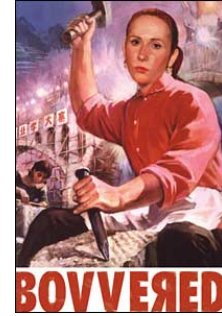


Christians and Culture: Why we have to be 'bovered'



Introduction: Dazed and Confused...

i) ...by the culture we are in

Some random cultural artefacts I have unearthed in the last few months.

Who are the 'others'? **Equality and Inclusion Questionnaire – Transport for London**

Sexuality:

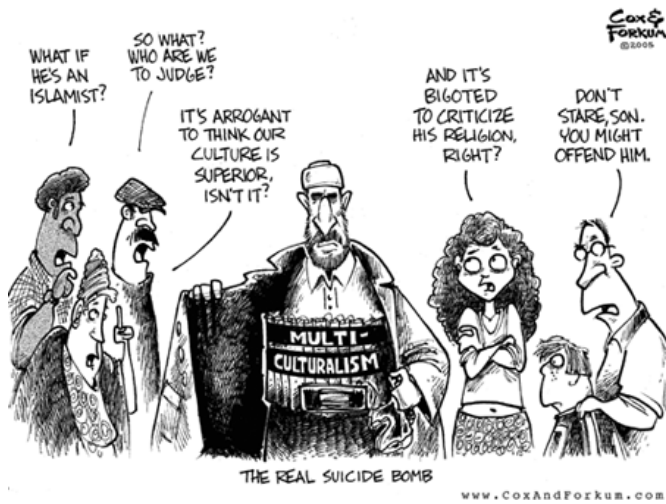
Lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bisexual woman	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heterosexual woman	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transgendered woman	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gay man	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bisexual man	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heterosexual man	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transgendered man	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



HAVE IT YOUR WAY®

You have the right to have what you want, exactly when you want it. Because on the menu of life, you are "Today's Special". And tomorrow's. And the day after that. And ... well, you get the drift. Yes, that's right. We may be the King, but you my friend, are the almighty ruler. EST 1954.

- West is East



What typifies contemporary culture?

-
-
-
-
-

ii) ...by the analyses we are given.

Who can doubt that there is something deeply wrong in the United Kingdom today? Everyone seems to be looking out for themselves, nobody seems to care, nobody appears to have any honour or respect - from the top to the bottom. There is a political culture of spin and lies, in which no-one can be trusted. Marriage vows don't matter, half a generation of children are growing up without a father, the government is encouraging children into promiscuity, homosexuality and infertility, crime has soared, people seek escape in drugs, our hospitals are filthy, our politicians spend our money like water while we all live on debt, injustice is done in the courts and the poor are robbed by the national lottery. The Christian Faith itself is under attack from politically-correct local government and the media and indecency is the rule in the arts. Last but not least, we kill our own children in what should be the safest place on earth. How did it come to this? (*Christian Voice*)

but

We celebrate the rise of pop culture as among the most profound, provocative, exciting expressions of legitimate spiritual yearning in at least one hundred years. We turn to pop culture in our efforts to understand God and to recognise the twenty-first century face of Jesus. We embrace pop culture because we believe it offers a refreshing, alternative route to a Jesus who for many has been domesticated, declawed, and kept under wraps. As the Christian church had often adopted the role a moral policeman, pop culture has assumed the role of spiritual revolutionary, subverting and frustrating those religious authorities who desperately cling to black-and-white answers in an increasingly grey world. (Detweiler and Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings*, p. 9)

iii) ...by the Bible we sit under (?)

