Mark Greene on the biggest challenge facing the church today... and what we can do about it.
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GLOBALLY, 98% of Christians are neither envisioned nor equipped for mission in 95% of their waking lives. BUT, just imagine if they WERE...
1. The Heart of the Issue

You can win a lot of skirmishes without winning a battle.
You can treat a lot of symptoms without defeating a disease.
And you can do an awful lot of good things without tackling the one thing that might really make the difference.

In the last 20 years, the UK church has taken many, many good and fruitful initiatives in evangelism, in social action, in youth work, in resource development, in a host of areas. However, research reveals two sobering truths:

- Church attendance has declined markedly – we’re down to 6.3 percent monthly, from 7.6 percent in 2000, and 9.6 percent in 1990. The missional opportunity is huge and urgent.
- The vast majority of Christians have not been equipped for mission in their daily contexts, nor are they being helped to live out the abundant life in Christ where they spend most of their time. (See ‘Apprentice 09’ survey, LICC.)

I’m convinced that we are missing something, that the message of the gospel is being partially eclipsed and that this has led to a narrower, less radical, less adventurous understanding of what it means to follow Jesus than the Bible’s compelling picture.

I am also convinced – given LICC’s international connections – that this is not just a critical concern in the West, where the church is in decline, but a vital issue for the church globally, even where the number of people becoming Christians continues to grow. Indeed, as many non-Western commentators have pointed out, there is a crying need for a deepening of discipleship. There is also an urgent need to avoid the mistakes of the Western church.

The challenge is the sacred-secular divide. And it is the malignant foe of fruitful mission and joyful Christian living. There is a better way.

Mark Greene, Executive Director,
The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity,
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2. Symptoms of a Pandemic

Four questions in search of an answer:

- Why do 50 percent of Christians say that they have never heard a sermon on work? And why have they probably not asked for one?
- Why do we pray for teenagers going on short-term missions overseas but not for their daily mission in their local schools?
- Why are so few of our contemporary worship songs about the nitty-gritty of daily life and mission in the world?
- Why do we believe that church-paid ministry and mission is a higher calling than any other?

These are all symptoms of the sacred-secular divide (SSD).

As we shall see, SSD affects pastors and people, children and adults, biblical interpretation and prayer, worship and work, and it has severely limited the scope, content and fruitfulness of the church’s mission.

Now, popular analysis of why the church has failed to make an impact in the West has tended to focus on external factors – ideological, economic and cultural. Ideologically, the rise of modernity and its shift into postmodernity has tended to relegate faith to the private sphere.
Religious faith is a matter for personal, inward reflection – one option among many around which to shape private life choices – but certainly not the basis for significant public policy decisions, nor for shaping the values of our workplaces or institutions.

Other commentators point to the power of consumerism, which vaunts material things not only as pleasurable – which they often are – but also as sources of identity and of self-esteem. I wear Nike, therefore I am.

Others blame the media and the myriad forms of entertainment and communication – the new opiates of the masses – which distract and anaesthetise us from our alienation and pain and prevent us dealing with that most awkward thing, ourselves.

The problem with these diagnoses is that they tend to suggest that the gospel of the crucified and resurrected Jesus is impotent to resist the onslaught of these external forces, never mind offer a credible, transformative alternative. In other words, we blame the world for the demise of Christian values in the world, and perhaps don’t ask ourselves to what extent we might be responsible. John Stott said, ‘You can’t blame the meat for going rotten. That’s what meat does. You blame the salt for not being there to preserve it.’

So, the question is this: Is the church herself limiting the gospel? Is our mission being constrained not so much by the potency of false ideas outside the church, but by the potency of false ideas inside the church?

Yes, we should rejoice in all that local churches are doing in their communities. Who’s running mums and toddler groups; who’s got drop-in centres; who’s voluntarily helping people with drugs and drink; who’s got twice as many youthworkers as the government, who’s got clubs in the afternoon for latchkey kids, who’s voluntarily visiting old people in their homes...? The answer, in many communities, is Christians in the local church. It’s an extraordinary contribution to social capital through formal programmes and millions of acts of spontaneous kindness.

On the other hand, if we ask ourselves ‘Are we having an impact on everyday life beyond the neighbourhood?’ then many would answer ‘Not much’. Some of that is simply lack of awareness of how God may have been using us – like those in Jesus’ lifetime who were entirely unaware that they’d ever given him a cup of water. Nevertheless, given the state of
our country and institutions, Christian influence on the character of our national life is clearly far, far less than the relevance and implications of the gospel demand.

Why?

Well, look at almost any area of church life and you can see the limiting impact of SSD.

Are we helping our children think biblically about what they study?

SSD & Workers

It is because of SSD that the vast majority of Christians feel that they do not get any significant support for their daily work from the teaching, preaching, prayer, worship, pastoral, group aspects of local church life.

No support for how they spend 50 percent of their waking lives. As one teacher put it:

‘I spend an hour a week teaching Sunday school and they haul me up to the front of the church to pray for me. The rest of the week I’m a full-time teacher and the church has never prayed for me. That says it all.’

