

PAUL M. GOULD & COURTNEY MCLEAN

A PRIMER ON

CULTURAL
APOLOGETICS

Conversations on Faith and
Flourishing in a Disenchanted World



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APOLOGETICS
STUDY GUIDE

Conversations on Faith and Flourishing in a
Disenchanted World

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COURTNEY MCLEAN

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I. LONGING FOR A FAR-OFF COUNTRY

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are some of the dreams God has put on your heart? What are some of the deep desires of your heart?
2. What are some books you are reading or shows you are watching? What do they reveal about your loves and longings?
3. Do you agree that union with God is man's highest good? What does this mean?
4. Why do you think there is so much anger and rage in culture today?
5. How is the gospel story subversive to the dominant narratives in culture today?
6. Look at the picture on the cover of this book. What do you think of the claim that we all long for that "far-off country"? How does Jesus and the gospel satisfy the longings of your heart?

II. WHAT IS CULTURAL APOLOGETICS?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you think Christians should pay attention to culture? Why or why not? What does the Bible say about this?
2. What is your view of apologetics? Does it excite you? Scare you?
3. How does culture shape you?
4. Do you agree that we've lost the Christian voice in culture? What does this look like?
5. Do you agree that we've lost the Christian conscience in culture? What does this look like?
6. Do you agree that we've lost the Christian imagination in culture? What does this look like?
7. What do you think of the projects of resurrecting relevance and hope by doing cultural apologetics? Which one—relevance or hope—is most needed today?

III. THE TWO TASKS OF THE CULTURAL APOLOGIST

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you agree that Christianity is often viewed as unreasonable? Why is this?
2. Do you think the church is largely anti-intellectual? Why is this?
3. Why do many think that faith is "blind"? What would it look like to adopt a more biblical picture of faith?
4. Do you think we need to work to show Christianity desirable today? Why or why not?
5. What is your favorite argument for God? What do you think of the claim that there are daily a million signs for God?

IV. ON PAUL'S TWO-HANDED BACKHAND, POSTURES, AND GESTURES

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is your posture toward culture (condemn, critique, copy, consume, create, cultivate)?
2. In what areas can you create and cultivate the good, the true, and the beautiful?
3. How is Christianity viewed by those in your sphere of influence? How can you help show Christianity reasonable and desirable in that sphere?
4. What are some encouraging examples of Christian leaders in academia, art, or government that are making a difference for Christ?
5. How can you better communicate the gospel?
6. How can you work to cultivate beauty in your life?
7. In what areas can you work for justice?

V. UNDERSTANDING "OUR ATHENS"

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you agree that it is important to understand culture? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the metaphor of the broken cord. How does this metaphor help explain the beliefs or behavior of others (even those in the church)?
3. Discuss the metaphor of the dungeon. Do you agree that this metaphor captures part of what it feels like to live in a disenchanted age?
4. Discuss the metaphor of the shopping mall. Do you agree that we are fixated on consuming things?
5. What do you think of Smith's claim that we are driven by our loves and passions, sometimes even more than our beliefs?
6. In what ways are your desires wrongly ordered? How does Jesus's call to self-denial help us rightly order our lives?
7. Are there any other images or metaphors that help you understand culture today? What are they?

VI. SEX, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE GODS OF A DISENCHANTED AGE

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What do you think of the claim that the opposite of theism is not atheism, but idolatry? Do you agree that man is inherently religious? Why or why not?
2. How does disenchantment contribute to the entrenchment and pervasiveness of idolatry?
3. Discuss your own struggle with idolatry. Do you struggle with sexual purity? Do you struggle with the idol of technology?
4. What do you think of the claim that happiness is found in union with God? Examine your beliefs and actions. If someone were looking at your life, what do you think they would say happiness is for you?
5. How can we use technology responsibly? What are some ways we can encourage each other and our children in this area?

6. How can we view sex as a gift? How can we encourage each other and our children in this area?
7. Do you long for wholeness? What do you think of the claim that wholeness is found in Jesus? Why is this both easy and difficult?
8. How might you begin to see and delight in reality the way Jesus does?

VII. TWO WAYS OF PERCEIVING THE UNIVERSE, PT. 1

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are some of the stories that compete for your attention and seek your allegiance?
2. How has the neo-Humean model of perceiving influenced how you see the world?
3. Discuss some of the philosophical assumptions that guide the neo-Humean model. Which ones have you seen in your life or the lives of those around you?
4. Do you think that the church has adopted parts of the neo-Humean model? How does that affect how we worship?
5. How do you see the neo-Humean model express itself in the stories we read and the shows we watch?

VIII. TWO WAYS OF PERCEIVING THE UNIVERSE, PT. 2

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How does the “Platonic” part of the PAC model push us toward mystery?
2. How does the “Aristotelian” part of the PAC model help us understand our purpose in life? How would you describe human nature? What is unique about humans, and how does this inform how we might flourish?
3. How does thinking about the universe as God’s “dazzling theatre” awaken in you a sense of awe? What part of God’s world leads you to praise the Creator?
4. What is your part in God’s on-going story? What is the work God has created you to do? (Ephesians 2:10)
5. What are some practical ways you can embody the gospel in your daily life? What spiritual disciplines are helpful to you?
6. Does it encourage you to think that everything fits together according to God’s plan and that nothing escapes his notice?
7. Is it scary to pray for self-denial? Why or why not?
- 8.

IX. TRANSHUMANISM, ETERNITY, AND THE END OF HUMANITY

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What do you think of Tozer’s claim that the most important thing about us is what comes to mind when we think about God?
2. Do you agree that the nature of man is a battle line today in culture? How so? How are traditional views of human nature being challenged today?
3. How can we apply Christian wisdom to transhumanism, posthumanism, the hookup culture, transgenderism, homosexuality, and so many other “isms” that challenge traditional understandings of human nature?
4. How can we connect the deeper longings that inform the transhumanist vision to Jesus and the gospel?

5. Why is it so important to defend the view that humans are created in the image of God?

X. DISENCHANTED CHRISTIANITY

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you struggle with feeling like God is absent? Do you think the felt absence of God characterizes your experience of church? For others?
2. Do you struggle with anti-intellectualism? How can you grow in loving God with your mind?
3. Why is it so hard for Christians to admit they are not perfect? How can you move toward vulnerability in the areas of your life where you struggle?
4. In what ways can you cultivate habits that lead to wholeness?
5. Does the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde scare you? What difference does it make that we have Jesus and the gospel?
6. Discuss the idea of re-baptizing the imagination. Is this a new idea for you? Do you agree that cultivation of the imagination is essential for a life well-lived? How can you work to re-baptize your imagination so that you see and delight in Jesus and the gospel?
7. What are some practical steps you can take to reenchant your life? What are so practical steps you can take to help reenchant the Church? What are some practical steps you can take to help reenchant the World?

XI. MINISTRY IN FOUR DIMENSIONS

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What do you think of the concept of ministry in four dimensions? Why are depth and time so important? Why are they so often neglected?
2. Do you agree that the Church today tends to focus on short-term thinking only? Why or why not?
3. What are some examples of Christian ministries that are thinking long term today?
4. How is God calling you to join with others to work to show Christianity reasonable and desirable? How can you join with the Two Tasks Institute to help?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PAUL M. GOULD is the Founder and President of the Two Tasks Institute. He is married to Ethel and has four children. When he's not reading philosophy, you can usually find him reading a good story, running, hiking with his family, or driving his kids to soccer practice.

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