

# Taking Time

## Waiting for Green Shoots

A look at the basic  
elements of spirituality  
and spiritual development

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## Reclaiming the Wasteland

*"The fruits of our times of stillness broadcast  
their seed over the heartlands of the world.  
It takes time to land though being so light -  
time to germinate, mature and multiply  
across our crowded days.*

*Yet one tiny seed nurtured in a heart in time  
becomes a great forest reclaiming a tract of  
the Waste Land."*

Noel Davis  
'Heart Gone Walkabout'  
Poems, Prayers, Lines & Space

## YOUNG PEOPLE, SPIRITUALITY AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS THE REALITY OF SHALOM WITHIN A NON-BOOK CULTURE

The title of this booklet may well be too ambitious a theme to deal with in such a context - a book or manual might be preferable. However during recent years a number of realities, factors and issues have come into connectedness in ways which are stimulating and challenging current thinking and practice in relation to these key themes. Exploring such aspects as;

- The social and cultural aspects of society and young people
- Understanding and defining spirituality and spiritual development
- Young people and the Church
- Communication and contextual challenges which arise including that of multi-media
- How people learn and how the Church has traditionally been teaching
- Identifying challenges and determining fresh paradigms
- Making real the biblical vision of shalom

may help to promote further thinking which will hopefully lead to improved practice and greater effectiveness in respect to the church's mission to and with young people.

Many years of involvement and training with those working with young people has revealed a continuing need to remind these keen activists that the world they grew up in is not the same world experienced by young people today. The processes of rapid social change, pluralism, secularisation, education, communication and the characteristics of post modernism are dramatically affecting everyone's experience of the world, but also their understanding of it and their place within it.

### **Culture and Youth Sub Culture**

Individuals are products of their culture, and that same culture has directly and indirectly shaped their understanding and experience of the Gospel. The topics of Gospel and Culture have become the focus of much current thinking but how relevant is an average youth worker's overall understanding of culture and its relevance to mission activity with young people? Do these aspects feature prominently in programmes of training? A broad definition of culture would include factors such as ethics, values, ideology, art, literature, music, attitudes, philosophy, tradition, lifestyle and the dominant religion and behaviour. Today's culture increasingly assumes a world wide dimension, a consequence of the revolution in communication, which is increasingly voracious in this global village. Whether a 'star' performs in Los Angeles, London, Manilla or Bangkok it looks and sounds the same. [It has been said that some expressions of modern culture such as the ' T shirt ' or ' McDonalds ' are indirectly undermining some of the culturally distinctive and traditional specifics of a region and/or nation, contributing to the destruction of those cultures]

Within any culture certain symbols and ' things ' assume importance, value and significance, e.g. in current Western culture, a car, a filofax, a mobile phone, or a P.C, denote those things that this particular culture values and prizes. Often they are the things which the 'have nots ' seek to obtain

at the expense of the 'haves'. Two of the words which best express some of the core values of contemporary culture are 'instant' and 'me'. Advertising, the media and other forces in society reinforce these values. Even in churches similar values pertain, e.g. the after church comment that 'I didn't get anything out of the service', suggesting that those concerned hadn't come prepared to contribute anything towards that time of worship, behaving in passive and non interactive ways.

There is an ever present temptation to look back to the past, to bathe in nostalgia and indulge in the 'feel good factor', which the last Tory government so desperately searched for, and for fond expressions recalling that 'those were the days'. Recall the Hovis advert from the mists of the past which was accompanied by an extract from the New World symphony and a rich northern voice saying "I remember....." Alternatively there is the urge to dream about the future - what would you do if you.....? Such escapism creates a space in the uncertainty of the present, underlining its transience but does this offer any excuse to justify a throwaway society? Richard Foster makes an important link between culture and spirituality stating that:

***"Superficiality is the curse of the age ....the doctrine of instant satisfaction is primarily a spiritual problem "***

Any culture has a set of basic assumptions which underlie the thinking of that society and by which its people live their lives. These assumptions about the nature of the human race and behaviour, values etc are so deeply held as to be unquestionable. These 'root paradigms' have helped to shape, structure and make that particular culture or society. Recognising that a paradigm can be seen as a model or pattern, these root paradigms comprise a set of assumptions that help to determine how a society behaves as well as describing its values, thought forms and thinking. The call for, and the need, for new paradigms in many areas of church life and mission, becomes more apparent as the millennium approaches. Old and familiar paradigms are fraying around the edges and have that look of tardiness or irrelevance. When Christopher Columbus discovered America a paradigm shift in thinking took place - he did not sail over the edge and the world was no longer flat. The need for an equivalent discovery and experience at the end of the twentieth century as far as 'being church' is concerned becomes ever more urgent. What these new, yet to be revealed paradigms will mean in terms of mission to and with young people, or how the church can be contextualised, may be hard to determine at the moment. Whatever develops they have to include some essentials such as the need;

to present the Gospel and the kingdom of God as a real alternative to contemporary culture  
to offer Christian living as being utterly distinctive and different to the norm  
to live, in all aspects, as citizens of the Kingdom of God in the here and now

These are challenging and key elements which have to be worked at and made real in a broken world which desperately needs to experience God's shalom in Jesus.

Many of the root paradigms which have shaped Western culture are now being adopted in the two thirds world. This is raising issues of wealth creation, exploitation trade, the role of multi national companies [a frightening one this], high finance and corruption, pollution and industrialisation with all of their attendant lifestyle issues and other problems.

In general terms culture in the developing world can be described as '**Primary**' whilst in our Western world it is '**Secondary**'. There are some essential differences between these two cultural expressions that require keen attention as they may offer clues concerning mission activity with marginalised young people. Primary cultural systems satisfy the needs of people through **personal relationships**. Secondary systems, on the other hand, satisfy needs through **organisational systems** in which knowing people is not essential, through material goods or money. In simplistic terms it could be said that a tribal culture is dominated by 'Primary' concerns and that an industrial or developed culture is dominated by 'Secondary' concerns. In every culture the elite operate almost entirely in secondary ways whilst the lower classes function in more primary ways. It is also worth noting that in most primary cultures there are many factors which point to some acknowledgement of the 'transcendent' or the spiritual dimension of life, even though this may be animistic or non Christian.

Religion is seen as integral to everything that people do. It is not a way of looking at life but is rather a way of life. The concrete and the ordinary have huge spiritual significance. Feelings and imagination are more important than logic or rationality. In contrast the secondary nature of our culture, conditioned by the related processes of secularisation and Enlightenment thinking, has sometimes negated the supernatural. We infer that unless there is a rational and logical explanation for anything it must be unbelievable. How has this impacted upon young people, and what effect has it had on their understanding and awareness of the spiritual? Have those who live in the western world been conditioned to look at life logically rather than imaginatively and with what consequences? A further thought comes into mind. A superficial look around the world mission scene reveals some interesting realities. Here in the west the church is struggling and in many contexts declining - though there are some notable exceptions. In the two thirds world the church is experiencing remarkable growth and is showing evidence of growth and experience that we long for, yet seldom experience.

Note some of the contrasts between the two cultural expressions. In a **primary culture** the **oral tradition** is dominant whereas in Western **secondary culture** most communication is generally expressed in **written, mechanical or electronic** forms. In many of the vast housing estates across the UK the grapevine is still the way the word gets around. For young people much of their lifestyle, attitudes and behaviour have primary connotations yet they are bombarded by the power and illusion of secondary and enterprise cultural expressions with their emphasis on power and money. They sense the missing dimension of the spiritual and learn that secondary culture cannot deliver the goods. They are trapped in a 'me' society which demands instant satisfaction but which is beyond their power to achieve in terms of legality.

In a primary culture **relationships** are foundational and are the **key to survival**. There is a clear **sense of identity, interdependence** has prominence, **inter generational activity** is the norm and there are obvious links to 'roots' and the past in the pattern of **extended families**. By contrast most secondary families are **nuclear or even lone parent; a knowledge of the system is the key to survival**; logic and the rational are the essential ways of explaining reality; identity is less clear; the sense of the 'now' dominates; individualism is the norm though peer groupings becomes important.

**THE CYCLES OF CULTURE -from Doug Hall [ Emmanuel Gospel Centre, Boston]**

In general terms it can be said that **PRIMARY** cultural systems satisfy the needs of its people through personal relationships. **SECONDARY** systems satisfy needs through organisational systems, materials goods or finance - knowing or relating to others less important. Simplistically a tribal type culture is dominated by the primary concerns listed below and an industrialised or developed system by secondary concerns. The elite of any culture however function in mainly secondary ways whilst the lower classes function in more primary ways. The two systems can be contrasted as shown in the following model.

