

## **‘Practices for the Refounding of God’s People.’ Part 1: Modernity’s Wager.**

To engage the modern west with the gospel we need to understand that it has been shaped by ‘modernity’s wager’: the belief that life can be lived well without God. According to authors Alan Roxburgh and Martin Robinson, somewhere between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries this assumption took hold and God ceased to be the core agent in the imagination of the west and its communities. Instead the nation state, consumer capitalism and the self, these three structured the ways we saw our life in the world. The churches lost their sense of the agency of God. In this conversation Alan and Martin remember their own experiences of encountering a deeply secular culture. They begin to wonder how the church can recover itself as a people which attends to God’s agency, which is shaped by God’s agency.

In this conversation Alan and Martin reflect on the explosive cultural change which we experienced in the sixties. Both sides of the Atlantic this was characterized by optimism and affluence. But by the end of the sixties disappointment set in, in Europe an angry disillusionment visible in the near revolution of 1968 Paris. According to Alan and Martin this gave way to today’s preoccupation with identity in the seventies, which in church and secular contexts generated a new interest in personal development and spirituality. The profound individualism of this culture rendered commitment and belonging difficult which again weakened churches and other institutions.

The UK and European contexts are very different to that of North America. Churches on both continents have assumed that their cultural displacement is fixable with the right methodologies. But now according to Alan and Martin, the British and European church has a sense that it has tried everything. It has discovered a helplessness which has opened it up in vulnerability to God. It has also had a learning opportunity in the arrival of believing migrants from across the world who have brought an expectation of God as agent and life as communal into this part of the west. However according to Alan the North American church still has confidence in itself, its own agency, in analysis and technique. It is still operating from within Modernity’s Wager: ‘we can manage without God’.

See also ['Practices for the Refounding of God's People' Part 2: Practices for Refounding.](#)