

Dare to Dream

Introduction

I think it is fair to say that most Christians in most churches live lives which are culturally indistinguishable from those of the people around them. And yet, when we talk about it, almost every Christian I speak with readily recognises that key aspects of the culture we live in are deeply opposed to Christian values and practice.

How can we live authentic Christian lives in a world which appears to have no place for compassion or faith? There are three basic choices.

- We can give up, accept that the world is broken and wait for Heaven.
- We can withdraw from the world and try to create our own better way of living.
- Or we can work and pray for God's Kingdom to come, to be made real in the here and now.

It's a ridiculous idea, of course. The challenges we would face are massive. The present systems seem impossible to challenge. But if this is something Jesus calls us to, maybe He is willing to guide and empower us, even when we face seemingly impossible odds?

The Challenges

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. The battle we are called to fight is not against people, no matter how misguided we may consider them to be; but we wrestle against systems and beliefs which imprison and destroy, which spread despair and hopelessness even as they promise hope and comfort.

Capitalism has had the effect of turning people into economic units of production. Secularism denies us the right to live our faith in the public arena. Leadership and management techniques push God and any real involvement He may have in our corporate life into ever-decreasing niche areas. Our lives are shaped by policies and performance targets rather than compassion and inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

We don't like where we are, but see no alternative. We feel impotent because, for all our frustrations with the world as it is, we have nothing better to offer. We cannot return to the old world of Christian values and assumptions; and, looking back, we can see it was deeply flawed anyway.

We know what we don't want, what we don't like. We criticise the trends in society which are 'turning people away from God', and we blame the things we recognise to be shaping people's lives when we fail to make much impact on their lives ourselves.

Some people say the problem is capitalism. Maybe. Or perhaps the problem is what we have allowed capitalism to become, how we have allowed it to operate as though the only thing which matters is profit; maybe money can be used to bless the needy and empower the weak without creating dependency.

Some say the problem is secularism. But maybe a secular society in which no religion is allowed to force its views on other people is able to create an environment in which people of many different faiths can live alongside each other with mutual respect, while allowing for honest disagreement and protecting their right to convert from one faith to another.

What sort of society do we want to live in? For the most part, it seems we are not sure: we each have some ideas about some details, what we would like and what we don't want; it is fairly easy to see details which need to be fixed, but God's Kingdom cannot be just a cleaned-up, nicer version of our current reality. If God's plan involves more than just tweaking a few details, we probably ought to try understanding some of the bigger and deeper issues we need to face. We probably already know some of the details, but it seems that nobody is offering a vision of a society in which those details could be realised.

We can sit back and wait for someone else to describe it for us. We may have to wait some time. Or we could start to do the hard work, start trying to figure things out with God's help and see where it gets us.

Maybe God is calling His people to start thinking and praying and listening, reading and talking, seeking to understand a little bit better what sort of society He is calling us to build. Of course, a good number of us have been doing this for some time; but maybe it is time to work together to build, as best we can, a shared vision – a vision in which we can be united in working towards.

An Impossible Dream?

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr, had a dream. He offered us a pithy, compelling picture of the society he wanted his children to live in. That dream helped to shape the future of his nation and touched the whole world. It was clear, it was concrete, and people believed it was possible with God's help.

We pray for God's Kingdom to come, but maybe our prayers would be a little bit more enthusiastic if we saw more clearly what the Kingdom might look like today: not a return to a mythic golden age, but a way to embody mercy, justice and peace in a world of food banks, gene therapy and suicide bombers. Maybe we would work together to build the Kingdom more willingly if we had found some agreement on what this Kingdom looks like.

Martin Luther King's dream did not spring out of thin air: he had been talking and thinking and dreaming and praying and planning with the people around him. Together, they had been creating an understanding of a society they wanted to build. My personal dreams do not matter that much, but if you and I and others can create a shared dream – something that can motivate and offer direction to many others – who knows what is possible?

Some people see God's Kingdom as an impossible dream. But that does not change God's call for us to live as Kingdom people, here and now. We are in this world but not of it, called to live lives which reflect, express and create this Kingdom which does not yet fully exist, this Kingdom which is coming and yet is somehow already present in the person of Jesus.

We pray: "Your Kingdom come." Most of us have very little understanding of what this prayer looks like in the way we use our time, our money, our homes, in how we respond to challenges such as those posed by capitalism and secularism, in how we love people who despise or hate us, in our choice to ignore or oppose the many injustices we see in the world around us.

But, if the Body of Christ means anything, it has to mean that we each have a part to play, a contribution to the whole, a part of the picture. None of us has a perfect understanding, but together we have been given all we need. Together, we understand enough, if we are prepared to share and listen to each other and to the Spirit's guiding.

And maybe learning to listen to one another is not only an essential part of discovering what the Kingdom is like: maybe it is an essential part of the Kingdom itself.

Next steps

This was written by Paul Hazelden as a contribution to the *Strong Foundations* exploration. You are welcome to use it and distribute it how you like, but feedback would be appreciated.

- Is it helpful?
- Would you change anything?
- Would you like to talk about how we can learn from each other about how best to follow Jesus where we are?

You can contact me through the web form at mad-bristol or join the conversation on the *Strong Foundations* site.

- Web form: <http://mad-bristol.org.uk/contact/>
- Strong Foundations: <http://strongfoundations.pbworks.com>

Copyright © 2019 Paul Hazelden
Last updated: 21:45 on 14 November 2019, revision: 0.4
Location: /home/paul/C/SF/main/SF_Dare_To_Dream.odt