SSD & Schoolchildren

It is because of SSD that a 17-year-old can go to a superb youth conference with thousands of 12 to 18-year-olds, be encouraged by stunning Bible teaching, engaged in God-honouring worship, offered life-changing prayer, given a vision for a life of service and mission, but never hear the word ‘school’ in relation to mission, never have the call to mission and discipleship connected to the place where they spend a huge proportion of their waking time.

It is because of SSD that David Wilson, the former national leader of the evangelistic organisation Agape, could conclude, ‘We teach gentle Jesus, meek and mild to teenagers in church. Meanwhile, in the world they’re studying nuclear physics. No wonder they drift away from Christianity when they go to university.’

That is the impact of SSD – setting a lower standard of educational expectation for church teaching than for school, treating teenagers like
primary school children, communicating to them that thinking may matter in the world, but not in the church.

In fact, SSD not only affects what we teach in church, it affects our attitude to education in school. It is because of SSD that there’s hardly a child or adult or youthworker who could give you a biblical perspective on maths, even though every child in the land spends an hour a day on maths for at least 11 years. It is because of SSD that Christian commentators have thought long and hard about the *Harry Potter* novels and, more recently, the *Twilight* series – primarily leisure-time reading – and almost entirely ignored the literature our teenagers study at GCSE. On the whole, we don’t help our children think biblically about what they study, or embrace their education, as Daniel did, as a vital preparation for their service in the world.

**SSD & Students**

SSD affects student life too. So it is that a grateful graduate of a fine university could say of their otherwise very supportive, highly purposeful Christian Union: ‘The CU completely ignored why we were at university.’ That is, the CU failed to help Christian students engage biblically with their studies.

SSD is the enemy of biblically engaged educational involvement, academic attainment and long-term social impact.

**SSD & Life in the Neighbourhood**

Similarly, it’s because of SSD that the vast majority of mums at home, or indeed dads at home, do not feel that theirs is a high calling on the frontline of disciple-making. In reality, they not only have the opportunity to nurture their own children to become disciples who can have a long-term impact on the health of the nation, they also have the potential for significant outreach to other parents met at ante-natal classes, nurseries, etc. Sadly, whilst many churches support mums and
toddler groups, they don’t tend to honour and celebrate them as enthusiastically as other forms of disciple-making and mission.

It’s because of SSD that many retired Christians think prayerfully and creatively about how they can use some of their time in church-related activities, but are much less likely to think about how they might continue to use their skills and relationships to make an impact on the world beyond the church’s buildings and programmes.

The abundant life in Jesus embraces our ordinary lives

Life’s a Peach, Not an Orange

SSD is the pervasive belief that life is an orange not a peach, that some segments of our life are really important to God – prayer, church services, church-based activities – but that others aren’t – work, school, university, sport, the arts, music, rest, sleep, hobbies. SSD is like a virus. It pervades the church and pretty much everyone I know has had it and is a carrier. I’ve had it. And I struggle against it all the time.
SSD & Holy Hierarchies

SSD leads us to believe that really holy people become missionaries, moderately holy people become pastors, and people who are not much use to God get a job. Bah humbug. Of course, this is not something that missionaries or pastors themselves believe or would, indeed, ever say; but the reality is that the majority of Christians do have a sense that they are second-class citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and that the 110 waking hours they spend in non-church activities each week are not of any substantial interest to the one who created the world he calls us to steward. SSD tells us that 98 percent of us are not missionaries, ministers or full-time Christian workers. SSD tells us that all Christians may be born equal but full-time Christian workers are more equal than others. It’s a lie. Did Jesus call any of us to be a part-time Christian worker? Or to take up our cross daily, but only when we get home from work or school?

Furthermore, SSD foments dissatisfaction with our contexts and ourselves: ‘Oh, if only I were elsewhere, then God could use me!’ ‘If only I were holier, then God would call me to pastoral ministry or overseas mission.’ The result is that we don’t embrace our contexts, look to see where God is already at work and how we might join in. The grass is not greener somewhere else, the grass is greener where it is watered – with biblical vision, faith-filled expectation and God’s blessing.

Beyond that, SSD teaches us that there is a hierarchy of holiness even among the 98 percent of non-church-paid Christians. SSD teaches us that people involved in the caring professions – nurses, social workers, teachers – are holier than those involved in industry or commerce. Indeed, it’s because of SSD that the church has historically treated business with some distaste, failing to recognise that the poor need jobs, not just aid, and that there is no poverty alleviation without wealth generation. As one businessman put it: ‘The church appreciates my tithe but not the enterprise that gives rise to it.’

The abundant life in Jesus involves living as material human beings. We’re called to work with God to make the world a better place, to produce goods and services that benefit people to the glory of God, to
alleviate poverty by creating jobs as well as offering aid, to work to release potential through endeavour – sand into silicon chips, children into confident adults, disparate individuals into productive teams.

