

## Culture and Mission

What do we mean when we talk of cultural literacy or engagement? Are there lessons and approaches which combine sociological and cultural analysis with biblical and missiological reflection which can aid us in our efforts to honor the Gospel and be more effective in our outreach. This session will seek to outline an orientation and model that may help us in our desire to connect.

**Stuart McAllister** was born in Scotland and saw his life changed by Christ at the early age of twenty. Filled with a hunger to learn more and deepen his understanding of the faith led him to join Operation Mobilization in 1978. He worked with the organization for 20 years in Vienna, Austria, and his service took him to Yugoslavia, where he was imprisoned for forty days for distributing Christian literature. Upon his release, he continued to preach in communist countries, resulting in more imprisonments. With a rich history of service, Stuart has acted as general secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance (1992-1998) and been involved with the European Lausanne Committee. Stuart joined Ravi Zacharias International Ministries in 1998 as the International Director and today serves as Regional Director, Americas. He has contributed chapters in the books *Beyond Opinion* (Thomas Nelson, 2007) and *Global Missiology for the 21st Century* (World Evangelical Fellowship, 2000).

### ***Titus 2:11-15***

- **The event that decides all.** What C. S. Lewis calls “*The Grand Miracle*” (See ***John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrew 1:1-4***).
- **Faithful presence, prophetic call.** (***Titus 2:14***) In the world, not of the world, but as Richard John Neuhaus said, “*for the world.*” It is as Lesslie Newbigin put it, “*public truth.*”
- **The Missionary Mandate.** ***Matthew 28:18-20; John 20:21***, etc. As John Stott said, “*The incarnation is the model for mission*”, or as John Piper put it, “*Mission exists because worship doesn't*

*“By our uncritical pursuit of relevance we have actually courted irrelevance; by our breathless chase after relevance without a matching commitment to faithfulness, we have become not only unfaithful but irrelevant; by our determined efforts to redefine ourselves in ways that are more compelling to the modern world than are faithful to Christ, we have lost not only our identity but our authority and our relevance. Our crying need is to be faithful as well as relevant.”<sup>i</sup>*

### **I. Reality, Life and Truth**

*Is reality secular? Is adequate knowledge secular? And is that something that has been established as a fact by thorough and unbiased inquiry? Is this something that today's secular universities thoroughly and freely discuss in a disciplined way?*

- **The pull of wonder and curiosity.**

*“Apologetics should be a matter of wonder and desire, not least because reason at its most reasonable is itself a matter of wonder and desire.” He goes on, “It is the work of the apologist to suggest that only in God does our wonder reach its zenith, and only in God do our deepest desires find their fulfillment. The apologist may labor to show that the Christian theological vision is true, but that will fall flat unless he or she has an equal confidence that it is supremely attractive and engaging.”<sup>iii</sup>*

- **Seeking meaningful connections.**

*“Christian apologists must locate ‘diagnostic spaces’: places where the relationship between religion and the wider world is being clearly played out, and where this relationship can be studied.”<sup>iii</sup>*

## **II. Pursuing Serious Engagement**

- **The wrong use of tradition.**

- Each age generates its own specific concerns and critiques of the Christian faith. Many of the issues seen as important by Carnell, and the other apologists of this age now seem of little significance. Indeed, reading older works of apologetics often seems like a journey down memory lane, marked by names of writers and controversies that no longer seem relevant.*
- Many apologists of modernity engaged their cultural context using approaches they believed would resonate with their audiences—such as an appeal to rational argument as to basis for a trustworthy faith. As we shall see, the hallmark of good apologetics is an ability to engage specific audiences. Yet the modernist assumption of the primacy of rationality has now been called into question, raising difficulties for apologetic approaches based upon or appealing to it.”<sup>iv</sup>*

- **Getting below the surface.**

*“The danger of forms of apologetics that respond to rationalism is that they often end up importing rationalism into Christianity, rather than exporting the gospel into a rationalist culture.”*

*“When most people turn to consider the substrata of thought or reality, they encounter something far more complicated and unsettling.” To shatter illusions, disturb certainties and probe into unknowns, may be our role? Davison, “It may be the task of apologetics to make the world more of a problem or puzzle, and not less. Before*

*anyone can accept God as the answer to the world's question, he or she must first perceive the world to BE a question.”<sup>v</sup>*

- **The fundamentals remain the same.**
  - i. *Understand the Christian Gospel (and don't assume all do).*
  - ii. *Understand the context within which you are doing apologetics.*
  - iii. *Develop apologetic approaches that are faithful to the Gospel and build on the 'common good' or 'points of contact' with the cultural context.<sup>vi</sup>*

### III. Christian Insights On Life

- **Christianity is a show and tell faith. (Acts 1:1-4)**
- **Lessons on Life and ways of seeing.**

McGrath writes *“For Lewis, the Christian faith offers us a means of seeing things properly—as they really are, despite their outward appearances.”*

