

I N T R O D U C T I O N

How the West Was Lost

Geoffrey lived five hundred years ago, in the market town of Beverly, in the Yorkshire region of northeast England. Geoffrey was a tall furniture craftsman, a sheep herder, a husband, and father of five girls and two boys. He loved to design furniture, and he felt close to the Creator when he was creating furniture. He loved to herd his sheep, which grazed in the common pasture outside the town. Tending his sheep kept Geoffrey in touch with the rhythms of nature and God's "natural revelation"; and Geoffrey cared for his sheep and knew their names, and thought often of the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for humanity.

"Times were changing" in this market town of two thousand people. The town's weavers were moving into the countryside beside streams—to harness water power. Many families were replacing the thatched roofs of their mud and timber houses with red tile—to reduce threat of fire. Cathedrals and parish churches were replacing frescoes with stained-glass windows.

In these changing times, Geoffrey heard rumors of corruption in the Church, that even Franciscans now lived in luxury. But, for Geoffrey, this was mere rumor. The priest at Beverly Minster loved the townspeople, and his devoted manner in baptisms, weddings, last rites, funerals, confessions, and the mass suggested the goodness of God. The priest was no great orator, but he was the only show in town; and he was wise to feature, one Sunday per month, a traveling Dominican friar who told mesmerizing stories from Scripture and church history. Beverly Minster, still an exquisite example of Gothic cathedral architecture, dominated Beverly's modest skyline and was the setting for the town's social life. The cathedral's many activities bathed people's minds in medieval christian images and ideas. Its

ministry performed, and informed, each rite of passage in each person's life. It rehearsed the children in their catechism. The minster's stained-glass panorama of prophets, apostles, saints, and martyrs reminded the people of the Dominican's stories; indeed, as families visited the cathedral, parents told the stories to their children, as they would one day tell their children.

Geoffrey, like most of his peers five centuries ago, was illiterate, but his mind was immersed in Christianity. He knew, by heart, many sayings and teachings of Jesus, many doctrines of the church, and many stories from the Scriptures and christian tradition. G. M. Trevelyan, the social historian, tells us that "religion and the language of religion surrounded his life."¹ Furthermore, Geoffrey and his generation thought much about death, and feared it. His age had experienced epidemics, famines, plagues, and the Black Death; and Geoffrey had already lived beyond the average life span of 35. Moreover, Geoffrey's generation still lived with Ptolemy's map of the cosmos in their minds. Their universe was a three-layer structure—with an enchanted earth sandwiched between heaven and hell, the natural theater for the visits of angels and demons. Amidst it all, Geoffrey lived his life in earnest, and often talked seriously with his children about their lives and futures, and encouraged them to consider church vocations; in time, two daughters became nuns, and one son became an acclaimed Dominican storytelling preacher.

* * * * *

Today, 500 years and 20 generations later, a direct descendent of Geoffrey, named Sidney, lives in Phoenix, Arizona, a metropolis approaching two million people. Sidney, in several ways, resembles his ancestor. He too is tall. He appreciates animals and the outdoors. He appreciates exquisite furniture, and he manages a furniture store.

But Sid's identity, world, and life experience come from a different galaxy than Geoffrey's. Sid lives in a climate-controlled condominium, with cordless telephone, answering machine, microwave oven, home gym, personal computer with laser printer, and remote control cable TV with VCR. He lives alone, following a divorce, but often telephones his grown son and daughter. He plans to marry again, a resolve recently clarified with the discovery that his fiancé is pregnant.

Unlike Geoffrey, Sidney can read and is a college graduate. But he knows nothing of Geoffrey's depth and meaningful world of ideas.

Sidney's mind is anesthetized by the "junk food of the mind" served up by an endless diet of men's magazines, formula novels, game shows, situation comedies, soap operas, shallow movies, and synthetic friends. Sidney knows nothing about Christianity, apart from negative impressions of TV evangelists. He cannot name the four Gospels. He cannot recite, and would not recognize, the Lord's Prayer. He does not fear death. Indeed, he lives with the illusion that a premature death "couldn't happen" to him; consequently, his golfing buddy who peddles Prudential life insurance has not sold Sid "a piece of the rock." Sid does not think often of religion or the Church, but when he does, it is with vague suspicion, including the suspicion that clergy represent some third gender. Sid has no conscious christian background, memory, or vocabulary, though he is superstitious and will attribute an "off day" in golf to "bad luck." If you commended Christianity to Sid, you would not find him an atheist, saying, "I don't believe in your God," nor an agnostic, saying, "I don't know if I believe in your God"; because Sid is an Ignostic, saying, "I don't know what you are talking about." But he would add, "There must be some truth in religions; otherwise there wouldn't be so many of them."

