

Artizo Discussion Paper – Section: Evangelize Boldly

Rico Tice on Evangelism and ‘Christianity Explored’

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Editor’s note: Michael Horton sat down with Rico Tice in the spring of 2004 to discuss Tice’s evangelistic program, Christianity Explored. Rico Tice is associate minister at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London.

MR: During our Oxford days at Wycliff Hall, Rico was running around like a chicken with his head cut off trying to meet all of his pressing evangelistic engagements. Sharing the gospel is the passion of his heart and I wanted him to explain a new program he’s developed. It isn’t a cookie-cutter process; it isn’t “four steps to this” or “three steps to that.” It’s using the Gospel of Mark and making it accessible to even the least prepared layperson so that anybody can really share the gospel by going through the Gospel of Mark. Rico, it’s just a pleasure to have you with us.

RT: It’s lovely to be here. I think we need to get back to this issue of letting the Gospel tell the gospel. God has given us the Gospels. The reason I’ve chosen Mark is because it’s the shortest. And I just found that as I was working with rugby players, if you kept it short it was quite helpful. Mark is a short, very simple Gospel, and the longing of my heart is that every member of the church family, literally from the 13 year old to the 87 year old will feel, “D’you know? I could open up Mark’s Gospel with my next door neighbor. It’s simple enough for me to be able to pray that they will be spiritually hungry and then pray that I will have the courage to say, ‘Would you like to have a look?’ And in the privacy of our own home I can get the Gospel open.” So Christianity Explored, like any other course, will come and go; I don’t mind if people put that in the bin, but what I’m longing for is that they’ll be equipped for life to share the gospel.

MR: And say, I can do this.

RT: And say, I can do this, exactly. What I found, working on staff at a church as an evangelist, is that my job is not just to proclaim the gospel myself, but to be equipping the church family to do it. So I’m speaking from the front, but I’m also wanting to get them into small groups, and above all to get them to be able to operate one to one. And I’m not going to be able to equip them to teach Mark’s Gospel, I’ve found, unless I put them in the training simulator which was running Christianity Explored, this course for non-Christians. So non-Christians would come, and we’d say ask any question you want. We’re going to look at Mark’s Gospel. We begin the course with a question, “If God were here and you could ask him any question, what would it be?” So we’re listening to them, but then we’re presenting Mark’s Gospel. As the church family helped me present Mark’s Gospel, they then grew the

confidence to think “I could do this alone, one to one. I could do this in my workplace. I could meet with someone at 9:30 in the evening when they’re free, whatever their schedule, and open the Gospel up.”

MR: A lot of our readers probably have heard of the Alpha Course. It was the cover of Christianity Today, “The Alpha Brits are Coming” was the title. Niki Gumball and others at a church in center city London, Holy Trinity Brompton, have developed a course that reaches out, has had a massive impact. Now a lot of people are comparing and contrasting Christianity Explored and Alpha. Christianity Explored is having an enormous impact now in the United Kingdom and is now coming to the States. What are some of the differences that our listeners probably should know about?

RT: Well, we’ve learned a great deal from Alpha, and Niki Gumball has been gracious and came to the Christianity Explored launch. I hugely appreciated that. I think what Niki has tried to do with Alpha is say here is a helicopter ride around the Christian faith: this is who Jesus is, this is why he died, week three, week four, how can I know I’m a Christian, what about the Bible, a weekend away on the Holy Spirit, prayer, healing. I’ve come along and I’ve said, well there are lots of lessons—particularly relationship lessons—to learn from Alpha, but what I want to do is walk through Mark’s Gospel with people.

And there are only three questions that I want to address: Who do you think Jesus is? (His identity.) Why did he come? (His mission.) What does it mean to follow him? (His call.)

My aim is to get people to make one move as we go through Mark’s Gospel. I want them to understand that they are no longer good people going to heaven, but they’re sinners going to hell. And I think we hit that much harder than Alpha does. Not that Alpha doesn’t speak of judgment; it does. But what we’re trying to say is, look it’s not just that sin is a problem and it leads to judgment. But the real problem is I’ve got God angry at my sin. So we want to have a course that is really God-centered in terms of saying, “I may be very comfortable with my sin, the issue is that God is not comfortable.”

MR: And the atonement makes sense in that context.

RT: It does indeed. I have to understand that God loved Jesus, but also at the cross God was punishing Jesus for my sin; that is how serious my sin is. And I will spend eternity in hell paying for my sin if I reject the death of Jesus. And particularly, I think the battle is to persuade people that right at the heart of sin is not believing in Jesus.

