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Christ's Bridges: How to Share My Faith with Secular/Post- Christian Friends



SCAN FOR AUDIO

EDITORIAL NOTE

This article is the fifth in the special series outlining how Seventh-day Adventists can share the Three Angels' Messages with important people groups.

One of the most critical aspects in mission is how to effectively build bridges of communication and trust with whom we wish to share the message of the eternal gospel (Rev 14:6). Did you notice? Eternal gospel. What does it mean? It means that the message and the mission are the same. However, we live in a very different world from a few decades ago. For instance, methods and strategies used in the 80s—even though they were successful back then—are not as effective today for one simple reason: people in 2023 are different! Profound and lasting sociocultural revolutions have brought new challenges for the church in the twenty-first century.

Among them, one of the most significant challenges is sharing Jesus with our irreligious, unaffiliated, secular, and—increasingly—post-Christian friends. But before we can talk about sharing our faith in today's secular reality, we need to better understand what is happening around us.

THE END OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD AS WE USED TO KNOW IT

Western areas of the world used to be known for their Christian roots. This is no longer the reality of today. According to surveys done by the Pew Research Center, around 30 percent of Americans identify as religiously unaffiliated, and 25 percent have a secular/nonreligious worldview. Very few Europeans are frequent churchgoers, and the proportion of Europeans who neither value nor care about Christianity is increasing. The rejection of religion is growing in Australia, following a similar trend. Nearly ten million Australians, or about 38 percent of the population, identify as religiously unaffiliated.

However, the effects of growing irreligiosity are not restricted to the Western world mainly because of the impact of globalization and advanced communication technology. For instance, this is an increasing trend across Asia,

where five of the ten least religious nations in the world—China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, and Hong Kong—are situated. Similar sentiments are also seen among “cultural” Muslims and Jews, particularly among younger generations who identify with their religion in cultural and social connections but prefer to disassociate from the faith of their parents. Irreligiosity is also having a significant influence in Africa and Latin America. So, the corrosive effect of secularism can be found and perceived on every continent.

The preceding examples illustrate how the secular/post-Christian worldview disseminates irreligion worldwide. This leads to a gradual rise of religious pluralism, in which any religion or nonreligious attitude is ultimately appropriate and acceptable. At the same time, there is a growing distrust of institutions, which causes people to reject and feel separate from any kind of organized religion. Additionally, with the rise of

a relativistic view of religion, many people are now trying to create their own spirituality, exclusively based on their own feelings and personal choices.

RELATIVISTIC RELIGION

Among the many mission challenges related to secularism, reaching the minds of those controlled by contemporary relativism, seen chiefly in urban areas, is a particularly daunting task. But what is it? Relativism, in a nutshell, means that nothing can be taken at face value, particularly regarding how we should approach truth and, consequently, religion.

The idea behind relativist thinking is something like this: what is true for you is not necessarily true for me. So, what is right for one person may be wrong for another. Why? Because truth is relative. To whom? Ourselves! This is a clever way to live without guilt, isn't it?

“Well, this is my lifestyle,” some say. Others think, “Being sincere to myself is what matters



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the most.” Really? But what if you are “sincerely” wrong? Think with me . . . You get up at night with a tremendous headache and start looking for some medicine, but you don’t turn the light on in the bathroom. Then, you grope around and pick up a container that you “sincerely” think is the medicine for the headache. But it is not! What if it is the stuff to unclog the sink? What will be the outcome if you drink it—even with a sincere heart? You will “sincerely” be on your way to the hospital with much more than just a headache!

Have you ever thought about what traffic would be like without rules and laws? What would happen in front of a red light if you were taught that it was just a “suggestion”? With relativism becoming the prevailing attitude of any contemporary society, do you know what is one of the central values that must be accepted? Tolerance. This is why tolerance is more valued today than truth—especially among younger generations. The problem is that the meaning of the word “tolerance” has changed. It used to mean treating people with respect, love, and dignity. Today it means that each idea is claimed to be equally valid and that we should accept every lifestyle.

Living the Truth (with a capital “T”) today means walking on a narrow path. The Word of God clearly presents that what is right is right, and what is wrong is wrong. So, truth matters. Without a doubt, it is not easy to communicate biblical truth in a relevant way within this new context. Still, we

must fulfill the mission that Jesus Christ left to His disciples. Do you remember His mandate? “Make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19, NIV). And here, the word “nations” (*ethnē*) refers not only to all ethnicities, but with even greater emphasis on groups of people, individually. But how can we effectively make disciples in today’s secular and post-Christian reality? Building intentional mission bridges may be a good start.