- 'in the world, but not of the world' ??
- goodness of creation ('the earth is the Lord's, fullness thereof' Ps. 24:1), but also the 'badness' of a fallen 'world' (Do not love the world or anything in the world, 1 Jn. 2:15).
- the cultural mandate 'to fill and subdue the earth' (Gen. 1:28) to the gospel mandate 'to make disciples of all nations' (Mt. 28:19).
- God's knowledge of himself in creation, and the knowledge of Himself in His revealed Word in Scripture and in Christ.
- the continuity *and* discontinuity between the earth now, and the new heaven and new earth to come. What do we mean by, 'Your kingdom come, your will be *on earth as it is in heaven*'
- 'Come out and be separate from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you (Isa. 52:11, 2 Cor. 6:17) with 'though I am free I belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (1 Cor. 9:19-22)
- Christians have to account that just as they continue to battle with sin in their hearts, so non-Christians are often producers of great cultural achievement.
- biblical examples: The Israelites 'plundered the Egyptians' (Ex. 12:35-36) and yet Paul is very clear that Christians are not to be unequally yoked (2 Cor. 5:14). The Samaritans were not allowed to help the people of God in the rebuilding of the temple, and yet Phoenician workmanship was welcomed (Ezra. 3-4).

Part 1 – An introduction to culture (and worldview)

i) Common (mis)understandings of Culture

Historically the concept has been used developed in three ways.

- culture equals cultivation

‘the pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which concern us most, the best which has been thought and said in the world.’¹

- distinction is now made between ‘high’ culture (true culture) and primitive culture, low culture and most recently ‘pop’ culture.

– every human activity is seen as a cultural act – ‘Any activity or artifact is considered cultural, if it is an identity-forming product of social culture’. (Scruton)

Raymond Williams, ‘culture is a signifying system that communicates and reproduces a social order through its various signifying practices’

ii) A biblical understanding of Culture

Looking from the outside in – The Genesis of Culture

Let’s go back to Genesis to look at the birth of this cultural mandate - Read Gen. 1:26-31; 2:18-25

“God has revealed Himself as a Speaker and a Maker, and thus the immediate significance of being made in His ‘image’ is that Adam and Eve were created to speak and make...to be the image of God is to be a creative speaker and producer of ‘cultural products...’²

“the product of human acts of concretization undertaken in the developmental transformation of the earth according to the commandment of God.”³

4 tasks to the culturative plan

- ‘fill’

- ‘rule’

Now let’s go to Gen. 2:15 which further develops the idea of filling and subduing –

- ‘tend’ / ‘work’

¹ ‘An Essay on Political and Social Culture’ in *Culture and Anarchy* (New York, 1897), p. xi.

² Peter Leithart, *Heroes of the City of Man* (Moscow ID, 1999), 30.

³ *Plowing in Hope* (Moscow ID, 2004), 15.

- 'keep'

All of this is done not by an individual but in community –

How does this compare with our earlier definitions of culture?

Culture is both what society is and what it ought to be, both real and ideal. Culture is what a society has made of God's creation, together with its ideals of what it ought to make. Or maybe we should put the ideal first. People make things, because they already have plan in view, a purpose, a goal, an ideal. The ideal comes first, then making things. First the norm, then the cultivation, the culture.

So now we can see how culture is related to religion. When we talk of values and ideals, we are talking religion. In the broad sense a person's religion is what grips his heart most strongly, what motivates him most deeply. It is the value which transcends all other values. ...It is interesting that the Latin term *colere*....also refers to religious service, and comes into English as *cult*, *cultic* and so in. Culture and cult go together. If a society worships idols, false gods, that worship will govern the culture of that society. If a society worships the true God, that worship will deeply influence, even pervade its culture. If like ours, a society is religiously divided, then it will reveal a mixture of religious influences.⁴

Whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)

'everything that does not come from faith is sin' (Rom. 14:23)

Contrary to our earlier definitions:

- religion is not a part of culture – culture is an outworking of religion.
- Culture seen in context of Xn story – creation – fall- redemption-consumation
- Culture is not an end in itself but a means to several greater ends – garden-city, the glory of God
- The opposite of so called 'culture' is not depravity
- There is a real sense in which all human social activity is cultural activity

⁴ John Frame, 'Christianity and Culture' available at http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/joh_frame/Frame.Apologetics2004.ChristandCulture.pdf#search=%22John%20Frame%2C%20Christ%20and%20Culture%22

Culture refers to the network or system of shared meaning in a society, a conceptual collection of ideals, beliefs and values, ideas and knowledge, attitudes and assumptions about life that is woven together over time and is widely shared among a people. It is a kind of invisible blueprint – a map of reality that people use to interpret their experience and guide their behaviour. The term culture refers directly to this fabric of meaning that is a people's way of life, and in its general usage also describes the 'texts' of everyday life and material works that are a manifestation of a cultural system'⁵

- As Christians we can't escape culture – while there will always be levels of expressivity, will it be God-is it God-glorifying or God-defying -
- The cultural mandate is a central plank of history and inextricable linked to redemptive history – what is God saving us for!

