



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Cultural Engagement in a Secular World, Pt.1

Guest(s): Dr. Rob Pacienza

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello, everyone. I'm James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome into Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host here of the broadcast. I'm delighted to serve alongside Dr. Dobson as a resident authority on mental health and relationships here at the JDFI. Thank you for joining us today. In today's world, we, as Christians are in a constant battle to protect and defend God-given values and freedoms, and it's easy to get discouraged, maybe frustrated, even distracted and swept up in today's misguided culture, but what does culture really mean? We toss that word around a lot.

Well, that's going to be the topic we're going to be discussing today with our special guest, Dr. Robert Pacienza. Robert is the President and CEO of the D. James Kennedy Ministries and Senior Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He also serves as President of Coral Ridge Ministries and the founder of the Institute for Faith and Culture. Pastor Rob recently earned his doctorate from the Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He's married to his lovely wife, Jennifer.

They have three children. Welcome to Family Talk, Dr. Pacienza. Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley send their regards.

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Yeah, it's a true honor to be on this show and to engage with Dr. Dobson's ministry in this capacity.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Rob, before we get started, I wanted our listeners to, I wanted to remind them of something historical that I think you might be aware, of and maybe some of our listeners are too, but Dr. Dobson actually spoke and delivered a very personal memorial tribute at the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church back when your ministry founder, Dr. D. James Kennedy had passed on, and that was a special moment. You recall that?

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Of course. I had the privilege of coming to Faith under Dr. Kennedy as a teenager, grew up here at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, and that was September of 2007. My wife and I and our family, we attended that funeral, and we're just blown away by the outpouring of love and support, but in particular, I'll never forget the funeral message delivered by Dr. Dobson. It was clear, it was concise, it was a call to action for the church. He not only honored the life and ministry of D. James Kennedy, but it was a true call to the next generation to step up and to carry this mantle, and to really carry on the legacy of the ministry that was committed to evangelism, the great commission and the cultural mandate that Dr. Kennedy had established at this church.

I do remember being just profoundly impacted by the reality that Dr. Dobson was chosen to give that message. I mean, Dr. Kennedy knew presidents, he knew leaders all around the world, ministry leaders, but it really showed his respect and admiration for Dr. Dobson. I know that was a family decision to have him deliver that message, and boy, was that the right decision. We were all blown away and he brought a great sense of comfort and hope for a congregation that was mourning the loss of their leader.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes, what a legacy. Pastor Rob, you're the CEO and President now of the D. James Kennedy Ministries. Dr. Kennedy wanted to create a global impact for God with his ministry. I remember interviewing him back in the day, and was such a delight. Was it 1974, he began with his radio outreach?

He led the way, if you will, in that whole sort of lane, that genre of moving into public culture and bringing the word of God and that spirit of evangelism that he had. Can you just reflect back on some of that, and then how it kind of sets the table for you as you take on that mantle and this role?

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Yeah, I appreciate the question. You actually have to go back to 1960, and that's really where it all started. When he planted Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church with his wife, Anne, here in Fort Lauderdale, they gathered with handfuls of people, and on his back patio, he challenged them and said, "Together, we can change the world." Talking to some of those people that were there on that summer evening in 1960, thought Dr. Kennedy was crazy. How can 14 people in South Florida change the world?

But they eventually caught the vision, and God used Dr. Kennedy, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and this media ministry to do exactly that, to change the world. '74, starts a radio broadcast, '78, starts a television broadcast, and as you said, was a trailblazer, a pioneer in the area of television evangelism. He really had a heart to take the gospel to the nations, and it wasn't just a gospel for our personal private lives. He believed that the gospel was a public truth. He believed in the two mandates of scripture, the great commission and the cultural mandate, that we need to engage culture faithfully so that we have the right and the privilege and the liberty to continue to proclaim the gospel, and we saw there in the '70s, God take this message and the ministry of our church, and eventually, within a few decades, reach every nation in the world.

And now, to be in this seat as Senior Pastor of the church he founded and to be the CEO of the media ministry that he's founded, is just an incredible privilege, 'cause I really do have a heart for the next generation, and we need to make sure the gospel remains a public truth, that we are speaking truth to power. I really do believe that there is a remnant out there, that no matter what the media says, that the culture is going adrift, that secularism is on the rise. Everywhere I travel around the country, I meet young people that are hungry for the truth, hungry to make a difference, hungry to make an impact, and it's our prayer that, just as Dr. Kennedy reached previous generations with the gospel for the sake of the culture, we're praying that we can do it yet again.

