



Biblical Framework for Engaging with Culture

The Bible in it's Culture

The Bible was written within the context of various ancient cultures, including those of the ancient Near East, Egypt, and the Mediterranean world.

The Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible, was written primarily in Hebrew, with some portions written in Aramaic, and it reflects the culture, history, and religious traditions of the ancient Israelites. The Old Testament contains the stories, laws, and teachings of the Israelites, and it describes their relationship with God and their history as a people.

The New Testament was written in Greek and reflects the culture and history of the early Christian movement, which emerged within the Roman Empire. The New Testament contains the stories, teachings, and letters of the earliest followers of Jesus and describes the spread of the Christian movement throughout the Roman Empire.

God and Jesus

Jesus was born within the culture of the ancient Near East. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a town located in the region of Palestine, which was part of the Roman Empire at the time. The culture of Palestine was a blend of various influences, including those of the ancient Near East, the Mediterranean world, and the Roman Empire.

Jesus was born to a Jewish family and was raised within the culture and traditions of Judaism. The New Testament describes Jesus as a Jewish rabbi who taught and healed in the region of Palestine. Jesus' teachings and ministry had a significant impact on the early Christian movement, which emerged within the cultural context of the Roman Empire.

Matthew 16: 2-3

He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

God and History

In the Bible, God is seen as the one who ordains and directs the course of history. God is portrayed as the sovereign ruler of the universe who is in control of all things. This includes the rise and fall of nations and empires, and the experiences of individual people.

One example of this is the Babylonian captivity, which is described in the book of Daniel. The Babylonian captivity refers to the period of time when the people of Israel were exiled to Babylon by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. This event is described as being ordained by God, who allowed the Israelites to be captured and taken into exile as punishment for their disobedience and sin.

Psalm 137:1-4

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we
remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of
joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of
the Lord while in a foreign land?

However, the Old Testament also portrays God as a God of mercy and redemption, and it describes how God used the Babylonian captivity to discipline and refine his people. The book of Daniel, for example, tells the story of how God protected and blessed the Israelites during their time in exile, and how he ultimately restored them to their homeland and brought about their deliverance. This portrayal of God as both just and merciful is a central theme in the Old Testament and is reflected in the way that God's relationship with his people is depicted throughout the Bible

The Method of Correlation

Paul Tillich was a 20th-century theologian. Tillich believed that theology should be seen as a "science of the ultimate," and that it should be concerned with understanding the meaning and significance of ultimate reality and human existence. Tillich's method of correlation involved exploring the relationships between theology and other fields of study, and seeking to understand how they intersect and inform one another.



For Tillich, this meant examining the ways in which theological concepts and ideas related to and interacted with the broader human experience in culture.

Tillich's method of correlation was based on the idea that theology should not be isolated from other fields of study, but rather should be seen as part of a larger and more holistic understanding of the human experience. Through his method of correlation, Tillich sought to bring together different disciplines and perspectives in order to better understand the ultimate questions of life and faith.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 1-3

Cultural Engagers

Over the years, different Christians have engaged with culture in very relevant ways. Here are some examples.

JUSTIN MARTYR

Justin Martyr was a Christian apologist who lived in the 2nd century AD. Justin Martyr's context for doing apologetics was one of intense persecution and hostility towards Christians.

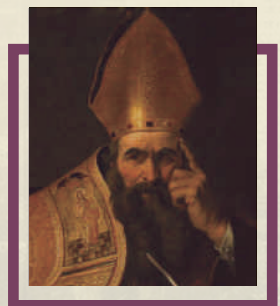


At the time, Christians were often seen as a threat to the Roman Empire and were subject to persecution and even execution. As a result, Justin Martyr's apologetic works were often addressed to Roman officials and leaders in an effort to explain and defend the Christian faith and to persuade them to treat Christians with more fairness and justice.

In his apologetic works, Justin Martyr sought to demonstrate the rationality and truth of the Christian faith, and he argued that Christians were not a threat to Roman society but rather were a positive influence. He also sought to refute common misconceptions and accusations that were made against Christians, and he defended the Christian beliefs and practices that were being attacked by non-Christian critics.