* * * * *

Geoffrey was typical of his time, a period of a "Christian Society" in which most everyone in the Western world believed, belonged to the Church, and was scripted by its rites and teachings. Historians call that period "Christendom." Christendom began in the fourth century A.D., when the Church picked up the pieces of a fallen Roman Empire and, with a vision of God's purpose, "attempted to create a Christian civilization, to shape laws consonant with the biblical teaching, to place kings and emperors under the explicit obligation of Christian discipleship."² The Church defined the purposes for each area of life, so government, education, art, architecture, literature, music, personal morality, community life, and even economics marched to Christianity's drum. The Church became the source and center of Western Civilization, influencing every area of Western humanity's life, thought, and activity.

Sometimes the Church's influence bordered on monopoly. If people were educated, they got it from the Church. Art and music served christian themes. The Church even became a prominent land holding institution.³ With variations, and periodic regional expan-

HOW TO REACH SECULAR PEOPLE

sions, this arrangement by which the Church pervaded western culture lasted for nine or ten centuries. Within the arrangement, the Church shaped a cultural environment in which, presumably, all western people were "Christians."

But since that time, the West has been substantially lost, to the extent that Sidney is fairly typical of his age today. As measured by the simple indicator of church attendance, nations that were once substantially Christian are now largely lost to the christian movement. The percentage of people even attending church on an average Sunday has declined to 6 percent in West Germany and Italy, to between 1 and 3 percent in the Scandinavian countries, to 12 percent in Great Britain. In Canada, the percentage of people attending Church on an average Sunday is less than half what it was 40 years ago; in Australia, less than half what it was 25 years ago. Christianity's influence has substantially declined in the United States as well, a fact obscured by the United States' relatively constant church attendance (about 40 percent, in surveys), because much American church attendance is "Christo-pagan"; that is, American civil religion in christian clothing. Some churches concoct a hash from ingredients like patriotism, moralism, cultural values (like materialism and the quest for the perfect "high"), with some wisdom from "celebrities" mixed with selected Bible verses, and then they serve the hash as "Christianity"; that hash panders to people's tastes and inflates "church attendance" statistics, though the hash is far from real Christianity and leaves people's souls malnourished.

The Church's missionary challenge in the West today is thus complicated by the fact that most western populations have been exposed to some distorted or diluted expression of Christianity that inoculates people against the real thing, at least in its traditional forms. Alan Walker, who has preached and observed in 74 countries—including all the secular European countries and all the Communist countries except Albania and North Korea, concludes that "the Western world is now the toughest mission field on earth." There is now more resistance to the christian faith in the heart of old Christendom than anywhere else—England, Europe, Scandinavia, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Only in the United States is the church more than a minority movement.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the christian movement has experienced great expansion in Africa, Asia, and

HOW THE WEST WAS LOST

Latin America, and has demonstrated great tenacity, vitality, and growth in China, Russia, and most other Communist nations—even, and especially, during persecution. Remarkably, "more people go to church in Moscow than in London."¹⁵

HOW "SECULARIZATION" HAPPENED

How was the West lost? And how can the West be engaged by the gospel again? Those questions are important because the West is once again a vast mission field. In the United States alone, there are at least 120 million functionally undisciplined people (aged 14 or older). Ralph Winter announced in 1974 that the challenge of reaching the "Unreached Peoples" of the developing world would constitute the third and "final" era in the history of mission, but he presupposed a static world.¹⁶ We now know that the western nations, who historically sent missionaries to the rest of the earth, are now mission fields themselves once again. They are arduous mission fields. Our challenge to reach the undisciplined populations of North America, Europe, and Australia will require as sophisticated a mission strategy as any mission field in the world today, or at any time in history. The whole world has a stake in Christianity's challenge to rewin the West because, as Harold Turner exclaimed during a lecture, "Western culture is now becoming the culture of all peoples, but it is increasingly sick—and the whole bit is being exported, including our social problems, to the whole world. And so we must solve this for the sake of the whole world."