Dr. Tim Clinton: As I listened to you, I was thinking about Coral Ridge Ministries, and I actually went to college at Liberty University back in the late '70s, 1979, when I showed up on campus with Dr. Jerry Falwell, and you saw the ministry and the legacy that's been built here with Liberty University and so much more, and then think of Dr. Dobson, and tying in the links of ... I remember when Dr. Dobson came and spoke at a commencement service at Liberty University. You start weaving all this together, you begin to realize that there were seeds that were sown to have impact in culture and more. I know we're going to talk about that. As I think about you and the role and responsibility you have now of carrying that torch, if you will, what are some of the current initiatives, efforts that have your attention, your passion as you continue to step boldly in this new sort of life and call to impact our generations?

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Yeah. One of the newest initiatives that we have launched is the Institute for Faith and Culture, and I often tell people what evangelism was to it, evangelism explosion back in the 1960's and '70s and '80s. We really want the Institute for Faith and Culture to do that for cultural equipping for all Christians, so this will be an institute that will produce digital and print resources. We'll hold courses here on our campus for lay people. This is not for seminarians, this is not for pastors, this is for regular, ordinary Christians, sitting in the pew that are concerned about our culture, but don't know how to respond, so we're excited about that initiative.

We have just recently relaunched our Center for Christian Statesmanship in Washington D.C.. This was started by Dr. Kennedy in '95 as an outreach to members of Congress and their staff. We awarded last year the Lieutenant Governor Winsome Sears from Virginia. The Christian Statesman of the Year Award, we're awarding that award to Tim Scott of South Carolina in September, and we're also coming up with programs, bible studies, initiatives, resources so that Christian members of Congress and their staff can boldly proclaim the gospel, stand for Christ in the public square. Dr. Kennedy called Washington D.C. the modern day Rome.

He said that in '95, and how much more is that true today in the 21st century? The last initiative that we're excited about is next year, we're going to be launching the Center for Christian Leadership and Revival. This will be for pastors to learn about the cultural mandate, to learn how to steward their

pulpits for the sake of proclaiming public truth. How do we talk about the moral issues of our nation without being accused of becoming political? And that's what happens.

A lot of pastors are afraid to speak the truth, afraid to talk about the great moral issues of our day, and so we want to train pastors on how to steward their pulpits and steward their ministries, and equip them to raise up the next generation of Christian men and women, who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You have a brand new book out called *The Hope Of The World: Christian Cultural Engagement in a Secular Age*. I want to talk a lot about that, in particular, here in a moment, but when you think of the last few years, Dr. Pacienza, there's been a real beat down. It's been a tough go for a lot of people when you think about it from COVID to what we're seeing currently, and it's just like people are stunned, they're shocked. They can't even believe what they see up on social media, what we're talking about, how out of control culture seems to be, but there seems to be a stirring. I think people are tired of what's going on.

They want to make a difference. They're tired of being silenced, and shamed, and stigmatized because they believe in truth, or want to stand up for righteousness and culture. Do you see that? Are you encouraged by that at all?

Dr. Rob Pacienza: I am. You have to go back about 60 years. 60 years ago, in our nation in particular, we began to be fed the lie, that if we become a purely secular nation, if we have a purely secular public square, remove God from the classroom, remove God from the public sector, and we really embrace secularism, that we will be a freer nation, we'll be a freer people, that we need to be liberated from the oppression of the traditional values and virtues that have been established in this nation. I think you and I can say emphatically that we are not only no better off, but we are floundering as a nation and as a society. Because we've bought the lie that we can do life without God, with no absolute being and without no absolute morality, because we've bought that lie, we see our nation in peril.

We see a society that is in decay, and I think what you are referring to is people waking up and saying, "No, we're living in a state of confusion. We're living in a state of utter chaos." I think it's a great opportunity for the church to say, but we have the answer. What previous generations got wrong of embracing secularism and rejecting the notion that God does have a role in the public square, we have the opportunity as the church to reintroduce God and to reintroduce ourselves as the people of God, not for the sake of being the only ones present in the public square, but realizing that the Church has always been the hope of the world, and we have an opportunity to give the answer that, I think our world is looking for. The next generation is looking for meaning, and purpose, and satisfaction, and we need to be able to have a reason for the hope that we have and say, "Secularism's not going to give you the answer."

"Government's not going to give you the answer that you're looking for. Mainstream media certainly doesn't have the answer, but the Church does have the answer, and it's found in the person and work of Jesus Christ." It's an incredible time to be a Christian.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I remember a meeting at Focus on the Family. Dr. Dobson was leading the meeting Pastor Rob and around the table where a number of Christian leaders... Not even sure how I wound up in the room as a young man, but I'll never forget what took place that day. Dr. Dobson was lamenting what was happening in culture, and he made a statement. He said, "We need to pray. We need to pray that the Church would awaken and take a rightful place."

He said, "Because the hope is in the Church, but," he said, "Until then, parachurch organizations have to 'Stand in the gap,' but the real hope, that which we hold onto, is there."

