

Going Forward

Jesus and Academic Culture, Podcast #8

James Cook

Going Forward

Introduction

- Review
 - The progression of the whole series
 - A few reminders and concerns
- Defining the challenge; what needs and can be done?

Going Forward

Review

- The progression of the whole series
 - Began by taking a look how Niebuhr and Carson handled the Christ and culture problem. Tried to get clear on what they had to say...
 - A key issue was the problem of the authority of both entities A) Christ and B) culture and their relationship with each other
 - An important thing to see was that Niebuhr's support of the Christ the transformer type was influenced by his pure form of "realized eschatology" view.
 - Carson focused his spotlight on doing good exegesis versus merely "choosing" a typology from Niebuhr's options.
 - Switched gears: how do Evangelicals in academe fit in (sociologically & academically)
 - We talked a little about the Renaissance and Reformation, but especially on the Enlightenment Period ideas as they have evolved and how they played a big role in shaping the dominant ideas and ambiance in academe to this day.
 - We talked about what changed: A) rise of Science as a cultural authority, B) the role of Reason as a cultural authority (knowledge is power), C) the decline of religious authority, and D) the decline of "revelation" as authority.
 - Some Evangelicals in academe who are conservative theologically and conservative politically don't easily fit in.
 - That last issue can make it hard for effective conversations and evangelism.

Going Forward

Review

- Reminders and concerns
 - However, “fitting in” isn’t the only thing to consider.
 - For evangelicals there are evangelism issues, relationship with the broader evangelical culture issues, and there are academic integrative issues.
 - Not unlike the challenge of pursuing the virtues of grace and truth.
 - Evangelicals in academe can face accommodation vs. marginalization with respect to integrative issues in academe.
 - Polarization between the educated and less educated evangelicals in the larger culture
 - Disconnect between academic evangelicals and non-academic evangelicals, especially between them & non-academic *white* evangelicals in the general public.
 - Education is one of the main ways evangelicals lose their faith; they are put in disequilibrium. They are being secularized in their thought life and that plays a role in folks leaving evangelicalism
 - However, moral issues still play a huge role (perhaps the larger role) in “losing” evangelicals
 - Together they are corrosive.

- The divisive problems among academic evangelicals occurs at the extremes (we talked about this in Podcast #7)
 - Progressive evangelicals vs. conservative evangelicals at the extremes in academe. However, note there are hardly any at the right extreme in academe.
 - You have the challenge of thinking Christianly and still having to be productive in your field and have the respect of your colleagues.

Going Forward

Review

- Reminders and concerns (con't)
 - My concern in this series is not primarily with getting academic and non-academic Evangelicals to get along. That needs and has been addressed elsewhere in *Connections Review* articles.
 - My concern in this series is with “academic” Evangelicals...because of the power of the assaults on the credibility of the gospel and Christian faith at least since the Enlightenment period.
 - These concerns affect thinking Christianly about the academic disciplines, it has a seminal affect on the credibility of the gospel (apologetics related), on the coherence of our intellectual lives, and to some degree on our spiritual formation. Many Christians in academe do not seem to see this...maybe because they “see” all truth is God’s truth” & think of science as closing in on the Truth.
 - Christians professors may *enthusiastically embrace* secular ideas—& there are reasons for that.
 - Christian academics may *subtly give in* to secular ideas: 1) views on important subjects (including their disciplines); 2) especially thinking Christianly about anthropology (eg. what is a human being); and 3) much more including moral issues.
 - Christians in academe may not know of a way, or presently there may be no way for them to flourish in academe as a theological conservative Christian, without cultural accommodation in important ways. Otherwise they make themselves marks, to be ostracized.
 - It is possible (and I think likely) given the current climate to embrace modes of cultural change that do not fit well with the gospel.

Going Forward

Defining the challenge; what needs and can be done?

- Evangelicals in academe need a lot of “stuff”
 - Besides their expertise in their chosen field, they need to be theologically acute and philosophically sophisticated.
 - They need to understand the history (and sociology) of ideas and the current climate means that some of their colleagues are willing to play hard-ball—“cancel culture.” That won’t be anything new, but it calls for courage & wisdom.
 - Most of all they need a grace motivated, vibrant, and they need to have a wise and long walk with Jesus in the same direction—they need to pursue and attain certain virtues.

Going Forward

What needs and can be done by Evangelicals in academe

- Having counted the cost
 - Realize that many of you can get along with your colleagues.
 - Deepen your understanding of Christianity's remarkable intellectual heritage and that gives you a tremendous advantage.
 - There is a renaissance going on in Christian philosophy that has made remarkable progress that you can tap into.
 - Resist secular modes of operation: 1) much of present day cultural change movements are "informed" by Marxist thought through critical theory and critical theories. 2) evangelicals do believe and have a scriptural basis for social progress but not by extreme means; 3) gospel works out from its center to the culture, but not the other way.

Going Forward

What needs and can be done by Evangelicals in academe

- Having counted the cost (con't)
 - Supporting free speech means you will hear a lot of things you won't like, but freedom of speech is incredibly important to the progress of the gospel.
 - Resist impulses and propaganda from the “extremes” of the political left and the political right to move towards governmental totalitarianism.
 - Realize there are ambiguities in defining what's politically “left” and politically “right.” (see Scalia's video).
 - What is “left” and “right” can turn on multiple axes and that makes analysis quite difficult.

Conclusion

- All this has been an introduction into the subjects.
- Evangelicals in academe represent a major hope for Christianity. That hope involves believing to understand; it involves believing in God as one believes in the sun, not only because you see it, but by it you see everything else.
- It's going to be hard, but the challenge will make you better and deeper in your faith and maybe allow you to leave a very valuable legacy to future generations of Christians and Christian scholars.

END