

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

Equipping to Reach the Radically Unchurched: A Contemporary Guide to Modern Evangelism

A Paper
Submitted to Professor Aaron Marks
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Course
Personal Evangelism
EVAN565

By
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Section One: Formal Critique

Bibliographical Entry

Reid, Alvin L PhD, M.Div. *Radically Unchurched: Who They Are and How to Reach Them.*
Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002.

Author Information

Dr. Alvin L. Reid serves as a professor of evangelism at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC and serves on the Bailey Smith Chair of Evangelism for his numerous contributions to teaching evangelism. He acquired both a Master of Divinity and a Ph.D. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX. If his plate was not full enough, Dr. Reid has written over seven books and maintains his website to provide radical updates to reach the lost of the world with a plethora of information.

Content Summary

In *Radically Unchurched*, Dr. Reid brings a bright spotlight to a world many Christians have tried to ignore or at least sidestep, a world where Christianity is in the decline and where the church as a whole walks a fine line between reaching the lost people and bringing revival and doing nothing and fading into the pages of time. The book is divided into two parts, each with a distinct theme and five chapters supporting this theme and following the division with a conclusion that connects one to the other. The first half focuses on learning who the radically unchurched are in a series of different cultural slices and stresses the urgency of reaching this radioactive group. The second half focuses on creating a systematic plan for reaching the lost people in unique and creative ways.

After a rousing story of a radical new Christian and his impact on the church he visited, Reid launches the reader into an in-depth exposé on the rise of the radically unchurched followed by a series of examples of their characteristics. The next chapter gives a very broad overview of the church's current interaction with the lost and shows how the media and the acts of other Christians have created an enemy among the unchurched wherein all Christians are lumped together until proven otherwise that will both excite and anger the reader. Changing the one a little further into the book, Reid provides wonderful examples of where one Christian making one choice to do what Christ would expect his followers to do, taking the focus off the church's actions and focusing more on the person itself to reach the lost.

Lost people are lost for many reasons, and it seems as though the church is not aware of this. Reid uses the first of the last two chapters in section one to shed a bright light on some of these reasons discussing some of the prominent movements in the last few decades to separate modernism from post-modernism and provides marked examples of each (Reid 2002, 75-77). But the author did not seek to leave readers on a dark note, the final chapter of section one gives a refreshing word to the reader about the newer generations of youth offer wonderful signs of a powerful faith building within them and closes the final chapter of section one with a resounding word...hope.

Building from the message of hope, the sixth chapter and first of section two transitions the reader from learning about the radically unchurched to reaching them. As the first area to tackle, Reid focuses on how churches tend to try to do too much to attract the lost that they sometimes become lost themselves (Reid 2002, 121) when all the lost want is to be found and provided with scriptural truths.

To further the belief of the lost, Reid stresses the importance of sharing a truthful and God-filled testimony with those who will otherwise never hear the Gospel (Reid 2002, 134) with proof that even an unplanned testimony can become a religious tract.

Walking the reader from outside in the streets (or trenches) of evangelism to the church building, the author discusses the concept of the evangelistic value of music to the world. Reid stresses the importance of keeping music and the presentation of the gospel as clear as possible. The church should always keep true faith at the core of what is being sang, played, and preached because worship is for God, not for the unchurched – they will follow if the Holy Spirit is present. (Reid 2002, 155).

In the final two chapters of section two, the reader is presented with two very important focuses on reaching the unchurched, the use of new media that is available and being willing to plant a church when and where it is needed. Reid discusses the importance of being radical to reach the radically unchurched using such mediums as the Internet with its countless resources and seemingly endless reach, he discusses the value of Sports Evangelism with the unique audience it reaches and the wide variety of ways to approach that audience, he also discusses the importance of teachers to use School Evangelism in any way possible. Changing gears, the author talks about the importance of planting churches in areas where they are needed the most as this is the only way some lost will ever get found but he warns of the importance of not trying to make the church so different that it loses the central foundation on which it was built – Christ and Scripture (Reid 2002, 186).

