



CHURCH GROWTH BOOKLETS

Reaching Secular People

Paul Beasley-Murray

254..1
CGB

Church Growth Booklets

General:

This Church Growth Booklet series fulfils a need for the wider dissemination of useful material to those who are interested in the subject of Church Growth. The series aims to produce booklets of between 12 and 32 pages, in a limited edition format, using materials both from Conference papers on specific areas of Church Growth which it is felt worthy to perpetuate, and other papers specially prepared.

In addition there is provision for the publication of 64 page booklets on relevant topics which it would not be economic or viable to print in large numbers.

Their publication at low cost has been made possible by the provision of a grant from the Drummond Trust.

This series, launched in 1991, complements a similar series co-published with the Handsel Press since 1986 where the prime aim is to present more academic treatise and new concepts. In contrast these booklets have a more practical element and often expound current Church Growth thinking. It is hoped they will be of value to a growing body of people.

This paper was presented at the Third European Church Growth Conference (1990) at de Bron in the Netherlands under the title *'Strategies for Secular Europe'*.

Church Growth Booklets Series

Reaching Secular People

Paul Beasley-Murray

The Challenge of Europe

- a) Europe as a Mission Field
- b) Europe as a Supermarket of Beliefs

Renewal Needed by the Church in Europe

- a) A Renewed Faith in God
- b) A Renewed Commitment to the Whole People of God
- c) A Renewed Commitment to Mission

What Kind of Gospel for Europe?

- a) A Plurality of Strategies
 - 1) The Near Fringe
 - 2) The Far Fringe
 - 3) The Neo-Pagans
 - 4) The Adherents of Other Religions
 - 5) The Secularists
- b) Leadership as the Key

Reaching Secular People

Reaching Secular People

Paul Beasley-Murray

The Challenge of Europe

a) Europe as a Mission Field

It is a truism to say that Europe is a mission field, a continent in urgent need of being re-evangelized. Although *The European Value Systems Study Group 1986* showed that 85% of people belonging to EEC member states claim affiliation to the Christian church, the reality is that overall only 32% of that population actually attend church on a regular basis (*LandMARC*, High Summer 1989). In the words of the 1988 Stuttgart Call to the Re-Evangelization of Europe, 'There are many areas in the continent where Christ's name is not really known, and where the Gospel needs to be proclaimed in a form relevant to the hearers' (*World Evangelisation*, Nov-Dec 1988, p31).

After centuries of Christian culture, Europe is in the process of becoming a 'post-Christian' society. This certainly is the way in which Alan Gilbert described the United Kingdom in 1980. In his preface to *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (Longmans, London, 1980) he wrote: 'A post-Christian society is not one from which Christianity has departed, but one in which it has become marginal. It is a society where to be irreligious is to be normal, where to think and act in secular terms is to be conventional, where neither status nor respectability depends upon the practice or profession of religious faith. Some members of such a society continue to find Christianity a profound, vital influence in their lives, but in so doing they place themselves outside the mainstream of social life and culture. Like the early Christians in a pre-Christian, classical world they become a 'peculiar people', anomalous in their primary beliefs, assumptions, values and norms, distinctive in important aspects of outlook and behaviour. They become a sub-culture.'

✕ In the words of David Lyon, 'Over the past two hundred years, the steeple's shadow has shrunk drastically. The social influence of organized Christianity has waned. Once a respected and central pillar of society, the

Reaching Secular People

church has been demoted from prominence and relegated to the social fringes. Frequently the steeple casts no shadow at all, itself overshadowed by the symbolic structures dominating modern cities: the soaring skyscrapers from which commerce, manufacturing, communications, policing and government are administered' (*The Steeple's Shadow*, SPCK, London, 1985, p1).

According to the British Council of Churches publication, *Telling the Good News Together* (London, 1988, p2ff), the way of life of most people in Britain today may be characterised as 'secular'. As evidence of this process of secularisation, three aspects of contemporary society are adduced:

1. A religious explanation of human existence is largely abandoned and belief in a life which transcends time and space is discarded.
2. Our society assumes that human existence is divided into a public sphere ('the world of reality') and a private sphere ('the world of fantasy or leisure'). The private sphere has become our escape, the place where we look for genuine freedom, a sense of meaning etc.
3. Ours is a peculiarly open society. Christianity has ceased to be the obvious source of moral and social criticism.

