

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

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CULTURAL
APOLOGETICS

Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience,
and Imagination in a Disenchanted World



Chapter 1

WHAT IS CULTURAL APOLOGETICS?

“If a genuine missionary encounter between Christianity and Western culture were to happen, and the church could bridge the gap by pointing to the truth, goodness, and beauty the culture longs for, I believe it would lead to the reestablishment of the Christian imagination, mind, and conscience.” (pg. 34)

SCRIPTURE READING:

Acts 17:22-34

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. What is “cultural apologetics”? (21)
2. What are the problems that the cultural apologist is responding to? (18-19)
3. What are the two “levels” that the cultural apologist must operate in? (22)
4. What is the model of cultural apologetics developed in this book (built on Paul’s example at Mars Hill in Acts 17)? (23-27)
5. What is hoped to be achieved by the cultural apologist? (34)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is cultural apologetics different than apologetics as we normally understand it?
What are your thoughts concerning the posture of the cultural apologist?
2. How are you understanding your culture (“your Athens”) and the cultural shifts? How does your culture *perceive* the world? How does your culture think? How do those in your culture *live*?
3. Is it true that Christianity and the church suffers from an image problem? Do you think that the Christian voice, conscience, and imagination has been muted in your culture? If so, in what ways?
4. The two tasks of the cultural apologist is to show Christianity as reasonable and desirable. What do you think are some reasons why Christianity is no longer viewed as reasonable or plausible? What are some reasons why Christianity is no longer viewed as desirable?
5. How can we have genuine missionary encounters with those in our culture? What steps could we implement to help others see Christianity as both reasonable and desirable? How can we help others see Jesus Christ as good, true, and beautiful?

PRAYER

Father,

Goodness, truth, and beauty are what all of our hearts desire and they find their ultimate culmination in you. As cultural apologists, our task is to help others see this reality, but we also know that this can only be accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit. So, we ask that you use us and empower us to reestablish the Christian imagination, mind, and conscience in our culture so that the lost may return home to you. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Ask yourself and reflect on the question: “What do you make of Jesus?” Do you view Jesus as a person of supreme goodness? Do you view Jesus as brilliant, a person of wisdom, and an expert in all matters? Do you view Jesus as beautiful and worthy of worship? Before you can help others see Jesus as good, true, and beautiful, you must first possess that proper attitude towards Christ.

Chapter 2

DISENCHANTMENT

“For in the gospel we find an enchanted, supernatural world where love is eternal, death is cheated, victory is snatched out of the hands of defeat, and all turns out for the good in the end. The world, if we pay attention, points to God and a God-bathed reality.” (pg. 65)

SCRIPTURE READING:

Matthew 6:22-23

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. There are two ways of perceiving the world – a *disenchanted* way and an *enchanted* way. What is meant by these two ways of perceiving? (37-40)
2. Two people can look at the same object, events, or evidence and *see and understand it differently*. Why is this so? (40)
3. What is the proposed model of re-enchantment? (41-45)
4. What are the four characteristics of disenchantment? Please explain. (52)
5. What are the five signs of transcendence? Please explain. (63-65)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think your culture has a disenchanted perception of the world? Has it suppressed the truth of God and emptied the world of the supernatural? If so, what factors do you think led to this disenchantment?
2. Do you see the disenchantment in the lives of Christians? In the church? Has disenchantment crept into your own perception of the world?
3. We are told by the “Reality Police” – the elite groups of university professors, journalists, Hollywood producers, lawmakers, and others who try to define reality for the rest of us – that transcendence has been declared “inoperative.” Discuss the pressing problems for these “official reality-definers” who want to push their secular and materialistic agendas. How can cultural apologists respond?
4. Do you think re-enchantment is possible? How so? What might this look like? How can we join God and others to work to re-enchant the world?
5. Part of the task of the cultural apologist is to help reawaken the universal and natural human desires and redirect them toward their proper end. What are these longings and how can be carry out this task?

