

Engaging Culture

Part 1: How we got here

What is happening in the world?

Question: How often are do you hear that question? Especially from Christians

What is really happening? **A shift in Worldview.**

We live at a key moment in the history of the world.

Medieval (300-approximately 1400) Chief shaping factors: Feudalism, Constantine

You are part of a **Community**.

Your place in that community is **Clear, Permanent and Preordained**.

Your life goal is **Mutual Obligations** to that community.

You are **born into** the belief system of your community (which became largely Christian). You participate in it by listening to the local authorities belonging to your community.

Modern (approximately 1400-1950's) Chief shaping factor: The Enlightenment

You are an **individual**.

Your participation in a wider society is **voluntary**

You come to your own beliefs by the use of **your own reason**; no one else has the right to influence your beliefs uninvited, but if you all reason well you will come to the same beliefs.

You are **autonomous** in your self conception.

Post-Modern (1950's—???) *The next major societal paradigm shift in western culture*

You belong to both **yourself** and **local communities**.

You are deeply formed by the **values** of your community in ways that cannot be erased. ²

This is our place in history. This transition point. We live during the shift into a Postmodern culture.

Why is that significant?

A 1 It shapes how you see your place in the world.

2 How you see your place in the world affects how both you are influenced and how you influence others.

B 1 When you live in a transitional phase, how you respond to cultural changes affects if and how you engage culture.

2 How you respond to cultural changes affects our effectiveness with communicating the gospel

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Through each of these transition points, historically there have been several types of responses.

4 Categories of Responses to the Emerging Culture

1) **Deny Changes** are occurring.

Any apparent changes are merely *superficial* and *unimportant*.

Response: *Little or none; keep doing things as we always have done*

Example: Many Traditional Churches? Churches composed of mostly elderly people?

2) **Developmental or Generational**

The changes are not permanent, it is just a phase or specific to a generation

Response: *Create temporary ministry structures* to accommodate. Focus on a single generation, in the hope that they will, "Grow out of it"

Example: A Worship Service for youth. Music as an outreach to "get more people in."

3) **Resist**

Changes are a Major Paradigm Shift

The changes are *significant* and *enduring*.

Goal = Remain in or hope to return to the "Good old days"

We will talk more about this one in a few weeks.

4) **Engage**

Changes are a Major Paradigm Shift

Goal = Move into the new world, facing both *challenges* and *opportunities*. Meet them where they are at. *Live among them.* ¹

*One important thing that we will do as we discuss strategies for engaging culture in the next few weeks is examine strategies along the way that **do not** engage culture.*

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What does it mean to engage culture in a meaningful way?

To engage a culture means to understand it in such a way that we can have effective influence within the bounds of that culture.

1) Commitment to understand the culture around us.

If we do not understand the culture around us, we will respond in inappropriate ways and will not understand the people of the culture.

As a result, our influence as Christians will be limited. They will neither trust us or like us.

2) Commitment to influence people. That means two things

A- *If we are not committed to live in the culture and experience it ourselves, we will not have the trust or relationships it takes to have much influence over the people around us.*

B- *If we are not committed to grapple with difficult issues and questions that the culture around us cares about, we will miss opportunities to influence people. And we will also never truly understand the culture or the people around us.*

As a result, our influence as Christians will be limited, or possibly non-existent.

3) Commitment to the gospel, while openly acknowledging our questions.

If we are not committed to the gospel, there is little substance behind our beliefs.

This does not mean that we do not have questions, admit having question or ask questions. Partly because if we are living in the culture, the questions we have likely are questions common to others.

And if we can be a Christian and have questions, those around us can as well. Commitment to the gospel is not limited to those who have no questions. If we are open with our questions, they become opportunities for influence, rather than obstacles to faith.

If we wish to have others talk openly about there questions, we need to be open about ours.

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Part 2: The Art of Study and the Exegesis of Culture

Studying Culture:

Make a list of 5 things you do to help you learn:

Which kinds of sources do you learn best from? (books, classes, other people, by yourself, with a group, etc.)

Why is it important that we study culture?

So we are _____ and _____ the people around us.
If we do not do that, our influence is limited.

Exegesis of Culture:

Exegesis:

Exposition, explanation; especially, a critical examination of a text or portion of scripture. (*Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, copyright 1996, 1998 Micra, Inc.*)

How can we do that with the culture(s) we live in?

We will try one of them today. On the back of this page, write down some things that you learn about this culture that you see on this videotape.

Pick one of them. What is one implication of that observation that effects your role as a leader.