soul-winning evangelistic practice is for churches to be aware of the key issues within their community associated with life transitions and tensions.

<u>3.3   Truth, Trust and Personal Choice.</u>

The post-modern western mindset holds that 'there is no grand narrative that explains everything… claims that there is some truth for all that embraces the totality of life and meaning are rejected as oppressive power plays' (Wright, 2006, p.45). Therefore, recognising that Scripture is a life meta-narrative (Terry and Payne, 2013, pp.5-6), the Christian story is sometimes mistrusted, viewed as a mechanism to assert 'control over society' (Murray, 2018, p.22), and seemingly imposed by self-appointed 'oppressive authority figures [churches]' (Chan, 2018, p.122). Furthermore, some people perceive the church as 'narrow-minded, corrupt, and intolerant' (Carson, 2018, p.9). The implication appears to be that meta-narratives are used to assert illegitimate authority in order to oppress others' freedom of choice. Consequently, evangelistic practice seeking to proclaim the grand meta-narrative Christian story is often treated with suspicion within contemporary western culture (Chan, 2018, pp.110-111).

While meta-narratives are often seen as a mechanism to control others, the post-modern mindset holds that 'every individual enjoys not only the right but the obligation to choose their own path and identity' (Carson, 2018, p.9). We may argue that God has given everyone the freedom to choose their pathway (Joshua 24:15). Therefore, there appears to be consistency between biblical understanding and this particular facet of post-modernity. Recognising that personal freedom of choice is a post-modern value, this inevitably leads to vast diversity. Consequently, an aligning value is to 'practice tolerance and appreciate diversity' (Beville, 2016, pp.116-117).

Noting the above issues, concerning freedom to choose and diversity, we may argue that perhaps the biblical meta-narrative is not rejected simply because it is a meta-narrative. Appreciating that the cultural value is freedom to choose, accordingly, people are free to make a personal choice to accept the Scriptural meta-narrative. However, if the scriptural meta-narrative is seemingly imposed (rather than as a matter of personal choice), this would be culturally unwelcome. Warren (2014, p.64) claims 'resistance [to the gospel] is just poor communication'. By reflecting upon past evangelistic practice, we may argue that contemporary western culture is not necessarily resistant to the content of the truth of the gospel meta-narrative. Instead, perhaps people are resistant because of how the gospel meta-narrative has been communicated and seemingly imposed in the past upon society. This, therefore, requires further exploration.

The biblical meta-narrative is often held with suspicion because of past centrality, dominance and partial integration of the church with western political states (Murray, 2018, p.15). Keller (2020, p.47) expresses that the previous generation of the church sought to 'change society by taking power and legislating Christian laws'. Consequently, a version of the Christian meta-narrative has often been seen to be imposed on lifestyle choices. Furthermore, in the past, in some western societies, 'if a man didn't come to church on Sunday, his boss asked him about it at work on Monday' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.11). These past practices appear to coerce someone into becoming a Christian, or at least be seen to follow a Christian lifestyle. However, we may assert that this behaviour is not soul-winning. The soul is won when the person freely responds to God's invitation, in repentance and faith (Grudem, 1994, p.696), rather than complying with the church, state or cultural expectation. As a consequence of such past evangelistic practice, Chan (2018, p.115), concerning Christianity, claims people 'don't think of good news, salvation, forgiveness, restoration, justice, mercy, or love, they think of hate, fear, power and violence'.

Chan's stated position above perhaps may be an overarching worldview impression of Christianity held within contemporary western culture. However, there is contrasting research to Chan's opinion. ComRes (a market research company), in 2015 and 2016, identified that 67% of non-Christians in England, who were surveyed,

stated that they know a practicing Christian. In most cases, this was through a family or friend relationship. The survey identified that 65% of people who know Christians describe them as 'friendly', and 51% were described as 'caring'. Concerning negative indicators, 13% of Christians were described as 'narrow-minded', and 8% were described as 'uptight' (Olofinjana and Butcher, 2018, pp.2-9).

There appear to be significant differences between Chan's opinion and ComRes' survey findings. Chan may be making a broad claim about contemporary western society, while ComRes' findings are specific to one country. However, broadly there is a suggestion that if a non-Christian knows a Christian, they are much more likely to positively view Christians relative to society at large. Recognising the unhelpful legacy from past evangelistic practices, we may argue that churches need to establish relational trust within their community. Accordingly, this will be explored in chapter four. However, we may note that in the absence of trust, a positive Christlike influence is not possible because it is reasonable to conclude that people will not proactively choose to engage with the church. We may argue that churches need to be going into the community in pursuit of building relational trust and influence, on the foundation of God's love. Murray (2018, p.22) contrasts the concepts of control and influence, expressing 'in Christendom churches could exert control over society but in post-Christendom, we exercise influence only through witnessing to our story and its implications'. Therefore, our exploration will consider how churches may seek to embrace practicing influence as part of a fruitful evangelistic practice.

