

The Magnetic Points

Q: What kind of obstacles do you face in communicating the gospel?

A. Context for Communication

1. 'We are all religious.' (Ecc. 3:11.)
2. Everything we do is a religious act (Gen. 1:28).

Culture is what a society has made of God's creation, together with its ideals of what it ought to make. Or maybe we should put the ideal first. People make things, because they already have a plan in view, a purpose, a goal, an ideal. The ideal comes first, then making things. First the norm, then the cultivation, the culture. So now we can see how culture is related to religion. When we talk of values and ideals, we are talking religion. In the broad sense, a person's religion is what grips his [/her] heart most strongly, what motivates him [/her] most deeply...If a society worships idols, false gods, that worship will govern the culture of that society. If a society worships the true God, that worship will deeply influence, even pervade its culture. If like ours, a society is religiously divided, then it will reveal a mixture of religious influences. (John Frame)

We do two things with the knowledge of God (Romans 1:18-19):

A. Suppress

¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

"Like someone violently holding a person's head under water in order to drown them, we suppress the truth." – Dan Strange

B. Substitute

Sin isn't only doing bad things, it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than God. Whatever we build our lives on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry. (Tim Keller)

Ultimate explanations; Ultimate authorities; Ultimate commitments; Ultimate loves.

What idols promise: *Isa. 36:13-20.*

What idols bring: *Ps. 115:4-8; Hos. 8:4 Jer. 2:13; 27-28; Isa. 44:19-20.*

Identifying idols:

- o whose authority do I acknowledge?
- o upon whom/what do I depend?
- o to whom/what do I give allegiance?
- o who/what can make me safe and happy?
- o who/what can sort things out?
- o what do I look to, to make everything OK?
- o at whose word of command do I sit up and take notice?
- o what needs to be in place for me to get on with life?

Is it possible to engage with hard hearts?

This relationship is very dynamic. Have you ever played the game at the beach when you try to sit on a beachball in the sea? You try really hard to get that ball under the water and you nearly succeed, but then at the last second it pops up again two feet away and you have to start again. So it is with God's revelation and our response. We suppress the truth, but we can never totally suppress the truth. Reality keeps getting in the way. The real world doesn't quite seem to be the right shape to fit our hole, and so there's a horrible grating sound as we apply force to push through it. (Dan Strange)

Discussion questions:

- o *Whom do you long to come to Christ?*
- o *What challenges do you face in sharing the gospel with them?*
- o *How might they suppress/substitute the truth in their lives?*
- o *How might they/society answer the questions above on authority/dependence/allegiance, etc?*

Second Session:

B. Contour our Communication: 5 Magnetic Points

We going to use these Magnetic points to point to The Magnetic Person (Jesus), as his Magnetic People (Church – indiv.+body)

Magnetic Points – J. H. Bavinck

All God's image bearers ask the same questions: what's my place in the universe? Is there a plan? Am I really in control or being controlled? Can I be delivered from the mess of life.

Man by virtue of his place in the world, must always and everywhere give answers to the same questions. He has to struggle with the basic problems which his existence itself entails. He is afflicted by grief and misfortune; he meets both adverse and prosperous conditions; deep in his heart he has a vague feeling of responsibility; he has to adapt himself to the course of nature; he is aware he only a small being in the immeasurable greatness of the universe; and he knows very well that sooner or later death will knock at his door. Wherever he goes, he is surrounded by a multitude of questions, and although he has the power to escape from them for a certain time, he cannot help being overwhelmed by them at times. His being on earth is itself such an immense riddle that it threatens to crush him. **The answers to all the questions with which he has to struggle may be different, but the problems themselves are always the same.** And he has to respond to them, not only in his thinking and feeling but also in his whole attitude to life, in his acts and rites, in his existence itself; his whole way of life is a response. Therefore, it stands to reason that this **universal religious consciousness, with all its antagonisms and tensions, is something real and is to be found wherever men live and toil.**

Is it possible to formulate the main points which have drawn the attention of man? Let us call them "magnetic points," because they are points which demand our attention and which we cannot evade. We cannot help being confronted with them. Since they are rooted in our existence, they are stronger than ourselves, and somehow we must come to grips with them. We can define five such magnetic points, or focal points. It is our intention to deal with each of them more elaborately later on, but here we shall confine ourselves to mentioning their names. – Bavinck.