<i><u>PRIMARY</u></i>	<i><u>SECONDARY</u></i>
Oral communication is dominant	Written, mechanical and electronic systems dominate
History is taught and preserved in mainly oral ways	History is generally preserved in written or disc form
Families tend to be extended	Families are generally nuclear
This system focuses on and preserves the relational	This system produces increasingly refined material products
Survival outside of the relational is difficult	Survival without relationships is easy but knowledge of the system and how it works is essential
Spiritual and even mystical explanations of reality are common	Scientific, objective, logical, cognitive explanations of reality are common
Learning is informal. Art, music, drama, stories, symbol are important ways of communicating culture and information	Learning and teaching is formal. Most information is taught and transferred in cognitive ways, often in formal contexts.
Effective control of violence and deviance	Less effective social control of violence and deviance
Identity clear at all stages of life	Identity less clear at all stages of life
Relates to ancestors and descendants	Relates mainly to the people of the present
The actions of God and man are made distinct	The actions of man dominate with a very unclear understanding of divine distinctives
Holistic	Particularistic
Interdependence	Individualistic
Primary cultural analysis	Economic analysis
Age spectrum integrated	Peer oriented

A number of connecting thoughts emerge;

**Firstly** -the story of Jesus was set in a primary culture and stories were His primary mode of sharing God's truth and God's purposes for his broken creation. What may this suggest about current patterns and styles of communication in a post literate society in general and within the church in particular?

**Secondly** -many of the housing estates previously mentioned have strong elements of primary culture threaded through their way of living and behaving. Young people there are living in a 'no man's land', caught between the two cultures.

**Thirdly** - authentic youth ministry has always been focused around relationships. There are signs that the tide is turning back to a relational dimension, but has there been a seduction by the drive towards glossy, frothy or even gimmicky, programmes in a desire to impress the church or encourage its feel good factor re youth work?

**Fourthly** - the means and processes of informal learning need to be re emphasised and the church needs to question how it has been teaching, how it understands learning and how it trains its communicators and preachers.

**Fifthly** - and in a world which is increasingly individualistic recovering the corporate and community dimensions of what it means to be the people of God is crucial. Is the church community to which most Christians belong that community upon whom they depend for survival? How might a biblical gospel be shared in ways which can bring community in the midst of contemporary culture ?

**Sixthly** -To what degree has the church itself become an expression of secondary culture, and sadly, so often dominated by individualism and materialism? By what means can this Gospel be shared in order to bring hope to a world and its people who are dissatisfied by the materialism in so much contemporary culture ?

**Seventhly** - what are the factors in society which socialise people into secondary ways of existing, thinking and behaving? It remains sensible to remember the part played by social class in all of this. For many 'frontier' young people the impact of culture and class on identity, lifestyle, thinking and action can be profound.

### Class and Culture

For example; A person's background, environment, education, home and family life have given them a 'set' of cultural norms, attitudes and values. Some of these are reflected below:

Middle Class	Working Class
<i>INDIVIDUALITY</i>	<i>GROUP LOYALTY</i>
<i>JUDGEMENTALISM</i>	<i>ACCEPTANCE</i>
<i>PRIVACY</i>	<i>OPENESS</i>
<i>STIFF UPPER LIP</i>	<i>VULNERABILITY</i>
<i>FACTS</i>	<i>FEELINGS</i>
<i>MEETINGS</i>	<i>MEETING</i>

For those with experience a reflection on their involvement with young people from both social groupings will affirm these broad realities, though of course there are always exceptions to the rule. It is similarly with theology. Personal history affects the way the Gospel and Scripture are both understood and experienced. Any youth worker worth their salt has to recognise their own cultural roots and the effects of this in the outworking of their faith, discipleship and engagement with young people. Different vantage points and experience give rise to differences in understanding and perception.

Middle Class	Working Class
<b>FORMULAS</b> <b>THEORY</b> <b>STATUS - right with God</b> <b>PERSONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS</b> <b>OMNIPOTENT LORD</b>	<b>DRAMA</b> <b>ACTION</b> <b>ACTIVE GOODNESS</b> <b>SOCIAL JUSTICE</b> <b>HUMAN JESUS</b>

John Bennington, writing in his book, Culture Class & Christian Belief underlines these realities;

" Discussions with them [young people] during this painful crisis of faith began to alert me to the extent to which personal attitudes and beliefs are patterned by one's particular social background and experience.....One of the effects of these new perspectives was to make me realise that even the most sincerely held beliefs can derive as much from a particular cultural background or position within the social structure, as from the essentials of the Christian revelation ". He makes a further point. "To explain the failure of the Christian Gospel to become real to working class young people would be to assume a remarkable predilection on God's part for the middle classes, and a singular distaste for let's say industrial workers." He includes these comments from young people, and they are still pertinent today, especially in a non book world;

*"Everything's on hearsay. You've just got to believe it. There's nothing to see for yourself. You're supposed to read it and hear it and believe it".*

*"Unless someone shows me facts I don't want to, you know - I'd like to believe but unless someone shows me the facts, I can't believe."*

*"You've been brought up that way so you don't find it so hard. But you get someone who hasn't and you try and tell them. They'll find it much harder you know."*

Some of these comments and their implications can be rationalised or explained away but they do pose challenging questions, particularly in the move away from the patterns of Enlightenment thinking in a post literate and post modern world. These young people are looking for facts which lie in the realm of sight, touch, feeling or hearing which are in tension with an expression of Christianity which is focused in beliefs, promises and doctrine which are attainable through faith. The clash between the concrete and the abstract is once again emphasised. Therefore how can the church develop a paradigm which will enable it to enter into the different modes of perception which are at work here, enabling and informing an appreciation of what the Gospel looks and feels like from what is generally termed an 'underside' perspective ?

The affects of **secularisation** cannot be ignored in any consideration of culture, especially when thinking about young people. Like it or not this is the world in which they live. It's also a world in which they have predominantly lived under a government committed to enterprise, wealth and success. The theory of 'trickle down' as far as wealth is concerned has proved to be the shell that it always was and many young people now languish in relative poverty and despair, with increasing numbers of people living in poverty. The gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' has grown wider. Secularisation has been rampant and can be defined as the process of change from the religious or sacred to the secular, together with those changes in the social order of things which take place when new techniques or methods of production are introduced. These processes result in three crucial areas of breakdown. Firstly, in **patterns of traditional belief**, secondly, in **the increasing disruption of community life** and thirdly, in **the fragmentation of family life**.<sup>(1)</sup> The

Enlightenment, which underlined the importance of reason, gave some initial impetus to the process of secularisation. The Medieval worldview focused on God as the ultimate reality and authority, but following the Enlightenment, there came a significant shift which saw the immediate world as the ultimate reality and on the individual as the centre of authority. In broad terms secularisation is hostile to supernatural explanations of events and history. Enlightenment thinking, e.g. the logical, rational, analytical and conceptual has profoundly shaped our thinking and understanding of learning and teaching. Some of this lingers on in many a sermon, which in a post literate, post Enlightenment and post modern world may be more than a handicap. Overlay this with the factor of **Pluralism** - a process in which truth claims become relative and situational, then we are presented with hard questions and challenges. How, in a pluralistic society, are truth claims determined ? For a church which believes that all truth is in Christ and in God's purposes for the world, and in the uniqueness of the Bible as the word of God, what does this mean ? An understanding of how secularisation has shaped social mores and contemporary beliefs will be more than useful enabling to honestly consider whether Christian responses have reflected cultural or biblical values. What, in this post modern world, are the 'fundamentals' that the people of God must retain at the core of their belief, thinking and action ?

The process of **rapid social change** has meant that many people, and especially the young, experience ambiguity and uncertainty. For many people 'anomie' is a consequence of those changes which give rise to feelings of lostness and separation from those experiences and roots which afford identity and meaning. Others, including those within groups and units serviced by Frontier Youth Trust, experience alienation, rejection and marginalisation. All too often this results in despair and is ultimately expressed in frustration, aggression and violence. Inevitably, as far as the system or state is concerned some young people actually do make it but they are generally the assenters, the achievers, the educated and the privileged. On the other hand there are those who defy it through protest or counter culture. And what about those who reject it by dropping out, or who become the victims or casualties, the bored, the unemployed, the 'have nots' and those who feel that they have neither a stake or a place in this society? For these young people the issues of survival, power and powerlessness, future and status become paramount and at times may either subvert the luxury of some sub cultural niceties or be the riving force which brings them together.