We noted that post-modernism holds to the value of freedom of choice. We may also identify that this extends to rejecting absolute truths, because 'it's all interpretation and no truth' (Chan, 2018, p.115). For example, it is claimed 'the concept of "alternative facts" grew in the loam of post-modernism' (Benko, 2017), whereby 'truth is viewed as subjective and internal to a person… so who are we to disagree with them or impose our ideas?' (Chan, 2018, p.112). Therefore, a soul-winning evangelistic practice implication concerns how churches may present the absolute gospel truth, such as John 14:6, in a culture that opposes such claims, but embraces personally constructed truth. Various evangelistic practice approaches will be discussed in chapter four. However, we may note that 'the traditional method for

reaching not-yet-Christians has been to bludgeon them into a recognition of how broken they are. To crush their spirit' (Frost and Hirsch, 2013, p.127). This is often typified as 'an in-your-face proclamation of "this is the truth, and you will go to hell if you don't believe it" [which] is unlikely to be helpful in bringing people to Christ' (Beville, 2016, p.122). In contrast, we argue that 'you don't threaten people into heaven' (Warren, 1999, p.27) and 'speaking harshly' should be avoided (Spurgeon, 1992, p.134), because 'as soul-winners there must be in our hearts a great deal of tenderness' (Spurgeon, 1992, p.61). Abrasive approaches will not be persuasive (Warren, 2012a, p.158). Consequently, presentation style needs to be non-adversarial (Beville, 2016, p.122), but persuasive like Paul (Spurgeon, 1992, p.134).

Beville highlights above a challenge of presenting truth within contemporary western culture. In contrast, Peace claims that the problematic issue is that generally people are not even interested in discussing truth claims. Peace (1999, p.331) states, 'in this post-modern environment, a debate about "truth" will be of less interest than a conversation concerning a Christian view of saving our planet'. From this position, Finney (1996, p.43) stresses that 'evangelism must deal with the agenda of those it addresses. Too often it begins with its own claims to truth rather than a concern for the people it addresses'. This aligns with Anderson's (2002, p.44) observation that Jesus began with people's felt needs, before entering into dialogue concerning their real spiritual needs. Therefore, we may argue that soul-winning evangelistic practice needs will need to take into account a personalised progression of insight for conversion.

3.4   Spirituality and Awareness of the Christian Story.

Within western cultures, 'spirituality has become wildly popular' (Bolsinger 2018, p.28). For soul-winning, perhaps this is encouraging as people may be motivated to explore spirituality. However, Beville (2016, p.117) is less optimistic 'because Christianity has historically been associated with intolerance… [Consequently] post-modern people now regard Christianity with a suspicious eye'. Beville is suggesting that spiritual receptivity generally does not include people seeking to explore the claims of Christ. Therefore, perhaps soul-winning is hindered because of unhelpful past church behaviours.

In contrast, Murray (2018, p.2) highlights that, generally the Christian story is unknown and that the church is unfamiliar to people within contemporary western culture. Consequently, 'churches are alien institutions whose rhythms do not normally impinge on most members of society' (Murray, 2018, p.2). Similarly, Carson (2018, p.9) notes that 'rising biblical illiteracy characterises the majority of people in the west'. Indeed, Finney (1996, p.43), writing over two decades ago, was highlighting the importance of comprehensively explaining 'the spiritual life' and introducing people to the 'unknown God'. In contrast to Beville, Murray and Finney are claiming that the evangelistic practice issue is not so much about navigating a negative church image, but rather people are unfamiliar with the Christian story and the purpose of the church. Perhaps the contemporary western culture attitude towards the church is more akin to indifference rather than rejection. Beville's (2016, p.117) argument that Christianity is rejected because of historical intolerance is perhaps insufficiently nuanced and consequently may misguide evangelistic practice in some circumstances.

For example, Beville's position may be countered by arguing that younger people are less likely to have familiarity with the church and the Christian story. Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012, is referred to as the first post-Christian generation, having been raised by non-Christian parents (Alford, 2019). Alford's (2019) observation is that 'Gen Z don't come with the hang-ups about Christianity – and Church in particular… and as such we have a clean slate, an opportunity to communicate the true beauty of the gospel'. Broadly, for younger people, they are less likely to have an understanding of the Christian story and perhaps will be indifferent to the church. In contrast, older people may have some knowledge of the Christian story but may view the church negatively.

In some respects, the church had a 'cultural advantage' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.23) in Christendom, because 'the Christian story and churches were central' (Murray, 2018, p.22). Encounter evangelism strategies were frequently practiced because it was 'assumed that nearly everyone' had an overarching knowledge of the Christian story

(Keller, 2020, p.7). Furthermore, people would 'at least be open to an invitation to come [to church]' (Keller, 2020, p.17).

However, authors highlight problematic issues for churches that continue to practice encounter evangelism. This approach assumes people have prior knowledge of the Christian story. The gospel message is presented, often in a 'sales pitch' style (Holland, 2011, p,62), by using a 'theological grid to communicate and explain Christian beliefs' (Chan, 2018, pp.18-19). From this position, it is believed that people are able to connect to the gospel message, and from this brief encounter may make a decision for Christ (Keller, 2020, p.7).