Looking from the inside out – The revelation of worldview

Culture is very closely linked to the concept of 'worldview'

"culture is worldview exteriorized, and worldview is culture interiorized and both stem from the religion of the heart"

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁶

- 1) 'heart of the matter of worldview is that worldview is the matter of the heart'
- 2) into the heart goes the issues of life – importance of nurture – needs to be watched – worldviews are works in progress.
- 3) out of the heart goes the issues of life - a presuppositional basis of life – first principles. People take for granted – do not rest on other principles but are rested upon, not argued to but argues from.

condition of the whole person – where religious life is rooted.

"As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man (Pr. 27:19)"

The central defining element of the human person – wholistic definition – wisdom, emotion, desire and will, spirituality, intellect

This seems to make a lots sense and ties in again with our definition of religion.

Because the biblical picture of humans post-Fall is not

'Religious' < -----as opposed to ----- > 'Non-religious'

⁵ William Romanowski, *Pop Culture Wars* (Downers Grove, 1996), 306.

⁶ Sire, James W. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (IVP: 2004), p. 122.

but rather

true faith < ----- as opposed to ----- > false faith

'False faith'⁷ is F. Turretin's brilliant phrase describing what happens to us in Genesis 3 (archetypal sin)

- Genesis 1 & 2 establish God is:-
 - a God who blesses (benevolent and good)
 - a God who is truthful and effective (He speaks and it is so)
- We disbelieve the truth about God, accepting He is:
 - not good (actuated by envy)
 - not truthful (we will not die)
- and believe lies about Him – but these lies about Him are 'leaps of faith'

More generally see 2 Kings 17:1-23 Israel is judged not because she is atheist and secularist, but because she is falsely religious and Romans 1:18-32, where religious honours **are** paid, but **wrongly**



Biblical view of humans as inveterately 'religious' – commitments of faith to things, persons and values



What is my faith in?/ what is my idol?

In passing, atheism and materialism aren't real exceptions to this:-

- adopted as 'leaps of faith' (i.e. on grounds that fall short of complete logical infallibility)
- feature goals which **function** as absolute, even if they aren't strictly treated as ontologically absolute

e.g. the existentialist who says 'my values are constructed by me', but actually his values function in his/her life as absolutely as if they had been handed down on tablets of stone from Sinai

Well, if there are these conceptual ties to the biblical ideas of false faith and idolatry, why bother using terms like 'world-view' at all?

Still has some use:-

- in highlighting the **all-encompassing** nature of this grid of reference – a view of everything
- in highlighting that Christians too have views of the world

⁷ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* Topic 9. Q. 6. IX.

Sire (not least as a result of D. Naugle's work⁸), wants to nuance this a bit:

- not just *intellectual*,
but
an attitude of the *heart* (what we have called a matter of faith, true or false) – in particular, truth is not just what I *think*, but what I *want*
- not just *propositional*, ('the world is full of sadness'),
but
narrative ('I once thought life was grand but when my wife left me, I saw how empty it all is'). Worldviews are 'lived in'
Worth noting that the narratives may be at different levels:
 - individual (my life story is this....)
 - cosmic/humanity/national (a couple of examples:
 - *modernistically*, 'once we thought God created life now we know after Darwin that life is the result of complex, beautiful but non-intentional evolutionary forces',
or ,
 - *more post-modernly* 'Once we thought there were grand meta-narratives that could explain life, but now we have come to know that there are no meta-narratives, and we must live in this new world')

BUT

Merely because the narrative is at a individual/personal level doesn't mean it can't be a governing/dominating outlook (a 'meta-narrative' in that sense)

ALSO

Some-one may have 2/more 'narratives' carrying different messages, operating at different levels

Paying attention to narrative and story means we ask questions:

Where did we come from and who are we?