Traditional assumptions have been tested and found wanting, as for example in the realm of literacy, and the Church is seen and experienced as irrelevant. They find it impossible to jump or to cross the cultural barriers which the church has erected around the person of Jesus. Some of the young people who came to faith in the youth centre where I worked found it almost impossible to be part of any church. 'Jesus is great but what's all that to do with the church ?' was an all too common comment or question. They saw Jesus as one of 'them' [the powerful] rather than as 'one of us' [the powerless and dispossessed]. Unless these barriers and others are dismantled, it is likely that many young people will never feel, touch, see or experience Jesus or hear the good news in ways which make sense to them and to which they can respond. What then are those aspects of Western culture which make the Gospel to appear either unbelievable or irrelevant as far as young people are concerned ? When the fundamental suppositions, assumptions and values of society are directly contrary to those of the Gospel there is a call to undertake some basic thinking, supported by factual analysis with the aim of determining and outworking fresh strategies and approaches.

Any sub culture contains elements of the dominant culture, yet it also has some clear distinctives in the form of symbols, language, dress, myth, ritual and other aspects which those within that sub culture cherish because they give meaning, identity and purpose to their lives. There may also be elements, sometimes strongly expressed of protest against the dominant culture.

Youth sub cultures are generally rich in distinctive symbols - though some might feel that the

colourful expressions of past youth sub cultures are less evident today. Some factors such as music, dress, behaviour and social activity continue to identify some groupings. The issues of authority and control will always evoke protest in terms of anti authority, anti adult and anti structure. Sub cultures are a way of life, a sort of haven from the seemingly boring normal life of the adult world. The ever lengthening period between childhood and adulthood in an era of high unemployment is one of the reason for young people being dependent upon either state or family and this, in turn, affects their sub cultural expressions. These are partly shaped and determined by factors such as;

- Uncertainties about identity and status in the adult world
- Personal struggle and turmoil in establishing an identity
- The importance of symbols and artifacts
- Dependence upon the values and attitudes of the peer group as opposed to those of parents etc.
- An inability to integrate into the wider world because of unemployment, powerlessness and educational underachievement
- The effects and experience of addictions and sexuality
- Population trends and numbers of young people in society
- Tensions between the generations
- The increased economic and spending power of some young people
- Commercial exploitation, i.e. trends, fashion and music etc
- The power and role of the mass media
- Society scape-goating young people

A major factor within most youth sub cultures is the music scene and many publications have been written and produced on this issue. Michael Medved in his book 'Hollywood versus America' explores some of the ways in which popular bands have abused and misused Christian symbols. Madonna is a case in point, and one of her videos, 'Like a prayer', is set almost entirely in a church although her actions and behaviour communicate a different message. Other groups such as 'Jesus and the Mary Chain', 'Faith no More', 'Judas Priest' and 'Black Sabbath' and their music and symbols open doorways to the occult which is a cause for concern. There are those who would suggest that it's the music which is more important rather than lyrics. Have all the fans of 'Guns N' Roses' really listened to the 'poetry' expressed by this globally idolised group? For instance:

*"Panties round your knees with your ass in debris,  
Tied up, tied down, up against the wall "*

or

*" Turn round bitch I got a use for you  
Beside you ain't got nothin better to do - and I'm bored"*

or even

*" She ain't satisfied without some pain  
Friday night is going up inside her - again"*

Do these lyrics really help to shape values and attitudes? Are they some form of 'verbal wallpaper', or are they as some claim just a raunchy and irreverent expression of humour. Would you be happy to let your 15 year old have free access to them? Other gems from Medved's book include the fact that 'Live Crew's' album 'As Nasty as They Want to be' contained in sixty minutes of entertainment,

226 uses of the 'F' word, 163 uses of the word 'bitch', 87 descriptions of oral sex and 117 explicit terms for male and female genitalia. Joni Mitchell is quoted as saying "Music has become a burlesque over the past years- video's done that. Every generation has to be more shocking than the last.....Our country is going down the tubes from it. It's rotten to the core." Are these simply extreme phrases in order to prove a point or are they a cause of genuine concern ?

What are your views concerning the influence of contemporary music, its bands and stars, on the values and attitudes of young people ?

What, if anything, disturbs you regarding contemporary popular music ?

Can you identify positive and negative expressions of spirituality in the past and present music scenes ?

How do you use contemporary music in your youth work programme and for what purposes ?

### **A Widening Gap - Young people and the Church**

There is ample research and statistical evidence around to confirm the fact that around 90% of the nation's young people aged 14-19 have no contact with the church. I am assuming that we can agree that to all intents and purpose the church is of little relevance to most young people.<sup>[2]</sup> When thinking particularly about those young people described and/or stereotyped as 'unchurched', 'at risk', 'marginalised' or 'non book' it is a fact that the church finds it difficult to engage with them. They are perceived as a threat or a source of trouble and we feel uncomfortable and ill at ease with them. The class and culture gap is immediately apparent and felt, and so we feel uncertain of our approaches, strategies and purposes towards them. They may have turned their back on the church but they are still on the journey of spiritual exploration. They seek for answers in widely differing contexts and through a myriad of experiences. Their aspirations are expressed in music, in new age ideas and thinking, in activities involving the supernatural and in other diverse, weird, and sometimes offbeat ways. At the core of their being lies that mysterious spiritual centre. Made in the image of God implies that this spiritual dimension will remain unsatisfied and unfulfilled until it finds meaning in the person of Jesus. From comments and thoughts shared with me these young people sense and feel that the church;

lacks drama, symbol and action

is light years away in terms of culture and communication

uses the language, thought forms and buildings of the past

lacks real fellowship - this is better experienced down at the pub

expects conformity -(to what the church thinks rather than what Jesus wants)

has wrong priorities - doctrine is more important than being 'salt and light'

is inward looking, concerned for itself rather than others

is dominated by pulpit, clergy and structures

is paternalistic and patronising to young people

perceives expressions of doubt in the same light as 'treason'

bombards them with meaningless preaching

Jim Punton, FYT's former and widely respected Education and Training Officer, asked an important question some years ago regarding the integration of those young people who had come to faith from an unchurched background. . " Are we in danger of putting new wine into old wineskins ?"

The implications of answering 'yes' are profound, and to some Christians very, threatening. Many youth workers strive to hold the church in high regard and have felt the people of God should be able to live in a community or peoplehood which embraces all - regardless of culture, class, education, gender, race and theological knowledge. A look at missionary activity in other contexts demonstrates that **primary evangelism** results in **primary church planting**. This causes no great difficulty, rather it is expected and accepted. What then is the difference, then in this country if youth workers adopt such a strategy, especially if they are in primary evangelism with unchurched and unreached young people? Furthermore, the context in which young people come to Christ has also to be the context in which they are discipled. Why is there so much apparent fear of following basic missionary strategy? Does the church as institution dominate in a way which makes organisation of higher importance than organism? or is it that the church has become so secondary in thinking and action that we have allowed the structures to overrule and dominate? The reality that the church is people, a movement, a pilgrim body journeying through an alien land to a different destination - and therefore marching to a different beat needs to be continually re stated. This whole issue does of course include worship and worship almost automatically implies music. This is often the focus of tension between the generations and becomes a tragic source of division among God's people. Do the ever increasing numbers and styles of alternative worship springing up amongst young people pose a real or imagined threat?

The disturbing truth is that there can be no effective proclamation without presence. This is the model found and revealed in the incarnation and is also the one which is the hardest to imitate. Furthermore it could be said that over the years the church has generally 'imposed on' young people rather than 'discussed' with them, whilst at the same time it has often prepared its young people to live in the church rather than in the world. This pattern of working can sometimes lead a young person to expressions of dependence on the youth worker, the youth pastor or other 'significant adult.' Generally speaking the church has failed to come to terms with youth culture and effectively work within it, and neither has it appeared to appreciate the present political realities of growing up in today's world. On many occasions it reflects the more negative attitudes of society as a whole towards young people, scapegoating them, and, in many cases simply 'using' young people. Some key realities emerge.