*“Lewis's commendation of the Christian faith” says McGrath, “rests partly in his belief that it offers a capacious and deeply satisfying vision of reality—a way of looking at things that simultaneously allows both discernment of its complexity and affirmation of its interconnectedness. The human imagination plays a leading role in grasping this ‘big picture’, in that it is more easily perceived than understood. Here is what we might call a ‘religious imaginary’—a ‘way of living, seeing and making,’ grounded in the Christian vision of reality, which lends coherence to the whole picture of existence.”<sup>vii</sup>*

- **Newbigin and the role of grace.**

*“God's sovereignty is that of God's grace. It is as Savior that God is Lord. It is as the one who overcomes our alienation from the truth that God reveals the truth.”* He goes on: *“The revelation of God given to us in Him is not a matter of coercive demonstration but of grace, of a love that forgives and invites. That reality of grace governs both the confidence we have in speaking of God and the manner in which we must commend the Gospel to others.”<sup>viii</sup>*

### IV. Reflective Missiology

*“We must learn the language of our audience. And let me say at the outset that it is no use at all laying down a priori what the ‘plain man’ does or does not understand. You have to find out by experience.....”<sup>ix</sup>*

- **With Eyes Wide Open.**

*“Culture is a stern reality. It is as extensive as man and as comprehensive as his ways, thoughts, sentiments, and relationships. It is the all-encompassing non-biological atmosphere of his being as well as the institutions that make life tolerable and mold him into the being he actually is.”<sup>x</sup>*

- **The particulars and distinctions count.**

Alister McGrath proposes three general principles from the models seen in the Acts.

- i. Address the specific audience.**
- ii. Identify the authorities that carry weight with the audience.**
- iii. Use lines of argument that will carry weight with the audience.<sup>xi</sup>**

The real issue McGrath suggests, is in identifying the gateway issues or issue that works best for each audience.

- **The role of experiment and risks.**

## **V. A Way Forward?**

*“To get at what is said and why it is said, good listening examines how it is said. By attending carefully, an apologist tries to get inside the other person’s perspective. This includes listening for and noting intellectual commitments, attitudes, and feelings. A careful listener discerns the other’s cultural identity and self-concept as well. She hears both the conceptual content of words and their emotional feel.”<sup>xii</sup>*

- **The role of Research and Development**

- **The Lordship of Christ**  
**1 Peter 3:13-16**

*“Apologetics, viewed in this way assists the Gospel in setting people free—from false desires, assumed needs, bewitching ideas, unreflected habits and substitutions for the real objects of their longing—to worship God and recognize the true orientation of the human heart towards such worship.” He says elsewhere, “Apologetics spearheads evangelism; and it begins with reading the signs of the times.”<sup>xiii</sup>*

• **Proper confidence**

***1 Corinthians 1:18-19; 2:1-2***

Lesslie Newbigin puts it well, “*The confidence proper to a Christian is not the confidence of one who claims possession of a demonstrable and indubitable knowledge. It is the confidence of one who had heard and answered the call that comes from the God through whom and for whom all things were made: Follow me.*”<sup>xiv</sup>

***Suggested Readings:***

- *Is Reality Secular? Testing The Assumptions Of Four Global Worldviews.* Mary Poplin.
- *Grand Central Question.* Abdu Murray.
- *Christianity Among Other Religions: Apologetics In A Contemporary Context.* Roch A. Kereszty, O. Cist. Edited by Andrew C. Gregg.
- *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change.* Paul G. Hiebert.
- *Translating The Message.* Lamin Sanneh.
- *The Prodigal God.* Timothy Keller.
- *How God Became King.* N. T. Wright.

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<sup>i</sup> Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: “A Challenge to The Idol of Relevance”* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003) 15

<sup>ii</sup> Andrew Davison (Editor), *“Imaginative Apologetics”* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2011) intro, xxvi

<sup>iii</sup> Donna Lazenby cited in Andrew Davison, 47

<sup>iv</sup> Alister McGrath, *“Mere Apologetics: How To Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith”* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012, 28-29

<sup>v</sup> Andrew Davison, 21

<sup>vi</sup> Alister E. McGrath, 35

<sup>vii</sup> Alister E. McGrath. *“The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis”* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 91

<sup>viii</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *“Proper Confidence”* (London, UK: SPCK, Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone Rd., 1995), 78

<sup>ix</sup> Richard Purtill, *“C. S. Lewis Case For The Christian Faith”* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004) 14-15

<sup>x</sup> George Peters, cited in David E. Bjork, *“Unfamiliar Paths: The challenge of Recognizing the Work of Christ in Strange Clothing”* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977) 27

<sup>xi</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *“Mere Apologetics”*, 68

<sup>xii</sup> David K. Clark, *“Dialogical Apologetics: A Person-Centered Approach to Christian Defense”* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 210

<sup>xiii</sup> Graham Ward cited in A. Davison, 125

<sup>xiv</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, 105