PRAYER

Father,

You have created the world beautifully and everything bears your sign – the grandeur of heaven is on display, if we have eyes to see; the music of heaven sings praise to you, if we have ears to hear; the aroma of heaven invites us to a feast, if we have the nose to smell. We ask that you will awaken those under the spell of disenchantment to see the signs of transcendence in your created order. Reawaken us to see creation in its proper light – as sacred, holy, and a gift from you, our Creator. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Everything that exists – every truth discovered, every beauty, and every good – points to and illuminates the Divine. How can you safeguard yourself from slipping into disenchantment? How can you begin to view the seemingly mundane as sacred and beautiful? Reflect on the signs of transcendence in your “ordinary” life.

Chapter 3

REENCHANTMENT

“People question the goodness of God, the attractiveness of the church, the beauty of Jesus, and the sufficiency of the gospel to meet human needs and the longings of the heart. A cultural apologetic of return calls the church to see and delight in the ever-present, all-consuming Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.” (pg. 92)

SCRIPTURE READING:

Psalm 63

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. As cultural apologists, we will encounter three types of people; who are they and what characterizes them? (68-69)
2. What are the three ways we can join the Holy Spirit in awakening the deep desires of the heart in those we seek to reach with the gospel? Please explain. (72)
3. What is the argument from desire? Is it a successful argument? What is the objection from evolutionary psychology? Is it successful? (75-79)
4. What are the steps to “returning to reality”? (82)
5. What are three false re-enchantments mentioned in this chapter? What makes these views false? (86-91)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. “[Human beings] are creatures driven by our longings and loves. We are *desiring animals*” (67). What does this mean? How does this understanding affect the way we engage others as cultural apologists? What are the proper desires we ought to have? Discuss the traditional understanding of love as a theological virtue.
2. Do you believe the human heart has been furnished with the universal longing for God? Reflect on the argument from desire. If so, why do you think many are unaware of this deep longing? Why has this universal longing for transcendence gone unnoticed or suppressed by many today?
3. Disenchantment redirects and channels man’s desires toward the mundane. How have you seen this played out in culture? In your churches? In your life?
4. Reflect back on the three ways the Holy Spirit reawakens the human heart and redirect it Godward – the way of the imagination, the way of reason, and the way of morality. Which way is the primary means of awakening *your* desire for the Divine?
5. How can we begin to see the world as God-bathed, full of wonder and delight? How can we collectively encourage each other and invite others to see the world as sacred and holy?

PRAYER

Father,

In re-enchancing the world, the Holy Spirit is turning the world right-side up, and the “righting” of this world begins by reawakening our deep desires. We ask that you will enable us to see our desires more clearly and re-order our loves to keep you first and foremost. Allow us to view you as our supreme good, so that we may draw others to see reality in the same way. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Reflect on the deepest longings of your heart. Are they for God and his glory? Do you see God as the supreme beauty and your supreme good? Ask the Holy Spirit to daily prompt your heart to long for God through imagination, reason, and conscience.

Chapter 4

IMAGINATION

“Beauty awakens our longings, and the imagination paints pictures in our mind that help us see reality more clearly... Art has an ability to bypass our defenses and touch our identity in a way that nothing else does.” (pg. 97)

SCRIPTURE READING:

Exodus 31:1-11

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. As cultural apologists, we need to bring back an appreciation for beauty into the church. What were the three reasons that led the church away from the appreciation of beauty and art? Please explain. (98-99)
2. “Does God care about art? Does he utilize beauty? Does he seek to engage our imagination? Scripture answers with a resounding yes!” (102). Where in Scripture could we turn to for the answer? How can we show others this reality through the use of Scripture? (100-105)
3. What is the *imagination*? What is its role in cultural apologetics? (106-110)
4. How can stories be utilized by the cultural apologist? What role do stories play in engaging one’s imagination? (112-113)
5. What are three practical things Christians can do as a means to utilize art, beauty, and the imagination to point others to Jesus? (114-116)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think the use of the imagination and beauty is important in apologetics (especially in a disenchanted age)?
2. What is beauty? Do you possess a proper theology of beauty? Or do you fail to understand what beauty is, or fail to understand its purpose or origin? In what ways has culture fallen into confusion when it comes to what beauty is?
3. Prior to reading this chapter, did you view God as a Master Artist – a God who uses art and beauty to attune our hearts to him? How has your view of God and his creative work changed?
4. What are some stories that have impacted your life? What was it about these stories that captivated you and left an impression? “Good stories are good precisely because they point to the one true story of the world: the gospel” (113). How can we, as cultural apologist, use stories or narratives to share the good news of Jesus?
5. What is the role of art and media in cultural apologetics? How can we partner with artists to promote, cultivate, and create that which is beautiful? How can art become a medium to share the beauty of Christ?