These 'disadvantaged, at risk and unchurched young people;

- lack many basic elements of a fulfilling life
- experience the world as unfair and unjust
- are ignorant of, and indifferent to the fact that God loves, accepts and values them
- are unable to respond to most expressions of current church life and action
- seek meaning, purpose, identity and significance
- do not use print or books as their primary source of information

Churches and Christians have consistently failed these young people by

- not recognising that they even exist
- not going out to them, remaining insular and fearful
- writing them off for rejecting a Jesus they have never heard of in words or forms which make sense to them
- forgetting that Jesus spent most of his ministry with such people

Churches and Christian can begin to meet their needs and engage in mission by;

- developing fresh approaches and radically different patterns of work

initiating friendships and 'coming alongside'  
getting involved with them, being out there with them  
releasing those with the appropriate gifts to work with them  
providing security, care and understanding

Churches and Christians can share Jesus by;  
taking this aspect of mission far more seriously  
meeting them on their patch or turf  
adopting a style of work which takes risks and which persistently loves in spite of rejection, indifference, etc.  
Listening and accepting [but not condoning sin and its outworking]

Therefore we should;  
be genuinely concerned for these young people  
take a hard look at present patterns of work and re-prioritise where necessary.  
rethink issues of leadership, finance and buildings etc.  
take on board and work at social justice issues as they affect young people  
identify specific needs and take prayerful action  
train, equip, deploy and support those who are called to this particular ministry.

*" We may live in extraordinary times, but most of us spend the greater part of our existence doing quite ordinary things. Our simple, everyday experiences can, however, put us in touch with the deepest mysteries of life....."*

*unfortunately the sameness and repetition of everyday activities can numb our awareness. We get nothing out of the ordinary and so conclude that nothing of value is there. Instead we seek extraordinary experiences and special techniques that might induce such states. We put religious experience too easily into the category of the unusual, and never expect to find God in the ordinary things we do. The rich, spiritual dimension of much of our ordinary lives is thus lost to us. "*

Charles Cummings  
'The Mystery of the Ordinary'

## Spirituality and Young people

A common response from many people, including the young, to issues of the spiritual is that they are 'other worldly' and have little to do with life here on earth and the nuts and bolts of daily life. The truth is that unless a person's sense of the spiritual and their spirituality is earthed in our experience it will prove to be empty and unsatisfying or at best a series of concepts and rationalisations. Experience confirms that the times in life when most people experience spiritual growth takes place in the contexts of pain, struggle, doubt and when the answer weren't always

known. Those 'off the shelf', neat and tidy or packaged answers did not deliver. So it is with young people. Any yearning for them to experience spiritual wholeness it will not come about through the offering of formulas, programmes or even doctrine. It takes time for the spiritual to find its earthing point in each life. During the course of the journey with them down the pathway of spiritual exploration and pilgrimage youth workers have to ensure that the nuts and bolts of their own lives and experiences engage with the revelation of the spiritual.

Beginning where they are, no matter how far away that is from God is foundational. Do not answer the questions they are not asking. \never assume that all spiritual journeys begin at the same place and follow the same route. \for a number of reasons the issues of spirituality, spiritual development and young people have assumed a higher profile in the UK at present, through the National Curriculum within Education, Ofsted reports and the Core Curriculum of the Youth Service. The terms have taken on a measure of stature, a flavour of the year and even a measure of mystique. Some of the following questions have arisen.

Is there any difference in understanding between a Christian understanding of spirituality and that of a local authority ?

Can spiritual development, as a curriculum subject ever be the vehicle for establishing a life of religious commitment ? Are Christian youth workers happy to work with concepts and understandings of spirituality outside of Christian experience ?

Christians affirm that all human beings are created in the image of God and, no matter how marred and despoiled their lives, the breath of the Creator beats in every human heart. Michael Eastman puts it this way:

***" When God created human beings in His image He put eternity in their hearts and breathed His Spirit into our lives. All people, right through history have an inbuilt sense of ' the other ' or the transcendent. They have sought to express this dimension of experience through art, dance, drama, music, poetry, song, creativity etc. What we feel and know, albeit intuitively, we seek for words and forms to express. In many ways therefore religion answers to these feelings. "***

From a Christian perspective moving into any serious thinking regarding the spiritual is akin to walking into a minefield. Ask a group of a dozen Christians to define the term 'spiritual' and twelve different responses will be received. David Parker writing in the Evangelical Review of Theology says;

***" the concept of spirituality itself poses a problem, and that for evangelicals spirituality as a discipline to be studied, researched or practised for its own sake is de-emphasised in favour of efforts to stimulate faith, devotion and love for God on the part of the believer. "***

It is worth noting in passing, the increased interest and emphasis on spirituality within evangelicalism and the growing popularity of the 'retreat ' experience. Perhaps some of the historical misunderstandings and suspicions are beginning to fade or is it due to the increasing busyness and activity of both business, church and family life which is prompting people to take out



gone and tomorrow is not yet here. For many people, including the young, it is tough to live in the present, for what is there to be hopeful about, to celebrate? Where is the spiritual to be found in this sort of jungle? The belief of Christians in the sovereignty and omniscience of God, enables a declaration that no situation is without hope. Any sharing of the spiritual must not only earth itself in the real world but must also affirm and declare that God is present, even in the darkest corner of life.

The experiences of young people should be one a key launch pads for exploring the spiritual, and to make it possible for them to make changing links between the story of Jesus and the stories of these young people. The 'then' of the Bible has to become real in the 'now' of today. To encourage young people to engage in honest reflection regarding their lives and spirituality requires a non-threatening and open environment, in which anxieties, fears and doubts can be expressed. This will not be helped by a narrow and restrictive understanding of the spiritual. As Bruce Springsteen said;

*"People use the cloak of spirituality as a controlling device. That strikes me as false. Basically that's how it was with me as a child. There was not an interest in bringing me closer to what God really is. It was used purely as a controlling device by people who had it used on them in that fashion. By the time I got to be thirteen I had had enough. I just told my parents; 'No more!' And I always felt that the spiritual thing has run through all my music. Certainly 'Born to Run' is, 'Nebraska' is. It's the perversion of religion and sirituality into superstitions. That's what it was for me."*

The Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied Movement [P.H.A.B.] have developed the following model<sup>[3]</sup> of spirituality which may help in the understanding the spiritual dimension of living with a broader eye and a greater sense of wholeness. Spirituality can be seen as a jigsaw - made up with pieces such as;

- our attitudes and values
- our sense of awe and wonder
- our concern for others
- our relationships
- our personalities
- our questions and ideas about things beyond ourselves
- our feelings about and understanding of God - however we define 'god'.

Such a model offers numerous triggers for exploring the spiritual. This is not to contradict the reality and centrality of Christian spirituality for the Christian, which can be seen as the next step down the track, as it were. For a Christian, spirituality centres on a deep relationship with God. It has to do with praying and living in Jesus Christ as our spirit is sustained and changed by God Himself. My younger years suggested that spirituality was for special people, those whose lives exuded a quality and serenity, especially in their later years. I have since discovered that spirituality is not for the favoured minority but is for all Christians in everyday life. It is not reserved for a few saintly souls and neither is it restricted to specific places and situations. Spirituality is in many ways a mystery - a unique union between the human spirit and the Spirit of God and this involves - body, soul, mind, imagination and will. a person's total being.

The earlier thinking regarding primary and secondary cultures is a reminder that cultural

expressions will help shape the ways in which spirituality is expressed and understood. In western culture the tendency is to 'celebrate' and 'talk out' the faith whilst in a primary culture the mixture is much more likely to be that of 'celebrating' and 'dancing it out'. For those young people who live in the twilight world between the two cultural expressions, what forms of celebration or what symbols may best allow them to express their spirituality?

### **And similarly with spiritual development.**

Firstly and for an individual development has to do with coming to terms with themselves as persons, with the way they see themselves and others and about who they want to be. Secondly, it includes other people and the way they are accepted together with any behaviour towards them. Thirdly it encompasses the world in which people live, the way that world is understood and how a person wants to shape or change that world. Development has an exciting element which should encourage youth workers not only in their own personal development but also as in the context of sharing in the developmental processes of young people. Always remember that development is NEVER about arriving!] -it must include the 'knowing', the 'doing' and the 'being'. It has been suggested by some that spiritual development has become confused with religious development. They would say that spiritual development is not about religion, it's about getting in touch with the deep parts of life - valuing the experiences of awe, wonder, sorrow, hurt, relationships with others and the world and coming to understand what is meant by the term 'god'.

Are there overlaps here ? Is spiritual development [in the broad understanding of the term] the same as personal development? If not, what and where are the differences ? Does the one include the other? And should authentic Christian discipleship include both spiritual and personal development ?