What has gone wrong with the world?

What can we do to fix it?

Part 2 - An introduction to cultural apologetics

Cultural what? No point in analyzing culture is we don't do something with it.

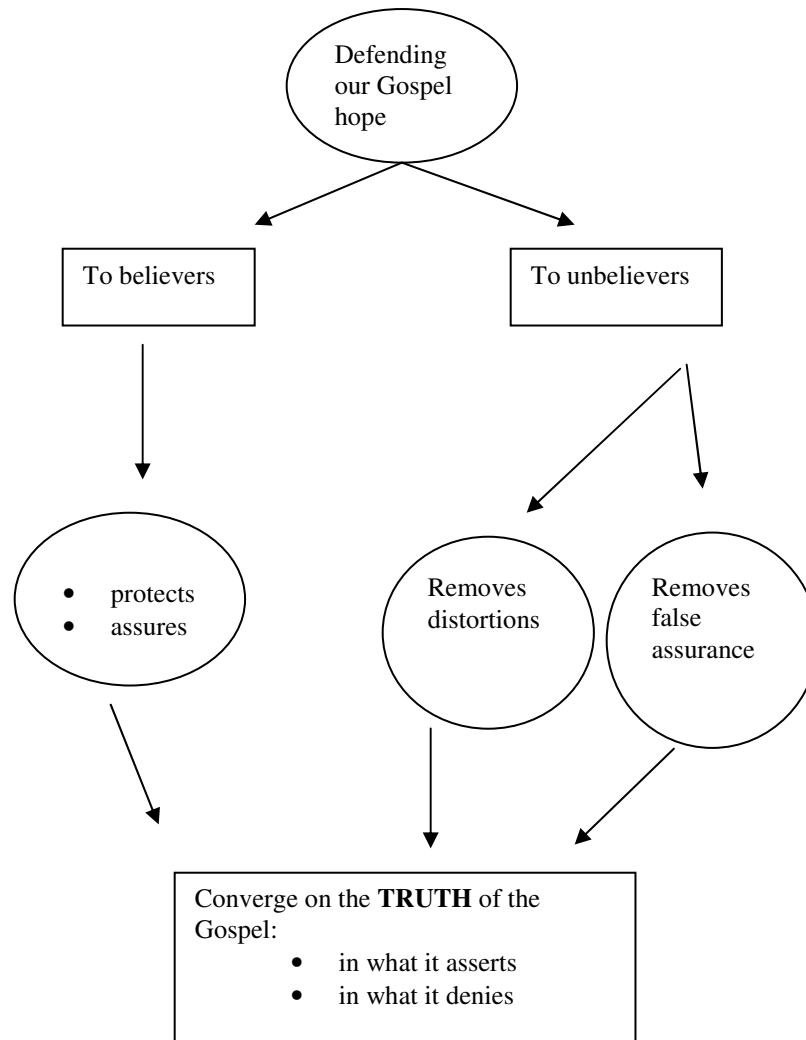
How do we define cultural apologetics and the apologetic task?

A definition of apologetics:

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? **14** But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, **15 but in**

⁸ D.K.Naugle *Worldview: the History of a Concept* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans .2002.

your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. **17** For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:13-16)



i) The content of cultural apologetics:

- *is Bible-based* – ‘setting apart Christ as Lord’
- *is gospel-centred* – What is our ‘hope’ in? Jesus Christ and the good news of the gospel

gospel is the power of God (Rom. 1:16)

gospel is totally sufficient - it is all we need – not a step but a hub, not ABC's but A-Z - by it we enter the kingdom of God, by the kingdom grows.

Implications:

gospel and apologetics - it is central in the apologetic task both in defence (Phil. 1:7) and attack (2 Cor. 10:5).

May want to nuance this slightly so:

Andrew Fellows distinguishes a 3-fold stage in apologetics - subversion, persuasion, proclamation.

