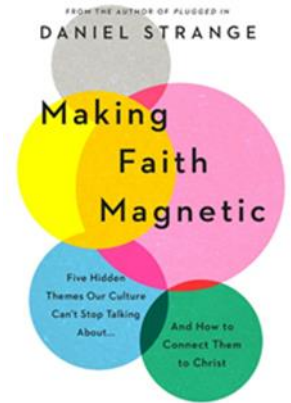


Sussex Gospel Partnership

Making Faith Magnetic

Dan Strange – Crosslands Forum



Session 1: Magnetic Foundations

Introduction

- **Traction**

Men of Issachar who ‘understood the time and knew what Israel should do’ (1 Chron. 12:32)

The need for a *theological vision*: “a faithful restatement of the gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history” (Tim Keller)

- **Tethering**

In your light do we see light (Ps. 36:9)

If Christians do not articulate how the Bible explains all other stories in terms of its own story and how it provides a positive vision for society, then other stories will step in to explain the Bible in their own terms and provide that vision in its place. (Christopher Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation*)

A. Disenchantment? Enchantment? Let’s call the whole thing.... ‘Diff-enchantment’

Who to have faith in?

- Taylor: *disenchantment and the triumph of ‘scientism’*
- *Understanding Unbelief: Across Disciplines and Across Cultures*:
[<https://research.kent.ac.uk/understandingunbelief/>]

5. *Unbelief in God doesn’t necessarily entail unbelief in other supernatural phenomena. Atheists and (less so) agnostics exhibit lower levels of supernatural belief than do the wider populations. However, only minorities of atheists or agnostics in each of our countries appear to be thoroughgoing naturalists. (2.2, 2.3)*

6. *Another common supposition – that of the purposeless unbeliever, lacking anything to ascribe ultimate meaning to the universe – also does not bear scrutiny. While atheists and agnostics are disproportionately likely to affirm that the universe is ‘ultimately meaningless’ in five of our countries, it still remains a minority view among unbelievers in all six countries. (2.4)*

- Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*

The 'Nones' are the 'Remixed'

The Remixed hunger for the same things human beings have always longed for: a sense of meaning in the world and personal purpose within that meaning, a community to share that experience with, and rituals to bring the power of that experience into achievable, everyday life. But they're doing it differently. (Or, at least, they think they are...) Today's Remixed reject authority, institution, creed, and moral universalism. They value intuition, personal feeling, and experiences. They demand to rewrite their own scripts about how the universe, and human beings, operate. Shaped by the twin forces of a creative-communicative Internet and consumer capitalism, today's Remixed don't want to receive doctrine, to assent automatically to a creed. They want to choose—and, more often than not, purchase—the spiritual path that feels more authentic, more meaningful, to them. They prioritize intuitional spirituality over institutional religion. And they want, when available institutional options fail to suit their needs, the freedom to mix and match, to create their own daily rituals and practices and belief systems. From Soulcycle to Contemporary occultism, from obsessive fan culture to the polyamorous and kink-based intentional communities of our new sexual revolution, from wellness culture to the reactionary, atavist alt-right, today's American religious landscape is teeming with new claimants to our sense of meaning, our social place, our time, and our wallets. (20)

The Remixed are functionally religion in the intuitional rather than the institutional sense but looking for meaning, purpose, community, and rituals.

B. Knowing? Not Knowing? Let's call the whole thing.... 'religious'

The Cosmic game of hide and seek:

a) God is not hiding: "For since the creation of the world..."

- *Made to Relate* (the image of God: Gen. 1:27)

'Eternal power' = dependence

'Divine nature' = accountability

b) We are hiding: "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9)

- *Suppression & Repression*
- *Substitution & Replacement*

Idols are to be found at the level of 'ultimates': *Ultimate explanations; Ultimate authorities; Ultimate commitments; Ultimate loves seen in the lives we live, the homes we make for ourselves, our hopes, fears, and desires, the scripts we follow, the everyday liturgies and rituals than (de-) form us*

- A fantasy horror: the walking dead existing in a living nightmare.....
- A tragicomedy "No-one stops to think" (Isa. 44:19)

c) The model of messiness (Acts 17: 16-34)

- Paul's attitude: a city submerged

- Paul's approach: : a 'religious' and 'reaching out' people

It is not beyond possibility that Paul cleverly chose this term precisely for the sake of its ambiguity. His readers would wonder whether the good or bad sense was being stressed by Paul, and Paul would be striking a double blow: people cannot eradicate a religious impulse within themselves (as the Athenians demonstrate), and yet this good impulse has been degraded by rebellion against the living and true God (as the Athenians also demonstrate). Although people do not acknowledge it they are aware of their relation and accountability to the living and true God who created them. But rather than comes to terms with Him and His wrath against their sin (cf. Rom. 1:18), they pervert the truth. And in this they become ignorant and foolish (Rom. 1:21-22). (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*)