All human experiences contribute towards spiritual development, whether a person is a Christians or not. Much of this developmental work, as far as good youth work practice is concerned, takes place in the context of relationships. Indeed, this is what has always characterised good youth work. In these relationships the following elements significantly contribute towards development;

- the experiences of being valued as a person
- the experiences of making choices and living with the consequences
- the experience of being part of a common cause or community
- the experience of being responsible for and to others
- the experiences of giving, receiving and sharing ideas
- the experiences of identifying and responding to the needs of others

In themselves the experiences may not be sufficient. They need to be followed up by reflection and evaluation if growth is to take place. Christians will affirm that God is in all of life and its experiences and that it is His Spirit that moves, directs, inspires, encourages and consequently enables growth and development. Spiritual development is for everyone - young or old. It can happen in the urban or in the rural. In a nutshell it is the process by which individuals recognise, own, and use their experience at each stage of their lives. If this is so, then spiritual development will become a reality for young people in the following contexts :

- death and loss
- relationships

purpose and the meaning of life  
search for identity and purpose  
morals, values and lifestyle  
health issues -drug, alcohol and substance abuse  
sexuality, AIDS, abortion  
smoking  
disasters - man made or natural  
world issues - war, peace, famine, injustice, environment  
the occult - tarot cards, horoscopes, satanism, seances  
mysticism - and reincarnation  
nature - the oohs and aahs.  
taking responsibility and leadership  
Culture - trends, fashion, music, exploitation  
evil - in the world, nation and people  
tempting and appealing experiences.

Here are many doorways and opportunities for exploring the spiritual and encouraging spiritual development. For example, how can young people best be helped when they have experienced bereavement or loss? More than a few workers admit to struggling with this issue. What are the events, feelings and experiences that arouse interest in young people and give rise to concern, fear or despair? What causes joy, hope and delight? What gives young people a sense of awe and wonder in the world of the late 20th century?

Spiritual development is a non transferable experience. As much as any youth workers may wish that those young people can be where they are 'spiritually', there is place to begin other than where they are. Reflecting on all that has brought a Christian youth worker to where they are presently on their spiritual pilgrimage makes the point. Therefore do not devise short cuts for young people around painful or hurting experiences. My personal experiences of losing two wives in fourteen years and all the associated grief, has taught me much about the role which suffering plays in our growth and development, especially in the realm of the spiritual. Ensure the identification of each young person's starting point, rather than beginning from where the youth worker is. Challenge young people to new experiences and provide creative and effective ways of reflecting on and learning from those experiences. No one has the right to impose their views and understandings on young people, no matter how excited they may be about Jesus. Experiences can be shared - understandings can be explained but in the end it is not the youth worker's or any other person's task to make young people into Christians - this belongs to the Holy Spirit. The primary task is to ensure that young people can hear and understand the story of Jesus in ways that are relevant to them and to which they can respond. And remember that spiritual development is NOT another issue in the curriculum - it is the context in which everything else takes place.

### **Communication and The Non Book Issue**

As previously stated adults working with young people must constantly remember that the world they grew up in is not the world inhabited by young people - so many things have changed. For example at age ten did you know the meaning of words such as 'bionic', 'computer', 'hijack' or 'terrorist' ? Did you have any vague idea about the internet or cyberspace ? It is in this world of

communication some of the profound challenges facing the church in terms of mission and young people come to light. Christians can sometimes be arrogant people. The idea of literacy is assumed as is an ability to think rationally, logically and conceptually. Therefore any person coming into church or any young person in the youth group is naturally assumed to be literate and therefore comfortable with the existing style of doing things. The early days of a post literate society are here alternative styles and patterns of communication must be developed .How many books will Scripture Union and other Christian publishers be publishing in ten or twenty years time ? The factors of culture, sub culture, communication, the non book issue and learning styles converge on the young person. A keen understanding and awareness of these factors will help shape an effective mission, together with its relevance and effectiveness and will also sharpen any longing for young people to experience shalom and wholeness in Jesus.

## Communication

Ask any missionary worth their salt and they will say that in order to communicate within a culture there is a need to enter that culture in order to understand it and its language. Let's remember that the Gospel is NEWS - not views. It is a STORY and not a proposition. It is an EVENT - not an idea. It is to be experienced in normal everyday life. It is not a game plan for academics to indulge in intellectual discussion or theological point scoring.

Sally McFague <sup>[4]</sup> has written;

*"When theology becomes over abstract, conceptual and systematic it separates thought and life, belief and practice, words and their meaning, making it more difficult for us to believe in our hearts what we confess with our lips."*

Listening attentively to any group of young people will soon enable an identification of some key words of vocabulary. These **key** words act as a sort of suitcase into which these young people pack much of their sub cultural luggage. The words will change over time, for language is never static and youth sub culture is ever transient. These key words also act like furniture, helping those young people to 'feel at home ' and saying to others ' this belongs to us'. Youth workers face the continuous need to identify these key words and then to carefully unpack them, discovering the implicit attitudes, values, beliefs, assumptions, behaviour, symbolism and life styles that are thus revealed.

This will mean that youth workers recognising their own cultural history, pre understandings and conditioning, particularly with regard to their experience of Christianity and the Gospel. Can, and should, the Gospel ever be packaged as an Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist or Charismatic product or is it legitimate or possible to market it in sermon, film, video, concert, book or other formats? Surely it demands to be lived out and made real in the lives of committed disciples ?

## Basic Communication Theory

Person ' A ' is trying to get a message to person ' B '. 'A' encodes their message according to their understanding and education. A sends a message, forgetting that they have a cold or a distinctive dialect. The message becomes distorted even before ' B' receives it, and when it is received the message is decoded on the basis of 'B's understanding and education. The message heard by 'B' is unlikely to be the one sent by 'A'. The importance of using the right codes cannot be over emphasised, as is the importance of both the sender and receiver using the same codes. Hence the need to get inside a culture and to understand the language and its use.

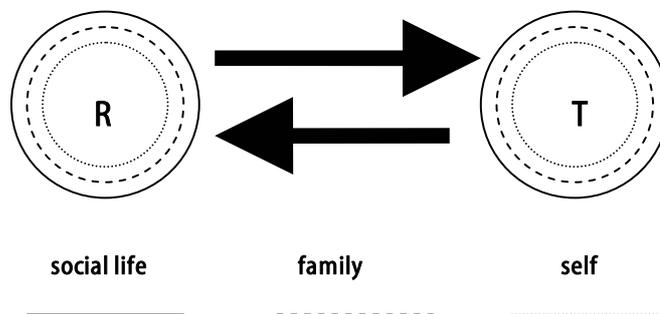
The church has generally relied on a communication pattern which has been very one way - usually a ' from ' and ' to ' model, i.e. from the pulpit to the congregation. There has been little or no attempt to develop a two way style of communication in church services though this pattern may account for some of the encouragements which have arisen from the popular small group activities in many churches. The time honoured sermon may no longer be the most appropriate communication style as we move into a post literate society. In some churches it may generally contain three points that are couched in concepts and words which some find hard to grasp whilst in other churches a ten minute homily may be the norm. It can vary in length from ten minutes to an hour. Perhaps it is time for change. In many tribal or primary cultural contexts where the oral tradition survives a different pattern is seen. Listening to the history of the tribe and to other stories for hours on end is pleasurable for old and young alike. My experiences of listening to Native American tribal story tellers engaged my imagination and stirred my emotions in ways I had long forgotten . The secret lies in the story and in the effective telling of that story. Current culture dislikes lengthy discourses and people have lost some listening skills and are now hooked on sound bites and TV slots as far as attention spans are concerned.

Listening is an essential skill in the non book task and youth workers need to work at enhancing and sharpening those skills. Keeping open minds, listening to HOW things are said, reading the hidden agenda and realising what is not being said are basic elements. Do not be afraid to ask for clarification if it will help. Stop reacting to ' wind ups ' or ' red flag ' words. Practise the art of not interrupting. A good youth worker will:

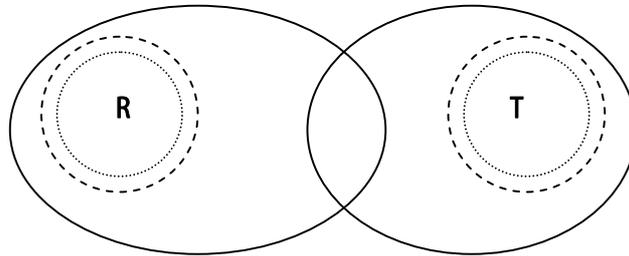
- always seek to use the right codes and ensure that they are using the same code as the listener.
- ensure that they have an understanding of both local culture and the sub-culture of the young people with whom they are involved.
- see the benefits of non verbal communication.
- avoid the use of the abstract and focus on the concrete
- use the everyday experiences of young people
- use media other than print and words
- never be all knowing
- not make assumptions.

In more general terms the church has tended to use one of four basic patterns of communication in its youth ministry. There have been many variations on these but they remain the core models.