Richard Pratt distinguishes between evangelism as proclamation and apologetics as justification for the proclamation – the 'why of the hope'

I like Frame who delineates three perspectives that are related:

- Apologetics as proof – basis for Xty being true
- Apologetics as defense – answering objections of unbelief
- Apologetics as offense – attacking foolishness of unbelieving thought.

gospel is a philosophy –

gospel is a worldview –

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)

Remember in *the* apologetic address of Paul in the Areopagus Repentance (Acts 17)

ii) The comprehensiveness of cultural apologetics

- *encompassing both Christians and non-Christians* - well this the gospel central this should be obvious because we the need the gospel to be saved and the gospel to grow. Let's look at these two aspects:

- *the believer* - we might call apologetics 'training in godliness' for it can protect, assure strengthen faith.

Why does 1 John finish with - Keep yourself from idols. Apologetics especially at the cultural level is about 'knowing the enemy' – ignorance is not bliss, know thy enemy 'Keep yourself from idols' – we need to know these idols – how they work.

IDEAS HAVE LEGS. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Rom.12:1)

We need to see where we and other Christians remain intellectually and socially 'in' the world, allowing our understanding to be constructed from something other than the word of God. We need to see how our faith is affected by the world we live in. If we don't do

this then we will indeed 'be tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes' (Eph. 4:14).

Therefore we need a certain amount of cultural literacy

Here is a sad example:

"I never doubted my belief in God for a single moment until I retired from sport," he says. "Faith was the reason that I decided to become a professional athlete, in the same way that it was fundamental to every decision I made. It was the foundation of my existence, the thing that made everything else make sense. It was not a sacrifice to refuse to compete on Sundays during my early career because that would imply that athletics was important in and of itself. It was not. It was always a means to an end: glorifying God.

But when I retired, something happened that took me by complete surprise. I quickly realised that athletics was more important to my identity than I believed possible. I was the best in the world at what I did and suddenly that was not true any more. With one facet of my identity stripped away, I began to question the others and, from there, there was no stopping. The foundations of my world were slowly crumbling...

...Once you start asking yourself questions like, 'How do I really know there is a God?' you are already on the path to unbelief," Edwards says. "During my documentary on St Paul, some experts raised the possibility that his spectacular conversion on the road to Damascus might have been caused by an epileptic fit. It made me realise that I had taken things for granted that were taught to me as a child without subjecting them to any kind of analysis. When you think about it rationally, it does seem incredibly improbable that there is a God." (*Interview with Jonathan Edwards by David Powell, Times June 07*)

- *the unbeliever*

- *cultural apologetics is 'person variable'* - there is no one size fits all method, no magic bullet – there can't be. Notice the fact of flexibility (Acts 14:8-20; 17:10-12, 16-34; 1 Cor 9:19-23)

If I am to love my neighbour as myself (Mt. 22:39) – I have to understand him – work hard to understand him – and his culture– obeying the law of love What is their greatest anxiety, greatest hope. Apologetics is not simply about arguments and projects but rather people and relationships.

Cultural 'plausibility structures' – this phrase comes from sociology, and particularly the sociology of knowledge:

A plausibility structure is a web of beliefs that are so embedded in the hearts and minds of the bulk of a society that people hold them either unconsciously or so firmly that they never think to ask if they are true. In short, a plausibility structure is a worldview of a society, the heart of a community...One of the main functions of a plausibility structure is to provide the

background of beliefs that makes arguments easy or hard to accept. (Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, p. 112.)

'common sense' consensus beliefs – make Xty implausible – defeater beliefs. Belief-A is true so belief B cannot be – very strong implausibility structure against Xty – these defeater beliefs can vary from culture to culture and be held lightly or strongly.

- *cultural apologetics is 'humanity constant'*.

