

ZONDERVAN™

Transformation

Copyright © 2006 by Bob Roberts Jr.

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Roberts, Bob, 1958–

Transformation : how global churches transform lives and the world / Bob Roberts, Jr.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-10: 0-310-26717-X

ISBN-13: 978-0-310-26717-1

1. Church development, New. I. Title.

BV652.24.R63 2005

262'.001'7—dc22

2005013739

CIP

This edition printed on acid-free paper.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

The website addresses recommended throughout this book are offered as a resource to you. These websites are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement on the part of Zondervan, nor do we vouch for their content for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Interior design by Ruth Bandstra

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments 9

Part 1

Survival Questions for the Church: What Would Your Church Be Like If ... ?

1. How Do We Find Our Voice Again? 17
2. Where Does the Church Fit? 39
3. Why Are We Growing Churches Apart from Transformation? 58

Part 2

T-Life: Creating a Culture for Personal Transformation

4. When Will Jesus Be Enough? 77
5. Can Following Jesus Ever Be Private? 96
6. What If the Church Were the Missionary? 105

Part 3

T-World: Creating a Church for Transformation

7. What Would It Look Like for the Church to Turn the World
Upside Down? 127
8. Do We Want to Be the Biggest Church in the Area,
or Church the Area? 139
9. What Do You Get When a Church Combines Billy Graham
with Mother Teresa? 156

Appendixes

1. Profile Qualities for Church Planters 171
2. Clarifying Your Calling 177
3. What Happens When We Capture Jesus' Vision for the
Kingdom and Start Kingdom Churches? 179
Endnotes 181
Subject Index 183

How Do We Find Our Voice Again?

I was speaking in Australia and was on my way from Sydney to Perth. On the overnight flight, I got up to stretch my legs in the back of the plane. A young flight attendant began making polite small talk as she prepared the drink cart, asking me where I was from, where I was going, and what I did for a living. I often hesitate to tell people I'm a pastor—our reputation is not exactly well received. That day, however, I just let it go. "I'm a pastor," I began. "I'm here to speak at some seminaries and colleges in Australia about how to start churches." What a great opener for an evangelism experience! Right! Only she didn't seem the least intrigued.

"Good luck. You won't get much of an audience here," she said nonchalantly. "I think you'll find it's quite different than what you see in America. No offense, just the way it is."

"None taken," I offered. Now I was the one intrigued. "So what's the deal? Is God just not part of the equation of life? What do most Australians think of him?"

She didn't hesitate. "It isn't that I'm angry with God or don't believe in him. He's just not a player, if you will."

Granted, she maintained her friendly flight attendant demeanor, but her matter-of-fact response to the topic at hand still threw me. "So help me understand this," I probed. "Have you been hurt in the past by the church somehow?"

"No," she smiled, undeterred. "My granny goes to church. As a matter of fact, I had a friend who had an awesome tragedy. The way the church stepped in and helped out was incredible. No questions asked."

I retraced our steps. “But you believe in God?”

“Of course. You’d have to be an idiot *not* to believe. I’m very spiritual, as are most of my friends; I’m just not religious.”

“How do you get in touch with your spirituality?” Great, there’s a token pastor-type question. She took it in stride, however, as she continued loading her cart.

“I walk in the bush, or take a long walk on the beach, or visit with my mates for a long time.”

“What would make you want God or pursue him in your life?”

What was this bloke getting at? she must have wondered.

She paused for a moment before responding, “I can’t answer that. I’m just perfectly happy without him.”

“So not angry, bitter, or resentful—just indifferent?” I offered once more.

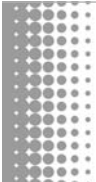
“That’s it,” she concluded.

That *was* it. Tragically, Christianity (as she understood it) had nothing to offer this young woman. How can that be? Does the gospel have the ability to reach happy people who “have it all”? Or is it just a crisis decision? I knew Jesus spoke to deep levels of truth and meaning beyond a crisis, but I was having a difficult time convincing her of that. Is the gospel powerful enough to *be enough* in and of itself, or does someone have to respond only because they’re hurting? How do we help people understand that they need God because he’s God and that there’s no true or ultimate meaning without him?

As I visited with her, I ached over the flaws in our understanding of what it is that we invite people to experience and our inability to engage the culture at a significant depth. Where is the church today speaking to justice and mercy? Where is the church today serving the poor and the hurting? Where is the church today serving as a prophet to society? Her view of the church was that it existed as an institution for itself—neither good nor bad, just irrelevant to her.

We cannot expect to help people understand there is value to following God and a depth of life that comes no other way if we

don't deal with issues at this level. We would have nothing different to offer them from the Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, animists, and other religions who merely beseech their gods in times of need for things they desire. When America was more "Christian" in its cultural moorings, it wasn't necessary to understand apologetics. Thinking about the deep issues regarding the existence of God was not as prevalent then; now that has all changed.



Thinking and apologetics are no longer options reserved for the serious student of evangelism; they are basics for every believer now.

When the church began to institutionalize and focus on gaining influence in political arenas and amassing wealth and respectability in global affairs, it lost its mooring—the central message of hope and healing that will transform individuals and cultures. The church became a regimented system, corralling its constituents into programs—and yet not without results. Megachurches exploded. Church networks grew. Something was happening—and as long as the numbers grew, we self-validated all the results. Instead of all our movement being God's work, we convinced ourselves of the opposite. We surmised all our feverish work must signify a movement of God.

I HAD TO GO HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD TO FIND IT

How did this colossal mistake happen? Somewhere along the way, we became lost. I didn't even realize how lost I was until I saw what the church was really supposed to look like. At first, I didn't even recognize it; then I wanted to rationalize it. I had to go halfway around the world to find it—in the persecuted underground house church in Asia. I had heard the stories and statistics, but I had never met anyone face to face. For the first time, I found people who were living a *Divine Conspiracy*,¹ as Dallas Willard would say.

They were nothing like me. They were nothing like any believers I had ever met—not even Willard! Not just culturally, but spiritually they blew me away. Sure, their theology is fuzzy. Some don't even have whole parts of the Bible, only perhaps an entire book or a few passages. But they know God at a depth I never had nor knew anyone else who had.

Worship takes on a completely new expression on the other side of the world. No sound systems, no calculated transitions, just sweaty believers crammed together into small rooms, weeping as the Holy Spirit oozes out among them, as I never before experienced. I don't know if they are charismatic or not (all I knew was it wasn't my tongue), but it doesn't matter. No one is getting rich, and no one is fighting for control or position. If there is a favored position, it is the privilege of being the first to die. Living on the edge as they do leaves little room for insincerity or self-promotion. These people are living what I grew up hearing the church should be.

Through small, indigenous, underground house church networks, these churches are transforming lives and their cultures. They cannot be stopped. There are too many of them, and they are spreading everywhere, every day. Here's a shocker: Laypeople start these movements, not just those "called" to full-time vocational ministry. Their church planting is the result of transformed lives and not the result of a grand strategy, even though the strategy is grand.

The differences are striking and so are the results—so much so that in spite of holding so many degrees and an earned doctorate, I've learned more about how to do church from outside America than I ever did inside America. I firmly believe that in order to find the real church, one has to get on a plane and fly west at least twelve hours over the Pacific. And then, one won't find it in a church building—it will be in a neighborhood. Don't go looking for it on Sunday, but seek it early in the morning or late at night as people quietly come in singles and pairs in order to not draw attention to themselves.