Sociologists have often described this new secular world as a 'world without windows'. 'It is as if our world is a gigantic room surrounded by solid walls – a closed system which has no place for a supernatural dimension beyond the natural world' (Derek Tidball, *A World Without Windows*, Scripture Union, London, 1987, p14).

According to Andrew Walls, 'Ours is apparently the first period in history when a religion has passed away without being succeeded by another' (quoted in *Telling the Good News Together* *ibid* p2). Or as T S Eliot, '*Choruses from the Rock*' once graphically put it:

} 'But it seems that something has happened that has never }
happened before: though we know not just when, or
why, or how, or where.
Men have left GOD not for other gods, they say, but for
no god; and this has never happened before'.

But is this analysis of British – and indeed European – society really true? Clearly the Christian churches in Europe face a crisis. Clearly in many ways the Christian faith has been marginalised. However, this does not mean to say that Europe has become a truly secular continent. Europe remains a

Reaching Secular People

religious, even if not a committedly Christian, continent. This has been well brought out by W A Visser t'Hooft, who in an article entitled 'Evangelism among Europe's Neo-Pagans', (*International Review of Mission* LXVI, October 1977, p355) distinguished between the 'pagan' who holds a non-Christian religious conviction and the atheist who (says he) does not believe in God: 'European culture had become a debate between three forces: Christianity, scientific rationalism and neo-pagan vitalism. For a long time it had seemed that scientific rationalism would take the lead. But recently the picture has changed. The atomic threat, the terrible pollution, the lack of meaningful perspective which the technocratic civilization had brought has led to the growth of a new irrationalism'.

T'Hooft therefore quotes with approval the words of Ernest Renan: 'Les dieux ne s'en vont que pour faire place a d'autres' (The gods only go away to make place for other gods). T'Hooft thus quite rightly argues that there is not only a process of secularisation, but also a process of 'sacralisation'. Our post-Christian society is not necessarily irreligious. Indeed, far from being a truly secular society, Europe would be better described as a vast supermarket of 'religious' beliefs. It is the challenge of evangelizing this vast supermarket that this paper seeks to address.

b) Europe as a Supermarket of Beliefs

Derek Tidball identifies five major religious interpretations of life which are on offer in Britain today: humanism, Marxism, existentialism, Islam and Eastern monism. He writes: 'It is important to stress that most people would not be able to articulate their views nor do they even hold them as coherent philosophies. . . . Nonetheless these are some of the unspoken assumptions which our friends and neighbours hold. And they must be addressed, rather than ignored, if we are to make an intelligent defence of the gospel' (*Catching the Tide*, Baptist Union, Didcot, 1989, p37-41).

This analysis is helpful, and yet in some ways it is too clear-cut. There are many who are syncretistic in the sense that at one and the same time they may be holding on to more than one strand of belief. Furthermore, this analysis does not do justice to the many other levels of belief that are present in society today.

From the perspective of the Christian church we may adopt a somewhat different division of 'religious' belief outside the church, again recognising that none of these divisions are clear-cut:

Reaching Secular People

- 1. The near fringe.**
- 2. The far fringe.**
- 3. The neo-pagans.**
- 4. Followers of other main-line religions.**
- 5. The secularists.**

The **near fringe** range from those who attend church services regularly, but who have not committed themselves to Jesus, to those who have lapsed in their church attendance. The near fringe are generally people known to church members by name.

