

# WE ARE CALLED TO BE CULTURE MISSIONARIES

*By John Gagliardi*



Like most Christians, I have always understood the “Great Commission” issued by Jesus in Mark 16:15, where he tells us to “go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature”, to mean we are to go into the farthest and uttermost parts of the earth to evangelize the lost.

My understanding was that I should get on an airplane and travel everywhere from Africa to Argentina, from Russia to Romania, from Turkestan to Timbuktu. And for the longest time, that is exactly what I did - I preached in Russia, I preached in China, I preached in Brazil, I preached in Vietnam, I preached in every country I could get myself into.

But then - in the way that our nearest and dearest beliefs are often challenged - I listened to some life-changing teaching from Dr A. R. Bernard of Brooklyn, USA, in which my paradigm was not only shifted, but shattered.

Dr Bernard, in Singapore’s great City Harvest Church, was talking about the different meanings in the original language of the English word, “world”:

- AION - an ‘age’ or period of time
- OIKOUMENE - a geographical area or territory
- KOSMOS - the social order or “culture” around us.

And it is that last one - “kosmos” that is used in Mark 16:15. In other words, to my utter shock, Jesus there is not telling us to travel to foreign countries (although of course He may well do that anyway), but in fact is telling us to preach the Gospel to our own CULTURE! Our own community, our own neighborhood.

For me, that is a huge and mind-bending revelation!

We are called first and foremost to bring the Gospel into the community around us, our own culture, and to be the salt and the light.

I very quickly realized that this is “marketplace ministry” in its purest form. The marketplace is all around us – business, government, education, arts, the media, entertainment – and we are first and foremost called to be ministers right where God has placed us. Right in our own “marketplace”.

It just so happened that soon after I had heard that teaching from Dr Bernard, and had the revelation of the “Great Commission” into our own culture, I had a number of preaching engagements in Medan, Indonesia. And I thought: “Wow! What a great message for Christians in that nation!”

We are called by Jesus to love our neighbours – be positive and helpful members of the local community, to be good citizens and to obey and pray for our government. It was a message that really resonated among the groups I spoke to in Medan – instead of feeling like an isolated Christian minority in the largest Moslem nation on earth, they came to see themselves instead as “ambassadors of Christ” who could operate in excellence and integrity in the local culture, thereby garnering respect and influence.

The Apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:4, that “Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world”. Again, that word “world” is “kosmos”, or “culture”. What a great encouragement! No matter where we find ourselves in our community, no matter how small and unimportant we may feel ourselves to be in the overall scheme of things, we have this blessed assurance that with Christ in us, we are greater than our culture.

Our culture can often seem alien and threatening – be it a different and antagonistic religion, or secular and humanistic, or just materialistic and complacent. But remember we are called to be ambassadors – envoys – into our culture, and to represent the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

We are, in effect, “culture missionaries” – agents of influence and transformation within our societies and communities, much as Joseph and Daniel were within their cultures. Joseph in Egypt, and Daniel in Babylon – both led by example and excellence, and came to a place of huge influence and power.

We can be leaders within our culture by operating always with excellence and integrity, serving as living examples of what “Christ in Culture” (Christos Kai Kosmos) can really do. Remember: ***Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in our culture.***