PRAYER

Father,

You are the Master Artist. You not only create that which is beautiful, but you are the fullness of beauty itself. Beauty – in nature, art, humans, and the sacred – awakens within us a longing for you. You use beauty to rouse a disenchanted world so give us the eyes to see the beautiful in the “mundane”. You use beauty to beckon us home, so give us the ability to recognize and respond appropriately. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

“Regardless of your own artistic ability (or lack thereof), Christians are called to be creators and cultivators of the good, true, and beautiful... the things we make – omelets, outfits, sermons, bridges, buildings, cars, movies, stories, blog posts, tweets, paintings, PowerPoint presentations, photos, research papers, movie reviews, furniture, landscapes – we should make with beauty in mind.” (105). How can you use your giftings – artistic gifting, musical gifting, storytelling gifting, etc. – to bring beauty back into your everyday life and in the lives of those around you? How can you lead others to see and recognize beauty as aids to worship?

Chapter 5

REASON

“God has given us reason as a guide on this journey to help us discover truth and its source. As cultural apologists, we want to help others see and understand the value of reason and then look along the path of reason on our quest for Jesus and the gospel” (pg. 127)

SCRIPTURE READING:

Proverbs 19:2

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. The Western mind and culture has been imbued with a spirit of anti-intellectualism. What has caused this “dumbing down” of our culture? (120)
2. A common objection against Christianity is the argument that belief in God is unreasonable. What motivates atheists to make such bold claims? What are some of their arguments? Do they provide a better alternative? (121-122)
3. How can we know something is true? By what process do we utilize our reason to arrive at truth? (128)
4. What is the argument from reason? What are the four features of rational inference? (130-137)
5. What is and is not the ultimate goal of the cultural apologist’s use of reason and arguments? (142)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you believe that the Christian faith measures up to the standards of reason? The standards of truth? Why or why not?
2. Reflect back on the argument from reason. Discuss how, given the four features of rational thought, the existence of minds is better explained in a theistic framework rather than a naturalistic framework. What are the shortcomings of a naturalistic worldview?
3. Identify possible starting points when presenting a case for Jesus and the gospel. How can you develop a case for Christianity from this starting point? Remember, when identifying a starting point, it is necessary to take into consideration a *plausibility structure* along with the *sacred core* of an individual (or group of individuals). Practice presenting a case for Christ by engaging in an experimental dialogue with one another.
4. “Becoming an effective case-maker takes time, study and practice, but it is part of what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and the disciples, all of whom gave arguments, reasons, and evidence for their positions” (142). How can Christians collectively encourage and engage with one another to become better prepared to be a more faithful witness for Christ by showing Christianity as true to the way the world is and true to the way the world ought to be? How can we recover the art of Christian persuasion? What steps can churches take in promoting the intellectual flourishing of their members?

PRAYER

Father,

We are living in a world that claims belief in God is unreasonable. However, we understand that faith is not a blind leap into the abyss of irrationality. You have left an abundance of evidence—as divine signposts, or fingerprints—in the created order and have furnished us with the capacity to reason our way to discover the truth and the Source of all truth. Allow us to properly utilize the gift of reason as we seek to know more of you and your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Ask yourself, “Am I able to make an effective case for the reasonableness of Christianity?” Our job as cultural apologists is to understand those we seek to reach and to present our case in truth with love. Are you in a position to carry out that task? If not, read an apologetics book, or attend an apologetics conferences, or maybe even take an apologetics class! Use whatever means you can; ask yourself, “What can I do to grow in my knowledge of the Lord and become a better witness for Christ?”