The **far fringe**, although not normally darkening the door of a church, often still regard themselves as members of the church – they would for instance happily describe themselves as 'Church of England', 'Lutheran', 'Catholic'. David Edwards, (*A Reason to Hope*, Collins, London, 1978, p223), referred to this far fringe as the dispersed church, likening its members to the 'majority of Jews dispersed in the Diaspora outside Israel. . . Although they are not regular churchgoers, they are also not convinced atheists. They like, rather than dislike, having their conduct called 'Christian'. Although they probably employ the words when swearing, they are made uncomfortable if people are seriously rude about 'God' and 'Christ' . . . When they watch television or listen to the radio they usually switch off or get indignant when the subject is religious. They are interested to read some religious news or articles in their papers or magazines, and some of them buy religious books. They want their children to get acquainted with the Bible. They like to have their children baptized, their marriages blessed, and their dead buried according to the rites of the Church – partly, no doubt because the old habits have not completely died out but also in order to assert a serious wish to see their lives at these turning points in a Christian context'. Clearly the size of this group will vary from country to country: LandMARC (High Summer 1989) reported that in the UK religious programmes in 1988 were watched by 62% of all adult viewers – an audience which was very similar to that of current affairs. Yet the percentage of church attenders in the UK is only 11% of the population.

Within this far fringe group – whose beliefs are often termed folk religion – are those whose belief in God, while still real, is less defined. Lawrence Garner applied to such people Gerald Priestland's phrase, 'the great anonymous church of the unchurched'. Garner wrote: 'We need to remind ourselves that evangelism need not be a matter of battling with hostility or indifference (Ocean of Indifference?, *Church Times*, August 19, 1989, p9). The religious dimension does exist; and, if you want confirmation of it, you

Reaching Secular People

have only to listen to everyday conversations. 'Luckily I got the letter in time'; 'Something told me I ought to ring her'; 'I knew I shouldn't do it but . . .'. Here we have the unconscious sense of providence, the awareness of guidance, the acknowledgement of conscience'.

The **neo-pagans**, to use Visser t'Hooft's phrase, are yet one step further away from the Christian faith. Unable to live happily in a 'world without windows', they pursue the 'sacred' under a variety of weird and wonderful guises. The church may be in retreat, but not from belief in the supernatural. Thus A Hammerton and A C Downing reported that some 50% of British undergraduates in their study had quasi-religious beliefs about spacemen visiting the earth and other oddities! (*Theology* 82, 1979, p 433-436).

John Habgood commented: 'The secularization of the mind has its limits. Science and technology can generate their own mythologies, and the growth of cults and other bizarre manifestations, including the various counter-culture movements, are signs that some limits of secularization have been reached. One possible explanation of the attraction of mass movements like CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament] is that they allow middle-aged people to tap some religious resources, and even use religio-moral language, in a secular cause, which is all the more powerful for centring on the deep emotional issue of security' (*Church and Nation in a Secular Age*, Darton Longman and Todd, London, 1983, p24).

Today nuclear disarmament may not be such a burning issue; substitute, however, Green politics for CND and his comments regain their original force. Religion is by no means dead. In the words of David Smith: 'The interest in the occult, the veritable explosion of esoteric cults and, more recently, the huge popularity of the 'New Age' movement, all point to the inability of a radically secularised worldview to satisfy deeply rooted human needs and aspirations' (*Secularisation: Changing Perceptions*, Church Growth Digest XI.2, Winter 1989/90, p8).

Followers of other main-line religions are, of course, adherents of Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and the like. Although overall still a small percentage of the population, in some areas these folk form a highly significant minority. In the UK, for instance, there are some 3 million Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs.

How many belong to the final category, **the secularists**, is difficult to say. What is clear, however, is that the extent of secularisation has been much exaggerated. *Homo religiosus* is very much alive. The truly secularist man or woman is still very much in the minority.

Reaching Secular People

Renewal Needed by the Church In Europe

How then is the Church of Europe to face up to the challenge of 'secular' Europe? In the first place the church must put its own house in order before the churches can reach out in mission, they must themselves become renewed.

a) A Renewed Faith In God

In the first place, the church must renew its faith in God. Faith levels are far too low. Secularism has invaded the church as well as the world, so that there is a diminished sense of the supernatural. In the words of J B Phillips, 'Our God is too small'. It has been said that 'If indifference to Christ is the sin of contemporary Western paganism, unbelief towards Christ is the sin of the contemporary church. Ultimately our failure is a failure of faith. It is strangling the life of our congregations, and it is killing the mission given to us' (G R Beasley-Murray, *Renewed for Mission*, p12).

