

'Living faithfully in our culture'

3. Faithful in our Answers



*But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** But do this with gentleness and respect, (1 Peter 3:14-15a)*

In what is often a hope-less culture, we want to talk about the hope of Christ. The problem is that our answers are often hopeless: we don't know what to say - and people don't ask! How can we be faithful in giving reasons for our hope?

Introduction:

i) giving a reason

Acts 9:22 – “drawing things together”

Reasoning does not mean being 'rationalistic' / Arguing does not mean being 'argumentative'

ii) giving a reason for hope

The experience of hope has a narrative structure built right into it. When people hope, they lay a story arc over a certain span of history, one that identifies the limitations of the present, offers a vision of how those limitations may be overcome in the future, and furnishes grounds for expecting that that future will be realized. The story may not be fully articulated in the experience itself, of course, but the narrative structure is there just the same. And it becomes even more pronounced as soon as people try to express hope, packaging their experiences in such a way that they might share them with others and revisit them themselves. (Daniel Johnson, 'Contrary Hopes: Evangelical Christianity and the Decline Narrative')

Hope is whole-personed.

1. Disenchantment? Enchantment? Let's call the whole thing.... 'Diff-enchantment'

- Who to have faith in? e.g. Charles Taylor vs Rodney Stark

Taylor: disenchantment and the triumph of 'scientism'

Stark:

Nor has Europe become disenchanted... Multitudes of Europeans believe in ghosts, lucky charms, occult healers, wizards, fortune tellers, *huldofolk*, and a huge array of other aspects of that enchanted world that Taylor believes has long since vanished. What Taylor really demonstrates is that from nowhere is one's vision of modern times so distorted as from the confines of the faculty lounge. (Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Faith*, 186)

Understanding Unbelief: Across Disciplines and Across Cultures:

[\[https://research.kent.ac.uk/understandingunbelief/\]](https://research.kent.ac.uk/understandingunbelief/)

5. Unbelief in God doesn't necessarily entail unbelief in other supernatural phenomena. Atheists and (less so) agnostics exhibit lower levels of supernatural belief than do the wider populations. However,

only minorities of atheists or agnostics in each of our countries appear to be thoroughgoing naturalists. (2.2, 2.3)

6. Another common supposition – that of the purposeless unbeliever, lacking anything to ascribe ultimate meaning to the universe – also does not bear scrutiny. While atheists and agnostics are disproportionately likely to affirm that the universe is ‘ultimately meaningless’ in five of our countries, it still remains a minority view among unbelievers in all six countries. (2.4)

2. 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)

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

‘Eternal power’ = dependence

‘Divine nature’ = accountability

b) Suppression & Repression / Substitution & Replacement

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

a ‘religious’ and ‘reaching out’ people

2. Running to? Running From? Let’s call the whole thing.... ‘Magnetic Points’



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.

- 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

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

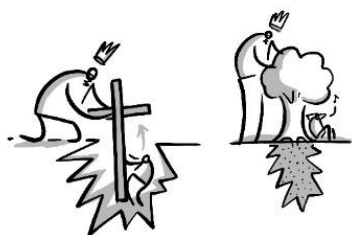
2. Jesus Christ: The way we live



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)

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)

Illustrations by Jason Ramasami - <http://www.saamvisual.com>

themagneticpoints@gmail.com