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And would God do that? Is that the heart of the message of your new book?

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Absolutely. This is an incredible time. I often hear people say that it's never been a worst time to be a Christian. I look at it the exact opposite. I think this is an incredible time to be the Church.

I think the lines have been drawn in the sand. We know where those that are leading, the revolution of secularism, where they stand. I mean, it's, no doubt, what the leaders of our culture are doing, what they stand for, what they're trying to do, but we have to understand that the Church of Jesus Christ lives and dies by this promise, that Jesus builds His church and the gates of hell will not prevail. As you just said, the Church really is the hope in this cultural moment, and we have such a great opportunity. It was back in the 19th century, when Alexis Tocqueville was doing his tour.

The French sociologist and philosopher was touring America. He wanted to discover the greatness of America, and I'm paraphrasing, but he said, "The greatness of America was not found in Washington D.C., but the greatness of America was found in the houses of worship all across this nation, pulpits aflame with righteousness." It was pastors who were boldly proclaiming the whole council of God, and men and women who weren't living a privatized Christian life, but were living out a public life for the sake of the gospel and the kingdom, and we need to recapture our prophetic witness once again in the public square, in the marketplace, and throughout our cultural spheres.

Dr. Tim Clinton: A lot of people talk about the deafening silence of America's pulpits, but there have been a lot of faithful. There's been a remnant of pastors who have stood strong. I think of my dad, Pastor Rob, who served nearly 60 years as a rural country pastor up in the hills of Central Pennsylvania. My dad loved God and

country. He was one of those what Tom Brokaw called was the greatest generation ever.

World War II veteran, had a flag in our yard. Boy, he stood boldly for truth. We need modern day warriors who would step up and step into this moment. Pastor Rob, I wanted to go into your book for a moment. In your book, you ask a question, "What is culture?," and you unpack that. Can you take us there for a moment?

A lot of people think of pop culture, wokeism. They use terms like that, but what does it mean to understand that word, culture, especially from a biblical perspective?

Dr. Rob Pacienza:

Yeah. The simplest definition I've ever heard of culture is simply what human beings make of the world. We create culture whether we like it or not. Whether we realize it or not, we are making culture every day. Lawmakers, when they put laws into action, it becomes legislation.

That is a cultural artifact. When a musician writes a song, that is culture. When a chef produces food, that is culture. When we're ... Whatever we do with the raw materials of the earth, that is culture, so the question is, "Are we making good culture that reflects the glory of God? Or are we making bad culture that reflects the glory of man?," and that's really always been the dilemma throughout redemptive history.

When you go back to the Bible, in biblical terms, in Genesis 1 and 2, we see God creating humanity in His image, but then, calling them to subdue the earth, have dominion over the earth, be fruitful, and multiply. We see man called to work and to cultivate the garden. That's the whole idea of culture-making. The problem is Genesis 3, the fall of humanity, and instead of cultivating the earth, subduing the earth, having dominion over the earth for the glory of God, we have dominion, subdue, we cultivate the earth for the glory of man. So what we see in Genesis 11 with the Tower of Babel, no longer are they building cities and cultivating culture for the glory of the city of God, but they're cultivating culture and building cities for the glory of man, instead of God, and so that's why we really need to understand we're all culture-making people at the end of the day.

We're shaping culture either for the good or for evil, and that's really the call of this book, to recapture the redemptive legacy of Christians in the Bible and all throughout 2,000 years of church history that have been shaping culture for the glory of God.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host here of the broadcast. Our special guest today, Rob Pacienza. He's the President and CEO of the D. James Kennedy Ministries, Senior Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, someone God is raising up for such a time as this, strong voice, new

book out, *The Hope Of The World: Christian Cultural Engagement in a Secular Age*. Pastor Rob, I wanted to stay with that thing on what we're called to do.

I think of that scripture verse, John 17:16, "We are to be in, but not of this world." A lot of people walk around with those shirts on, not of this world. What does that mean to you, and what should we be thinking about personally, because we are the Church of Jesus Christ?

Dr. Rob Pacienza:

Yep. I really appreciate that question and that verse because that verse gives us the biblical center for what it means to be a Christian. The one extreme, if you ignore that verse, is that we can tend to find ourselves isolating ourselves as the Church, rejecting culture, rejecting the world to the point where we run away from culture. We run away from the problems of society. We stay in our holy huddle, as they say, and we really do little to nothing to engage the cultural moment. On the other extreme, if you ignore that verse, you find Churches and sincere Christians that unfortunately, are so assimilating to culture and accommodating to culture.

