

## **Journalism and Apologetics: A Case Study on the Integration of Faith and Learning**

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### **I. Setting the scene**

- The calling of Christians – as expressed in Rom 12,1-2.
- The contemporary context as postmodern or late modern
- The role of the media as reflecting and shaping contemporary culture
  - The news media
  - The entertainment media
- The different roles in the media:

There is a need to explore the legitimacy and the key differences between various significant roles in the media. Vital roles to explore and expound are especially those of a journalist, of an artist, and of a persuasive communicator (such as the public relations officer, the preacher, the evangelist or the apologist). The focus in this context is on the role of a journalist.

It is an important task to raise the awareness within Christian churches and missions about the vital task and role of a (traditional) *journalist*. Christian journalists are often under pressure from their Christian circles to become advocacy journalists or even ‘preachers’ and thus their professional integrity is threatened. It is on the other hand an equally important task to address ‘the myth of neutrality’, which (despite being an outdated view) still seems to influence much journalism training and practice. Christian journalists should thus reflect on the value-laden nature of their profession and seek to be professionals with Christian integrity.

### **II. The key role of journalists in the media:**

- Providing information
- Providing a platform for public debate
- Providing critique (and self-critique) as ‘the Fourth Estate’
- Providing entertainment (relaxation/amusement)

### III. Key Values of Traditional Journalism

a) truth – or only a construction?

“For on the one hand the Jewish and Christian faiths join the modern thinker to insist on the objectivity of truth, while on the other they stand with the postmodern thinker to acknowledge the subjectivity we bring to truth, including our own personal distortions. Within the biblical view, humans are truth-twisters as well as truth-seekers.” (Guinness 2000:124)

b) public interest – or what interests the public?

c) impartiality – or what is politically correct?

d) integrity – or what is commercially beneficial?

e) human dignity – or treating people as means?

### IV. Journalism, Values and Worldviews

There is a need to explore further *the Christian rationale and basis for involvement in traditional journalism*.

*First*, along with e.g. secular humanists, the Christian can affirm key values of journalism such as truth, integrity, relevance and human dignity.

*Secondly*, unlike e.g. secular humanists, the Christian can argue for a proper and unique basis for these values, found ultimately in the existence and character of the triune God of the Bible.

*Thirdly*, the biblical view of humanity (as both uniquely valuable and fallen) will influence on how to evaluate the common ‘news criteria’ (Thus: What is news within a Christian perspective? E.g.: Is ‘the good’ also newsworthy, since that often might be more unexpected in a fallen world?) .

*Fourthly*, a ‘Christian Ethic of Realism’ will look critically at the role of journalism in setting the agenda through the selection and shaping of stories, not the least since this increasingly is being done on the Internet with its new challenges to journalistic trustworthiness and integrity.

*Fifthly*, given the importance of virtues in recent ethical thinking (and in biblical thinking), what is the role of (moral and intellectual) virtues in journalism?

### V. Journalism, Calling – and Other Professions

Historically the biblical notion of ‘calling’ has been a dynamic and deeply influential idea.

Os Guinness has recently defined calling in a helpful way:

“Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.”

(Guinness 1998: 29)

We live in a global (media) context characterized, among other things, by the pressures of secularisation, pluralization and privatization. Guinness reflects on how an understanding of calling helps us to counter these pressures:

- a) “Calling directly counters the great modern pressure toward secularisation because the call of Jesus includes a summons to the exercise of the spiritual disciplines and the experience of supernatural realities.” (*ibid* p. 156)
- b) “Calling directly counters the great modern pressure toward privatization because of its insistence that Jesus Christ is Lord of every sphere of life.” (*ibid* p. 164)
- c) “Calling directly counters the great modern pressure toward pluralization because the call of Jesus provides the priorities and perspectives that are essential for a focused life in an overloaded age.” (*ibid* p. 174)

It is the task also of Christians journalists to apply the truth of calling to their lives – which includes being Christian educators and trainers in the fields of media and communication.

The vocation as Christian journalists includes having the wisdom to *seek the 'shalom' of our cultures* (Jer. 29:7). This means enabling the listeners, the viewers and the readers to seek truth, beauty and goodness through their personal and professional involvement with the media.

Christian journalists – as well Christians in other professions - are ultimately called to live out *the reality of Christ and his 'shalom'* in an ultramodern or a postmodern media context, and when appropriate, creatively presenting and defending the unique truth and relevance of the Christian worldview in the various contemporary marketplaces of ideas which includes both the traditional and the new media.

## **Recommended reading**

Guinness, Os: *The Call. Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*  
(London: Word, 1998)

Guinness, Os: *Time for Truth. Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype and Spin*  
(Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000)