Finney (1996, p.46) expresses that encounter evangelistic practice is 'one of the most pernicious fantasies of evangelism', rejecting the idea that the soul is won through a short gospel presentation in isolation. Aligning with Finney, with reference to our preceding discussions, we may offer three overarching reasons why evangelistic baggage, in the form of encounter evangelism practice, is unfruitful within contemporary western culture.

Firstly, many people do not have an awareness of the Christian story. Finney's (1996, p.25) research, over two decades ago, concluded that on average, someone becomes a Christian four years after they commence a pre-conversion journey. This is in stark contrast to the idea that someone may turn in repentance and faith based on a brief evangelistic encounter. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suggest that a basic understanding of the Christian story has further diminished over the past two decades. Therefore, evangelistic practice will need to provide a comprehensive overview of the Christian story, rather than simply helping people to join up assumed 'religious dots' of knowledge (Keller, 2020, p.7).

Secondly, although some people will have a knowledge of the Christian story, their understanding will likely be akin to 'the Jesus of culture' (Peace, 1999, 299) rather than 'an accurate view of who he is' (Peace, 1999, p.298). We have identified that often people with some knowledge of the Christian story are likely to have a negative perception of Christianity. Therefore, perhaps people are unlikely to change

drastically from their negative perception to turn in repentance and faith, through a brief evangelistic encounter.

Thirdly, encounter evangelism is usually seen to be 'pontificating and lecturing, often in a sanctimonious tone that understandably irritates others' (Murray, 2018, p.151). We have already noted that authoritative pronouncements of absolute truth are usually 'met with incredulity' (Kim, 2012, p.186). Therefore, the message is likely to be rejected.

We may argue that soul-winning evangelistic practice needs to ensure 'our language and concepts [of the Christian story] will be understood' (Murray, 2018, p.170). Principles will be discussed in chapter four. However, we may assert that such practice will need to ensure that trust is established in order for the message even to be considered. Furthermore, when people are receptive to hearing the gospel truth, it needs to be shared comprehensively, probably over a long period of time. Additionally, it will need to be humbly shared for consideration, rather than being seen to be authoritatively imposed.

Bolsinger (2018, p.23) expresses that some pastors will accordingly need retraining in evangelism, to move away from encounter evangelistic practice. Bolsinger has a valid point. However, 67% of surveyed non-Christians in England know a practicing Christian, but only 1% view a church leader as their point of contact (Olofinjana and Butcher, 2018, p.8). Keller (2020, p.18) claims the early church grew because over 80% of evangelistic practice was through 'ordinary Christians [not pastors] explaining themselves to their network'. Therefore, more crucially than retraining pastors, congregations need to be nurtured in an evangelistic lifestyle (words and deeds) because they are the church's primary connection points with non-Christians.

This chapter has sought to identify key implications for soul-winning evangelistic practice concerning contemporary western cultural dynamics and evangelistic baggage. In particular, critical discussion considered: a) the necessity for understanding the cultural context for evangelistic practice, b) the transitioning and diverse nature of western culture, c) the implications of truth, trust and personal

choice, and d) spirituality and awareness of the Christian story. The underlying implications identified from this chapter, alongside the biblical foundations identified in chapter two, will inform and progress our critical discussion concerning key principles for evangelistic practice.

Chapter 4

Principles for Authentic and Fruitful Soul-Winning Evangelistic Practice Within Contemporary Western Culture.

'Rethinking and reconstructing evangelism is a task that must be taken up in every era' (Stone, 2007, p.10). Therefore, we have critically discussed soul-winning evangelistic practice in terms of definition and parameters, theological foundations, cultural context implications and associated evangelistic practice baggage. Developing from this position, the purpose of this chapter is to offer overarching principles for authentic and fruitful soul-winning evangelistic practice within contemporary western culture. Critical engagement will be made with reference to the coalesce of key implications from the preceding discussions. In doing so, we will firstly discuss overarching strategic evangelistic practice principles (sections 4.1 to 4.3). Our second theme (sections 4.4 to 4.7) concerns key principles for facilitating spiritual receptivity, from initial insight to turning in repentance and faith to Jesus.

4.1   Partnership, Dependence and Prayer

We identified that fruitful soul-winning evangelistic practice includes the recognition that: a) it is founded on God's nature (Ashford, 2011, p.1), b) receptivity is through the Holy Spirit (Chan, 2018, p.21), c) witnessing is Holy Spirit enabled (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 3:18), and d) invitation and regeneration are the work of God (Chan, 2018, p.21). However, we noted 'operant theology' (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54) that is inconsistent with 'normative theology' (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54). For example, inauthentic manufacture of so-called spiritual waves (Warren, 1995, p.13). In consideration of the above points, we argue that the first principle is to engage in soul-winning evangelistic practice with full acknowledgement 'that real [soul-winning] fruitfulness lay in complete reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit' (Parkinson, 2015, p.121). Accordingly, authentic participation recognises that 'you are to be instruments in the hands of God' (Spurgeon, 1992, p.128). From this belief 'we find prayer as the saturating medium of the mission of Jesus… [Jesus] did not dissolve the reality of his human dependence on his Father and the need for prayer' (Wright, 2010, p.257). Noting Jesus' example, a prayerful approach to soul-winning is critical. From this posture, an evangelistic strategy and culture enables a 'Spirit-

guided process of preparation, development, implementation, and evaluation' (Terry and Payne, 2013, p.13).