This unbelief towards Christ is reflected in the BCC publication, *Telling the Good News Together* (ibid, p7), where it is stated that 'most British Christians have little conscience that the Gospel can be more widely shared in our society'. If the church is to make disciples, then in the first place there must be a fresh vision of the Risen Lord, who declared: 'All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me' (Matt 28:28). Faith is the vital catalyst which is needed in Europe today, the kind of faith which enabled William Carey to cry, 'Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God'.

b) A Renewed Commitment to the Whole People of God

Mission is hindered by disunity. Thus the Indian Christian leaders who came together at Tranquebar in 1919 – shortly after the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 in which the modern ecumenical movement was born – declared: 'We face together the titanic task of the winning of India for Christ – one-fifth of the human race. Yet confronted by such an overwhelming responsibility, we find ourselves rendered weak and relatively impotent by our unhappy divisions – divisions which we did not create and which we do not desire to perpetuate'.

Would that evangelical Christians in Europe had a like sense of the greatness of the task and the hindrance of their divisions. Schism, so

Reaching Secular People

characteristic of evangelicalism, is a luxury Europeans can well do without. Yet, as it is, Europe is bedevilled by a wide variety of parachurches and Christian groups all seeking to do their own thing with little regard to others. Whatever be our attitude to the ecumenical movement '*per se*', evangelicals in Europe need to get their act together if they are serious in winning Europe for Christ. When it comes to mission the words of Jesus in John 17:20ff are crucial: 'I pray . . . that all of them may be one . . . so that the world may believe you have sent me'.

c) A Renewed Commitment to Mission

Europe will only be won to Christ as mission – and not maintenance – tops the agenda of the churches. With ten years left before the end of this millenium and the beginning of another, many denominations are gearing themselves up to a decade of evangelism. In the UK at least there is a recognition among a wide variety of churches that now is God's *kairos*. Interestingly, one response which seems to be common across the board, whether in the established 'main-line' churches or in the new 'house' churches, is a realisation that church planting is an integral element of evangelism.

What Kind of Gospel for Europe?

a) A Plurality of Strategies

To return to the initial question: how can Europe be reached for Christ? What are the strategies that need to be adopted?

The question begins to be answered the moment we realize the complexity of the task. There is no one strategy, for there is no one kind of people. People are at various levels of belief and unbelief. There are not simply the saved and the unsaved – for over against the saved there are a wide variety of the unsaved: those on the near fringe of the church, those on the far fringe of the church, the neo-pagans, members of other religious communities, as well as the truly secularized. If these various groups are to be reached with the Gospel, then the Gospel must be carefully targeted at

Reaching Secular People

them. A blanket approach is not helpful.

All too much evangelism presumes that folk are nearer the Kingdom than they actually are. Evangelism Explosion, for instance, may work well for the lapsed who can at least understand the language in which that particular presentation of the Gospel is couched, but for the truly unchurched, it is perceived to be both irrelevant and meaningless.

The same must be said of much Gospel broadcasting: Christian radio programmes beamed over Europe by well-meaning evangelicals are often *gobble-degook* as far as the average non-Christian is concerned.

The Dutch theologian, J C Hoekendijk cited a one-time prisoner of war from Russia who gave his impressions of the church as he found it on returning to freedom: 'There is a preacher talking from behind the pulpit. We don't understand him. A glass cover has been put over the pulpit. This smothers all the sound. Around the pulpit our contemporaries are standing. They too talk, and they call. But on the outside this is not understood. The glass cover smothers all sound. Thus we still see each other talk, but we don't understand each other any more'. Hoekendijk goes on to comment that it is not ordinary glass that separates people on the inside from those on the outside, but distorting glass! The people outside get the strangest images of what is going on inside the church!

Perhaps in parenthesis, attention may be drawn to one of the stranger forms of evangelism which has recently gained favour in large sections of the British evangelical community *viz* 'the marches for Jesus'. Innovated by a group of the newer churches in 1987, these marches have been taken up with great enthusiasm. Thus in 1987, some 15,000 people marched around the City of London; in 1988 some 55,000 people marched around the City of Westminster; in 1989 some 200,000 marched in over 45 towns and cities; in September 1990 around 1000 marches are being planned all over the UK. In 1992 it is hoped that there will be marches across Europe – in every major capital city. Marching together for Jesus can no doubt be a splendid act of witness for Jesus. However, witness is not the chief point. This marching is understood more in terms of battling with the powers of evil: Christians are called to march in power to 'invade the land for Christ, a land which is held to be 'subject to a demonic spirit of slavery'. The very act of marching clears the ground, as it were, of the 'principalities and powers', opening the way for church planting to come in its train. Needless to say, such marching can be great fun – but theologically it appears to be highly dubious, if not naive. Effective evangelism is far more costly.