As Reid brings his masterpiece to a close, he ties it all together by discussing passion. The unchurched desperately needs to see the passion of the church before they will have any desire to join them. Reid encourages prayerfully seeking God to give the readers passion for the lost, setting their hearts on fire with sharing God's love and awesome gift with a radical world with a radical need.

Evaluation

Dr. Alvin Reid is a man who understands the world's need for Christ and has dedicated his entire life to reaching those who are lost. In his work *Radically Unchurched*, the reader can feel this passion shining from page to page with a bright enough shine that it takes scarce little time to be infected with it. Not only does Reid inform the reader about this amazingly diverse group but also offers a potent mixture of tools to reach them in this indispensable manual for evangelism in the darkened world around the churches.

The world of the radically unchurched is not a sudden development and the early portion of Reid's work offers incredible detail into the rise of this era that few people would have any concrete knowledge of otherwise. The reader will have little question about the authority Reid has in understanding this culture before the second chapter even begins and the remainder of the first half of his book deepens the reader's knowledge exponentially thereafter. This knowledge is given a bitter edge by real life stories that the author has woven in to the fabric of the message to illustrate both depth and width of the challenges an evangelist faces with this slice of the population.

More prominent than Reid's knowledge of the radically unchurched is his passion for reaching them. This fact is, by far, the most overarching element of his entire work. The passion exhibited by Reid is potent and infectious as he rolls through the countless examples where a

simple change in heart or action could drastically alter the future of a radically unchurched but far too often does not occur. Furthermore, the author offers ever-present reminders of how simple it is to reach the lost if Christians would simply stand up and give their fears to the Holy Spirit and be used to draw people to Christ.

While it is certainly refreshing for the reader to see that the author's heart is passionate about reaching others, this can be bit of a hindrance at times. Reid expresses his passion for reaching the lost so often that it sometimes outshines the information being presented and the reader will find themselves wondering how the story changed from the path it was on and arrived at the place the author took it. However, if the reader is as passionate about reaching the unchurched as Reid is, this aspect will not reduce their enjoyment of the information in any way.

As mentioned previously, Reid has a considerable knowledge about the world of the unchurched and provides countless useful insight to the reader in this book. However, this intense information supply sometimes can cause the reader to lose interest in the information being presented as Reid has a tendency to over-inform. Undoubtedly, much can be gleaned from the information that is provided and it will help further the means to reach the unchurched but sometimes a little information goes a long way. The reader should consider the information presented as providing the most complete picture that Reid can muster rather than an attempt to overemphasize the knowledge he possesses.

There is not a Christian in the modern world that could not benefit from reading this important and compelling book. It is too easy to see the world around Christians as the 'enemy' of faith and to react to the radically unchurched with hostility for attempting to disrupt the believer's conservation of their traditional life. Once a reader has a firm grasp on the knowledge Reid presents, the radically unchurched will seem far less as a means for hostility but more as a

focus of love and compassion to reach them and his book provides the means to do just that.

Ministers, especially those from a very traditional background, will find this book as a wonderful resource in understanding how to reach a group that might seem impenetrable at first glance but quickly become one of the most important groups they should be reaching out to. More contemporary ministers will likely find this as the book they have been waiting for, thinking that it is high time someone was able to present what they have been trying to present for years in their ministry and may even help them to see where their own thoughts and assumptions can be further shaped. Furthermore, any person who works directly with youth at any place of worship will find that the concepts expressed by Reid seem to be all of the things youth wished their leaders knew.

There is a vast sea of darkness in this world that grew first from small corners and darkened alleyways that has now spread and permeates almost every corner of the world now. This is not a mass of darkness and sin, but of people who have a gaping hole in their hearts and will try anything to fill it, not knowing it is their own need for a relationship with Christ. The church should be not only deeply hurt with this knowledge but also passionate in their desire to share the very thing that fills that hole. In a world rampant with hopelessness, people are seeking hope and faith in Jesus is the hope they need regardless of how disconnected they may seem from the church. These radically unchurched people can become the radically churched and use their knowledge to reach their brothers, all for the sake of Jesus' command to make disciples of the nation.

