

Book Review  
Questioning Evangelism  
By Randy Newman

Submitted by:  
Brian A. Schulz

BTH 625 - Theology for a Christian Worldview

Louisville Bible College

Professor: Dr. Peter Jay Rasor II

Fall 2013

The world is a different place. This thought, on face value, is simple, yet it carries a much deeper meaning. The world is a different place on many levels. The assault on truth and the Bible has reached a fever pitch. The once common understanding and awe of God's Word is long gone. The well tilled fields of harvest which were common thirty to forty years ago are now arid wastelands. The work of God's people in carrying out the great commission in the Western world has taken a drastic turn which requires rethinking and remolding the evangelistic paradigms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Post-Modern worldview which dominates society today has some striking parallels to the worldview that Paul was dealing with as he entered Athens and began to preach at Mars Hill. In contrast to this Peter, as he preached the first Gospel message in Jerusalem, was dealing with a worldview that came prepackaged with some understandings which made the Gospel message soak in much easier. These two worldviews, the Jewish as the Greek mindset, exemplify and are very similar to the shifts that have taken place in the Western world. Just thirty years ago, the American Church was dealing with a worldview similar to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. Today, however, the American Church is dealing with a worldview much more akin to the Greek worldview of Athens. The starting points and methods that Paul employed provide the proper backdrop for rethinking and remolding the methods of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian. This is exactly the message of Randy Newman's book, *Questioning Evangelism*. In this solid work, Newman sets out to provide a new paradigm for engaging in evangelism. It is therefore the goal of this evaluation to detail the highlights of this book.

The title of the book, *Questioning Evangelism*, seems to be stating that Newman is going to question evangelism itself as a worthy endeavor. However, this title actually is stating the method of evangelism. Newman proposes that the main weapon for the Christian is actually well

thought out questions. Rather than simply filling people's head with facts and figures, he suggests that answering a question with a question can be a most effective tool. Newman states:

Answering a question with a question, then often has significant advantages over using direct answers. It brings to the surface the questioner's assumptions. It also takes the pressure off of you – the one being asked – and puts the pressure on the one doing the asking. Shifting the burden of the response is important because as long as we're on the defensive, the questioners are not really wrestling with issues. They're just watching us squirm.<sup>1</sup>

In the following section Newman begins to explain a term called Rabbinic Evangelism. Here Newman uses this term to label the usage of answering questions with questions likening this to the methods of the rabbinic traditions and methods. In this section Newman discusses some truly powerful dynamics which can result from sharing the Gospel without a proper backdrop. He writes:

But without the context of God's holiness, the horror of our sinfulness, the need for repentance, and the necessity of the Cross instead of just a guidebook to better behavior, we'll terribly misrepresent the Gospel. People need to hear the bad news in our message before they can appreciate the Good News. Not only do the minds of nonbelievers need to be persuaded, but also their knees need to buckle.<sup>2</sup>

This statement is true and powerful. If Christians as a whole could get this concept down then the Gospel message as a whole would have change that is convincing and converting.

In summing up Chapter one Newman makes an excellent case for this method. He states:

I'm suggesting that we do more than just "proclaim the Gospel" and wring our hands when the results don't come pouring in. I'm proposing a style of evangelism that is a dialogue more than a sales pitch. I'm pleading for conversations that lead to conversions, rather than presentations that lead to preconceptions. I'm encouraging the use of questions more than the use of answers. The apostle Paul found validity in adding "reasoning, explaining, and proving, to his arsenal of evangelistic weapons. So should we."<sup>3</sup>

As Newman moves on to the next chapter he makes a statement centered on the idea of employing Solomonic Wisdom. He asserts that rather than using booklets and the like should

---

<sup>1</sup> Page 29

<sup>2</sup> Page 35

<sup>3</sup> Pages 37-38

take a back seat to a different paradigm. He writes, “This means we become people who incarnate the gospel to speak of it freely because our hearts and minds have been captivated by it. Becoming people of compassion and wisdom is the prerequisite for any evangelistic technique.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to offer four lessons from Solomon which allows the Christian to proceed with wisdom. First, avoid and argument. Second, recognize a fool. Third, remember that people are people. Forth, remember the power of the tongue. As he details these principles some great points are made.

Chapter three begins to hit at the core of Newman’s philosophy of evangelism. Inside this philosophy Newman details the necessity of building “plausibility structures.” In this dynamic he relates the necessity for demolishing strongholds. There are certain weapons which do just this. He writes, “such weapons include dialogue, discussion, challenging questions, well crafted explanations about life’s difficulties, and thought provoking articles about various topics addressed from Christian people.”<sup>5</sup> Newman goes on to list five principles which employ this understanding. Principle one, reveille precedes revelation. Here people must be awoken from their slumber and shaken concerning their presuppositions. Principle two, some things can’t be true. Here the idea of propositional truth is propped up by the law of noncontradiction. This understanding is necessary to demolishing strongholds. Principle three, some things can be partially true. Here Newman makes an excellent point that things can be partially true. He says that the goal of the Christian evangelists is to show people that there is only one which is all true. Principle four, some things might be true. And principle five, somebody sees the whole elephant or we can know the truth. Here Newman makes the case that truth can be known and it is not arrogant to say so which is contrary to predominant worldviews.

