

Summernar Two

How Must We Adjust as a Church to Reach Out to Our Surrounding Culture?

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:14-16

Crucial Matter: Being a faithful church, oriented to Christ

We must humbly acknowledge how much we are affected by our culture. Christian reactions are often to condemn, critique, copy, or consume culture; rarely do Christians create culture.¹

“The truth is that the greatest enemy of the Western church is not the state or any ideology such as atheism, but the world and the spirit of the age. Anything less than a full-blooded expression of the Christian faith has no chance of standing firm against the assaults and seductions of the advanced modern world.”²

Our task is not so much to accommodate to our culture as to understand it in order to reach out with the gospel. We want to be able to show how Christ answers the deepest dreams and aspirations of people around us. We need to challenge the culture from within, in the words of Timothy Keller, “to resonate with yet defy the culture around you.”³

Review: Five “late-modern baseline cultural narratives”

1. The rationality narrative—the material world is the only reality (hopes in technology, medicine, and psychology)
2. The history narrative—progressive without any divine control (newer is always better)
3. The society narrative—from the worth of the individual to individualism, free to live as one chooses
4. The morality or justice narrative—seeks justice without God’s norms, “morally self-authorizing”
5. Identity narrative—personal identity defined by one’s own desires and dreams

Some consequences: keep your views private, cannot judge, free to do what I want, etc.⁴

Things that we can do as a church to speak into our culture: ⁵

1. We can try to use words that people can understand.
 - Define important terms
 - Avoid religious jargon
 - Avoid insider/outsider language (we-them)
 - Avoid inside jokes
 - Explain worship practices
2. We can try to accurately understand the doubts and objections that people have. Then we can seek to show how the gospel speaks to them (see above on the five cultural narratives).

3. We can be honest with our own convictions and show respect in disagreement.
4. We can affirm the value of vocation—Christians in all of life. We can train people for faith in public life.⁶
 - More than church activities and training for church
 - Theological insight into work and social life
 - Seeing work as valuable to the kingdom
5. We can look for a kind of Christian community that is “counter-cultural and counter-intuitive” (oriented towards the kingdom of God and not what people always expect).
 - Not a voting bloc
 - Modeling different values, a different and better way of living
 - Concerned for compassion and social justice but also for evangelism and discipleship
6. We can try to show the difference between gospel motivation and moralism.⁷ Demonstrate submission to the Lord over being right.
7. We can seek to practice Christian unity as much as possible on the local level.

Final matter: Don’t be overwhelmed!

¹ Andy Crouch, workshop at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, March 24, 2010.

² Os Guinness, *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014), p. 119.

³ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, Random House, Viking, 2015), p. 99.

⁴ Keller, *Preaching*, pp. 129-132.

⁵ These points are adapted from an unpublished paper by Timothy Keller, “The Missional Church,” June 2001, taken from the website of City Church, Atlanta, GA. The adaptations also reflect his books, *Preaching*, and *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead Books, Penguin, 2008).

⁶ See also Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, Thomas Nelson, 1998, 2003).

⁷ See Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994) and Bryan Chapell, *Holiness By Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).