

## **Make Them Wish It Were True: Capturing the Imagination of Our Culture with the Beauty and Relevance of the Christian Faith**

One of the challenges facing the apologist today is that demonstrating the rationality of the Christian faith does not always lead people to embrace Christianity. Unless people can see that Christianity is practically relevant to their lived experience, as well as morally attractive, they are unlikely to give a fair hearing to the strong arguments for the truth of Christianity. In this session, we will therefore consider the apologetic importance of not only appealing to people's intellects with arguments and evidence to show that the Christian faith is true; but also of appealing to people's imaginations with the beauty and relevance of the Christian faith so that they actually want it to be true.

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### **I. Introduction**

- a. In 1 Peter 3:15 Peter writes, "But in your heart set apart Christ Jesus as Lord, and always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us for the reason for the hope that we have, and do this with gentleness and respect."
- b. *One of the problems facing evangelism in the church today is that we don't even know what the questions are, let alone the answers.*

### **II. Objections to the Christian Faith:**

- a. Christianity is irrational (there is no God),
- b. Christianity is immoral (I don't like your God)
- c. Christianity is irrelevant (I don't need your God).

### **III. Primary Motivating Questions**

- a. Is it true?
- b. Is it good or beautiful?
- c. Does it work?
  - One of the challenges facing apologetics today is that demonstrating that Christianity is true might simply prompt the response – well, maybe it is, but...so what!
  - We must not only address the intellectual question – is it true? We must also address the existential questions – is it good? And does it work?

#### IV. Evidential and Existential Apologetics

- a. Whereas *evidential* apologetics is about appealing to people's intellects with arguments and evidence to show that Christian faith is true, *existential* apologetics is about appealing to people's imaginations with the beauty and relevance of the Christian faith so that they actually want it to be true.
- b. *Emotions are the mysterious energy that drives humans to love, kill, marry, divorce, buy things we can't afford, drink too much, and worship invisible deities.* – Jonathan Pennington (New Testament Scholar)
- c. The analogy of the rider and the elephant. – Jonathan Haidt
- d. *Only if their imagination is captured will most people give a fair hearing to the strong arguments for the truth of Christianity. Let's appeal to heart and imagination as well as to reason as we speak publicly about our faith in Jesus.*  
– Tim Keller
- e. *Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is.* – Blaise Pascal

#### V. Three Possible Objections

- a. Objection 1 – Trying to make people wish that Christianity were true is manipulative and deceptive.
- b. Objection 2 – Trying to make people wish that Christianity were true is pandering to selfishness and sin.
- c. Objection 3 – Trying to make people wish that Christianity were true suggests that our faith is nothing but a wish fulfillment.
- d. *The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.* – C.S. Lewis

- e. *Every time a man knocks on a brothel door, he is really searching for God.* – G.K. Chesterton

## VI. Evidential Versus Existential Apologetics

- a. Not “either/or” but “both/and”.
- b. *Need without reason is blind, but reason without need is sterile.* – Clifford Williams (Christian philosopher)
- c. How can we show that Christianity is a *better story*?
- *We are the way we are... because of the stories we tell ourselves.* – Seth Godin
  - *The whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the story of the whole world.* – N.T. Wright
  - *We are called to out-narrate the dominant stories that shape our culture, by exposing their weaknesses or showing how they are enfolded by our own or how they are eclipsed by a more luminous and compelling story.* – Alister McGrath
- d. Examples of competing narratives:
- The Capitalist Prosperity narrative, the Progressive Socialism narrative, the Scientific Enlightenment narrative, the Expressive Romantic narrative, the American Experiment narrative, the Militant Islamic Resurgence narrative, the Destined Unity with Brahman narrative, the Ubiquitous Egoism narrative, and the Chance and Purposelessness narrative. – Christian Smith (sociologist)
  - *Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness that has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years.* – C.S. Lewis
- e. Questions
- What do they believe?
  - What do they value?
  - What do they hope for?
- f. Response
- A.C.T. model.
    - *Affirm*
    - *Critique*
    - *Tell a Better Story*

## VII. “Global” Meaning vs “Situational” Meaning

- The question of Identity: Who am I?
- The question of Value: Do I matter?
- The question of Purpose: Why am I here?
- The question of Agency: Can I make a difference?
  - Roy Baumeister (Social Psychologist)
  
- *Out, out, brief candle!*  
*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player*  
*That struts and frets his hour upon the stage*  
*And then is heard no more: it is a tale*  
*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,*  
*Signifying nothing.*
  - Shakespeare's Macbeth
  
- *Man is the product of causes, which had no provision of the end they were achieving. His origin, his growth, his hopes, his fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms ... no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave ... and all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon-day brightness of human genius is destined to eventual extinction in the vast death of the solar system ... the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins* – Bertrand Russel

## VIII. Homelessness and Home

- *The first thing I remember about the world – and I pray it may be the last – is that I was a stranger in it. The feeling which everyone has to some degree, and which is at once the glory and desolation of homo sapiens, provides the only thread of consistency that I can see in my life.* – Malcolm Muggeridge

*For men are homesick in their own homes,  
And strangers under the sun.  
But our homes are under miraculous skies  
Where the Yule tale was begun*

*A Child in a foul stable,  
Where the beasts feed and foam;  
Only where He was homeless  
Are you and I at home;  
We have hands that fashion and heads that know,  
But our hearts we lost - how long ago!  
In a place no chart nor ship can show  
Under the sky's dome.*

*To an open house in the evening  
Home shall men come,  
To an older place than Eden  
And a taller town than Rome.  
To the end of the way of the wandering star,  
To the things that cannot be and that are,  
To the place where God was homeless  
And all men are at home.*  
– G.K. Chesterton

- *You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. – St Augustine*
  
- *What is it then that this desire [to find happiness] and this inability [to find happiness] proclaim to us, but that there was once in man a true happiness of which there now remains to him only; the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present? But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable Object, that is to say, only by God Himself. – Blaise Pascal*