BECOMING AN INTENTIONAL BRIDGE BUILDER

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we are called by God to be “Christ’s representatives” (2 Cor 5:20, MSG). But to accomplish this glorious task, we have to break out of our Christian circles of isolation, out of our comfort zones, thus learning how to fill in the space—to bridge the gap—between the church and the world of our day.

This is precisely what Christ did between us and God: “For there is one God and one mediator *between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people*” (1 Tim 2:5–6a, NIV).¹ Christ was “the bridge” between us and God the Father.

Speaking of bridges, they are fascinating, aren’t they? Bridges are designed to bring things together, overcome obstacles, and connect two distant points. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have the same privilege and responsibility. We ought to be bridge builders for

our Master. But what kind of bridges remain to be built? Irreligious, secular, and unaffiliated people often have intellectual, cultural, and even moral barriers that keep them from considering Christ as the ultimate purpose for human life. But here, I repeat, we can be Christ’s bridges for the proclamation of the eternal gospel. Just as Jesus left heaven to come and mingle with a sinful world, He left us with the glorious task of creatively reaching our world with the good news of God’s love and His soon Second Coming.

But how does one become a bridge builder for Christ in an increasingly secular world? While it is true that we need to understand the theology and message of the gospel, we also need to know how unbelieving people think, why they intentionally reject religion, and how they are impacted by today’s culture before we can effectively share our faith with them.² Only then, as Christ’s representatives, can we become the bridge between our Master and the world, communicating the everlasting gospel in the context of secular and post-Christian worldviews.

Furthermore, a bridge builder must be committed to understanding those from different backgrounds and beliefs, with the deliberate purpose of making Christianity relevant to them. So, to become an intentional bridge builder, we must go through at least a three-step process. First, we need to look at the problem of isolation found in the lives of many who claim to be followers of Christ. Second, we need to learn about Christ’s model and method of ministry, which will help us overcome the problem of isolation. And finally, we will only then understand and experience how our lives can build bridges between Christ and the world around us.

Let's go to the first of them: isolation. Unfortunately, many who claim to follow Christ live entirely isolated from the cultural reality of our days. Often afraid of "contaminating themselves with the world," they decide to live separately and forget that even though they are not from this world, they should dedicate their lives to reaching out to those around them. Jesus Christ expressed this concern in His special prayer to the Father in John 17: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. . . . As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:16, 18, NIV). Amazingly, between these two realities, in verse 17, Jesus intentionally pleads for His disciples: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (By the way, just to make sure you remember, truth matters!) Do you understand? Even

though we are not of the world, we are sent into the world by Christ as His disciples. But how? Following the model and method of Jesus.

Here we come to the second step: Christ's model and method of ministry are based on the very character of God. The Bible presents a God who continually seeks humankind by intentionally entering into humankind's cultural context. In the New Testament, we find God seeking His children by taking a "contextualized" form, the form of a man—Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23, NKJV)! In a simple definition, a contextualized approach involves becoming identified with the people to be reached. It requires breaking cultural barriers to establish relevant and effective communication of biblical truth.

Scripture clearly states that "the Word became flesh and dwelt

among us" (John 1:14, NKJV). Through the incarnation of Christ, God bridged a gigantic "cultural gap" to seek us out and identify Himself with us. God took over our context, and in doing so, He broke down all the barriers that prevented us from having a relationship with Him. Moreover, Christ's method is described in more detail with these well-known words: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' . . . Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit."³

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human life, we must, as Christ's bridges, enter the context of today's world. For that, we certainly need, with wisdom and intentionality, to explore new methods and strategies in order to focus our attention on those who today are influenced by the secular and post-Christian mindset but who are also objects of love and care from the One who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6, NKJV).⁴

Therefore, the basis for our mission is not only found in sharing the truths of our faith, but also

in using our own lives as a meaningful channel for relating those truths with today's reality. In other words, the mission is more than just sharing information. The mission involves the sharing of something else. In the secular/post-Christian environment of the twenty-first century, the mission also includes the sharing of our life, our real experience with God. Only in this way will we be authentic "Christ's bridges" (see Matt 5:13–16; John 14:34–35; Eph 5:1; 1 Pet 2:9) to people who desperately—but also unknowing-

ly—need to know the truth that will ultimately set them free.

So, what can you do to bring your secular/post-Christian friend to God?⁵ ED

¹ Emphasis added.

² See Kleber D. Gonçalves, "Faith in a World of Unfaith: How to Share Christ with Unbelievers," *Adventist Review*, November 6, 2016, 32–25.

³ Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 143–144.

⁴ Emphasis added.

⁵ For further information on the Center for Secular and Postmodern Studies, visit <https://cspm.globalmissioncenters.org>.

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