'The recognition that all sinners are engaged in the same project, or battle. The mob of rebels against God may carry a variety of weapons, but they are all rushing in the same direction with the same hostile demeanor and destructive intent.' (D. Field)

The best form of defence is attack (Is 44; Acts 17:16-34)

Note the debunking of alternative views held by non-believers. What is particularly interesting here is the way this debunking :

Removes false assurance:

----- > *the 'gods' cannot do what is pretended of them*

----- > *humanity is not at peace with God in the way it pretends*

This commonality is universal and covers all forms religious and 'non-religious' and all levels from the philosopher to the stropky teenager.

- *encompassing the whole person*

'The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing' (Pascal)

Cultural apologetics focuses on the heart and those reasons of the heart

- *encompassing both the individual, the cultural and the cosmic*

Here I want us to understand the big apologetic picture – Cultural apologetics is always done in the context of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We are to set apart Christ as Lord

As a matter of obedience to Christ's lordship

----- > Lordship theology

The Identity of Christ

The one to whom all authority has been given by the Father (Psalm 2, Mt 28:18ff, John 13:3, 17:2)

The one who will judge, amongst other things, for 'public office' actions

Kuyper's presentation of Christ's Lordship

- there is not a single inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'

but

- This perfect Sovereignty of the sinless Messiah at the same time directly denies and challenges all absolute Sovereignty among sinful men on earth, and does so by dividing life into separate spheres, each with its own sovereignty.



How is Christ 'lord' in a particular sphere?

- > Christ has the **right** to be lord of all
- > Christians have a **duty** to challenge areas where this rule is not respected
- > accounts of anything in creation that do not relate that something to Christ are **necessarily incomplete**, and to that extent misleading
- > a key area is that of our thoughts and ideologies – we must take every thought captive for Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

“Christ does not settle for a part-time or restricted reign as King. He demands obedience in all things from us, and His aim is to subdue all resistance – of any nature (internal and external) – to his rule.”

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col. 1:19-20)

Whether people acknowledge it or not – Jesus Christ is Lord of the Universe, he is King, he is in control – of everything – every thing.

Abraham Kuyper the great dutch theologian and prime-minister said famously “there is not a thumb-breath of the universe about which Christ does not say ‘It is mine’

Jesus has reconciled all things

This means there is no:

No sacred / secular split

No physical / spiritual split

“A thoroughgoing rejection of any privatization of the Christian faith, Christ principles cannot be restricted in their application to private and church matters, but have relevance to every sphere of life. The task of the people of God, individually and corporately , is not only to seek the conversion of sinners, but also to train them to live in every part of life accordance with the royal words of king Jesus”

We need to live under the authority of Christ in all dimensions of life – in family life, social life – Whatever you eat or drink – or whatever you do – do it all for God’s glory

Let’s go back to our TV illustration

Imagine you had just turned on the TV. You have one of those TV that take moment to warm up – so the sound comes on before the picture. And you hear the words Jesus is Lord. What kind of image would you expect to see? An interview with a government minister explaining policy, an a-level student writing an English lit. essay, a business man discussing company strategy, a builder mixing concrete, a world leader discussing international affairs.

I guess you might be surprised if any of these came into view – Jesus is Lord sounds out of place – but wrong thinking.

All callings are for God

There is not one square inch

What does the Christ’s Lordship over your life mean for your calling, the way you bring up your kids, your television watching, your views on the economy -

What does this mean for your studies – not just nicking pens – your subject.

iii) The context for cultural apologetics

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1Pet. 2:9-12)

- *Christian Character*

- please note in our cultural apologetic endeavours we are to be 'gentle' and 'respectful' This does not mean we compromise on truth. As we will see the Bible is very stark and blunt in talking about unbelief. I realise it is a trite saying but we can win the argument but lose the person. Of course, if the gospel is central in our thinking then of course there is no room for boasting or arrogance for it is by grace we have been saved, not because of anything we have done.

Many apologists have taken this slogan as their motto: *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* bold in our defence, gentle in our manner of defence

- life of prayer, Bible knowledge

- *Christian Community* community – medium as part of the message – 1 Peter 2:9 – chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, - praise your good deeds – important as we put all this together.

'Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful. Christian community is the ultimate apologetic' (Schaeffer)

- *Christian Culture (?)*

Further Reading:

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<http://www.christkirk.com/>

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