

7 ESSENTIALS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM, FINAL

This is number seven and the final installment in this series of articles discussing the type of culture we live in today. We have already mentioned 6 facts about our society today and the need to address each area with the gospel. We have observed that we live in a “niche” world (pointing to a need to “target” instead of the “shotgun” approach), a “computerized” world (opening up new areas of communication and visual teaching), a “complex” world (a cry for simplicity), an “informed” world (stressing our need to be factual and educated), a “cold” world (searching for family relationships), a “distracted” world (needing patience and up-to-date methods of communicating the message), and with this article we point to the fact that we live in a “fragmented” world.

Even small towns in America are touched by different races, cultures, backgrounds, and religions today. The fastest growing religion in the world is Islam. It is no longer unusual to see groups of veiled women at the grocery store or K-Mart. Hispanic communities are everywhere. One of the states who accepted the most Vietnamese refugees for settlement, numbering in the thousands, was surprisingly enough the state of Iowa. More and more handicapped people are able to make their own way in society with the help of modern technologies and laws. And amid all this mixture of ability, background, culture, education, and religion, the church of Christ still has the responsibility to reach out and unify people in our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does this mean? If you asked Cedell Fletcher, who used to run a net boat for mullet off Cedar Key, FL, he would tell you, “The smart fisherman goes where the fish are!” There’s not much use in throwing nets when the fish are elsewhere and there’s not much use in continuing to use the same tired methods and talking to the same people who have refused the gospel for years. There are churches that continue to canvas the neighborhoods around their buildings where no one has moved in or out for a decade and no response has been seen in two. Is there a possibility of catching a “fish?” Sure there is, but is it a wise use of talent, effort, and funds to search for one fish when there is a “school” on the other side of the reef? I believe Jesus addressed this in Matt. 7:6 when He spoke of casting pearls before swine. There comes a time when we must quit “doing what we’ve always done” and cast our nets elsewhere.

One congregation noted that it had 30 retirees in its number. In an older neighborhood they questioned the practice of always making every effort to reach young people. Instead, they started a “Golden Agers Class” on Tuesday morning. The last I heard that group of 30 had 65 in attendance.

Our society is “fragmented” and each piece will respond to different aspects of the gospel. We need some dialogue about our differences. The matriarchal black culture responds differently than the “macho” Hispanic culture. What catches the attention of deaf or otherwise handicapped folk is different than upper class, double income, soccer moms and overworked dads. Families vs. singles vs. elderly vs. youth, they’re all different and in our society today they are segmented into different areas sometimes with little communication between the groups.

In a fragmented world the gospel can provide a unifying influence. It just takes some time and thought. Workers need to be recruited. Particular problems and questions can be worked out. And we will all have to stop thinking that everyone feels the way “I” do about things. We must learn the difference between helping folks be conformed to the image of God’s Son and conforming them in our own image. People don’t have to dress like me, recreate like me, or talk like me to be saved. They can be young, old, tattooed, ear-ringed, veiled, red, yellow, black or white and still come to know Christ and be part of His family. The good news of Christ’s sacrifice can make us all one if we will let it.

Carl McMurray