The West was lost when the "Christendom" arrangement disintegrated. Geoffrey's world no longer exists; it is scarcely a memory. The cause of Christendom's disintegration was a massive "secularization" process within western history in the last five or six centuries, a process that continues today. An example of the secularization process occurred, repeatedly, over much of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the armies of various nobles and barons sacked the monasteries and seized church property; they said at the time that the property was being "secularized," that is, withdrawn from the control of the Church. We see from that example that "secularization" may be defined as "the withdrawal of

HOW TO REACH SECULAR PEOPLE

whole areas of life, thought, and activity from the control or influence of the Church. "The Church experienced lost influence in every area of western society's life—from education to government, economics, art, architecture, literature, music, personal morality, and community life. Today no one even pretends that western culture still marches to Christianity's drum. The nearly complete secularization of the West is the Great New Fact confronting the entire western Church.

There are variations in the secularization process. The story of the secularization of economics varies from the story of literature's secularization, which varies from the secularization stories of government, and the arts, but the secularization of all areas of western life and thought share a common history involving *two fundamental causes* of western secularization.

Did/What did you learn about what we
SIX WATERSHED EVENTS do + why?

The first cause of Christendom's decline and the secularization of the West is located in a series of six major cultural events spanning several centuries. This discussion does not do them justice, but serves as a synopsis to remind us of the "big picture."

① Secularization began with the Renaissance, an intellectual and cultural movement from the mid-fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century, led by Erasmus and Bacon. Essentially, the Renaissance represents the West's rediscovery of ancient Greek philosophy, science, and literature. The Renaissance affected western people in three ways. First, it redirected people's attention from God, another world, and theological matters to this world, to humans, and to humanity's progress. The ancient shibboleth of the Greek sophist Protagoras became the battlecry of the Renaissance: "Man is the measure of all things." Second, the Church's worldview was, for centuries, the only comprehensive worldview available to Europeans. But the recovery of Greek philosophy gave people another option for understanding life and the world, thereby introducing pluralism and a new source of doubt to western minds. Third, the Renaissance created the cultural soil out of which humanism eventually emerged as a major and perennial competitor to christian truth claims and ethics.

HOW THE WEST WAS LOST

② The breakup of Christendom continued with the Protestant Reformation, led by Luther and Calvin. The Reformation removed Church influence from western life by dividing the Church and by turning the Church's attention away from the management of society and inward toward renewal, reorganization, and theological matters.

The Renaissance and the Reformation provided the one-two punch that got secularization rolling. During Luther's lifetime, the people said "Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it!"

③ Secularization continued with the rise of Nationalism and the rise of proud independent nations in what had once been a comparatively united Europe. The nationalistic spirit that swept Europe killed Christendom as a political entity and undercut the understanding of a common humanity that had largely prevailed in Christendom. Moreover, nationalism led to unprecedented warfare between the peoples of Europe—including the two world wars of this century. The experience of war induced disillusionment and doubts about the Church's God.

④ The rise of Science challenged Christendom's prescientific assumptions about the universe and human life. It would be difficult to exaggerate the impact of science, and what passed itself off as "science," upon western consciousness, but its impact can be potentially suggested when one recalls the impact of these six thinkers: Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Marx, and Freud:

Copernicus and Galileo, by discovering the structure of the solar system, challenged the Church's traditional understanding of the cosmos. Ptolemy had placed the earth at the center of the universe, with the sun revolving around it. But Copernicus and Galileo demonstrated that the earth revolves around the sun, and the earth's rotation on an axis gives us our days and nights; the cosmology assumed from the New Testament through the Middle Ages was now ludicrous.

Newton's theory of gravity challenged the doctrine of Providence, as traditionally understood. Prior to Newton, people assumed that God's providential hand kept the moon, planets, and stars in place. Newton's *Principia* demonstrated, mathematically, that the universe's cohesion could be explained by his theory of gravity, and for many people God was edged out of the providence business. The long-term effect of the Newtonian revolution was even greater, as people came to see the universe as a self-enclosed system, or a "machine" that did not require "God" to explain or manage it.