**SSD & The Bible**

Now this is not just an issue for people who are not ordained; it is an issue for those who train us and those who train the trainers. In reality, SSD has shaped the way we read the Bible, the way we have been taught to read the Bible and the way our pastors have been trained to read the Bible.

So, for example, research I conducted showed that Christians, in this case primarily evangelical, found the preaching and teaching in their churches least helpful where they spent most time – work and home (see www.licc.org.uk/greatdivide).

Nationally, 50 percent of Christians have never heard a sermon on work. And if you explore it further and say ‘Okay, not a sermon, but would you be able, in two or three minutes, to give a biblical view of what work is and what Jesus would say about it and its role in your life?’, you’d get about the same response. Actually, you might get a worse response. Here is something that people spend 65 percent of their lives doing in ‘the public arena’ as ‘ordinary Christians’, something so central to the life of every community and every nation – yet they are often not helped to do it. How could this be?

How can it be that the ‘People of the Book’, the people of the God of all creation, are actually least well equipped to live Christianly where they spend most of their time? How can it possibly be that Christians have not been given a biblical vision for the role of daily work in God’s purposes in time and eternity? After all, it’s as creator/worker that God is first introduced to us – Genesis 1:1. It’s work that is the primary task that Adam is given to do – to release the potential of God’s creation even as he cares for it – Genesis 2:15. And work is a theme that finds expression throughout the Bible: in the story of Cain and Abel, in the first big construction project – the ark – and in the second – the tower of Babel.

Work is an intrinsic part of the way the biblical story unfolds. We are invited to think about Abraham’s dealings as a wealthy herdsman, to reflect on Jacob’s
transactions with Laban, Joseph's role under Potiphar and Pharaoh, Moses' leadership, Jethro's consultancy, Joshua's generalship, Ruth and Boaz's labour on the farm...

However, the problem is not primarily to do with work. No, the church's failure to engage with work, school and university are symptoms of a much deeper and wider problem that affects our attitudes to parents at home, to artists and to the retired. The key problem is not that we have failed to regard work as significant but that we have failed to regard all of life as significant. This is reflected in how we do church together.

SSD & The Life of the Church

A few years ago I was asked by Graham Kendrick to analyse the themes and theology of contemporary hymns and songs, with particular reference to whole-life discipleship. His concern was this: ‘Are we perpetuating an abstract spirituality?’ Broadly speaking, the answer to his question was ‘Yes’. You certainly won't find many songs that express the kind of gritty engagement with daily life that you find in David's psalms, with his frequent references to the tools of his trade, his sense of God's intervention in his daily life as soldier, songwriter, husband, adulterer, fugitive, father, general, king...

Similarly, SSD affects our prayer life. It leads to people in home groups praying by name for the contacts of overseas missionaries, but not knowing the name of the boss or colleague or grandchildren of anyone in their home group, never mind praying for them.
SSD & Where God Works

SSD limits our sense of where God might work. Yes, God may heal someone physically in a sanctuary or a home group, but does it occur to us that he might heal on the factory floor or in the offices of an advertising agency in a New York skyscraper? Well, he certainly healed my former boss’s PA. Furthermore, the idea that Jesus might actually be discipling us in our primary arena of occupation rarely hits our own or our pastor’s radar. But where are the challenges to Christlike character more acute – in a factory or a home Bible study? In which context is it more difficult to display the fruit of the Spirit or think in ways that do not conform to the surrounding culture? What a difference it might make if I began to ask questions like these wherever I find myself:

- Have I seen God’s hand at work here?
- What is God teaching me? How is he changing me?
- What do I sense he might be doing here?
- How does my faith in the God for whom all things are possible change how I view this context?

We should be asking each other, ‘Where do you spend your time in the week?’ and then discipling each other for the contexts we find ourselves in. On the whole, we aren’t.

We have a leisure-time Christianity, not a whole-life Christianity.

SSD & Our Devotional Life

And you can see the impact of a focus on leisure-time
in the way that SSD affects the practice of our devotional life. Think, for a moment, about how much devotional material revolves around taking time away from the frontline of family, work and school – quiet times, fasting, silence, retreats. All these are healthy spiritual disciplines of separation. But there’s been much less emphasis on material that helps us connect to God, hear his voice and practise his presence in the midst of life – out on the frontline – the spiritual disciplines of engagement. Prayer is wi-fi, not just dial-up.

**SSD & Being Human**

The impact of SSD goes deeper still.

It affects our understanding of our very humanity. SSD makes people believe that art, music and the multifarious ways in which human beings express their God-given human creativity have no place in the kingdom of God – unless they have overtly biblical themes.

Similarly, SSD leads to a negative view of the body, and of physical pleasures. By contrast, the Bible affirms the material world as created by God, reminds us that Jesus had a body and does still, promises that eternal life includes a new body and involves a new earth, as well as new heavens. The Bible also celebrates the emotional and psychological pleasures of good wine, bread and oil, not just their physiological benefits. Wine is given to ‘gladden the heart’, Psalm 104 tells us, not just to reduce the likelihood of a heart attack. And it is surely not merely for symbolic reasons that Jesus’ first sign in John’s Gospel was to provide a great deal of rather excellent wine to keep a wedding party humming.

