

Engaging (and surviving) Campus Culture

By: Michael W. Swanson
Spring 2003 – Seminar Notes

Recommended Readings:

Finding Common Ground – Tim Downs

Love Your God With All Your Mind – J.P. Moreland

Divine Conspiracy – Dallas Willard

Apologetic Books:

“True For You But Not For Me” – Paul Copan

*Reason for the Hope Within – ed. Michael J. Murray

*=moderate difficulty

I. Jesus as Saviour and Teacher.

“... What happens to Jesus in the crush of the information pushers? Unfortunately he is usually pushed aside. Many Christians do not even think of him as one with reliable information about their lives. Consequently they do not become his students. What does she have to teach them? It is very common to find Christians who work hard to master a profession and succeed very well in human estimation, while the content of their studies contains no reference at all to Jesus or his teaching. How could this be?”

“By contrast, the early Christians, who took the power of God's life in Jesus to all quarters of the earth, thought of Jesus as one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col. 2:3 NAS) They thought of him as master of every domain of life.”

“A natural progression of this confidence in him was to “steward” doing everything, in word or deed, all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.” (3:17) That is, they learned to do everything they said or did in cooperation with Jesus their always present teacher.”

“... If you trust Jesus Christ as your teacher, he will teach you in all these ways. You should always put forth your very best efforts, of course, and you will always find room for improvement. But you also will certainly know the astonishing reality of God's eternal kind of life flowing through you moment by moment and forever. And the effects of your efforts will, as is seen in persons and events in the Bible, be vastly greater than what could result from your abilities alone.”

Excerpts from: "Who Is Your Teacher?" – Dallas Willard

<http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=67>

Understanding who Jesus *really is*, and giving our *whole lives* to the *Him* is foundational and essential...

If we are not learning from and relying upon Jesus in *all* that we do, we are spinning our wheels.

Q: Who is your teacher?

If Jesus occupies the rightful position of authority and dearest friend in our lives, everything else will fall into place.

II. Thoughts, tips, and advice on following Jesus as an undergrad and engaging the culture around us:

*Our studies need to be informed by a Christian worldview.

This is especially important in the humanities, soft sciences, and arts (not as much in the applied sciences).

Why? So we don't get sucked into false views about reality (which are commonly taught: e.g. you are just your body; reality is just the sense-perceptible world, etc.). Such views stand in direct opposition to the teaching of Jesus and his people and can have serious consequences.

Furthermore, this is a means of 'loving God with our minds,' and still further, helps us be more winsome for Christ within our respective field of study.

Do outside reading.

*Pray for discernment! (especially in the classroom)

*Don't set up a culture war in class.

*Choose your battles wisely—we can't fight them all...

Don't always chime in on social issues...

What is your goal?

*You have a whole quarter to develop a communication climate in the classroom.

This is accomplished by what you say and what you *don't* say (not to mention, who you are) (See Paul in Acts 17)

Show your prof's (and classmates) respect.

1 Peter 2:13-17

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. ¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. ¹⁷ **Show proper respect to everyone** : Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

* Find common ground.

Where can we line up on certain issues with those we are trying to reach?

The problem or weakness of the finding common ground approach is if you find common ground but never take it further... of course, that's over compensating. We must not forget why we're doing what we're doing. Our ultimate goal is *he gospel*, for "By *this* gospel you are saved..." **1 Cor 15:2**

* Be **fair**—don't distort other people's view set c. in speaking or in the papers you write.

Try to *understand* the other side *first*, before critiquing.

* **Listen.**

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry," (James 1:19)

* Be a student—ask questions, show up...

Are you a Psych major? Well man, show up in Psych! Be a good Psych major!

We can have a *huge* impact on our peers, our friends, and even our professors.

* Have a good work ethic.

Col 3:17

¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

There should be no such thing as a *lazy* follower of God.

*Col4:5-6

“Bewiseinthewayyouacttowardoutsiders;makethemostofeveryopportunity. Let
youconversationalwaysbefullofgrace,seasonedwithsalt,sothatyoumay knowhow
toanswereveryone.”

What’simplicithereis,be **intentional!**Makethemostofeveryopportunity!

I’mnotsayingweshouldbesilentinclass,I’mjustsaying,weneedtohavegraceand
truth,love,andrespect.Butwealsoneedtotakeadvantageoftheopportunitieswehave.

