

Jesus: Subversive Apologist

Most apologetics presuppose some degree of ‘openness’ on the part of the person we are engaged with. The fact is, most often we are dealing with those who are ‘closed’. The apologetics of Jesus give a remarkable insight into how we can engage subversively with the ‘closed’. This involves tackling their dominant worldview symbols, using narrative and engaging with questions. This workshop will discuss how to engage in these tasks.

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Introduction

The Apologetic process can be broken down into three stages;

I. Three Stages

A. The Final Stage: Proclamation

1. This is the telos of apologetics – to tell forth the central gospel message,
2. Tragically, many Evangelicals see this as the only stage in our engagement with the unbeliever.

B. The Middle Stage: Persuasion

1. This is the Christian in a dialogue with an unbeliever who is *open* to exploring an alternative.
2. This is the traditional remit for apologetics.

C. The First Stage: Subversion

1. This is an engagement with persons who are *closed* to Christianity and *entrenched* within their own worldview.
2. This entrenchment can take two forms;
 - a. Hostility
 - b. Indifference

1. Most non-Christians we engage with in Europe require subversive apologetics.
2. This is easily the most challenging Apologetic situation.

II. How did Jesus Deal with the Entrenched?

1. The entrenched of Jesus day were stuck in 2nd temple Judaism. Roman occupation had made their entrenchment even more severe than usual.
2. **Luke 10:25-37** as an example of Subversive Apologetics at work
3. *Jesus engagement with this man had three subversive elements to it*

A. Jesus Worked From Within their Worldview and Subverted Their Dominant Symbols

1. The lawyer's question (verse 25)

What do I need to do in order to be part of God's victory over our enemies (the Romans)?
This was the promise of eternal life to a 1st century Jew.

2. Jesus answer (verse 26)

NOTE: Jesus meets the lawyer within his own WV by directing him to the Torah. To a 1st century Jew, the Torah was everything. It defined their identity.

3. The lawyer's response (27)

A very predictable answer - love God and love your neighbor.

4. Jesus unpredictable counter response (28)

Sensing the agitation in the lawyer, Jesus challenges the lawyer to live it out.

5. The lawyer's request for clarification (29)

1. For the lawyer, loving God was straightforward – keep the Torah. It was the issue of loving neighbor that needed clarification.
2. NOTE; for a 1st century Jew, only a fellow Jew could be a neighbor. Jews used the Torah as a boundary marker against the Gentiles. It functioned as an Identity point that excluded contact with the Gentiles.

3. In the lawyers definition of kingdom only a fellow Jew could be a neighbor.
4. In Jesus kingdom there was a different boundary marker.

- *The Outcome:*

By meeting the lawyer within his own worldview, Jesus was able to deconstruct (take the roof off) it. By telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus destroys the Torah as a boundary marker of nationalism. This is because the real neighbor in the story is the non- Jew (unlike the two national Jews who did not act as neighbors).

- *The Lesson:*

(i) *Be sensitive to the worldview of the other person.*

This means listening must be a key part of the apologetic task.

(ii) *Once you gain an understanding of their WV look for the key symbols that represent it.*

- *An Example of How to do this with Modernism:*

B. Jesus' Use of Story

1. In verse 29 the lawyer is tempting Jesus to a debate (he wanted to justify himself).
2. How would you have answered it?

a) *A rule to operate by*

- ◇ When you are dealing with the entrenched, a debate often leaves the other even more entrenched.
- ◇ If you win the argument you may have lost the battle because they are 'dug in' more than ever.
- ◇ NOTE; in response to the killer question from the lawyer, Jesus tells a story.

b) *The power of a well-told story is that it draws the listener in.*

- ◇ The lawyer is forced to see himself in the light of this story. When he identifies with the Jew in the ditch he knows who real neighbor is.

- ◇ Only a story could have broken through his dominant viewpoint.

- ◇ Subversive Apologetics must learn the power of the story.

3. A few pointers on how we can use story:

a. The use of story from our own experience

Acts 27 - Paul before Felix – Paul’s personal story opens him up.

b. The use of history as story

Again, this can draw the listener in and show them where they fit into the larger story.

c. The use of film as story.

Films shape our symbols and language. They deal with all the key themes of our contemporary situation. We must learn how to use them.

C. Jesus’ Use of Questions

1. Is apologetics primarily about giving the right answers?
2. With the entrenched person, often the answer just makes for greater alienation.
3. Thankfully we have the question as one of our tools (perhaps the most effective in the toolbox).
4. Questions are disturbing:
 - a. They shake the status quo.
 - b. Questions have the power to break down the resistance of those who are entrenched.

- c. T S Eliot called Jesus '*the stranger who asked questions*'.

D. In Jesus encounter with the lawyer, we see two questions;

1. Designed to get the lawyer to embrace his own worldview

- a. Verse 26.
- b. The aim of this question was to get the lawyers to bring his belief system into the open. Jesus wants the lawyer to state his own worldview.
- c. NOTE: *This is a crucial step in subversive apologetics. Never tell someone what they believe. Ask them what they believe.*
- d. Often the entrenched are unaware of their own worldview (even though they have one – everyone does). To ask someone what they believe can bring them to engage with it for the first time.
- e. Only when a person has their belief system at the surface of consciousness do they have the possibility of seeing its inconsistency.
- f. When one can question their own belief system, they have moved from being *closed* to *open* (at which point the subversive stage is done).

2. Designed to get the lawyer to step into an alternative worldview

- a. Verse 36.
- b. This question comes after the story. There was only one answer.

c. *The point:*

When the lawyer gave the ‘right’ answer he momentarily left his own worldview (where the Torah functioned as a boundary marker against Gentiles). Now, there is no indication that he accepted the answer (i.e., changed worldviews). However, for that moment that he indicated ‘the Samaritan’ as the neighbor, he stepped out of his paradigm and accepted Jesus version of reality.

The wounded surgeon plies the steel,
That questions the distempered part.
Beneath the bleeding hands we feel,
The sharp compassion of the healers art,
Resolving the enigma of the fever chart.

(T S Eliot from The Four Quartets).