SSD, however, ignores the way the Bible affirms enjoyment of the beauty of God’s creation and of people’s creativity and prowess. It seeks to make us feel that relishing the rich, relaxed ‘chook-chook-chook’ of the common blackbird, or the breathtaking originality of Hendrix’s guitar on *All Along the Watchtower*, or a really good joke, or the well-timed crack of leather on willow are really a waste of time, and are not regenerative, restorative, providential gifts from our Creator-Father to his children.
SSD & Holiness

Indeed, holiness, as the book of Leviticus makes abundantly clear, is far from being some ethereal, otherworldly spirituality. Rather, holiness manifests itself in how we live out our lives in the material world. It’s about disease control (Leviticus 12-16); godly relationships (Leviticus 18); honest scales and weights (Leviticus 19:36); telling the truth, avoiding slander (Leviticus 19:11, 16); ensuring the poor have food (Leviticus 19:9) – doing all to the glory of God.

This is not about giving God’s people some teaching on a few key topics, but about giving God’s people new eyes to see the high and full-orbed calling of whole-life discipleship.

In summary, SSD has affected almost every area of church life and it has limited mission in four main ways:

- It has limited mission

  **GEOGRAPHICALLY**

  usually to within a few miles of the church building or far, far away.

- It has limited mission in terms of

  **PERSONNEL**

  since mission tends primarily to be seen as the province of church-paid people.

- It has limited mission in terms of

  **TIME**

  since SSD tends to confine most people’s mission activity to their leisure time – evenings and weekends.

- It has limited the

  **SCOPE OF THE GOSPEL**

  and the message that we share with others. It’s no longer about all our life and all our being.

That is why SSD is the greatest missiological challenge facing the church. Far from ‘the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world’ we have a small percentage of the church taking a partial gospel to far, far fewer people than are actually known by the Christians in our congregations.
3. Healing our Perspective

SSD is a virus that affects every area of the Christian life. At root, it stems from a false view of God. As such, the primary antidote is a renewed grasp of the character and purposes of God in Christ and the persevering application of that understanding to every area of the Christian life.

SSD does not just dehumanise people; it does a profound disservice to our picture of God. It limits the apparent scope of his concern to a very narrow band of activities, and thereby blinkers our vision of how wide and long and high and deep is his love. And how splendid he is. SSD makes us think that God is like a parent who is only interested in one aspect of our lives, say, our academic performance. Yes, they help us with our homework, discuss ideas with us, take us to pertinent exhibitions, fund relevant trips, and encourage us to work hard, sleep well and eat lots of fish. And we really appreciate them for that. But they aren't interested in our love of tennis, or early medieval lute music, or Scrubs, or our entrepreneurial ability to make money selling snacks bought at discount shops to our fellow pupils in school breaks. Wouldn't it be so much better to have a parent who is interested in all of our life?

Furthermore, to reduce God to a deity interested in only one area of life is like reducing Leonardo da

The more we appreciate the range of God’s loving interest, the more we appreciate his splendour and majesty.
Vinci to being solely the painter of *The Mona Lisa*. Certainly, *The Mona Lisa* is a masterpiece, but if we base our assessment of Leonardo’s genius on one painting, that would severely limit our appreciation. We’d be ignoring a number of other masterpieces, including *The Last Supper*, and 13,000 pages of notes and drawings, which brilliantly bring together art and natural philosophy. We’d also be ignoring his prowess as an engineer and the extraordinary range of his inventiveness in design – musical instruments, hydraulic pumps, reversible crank mechanisms, finned mortar shells, a steam cannon and, famously, a flying machine. Together, that’s a whole lot more impressive than being the painter of even one of the world’s greatest pictures. How much more is that the case with our great God? The more we appreciate the range of his loving interest, the more we appreciate his splendour and majesty.

In fact, our Father in heaven is interested in all of our life. We see it in the beauty of the surroundings he created for Adam and Eve in Eden; we see it in his intense interest in what Adam would name the animals and the birds – such a mundane task, really; we see it in his tenderness as he makes clothes for his naked, rebellious children; we see it on every page of the Bible. And we see his interest in *all* things supremely in the work of his Son on the cross.

**Creation & All Things**

In Colossians 1, Paul affirms that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. He then clarifies why:

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (v 16).


Now here are two reasons for Jesus’ abiding interest in the material world:
1. He created it
2. It was created for him

If ‘all things’ were created by and for Christ, why wouldn’t he be interested in the impact that our activities in the kitchen, at school, in factories, fields and offices have on his creation?

**The Cross & All Things**

However, the climax of Paul’s argument is not a robust theology of divine creation, but a startling affirmation of the comprehensive scope of Jesus’ work on the cross. God is working through Jesus:

‘to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross’ (v 20).