Darwin's theory of evolution challenged the doctrine of the creation

and the nature of humankind—as traditionally understood. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, with theories of natural selection, survival of the fittest, and progressive evolution, made it possible for people to understand their species in a very different way—as rational animals, without the dignity and purpose assumed in the biblical doctrine of creation.

Marx's writings provided an alternative to the traditional christian understanding of the goal of history. Marx seems to have retained the Judeo-christian structure of history, but he substituted for Christianity's promised Kingdom of God a promised economic utopia.

Freud wrote a question mark over religious belief and religious experience, charging that belief in God and experiences of God could be explained psychologically, and thereby explained away as an "illusion."

5. The Enlightenment built upon the Renaissance to escalate the West's secularization. The Enlightenment is such a colossal cause of secularization that some writers, like Newbigin, treat it as virtually the only cause. The Enlightenment swaggered into European history with enormous confidence in human reason, and it left an intellectual legacy that has affected western society ever since. Enlightenment thinkers believed that human beings are intrinsically good and reasonable, but that their environment makes them less good and reasonable. Enlightenment leaders taught that beneath the world's diverse religions is a common "natural religion" universally present in human nature. Enlightenment leaders were confident that morality and society could be based on reason alone, without revelation or religion.¹⁰ Enlightenment thinkers believed that science, technology, and education would deliver "inevitable progress." Some children of the Enlightenment saw the universe in terms of Newton's machine, assuming that the universe is self-contained and that the idea of God is therefore superfluous—not needed to understand the universe.¹¹ Furthermore, the Enlightenment trumpeted "human dignity" and "human rights" and inspired movements working for a more just and humane society, thereby providing a radical alternative to christian teachings and christian service. The Enlightenment thus encouraged doubt about Christianity and provided beliefs and causes that seemed to replace it, and ushered in "modernity."

6. If the Enlightenment escalated the secularization process, Urbanization stampeded it. Great Britain, in the eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution, became the world's first substantially urban country, but other European countries were not far behind. The

United States population has moved from 20 percent urban in 1870, to 40 percent in 1900, to 70 percent by 1980, and will approach 90 percent urban in 2000 A.D. Australia is no longer the "Outback" oriented nation featured in *Crocodile Dundee*; 85 percent of her people are urban, 70 percent live in the ten largest cities. Urbanization is the siamese twin of secularization. It has amplified the effects of secularization and has profoundly, if subtly, affected the God consciousness of urban secular populations. William Blake observed, in England's eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution, that "great things happen when men and mountains meet, but these things do not happen when men jostle in the street." Ralph Waldo Emerson, during the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution in North America, is said to have confessed: "I look upon cities as great conspiracies; I always feel some loss of faith upon entering one."

HOW THE CHURCH ALIENATED THE PEOPLE

If the first cause of Christianity's loss of influence upon western people and culture was such a series of events—Renaissance, Reformation, Nationalism, Science, Enlightenment, and Urbanization,¹² the second cause was the Church's pathological pattern of responses to these events—responses that undermined the Church's credibility and distanced the people from her witness.

For instance, the Church conflicted early and persistently with Science. She tried to control what could (and could not) be researched, as in prohibiting Leonardo's study of cadavers to understand human anatomy. The Church tried to control what conclusions could (and could not) be reached or taught from scientific inquiry, as in banning Copernicus' books for 200 years, and in forcing Galileo to disown his discoveries in astronomy. The Church seems to have fought a reactionary war against Science at almost every opportunity, an unnecessary war! People like Newton and Galileo, and even Darwin, never understood themselves to be the enemies of the Church. But the Church's behavior made it appear to be the enemy of thought, rationality, and truth.

Protestant Churches became inordinately identified with the

nationalism sweeping Europe. Much of Protestant Christianity lost the vision of a common humanity and contributed to the chauvinism that separated nation from nation and led to many wars. Few people in the West had reason to associate Protestant Christianity with the Prince of Peace, and many observed this wing of the Church betraying him.

