

A Study in Cultural Relevance

What is cultural relevance?

What does the Bible say about cultural relevance?

How do we become (more) culturally relevant?

I. What is Cultural Relevance?

➤ Hot Topic

- Google

1,760,000 results for the phrase “cultural relevance church”

- Books, web sites, blogs, articles abound!

- www.probe.org

- www.relevantmagazine.com

- www.christianitytoday.com/ctmag/features/culture/

- www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/culture.html

- www.theOoze.com

- www.emergentvillage.com

- www.the-next-wave.org

➤ What's All The Fuss?

- Prominent in core values/mission statements

“Our vision is to build relationships with unchurched people in metro (City) and present them with a compassionate, creative, and culturally relevant expression of the Gospel.”

Non-Denominational Church

“Relevance to culture is not optional. The Church is incarnational, not esoteric. Every follower of Jesus celebrates communion with God.”

Emerging Church

“To turn people who think God is irrelevant into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ through high-impact churches...Biblical truth is culturally relevant today.”

Presbyterian Mega Church

“We see ourselves as a church that, through diversity, innovation, size, total member involvement, flexibility, understanding of present cultural and community needs...can meet the needs of people in all of life's carrying circumstances in an exciting, relevant, and enjoyable way.”

Non-Denominational Mega Church

- Relevance is about significance and strategy and outreach

“It’s the basic missionary principle of contextualization. As our church puts it in our list of core values: “We believe that the church should be culturally relevant while remaining doctrinally pure.”

Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church*

“To reach and challenge those who shape the ideas of culture with the credibility of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Ravi Zacharias International Ministries

➤ **Definitions**

○ Culture

Creation = God made

Culture = man made

Notes:

“An integrated system of beliefs, values, customs, and institutions which binds society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.”

The Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism

○ Cultural Relevance

To observe, understand, and engage the culture in which we live by living out the reality of the Gospel in the presence of a watching world.

To be effectively involved in our community as salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16) by modeling Christ-like service and by engaging in truthful and meaningful dialogue. For us to become increasingly obedient to God's Word in all areas of life!!

II. What does the Bible say about engaging with Culture?

➤ **Adam & Eve**

○ The Cultural Mandate – Genesis 1:28

“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Genesis 1:28

- The cultural mandate is _____ recorded in Scripture.

“For the same reason, ultimately that he does everything else—for His own glory. God’s glory is that beautiful, intense light that shines out from Him when He makes Himself visible to human beings...In the beginning, God created us as his “image and glory”, so he wanted Adam’s family to spread that glory through the whole world. Adam was not to rule merely for himself, but for God, glorifying God in all he did...Adam must develop culture because that is God’s desire” **John Frame, Christ and Culture**

Notes:

➤ **Jesus**

○ Immanuel

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” **John 1:14**

Notes:

○ Missional

“Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” **John 20:21**

Notes:

“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” **Matthew 9:9-13**

Notes:

➤ **The Apostle Paul**

○ Acts 17:28-30

“For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ “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 man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

- The Epicureans

- The Stoics

Notes:

○ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

Notes:

III. Examining Cultural Relevance in Christian History

➤ Three Views

○ Christ Above Culture

Supporters: Church Father Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Roman Catholicism.

Notes:

Consider: *“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”* 1 Cor. 10:31

○ Christ Against Culture

Supporters: Early church father Tertullian (160-220AD), Anabaptists (post-reformation), Amish, some American fundamentalist groups

Notes:

Consider: *“I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.” 1 Cor. 5:10*

○ Christ Transforming Culture

Supporters: Puritans /17th century England; Puritans /18th century New England; North American revivalists/ 19th century; and most classically Reformed (Presbyterians) believers today.

Notes:

Consider: *“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” John 17:15*

• Note: This three-view structure is adapted from Richard Niebuhr’s five-part Structure in *Christ and Culture*. The others two views are Christ and Culture in Paradox, a dual world of sorts, and Christ of Culture which closely links Jesus with everything in culture.

IV. **Stories of Cultural Redemption**

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 10:31 – 11:1

➤ **Redeeming Popular Music: Martin Luther**

○ “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

Notes:

“I am not of the opinion that all arts are to be cast down and destroyed on account of the gospel as some fanatics protest. On the contrary, I would gladly see all arts, especially music, in the service of Him who has given and created them... God has His gospel preached also through the medium of music.” Martin Luther

Honorable Mention: Johnny Cash, Nickel Creek, Vigilantes of Love, The Call, Lifehouse, Switchfoot, Michael Gettel

➤ **Redeeming Popular Writing: C.S. Lewis**

- Stories of Fantasy – *Chronicles of Narnia*
- Science Fiction – *Out of the Silent Planet*

Notes:

“The author almost certainly did not want his readers to notice the resemblance of the Narnian theology to the Christian story. His idea, as he once explained to me, was to make it easier for children to accept Christianity when they met it later in life. He hoped that they would be vaguely reminded of the somewhat similar stories that they had read and enjoyed years before.” from **Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis** by George Sayer

Honorable Mention: J.R.R. Tolkien, Fredrick Buechner, Anne Lamont, Emily Dickinson, Cal Thomas

➤ **Redeeming 21st Century Life: Dave Ramsey**

- NY Times Best-Selling Author: *Financial Peace, More Than Enough*
- National Radio Show: *The Dave Ramsey Show*

Notes:

Honorable Mention: Peter Lowe, Zig Zigler, Pat Williams

➤ **The Church/believer has a call...**

“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” **John 17:13-18**

Notes:

Matthew 28:18-20

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...’ ”

• **Why are we here?** _____

• **Why should we engage with our culture?** We are seeking to bring lost people—and all of life—under _____!

Next Week:

- **Am I culturally relevant?**
- **How can I become (more) culturally relevant?**
- **How can I be culturally relevant without sliding into temptation and sin?**