1Cor10:31-11:1(NIV)

31Sowhetheryoueatordrinkorwhateveryoudo,doitallforthegloryofGod.
32Donotcauseanyonetostumble,whetherJews,GreeksorthethechurchofGod-
33evenasItrytopleaseeverybodyineveryway.ForIamnotseekingmyown
goodbutthegoodofmany, *sothattheymaybesaved* .11:1Followmyexample,
asIfollowtheexampleof **Christ**.(emphasisadded)

- Paulwasconcernedaboutpeople’s salvation.
- Paulwasn’tpassive... Hewasintentional!
- Pauldidn’tjustsitonhisrear...
- “Hisultimateobjectiveinallhisconductisthatpeoplemightbesaved—not superficiallybutfullyandtothegloryofGod.”(Expositors,253)

Eachofusaresurroundedbypeople,allthetime...Class,house,dorm,sportsteamsetc.
AndweneedtofollowtheexamplesofPaulandJesusinbeingpurposefulwiththose
aroundus.

Whodoyoustudywith?OnlyChristians?That’saprob.

Whodoyouhangoutwith?...

MyconcernisthatmanyChristiansnevergobackintheworldoncetheygetsaved
Stuckinthe‘holyhuddle’

Weneedto be ‘ *intheworld,butnotofit* ’

Ideas:

Joinafratifyoucanhandleit.

ASI

IMteam

RA

Club

They’re notgoingtojustcometous,weneedtogotothem.(Iamremindedofthe
parableofthelostsheep.SeeLuke15)

*We’ve lostoursenseofhumor...

GK Chesterton ex. - Gotopub after debate...

Laughter is first level of acceptance...

We need to lighten up.

*Lack of love in **Christian rhetoric** ...

We can't adopt the culture's tactics! Fighting ugliness w/ ugliness, sarcasm w/ sarcasm...

I think we do this because we really don't trust the gospel.

"turn the other cheek"

"the first shall be last"

"lose our life to gain it"

"love your enemy" (from 'deconstructing the gospel of tolerance' - Daniel Taylor)

How do we know what we do is important! Just as if not more important than what we do.

We need to seek ways to engage culture (the people around us) existentially, and we need to seek ways to engage them cognitively.

We need to do both.

Tipson Existential Engagement (i.e. relating to human existence):

- Reclaim *story, art*.

We need to recover, as Tim Down talks about, the *art* of the gospel.

The science of the gospel is the *content*—what we say.

Now, this is extremely important, we cannot abandon this.

But, we need to fuse that content with the *art* of the gospel.

Art = *how* you say it.

- We have room to be a lot more creative in *how* we communicate, *how* we share talk about our faith. And communicate generally speaking. We get too trapped in slogans and clichés, and we need to breakout. Why?
 - Effectiveness...
 - Also because we now live in a *Biblically illiterate culture*, and we've got to be aware of this, and seek to re-wrap the gospel in the art of our times, so that people can actually figure out what we're talking about. I can't emphasize this enough.
 - Note: Jesus was very creative in how he communicated and taught; he didn't just stick to the usual religious clichés. He used illustrations from the world around him that people could connect with. (more on this later)
- We need to not assume that everybody is like us!
 - We need to be *cross-cultural missionaries* within our own culture and understand the culture of those we are trying to reach!

- I would recommend, assume that people know little about Christianity and the Bible... assess their level of Biblical knowledge, etc. on an individual basis.
- Avoid 'Christianese'—words or terms that only Christians understand. These could be biblical or theological words, or, these could be Christian sub-culture things, like "I'm on fire." People don't know what the heck we're talking about. And they can feel excluded and put-off if we just stick with our jargon.

• **Weneed to be savvy about how people use their words** , like Paul in Acts 22
 I would argue, it is the burden of the *evangelist* to learn the language of those they are trying to reach, and translate the gospel into that language, even if both languages are English!

*But, not only do we need to understand culture more...

Weneed to get to know the gospel better!

Our ability to communicate, is gonna be proportional to the depth of our understanding of the revelation of God!

[Back to existential engagement tips...]

- Realize Christians have a perception problem in our culture: got a question? I've got the answer.
- Weneed more epistemic humility! we don't *know everything* or *have it all figured out*, I've still got a lot of questions.
- Weneed to be a lot more open about our:
 - Questions
 - Views
 - Biases
 - Struggles

BEREAL! This can open doors! This has opened tons of doors for me, esp. when sharing about really hard things, and my struggles.

- Weneed to be better listeners!
- Weneed to ask more questions!

It's really powerful to ask questions!

It's a disarming thing.

It's an indirect form of communication to use... Socratic...

Shows a person you care

'You may not be able to share the 4-Spiritual Laws with every person that you meet, but you can say something to everyone!'

'Tim-Tim' communication model: ... based on wisdom from Proverbs

Question One: "What does this person believe?"

Question Two: “Why do these beliefs seem right to this person?”

Question Three: “Where do we agree?”

Common answers?

Common questions?

Common desires?

Common struggles?

Avoid confrontation

Question Four: “Based on this knowledge, how should I proceed?”

With this person, at this time, under these conditions, what is the next step in bringing them closer to faith?