4.2   Soul-Winning Strategy and Church Culture.

We have argued that conversion, and therefore evangelistic practice, is often a long-term process (Smith, 2010, p.9). Additionally, western society consists of many sub-cultures (Beville, 2016, p15.), experiencing 'epochal change' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.30), often with tension (Sherwood, 2020). Recognising the process nature of conversion and numerous cultural variables, we argue that a continuous, flexible, relational, evangelistic strategy practice (Terry and Payne, pp.3-27) is necessary, rather than a 'one size fits all' (Chan, 2018, p.34) event approach.

The strategy must be biblically founded (Sproul, 2016) and contextually styled to present 'the gospel in culturally relevant ways' (Stetzer, 2014a), which is 'intelligible and compelling' to the community (Keller, 2020, p.4). Accordingly, key strategy components include prayer, and researching and understanding the local community, through observation and listening (Wild-Wood and Rajkumar (2013, pp.28-29). From this position, under the continued direction of the Holy Spirit, planning, implementation, evaluation, and adjustment may develop (Terry and Payne, 2013, pp.3-27). Churches need to embrace being sent into the world (Bolsinger, 2018, p.21) because the world is unlikely to come to the church (Murray, 2018, p.2). In doing so, entry into the world recognises that a qualification for soul-winners is a heart of tenderness (Spurgeon, 1992, p.61) in order to 'develop a spirituality of engagement with not-yet-Christians… [involving] true listening and genuine presence' (Frost and Hirsch, 2013, p.127).

In contrast to Terry and Payne (2013, pp.3-27), who emphasise evangelistic strategy, Bolsinger (2018, p.75) cautions that 'culture trumps strategy… the best strategic idea means nothing in isolation'. The argument is that if the underpinning church values are not soul-winning centred, evangelistic strategy will not be embraced by the church congregation (Bolsinger, 2018, pp.74-75).

Authors, broadly, appear to emphasise one of two facets of healthy church culture for soul-winning evangelistic practice. Peace (1999, p.333) emphasises 'an evangelistic mindset in all our activities'. The cultural value is to realise the soul-winning contribution of every church programme. Contrastingly, Engel and Norton (1975, p.45), seek to track and facilitate a person's progression towards a relationship with Christ. This model has been developed by many churches, such as Saddleback Church's 'How People Come to Christ and then Grow' process model (Warren, 1999, p.23). Warren (1999, p. 24) states, 'evangelism is a process of moving people through the stages [towards repentance and faith]'. Both approaches are strategies in nature, but Peace focuses on activities to engage people. In contrast, Warren (1999, p.23) focuses on people development, progressing people towards faith through stages of spiritual receptivity; such as resistant, receptive, seeker, consideration, understanding, ready, and new life in Christ. Warren's (1995, p.78) criticism of programme focused approaches is that the 'church's goal subtly shifts from developing people [towards repentance and faith] to just filling [programme] positions'. In other words, the focus is on developing the programme (the method), rather than assessing its fruitfulness in progressing people towards faith. We may agree with Warren that, to keep the soul-winning mandate central, the focus needs to be on developing the person's spiritual receptivity rather than programmes.

In contrast to soul-winning strategy approaches, some authors place a greater emphasis on loving others within the church and community. For example, Mullenix (2012, p.25) expresses that a church united in love will be evangelistic (John 13:35 and 1 Corinthians 13). Similarly, '[Paul] said hardly anything [to churches] about their duty to evangelise: he said a great deal about their duty to live in wholesome unity with each other… [because that] would attract attention and win converts' (Finney, 1996, p.45). Both Finney and Mullenix bring the argument back to the importance of healthy church culture for soul-winning. We may argue it would be reasonable to conclude that an unloving and divided congregation is not going to be a conducive soul-winning culture. Conversely, using the depiction of child-birth, Barrett (2013, p.83) expresses, 'when God has a delivery, he looks for the warmest incubator church he can find'. Bolsinger (2018, p.75) endorses the importance of unity and love within the church but highlights potential implications for soul-winning if unity is

inappropriately achieved. For example, a 'church that has maintained unity through homogeneity will find it difficult to welcome those who differ in lifestyle' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.75). Therefore, if a church is uniform in style rather than unified in God's mission purposes, soul-winning evangelistic practice, at best, could be limited to people who fit the church's homogeneity. Alternatively, perhaps soul-winning may not exist if the focus is simply on loving each other in the church.