Jesus’ sacrifice is not only intended to offer all human beings the opportunity for reconciliation with him, but to reconcile all things, all matter, the entire cosmos to himself. Jesus’ work on the cross serves to bring all things back into proper relationship with him.

**The Future & All Things**

Similarly, in Revelation 21:5, he who is seated on the throne says, ‘I am making everything new!’ Now there are two words for ‘new’ in Greek. There is ‘new’ in the sense of going down to the shops and, for example, buying me a different tie. That is not the sense of the word ‘new’ here.

Here the word means ‘renewed’. That is, my tie will not be replaced but renewed, transformed into a lustrous blend of sapphire and ruby and emerald, with strands of titanium for strength, and slivers of diamond for sparkle, a tie gleaming so brightly that it will make a Lady Gaga outfit look like a funeral director’s suit.

In sum, SSD not only denies God’s intentions in creation, it severely limits the scope of what Jesus did on the cross.

Yes, Jesus came to die to satisfy the wrath of a holy, loving father, to take away the sin of the world. He came so that many would be rescued from futility and hell, so that many would come to know him and love him and spend time and eternity with him; but he also came that we might have abundant life, life to the full. And he calls his servants to cooperate with him in making his world as much like he intends it to be before he returns. The prayer ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it
is in heaven’ is a prayer for today, even if it will only be fully realised in the future. ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done in my office, my school, my football club, my local council, my home...’

This is the great project God calls all of us to be involved in – the reconciliation and renewal of God’s world. Indeed, when SSD is replaced by a whole-life ethos it enables us to begin to see the imaginative possibilities of ordinary life lived with gospel resources. Indeed, the challenge to the twenty-first-century church is not one that we should imagine can be addressed by a new set of programmes. Rather, it is one that must be addressed by the rediscovery of a whole-life Christianity that, in turn, will shape all our attitudes and activities.

**Whole-Life & Mission**

Our picture of the church in the ghetto, in the corner, is replaced by the realisation that Monday through Saturday the people of God are not hemmed into a corner but out in the world, touching scores of people.

You certainly have lots of contacts if you go to school or university or work, or if you’re a member of a club or take your children to school, or go shopping or live in a retirement home. As the World Council of Churches put it in 1954:

*’The real battles of faith today are being fought in factories, shops, offices and farms, in political parties and government agencies, in countless homes, in press, radio and television, in the relationship of nations. Very often it is said the church should go into the spheres but the fact is that the church is already in those spheres in the persons of the laity.’*

In reality, the majority of Christians are already in potentially fruitful contexts for witness and ministry. Their workplace, for example, not only offers the opportunity to develop relationships through which people may meet Jesus, but can also play a significant role in social transformation. After all, if we want better schools, shaped by Christian values, we will need better teachers, whose own sense of identity as well as their teaching is shaped by the Bible; if we want justice in our courts, we will have to look to lawyers and the police; if we want trust in business, we had better start where we work.
...to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:20
Whole-Life and a New Imagination

Indeed, a whole-life perspective enables us to see that every context we find ourselves in is not just a place to display Christian character – to model the ways of Jesus – but also a place to minister to others, to be a mouthpiece for truth and justice and the gospel, to be a maker of disciples and to be a maker of culture – a shaper of the way things are done.

After all, a Christian secretary in an office may have the opportunity to ‘pastor’ more people in a day than a pastor; a doctor may have more opportunities to offer wisdom and comfort to those in suffering than a vicar; a 14-year-old at school may have more opportunities to share Jesus in a day than a church-paid youth evangelist.

Whole-Life and a New Way of Being Church

When is the body of Christ the body of Christ? In current practice, the answer often is: when we are doing things together – either actually in the church building or organised from the church building. Despite recent growing affirmation of the ministry and priesthood of all believers, this is almost always understood as the ministry and priesthood of all believers acting within the local church community. However, a whole-life perspective changes how we see ourselves, and others, in the body of Christ.

Indeed, all the things we do together as the gathered community of God’s people – our teaching, our worship in song, our sharing in the bread and wine, our praying together – all our practices are intended to help shape us for fruitful living in the world.

We are always members of the body of Christ, whether we are gathered in a worship service or scattered on our frontlines in the world. Even if we are the only Christian when we go to a coffee morning, or work, or to the shops, we still go as the individual representative of Christ’s body. So we should actively seek the prayers and support of our brothers and sisters for those contexts, and we should actively look for ways to encourage others in their roles, both in and beyond church activities, and learn how we can do things ‘together’, even when we are physically apart.
We might formally commission shop assistants for their work, or formally commission people who are about to retire into a new phase of service for the king of kings, or school kids for their mission and ministry in their school. We might put local clubs and shops and businesses on our prayer lists, along with the homeless project and the Monday evening soccer sessions for teenage boys. More simply, we might just get to know each other a bit better and celebrate our various enthusiasms...