**Basic model**

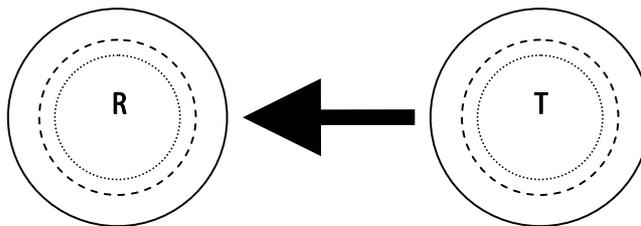


### 1. 'Closed' youth ministry model



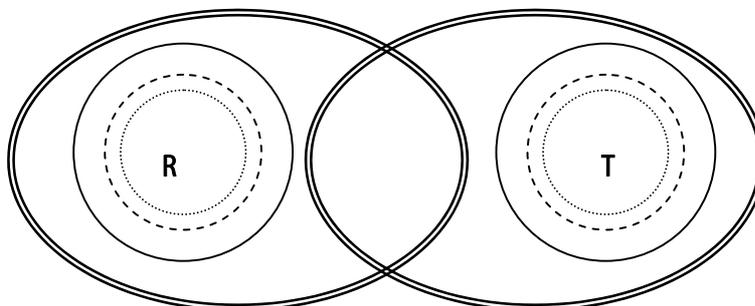
youth work takes place where social life worlds meet  
is a 'safe' style of working  
can be insular, cliquey or hard to get into  
can initially help new Christians

### 2. 'You come to us model'



young person has to come on our terms  
activity is in our environment  
means that young person may have to leave their roots  
implicit assumption that young person will ultimately adopt our ways  
raises questions re cross cultural mission, indigenous church planting etc

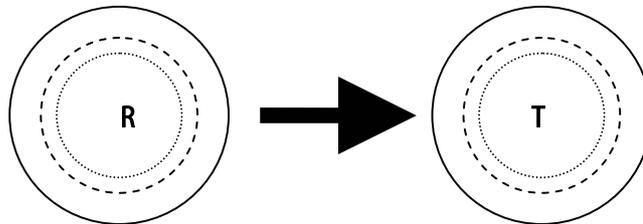
### 3. 'Open' youth work model



youth work takes place on neutral territory - a created space  
has shared and common contexts

demands acceptance and trust on both sides  
is for workers and young people  
can encourage a sense of belonging and experience of community

#### 4. 'Outreach' or 'detached' model



is obedient to the Gospel imperative to 'Go'  
allows authentic incarnation  
is risky and demands vulnerability  
is usually with at risk and marginalised young people  
workers need much care, back up and support  
can allow new churches and groupings to come into being

Reflecting on the possibilities of new paradigms underlines an awareness that old and tested communication paradigms of the past, which may have served us well, still cling on. . They are now beyond patching up or modifying-they have had their day. Fresh approaches must be developed, not only in ministry with young people but in general methods and patterns of communication. Those institutions which train Christian communicators will have to re think their curriculum and the contents of their courses, asking themselves some tough and uncomfortable questions. If it is accepted that the old paradigms are both lost and ineffective, then it should not be asking too much to take a long hard look at all we do. Two of the basic questions are " What sort of churches are needed by non book people? " and " What changes would we be willing to make in our churches to help non book people feel at home?"

#### The Non Book Issue

This issue is slowly being understood as one of the major challenges facing the church today and in the future. It particularly concerns young people and the way they are learning, including their use of modern technology. Increasingly they are moving into visual patterns of education and learning. A pattern in which books feature less and less. Many current tools for evangelisation and discipling rely heavily on the use of literature and print, i.e. -tracts, invitations to special events, materials for use with children, young people and adults, hymn and song books, prayer books etc. Their impact on the non book person will at best be minimal and at worst, disastrous. Those from the non book culture who come to faith struggle against a bias towards the printed page. It may be too obvious to say so but literacy is not a pre- requisite for Christian discipleship and teaching. Think for a moment about how Christians who lived before the birth of the printing press managed to nurture their faith. Personal and daily bible reading is a relatively new aspect in the Christian tradition. Prior to its wider availability the bible was generally read in community. Did something quite fundamental happen when the printing press was invented? Prior to this momentous event the focus of action in the church was around the altar. Here in a mysterious fashion, symbol and drama came together with the story being told in words, in stained glass windows and in paintings and

carvings around the walls. Then came the printing press and the focus moves from the altar to the pulpit, from the concrete to the abstract and from story telling to proposition. The fact that Christianity began in a non book culture and that the author and finisher of our faith was a great story teller who also struggled with religion as an institution should be a great encouragement.

Down through history the church has survived without the masses of books now published each year. Even in the time of the Reformation the Anabaptists successfully instructed their members in scripture so effectively that their enemies acknowledged their unparalleled grasp of biblical truth. Looking at the growth of the church in many largely illiterate primary cultures there is an explosion of growth amongst those with little or no access to either the literature (assumed as normal), or training resources (taken so much for granted).

### What is the non book culture ?

It is not monochrome and it is not confined to one social class or grouping, or to urban priority areas or to the vast wastelands of our housing estates. Only half the population read books for pleasure, yet the average family buys some eight books annually. In the United States it is estimated that some twenty-one million Americans are illiterate. Fewer than 25% of seventeen to eighteen year olds read for pleasure. 90% of six to fourteen year olds find TV more appealing than books and 82% of this age group prefer video games to reading. A huge challenge arising when thinking about Bible reading as a means of nurturing Christian life. How can the Bible continue to be the primary means by which God communicates to a people whose chief source of information is the TV set or the computer ? The necessity for developing further multi media tools becomes crucial. It will be no easy task to develop electronic ways of exploring the Bible, and if the trend is moving away from reading then it is a challenge to be faced. The demands of the task and its costs will require a multi agency approach with a willingness to develop partnerships and collaboration across theological and other traditional boundaries. The move from the literary to the electronic will be dramatic a shift as that from orality to literacy. How excited those earlier Christians must have been when they saw the first Bible come off the printing press? Some of that excitement may be a modern experience, standing here on the threshold of this challenging new paradigm. Has the church begun to recognise these realities and to think seriously about developing creative alternatives ? Is there a general awareness of the communications revolution which is gaining an even greater momentum ? Returning to non book culture. There are two basic groupings;

- a) The **technically illiterate** - those with learning difficulties, who are dyslexic etc
- b) The **functionally illiterate** who can be divided into four sub groups;
  - i) the highly literate - those who read quality newspapers and technical books highly educated yet seldom read a book for pleasure many will struggle to read a chapter or two of the Bible
  - ii) the general non book- will not read books at all but will read tabloid newspapers, will also read a range of magazines from specialist interest through to TV Times etc
  - iii) young people - will use books at school at highest point of literacy stop using books when they leave school
  - iv) non English speakers - especially women from ethnic groupings

It is tempting to ask some questions - [which I suggest would be the wrong ones initially ] such as;

What books are suitable for these people ?

How can they be 'fitted' into churches ?

How can they be persuaded to read the bible for themselves?

How can prevailing concepts and ideas be made into forms which they can understand? Instead ask questions such as:

How important is literacy in our society ?

How do people in this very visual age gather the information they need in order to make decisions ?

What methods will be most appropriate for evangelising and discipling non book people ?

How can non book leadership be brought into church ?

What might the Gospel feel and look like from the perspective of a non book person? How is it perceived?

What churches are needed by nonbook people?

I recall a discussion with young people in my days in Streatham. During the course of the evening as the topic of authority was being explored the issue of parents came up. At some stage it seemed right to read a verse which said something about the care of God as Father. When I had finished one lad said to me ' Tel - read that again will ya ' I did, and I had to read it four more times. Then he turned to me [and I can still see his face now] and said ' Do you know what it feels like to hear that for the first time ?' In all honesty I had no idea. I had slipped into a comfortable way of reading scripture from the top side. Here was someone who was reading it and hearing it from the underside and it made an unforgettable and lasting impact on me. I had to dismiss my pre-suppositions and assumptions, and my cultural captivity, and begin to learn to see things from the perspective of disadvantage and the underside. I had to move from the abstract to the concrete and begin to identify and discover those points and connections where Christian concepts get earthed, ring true and begin to root in peoples' lives A recent day facilitating some Post Ordination Training with two dozen Anglican Ordinands underlined the realities. One of the issues which emerged was this whole question of the non book person. It was generally acknowledged that these people are in the churches and they are not just young people or those less educated. Churches with a liturgical tradition face a problem which is less upfront in ' free' churches but the issues are the same. I recall a period in my childhood when I learnt massive chunks of the A.V. for a scripture exam. Has memory been downgraded in the light of the availability of so much instantly available information via CD ROM and other sources ?

### **Learning**

How do non book people learn ? - conceptually or concretely ?

