

Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can't Stop Talking About

As Christians how do we get analytical and apologetic traction with our contemporary culture(s)? In this session, and using specific examples, we will outline the 'subversive fulfilment' framework for cultural engagement, spotlighting the tool of the 'magnetic points' put forward by the Dutch Reformed missiologist J.H. Bavinck.

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I. Knowing? Not Knowing? Let's call the whole thing... 'religious'

A. God is not hiding: *"For since the creation of the world...."* (Rom. 1: 18-32)

1. Made to Relate (the image of God: Gen. 1:27)

a. 'Eternal power' = dependence

b. 'Divine nature' = accountability

2. Made to Cultivate (the cultural mandate: Gen. 1:28)

B. Suppression & Repression / Substitution & Replacement

C. The model of messiness (Acts 17: 16-34)

D. Paul's attitude: a city submerged

E. Paul's approach: a 'religious' (δεισιδαιμονέστερος) and 'reaching out' people

1. It is not beyond possibility that Paul cleverly chose this term precisely for the sake of its ambiguity. His readers would wonder whether the good or bad sense was being stressed by Paul, and Paul would be striking a double blow: people cannot eradicate a religious impulse within themselves (as the Athenians demonstrate), and yet this good impulse has been degraded by rebellion against the living and true God (as the Athenians also demonstrate). Although people do not acknowledge it they are aware of their relation and accountability to the living and true God who created them. But rather than comes to terms with Him and His wrath against their sin (cf. Rom. 1:18), they pervert the truth. And in this they become ignorant and foolish (Rom. 1:21-22). (Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 254)

F. Paul's appeal: a call to repentance

II. Running to? Running From? Let's call the whole thing.... 'Magnetic Points'

It appears that humanity always and everywhere has fallen back on definite ideas and presumptions, and that these ideas and presumptions always resurface in surprising ways whenever they may have been temporarily repressed for various reasons.... This is a universal religious consciousness that remains indestructible in the midst of all disturbing and confusing developments (J.H. Bavinck, (1895-1964) Religious Consciousness)



1. Totality: A way to connect?

Brief description: All humans have an innate sense of totality, that they are small cogs in a much bigger machine. They are cosmically interconnected. They are simultaneously small and insignificant but also significant through belonging. They enjoy communal awareness. They crave connection, feel abandoned after they've experienced it and crave for it again and again.



2. Norm: *A way to live?*

Brief description: A vague sense there are rules to be obeyed. People know and accept that there are moral standards and codes which come from outside them but to which they must adhere. There is an appreciation of transcendent norms of behaviour which apply to all people and which are cosmically ordered. This brings with it a sense of responsibility to live up to those norms



3. Deliverance: *A way out?*

Brief description: That there is something not quite right with the world is a common and little disputed notion. There is finitude, brokenness and wrong-doing in the world and the problem of suffering consistently confronts us. We mourn for a 'paradise lost' and long for deliverance from these evils, craving redemption.



4. Destiny: *A way we control?*

Brief description: Although humans know themselves to be active players in the world, there is a nagging feeling that they are also passive participants in somebody else's world.



5. Higher Power: *A way beyond?*

Brief description: People everywhere perceive that behind all realities stands a greater reality. This greater reality is variously conceived but is always a superior power.

3. Appealing? Appalling? Let's call the whole thing.... '*Elenctics*'

...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ... (1 Thess. 1:9)

- the Gospel as subversion and the Gospel as fulfilment
- The Gospel as 'subversive fulfilment'
- Our hope is not in a 'what' but a 'who': *We offer people Jesus*

- 1. ENTERING: *Stepping into the world and listening to the story:*** “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship...” (v. 23)
- 2. EXPLORING: *Searching for elements of grace and the idols attached to them:*** “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” (v.23)
- 3. EXPOSING: *Showing up the idols as destructive frauds:*** – “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.” (v.29)
- 4. EVANGELIZING: *Showing off the gospel of Jesus Christ as ‘subversive fulfilment:’*** – “So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship - and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.” (v. 23)

The gospel of Christ addresses people and rips open their religiousness consciousness. People want to suppress and push away the gospel in the worst way, just as they have repeatedly done with God. But it can happen that God causes their heart to submit. Then all the engines of resistance are switched off and people listen. Then the King of Glory makes his entrance, the everlasting doors of the understanding are thrown open. And this is what we call the new birth. (Bavinck, Religious Consciousness, 291)

1. Jesus Christ: The way we connect



Jesus says: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: connectedness and accountability; communion and community

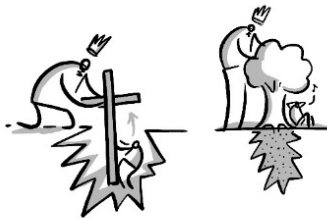


2. Jesus Christ: The way we live

Jesus says: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Mt: 5:17)

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: standard and saviour; not ‘I obey so I’m accepted’ but ‘I’m accepted so I obey’



3. Jesus Christ: The way out

Jesus says: *I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; they will live (Jn. 11:25)*

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: Stress root (our enmity with God) and fruit (our enmity with each other and with creation); a rescue from the outside; Grace (done) vs works (do)

4. Jesus Christ: A way of control



Jesus says: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (Jn.10:11)*

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: a sovereign plan and human responsibility; relationship of a parent and a child.

5. Jesus Christ: The way, the truth and the life

Jesus says: *"I am the way the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father accept through me" (John 14:6).*



Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: a personal absolute, absolute personality; a God who isn't out of reach but who reaches down; a servant King, the Word made flesh.

ed. John Bolt, *The J.H. Bavinck Reader* (Eerdmans 2013)
 J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Baker, 1960)
 Harvie M. Conn & Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City & the People of God* (IVP 2001).
Daniel Strange, *Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can't Stop Talking About... and how to connect them to Christ* (Good Book Company, 2021)
 _____ *Plugged in: Connecting your faith with what you watch, read and play* (The Good Book Company, 2019)
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