

Future of Anglo American Christianity: Interview with George Patterson

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The decline of Christian churches in Anglo America stands well documented. Mega-churches, emerging churches and house churches represent trends that remain too small to reverse the removal of Christian thought from business ethics and social fora. MentorNet asked veteran church-multiplication advocate and trainer, George Patterson, “Since Anglo America currently has no verifiable, church-planting movement, what kind of churches can multiply in Anglo America?” Patterson enumerated the following ten qualities that such a movement would likely adopt or exhibit.

1. **New wine skins.** Stop trying to push camels through the eye of a needle! Church as we have known it and peddled it round the world no longer works. Church-planting movements have taught us that churches must become intimate, organic, reproducible and mobile. Church leaders must abandon their pretension, office and authority, by assume responsibility to lead and to mentor leaders.
2. **Christ-centred experience.** Teaching, discussion, ethics, worship, spirituality and, above-all, obedience, will focus on the Lord Jesus Christ: who He is, His presence and power, what He promised, specific things that He is doing in the earth, in families and in individuals. Christolatry must trump all other good, valid doctrine, including creationism, personal ethics, charismatic phenomena and even evangelistic outreaches.
3. **Lots of prayer.** The rationalism and wealth that mark Anglo America seem to have displaced conscious dependence on God. Whilst busy Americans may not be able to gather daily for two or three hours of prayer, they must learn to pray a lot, on all occasions, for all kinds of needs and for Kingdom advance. Personal and small-group prayer can prove just as powerful as big group prayer meetings.
4. **Child-like faith.** When you pray, humbly expect God to answer. When children pray, they do not think about whether they be good enough, whether God honours human boldness, whether God interferes in nature, whether others have enough faith. They make their requests simply and shortly, and God usually acts.
5. **Courageous proclamation.** Courage may not be listed as a fruit of the Spirit, but to act with courage is both commended and commanded in Scripture, and reflects strong faith. Tell others what Jesus taught, what the Bible affirms, and what thoughtful Christians are saying, with humility but without hesitancy. Let the Spirit of God confirm your witness and your teaching.
6. **The Bible in practice.** The great heresy of the evangelical movement was to use the Bible as fodder for lessons and sermons, while denying it a role in determining church practice and missionary methods. We believed it but did not trust it to prove practical in modern societies. Spurgeon used to say, “The Bible is like a lion. Do not defend it; let it out of its cage.”
7. **A prophetic voice.** Every movement requires a prophet, a bold leader who speaks with passion, formulates clear, compelling teaching, and serves as an example of what he teaches. Amos (3:7) observed, “The Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.”
8. **Post-modernism.** The future of Anglo America will prove “post-modern” in worldview and social preferences, and the new Christian movements and churches will be launched by post-moderns, not for them by well-meaning moderns. Older believers can serve as cherished mentors to post-modern leaders, but must not dictate to them the rules and forms that caused the current decline.
9. **Effective leadership.** Whilst post-modern worldviews prove more like those of the Bible than did modernist, evangelical rationalism and individualism, post-moderns remain hampered by their refusal to

provide strategic direction, decisive leadership, and training leaders in the way Jesus and His apostles did. Effective church leaders must overcome their group-think enough to provide plans, goals and correction in obedience to Christ.

10. **Three kinds of cell groups.** I call these seeker, seeder and feeder. *Seeker* groups are pre-believers who are willing to investigate Jesus, and often meet in homes of seekers such as Levi, Cornelius and the Philippian jailer; *seeder* groups are new believers who are excitedly launching seeker groups with their friends and families; and *feeder* groups are mature believers who require pastoral care and send willing workers to launch seeker and seeder groups. (See MentorNet #70.) One group might meet the needs of all three types of people, but in older churches it seldom occurs, because feeder groups tend to swallow up the seeder groups before they can multiply.

“What can old, traditional churches, missions and leaders do, in order to foster such a church-multiplication movement in Anglo America?” In brief:

1. **Start mentoring young leaders.** Respect their post-modern social values, while helping them to plan, set goals and evaluate outcomes. Do not dictate forms and methods, but ask questions that will stimulate the young leaders to discover forms and methods that work for their friends and family.
2. **Empower young church planters.** Let them work outside existing churches, performing all kinds shepherding tasks, obeying all the commandments of Jesus, setting no non-biblical qualifications or standards, and raise up their own new leaders, training them in mentored relationships. Where people do not “come to church,” take the church to them!
3. **Leverage post-modern values.** The group orientation and communal values of post-modern adults suit the organic nature of house churches, and the expressive arts can communicate about Jesus and his teachings far more compellingly than do logical, analytical, linear sermonic monologues of the past.
4. **Experience the Presence of Christ.** Let worship focus on the Lord Jesus Christ, his spiritual presence in Christian gatherings, the work of the Holy Spirit through the sacraments, and the love of the Father for his children.
5. **Emphasize prophetic ministry.** The promise of Joel was that the Spirit of God would be poured out on old men and young, men and women, and they would prophesy. Peter proclaimed the fulfilment of that promise at Pentecost, and Paul instructed that prophecy should characterize church gatherings. Intimate gatherings that seek prophecy make no more errors that do seminary-educated clerics resounding from behind their pulpits.
6. **Praise reproduction.** It is the will of God that churches reproduce and that they fill the earth with Christian teaching, both geographically and socially. Teach church multiplication, empower church multipliers, and publicly approve of churches that multiply.
7. **Mobilize many self-supported workers.** For every paid professional, there should be dozens or hundreds of “tent-makers”, that is, their volunteer counterparts having the same gifting.

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