Reaching Secular People

How then do we reach secular Europe? In the words of the Apostle Paul, 'By all possible means' (1 Cor 9:22). There is no one way – the church must operate at all the different levels if Europe is to be won for Christ. With these different levels in mind, we shall explore some of the possibilities for evangelism:

1) The Near Fringe

For those on the near fringe of the church the traditional forms of evangelism will probably continue to be effective: special services, evangelistic coffee mornings and/or dinner parties, visitation evangelism, mini-missions of one kind or another . . . all these activities, and a thousand more, may still be usefully used.

Unfortunately our evangelism often gets no further than this group. Thomas F Stransky made the perceptive observation that in the USA up to 55% of those who swell church growth statistics are 'dechurched' – former Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Catholics etc: 'Overall in the USA, evangelism seems in fact to be the Christian exchange of pews, collection plates and parking lots, as well as 'the faith enhancement of the penitent returnees' who found *It* again but elsewhere. The truly churched, those never before evangelized, the folk with no previous Christian experience or none of any religious tradition – alas that far more difficult challenge is avoided' (*WCC Letter on Evangelism* 10, October 1988). Is the situation in Europe all that different?

2) The Far Fringe

The far fringe can be reached in two particular ways. First of all, by exploiting the possibilities inherent in two of the main Christian festivals, *viz* Christmas and Easter. Even in secular Europe these two festivals have an important place – not least because of their exploitation by commercial forces. Christmas and Easter are the two times of the year when people's attention is focussed on the person of Jesus; the two times of the year when outsiders are more likely to attend church than at any other time. Thus according to one survey 15% of adults (14+) in the UK are to be found in church on an average Sunday (*ie* 6.5 million). However, on Easter Sunday this figure is doubled: 30% attend church; while at Christmas the figure goes even higher: 40% (17 million) attend a service of some kind. No doubt there could be many more if the church were to go all out in mission!

Reaching Secular People

In the second place we need to take more seriously the opportunities that the rites of passage afford. A Bible Society survey found that 81% of British adults (35 million) are in touch with churches for 'christenings', marriages, and funerals. True, in the UK it is now a minority of people who come to church to have their marriage blessed – it is said that entering upon a mortgage has taken the place of the church wedding. Nonetheless, large numbers still make their wedding vows 'in the sight of God', even larger numbers still have their children 'done', while the overwhelming majority mark the death of a loved one with a religious service. Here surely there are opportunities for evangelism, as week by week literally thousands upon thousands turn to the church for help. True, such evangelistic opportunities must be sensitively used. In the words of Donald English, we are not 'to exploit vulnerability but meet the real need at the heart of the occasion itself' (*Evangelism Now*, Methodist Church, London, 1987, p17).

These rites of passage are inevitably easier for state churches to exploit than for free churches. Nonetheless opportunities abound. In the UK setting, for instance, the Church of England is not allowed to marry divorcees, with the result that those wishing to remarry in church will turn to the free churches!

One particular rite of passage Baptists might do well to exploit is baptism. True, by and large, people don't come to be 'done' in our churches – but we can do much more to get people 'to see us done'. Let me explain.

In England at least, 'christenings' are still something of a social event – especially as far as the far fringers are concerned. They are occasions for the ladies to dress up, for presents to be given, and in particular for parties – lunch parties or supper parties – to be held. Now without too much effort this atmosphere can be transferred to a service of believers' baptism. An invitation to a baptismal service can normally be refused with ease when it is some unknown person being baptized; when, however, an invitation is given by the person actually being baptized, it is embarrassing to say no, as far as the average far fringer is concerned. Courtesy demands that one accepts! but, on the other hand, where the service is to be followed by a party, the embarrassment begins to disappear. If drinks are to follow, then one can always put up with a religious service!