The Roman Catholic Church was strongest in the European countries where the Enlightenment was most vigorous, and widely opposed the Enlightenment's causes. Something happens to the Church's credibility every time she fails to throw her influence behind movements working for justice and democracy. Throughout Catholic Europe, the Church sided with monarchs and money, as later the Russian Orthodox Church did in Russia and Catholicism in Latin America. The effect, everywhere, has made the Church appear reactionary and against progress, democracy, justice, and the people.

Likewise, the western Church (especially Protestantism) has been paranoid of cities and reluctant to accept, or even perceive, urban challenges. Many people believe that the Church once had the West's urban working people but subsequently lost them; but in fact, it never had them, because the Church never reached out to city people with churches and clergy at all proportionate to the numbers of people in cities. Most denominations still distribute their churches and clergy as though we minister to territorial "parishes"—a model more consistent with the way the people previously were scattered in towns and across the countryside than the way they are stacked in cities today.

So Bertrand Russell wrote in his *History of Western Philosophy* (with some exaggeration) that "the churches, everywhere, opposed for as long as they could, practically every innovation that made for an increase of happiness and knowledge here on earth."¹³ Many christian scholars are forced by the evidence to agree. David Edwards attributes secularization chiefly to the clergy's failure to transcend nationalism, to understand science and democracy, and to reach urban industrial workers. As a consequence of the secularizing events in Europe and the Church's counterproductive responses, Edwards observed eastern Europe as officially atheistic. In western Europe a small minority attend church, "skepticism is widespread, neither politics nor daily life is often profoundly influenced by the teaching of the churches," and "the average European has lost any vivid sense

of God and any religiously based sense of right and wrong." Indeed, much of Europe experiences secularization as "a process by which explicit religion becomes private, problematic, marginal and, in the end, eccentric."¹⁴

SECULARITY IN DIFFERENT SHAPES

To put secularization in perspective, observe that this force in western culture has its limits. Secularization is not inexorable, nor irrevocable, and it is influenced and "bent" by other major forces in western history. Martin Marty has demonstrated, in *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular*, that the schism between the Church and western culture has taken at least three different forms.¹⁵

One form, characteristic of the European continent, is "Utter Secularity." This form, typified by Voltaire and Marx, featured an open clash of doctrines involving "a formal and unrelenting attack on gods and churches and a studied striving to replace them." In such a hostile secular environment, many people "lost their faith."

The second form, characteristic of Great Britain, is "Mere Secularity." In this form, God and the churches are not attacked; they are ignored by people preoccupied with this world and their daily routines. Mere Secularity retains the shell of Christendom—a religious coronation of the monarch, a state Church, bishops in the House of Lords, religion taught in the schools, but without much meaning, power, or commitment. For most of the English, Christianity is equated with moral goodness, and most English people regard themselves as "Christians"—in the sense that they are civilized and are not barbarians! Many people lose their faith in this "mere" secular environment too, though more incrementally and less consciously. Charles Darwin's own experience is representative: "I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation. . . . This belief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted for a single second that my conclusion was correct."

The third form, characteristic of the United States, is "Controlled

HOW TO REACH SECULAR PEOPLE

Secularity. The dominant religion in the United States is a folk religion which defies traditional American values. This civil religion retains and uses the symbols of traditional Christianity, but with the meanings changed. So in the nineteenth century, christian symbols were used to support American imperialism as "Manifest Destiny." In the twentieth century, Christianity is widely equated with the religiosity of *Readers Digest*, and some churches with large attendance reinforce this heretical equation, rather than liberate people from their cultural idolatry into biblical faith.

Although secularity takes different regional and cultural forms, Christianity in each form has lost most of its influence. A vast majority of the people in western culture are no longer christian disciples by anyone's serious definition. They live their lives, personal and public, not consciously influenced or shaped by Christianity. Christianity is no longer the dominant privileged religion of western nations. Indeed, western nations now ferment with many religious and philosophical options, and Christianity must now *compete* on its merits if it is to rewin the West.

Three other observations place secularity in perspective.

