

123 Rosslyn Street
West Melbourne
Victoria Australia 3003
+61 3 9254 0254 Telephone
+61 3 9254 0255 Facsimile

166 William Street
Woolloomooloo
NSW Australia 2011
+61 2 9994 4340 Telephone
+61 2 9994 4027 Facsimile

FutureBrand



Exploring motivations to (re)consider Christianity Secondary research brief

4 June 2003

Background

The Christian Media Project is developing a media campaign to promote Christianity to Australians. The proposed campaign is modelled on similar initiatives developed in Canada and Ireland by the Campus Crusade for Christ. It will involve substantial prime-time exposure to TV advertising, possibly supported by outdoor advertising, branded events and door-knock activities.

The ultimate goal of the campaign is to encourage Australians to accept Christ's teachings as the word of God, and thereby to increase their rate of Church attendance. The immediate communications challenge is to motivate non-Christians to seek further information by contacting a web-site or call-centre. Those who request further information will be given a booklet containing relevant biblical extracts and explaining the nature and benefits of Christian faith in contemporary terms.

Secondary research objective

While there has been considerable research into issues surrounding church attendance among Christians, there is little that directly relates to more basic questions surrounding Christian faith, particularly as to why non-Christians might decide to look into Christianity in more depth, and what barriers might prevent them from taking that step.

Our first step will be to undertake a broad review of existing sociological and psychological literature to explore these issues, to identify the concerns or ideas might lead a non-Christian to re-consider their faith in Christ.

While this secondary exploration should encompass Christian research, we also need to review secular sources to identify potentially powerful ways to engage with our target audience. The key point here is that our non-Christian target audience is unlikely to have thought about these issues in religious terms, such as church attendance or faith.

Our specific aim is to develop and refine hypotheses for exploration in qualitative research. We will also look to the secondary research review to specify the target market in terms of existing beliefs and attitudes, define relevant segments within the target market, and outline specific lines of enquiry.



Defining faith

For the purposes of our exploration, the concept of faith will be used to refer to an individual's acceptance that meaning and purpose exist beyond that which can be explained by science. It is reasoned that we need to address this basic level of faith in order to understand the basic motivators that lead to consideration of the more narrowly defined concepts of Christian faith.

Areas of exploration

An initial investigation by John Bellamy has highlighted four areas of psychological research that may shed light on potential triggers for re-evaluation of personal faith; namely, attachment, coping with crisis, searching for existential answers and immediate reward maximisation/pain avoidance. This, in turn, suggests a range of starting points for our search.

Stages of moral and social development

The formation of beliefs and modes of behaviour tends to follow a predictable pattern over a person's lifetime, which is driven both by psychological and social factors. For example, a young child will tend to understand the world in relatively black and white terms, until they develop the intellectual capacity to comprehend shades of grey. An adolescent will tend to accept the moral and religious framework within which they have been raised, until they reach a stage of social and intellectual independence where they begin to question and so develop their own beliefs.

Our investigation needs to focus on common lifetime 'events' that tend to trigger or at least to be associated with individuals' re-evaluation of basic moral beliefs and orientation with socially defined codes of conduct. For example, we need to explore whether events such as leaving home, the death of a parent or starting a family may represent key 'trigger points' that lead to a re-evaluation of personal faith.

This investigation will shade into the more extreme and idiosyncratic types of events— near death experiences, alcoholism, losing a job, etc. While these sorts of events may provide potentially important insights into basic psychological triggers, our investigation should focus – at least initially – on understanding the general patterns and principles that apply equally to all people, not just those who may experience an intense personal crisis.

Self-identity

Historically, religious faith has provided people with clear-cut answers to the basic existential questions of 'who am I?' and 'why am I here?' The growth in secular humanism suggests that increasing numbers of people have accepted scientific or perhaps



materialistic answers to these questions and so have, at least unconsciously, reflected the need for faith.

We need to explore the limitations of secular ‘models’ of self-identity in terms of their ability to satisfy basic underlying needs for emotional and spiritual fulfilment. What areas of doubt and uncertainty tend to lead individuals to question the adequacy of secular belief systems, and so to accept the concept of faith as a necessary aspect of self-identity?

In particular, we need to focus on the limitations of material success as a basic definition of self-fulfilment and self-worth. In what ways do people feel unfulfilled despite achieving material success? What aspects of their self-identity remain doubtful, or lack definition?

Social harmony through consensus

There can be little doubt that many Australians have begun to question the adequacy of our fundamental social values in light of recent terrorist acts by Muslim fundamentalists as a reaction to multi-national corporations’ increasing dominance of public life.

We need to explore how individuals interpret and react to such stark evidence of a potential breakdown in the social fabric, in terms of seeking for practical ways to make a personal contribution to establishing a more harmonious balance.

Confronted with two equally appalling visions of our social future – namely religious extremism and unscrupulous capitalism – we might expect people to seek a clearly defined alternative vision as the basis for social consensus.

The challenge here is to understand how such large scale and abstract concepts impinge directly on the experience and mental life of individuals.

Personal wellbeing

There is a substantial body of evidence that religious faith and the sense of spiritual fulfilment is directly related to physical health and a sense of personal wellbeing. We need to explore this area to understand what it tells us about the problems and anxieties associated with a lack of faith (see self-identity). Specifically, we should look to identify the ‘symptoms’ associated with a lack of faith, which might be used to help people understand what they are missing out on.

Another way to think about this is that we are looking for physical and emotional evidence of the ‘God shaped hole’ within each of us, by identifying the differences between those who have filled it with faith, and those for whom it remains empty.



Initial hypotheses

To date the development of the creative brief has been guided by a number of key hypotheses, which we need to keep in mind as reference points for our exploration of issues. Specifically, we are looking for evidence that may directly support or contradict these hypotheses, and to develop additional or alternative hypotheses that can be tested in primary research.

Motivations

- Australians who are actively seeking to explore issues of spirituality form a substantial part of the potential target audience.
- Realisation that social and material success do not lead to sense of personal fulfilment is a primary motivation to explore Christian faith.

Barriers

- Christianity is currently positioned as an anachronistic organisation, rather than as an enduring source of personal spiritual fulfilment.
- The teachings of Christ are not regarded as offering relevant solution to current (and future) sources of human conflict and unhappiness.

Propositions

- The idea of 'changing your life' is the most effective way to explain the benefits of Christian faith.
- People will understand the idea of faith in Christ (alternatively, we need to explain in simple terms what faith in Christ entails).