- Paul's appeal: a call to repentance

God's not hiding... "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." (Jn.1:18)

He's the best seeker! "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Lk. 19:10)

Session 2: The Magnetic Points

There seems to be a kind of framework within which human religions need to operate. There appear to be definite points of contact around which all kinds of ideas crystallize. There seem to be quite vague feelings – one might better call them direction signals – that have been actively brooding everywhere... Perhaps this can be expressed thus: there seem to be definite magnetic points that time and again irresistibly compel human religious thought. Human beings cannot escape their power but must provide an answer to those basic questions posed to them. (*J.H. Bavinck, Religious Consciousness*)

1. Totality: A way to connect?

Brief description: All humans have an innate sense of totality, that they are small cogs in a much bigger machine. They are cosmically interconnected. They are simultaneously small and insignificant but also significant through belonging. They enjoy communal awareness. They crave connection, feel abandoned after they've experienced it and crave for it again and again.



2. Norm: A way to live?



Brief description: A vague sense there are rules to be obeyed. People know and accept that there are moral standards and codes which come from outside them but to which they must adhere. There is an appreciation of transcendent norms of behaviour which apply to all people and which are cosmically ordered. This brings with it a sense of responsibility to live up to those norms



3. Deliverance: A way out?

Brief description: That there is something not quite right with the world is a common and little disputed notion. There is finitude, brokenness and wrong-doing in the world and the problem of suffering consistently confronts us. We mourn for a 'paradise lost' and long for deliverance from these evils, craving redemption.



4. Destiny: A way we control?

Brief description: Although humans know themselves to be active players in the world, there is a nagging feeling that they are also passive participants in somebody else's world.



5. Higher Power: A way beyond?

Brief description: People everywhere perceive that behind all realities stands a greater reality. This greater reality is variously conceived but is always a superior power.

Religious Consciousness put together:

The super-ethnos of the *Russki Mir*:

As for our people, our country, like a magnet, has attracted representatives of different ethnic groups, nations and nationalities. Incidentally, this has become the backbone not only for our common cultural code but also a very powerful genetic code, because genes have been exchanged during all these centuries and even millennia as a result of mixed marriages. And this genetic code of ours is probably, and in fact almost certainly, one of our main competitive advantages in today's world. This code is very flexible and enduring. We don't even feel it but it is certainly there. So what are our particular features? We do have them, of course, and I think they rely on values. It seems to me that the Russian person or, on a broader scale, a person of the Russian world, primarily thinks about his or her highest moral designation, some highest moral truths. Therefore, the Russian person, or a person of the Russian world, does not concentrate on his or her own precious personality ... Western values are different and are focused on one's inner self. Personal success is the yardstick of success in life and this is acknowledged by society. The more successful a person is, the better. This is not enough for us in this country. ... Death is horrible, isn't it? But no, it appears it may be beautiful if it serves the people: death for one's friends, one's people or for the homeland, to use a modern word. These are the deep roots of our patriotism. They explain mass heroism during armed conflicts and wars and even sacrifice in peacetime. Hence there is a feeling of fellowship and family values. Of course, we are less pragmatic, less calculating than representatives of other peoples, and we have bigger hearts. Maybe this is a reflection of the grandeur of our country and its boundless expanses. Our people have a more generous spirit. (Vladimir V. Putin, 'Direct Line with Vladimir Putin', April 17, 2014, at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796> (accessed 23.03.2022)).

Session 3: The Magnetic Person

1 Cor. 1:18-25:

- *The message that confronts*

We will have to observe with great care what has happened in every individual life. We need to be sensitive to the wounds inflicted in each person's struggle against God. Feeble human feet can never kick aside God's presence with us without incurring a penalty. That very painful reality is played out in each life in its own unique way. (Bavinck, Religious Consciousness)

- *The message that connects*

the Gospel as subversion and the Gospel as fulfilment
The Gospel as 'subversive fulfilment'

Our hope is not in a 'what' but a 'who': *We offer people Jesus*

1. ENTERING: *Stepping into the world and listening to the story:* “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship...” (v. 23)

2. EXPLORING: *Searching 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 altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” (v.23)

3. EXPOSING: *Showing up the idols as destructive frauds:* – “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. EVANGELIZING: *Showing off the gospel of Jesus Christ as ‘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)

1. Jesus Christ: The way we connect



Jesus says: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: connectedness and accountability; communion and community



