



Cultural Engagement

Introduction

Right but repulsive

“...it is vital that we (evangelicals) do not become like Cromwell's followers as they are described in the classic humorous telling of English history *1066 and All That*... There, Sellar and Yeatman describe the roundheads as 'right but repulsive'. This has been a constant danger for us evangelicals. We know that we hold to the truth about Jesus, and so we can sometimes become smug or aggressive or unpleasant towards those who do not understand the truth. But the truth about the Saviour Jesus is never unpleasant or repulsive; it is beautiful, winsome and attractive, alluring and arresting. And so must our theology- and particularly our preaching – be beautiful, winsome, and alluring and the rest. We are called to live in cheerful, self-deprecating hopefulness. Zealous for truth, yes, but always remembering that God can look after his own interests and doesn't really need our help...

...truth matters, but truth without love is so far from anything Christian that it has ceased to be truth. Christian theologians can never be 'right but repulsive': if they are repulsive, they are so far from Jesus and his gospel as to be just plain wrong.” (Stephen Holmes, pp. 10-11)¹

- This is not immediately obvious. It takes skill to know how we come across.

Reasons for cultural sensitivity

- To the pure, all things are pure... (Titus 1:15)
- Be quick to listen... (James 1:19)
- So that I might reach some... (1Corinthians 9:22)
- So that the truth of the gospel might remain... (Galatians 2:5, 14)
- Others...

1. What is a cultural survey?

Demographics versus survey

Advantages of survey

- Easier than you think
- Easier than friendship

¹ Cited by M. Jensen, “Right but repulsive” at <http://mpjensen.blogspot.com/2008/10/right-but-repulsive.html> accessed 22 October 2008.



- Fun and interesting
- PR exercise
- Learn
- Find 'people of peace'
- Find evangelistic contacts

2. How to do it part 1: walking and watching²

- Walk around and notice anything and everything.
- What kinds of cars? How are front yards managed?
- Where do people congregate?
- What is advertised? What is graffitied?
- What are busy times of day?
- Read the newspaper, watch the television, eavesdrop on conversations.

3. How to do it part 2: talking and listening

- Listen thoughtfully and intently in informal situations.

Starting and ending the interview

- "I am new to the community and would like to start a church that meets the needs of the area. Is there a convenient time for you to give me some advice?"
- Some people just won't get it. Don't be put off: others will totally get it and love it.
- Take note of the full name, including titles, jobs/roles, address, email, phone number.
- End the interview by asking if there is anyone else they recommend you speak with. Ask if they would like to be kept in touch about the church.

Sample questions

- "As you deal with young people from the neighbourhood, tell me what you sense are their hopes, aspirations, and pleasures? To what degree are these realistic dreams?"

² See Keller and Thompson, *Redeemer Church Planter Manual* (New York: 2002), pp. 75-83 and D. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-culturally* (Grand Rapids: 2000), pp. 111-41.



- "What appears to be their greatest fears and problems? Can you give me some examples?"
- "What kind of church, if any, would people come to? Describe a church that would meet this area's needs?"
- "In your opinion what views of right and wrong do these people hold? How are these values formed and nurtured? How are they destroyed?"
- "What are the major religions represented? Would you say that most people are religious? How are the religious bodies in the community doing? Which ones seem to be the most effective?"
- "Finally, could you give me some ideas how the material/economic aspect of the society in this area is affecting the fulfilment of aspirations and dreams? How could a new church help?"
- "Thank you for your time and valuable information. Who else would it be profitable for me to talk to?"³

4. Using the results

Types of apologetics

- Apologia versus kategoria
- Presuppositional

"Cornelius Van Til (1896-1987) was a Reformed theologian, born in the Netherlands and educated at Calvin College and Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary, who had a profound influence on many students at Westminster Seminary. Van Til defended a presuppositionalism denying that the issue between Christianity and its rivals can be decided by an appeal to agreed-upon facts. Instead he argued that every belief system is grounded in an ultimate presupposition, Christianity being grounded in the self-attesting revelation of the triune God. Non-Christian views must be critiqued by pointing out the internal contradictions that arise from their inadequate presuppositions."⁴

- Aesthetics
- Narrative

³ From Keller and Thompson, p. 82.

⁴ C. Stephen Evans cited by Brian "Historical Apologist: Cornelius Van Til" at <http://apologetics315.blogspot.com/2008/10/historical-apologist-cornelius-van-til.html> accessed 22 Oct 2008.



“How will you incorporate Christ's story with the stories of the people of your place? How do gospel themes address your culture's hopes, fears and tensions? (1) Begin with familiar and show how the gospel confirms what is strong and good in the culture. (2) But use the gospel to challenge and de-stabilize common cultural assumptions at points that they are weak and inadequate. (3) Finally, comfort and galvanize with the promises of the gospel.”⁵

Church design

- Sermon illustrations
- Graphic design
- Communication style
- Leadership structure
- Participation expectations
- Level of emotional display

5 T. J. Keller and J. A. Thompson, p. 103.