First, other religions and worldviews are also experiencing secularization and losing their earlier influence with large populations. Japanese culture's historic relation to Shinto has experienced substantial secularization since World War II. Most primal religions lose control of their people when they move to the cities. The phenomenon of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini represents Shi'ite Islam's attempt to stand against the tide of secularization eroding Islamic cultures. Furthermore, we now observe, from China, to Russia, to the Soviet Union's satellite states and even Albania, the secularization of Communism's influence upon its peoples. Each experience of secularization is distinct, but common features include the impact of science, nationalism, humanism, urbanization, and the *de facto* westernization of much of the earth. Given the sudden collapse of the Communist parties, much of what we are learning about communicating Christianity to secular western pagans can inform our mission to populations in cultures now removed from the former influence of other religions and worldviews.

Second, though "secularity" is not synonymous with the ideology of "secularism," the secularized soil out of any religion breeds

HOW THE WEST WAS LOST

"secularism." Os Guinness observed, in an unpublished speech at Lausanne II in Manila, that

since 1900, the percentage of the world's atheistic and non-religious peoples (agnostics, secularists, communists and so on) has grown from 0.2 percent to 21.3 percent—in other words from less than one-fifth of one percent to over one fifth of the world's population. This is the most dramatic change on the entire religious map of the twentieth century. Secularists, or people with no religious commitment, now form the second largest bloc in the world, second only to Christians and catching up fast (at the rate of 8.5 million 'converts' a year).

Third, it is also noteworthy that Christianity is not alone in experiencing difficulty in communicating its message and way of life in a secularized culture. Virtually every religion, philosophy, and ideology finds that secularity has not made its way easy, but a secular culture especially challenges religions like Christianity whose core truth claims are not negotiable.

SECULARIZATION APPRAISED

Upon reflection, how should the christian movement appraise the loss of Christendom and the rise of a secular culture? Dozens of scholars and leaders have given much thought to this; the following lines of thought are representative.

R. H. Tawney, in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, claimed that the loss of Christendom was a genuine loss for western humanity.¹⁶ Christendom, for all its flaws, was a considered attempt at a christian society, and it achieved an impressive level of human community, economic justice, and peace. He lamented that, following Christendom's decline, the Church narrowed the sphere of her thought and interests to individualistic and "spiritual" matters, and lost her own social philosophy, and is now prey to whatever social philosophy is fashionable.

But, a century before Tawney, Søren Kierkegaard mounted an *Attack Upon Christendom*, celebrating Christendom's decline, because "when everybody is a Christian, nobody is a Christian."¹⁷ Kierkegaard saw that when one understands oneself to be a Christian because one is born in a so-called christian country, has been baptized

and scripted with a few christian values, one is only "playing Christianity" . . . like soldiers play war on the parade grounds," and this "illusion" almost prohibits anyone from becoming a Christian in the New Testament sense of following Jesus Christ and conforming one's life to God's will. Kierkegaard yearned for the day when the only "Christians" would be real followers of Jesus Christ.

Rudolf Bultmann's essay "The New Testament and Mythology" reminded us that western populations now live after the Copernican revolution in cosmology, and so "we no longer believe in the three-storied universe which the creeds take for granted."¹⁸ We are called, therefore, to meaningfully reinterpret the New Testament's message to our own time and culture.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, building upon Kierkegaard and claiming that Bultmann "did not go far enough," saw some matters deeply from his prison cell.¹⁹ In the advanced secularization he observed, Bonhoeffer concluded that most people now refer to "God," even "religious" people, as a "stop-gap god," or a *deus ex machina*. People characteristically refer to "god" as the cause of something they cannot explain, such as lightning, or they turn to "god" for help when they cannot otherwise help themselves, such as in sickness. He observed that, as people have to use "god" as an explanation less and less and have to call on "god" for help less and less, this "god is being edged out of the world," to the periphery of people's conscious world. But Bonhoeffer proclaimed that this creeping event in western consciousness is to be celebrated, because the *deus ex machina* is not the God of the Bible anyway; the biblical "God is the 'beyond' in the midst of our lives." Bonhoeffer welcomed secularization because it is "a clearing of the decks for the God of the Bible." He believed that a viable communicating form of Christianity in the future would assume a form of "religionless Christianity." Effective communication would avoid "religious jargon," and would "speak in secular fashion of God." A faithful church in a post-christian era would commend the gospel and explain "the cost of discipleship," and would appeal to people in their strength, not just in their weakness.