My own experience has shown that where baptismal candidates make friends, and invite acquaintances, on average each candidate can bring along some twenty or so outsiders, with the result that the preacher then has 100 happy pagans to whom to preach the Gospel!

3) The Neo-Pagans

If the church is to reach this third group, then it will only be to the extent that Christians are prepared to go to them, as distinct from expecting them to come to church. In this area evangelistic programmes have little use. The costly business of bridge-building is called for. Friendship evangelism, life-style evangelism, incarnational evangelism – Christ must be seen in and through his people.

The trouble with the average committed Christian is that they have become so committed to Christ that they have lost all contact with the world. Alas, the older most of us grow in the Christian faith, the more likely we are to move into a Christian ghetto. True, this process need not be inevitable, and with imagination and hard work could be reversed. If pastors were to declare a moratorium on all mid-week church activities for three months, and instead encourage their members to enroll at the local centre for evening classes, with a view to church members making friends with some of the happy pagans in the neighbourhood, a revolution could take place. Indeed, some real conversions amongst the neo-pagans might be seen!

Incidentally, the most strategic people in building bridges in the neighbourhood are pregnant mums. Let me explain.

When a woman gets pregnant, then, without any trying on her part, she finds her network of relationships immediately expanding. For in attending antenatal classes – and later hospital and clinics – she finds herself meeting up with a wide spectrum of people; people, furthermore, who are open to exploring the deeper issues of life. For mothers at this stage are asking questions as to the meaning and purpose of life. The birth-process is a crisis period in life, when people are jolted out of the ruts of their previous way of thinking and are open to hearing the Gospel. Pastors with an eye to an evangelistic strategy for reaching their neighbourhood for Christ, will ensure that as soon as their women are pregnant, they are put through a faith-sharing course in their church!

For such women are 'strategic people' people – for reaching both the far fringe and also the neo-pagan.

But what about those who are not pregnant? How can they win the neo-pagans for Christ. There are no easy answers. Evangelism cannot be likened to making a cup of Nescafe. One thing for sure, by and large evangelizing neo-pagans will mean taking seriously the secular affairs of the world. The concerns of the world – whether they relate to ecology or to poverty, to nuclear disarmament or to educational curricula, to genetic engineering or to

Reaching Secular People

the deprivation of the inner city – must become the church's concerns.

What John Jonsson has called 'the secluded niceties of our internal church matters of faith' (*Facing the Third Millenium*, BWA Resource Manual on Evangelism, July 1988, p2), must be put on the back burner. Alas, all too often the church glibly sings 'Christ is the answer!' without ever facing up to the problems that confront the world in which we live. It is as Christians wrestle with the world's concerns, whether in some political forum or simply around the table in the local bar, that those right outside the church will begin to see that none of the world's great problems will ever be answered without reference to the crucified and risen Christ. To preach the Lordship of Christ without involvement in the world's political and social concerns is a meaningless exercise.

4) The Adherents of Other Religions

There is no easy way to evangelise the Hindu, the Muslim or the Jew – that surely is demonstrated by the story of the modern missionary movement. On the other hand, the task is far from hopeless – not least when understanding and sensitivity are combined with Christian proclamation.

The obvious strategy which needs to be adopted in seeking to reach this particular group of people is to send a Macedonian call to our partner churches overseas: 'Come over and help us', we need to say to our African and Asian brothers and sisters. Instead of just *sending* missionaries, we need to *receive* missionaries. If we are to reach people for Christ in cultures so different from ours, we must use those who are familiar with these cultures. Otherwise instead of the Gospel being a stumbling-block, it may be our presentation of the faith which proves to be the stumbling-block.