Recognising potential shortcomings of a church culture which is strategy focused but without love and unity, or vice versa, Beville (2011, p.378) stresses, that the soul-winning 'missionary mandate is about living out the Great Commission with the passion of the Great Commandment (to make disciples and love God and neighbour)'. Similarly, Bolsinger (2018, p.104), highlights that for fruitful soul-winning evangelism, the church needs to be a community where 'people are both loved (relationship) and challenged (purpose). There is both a commitment to depth and authenticity (relationship) and space to welcome new people (purpose)'. We may argue that a soul-winning evangelistic church culture will be lovingly unified (for God, the church and the community) and intentionally seeks to reach people for Jesus. Indeed, the Great Commandment and Great Commission are inextricably linked because love for God, the church and 'people heading towards a Christ-less eternity' should provide the motivation, for intentional participation in the Great Commission (Pate and Wilkes, 2008, p.12).

4.3   Focus on Spiritually Receptive People.

We may argue that churches should adopt the principle to focus evangelistic practice towards people who are most spirituality receptive (Warren, 2014, p.81) and for whom the Holy Spirit has directed the church to reach (Hsu, 2006, p.68). Bolsinger (2018, p.132) disagrees, expressing 'our mission is to be a community of disciples who proclaim and demonstrate the good news in every sector of society'. Bolsinger appears to be suggesting that churches should intentionally aim to reach everyone. Leaning on Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8, in isolation, perhaps it could be argued that there is biblical justification for seeking to reach everyone. However, other authors have a different perspective. For example, we noted that churches are responsible for 'finding out what God is doing and joining in' (Williams, 2003).

Williams is suggesting that in some places the Holy Spirit is particularly at work, and accordingly, churches should be present in those locations. Alongside this position, Warren (2014, p.80) notes that not everyone is always spirituality receptive. With reference to Matthew 10:14, Jesus instructed the disciples to avoid people who would not listen and focus evangelistic engagement towards receptive listeners. Warren (2014, pp.81-82) suggests that receptive people are likely to include those who are going through life transitions and tensions. Conversely, 'it takes ten times more energy to reclaim somebody who's gotten upset and cantankerous [with the church] than to go out and win somebody new' (Warren, 2014, p.81). Therefore, people who have left the church are unlikely to be receptive.

The second reason for being focused is that God directs different churches to reach different people groups. We may identify that Paul targeted Gentiles and Peter targeted Jews (Galatians 2:7). Warren rejects Bolsinger's position of being able to reach every people group, based on contextualisation. For example, a church's music choice demonstrates its demographic evangelistic focus, which will likely put off some people (Warren, 2019). Recognising that felt needs within the community could be a spiritual receptivity indicator, Hsu (2006, p.68) cautions that this does not necessarily mean that your church is the chosen one to engage. Rather, churches should identify 'specific needs in the community that the local church is best suited to meet' (Hsu, 2006, p.68). Warren and Hsu are asserting that it is unrealistic for individual churches to be all things to everyone through their evangelistic practices.

Finally, evangelistic engagement for soul-winning must focus on non-Christians (Bolsinger, 2018, p.132; Warren, 2017). Practices veiled as evangelism in the pursuit of encouraging Christians to transfer to their church is not being a soul-winner, but rather a 'sheep-stealer' (Spurgeon, 1992, p.5). The priority is 'to reach people for Jesus Christ. Our mission is not to help Christians move from one church to our church' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.132).

4.4   Facilitating Progression from Initial Receptivity to Spiritual Birth.

We have identified that 'God's prevenient grace is God's act of wooing us to God' (Thielen, 2013, p.150), and from studying biblical accounts, it is clear that journeys towards faith are varied. Nevertheless, authors suggest overarching paradigms portraying receptivity stages that people often (but not always) progress through, on their way to becoming a Christian. For example, Chan (2018, p.282) suggests seven stages and Engel and Norton (1975, p.45) suggest eight. Such paradigms are broad models, and the sequential stages are not obligatory (Warren, 1999, p.33). However, such paradigms provide insight for evangelistic practice to progressively facilitate someone's conversion. Our study now proceeds to discuss and argue for evangelistic principles to facilitate receptivity progression. In doing so, we will critically discuss: a) initial engagement, developing relational trust and demonstrating truth, b) exploring belief and truth through verbal engagement, and c) presenting an invitation and seeking a response to God's call.

4.5   Initial Engagement, Developing Trust and Demonstrating Truth.

We identified that people, broadly, either mistrust or are indifferent to the church. Perhaps this is because of some unhelpful past evangelistic practices, or because the church is relatively unknown. However, research in England suggests that generally, non-Christians with Christian family or friends have a positive impression of Christians (Olofinjana and Butcher, 2018, pp.2-9). Therefore, we argue that the 'most important step is to focus on building personal relationships with non-Christians by befriending and loving them' (Keller, 2020, p.20).

In doing so, 'evangelism must deal with the agenda of those it addresses' (Finney, 1996, p.43). Consequently, 'a dynamic service-oriented church will not be ignored by the local community' (DeKruyter and Schultz, 2008, p.91) when engaging in evangelistic practice that seeks to address people's felt needs. Warren argues that this was Jesus' evangelistic approach, highlighting 'the first question Jesus asked whenever he met someone was, "What do you want me to do for you?"' (Warren, 2012b).