More recently, Lesslie Newbigin's *Foolishness to the Greeks* sees that secular western people now live in terms of two worlds: (1) a Public World of "facts"—demonstrable by science, the same for everyone, to which all reasonable people agree, and (2) a Private

World of values and religious beliefs in which pluralism reigns and each person believes in something (or nothing) by choice.²⁰ Newbigin sees two special problems with this private world of beliefs and values: (1) The culture now assumes, as percolated down from the Enlightenment, that the essence of Christianity is the same as that of the other world religions, and that the different religions make up a mosaic from which people pick and choose. (2) Newbigin charges, agreeing with Tawney, that Protestant Christianity has largely accepted the public-private dichotomy and has withdrawn into the private sector, thereby securing a continuing place for itself but abdicating the central biblical convictions that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" and that "Jesus is Lord" and "the light of the world."

OUR NEW "APOSTOLIC AGE"

Scholarly appraisals accepted, the Church in the western world needs to experience the paradigm shift that allows it to perceive the new missionary challenge in the secular West today. Indeed, the situation we face is much like what the early apostolic Church faced. What does this mean?

For the christian movement's first three centuries, the communication of Christianity had to achieve four objectives: (1) Facing a population with no knowledge of the gospel, the christian movement had to inform people of the story of Jesus, the good news, its claims, and its offer. (2) Facing hostile populations and the persecution of the state, the Church had to "win friends and influence people" to a positive attitude toward the movement. (3) Facing an Empire with several entrenched religions, the Christians had to convince people of Christianity's truth, or at least its plausibility. (4) Since entry into the faith is by an act of the will, Christians had to invite people to adopt this faith and join the messianic community and follow Jesus as Lord. These were the components of persuasion in the ancient apostolic setting. *How today?*

The early Church was intentional about achieving each of these four objectives. They informed people by creatively communicating and interpreting their gospel in conversations, synagogue presenta-

tions, and open-air speaking. They influenced people's attitudes by their changed lives, their ministries of service, their love for one another, and by their love for nonchristians and even their enemies, even in martyrdom. They convinced people by reasoning from the Scriptures and by their common-sense apologetics. They invited responsive people to confess faith and be baptized into the messianic community.

Much later, when Christendom was in place, with the parish church at the center of community life and the Church informing every area of the culture's life, the informing, influencing, and convincing goals were achieved in people's enculturation. Most people were already informed in the faith's basics, were favorably disposed toward the faith, and already assumed its truth. So the christian communicator could largely focus on inviting people, who were already informed, convinced, and favorably inclined, to adopt the faith.

With the events of secularization and the Church's defensive reaction to those events, increasing numbers of people experienced alienation and a negative attitude toward the Church, withdrew from the churches, and in time many western people no longer understood, or recalled, the faith of their ancestors. Today, this secularization is so advanced in all of the countries of Europe, North America, and Australia that no communicator today has the luxury of beginning at point four and appealing for a response, because, as Donald Soper has observed, "Not one in every ten people has the remotest idea of what you and I within the church mean by 'religion.'"²¹

So the Church must begin farther back with people today. For centuries the Church was harvesting grain in fields already plowed, seeded and watered. But today we must first plow, seed, and water the fields before we can reasonably expect to gather harvests. For centuries, in basketball jargon, the Church always had "home court advantage," but today we occasionally play on a neutral court and usually on the opponent's court—if we play at all. Unfortunately, most churches still sit back and wait for people to come play on our court. But, as Donald Soper contends, most evangelism today presupposes that the Middle Ages are still with us, "and takes little or no account of the fact that the Church today is back in apostolic times."²²

THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT'S EMERGING OPPORTUNITY

Coincidentally (or providentially), the Church's new apostolic challenge is joined by a rising opportunity more vast than anything the Church dared pray for. Today, Sidney's numbers are so legion that the secularization of the West has placed the Church in a missionary role here "at home," because most of our neighbors do not share our faith, or a memory of our faith, or our assumptions, or our vocabulary. The West is, once again, a vast mission field.²³ Until recently, however, the western Church has still behaved as though Christendom were still intact, as though a church's only role is to shepherd christian people in a settled christian society. But Newbigin's *Foolishness to the Greeks* has alerted many church leaders to the missionary challenge in Europe and North America, and, more recently, Diogenes Allen's *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* suggests that Christianity's mission to the West now approaches an unprecedented opportunity.