**Whole-Life & Confidence**

One of the reasons many Christians have lost confidence in the gospel is because we may not have a testimony of how Jesus has indeed helped us in our ordinary everyday lives. And that tends to make us less enthusiastic to share the good news with others. After all, if my neighbour's number one issue is their fractious marriage and I don't have a testimony of how God has helped me or someone else in marriage or relationships, then what kind of good news do I have to offer? Yes, I still have the truth to proclaim, but do I have a ‘way’ to point to and ‘life’ to testify to? Similarly, if my colleague’s number one issue is their stressful job and I can't share a testimony of how God helps people in times of pressure, then what kind of gospel do I have to offer? Yes, I still have a wonderful truth to proclaim, but will I be confident to proclaim it when I don't believe that Jesus really can help my colleague with their life issues?

So a recovery of the whole-life gospel leads us to expect that Jesus wants to change us, wants to help us in every aspect of our life. The whole-life gospel also makes it clear that Jesus expects us to help one another discover and appropriate the lavish resources of word and Spirit and fellowship that will enable us to live out the gospel of abundant life: God helping us to turn difficult relationships into purposeful companionship; repetitive, even boring work into fruitful service for the king of the universe; pay rises into opportunities for generosity – God transforming the ordinary. In turn, that gives us much more confidence to talk about Jesus. He's not just an idea, he's a living person, who transforms people’s lives today – see what the Lord has done. After all, many people today – Christian and not – are looking for an integrated way of life that empowers them to be consistent in values and action in every area of life – and therefore to be authentic. And that is precisely the kind of life Jesus lived and wants for us all.
4. Ways Ahead

So, how shall we move forward?

Let us rediscover the riches of the whole-life gospel, and figure out together how to live it and disciple others in it too. Not that this will be easy. It’s not easy for a ten-year-old to change the culture of their primary school. It’s not easy for someone confined to their home to see how they can minister to those who don’t know Jesus. It’s not easy for a retired professional to obey God’s command to pick up litter and trust him for the results. It’s not easy for a businessman to forego the profit from a popular product by refusing to sell it on moral grounds. It’s not easy to be a parent with three children under two and model love, joy, peace, patience, self-control... It’s not easy but... testimonies abound.

We should not underestimate the profound impact a whole-life gospel orientation will have on us as individuals, on our churches and our collective potential to make an impact on our society. This will undoubtedly take us beyond our comfort zones. Yet, as we seek to live all of life before the Lord, we will, by his grace and Spirit, become different people.

Ways Ahead for the Local Church

As it relates to the local church, we need a radical return to whole-life disciple-making as the central task of the body of Christ. At least, that’s what we need if we want to win more than skirmishes and make sure that the next generation of Christians are better equipped to live and share the whole-life good news than we are now. As Bishop Graham Cray put it at an LICC event:

‘Churches have to realise that the core of their calling is to be disciple-making communities whatever else they do.’

And that has profound implications for the focus and orientation of ministerial training and theological education.

Indeed, it’s because of the need to help churches become whole-life
disciple-making communities that LICC began the Imagine Project some seven years ago. It’s a project designed to help local churches bring about the profound shift in ethos and culture that is required to root out SSD and make whole-life disciple-making central and sustainable in the life of the church (see www.licc.org.uk/imagine).

Still, we are under no illusions. SSD is a potent virus that has often been diagnosed but is very hard to defeat. Indeed, in 1974 the global gathering of the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelisation rightly summoned the worldwide church to ‘holistic’ mission, and included the vital role of social action as an essential component of the good news. This has led, praise God, to a new and enormously fruitful wave of Christian engagement with the poor. However, ‘holistic’ or ‘integral’ mission, as it is now currently understood and practised, stops short of embracing a vision for whole-life, all of life, everyday mission for every believer that is the inevitable outworking of a whole-life gospel. Broadly speaking, the ‘holistic’ mission movement has become church or parachurch-centred and, for most Christians, leisure-time based, which was certainly not the intention of the Lausanne Movement. SSD has limited its scope and its massive potential for fruitfulness.

More Than One Thing

SSD has been in the church’s bloodstream for nearly two millennia, and it will not give up its dominion without a fight. It will be hard to defeat precisely because it affects every aspect of church culture. It won’t be uprooted by sermons alone – though it is unlikely to be uprooted without a renewed grasp of what the Bible has to say about God’s comprehensive vision for human flourishing. Still, it won’t be uprooted by sermons alone because the likelihood is that the prayer life, the worship life, the group life, the conversational life of the church will still be brimming with the culture of SSD, and will quench the sparks of whole-life discipleship.
that the sermons might have ignited. To change a culture you always need to change more than one thing.

Furthermore, SSD will also not be overcome merely by earnest effort, multiple initiatives and biblically-based reasoning – though all are required.

Whole-life & Repentance

SSD is a way of thinking and living that we need to repent of.

