

Acts for today**'The Growing Church in the Acts of the Apostles'**

No. 10: Athens

A recent survey of 10,500 households concluded that Britain is in "an advanced state of secularisation". Between 1991 and 1999, it found that belief in God has fallen faster than church attendance: a drop of 5.3% compared with 3.5%. Therefore, how can we engage in cross-cultural mission to our society?

In Acts the early Christians were breaking the boundaries of their Jewish roots to engage with Roman and Greek culture. While Paul's approach to sharing the gospel varied from place to place, he recognised that:

the cultural background of his hearers determined what he presented
his message remains unchanged, although the component parts were rearranged.

What does this mean for us, as we reach out to different cultures e.g. youth, young families, estates etc?

Paul speech to the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17) is perhaps the finest example of culturally attuned preaching in Scripture. Paul was distressed by what he saw (is this always true of us?), but he still acknowledged the religious hunger of his listeners and explained the gospel in terms they could understand. Unlike in the synagogues where he usually went, he could not assume knowledge of the Old Testament in his audience. Therefore, he started with their own poets. What principles of cross-cultural communication do we find in Paul's approach?

He started where they were, acknowledging what God was already doing (23)

He spoke in language that they could understand (28)

He engaged in the issues that concerned them (32)

He challenged their own cultural perspectives (24)

He faced the experience of rejection (32)

Although not planting a church in Athens, Paul did successfully communicate the gospel in ways that the Athenians could understand. How will we face the same challenge in our own day?

**The Rev Paul Hardingham
continues his series on the early Church.**

**Never undertake more Christian service
than you can cover by believing prayer.**

Alan Redpath.