Now I have two nephews, Dolton and Patrick, and they’re lovely little boys. If they walked into the room now and you ignored them, cut them down, or were unpleasant to them in any way, we’d be enemies. We must get people to understand that they may think they are living thoroughly pleasant lives, but in holding God’s Son at a distance when he sent him to die makes them God’s enemy. It’s the heart of sin. We find in England (and it’s probably because

we're quite Pelagian), we really don't have a big enough view of sin. It takes weeks to persuade people that sin is the problem. We're saying to people, "Jesus didn't come for good people but for bad people" so the qualification for being a Christian is not are you good enough, but are you bad enough? Jesus said, "I didn't come for the righteous, but for sinners." And if they still think they're okay, we say let's look at Mark chapter 7. And see that the heart, Mark 7 in verse 20, is a fountain of evil. It's what's within us, and no good work can cover up. That would be like using a Band-Aid on a gaping wound.

MR: So this isn't exactly a feel-good sort of ...

RT: Well, it becomes a very feel-good course once you've seen the horror of your sin, you understand God's grace, and you understand imputed righteousness—by which I mean, you understand that today God is delighted with me and it's because I am relating to God through his Son, Jesus, and he's delighted with Jesus. Once I live by Jesus' performance and not my own, well, it's absolutely overwhelming because then the unconditional love of God flows through. But the root to that is to understand sin, judgment, wrath, and hell. And in England that is what the churches have lost their nerve about. We have to teach those four. So, if people still think they're okay, we say, let's have a look at Mark 12. Have you loved God with heart, soul, mind, and strength? And if you don't, Jesus says, cut off your hand, pluck out your eye, cut off your foot rather than go to hell for your sin. Week by week we tell people, they're not good people going to heaven, they are sinners going to hell, and then we long for them to understand that they are more wicked than they ever realized, but more loved than they ever dreamed, and it's because of the gospel. So the wonder of the gospel comes through as I see the horror of my sin.

MR: It's so clear, so simple that you would think that any layperson could use this course.

RT: Well that's exactly the issue.

MR: Or any pastor.

RT: Any pastor. The issue on using this course, Mike, honestly, is believing in the Holy Spirit. You must believe the Holy Spirit as you say these things that are totally politically incorrect. I tell people that you're a rebel not a victim. But in so much of Christian preaching today, people are addressed as victims. And I stand up and I say, you know it's wonderful that you're here, I'm sure that you've been very hurt....So the opening question is, if you have a question for God and he'd answer it right now, what would it be? There'll be many questions on suffering, but once we have listened to people, which is so important in evangelism, we're then saying, this is Jesus; he came because we're rebels. Will you please allow him to pay for your sin at the cross rather than pay yourself in hell? Please do not pay for your sin yourself in hell. The only way to get to hell is to trample over the cross of Jesus. So he stands before us

and he says don't go there, I've died, I've paid in death and blood so that you don't have to go there. What people need is the courage to say that and a real love for people as they say that. We pray that people will know we're saying that because sin is serious.

MR: And because we care about them.

RT: We do care about them. I think it's a wonderful time for gospel preaching these days, because people here are sick of "spin." I don't know if they spin over here in the states, but in England....

MR: Just a little.

RT: The politicians are accused of spinning everything, and people are sick of being manipulated. So when you stand up and you say, "Let me tell you, this is sin, this is judgment, this is wrath, this is hell, and this is the glorious cross of Jesus. . . . Do you believe me or not?" You know, time and again I've sat down and people look at me and they say, well thank you for being honest.

MR: No one would have invented this.

RT: Well that's right, and the Spirit of truth will do his work and convict people of this truth.

MR: A lot of people reading our exchange will probably say, we're onboard, this is exactly the kind of message that we embrace. Modern Reformation and The White Horse Inn talk about this stuff all the time, and all that's great. But how do we—practically speaking—reach the lost? How does the Christianity Explored course try to do what perhaps we have not done as effectively in our own churches and in our own personal practice?

RT: Well, two things. The ultimate aim of this course is that you help lead the course with your pastor in charge of evangelism. You become a helper to answer people's questions and to befriend them. And as you do the course and teach Mark's Gospel, and teach the identity, the mission, the call of Jesus, you become equipped to open Mark's Gospel yourself. So that's the first way in which it reaches people.