That is, we need consciously and prayerfully to turn away from this flawed thinking that has so limited our understanding of the scope of Jesus’ interest in his world, and that has so falsely represented the glorious riches of the good news. It has become part of our system and so, like Nehemiah, perhaps we should bring this false system to the Lord, confess it, seek his forgiveness and crave his blessing for a different future.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Perhaps, too, some of us have colluded with the system – we’ve known that God was a God of all of life and chosen not to pursue what would inevitably be a more difficult, more costly path. We’ve been content, or perhaps resigned, to being spectators in the stands, not participants in the adventure. Or perhaps we’ve had an intimation that there must be more to the Christian life than the Christian life we’ve been leading, and we’ve suppressed that thought.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.
Perhaps we’ve sat in church Sunday after Sunday listening to stories of pastors and overseas missionaries and social activists and known that there was more, that there were tales to be told of schoolchildren and builders, cleaners and accountants that would never be told. And worse, that there were people who, as one NHS worker put it to me, would ‘die without knowing the ministry God had for them’. And we knew. But we weren’t prepared to challenge the status quo for fear of offending the leadership or bringing disunity.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Perhaps we’ve been in leadership and we know that God has called us to make disciples for all of life and we have not had the stomach to take on what we assume will be stiff congregational resistance to such a path. Perhaps we’ve preferred to recruit volunteers for leisure-time initiatives rather than propel disciples into whole-life mission. Perhaps we haven’t really had the confidence that God can use our people to further his kingdom where they are – in that factory job they hate, with the grandchild they have lunch with every week, in that secondary school. Perhaps we haven’t really been interested to go and see if he already is using them.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

None of us are immune. And we are no doubt blind to SSD’s insidious influence in many areas of our lives. Getting rid of SSD is a process. But repentance is the first and decisive step on the path to healing and wholeness, the path to renewed joy in God and to living with eyes of wonder and gratitude in his world.

The potential impact of breaking down SSD is to release hundreds of thousands, millions of ordinary Christians into the epic purposes of God. The potential is to see whole communities of God’s people envisioned and equipped and supported for whole-life mission and discipleship where they spend most of their time, among the people they already know. Of course, living out the whole-life gospel may sound all rather daunting but it begins with little things – praying about an area of your life you normally ignore, inviting a pastor to visit you at work, asking someone to tell you their life story, discovering a child’s enthusiasms or a teenager’s favourite song, looking back on the day through God’s eyes... little things that help you pay attention to people and places and what God might be saying through it all.
Imagine what might happen if the 98 percent of God’s people who are currently not envisioned for daily mission were envisioned and equipped and supported and prayed for. What a difference that might make to the people they know, the organisations they serve, the nations they are part of and, indeed, to themselves. We have all been created to be part of the adventure of the mission of God, to abide in him and let him transform every aspect of our lives. Jesus is Lord of all.

**A Vision of Shalom**

The gospel is holistic. It affects all of life and it affects every aspect of who we are. The light is intended to shine through every pane of glass in the stained glass window. It affects our minds, our hearts and our bodies because God calls on us to love him thus, with our minds and our hearts and our bodies. And so our testimony and our service to the watching, listening world will be holistic – ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good, in all his ways.’

Indeed, the Hebrew concept of ‘shalom’ relates to all of life. Its essential meaning is not peace; its essential meaning is wholeness. So what we at LICC yearn for ourselves, and for God’s people, is that day-by-day, hour-by-hour, we might know true shalom of heart and mind and body. And we hope that you will join us in praying, in wrestling with Scripture, in creative experiments, and generous sharing of what you’re discovering so that together we might learn how to live, share and proclaim this life of shalom in Christ. So please do think about connecting with us via the web or the tear-off card.

In all your ways, may you walk in step with the Prince of Shalom, and be empowered by his Spirit, so that our Father’s name might be hallowed and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

May it be so.
Next Steps

Using this Booklet

There are two main ways in which you might use this booklet.

First, we hope it will be a springboard for you to think about your own discipleship and the impact of SSD in your life and church. There are some ideas below about how to do this, some small steps in tackling SSD that you could consider, and there’s more on our website – www.licc.org.uk/greatdivide.

Second, if this challenge resonates with you then you might see yourself as part of a countermovement to SSD. Movements need momentum and you could contribute to the growth of this movement to tackle the great divide by getting this message into people’s hands. Pass the booklet on to a friend, or your pastor or leaders in your church. If you’re in a position to do so, perhaps you might consider buying copies for others.

1. On the Web

Go to www.licc.org.uk/greatdivide to explore a number of tools, resources and ideas related to whole-life discipleship, including:

For you/your small group:

- ‘The Great Divide Discussion Guide’ – questions to help you explore the message of this booklet.
- ‘Life on the Frontline’ – a six-session DVD resource for small groups and churches to inspire and equip Christians to make a difference on their frontlines.
- ‘You and Your Frontline’ – questions to help you think about fruitfulness where you are.
- An imaginative prayer walk round your frontline.
For your church:

- The Imagine DVD is a great springboard to explore the impact of SSD in your church, and specific scenes can be used in church services, seminars and groups. For details, and a range of connected resources, see the LICC website. The DVD is available from the LICC online shop – www.licc.org.uk/shop.