5 Magnetic Points: Cosmos, Norm, Salvation, Existence and Power



1. "I and the Cosmos"

Key ideas: COSMOS, CONNECTION, NORM, TOTALITY, COMMUNION WITH THE COSMIC WHOLE.

One-word summary: Connection

Key question: Is there a way to connect?

Bavinck snippet: "underlying all this is the certainty that people unite in themselves the two amazing dimensions of unimaginable insignificance and matchless greatness; in the experience of the eternal, once feels like a reed swaying to and fro, insignificant, more significant than could ever had been imagined."

Examples:

Gospel Confrontation and Connection:

Q: *What would you want to say about the gospel in response to this awareness and need for connection?*



2. 'I and the Norm'

Key ideas:

One-word summary: Standard

Key question: Is there a way to live?

Bavinck snippet: "life is a dialogue between law and reality, between natural self-fulfilment and the moral demand for self-restraint. People chafe against the law and they want to be enveloped by it, carried by it."

Examples:

Gospel confrontation and connection:



3. 'I and Salvation'

Key ideas:

One-word summary: Deliverance

Key question: Is there a way out?

Bavinck snippet: "Throughout the ages all nations have retold their story in terms of that cry (for deliverance)... they looked for salvation from death, from famine, from sickness, from poverty, from dependence, from the chaos threatening their community...."

Examples:

Gospel confrontation and connection:



4. 'I and the Riddle of my Existence'

Key ideas:

One-word summary: Destiny

Key question: A way we control?

Bavinck snippet: 'A person is only master of his or her life up to a certain point. A power exists that repeatedly reaches into a person's existence, that pushes him or her forward with compelling force, and from whose grip the person finds it impossible to struggle loose. Sometimes people can despair that they can lead their own life. Sometimes they gradually achieve the insight, in the school of life's hard knocks, that it is more appropriate to say that they suffer or undergo events that develop in and around them.'

Examples:

Gospel confrontation and connection:



5. 'I and the Higher Power'

Key-ideas: being connected to a higher power.

One word summary: Ultimate

Key question: A way up and a way down? (in terms of ultimate authority and 'ground'.)

Bavinck snippet: 'Included in human religious consciousness is also the dimension of being connected to a higher power. But what have people down through the centuries done with that higher power? They have fled from it, resisted it, lost it in the midst of being in general, diminished it as *mana*, divided it into a motley array of spirits and gods. People understood their lives we are every moment bound by a higher power, but they have reshaped the higher power in their own image.'

Examples: sense of transcendence

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Discussion questions:

- *Which magnetic point/s do you recognise in your friends/family/local community/people group?*
- *What might you say/do in response to that need for connection or deliverance? (Take the magnetic point most relevant to your context and in word and deed consider how you might apply the gospel to that area.)*
- *How can you facilitate outreach/what kind of outreach can you lead so as to meet those magnetic points in your community and point them to Christ?*
- *What questions does this raise? What might you need to read/reflect/consider in response to these sessions?*

Bonus material:

C. Confrontation and Connection in our Communication

Establishing the Pattern - 1 Cor. 1:18-25:

- The message that confronts
- The message that connects

the Gospel as subversion *and* the Gospel as fulfilment

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- The Gospel as ‘subversive fulfilment’

1. ENTER: Step into the worldview and discern the ‘gospel story’ –

“For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship...(Acts 17:23)

2. EXPLORE: Search for elements of grace and the idols attached to them.

“People of Athens I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an alter with this inscription: to an unknown God. (v.23)

3. EXPOSE: Show up the idols as destructive frauds – focus on this one and number four.

“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 human design and skill. (v.29)

4. EVANGELIZE: Show off the gospel as Christ is the One in whom we find rest. Point to the Magnetic Person! This is subversive fulfilment.

“So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”(v.23)

Further reading:

Apologetics at the Cross: Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen.

MORE> Truth: Kristi Mair.

Plugged In: Dan Strange.

Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes our Culture Can’t Stop Talking About and How to Connect Them to Christ: Dan Strange.

Recapturing the Wonder: Mike Cospers.