The second way it reaches people is that you just ask your non-Christian friend to come along. And the key thing you say is, "You know what? We're not taking anything for granted on this course. You can just come and ask any question you want." So they feel that they can come into an environment....By the way, don't necessarily run this in a church. Run it in a home, run it in a hotel, run it in a place where you know your friend will feel secure because it's on his or her territory.

MR: We've talked about pubs. Inviting people to ...

RT: Absolutely. I have a friend back in England who ran Beer and Bible. And as they arrived

in the door he gave them a bottle of beer! It was a men's evening, and they'd come and they'd just look at the gospel together.

MR: That's great. And instead of trying to turn the church service into something that is neither feeding the sheep nor reaching the lost, this allows you to do on the Lord's Day what should be done on the Lord's Day with the people of God, and yet reach out on other occasions to bring people to an earshot of the gospel on their turf.

RT: And that's right. And what a lot of churches do is have the pastor preach through each week of Christianity Explored so the church family knows what they are bringing their friends to.

MR: Isn't that a big part of it? We don't know what we believe and why we believe it. We have all of the seminary notes in our binders. And that's in the best-case scenario, but we don't know how to summarize what we believe to non-Christians.

RT: I think that's exactly right, and that's why we say that there are three great questions in Christianity Explored. The first is, Who do you think Jesus is? Was he just a man or was he Lord and God, the one who could calm a storm, raise a dead girl, and ultimately rule the universe? This is Jesus. What do you think of his identity? And I ask people to score themselves.

If he's just a man, it's a 1; if he's Lord and God it's 10. And people will say, well I'm here now. I'm 3, 5, 7, and gradually, as we teach Christ, the Holy Spirit causes their belief in him to grow.

The second question is, Why did Jesus die? Why did he come? Was his death a waste? Or was it a rescue? So as we teach about the death of Jesus and explain the cross, we're saying, what do you think happened? Do you think your sin was paid for, or is this just the tragedy of a Galilean convict getting slaughtered? And third, what does it mean to follow Jesus? Will you obey his call to take up your cross and deny yourself? It's uncomfortable! Will you hear that call, and stand for Christ in a world that stands against him, or will you walk away from the call, and live for yourself?

MR: Now I've just heard you do a brief thumbnail sketch—a twenty-minute summary—of that here in chapel at Westminster Seminary California. You were able, even in twenty minutes, to summarize all of what you've just said from the Gospel of Mark. It didn't seem to me that those were three questions that one might have come up with and then superimposed on the story.

RT: Mike, that is so important. I'm saying this is simple but not simplistic. Mark's aim was to answer those three questions. You see the issue in Mark's Gospel is the disciples cannot see

who Jesus is, they're blind. So in Mark 1:1 it's as though we're in an Agatha Christie detective novel that begins with the words, "The butler did it." We're told at the start that Jesus is not just a man, he is God. The drama is that the disciples can't see that. So we walk through Mark's Gospel, getting the evidence, layer upon layer, put before us, and the disciples not knowing what to do with it. So there comes a storm and they say, "Who is this? We're terrified!" He raises a dead girl, but they still don't know that he's Lord and God. But eventually, in Mark 8, Peter says, "You're the Christ."

So you could get a highlighter and go through most of the first eight chapters and see that the disciples' blindness to identity is the big issue. But once they've seen he is the Christ, they ask, "Why did he die?" Peter knows Jesus is the Christ and when Jesus says "I have to die" Peter says, "You mustn't do that." A king can't die; a king must sit on his throne. Peter can't see that Jesus' throne is his cross. What does Jesus say to Peter? "Get behind me Satan. You don't have in mind the things of God, but the things of man." In other words, "Peter, you're still half-blind to my mission. You can't see it."

MR: One of the things that is obvious in the way you're going about this is that you are telling a dramatic narrative.

RT: That's right.

MR: Most of the evangelistic programs people are used to are these very abstract propositions about $2 + 2 = 4$. It's not that they're not true, but the Bible itself doesn't present Christ that way.

RT: Mike, if I may say, this is so important for the postmodern generation. I know that word is used so often. It's a story and you discover the truths yourself as you walk with the disciples and see how blind they are but see the penny gradually dropping. They gradually get it. So, the wonderful thing for a generation that is quite antiauthority, they walk through Mark's Gospel and encounter Jesus, not just propositions. They encounter the person.

MR: They see for themselves.

RT: And they begin to say, "He died for me." And then they begin to say, "What does it mean to follow him?" And the answer in Mark's Gospel is: You serve. So even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life for many. That's comedic writing!

MR: Lots of sarcasm.