- A questionnaire for group use: ‘How Whole-Life is Your Church?’

- TTT – tips on how to use two-minute interviews in your worship service on what someone from your congregation will be doing ‘This Time Tomorrow’.

- ‘One-Degree Shifts’ – ideas that have helped churches create a whole-life culture.

2. Good Reading

Imagine Church, Neil Hudson
Our time in church needs to equip us to be salt and light in our time out there. Drawn from the hard-won lessons of the Imagine Project, this book offers help and hope from churches which have begun to do just that.

Whole Life, Whole Bible, Antony Billington et al
Written from the conviction that God’s word illuminates every part of existence, this series of 50 readings and reflections shows how our lives are bound up with, and shaped by, God’s plan to restore a broken universe.

Celebrating Life: Beyond the Sacred-Secular Divide, Graham Buxton
Exploring literature, art and science, politics and work, Buxton describes a holistic, theological framework for engaging with life in all its dimensions, and argues for an engagement by the church in society beyond the sacred-secular divide.

Maximum Life: All for the Glory of God, Julian Hardyman
In this upbeat, biblically astute, winsome book, the pastor of Eden Baptist Church, Cambridge, explores how life in all its variety – work, windsurfing and washing up – can be lived to the glory of God.

For material on the frontline of work – group DVDs, Bible studies, articles, etc. go to www.licc.org.uk/work-forum/.
About the Author

Mark Greene has been LICC’s Executive Director since 1999. Before that, he served as Vice-Principal and Lecturer in Communications at the London School of Theology. And before LST, he spent 10 years working in advertising in London and New York, and has been a pioneer in workplace ministry for two decades. He specialises in helping Christians and churches engage with contemporary society. He has spoken widely on the topic in the UK, and internationally.

Mark has produced a variety of workplace resources, notably Thank God it’s Monday and the widely distributed Supporting Christians at Work – Without Going Insane. In addition, he has developed Christian Life & Work, a six-part small group DVD resource, and edited Pocket Prayers for Work. His latest book, published in Spring 2014, Fruitfulness on the Frontline is a joyously liberating exploration of the many ways God can and does work through his people, in the ordinary places we find ourselves day by day, among those who don’t know Jesus – our frontlines.

About The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity

LICC was founded in 1982 by the Revd Dr John RW Stott, who saw the urgent need to enable Christians and their churches to connect the living word of the living God to the issues they face in a rapidly changing world.

Today our work has two main thrusts:

❖ To envision and equip ‘ordinary’ Christians for their frontlines in the world.

❖ To enable local church communities to become whole-life disciple-making communities – and stay that way.

With these goals in mind, our team works to develop and distribute biblically robust, culturally astute, practical wisdom for living as missionary disciples. As such, we are engaged in innovative field research, consulting, writing, speaking and broadcasting and are increasingly working in partnership with major denominations and agencies to test, develop and disseminate what we learn together.

Connecting with LICC

We hope that this booklet will help you in your own context and that you will want to join with us in the cause of whole-life discipleship, to the glory of the one who is Lord of all. To sign up for our free emails, receive our mailings or become a ‘Friend of LICC’ fill out the tear-off flap, go online (www.licc.org.uk), or call us on 020 7399 9555.
Dear LICC

Thank you for highlighting the problem of SSD, I want to join you in being part of the solution as follows:

☐ I want to distribute this booklet to my friends, family and church leaders and members – please send me _____ additional copies of this booklet* so that I can alert others to the problem of SSD and the importance of whole-life discipleship.

☐ Please sign me up to receive LICC’s weekly emails and quarterly mailings to inspire and resource my journey into whole-life discipleship.

☐ I want to become a Friend of LICC – please send me information on how I/my church can partner with you in promoting whole-life discipleship.

☐ I wish to make a donation to support the work of LICC, and enclose a cheque (payable to ‘LICC Limited’) accordingly.

☐ I want to remember LICC in my will. Please send me information on leaving a legacy to LICC.

Title ____________________________________________

Name ____________________________________________

Address _________________________________________

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Postcode _________________________________________

Email ____________________________________________

Alternatively, you can email your response to mail@licc.org.uk

*Further copies are available at a cost of £2 per copy for up to 50 copies or £1.50 per copy for 51-100 copies (p&p within the UK is FREE). If you require more than 100 copies, please call LICC on +44 (0) 20 7399 9555 for a special rate. Please make cheques payable to ‘LICC Limited’. To pay by credit or debit card, please call LICC on the number above.
In this compelling essay, Mark Greene, LICC’s Executive Director, explores the stifling, pervasive, life-denying impact of the sacred-secular divide on Christian mission and living, and reveals how overcoming it can:

expand our vision,
inspire our mission,
release our churches,
broaden our minds,
enlarge our hearts,
nourish our souls,
thrill our spirits,
free our imaginations

for faithful following and fruitful living in all of life.

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