

The Gospel's Impact on Culture

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This past Easter, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins was interviewed in Great Britain regarding his views on Christianity. Dawkins is an outspoken critic of faith. He authored the book, "The God Delusion." In his public discourse, he speaks rather harshly and mockingly of people who believe in God.

In this Easter interview, Dawkins surprised many people by identifying himself as a "cultural Christian." Dawkins said, "I'm not a believer, but there is a distinction between being a believing Christian and a cultural Christian," Dawkins noted, adding: "I love hymns and Christmas carols and I sort of feel at home in the Christian ethos, and I feel that we are a Christian country in that sense."

Dawkins likes the by-products of Christianity, just not the belief system. He went on to express concern with the diminishing influence of Christianity in Great Britain with the simultaneous growth of Islam. Dawkins does not like the thought of living in a country where Christianity is a minority religion.

There are many people just like Dawkins. They do not believe in God. They do not believe in the resurrected Jesus. But, they appreciate the kind of world that the Gospel produces. Overall, the Dawkins interview was telling. When a staunch atheist like Richard Dawkins publicly says he is a "cultural Christian," it begs consideration.

The Gospel & the Reshaping of Culture

Dawkins and many more people like him describe themselves as "cultural Christians." This term is an acknowledgment of Christianity's impact on culture. The resurrection of Jesus has deeply impacted culture. Consider why.

1). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead boldly declares new life. Death is not the end; death does not have the final say over the Creator or His creation. Where sin has brought decay, corruption, and death, God can make a new creation. Rebirth and renewal are made possible. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus changes our understanding of what is possible.

Jesus hinted at this shortly before His death and resurrection when He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:23-24). Fruit could be produced through death.

2). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead, reveals God's future. Before the resurrection of Jesus, people viewed the world as being on an unbreakable cycle. There were periods of

growth followed by periods of decline. The cycle repeated. Israel was the exception to this worldview. They considered themselves living in a story that had yet to be finished. The resurrection of Jesus from death broke this cycle and finished the story. This demonstrated how humanity could genuinely progress into something better.

The New Testament writers frequently spoke of the age to come, a new world, and a new heavens and earth. God has a bright future for His people. Civilization is not on an unbreakable cycle. Civilization has a direction and aim. The human family is headed toward being reunited with God in a new world. God's new world is filled with love, beauty, justice, and holiness.

3). How the Gospel can reshape culture. Believers in the resurrected Jesus, are to bring the hope of the new world into the present world. This is how culture is reshaped. For example, Peter wrote, "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (2 Pet. 3:13-14).

The apostle Paul famously wrote, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8). This text indicates how believers in the resurrected Jesus are to reshape culture. These qualities are the fruits of faith that are to be planted in the world.

4). The purpose of reshaping culture by the Gospel. Sharing in God's project of new creation is the purpose for which He has made us. Filling our families and communities with the beauty of Jesus is how we engage in the care of God's world. Also, in reshaping culture through the Gospel, we demonstrate to the world the power of the Gospel to save and transform. This is how believers lead people away from sin, decay, and death, towards salvation, fulfillment, and eternal life.

5). Evidence of the Gospel's power to reshape culture. The proof of the Gospel's power to reshape culture is all over the New Testament. Perhaps we have missed seeing it. For example, every city, town, and hamlet where a community of believers emerged was a representation of new creation. People changed. Families changed. Husbands began to change how they treated their wives. The way people engaged in business changed. The way people treated their neighbors changed. Slowly and steadily the Greco-Roman culture began to be reshaped. Such transformation only validated the power of the Gospel.

Conclusion

The New Testament documents several decades of history. Western society typically attributes the roots of its culture to the Greco-Roman world. This is a short-sighted explanation of our culture's origin. There is very little of the West's culture that reflects the Greco-Roman

world. The culture of the West is more accurately attributed to the Gospel; attributed to the embrace and spread of Christianity.

There are certainly some good features of our world that grew from the Gospel. Public health. Public education. Caring for the poor. Beauty in architecture. Clean towns and cities. However, reaping the benefits of a culture shaped by Christianity will not save us from sin and eternal death. Biblically, there is no such thing as a “cultural Christian.” There are only Christians. Disciples. Believers.

If there is goodness and beauty to be found in our culture, we need to ask, “Why?” Trace the roots. They will lead us to the life-giving, soul-saving, resurrected Jesus Christ.