However, we may caution that meeting a felt need must be more nuanced than merely doing something *for* someone (Wells, 2015, pp.1-11). The practice must have an emphasis on being *with* people because doing things *for* people, without being *with* them 'doesn't dismantle resentment, it doesn't overcome misunderstanding, it doesn't deal with alienation, it doesn't overcome isolation' (Wells, 2015, p.2). The critical issue is that a relationship must be established to develop trust for evangelistic practice to progress fruitfully.

We recognised that often the 'pedagogical sequence is: praxis, belief, truth. This Christian life is liveable. If it's liveable then, it's also believable. If it's believable, then it's also true' (Chan, 2018, p.125). On this basis, we argue that evangelistic practice must include living 'in a distinctive [Christlike] way such as the alluring… beauty of holiness can be touched, tasted and tried' (Stone, 2007, p.21). However, for someone to equate the observed Christian lifestyle being influenced by Christ, they need to know their interaction is with a Christian (Thiessen, 2018, p.182). From this position, Briggs and Hyatt (2017) emphasise that, as relational trust develops, it is important to 'invite people to belong to your [church] community even before they believe, and to taste and see whether or not God really is good'. We may argue that the more positive relationships someone has with Christians, the more likely they will see the fulness of life that Jesus brings.

We may also note that living distinctively, in a Christlike way, should not include being 'culturally weird, dated or obscure' (Chester and Timmis, 2011, p.56). The critical issue is for people to be attracted to the distinctiveness of Jesus and not potentially put off by culturally weird church stylistic traditions. For example, Spurgeon (1992, p.215) criticises churches that seek to stand out from culture by wearing 'gaudy rags', and points to the helpful example of Jesus wearing clothing in the common style of local people. Therefore, perhaps Salvation Army uniforms, with their origins in the nineteenth century, are distinctive but also unhelpfully culturally weird.

Overarchingly, Christians need to understand that 'people don't care what we know [about Jesus] until they know that we care [about them]' (Eastman *et al.*, 2002, p.34).

This platform is established by being with people to develop relational trust (Wells, 2015, p.2), demonstrating the attractive distinctiveness of the gospel truth (Chester and Timmis, 2011, p.56), and often 'begin[s] with their felt needs' (Anderson, 2002, p.37). From this position, people often become receptive to exploring belief and truth (Chan, 2018, p125).

4.6 Verbally Presenting Belief and Gospel Truth.

From preceding critical discussions, we may argue that the articulation of the gospel message should be developed over two stages. The first stage is to 'explore questions of lifestyle, faith and spirituality' (Hollinghurst, 2010, p.242). Primarily, at this exploration stage, the sharing of personal testimony 'is a powerful way of communicating the gospel' (Gumbel, 2010, p.182). In support of this argument, we may offer the following insights. Firstly, 'while our non-Christian friends can argue against a truth claim, there is no argument against our personal story' (Chan, 2018, p.188). Secondly, a testimony is a story-telling communication method, and according to Chan (2018, pp.173-175), 80% of people within western culture prefer a 'concrete-relational learning' style such as story-telling. Thirdly, testimony is likened to a customer endorsement, which perhaps has more credibility than a pastor, who is sometimes seen as a pushy salesperson (Earley and Wheeler, 2010, p.248). Finally, in alignment with 1 Peter 3:15, the testimony hopefully explains the already demonstrated Christian lifestyle.

Hollinghurst (2010, p.242) recommends that this exploration stage should take place on 'neutral territory', such as within a social action or social settings. Contrastingly, Chan (2018, p.117) states, 'in the private spaces of our homes, around food, our friends are more likely to talk about matters related to religion, especially if we show them it is safe to do so'. Furthermore, Chan suggests that although people often choose not to listen actively to Christian responses because they view Christians to be hypocritical, 'it is hard for them to accuse Christians of being hypocritical when they're enjoying a meal with us' (Chan, 2018, p.118). Considering the two arguments, we may suggest that the underlying issue is that people need to feel safe to share.

The second stage of verbal articulation concerns a progression from personal belief exploration to considering and understanding the gospel truth of Jesus (Warren, 1999, p.23). This aligns with Chan's (2018, p.125) observation that often the 'pedagogical sequence is: praxis, belief, truth'. Ashford (2011, p.118) stresses that the gospel truth should be 'presented in ways that are faithful, meaningful, and dialogical'. Faithfulness recognises that the authenticity of Scripture must never be compromised. Without a faithful presentation of Scripture, soul-winning evangelistic practice is not going to be authentic or fruitful. We may argue, with reference to Chan's (2018, p.125) pedagogical sequence, that for someone to have freely chosen to progress to this stage, they are sufficiently open to considering the gospel truth. Therefore 'there should not be any attempt to water down the Christian content.. [at this stage] to make it easier for explorers to attend' (Hollinghurst, 2010, p.243). We should note that this does not mean other people are ignored but rather their current level of spiritual receptivity is more fruitfully aligned with previous stages.