-by listening or by doing ?

How do non book people communicate ? -theoretically or visually ?

-print or orally ?

-grapevine or agenda ?

In a church characterised by secondary culture there are two almost unwritten equations which state or imply that in which books plus print equals education and therefore success. Conversely there is an assumption that non book equals no education and therefore failure. How many books have you read in the past six months? What sort of books?

What newspapers and magazines do you usually read? From where do you obtain most of your information and knowledge? When you next meet with a group of young people ask them the same questions and then compare their answers with your responses.

For older readers this may a common experience. When I first began Sunday School teaching I was given a teaching resource. I made an assumption that if I taught it as laid out in the book, then at the end of the lesson the group would have learnt A, B and C. Not true! Yes, a few did learn, but others learnt M, N and O whilst others learnt virtually nothing, other than how to make life hard for the teacher. No one suggested that people have different learning styles and that teaching methods need to take this into account Asking any group of people to brainstorm on any topic may produce a feeling that they don't know very much. Yet when people begin to share their knowledge and pool their experience a mass of information comes together. It contradicts the assumption that for learning to take place requires serious and /or heavy study. Instead people realise that they can learn from one another. To what degree do church programmes and youth ministry groups encourage and enable such shared learning to happen? In life much learning is prompted by a particular need for knowledge which needs to be met in a practical way.

Roy Dorey, presenting a paper at an Evangelical Alliance Non Book Event wrote;

" The reassuring factor for me is that the Christian faith began in a non book culture. It was a culture of the demonstration of truth through the lives of people, of the testing out of their experience against the declarations of God and of becoming a community which recognised its dependence on each other. We may be conversant with books but a large proportion of society is not. Even most of those who have a tertiary education are not likely to be people who read very much. The fact that most people, even those who can read, do not read is not a criticism of them. Reading a book is an individual and isolating experience. Sharing it afterwards and checking it out with other people is not. But reading is only one part of the acquisition of knowledge. We are not talking of ' non book ' communication as an interim stage, but as a permanent way of communicating that reflects the teaching methods of Jesus. "

Reflect for a moment on responses to these questions;

**How do young people learn ?**

**Why do young people learn ?**

**What blocks the learning of young people ?**

**In general how do churches teach ?**

Learning can be **formal** or **informal** and can arise from **reflecting on experiences**. Learning comes through **watching** and **observing**, and **being alongside** the master craftsman as in the apprentice model. **Formal teaching** and **catechising** also has its place as does involvement and interaction with others. The Evangelical Urban Training Project produced the contrasts found in Appendix 'A' which illustrates some of the tensions and challenges in the book - non book issue.

## Making the links between 'then' and 'now'

The jargon word for this key process is **contextualisation** - and yes it is a mouthful, but also a practice which has to become the norm for effective youth ministry practitioners. It is the word used to denote the ways we adjust messages to differing cultural contexts and the way we go about 'doing theology'. It is vital because it has to do with communicating and sharing the message of the person, works, words and will of God, which is true to His revelation, as it is found in scripture, and can be understood by people in their lives and cultures.<sup>51</sup> It means that we do not rely upon an interpretation of the Bible or its stories based purely on our own cultural conditioning. It means engaging with the text and discovering its implicit content and meaning as well as that of cultural signs, symbols and language. The Bible often uses symbols we are familiar with but which our culture interprets differently. You will begin to see the importance of contextualisation as an essential tool for youth workers, especially as the Gospel events and stories are retold. It is essential to remember that the Word of God does not change but language does.

Contextualisation can be verbal and non verbal and includes Bible translation, interpretation, application, evangelism, discipling, worship, teaching and all those activities involved in carrying out the Great Commission. If you want to see a great contextualiser at work just re read the Gospels and examine the life and ministry of Jesus. His approach and style was never programmed, for he always responded to his listeners and their needs. I have already made the point that much of our expression of Christianity is wrapped up in a cultural package which quite often prevents an 'ordinary' person from hearing the real content of the good news.

Recently I was sharing in a funeral service at an Anglican church and I chose to listen to the prayers and other readings as someone who knew nothing of true Christianity. Yes, the content of the Gospel was there, yet it lay hidden beneath a coded language which could be a real block. So, how do we communicate and contextualise the Good News about Jesus to the average citizen of this nation and to young people in particular? The methods and styles used by theologians and others through the history of Christianity may not be appropriate for today. They did not have to wrestle with the issues which face the church in the 1990s. Who will pioneer effective, creative and innovative ways of authentic contextualisation in the new paradigm just as Luther did in his day? Contextualisation is essentially a deep cry for relevance without in any way compromising the eternal truth of scripture. Although language may change the Word of God does not change. We have to find ways of helping those who are struggling with Christian jargon and language and who find books so daunting to 'get into' God's word. They may be very interested in what the bible says but just cannot find the way in. How many times have you heard young people express that sentiment in more ordinary words and terms? Good contextualising will always be incarnational, will always address the culture and hopefully bring transformation. Some key principles and possible ways of working are set out in Appendices 'H', 'J' and 'K'. Authentic contextualisation will always seek to avoid the very real dangers of syncretism and absorption. Cross cultural communication must be part of any basic Christian youth work training, and has to leap many hurdles including those of;

- ways both cultures perceive the world
- different ways in which they think
- forms and patterns of expressing ideas and concepts
- different ways of behaving, responding and inter acting

varying forms and styles of communication  
ways by which decisions are made.

The greater the difference between the two cultures, the greater the impact of the factors listed above upon the message, and the more critical the contextualisation task becomes.

## **Shalom and Wholeness**

In order to make shalom possible for the majority of young people the churches have to move from a maintained 'come to us' agenda to a 'missionary go to' agenda. We believe that all young people have potential and this can only be fully realised when they are in a right relationship with Jesus Christ. We do not dispute the fact that it is the right of all young people to see, feel, and experience, as well as hear the Good News of Jesus in ways which they can understand. This demands a relevance regardless of location, context or circumstance. It means beginning where they are. It requires not only the telling of the good news but BEING that good news. A church wishing to rejoice as young people discover Jesus has to be challenged. to rethink old models and paradigms of youth ministry. Such a church will need to:-

- Expand its vision and horizons
- Develop shared patterns of work
- Model the ministry and mission style of Jesus
- Recover the experience of Christian community
- Evolve new forms of communication
- Obey the biblical commission to 'Go'
- Recover biblical worship
- Be creative and take risks
- Major on relationships rather than programmes
- Be authentic and BE there
- Share its faith rather than passing on jargon and philosophy
- Be a Kingdom people in the fullest sense of the word.

I love and rejoice in the understanding of biblical shalom. It has a quality which gives a greater meaning to evangelisation and discipling, and brings life to all that God intends for us to enjoy as citizens of His kingdom. To make a decision for Jesus seems such an inadequate understanding for all that God offers in terms of forgiveness, restoration, healing, joy, wholeness, worship, son [and daughter]ship and to being one of His pilgrim and journeying people who now live as His new community in Christ. This is awesome, bringing freedom and responsibility together.

When the Bible uses the word 'shalom' it is saying something far deeper, more profound and all encompassing. The word comes from a Hebrew verb meaning 'to bring to completeness or to make whole'.

Individually it means

- health of mind, body and spirit - a totally integrated life
- a life open to others and to God
- a life attuned to nature

Between persons it means

right relationships  
sharing, trust, mutuality, freedom, respect, love

In community it means

justice and dignity  
interdependence  
a satisfaction with enough so that all may have enough

Shalom is the opposite of oppression, violence, selfishness and injustice. It is part of the total well being which God intends his creation to enjoy and experience. It is the ultimate fulfilment of His purposes and is the content of the kingdom and the reign of God - and is made possible in the person of Jesus Christ. God's plan for the world centres in Jesus who came as the Prince of Shalom as we read in Isaiah Ch 9 v 6. We have lost something of the real meaning of the Hebrew word 'shalom' and to simply translate it as peace is totally inadequate. Peace is many things to many people. It can mean an absence of war but can also be that time of the day when the kids have gone to bed and you have the house to yourself. It can also mean sitting by a river fishing, looking at a beautiful sunset or simply enjoying the company of that special person in your life.

There is also a difference in how peace is understood. In the western world it is often associated with a state of mind, whereas the Hebrew understanding refers primarily to a physical state of well being - things being as they ought to be. This thought takes us back to the garden of Eden and to the moment when the original, and perfect state of shalom was broken as sin entered the world. The promise of shalom can never cover up the reality that things are not as they ought to be. Thinking about many young people on the underside of society should cause us to ask what are we doing to ensure the bringing about of shalom - a challenge which takes us directly into the issues and rough seas of social justice with a real possibility of getting our hands dirty. Struggling for shalom will bring us into direct conflict with the principalities and powers. Shalom does not come through loving at a distance, neither is it an abstract concept. Shalom love is suffering love and shalom love in the youth ministry field has to be centred in relationships.