There's no distinction after a while between the Church and the culture, and so we need to realize, "Yes, we are in this world, but we're not of this world," and being in this world and of this world is recognizing our citizenship, is ultimately not here in this world, but it is in heaven, but God has placed us here. If God didn't want us to be in the world, He would've saved us and taken us up to heaven, but Jesus, when He leaves the earth, He says, "All authority has been given above and below to Me, and that authority was then transferred to the Church to go and make disciples of all the nations, proclaiming the good news as a public truth." You look at the story of the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah calls the people of God to not stay on the edge of Babylon, but to go into Babylon to engage with culture, on the one hand, keeping your distinctiveness as the people of God, but go and build houses, and plant vineyards, and engage the cultural moment to seek the shalom of all people. We think of Daniel and the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and all of the different examples we have either in the Bible or throughout 2,000 years of church history.

I shudder to think if Christians, throughout the last 2,000 years, would not engage culture faithfully, would not embrace that call to be in the world, but not of the world. Where would we be without the William Wilberforces? Where would we be without the Christians standing in the gap in the first few centuries when Christianity was under persecution? They changed the world by not being of the world, but by being in the world, by being salt of the earth and light of the world, that's sitting on a hill that Jesus called His Church to be. That's true cultural engagement for every generation.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Again, I really believe there's a stirring going on, but I still hear a lot of people pull back and say, "Hey, I don't want to cause waves. You can do your thing. I'll do my thing," that kind of deal, but at the same time, the beat down continues, and this suppression, if you will, of our Christian witness. It's so troublesome to me. I saw on Instagram, Pastor Rob, recently, and it just simply said this, "You

can sit back and be quiet and go the easy route in the midst of all this insanity that we're seeing," and you're probably, "Yeah, you'll be okay," but I promise you, your kids won't. There's a price tag.

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: God has called us to stand up and be bold for truth, and we've got to somehow get to a place where we can embrace this and get the courage that we need to move forward.

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Amen. We've got to learn from history. I mean, you look at the 18th century and the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment led to the 1789 French Revolution. It was a bloody revolution that led to chaos.

It was nothing like the 1776 revolution in America, that was fueled by the Judeo-Christian worldview. It was a godless revolution, it was a secular revolution, but they bought the lie of the Enlightenment, that faith and reason don't go together, that Christianity should be privatized, so Christianity lost its influence. We're losing our influence now. France lost its Christian influence centuries before, and we saw the aftermath of the 1789 revolution, that, as I said, led to complete chaos. Then, you fast-forward to the early 20th century, and the National German Church under Nazi Germany, what did they do?

They were convinced by Hitler that they shouldn't have a voice in the public square, that they should stay out of politics, just keep your religion to yourself, and they did just that. We saw one of the greatest atrocities in human history through the Holocaust, but at what point will the Church wake up? We have hundreds and hundreds of years of historical precedent of the Church not engaging culture, and it leads to ruin. It leads to chaos in society. The only hope for the world and the only hope for a flourishing nation in society is for the Church of Jesus Christ to stay engaged in every area of public life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, what a delightful conversation. We're going to talk tomorrow more about your passion. What's kind of that backwater story, how you got where you are, and why God has put this message deep into your soul, and then you went through a tough time as a dad. That book, again, *The Hope of the World: Christian Cultural Engagement in a Secular Age*. It's a book that you need to get your hands on.

Again, our special guest has been Pastor Rob Pacienza. He's the CEO and President of the D. James Kennedy Ministries. What a delight to have you. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, our entire team here, we salute you and pray again that God would continue to strengthen and encourage you for such a time as this. Thank you so much for joining us.

Dr. Rob Pacienza: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, I hope you found today's conversation encouraging here on Family Talk.

You've been listening to Pastor Rob Pacienza and Dr. Tim Clinton. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of that conversation. We'll hear about Pastor Rob's background and what you, as a Christian can do to seek God's redemptive grace in your life. You won't want to miss that conversation.

Now, there are many things to stand up and fight for, and one of the most important things, of course, is our children, especially the preborn children. As you know, some significant gains have been made in the fight for life here in our culture, but the war to protect the preborn is far from over. Let's stand together and support expecting parents, young families, and new mothers and fathers in need. Far too few people realize that their local Pregnancy Resource Center, or PRC, as we like to say, is on the front lines of the mission field. It's important for PRCs to have the resources they need to share the gospel and minister to pregnant women, young moms, and their children.

Now, to encourage these inspiring ministries, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute urges every church and Christian to adopt a PRC. To get more information about how you can make a difference, just visit drjamesdobson.org/prc. That's DR james dobson dot O-R-G/P-R-C, and remember to please keep these expecting moms and their babies in your prayers each and every day. I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at the JDFI, thanks so much for making us a part of your day. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. James Dobson: Hello Everyone, this is James Dobson inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk. Everyday we come to these microphones with someone in mind. Whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline, or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife. We want to put an arm around your family in any way that we can. So join us next time for Family Talk, won't you?