Ashford's (2011, p.118) second and third points are that the gospel truth should be presented both meaningfully and dialogically. Within western cultures, we identified that often people either have a misunderstanding of gospel truth or 'lack even the memory of the gospel story' (Alford, 2019). Essentially, the provision of gospel truth insight needs to enable people to 'discover the true Jesus (as against the cultural Jesus) – be it a long or short journey' (Peace, 1999, p.328). In addition, the method of communication needs to take into account stylistic cultural preferences. It is for this reason that Ashford suggests dialogue rather than monologue pronouncements. We may argue that the significance of these two points is that a small group dialogical learning environment is more conducive, relative to a large gathering with a monologue preacher (Finney, 1996, p.47). In particular, the small group context provides opportunities for on-going exploration and dialogue, personalised to the 'uniqueness of the individuals and… varieties of religious experiences' (Salter, 1996, p.209).

We may note that the above argument is not to say that monologue preaching should cease, or that the small nurture group is a new addition to evangelistic practice. Nevertheless, 'the reversal of the importance given to the two is highly significant' for

cultural engagement (Finney, 1996, p.47). The gospel truth is the same through both communication mediums. However, we may argue that dialogue rather than a monologue is likely to be more supportive for personalised engagement and understanding within contemporary western culture. Accordingly, we may caution that perceived authoritarian monologue preached pronouncements could be rejected (McQuilkin, 2005, p.174) because 'people don't want anyone to tell them what to believe' (Hollinghurst, 2010, p.37). Nevertheless, preaching may foster engagement when the truth is presented with unassuming confidence but personal vulnerability (Laurie, 2005, p.472) and includes a 'higher ratio of stories as illustrations' (Chan, 2018, p.120). Therefore, we may contend that when preaching embraces the above humble posture and learning style, it appears to align with western cultural tenets.

4.7   Invitation and Response.

In section 2.6, we discussed invitation and response. From our critical discussion, we may hold that a key principle for soul-winning evangelistic practice is to ensure that an invitation is made for people to consider responding to God's call (Keller, 2020, p.13). We noted that evangelistic practice often starts with the individual's felt needs agenda (Anderson, 2002, p.37), and develops through a sequence of praxis, belief and truth (Chan, 2018, p125).

Evangelistic practice should attract people to the church community (Stetzer, 2014b). However, 'going to church doesn't make you a Christian' (McFarland, 2009, p.23). Equally, evangelistic practice should include sharing testimony and gospel truth. Nevertheless, having theological knowledge does not make 'Jesus my Lord and Saviour' (Parnell, 2013). Critically, 'without inviting a person to repent of their sin and believe in Christ, we haven't given them everything they need. What use is the best news… if a person doesn't know how to apply it to themselves?' (Brown, 2019). Similarly, Warren (2001, p.11) highlights that 'no matter what you start with… you close with the focus on Jesus'. We may argue that under the direction and timing of the Holy Spirit, authentic soul-winning evangelistic practice will include the presentation of God's invitation call.

Furthermore, we noted that 'conversion is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation' (Grudem, 1994, p.709). Grudem places emphasis on repenting with the prefix 'sincerely'; perhaps he is justified for stressing its importance. Lane's (2013, p.177) observation is that too often the 'operant theology' (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54) evangelistic practice is limited to informing the person to invite Jesus into their life, while omitting to invite them to repent of their sins. Lane (2013, p.177) asserts 'we are in danger of producing stunted and defective [spiritual] births… Repentance is more than just acknowledging that one is a sinner… [it] means a change of mind and heart, a turning from sin to God'. We may note that the use of the so-called sinner's prayer is often used as part of an invitation that may assist someone to make a profession of repentance and faith. For example, the sinner's prayer is found in Alpha publications such as Why Jesus (Gumbel, 2013, p.18) and Questions of Life (Gumbel, 2010, pp.65-66). However, we may caution that sincere repentance is not merely saying the words, but rather it 'means a change of mind and heart, a turning from sin to God' (Lane, 2013, p.177).

In contrast to the absence of an invitation, pressuring people to make a decision is inauthentic evangelistic practice. People progress through receptivity 'stages at different speeds' (Warren, 1999, p.31). Chester and Timmis (2011, p.132) stress, 'give people time… we are asking people to make a life-changing decision'. Therefore, we 'need to be sensitive to the fact that not all are able to say "yes" to Jesus at any given time' (Peace, 1999, p.307). Furthermore, in doing so, we rely entirely on the Holy Spirit to do his work (Parkinson, 2015, p.121) to enable someone to respond freely in repentance and faith to the gospel call (Grudem, 1994, p.709).

Conclusion

Implications concerning eternal life, earthly life, reflecting God's character, and obedience to Christ, we may contend, are compelling reasons for the priority of soul-winning. The church, globally, is growing; conversely, most western churches are declining. 'Rethinking and reconstructing evangelism is a task that must be taken up in every era' (Stone, 2007, p.10). However, the task is significantly important within contemporary western culture, as 'we are amidst an epochal change' (Bolsinger, 2018, p.30). This dissertation has critically discussed the theology and practice of evangelism for contemporary western culture, in order to argue critically for key principles of authentic and fruitful holistic soul-winning evangelistic practice. In conclusion, we seek to synergise critical themes and arguments, offer personal discernment and suggest associated areas for further exploration.