Looking at some communities and families we see much brokenness and sorrow. I see a society that appears to care less for the individual and where the strongest survive. As youth workers and those concerned for young people we see despair and hurt in the eyes of so many, and a sense of bravado and pretence as they go through the motions of enjoying themselves in a hedonistic round of pleasure, whilst at the same time saying they are 'bored'. As I travel around this country and overseas I see many young people who have no hope - they are 'lost' in every sense of the word. Outside of Christ they literally do not stand a chance. How much they need to touch and feel and experience this shalom, this gift of God. Their experience of brokenness and alienation, their sense of not being wanted and of seeing no purpose in life, cry out for urgent action and response from the people of God. Getting them in touch with Jesus in a life changing way will not come solely through heavy theology, legalism, doctrinaire creeds, sermons, books or exercises but by being with and relating to those whose lives have been changed and transformed by this Prince of Peace.

As shalom people we are privileged to demonstrate the reign of God, to share in God's mission and to offer worship to God. The church needs a new way of living together and of disengaging from its cultural captivity. It has to ensure that the norms of the kingdom become the norm in our living, praying and worshipping together. This should include the qualities and gifts of humility, forgiveness, bearing each others burdens, relating to each other in non manipulative ways, living in trust, openness and being patient, being committed to a life of sharing and simplicity, and loving

those who cannot or will not love us. What an upside down challenge ! Enabling others to know shalom will involve us in:

- being active in every aspect of the world's life
- befriending the loveless and the lonely, clothing them, and willing to wash their feet
- healing those sick in mind, body and spirit
- taking seriously the roles of mediator and conciliator
- costly, and at times, risky service
- continually witnessing to the power of Jesus to change lives
- declaring the essential content of the good news - forgiveness, repentance, and discipleship

We identify with the world. We agonise and suffer with it. We give time and life for it. We weep and laugh for it. We celebrate for it. We offer our lives for it and ultimately we take up the cross on its behalf. How can youth workers live their lives according to the demands of the Gospel and allowing them to be moulded by the pattern of Christ's servanthood? Dare we encourage a new style of 'being' which turns upside down some of the established and traditional patterns of working? The need is for servants rather than old style leaders, those who know they don't have to know all the answers.

Jesus is challenging us, if we are serious about making known His shalom, Jesus is challenging us to new experiences and realities of being His people. We have to leave our hiding places, even our churches, and simply declare that Jesus is indeed alive! We need to recover our confidence in the one who holds this world in his care and who longs for his broken creation to taste of his wholeness. We can have that confidence and boldness if we remember He is risen, and has overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. He has disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them through the triumphs of his cross. Our confidence is underlined and strengthened as the Holy Spirit continues to change and transform our lives and as Jesus is increasingly acknowledged as Lord.

The task of building Christian community is also vital. With so much individualism within society and with people feeling they are rootless or have no place to belong, the need for such caring communities needs no emphasising. A core element of Christianity goes to the roots of our basic strivings for a sense of belonging and security, by issuing the call to community. These communities can never exist for themselves but for others. We need to be touched by the needs of others so that we worry less about our self preservation and maintaining our structures and become that open and serving community. Our false priorities have meant that many have been hurt by the church and starved of love and healing. Wherever we are in our growth as Christians we have to transcend our pain and struggle in order to be with the stranger in their hurt. The prophets continually remind us that in giving of ourselves we keep our own lives watered. In our reaching out we rebuild the ancient ruins of our lives and restore the broken walls. [Isa 58v2] However some deep questions arise. If we dare to live like this who will take care of our deep needs? Old positions will have to be given up as true 'metanoia' or turning around takes place.

Think for a moment about the Levitical passage regarding Jubilee.[ Lev 25] The very idea is mind blowing - cancelling debts, freeing slaves, land returned to former owners and no one to be in need. It was seen as the year of the Lord's favour and it could have been in a year of Jubilee when Jesus began His ministry as he stood in the synagogue and read those verses from Isa 61. What exciting ideas to wrestle and struggle with. How do we make these real? Is this just an ideal and totally

impractical? If the church is to be that upside down demonstration of the kingdom it may need to be more than just a place of worship or busy activity. Consider this for a moment. It seems that when we meet broken and damaged people, we look for para church or specialised agencies to deal with their problems. We often feel totally inadequate and ill equipped. What might happen if the church itself became the healing community rather than that agency or whatever? What signs would we be sending to the community? What might the church then look like to young people? How might our patterns of worship change? How different our activity might look as we move from a programme centred model to one centred in people. Is it possible that we could show to young people that here is a totally and radically different way of living and behaving. Here is the possibility of living life on the edge in utter security. Here is the possibility of a quality and richness of living only dreamed about in an ideal or utopian world. Here however, in this profound and deep promise of God in Christ is wholeness and shalom.

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## Suggested Reading

Arbuckle	EARTHING THE GOSPEL - An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers	Geoffrey Chapman 1990
Bennington	CULTURE, CLASS & CHRISTIAN BELIEFS	Scripture Union 1973
Day & May	TEENAGE BELIEFS	Lion 1991
Finney	FINDING FAITH TODAY - How does it happen ?	Bible Society 1992
Nicholls	CONTEXTUALISATION - A Study of Gospel and Culture	Inter Varsity 1979
Nida	MESSAGE & MEANING - The Communication of the Christian Faith	Harper and Row 1960
Westerhoff	WILL OUR CHILDREN HAVE FAITH?	Seabury Press 1976
Simon	BORN CONTEMPLATIVE - Introducing Children to Christian Meditation	DLT 1993
Stott & Coote [Editors]	DOWN TO EARTH - Studies in Christianity and Culture	Eerdmans 1980
	HOW FAITH GROWS - Faith Development and Christian Education	Church House Publishing

<b>HOW WE BEHAVE</b>	
<b>BOOK PEOPLE</b>	<b>NON BOOK PEOPLE</b>
we opt for further education	we look forward to leaving school
we collect books	we collect badges, beer mats etc
we have lots of books at home	we have few, if any, books at home
we study alone	we learn in groups
we have studies	we have workshops and work rooms
we like peace in which to study	we like background noise
we use watches, filofaxes, calendars	we act when the time is right
we learn the act	we act then learn

<b>THE CHURCH AND US</b>	
<b>BOOK PEOPLE</b>	<b>NON BOOK PEOPLE</b>
we go regularly	we go on special occasions
our church is friendly and welcoming	we feel like outsiders
we become leaders	we are taught to be followers
we are left to do everything	everything has to be done their way
we have deep bible studies	we never get a chance to share our stories or ideas, we feel silly to ask questions
the church trains its leaders in our methods	the church trains its leaders in their methods
we move around a lot - it's due to our work	we like to stay in one place but there are no jobs now
they need us to take on roles and responsibilities for them	we need to be enabled, supported and trained

**APPENDIX A** From E.U.T.P.

**HOW THE OTHER HALF LEARN**

Every person is unique. This chart highlights some typical differences between 'book' and 'non book' people - but it is only a rough guide. People and communities cannot be put into boxes and the differences have nothing to do with intelligence. All human beings have masses of 'brain power' but some are never enabled to unlock and use that power.

**HOW WE THINK**

<b>BOOK PEOPLE</b>	<b>NON BOOK PEOPLE</b>
we think in words	we think in pictures
we think in straight, logical lines	we think in patterns of pictures which connect for us
we store what we want to remember on paper, in files or on PC disks	we convert what we learn into memorable experiences
our thinking is calm, cool and [cold]	our thinking is emotionally involved [hot]
we generalise	we are specific and concrete
we continually search for new ideas	we value traditions, customs, songs, sayings, proverbs etc
we dissect what we 'know'	we add to what we 'know'
we have a broad vocabulary	we share our own pool of words
we 'think'	we 'know'
we rely on writing	we rely on memory and story
<b>HOW WE LEARN</b>	
we learn alone	we learn in groups
we enjoy structured learning	we like imaginative ways of learning
we like top down teaching	we like bottom up discovery
we pass exams	we won't jump thro your hoops
we take it all very seriously	we like a laugh
we like expert teachers	our teachers help us discover we are experts
we like regularity and order	we like the unusual, unexpected
we learn and often fail to do	we learn to do
we like references, handouts, notes, answers, formula and exact details	we like questions, visits, stories, colour, exaggeration, catchy sayings