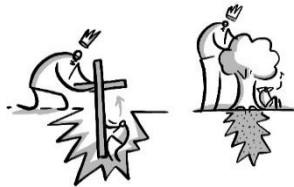
2. Jesus Christ: The way we live

Jesus says: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Mt: 5:17)

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: standard and Saviour; not ‘I obey so I’m accepted’ but ‘I’m accepted so I obey’

3. Jesus Christ: The way out



Jesus says: ‘I am the way the truth and the life’ (Jn. 14:6)

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: Stress root (our enmity with God) and fruit (our enmity with each other and with creation); a rescue from the outside; Grace (done) vs works (do)

4. Jesus Christ: The way of control

Jesus says: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* (Jn.10:11)



Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: a sovereign plan and human responsibility; relationship of a parent and a child.



5. HIGHER POWER: The way beyond

Jesus says: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (Jn. 8:12)

Gospel confrontation and connection:

Kingdom characteristics: a personal absolute, absolute personality; a God who isn't out of reach but who reaches down; a servant King, the Word made flesh.

Session 4: The Magnetic People & Magnetic Spaces

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (Jn. 12:32)



It is the Spirit of God who puts power into the truth about Christ. And then men and women feel that truth and come to Christ and live. But our blessed Lord and Master, uses instruments. The force of Christ's love is sometimes shown to by those who already love Him. One Christian makes many. One believer leads others to faith. To come back to my metaphor of a magnet, you have sometimes seen a battery attached to a coil, and then, if you take a nail and put it on the coil, the nail has become a strong magnet. You notice that the nail turns into a magnet, for you take another nail, and you put it on the end of it and it holds the second nail fast... All the magnetism comes from the first place from which it started, and when it ceases at the fountainhead there is an end of it altogether. Indeed, Jesus Christ is the great attractive magnet, and all must begin and end with Him... Thus from one to another the mystic influence proceeds, but the whole of the force abides in Jesus. More and more the kingdom grows, "ever mighty to prevail," but all the growing and the prevailing come out of Him. So it is that Jesus works—first by Himself, and then by all who are in Him. May the Lord make us all magnets for Himself. (Spurgeon, *The Marvelous Magnet*)

Our evangelism flows from our discipleship!

Be appalled at this, you heavens,
 and shudder with great horror,"
 declares the Lord.
 "My people have committed two sins:
 They have forsaken me,
 the spring of living water,
 and have dug their own cisterns,
 broken cisterns that cannot hold water. (Jer. 2: 12-13)

We are either being formed by Christ or being deformed by something or someone else. If we not being drawn to Christ, we will be being drawn away by something else.

Relating it to Spurgeon's illustration, our hearts are like the unmagnetised material: we are fragmented and our inner desires, commitments, loves, emotions, beliefs etc are attracted by all different created things (think David's 'give me an undivided heart' prayer). As Christians, this means we are not magnetic. What we need is to be close to Christ. As we behold his glory (2 Cor 3v18 - spend time in his magnetic field), all these inner "mini-magnets" that were all attracted to other things become attracted to him and start to align. This then makes us magnetic.

- *totality and the way to connect*
- *norm and the way to live*
- *deliverance and the way out*
- *destiny and the way we control*
- *higher power and the way beyond*

How do we become a people who are fully magnetised?

1. Loving Jesus

- *Listening to Him in his word*

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (Jn. 17:20)

- *Obeying His commands*

"You are my friends if you do what I command" (Jn 15:14)

- *Meditating on His majesty*

2. Loving our identity in Jesus

3. Loving Jesus' body: the church

'serves as witness to the new order, as agent for it, and as first model or exemplar of it.'
(Plantinga)

- *In our gatherings together*

"if the church is not first of all the place where Christians are made, then it cannot become a community of witnesses and servants." (Michael Horton)

"Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful— – Christian community is the final apologetic." (Francis Schaeffer)

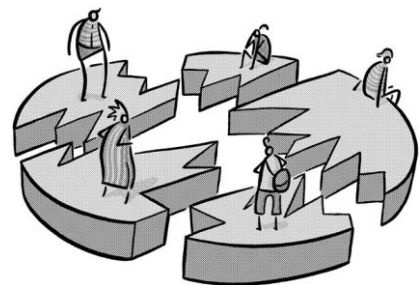
The affirmation of Yahweh always contains a polemic against someone else. . . It may be that the [exiles] will sing such innocuous-sounding phrases as 'Glory to God in the highest,' or 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.' Even those familiar phrases are polemical, however, and stake out new territory for the God now about to be aroused to new caring. "When we sing our pretty songs of praise, it is as if we are singing "take that you false gods (!)." (Brueggemann)