There are numerous evangelism definitions, each with particular nuances. We conclude that how someone defines evangelism may influence their practice of evangelism. When evangelism is narrowly defined and practiced (for example, as isolated encounter events), it ignores the inter-dependencies, and the multi-faceted and relational nature of evangelism. Indeed, such narrow practice is inadequate to enable people 'to discover who Jesus [really] is' (Peace, 1999, p.310), and perhaps may reinforce the unhelpful 'Jesus of culture' (Peace, 1999, p.299) perception often held within western society. Conversely, broad definitions may also have problematic issues. For example, when evangelism is defined to include a believer's on-going spiritual formation, the principle of concentration is weakened (Warren, 1995, pp.88-89).

Contemporary western culture continues broadly to transition and diversify from modernity to post-modernity and from Christendom to post-Christendom. However, transition is not uniform across western societies, resulting in unique community cultures, and personally held values, beliefs and constructed truths. We conclude that on-going assessment of the cultural landscape is critical within each community for authentic and fruitful holistic soul-winning evangelistic practice. Overarchingly, because of movements in western cultural frameworks and some past church

practices, the church is either somewhat mistrusted or unknown. In addition, the gospel message is generally negatively perceived or unknown. However, Christians are generally perceived positively by people who know a practicing Christian. Accordingly, we conclude that relationships are required to establish trust, and trust needs to be established for Christians to be receptively heard, to share personal testimony and gospel truth.

For authentic and fruitful soul-winning evangelistic practice, we have developmentally argued for 'a language of conversion that accounts for the process… only then can we develop an understanding of congregational life and evangelism' (Smith, 2010, p.9). This argument is presented with reference to and by synergising cited biblically recorded conversions, the offering of an alternative explanation for Saul's conversion, and research findings concerning conversion.

We may conclude that the authenticity of soul-winning evangelistic practice is: a) 'initiated by God and is completed by God' (Cardoza-Orlandi, 2002, p.48), b) biblically founded, c) practiced with a Christlike character 'way of life' (Payne, 2017), and d) 'governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time' (Abraham, 1989, p.95). Sincere embracement of the relational focus of the Great Commandment ('genuine love for God and fervent love to [humankind]' (Spurgeon, 1992, p.133)), will lead to authentic participation in the Great Commission with purpose, direction and goal focus (Pate and Wilkes, 2008, p.12).

As part of a soul-winning evangelistic practice, we may conclude that love for God is demonstrated by acknowledging God's sovereign role and movement (Chan, 2018, p.20), prayerfully seeking God's direction (Jack, 2018, p.45), and obedient participation (Spurgeon, 1992, p.31). In contrast, contra indicators could include knowingly creating human-initiated so-called evangelistic practice and practicing behaviours that compromise biblical principles.

As part of a soul-winning evangelistic practice, we may conclude that love for non-Christians is demonstrated by developing relational trust with a tenderness of heart (Spurgeon, 1992, p. 61). Furthermore, love is shown by relationally assisting with felt

needs and life transitions, engaging in spiritual real needs through relational dialogue, but also respecting a person's freedom of choice. In contrast, contra-indicators could include engaging in so-called evangelistic practices that 'crush their spirit' (Frost and Hirsch, 2013, p.127), threatens, seeks to control, and impose.

We conclude that soul-winning evangelistic practice should be practiced as a relational, holistic and intentionally focused process. In particular, this means developing people to progressively acquire insight for conversion, facilitating spiritual receptivity, and presenting God's invitation call. In support of this position, Jesus' approach often commenced by meeting people's felt needs before entering into real spiritual needs dialogue (Anderson, 2002, p.44). Similarly, within contemporary western culture, often the most fruitful soul-winning evangelistic practice 'pedagogical sequence is praxis, belief, truth' (Chan, 2018, p.125). Recognising that culturally there is potential resistance to the church and absolute truth claims, evangelistic practice should begin by establishing relational trust. In particular, this means intentionally developing trust with people already known to the church through existing friendships and networks in the community. It also includes, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, relationally supporting individuals and identified specific groups with their felt needs, including life transitions. Dialogue concerning personal belief may follow, such as the use of personal testimony. Thereafter, the gospel truth is more likely to be fruitfully considered, often through interactive dialogue, such as within small seeker groups. Under God's direction and timing, God's invitation call should be obediently presented, in order for the person to potentially turn in repentance and faith to Jesus.

Within this dissertation, we identified that if a church's culture is not conducive to embracing a relational holistic soul-winning evangelistic practice, any such strategy is likely to be unsuccessful (Bolsinger, 2018, p.75). Research into healthy church culture and transitioning church culture are encouraged. In addition, we highlighted that a Christian's Christlike example significantly influences an unbeliever's receptivity to exploring the claims of Jesus (Wakefield, 2014, p.22). Therefore, reading in the area of whole-life discipleship is recommended.

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