RT: In Mark 9, the disciples are on the road and they say, "Well, who's the greatest?" while they are in the company of the greatest person! He's just done a teaching on his own death,

and they ask, "Well, which one of us is the greatest?" Then, in Mark 10, he again does another study on his own death, and James and John walk up and say, "We want you to do whatever we ask." Their blindness is amazing!

MR: Dorothy Sayers, the great British playwright said, "This is the most exciting drama ever staged. And it only takes clergymen to ruin it."

RT: Well, you're quite right. I think it's quite interesting that in the film *Gladiator* Ridley Scott picked up the metaphor of a general becoming a slave who becomes a gladiator to free Rome, but in the process dies. Well, he was picking up the Christ story in that film and that's, I think, one of things that makes *Gladiator* so appealing. It is redemptive myth. One of the great tensions in the film is that the identity of Maximus is unknown. He's not just a gladiator or a slave, he is a general. Well, Mark's Gospel is the same. Jesus is a general that came to die. He came to judge and to save.

MR: A great reversal.

RT: It is a great reversal. Just as in the film *Gladiator* Maximus says to Comodos, "The time for honoring yourself will soon be past," Jesus says the same to the authorities in Jerusalem. And we have to make a decision. Will we stand with Jesus or against him? Will we take advantage of his death or not?

MR: What kind of practical steps can people take who are listening, pastors or laypeople, who perhaps want to see about bringing *Christianity Explored* to their church? They're probably wondering what kind of materials are available and what the next step is if they're interested. They may also be asking, how does this actually work? You've given us a lot of content here, but practically speaking, how does this work? Are we talking about great meetings where we bring a lot of people? Or are we talking about things that happen in our homes?

RT: Well, the first thing I think you should do in the Reformed tradition is get three highlighters, go through Mark's Gospel, and ask whether what I'm saying about Identity, Mission, and Call is right or not. Go through and ask, Is this about Jesus? Why did he die? What does it mean to follow him? Do that first. Go back to the Bible and test out this theory.

Then, once you've established whether I'm telling the truth or not, get hold of the materials and see how we explore it. We have a study guide for the non-Christian who attends, a leader's guide to train the church family with all the answers to the questions on Mark, and then a course leader guide that includes the talks. Those are the three materials. I've also put all the material on video, so you can have the talk on video if you want a stupid Englishman to give the talks. We go around England, from Buckingham Palace to Big Ben, and I give the

talks from there. So you'll get a bit of the tour of England in the series as you get the seventeen-minute talks. So check Mark out and then check out the material.

MR: By the way, that is probably a good thing to do especially for people who say, I'm a little nervous about having my neighbors over. I'm not nervous about talking one on one, but if I have five or six friends over for dinner, I could put that video in and then talk about it. I'm not just going to mindlessly press play....

RT: That's right. We will set up the discussion on Mark's Gospel. The video forms the key talk. So people can arrive and have a look at a passage. You'd have the talk, and then there'd be a discussion.

What I do want to say, though, is that we are absolutely unashamed of the Bible. So from week one we say, look, Christianity is Christ, and it's Christ as he walks off the pages of Mark's Gospel. So what I am asking people to have the courage to do is say, Look, we are going to have a look at a Gospel. Please ask any question you want, but we want to give you the authentic document.

Now if I were investigating Islam and I was looking at the Muslim faith, I'd want to look at the Koran myself. I'd want to form my own opinion. So I think unashamedly I'd say to a neighbor, pray that they're spiritually hungry, but say that we're all going to be looking at Mark's Gospel. There's an English guy on video, and we're going to get the talk from him, but there is going to be a bit of a study of Mark. I have one story I need to tell. In week 2, we look at the passage in Mark 2 about the paralytic. About four years ago there was a photographer in the group. He was nowhere spiritually. He said, as we looked at Mark 2:1-12, "So this boy is paralyzed because of his sin." Now, there was another man in the group, an atheistic doctor, who had come only because he was in love with a Christian girl who said she would have nothing to do with him unless he was a Christian! After this photographer made his comment, this atheistic doctor looked down and said, "No, I don't think that is what it's about." He said, "I think Mark is saying that Jesus can forgive sin because Jesus is God." He looked up and said, "I can't believe I just said that."

MR: He got caught up in the story.

RT: He was just looking at the story and saying, "What do I think this means?" It's very exciting. The questions with the material are there to draw this out.

For more information on Christianity Explored please visit www.christianityexplored.com.

Questions:

1. What place does Rico say the bible plays in Evangelism? Do you agree?