Section Two: Reflections on Evangelism

The Challenge

With centuries of history leading the world to a state of postmodernism, the landscape of the unchurched has become frighteningly complex and facing it is not something for the faint of heart. As a minister in training, I could easily look at the world I am to reach and choose to find a nice ‘safe’ church and live out my life there as a minister and hope I do not have to step out on the streets. I have only been a truly transformed Christian for a mere four years and although I have a firm faith that is growing daily and have packed my brain full of knowledge, my understanding and comprehension of God is rudimentary at best. Everywhere that God builds a church; the devil builds a chapel next door¹ so how on earth will I make a difference? That is the challenge I face as I perceive evangelism.

The Solution

The fact of the matter is that there *is* no way on *earth* that I can make a difference but as Philippians 4:13 says *I can do all things through He who gives me strength* (HCSB). My power to reach this lost world is not in me, it is in my connection with the Holy Spirit. The old adage says ‘where there’s a will there’s a way’ and since the Bible tells us that it is the will of God for us to reach to the world, the way is there and it is backed by a will none can contend with. Once I came to the realization that evangelism is not through me but through the Holy Spirit, the concept is a lot less frightening than it once was. I can and will make a difference, that is the truth about evangelism.

¹ Defoe, Daniel. *Anatomy of Melancholy*, part iii, section 4, Memb. 1, Subsect. 1. 1701

The Tools

As I have made my way through Personal Evangelism, I have been provided with more tools in eight weeks than I have ever thought of in my lifetime. Through the matter-of-fact ‘Sharing Jesus Without Fear’ method composed by Bill Fay, I have seen the simplest yet most potent form of evangelism that I have ever known and I have gone on to share this with countless other people. I learned the basics of disciple making and perfecting my internal relationships through *Concentric Circles of Concern* by Oscar W. Thompson and even the core of ‘get it right with God and get it right with self’ have provided me with a powerful balance of my faith.

I have read the countless stories of people who were once lost, some far more than others, in Rainer’s *Unexpected Journey* and have added it to the power of my own conversion to find the ultimate source of belief in why evangelism does matter. I can use my faith as the support for my family and teach beliefs to my daughter and any other children God blesses me with to teach a new generation about faith and the Gospel thanks to *Family to Family* by Pipes and Lee. Finally, I have seen the ‘Radically Unchurched’ and realize that only a few short years ago, I was one of those radically unchurched and wonder why no one read this book and used it for me. But since I know what it is like to be on the other side, I am playing for the right team now and I know the playbook for the other team too!

The Application

As we are reminded in James 2:17 “...*faith by itself, if not accompanied by work is worthless*” (HCSB). So now that I have been given all these tools, it is necessary for me to use them in a way that makes them useful and I must determine how I am best equipped to do so.

After searching my heart and searching God's Word, I have learned that there's not just one field where God wants me to use these gifts but countless fields! I started by making sure that my life in of itself exemplifies the faith that lives in me. I changed my outward actions and appearances in ways that truly reflect He who lives in me and strive daily for humility when I feel the urge to act in a way that is not pleasing to God. Further still, I share my faith with others and have not only found myself meeting some wonderful Christians who I would not have otherwise known I could ally with but have also planted the seeds of hope and faith in many that have heard my faith expressed as I do.

I am actively pursuing a career in youth ministry now because these are the most radically unchurched of the era and I am not fearful of them at all. I will strive daily to reach people, disciple them, and push them to reach others around them. It is my prayer that now that I have stepped out of the darkness thanks to God's grace that I will shine a light so bright that it lights other candles and leads countless people across the line that I once walked across. I sometimes struggle with the fact that my life is no longer my own but once I realize it never was my own anyway, then the situation looks very promising.