SAINT AUGUSTINE

Saint Augustine was a 4th-century Christian theologian and bishop who wrote extensively about his faith and its relationship to the broader culture of the time. Augustine lived in the Roman Empire during a period of significant cultural, political, and religious change, and his writing reflects the context of this time.



In his writing, Augustine sought to integrate Christian theology with the philosophical and cultural ideas of his time, and he drew heavily on the works of classical philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle.

Augustine wrote about the role of the Church in society and the importance of Christian values in shaping public life, and he sought to address the challenges and issues facing the Christian Church in his time.

In his book, 'The City of God' he states that human history is a conflict between the Earthly City and the City of God, and this conflict is ultimately destined to end in victory for the City of God. The City of God is made up of people who prioritize eternal truths and dedicate themselves to the Christian faith, while the Earthly City is made up of people who are focused on the present world and its pleasures. The Lord is seen as the central purpose and meaning of human history and the ultimate source of fulfillment and satisfaction for all people.

JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley was an 18th-century Anglican clergyman and the founder of Methodism. Wesley was deeply engaged with the culture of his time and sought to apply the teachings of the Christian faith to the issues and challenges facing society.



The movement of many people away from the villages and into the cities due to the industrial revolution brought about significant societal changes. Wesley was particularly concerned with the spiritual and moral condition of the people of his time, and he saw the Church as a means of bringing about social and spiritual transformation. To this end, Wesley preached regularly in the open air and in other unconventional settings, and he sought to reach out to people from all walks of life.

C.S. LEWIS

C.S. Lewis was a 20th-century Christian writer and theologian who is known for his engaging and thought-provoking works on theology, literature, and a wide range of other topics. Lewis was a prolific writer and published a number of books, essays, and other works that addressed the cultural, social, and spiritual issues of his time.



His most famous work, 'Mere Christianity', is a classic defense of the Christian faith for the cultural questions of the 20th century. Lewis was deeply concerned with the nature of good and evil and their role in the world. His novels 'The Chronicles of Narnia' explore these themes in a fantasy setting. He was deeply interested in the role of imagination and creativity in human life. His works 'An Experiment in Criticism' and 'The Discarded Image' explore these themes in the context of literature and the arts.

TIM KELLER

Tim Keller was a contemporary Christian pastor, theologian, and author who had the ability to engage with culture in a meaningful and thought-provoking way. He deeply engaged with culture and seeks to apply the teachings of the Christian faith to the issues and challenges facing society.



His main ideas include: The importance of faith for a fulfilling and meaningful life, the nature of sin and its impact on individuals and society, the need for spiritual transformation to experience the fullness of God's love and grace and the role of the church in society as a force for good, working to bring about social and moral transformation.

JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

In the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman recorded in John 4, there is a shift from discussing physical water to eternal water. Jesus uses something familiar and tangible to the woman's culture to guide her towards a deeper understanding of a reality that extends beyond the temporal.

Three Main Stages of Engaging with Culture



1. Understanding the Problem

Society faces a number of problems, some of which may be symptoms of a deeper issue rather than the cause themselves. The challenge is to identify the root cause of these problems amidst a range of symptoms.

2. Finding the Answer in God's Word

Once the problem has been identified, society often offers a variety of solutions. It is important to be able to set aside the distractions and noise of culture and seek the answer in God's word.



3. Articulating it Back into the Culture

Once the solution has been identified, it needs to be effectively communicated in a way that is relevant to the context and that people can understand and relate to.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is culture, and how do you see it influencing your daily work environment?
2. In what ways does the culture of your organization reflect or conflict with biblical principles?
3. What are the dominant 'idols' in your work environment?
4. How can you begin to articulate biblical truths within your corporate culture in ways that are accessible and relevant?
5. How does your faith equip you to understand and address the root problems in your corporate culture?
6. What steps can you take to begin transforming the culture of your workplace from within?





About the Speaker

Jacob Cheriyan serves as a Speaker and Ministry Director of Life Focus Society. After completing his Bachelors in Mechanical Engineering, he went on to do an M.A. in Biblical Studies, after which he pursued an M.Div. in Theology and Apologetics from SAIACS, Bengaluru. Jacob received his Certificate of Theological Studies from Oxford University (Wycliffe Hall) and was trained at The OCCA (The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics).

Jacob is the director of the Culture Unraveled Project and God and Eastern Mind projects for Life Focus Society.



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