Diogenes Allen argues that, due to twentieth-century revolutions in science and philosophy, the Enlightenment is now a spent force, and the period of "Modernity" it produced is spent too.²⁴ "Modernity" is essentially finished because most of the Enlightenment's key ideas have now been abandoned by leading scientists and philosophers, and by historical experience. We can now demonstrate, from a wide range of literatures, some significant changes.

1. Human beings are not as good and reasonable as enlightenment ideology taught; "There is an increasing recognition that evil is real and that it cannot be removed merely by education and social reform" (Allen, p. 5). Good legislation for, say, urban renewal, is aborted without good people to manage the programs. The corollary enlightenment view that knowledge is inherently good is also crumbling. The atomic age has demonstrated that knowledge can be made to serve good purposes or evil purposes, depending on the morality of the people controlling it.

2. Enlightenment teachings about a common "natural religion" in human nature have not survived examination (Allen, p. 185). There is no apparent common base that all the religions hold in common; indeed, their core worldviews contradict one another. For instance, the Jewish, Moslem, and Christian religions are theistic, Buddhism and Communism are atheistic, Hinduism and most primal religions are polytheistic. The eastern religions,

generally, are world renouncing; the western religions, generally, are world affirming.²⁵ The first argument for the "uniqueness" of Christianity is that each of the major religious traditions is unique! Far from sharing a common core, the religions appear most alike at the surface (for instance, all, or most, religions feature prayer or meditation), and more dissimilar the deeper you go in each.

3. Society has proven incapable of developing, by reason alone, a consensus morality. The quest for "rational laws" for human behavior has been frustrated because, apparently, there are no such laws. Nor are there objective values upon which a consensus morality could be based; values are now seen to be culturally scripted, or a matter of preference. This represents a mammoth breakdown in the western tradition, because it programs the culture for moral anarchy and demonstrates no reason to support the long-held conviction that every person has intrinsic value.

4. Science and education have not liberated humanity from entrenched problems like crime, pollution, poverty, racism, and war, and this failure has crippled the notion of "inevitable" progress. A greater realism has replaced the earlier Pollyanna optimism of the Enlightenment. We may be able to overcome these difficulties, but humanity's liberation from social bondage and nature's bondage is not assured, and certainly not "inevitable."

5. As twentieth-century scientists probed the mystery of the atom, the Newtonian view of the universe as a machine was not confirmed; indeed, nature at its core now appears random and mysterious. Consequently, many leading scientists and philosophers now admit the limits and fallibility of science, and the myth of complete "scientific objectivity." Many scientists and philosophers are no longer closed to the possibility of God—as the enlightenment script required, but now pursue it as an open and important question. Increasingly, sensible people want to know whether the universe is ultimate or not, why this universe exists rather than some other, and why this universe exists at all. They know that God is one possible answer to these questions.

This means that the pillars of "modern" western civilization, erected during the Enlightenment, are now crumbling. Allen observes that we are now in a period of culture lag—in which most people in the western world are not yet as aware as scientists and philosophers that the Enlightenment is over. But, Allen predicts, "when the dust settles," we will see that "the fields are ripe for the harvest."

The dust may be settling already. I attended an awards assembly at my daughter's middle school in Jessamine County, Kentucky. The new superintendent of schools, Dr. Lois Adams, addressed the student body. She encouraged each student to make every day count, to accept responsibility for themselves, and to believe they are

"special." She delivered the "you are special" part of her address sensitively and effectively, but, as I studied several dozen faces, I could tell they were not buying it! They were afflicted with "MEGO"—an acronym for "my eyes glaze over!" The affirmation of every person's uniqueness and dignity was washing past them!

I think I know why. The youth are the products of too many losing experiences and negative messages to believe, easily, that they are special. Besides, you need *reasons* to believe in your own uniqueness and dignity. Historically, most people in the West have been able to believe in their dignity because they (a) were culturally "scripted" with biblical assumptions about human creation in "the image of God" or, more recently, (b) because they were scripted by enlightenment ideals. But the rising generation's glazed eyes, volatile feelings, and vulnerability to drugs tell us they are the first generation for whom the once powerful Enlightenment is now extinct. If we lift up our eyes, we may see that the western fields are already becoming "white unto harvest."