---

<sup>4</sup> Page 40

<sup>5</sup> Page 57

Having effectively detailed and discussed his overall philosophy of evangelism Newman moves on to part two of this work. In this section titled, “What Questions are People Asking,” Newman provides some excellent tools for the prospective sharer. Utilizing example lines of questioning, Newman provides some interesting strategies for dealing with some of the most difficult questions that Christianity faces such as; why are Christians so intolerant, why does a good God allow evil and suffering, why should anyone worship a god who allowed 9/11, why should we believe an ancient book written by dead Jewish males, why are Christians so homophobic, and what’s so good about marriage? In each of these chapters Newman provides some very interesting perspectives for dealing with these issues. Of course he deals with these issues by employing the use of answering questions with questions.

Under the heading, why are Christians so intolerant, Newman proposes that people will not see the reasonableness of Jesus’ “I am the way” claim unless they are led to understand two nonnegotiable truths. Firstly, God is more holy than we think. And secondly, we are more sinful than we think. He elaborates, “God’s holiness is a foreign concept for many non-Christians. *What’s the big deal?* they wonder. No one’s perfect. People have trouble grasping why God was so hacked off that He demanded the death of His Son.”<sup>6</sup> Later he writes, “The second aspect of the answer, the depth of our sinfulness, needs clarification as well. Although most people are quick to admit “everyone makes mistakes,” they can’t see what difference it makes. We must show that making a mathematical error in the checkbook is not the essence of sin; cooking the books or cheating someone is!”<sup>7</sup> In attempting to answer the question of why Christians are so intolerant, Newman hits right back with a great question, “what’s so bad about intolerance?” This question surely will cause a few feathers to be ruffled in today’s society as tolerance is just

---

<sup>6</sup> Page 81

<sup>7</sup> Page 81

about on the highest level of the totem pole. The discourse the he offers following this question and others like it provide some great tools for the evangelist.

A parenthetical note should be offered at this point. The concepts in this book, after careful evaluation and thought, seem to be more suited for the experienced Christian. This dynamic in the hands of a newborn could prove to be quite counterproductive. The person utilizing this method, while primarily using questions, must also have answers. At any point in time a shrewd person could easily derail the discussion by pressing for real concrete answers to these difficult questions. Coherent philosophical arguments, complete historical facts, unambiguous apologetic answers, systematic Biblical understandings, and the like, must be ready arrows in the quiver for the person employing this dynamic especially in dealing with such difficult subjects such as death, pain, homosexuality, marriage, and more.

In the third section of this book, Newman turns the focus squarely on the heart of the evangelist. These chapters deal with some very difficult, yet necessary, issues that each Christian must be aware. These would include apathy, lack of compassion, and anger. Every person, even the Christian, deals with these dynamics to some measure. Newman explains some excellent ways that these issues can be tackled. He elaborates, “If we’re to incarnate the Gospel with our lives as well as communicate it with our words, we must be liberated from contempt and anger, and be transformed by grace and love. For that transformation to occur, asking God to bring it about is crucial. But we can also contribute to the process by reflecting on some great examples.”<sup>8</sup> Newman goes on to provide some excellent examples from the supreme source, the Bible. Firstly he provides the example of Jesus and then of Paul. Each in their own way and in different circumstances, properly deal with anger, apathy, and contempt. He writes, “Neither Paul nor Jesus made such mistakes. They saw idolatry and lostness around them and were

---

<sup>8</sup> Page 214

moved to distress – even tears. Without such anguish, we fail to reflect godliness and wholeness to a godless, fractured world. If Jesus wept and Paul groaned, we should do more than sign or sneer.”<sup>9</sup> Newman goes on to make a wonderful point which every Christian must realize as they set out to evangelize:

Paul and Jesus also grasped the real nature of unbelief. People do not reject the gospel primarily because they’re too thickheaded to “get it.” Unbelief grows out of other soils besides intellectual confusion. Instead, people reject the Good News because they’re enslaved to other kinds of news. They’re in love with something unworthy of such devotion, and it won’t let them go.<sup>10</sup>

All in all Newman has provided an interesting and well thought out strategy for engaging the postmodern mind. As was previously mentioned, this work is best suited to be employed by the mature believer. In the hands of the mature believer this dynamic, the shrewd use of questions, could prove to lead many people to the Lord.

---

<sup>9</sup> Page 215

<sup>10</sup> Page 216