Chapter 6

CONSCIENCE

“The longing for wholeness, justice, and significance are three aspects of a universal longing for goodness found within the human heart. As cultural apologists, part of our task is to partner with the Holy Spirit in awakening this longing for goodness. We do this by pursuing the one who is perfectly whole, the source of justice, and the fount of meaning.” (pg. 157)

SCRIPTURE READING:

1 Peter 2:1-12

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. For Christianity to be viewed as desirable, what must Christians begin to do? (147)
2. Humans possess the universal longing for goodness. This quest for goodness finds its expression in three sub-longings. What are they? Please explain. (149)
3. What is the moral argument for God? Consider the objections. Do you think the moral argument is a good argument? (157-163)
4. What were the two reasons given for why Christianity is good? Also, in what ways does Christianity make *this* world more inviting, more delightful, and more flourishing than a world without it? (164-166)
5. How can Christians go “deep” in our culture, penetrating into the social and ideational structures of culture so that the gospel will be viewed as reasonable *and* desirable? (169)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Christianity and the church suffers from an image problem. If the church is compromised and nominal, how might Christianity be seen as good to those outside the church? Is it possible for our culture to transition from seeing the church as hostile and hypocritical to the beautiful bride of Christ? If so, how might this be done?
2. Concerning the longing for wholeness, how do you see fragmentation in your own life? Where do you see fragmentation in the culture? Where does our longing for wholeness come from? And how can we be made whole again?
3. “Why does God allow pain and suffering?” The question of why God allows evil reveals a deep longing for a world made right. How does Jesus and the gospel story give us hope in the midst of the injustice in the world? How can Jesus and the gospel story give you hope in the midst of the trials you undergo?
4. “Christians throughout history have been a large part of the efforts to abolish slavery, improve health care, meet the needs of the poor, establish equal rights for minorities and women, and champion the arts” (166). Well, what can we do now – as individuals and as the church– to make a positive difference in the world today?
5. We all long to be a part of a story greater than the ones we can create. We long for a story of significance, where we can locate our lives and find meaning. How can we locate our lives in the gospel story? How can we find of significance? How can you live a life of cultural impact right now, right where you are?

PRAYER

Father,

We understand that Christianity is good for the world because in Christianity we get Jesus, and when we have Jesus, we have everything we could ever need. Through Jesus and the gospel, we become a part of a story that fills our lives with meaning, hope, significance, and wholeness. Allow us, as cultural apologists, to constantly remind those around us of your goodness and invite others to become a part of the greatest story ever told. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

We can make a positive impact in our cultures by faithfully taking up the vocation God has called us to and living missionally. Reflect on what vocation God has called you to – remember, you do not need to be in Christian ministry to be in faithful service to God. Whatever it is that God has called you to – engineers, cashiers, students, bank tellers, truck drivers, educators, etc. – faithfully take up the calling and flourish where you are. How can you lead a missional life where you are right now? How can you rekindle the conscience of those around you and direct them toward the source of all goodness?

Chapter 7

ADDRESSING BARRIERS

“The cultural apologist should help seekers overcome... barriers so that the seeker can genuinely consider the question of Jesus as an attractive possibility. The tools of the cultural apologist are many, offering multiple points of entry and contact with these barriers... What we cannot do, however, is ignore them if we want others to see and understand Jesus as their only hope and greatest need.” (pg. 200).

SCRIPTURE READING:

Proverbs 18:17; 2 Corinthians 10:5

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel? (172)
2. What are the distinctions between interior barriers and external barriers to Jesus and the gospel? (172)
3. What are the chief internal barriers to Jesus and the gospel? How can we overcome these barriers? Please explain. (172-182)
4. What are the chief external barrier to Jesus and the gospel? How can we respond to these barriers? Please explain. (182-198)
5. In addressing barriers, what is the cultural apologists ultimate aim? (200)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Reconsider the internal barriers to Jesus and the gospel. Which internal barrier presents the most difficult obstacle for you to overcome? Why?
2. Which internal barrier do you think is most prevalent in the church? How can we work together to overcome this barrier?
3. Reconsider the external barriers to Jesus and the gospel. How many of these barriers have you personally encountered – whether at school, at work, in your home, etc.?
4. Which external barrier did you find the most difficult to address prior to reading this chapter? Do you feel like you can adequately address the barrier now? Practice responding to an external barrier by engaging in an experimental dialogue with one another.
5. What are other barriers, internal or external, that you can think of? Collectively reason and think through these barriers in a safe place.