5) The Secularists

The truly 'secularised' are the hardest of all to reach for the Gospel. Yet even the hardest of hearts can be melted by the love of Christ's people seen in action. The evangelistic potential of Christlike lives must never be minimised. Thus Donald English draws attention to some research in North America which has shown that 80% of those who join churches, do so because of the influence of family, neighbours, friends or colleagues at work. To which he adds: 'The corollary is that an equal percentage of those who leave a church do so because at times of crisis they do not receive evidence of adequate care from fellow members!' (*Evangelism Now*, *ibid*, p10)

Reaching Secular People

Our lives tell a story. This truism is surely particularly true in the area of Christian marriage. At a time when one in three English marriages are ending in the divorce courts, the witness of a happy Christian marriage can be incalculable. For Luther's question, 'How can I find a gracious God?', has today been replaced by the question, 'How can I make my marriage work?' Hopefully, God's people have an answer.

b) Leadership as the Key

As we approach the end of the second millenium, from a Christian perspective Europe presents a sorry picture. For although exceptions to the rule can always be cited, on the whole the Christian church is declining, and declining with rapidity. The loss of church membership is such that it is calculated that if present trends continue, then there will be nobody left in the Church of England by 2040!

Furthermore, the Christian church is becoming increasingly marginalised. Its ministry, for instance, is being seen as increasingly irrelevant. Indeed, its ministers have been likened to 'charcoal burners and alchemists', engaged in processes that are both long obsolete and intellectually untenable!

Yet, in spite of the decline, there are signs of hope. Religion, as we have seen, is not dead. The growth of religious movements is a clear indicator of the continued search for God even in late Twentieth Century Europe. What is more, the political changes and uncertainties which now characterise much of Europe offer fresh opportunities for proclaiming the Christ who is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

But how are we to make the most of these new opportunities? How is the tide of unbelief to be turned? How are the false gods to be dethroned? Not surprisingly as principal of a college training men and women for leadership in today's and tomorrow's church, I see leadership as the key. The church in Europe needs not more members, but more leaders – leaders who have a clear grasp of the Gospel and who can rise to the intellectual challenges of our day; leaders who understand the society in which we live and can therefore present the Gospel in forms both relevant and intelligible; leaders who are trained to communicate – not just from the pulpit, but in the studio and on the street; leaders who have a heart for evangelism and a burning desire to plant new churches and revitalize old churches; above all, leaders who can mobilize the people of God for adventurous mission. Only so can so-called 'secular' Europe be reached for Christ.

Other Titles Produced in this Series

1991

Do Churches Grow? *Donald McGavran*

Bridging The Gap With the Secular World *Monica Hill*

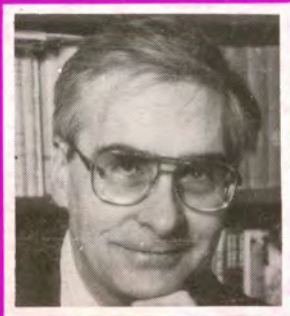
The British Church Growth Association

was formed in September 1981 by a widely representative group of Christians committed to church growth either as researchers, teachers, practitioners or consultants. Prior to this the Evangelical Alliance had set up a Church Growth Unit and begun publishing the Church Growth Digest which continues as the quarterly journal of the Association.

Practical help is given through membership of the Association which networks across all denominations and links together practitioners, researchers and teachers of Church Growth. The Association runs conferences and has co-published a number of books as well as maintaining a Church Growth Book Service with discounts for members.

Since 1984 there has been a European Church Growth Association in existence linking together a number of national Church Growth Associations across Europe.

Details of membership of both these Associations, of their journals and various publications are available on request.



Rev Dr Paul Beasley-Murray has been Principal of Spurgeon's College, London, since 1986. After serving with the Baptist Missionary Society as a teacher in the Protestant Theological Faculty in the National University of Zaire (1970-1972), he was from 1973-1986 pastor of Altrincham Baptist Church, Cheshire, which during that time experienced significant growth.

With Alan Wilkinson he co-authored *Turning the Tide*: an assessment of Baptist Church Growth in England (Bible Society, 1980). He has also written *Pastors under Pressure* (Kingsway, 1989) and *Dynamic Leadership* (MARC, 1990). Forthcoming books include *Faith and Festivity* – a guide for worship-leaders (MARC, 1991). He has also recently edited *Mission to the World* (Baptist Historical Society, 1991).



75 p

Published by

British Church Growth Association,
St Mark's Chambers,
Kennington Park Road,
London SE11 4PW

Printed by

Channel High School,
Folkestone, Kent

Cover design by

Richard Bradley,
Gosport, Hants

ISBN 0 948704 17 9

Copyright BCGA 1991