A FRESH LOOK AT EVANGELISM

Responding to a desire to "image" God



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A desire to "image" God
Why is this so? Ideal selves Imago Dei (Exemplary Jesus)
Implications for evangelism



People aspire to reflect attributes of God

- This can motivate faith formation
- Why?
- This should inform our evangelism (and worship and preaching)

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Cross Training : Psychology + Theology

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"Why do previously unchurched people become Christians today?"



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AMONG NEW (FORMERLY UNCHURCHED) CONVERTS

- "better people" or "who they really are" they wanted to be MATCHED what they appreciated about God
- Loving, patient, accepting, forgiving (powerful)
- Eg: God is "rich in love and slow to anger" saying "Nearly every day I just look back on that [song] and think … we're here to love and not be angry."
- Self-transcendent aspirations (self-giving)

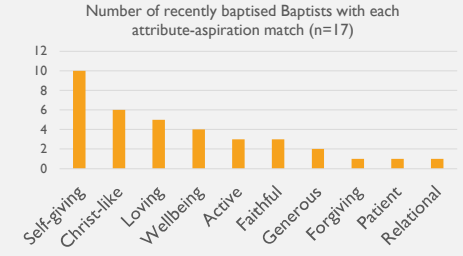
- Desiring, observing, experiencing "relational authenticity" – project of becoming the people they are, imaging the relational God.

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AND AMONG RECENTLY BAPTISED BAPTISTS (AND OTHERS)



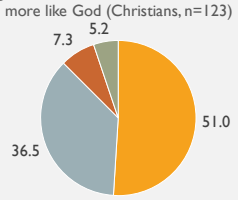
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AND AMONG RECENTLY BAPTISED BAPTISTS (AND OTHERS)

Reflecting on what God is like ... makes me want to be more like God (Christians, n=123)



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Why is this so? Ideal selves and insights from psychology

- Actual, ideal, and ought selves:
  - Actual: what am I like?
  - Ideal: what do I want to be like?
  - Ought: what do others say I should be like?
- Ideal self as aspirational
- Discrepancies between ideal and actual can be motivational towards change

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Why is this so? Imago Dei and insights from theology

- Made in God's image
- To image God
- Dynamic and relational
- Impacts how we live and aspire to live
- It is in knowing we are made in God's image that we have the incentive to imitate God
- Active becoming towards God and godliness

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Why is this so? Imago Dei and insights from theology: Jesus as exemplar and redeemer

- (But the Fall)
- Jesus Christ as exemplar
- Enabling transformation and redemption

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Implications – for talking about God in evangelism

- Theology of imago Dei helps define ideal selves (including for people asking identity-related questions)
- Discern matches between aspirations towards living well and attributes of God
- End goal of Christ-likeness, yet each unique. We are "to become more like Christ as our unique selves" (Balswick et al, *The Reciprocating Self*, p33)

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Implications – for talking about God in evangelism

Christianity offers

- a vision of the ideal self
- a means by which the ideal self can be realised.

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Implications – for talking about God in evangelism

- Recognise motivational importance of ideal selves/self-discrepancy
- Content of religious beliefs is important
- Explore what people perceive to be their ideal selves – encourage ideal selves that are whole and healthy
- Illuminate connection between ideal selves and attributes of God
- Carefully consider images of God that are communicated in worship and preaching etc

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Want to explore more? Study (by distance):

PAST 219/319
"Christian Witness in a Secular World"
(Semester 1, 2027)

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