PRAYER

Father,

In a disenchanted age with false ideas and disordered loves, there are many great obstacles to the reception of your glorious gospel. As cultural apologists, our task is to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of [you]” (2 Cor. 10:5). Our desire is to remove any and all barriers hindering others from seeing you as the source of all that is good, true, and beautiful. Grant us the wisdom and a posture of love to draw others to you. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

We can make a positive impact in our cultures by faithfully taking up the vocation God has called us to and living missionally. Reflect on what vocation God has called you to – remember, you do not need to be in Christian ministry to be in faithful service to God. Whatever it is that God has called you to – engineers, cashiers, students, bank tellers, truck drivers, educators, etc. – faithfully take up the calling and flourish where you are. How can you lead a missional life where you are right now? How can you rekindle the conscience of those around you and direct them toward the source of all goodness?

Chapter 8

HOME

“We all have a sense of what home ought to be. Home is the place where you belong. It is a place where you are fully known and fully loved and where your identity is forged and your purpose discovered... Home is an apt metaphor for our hearts deepest longing – for God, wholeness, meaning, and purpose; a place and path where life is experienced as it was meant to be.” (pg. 204-205)

SCRIPTURE READING:

2 Peter 3:8-13

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. How does the metaphor of a home help explain the story of the Bible? Why can't we find our way home? How does it help us engage in cultural apologetics? (204-208)
2. What are the three major stories in the West? How can the main plotlines be summarized? What is it about the Christian story that makes it the “best possible story there could be”? (208-212)
3. How can the cultural apologist assist the “non-seeker” and the “seeker” to set them on the path home? (214-215)
4. How can we come alongside the “found”, those who have already discovered the path home, and challenge them to continue onward on their journey home? (216)
5. What is meant by “Ministry in Four Dimensions?” What is the fourth dimension? Why is it important? (217-218)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the metaphor of the home resonate with you? When do you most feel the sense that this world is not our home? How does the Christian story help you better understand this feeling?
2. Think back on the naturalist and postmodernist narratives. Consider: what if these narratives were true? What if these narratives represented reality accurately? What kind of life would we be living? Discuss what makes these stories less appealing than the Christian story.
3. Think back on the Christian story. What are the main acts? Where can you find yourself – your identity, your purpose, your significance – in this story?
4. Do you think cultural renewal is possible? Can the Christian voice, conscience, and imagination be reestablished within culture? Cultural formation is generational; thus, we need to see the importance of generational thinking. What can we do now to cultivate and inspire a vision for the future?
5. An apologetic of return requires the entire Body of Christ to come together to work towards the good. How can we, as the Body of Christ, be the hands and feet of Jesus to each other and helpful guides to those along the way? What can we begin to implement in our churches and small groups to cultivate an apologetic of return?

PRAYER

Father,

Through Jesus and the gospel, you extend to us an invitation to come home. We long for refuge and rest, but we cannot find that in on our own this broken world. Do not allow us to become complacent and disenchanted; rather, keep reminding us that this world is not our home. Our true home is where we find wholeness, meaning, and purpose; home is where we ultimately find you. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

We are all on a journey home. Reflect on that. We are not home yet – that is why we feel so out of place. But the good news is we'll be home soon. We can have hope and eagerly look forward to a day when sin, death, sickness, and evil will be no more. Allow that hope to be your anchor in the midst of your trials on your journey home; the end will be worth it. In the meantime, we all have our own parts to play in God's unfolding story. What is your part in this story? Locate your life within his story and live faithfully in your current sphere of influence.