- *In our sending outs*

In our time we still struggle with the idea of the Kingdom of God. For a long time Christians have overemphasised the fact that the Christian faith is something that concerns mankind's innermost being and is the way to salvation, without paying enough attention to the fact that faith places men and women in the perspective of the kingdom. That includes the fact that the believer must strive after a new world. Something of the power of the new life in Jesus Christ must penetrate social and economic life, commerce and industry, science and art. We must not leave any sector of individual or social life to its own devices. God wants us to gather together right now all things in this world under one head, Christ. (J.H. Bavinck)

Magnetic Spaces

Plos One 'Differential personality change earlier and later in the coronavirus pandemic in a longitudinal sample of adults in the United States'



The pandemic appears to have negatively affected the following areas:

- our ability to express sympathy and kindness towards others (agreeableness);
- our capacity to be open to new concepts and willing to engage in novel situations (openness);
- our tendency to seek out and enjoy other people's company (extraversion);

- our desire to strive towards our goals, do tasks well or take responsibilities towards others seriously (conscientiousness).

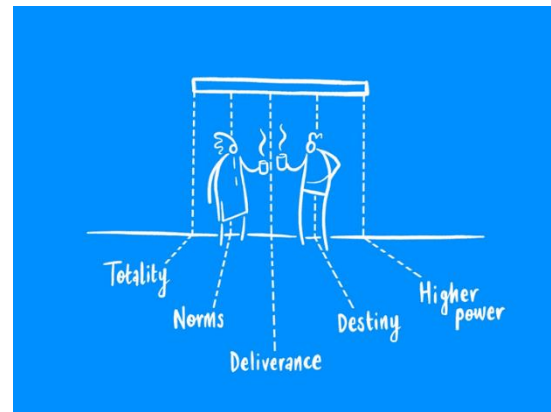
1. Porches

In a nutshell it means that there must be a balance of criticism and clear confrontation of unbelief (“subversive”) along with a great deal of respect and appreciation for the good values, commitments, and aspirations of the non-believers (“fulfilment”).’ (Tim Keller, *Lemonade on the Porch*).



3. Theological Foundations

- Totality: is there a way to connect?
- Norms: is there a way to live?
- Deliverance: is there a way out?
- Destiny: is there a way we control?
- Higher power: is there a way beyond?

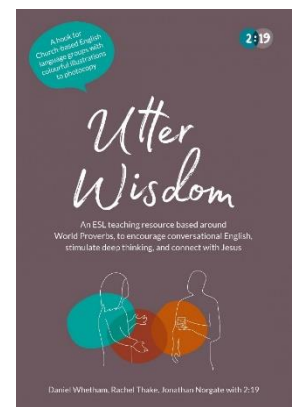


4. Magnetic Spaces



- E.g. *Utter Wisdom* (2:19)

Written for churches to use in English language teaching outreach, *Utter Wisdom* is based around 60 World proverbs, each with a short English teaching plan and illustration, with sets of questions in simple English aimed at discussing how the themes which emerge in these proverbs help us to consider the deeper questions of life. Each of these themes (based around J.A. Bavinck’s 5 ‘magnetic points’ which Dan Strange lays out in *Making Faith Magnetic*) leads on to a short study where learners can see how these deep themes connect with and are confronted by Jesus the ‘I am’.



5. Thinking Space

Not 'bait and switch' – the need for an integrity of purpose.
 Not 'social action' – the need to be intentionally apologetic

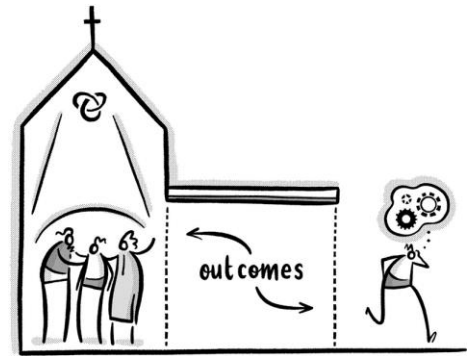
- The dignity of difference
- The idolatry of difference



'Conversational difference' creates the space and the platform for 'conversional difference'.

pre-pre-evangelism → pre-evangelism → evangelism

Both 'come and see' & 'go and tell'



Further Reading and Resources:

ed. John Bolt, *The J.H. Bavinck Reader* (Eerdmans 2013)

Daniel Strange, *Plugged in: Connecting your faith with what you watch, read and play* (The Good Book Company, 2019)

_____ *Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can't Stop Talking About... and how to connect them to Christ* (Good Book Company, 2021)

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