



CHRISTIAN IN SOCIETY

LIFE IN THE CHURCH AND WORLD

CHRIST AND CULTURE

TOWARD AN ADEQUATE DEFINITION OF CULTURE (NIEHBUHR)

- Descriptive or prescriptive – how it is; how it ought to be
- *A social heritage* . . . an expression of spiritual and moral life embracing a people's language, habits, beliefs, customs, social organization and technologies, received and transmitted.
- *A set of values* that identify ends and goals for human achievements; what is good for the people, especially in the temporal and material spheres of life.
- *A uniting of plural values*, combining peace with prosperity, justice with order, freedom with welfare, truth with beauty, scientific truth with moral good, technical proficiency with practical wisdom.



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CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE

- Christ's singular work in the world is redemptive – to save sinners from this lost and condemned world.
- Citizenship in Kingdom of Heaven and its life have nothing to do with the temporal orders of this fallen sinful world.
- Christ has nothing to do with culture.
- Christians are called to live separated lives of holiness and godliness.
 - Monasticism
 - Holiness communities (e.g. Amish, Mennonites, Quakers, United Brethren, etc.)
- *Separation* from secular communities is what it means to be *in the world but not of the world*.



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CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE – ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

- Greatly influenced by gnostic thinking drawn from Greek stoic and ascetic philosophy.
- Would include the Hermit Movement of third and fourth centuries, and Monasticism in the Middle Ages and beyond.
- The call to faith is a call to an other-worldly higher calling in this life shaped by Jesus' command to love one another.
- Caesar's standards of civic justice, an eye for an eye . . . have no place in the conduct of true believers.
- Because culture is in us as around us - this position tends to create counter-cultures – e.g. monastic communities and those spawned by the Radical-reformation.



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- Dreher's modified Benedict's Option – counter-cultural social communities for growth and preservation of faith life and Christian community in today's anti-Christian culture.
- Think also of underground necessities for the people of God in the context of persecution and its threats (Roman persecution, CCP, Militant Islamic rule, etc.).
- What do you think should be the criteria whereby Christians should withdraw from general society?
- Issues of the nurture and education of our baptized children.
- Should this position be considered as a matter of degrees relative to location, times, and shape of how the culture impacts people of faith, families, and the local church?



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CHRIST OF CULTURE

- Christ's work of redemption is subsumed into his Lordship over all creation.
- Progressive refined human culture is the evolution of the Kingdom of God.
 - Evolution of humane civilization in the world is equated with the progressive realization of the Kingdom of God.
 - Jesus is both our example and inspiration.
 - Redemption is collapsed into an evolved Kingdom of God through the governing and social structures of this temporal world.
 - Examples: Social Gospel, 19th cent. Prot. Liberalism



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CHRIST OF CULTURE – ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

- This position collapses all themes of redemption into a realized eschatology of an evolved Kingdom of God on earth.
- Christianity is understood as the terminal point of civilization itself. The Kingdom of God is brought about by the reforming of Caesar.
- With the likes of social gospelers, proponents of this view were out to demonstrate the moral power of the churches to *Christianize* the social order.
- The world establishes the agenda for the Church.
- The truth of Christianity is shown in its social utility.



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CHRIST OF CULTURE – ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

- The crisis of this position is not with a Church in the world, but a world in the Church.
- Today we are decades from the heyday of the Social Gospel in the 60s and cultural accommodation by the Church is very much disdained.
- Still contemporary mainline Protestant Churches in America would be embarrassed to make any public announcements without considering them to possess some redeeming social value.
- This position is patently heretical. The saving work and gifts of Christ can never be confused with temporal culture or governance.



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THREE VIEWS THAT EMBRACE BOTH CREATION AND REDEMPTION

- Christ is Lord in both realms: the temporal orders of this fallen world, and the ecclesiastical orders of grace that establish and extend the the Kingdom of God.
- Christ provides all blessings both for temporal and eternal welfare.
- The world is the context of the Church where the faithful cannot yet be taken out of this vale of tears.
- We live lives of faith and faithfulness within the temporal orders and culture which include ills and suffering.
- The state exercises the rule of God when evil doers are brought to justice and punished (as St. Paul teaches in Romans 13).



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THREE MORE VIEWS THAT EMBRACE BOTH CREATION AND REDEMPTION

- All quarters of the *City of Man* stand under the Lordship of Christ.
- These views present different understandings of how the Incarnate Christ exercises His authority in creation and redemption.
 - What he would accomplish through believers who live, work, and serve in the temporal orders of a given culture or civilization.
 - Different views of the methods Christ would use to accomplish his work in society.
 - Different views of the purpose of Christ's exercise of temporal authority.



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CHRIST ABOVE CULTURE

- Jesus is the fulfillment of cultural aspirations and the restorer of the institutions of true society, while Himself discontinuous with the social life and the elements of culture.
- Christ enters into life and culture *from above* - he transforms individuals by his grace and then molds them collectively into a new supernatural culture and society - *The New Jerusalem* - the temporal manifestation of the people of God.
- Christ converts Caesar and uses him to protect the Church and establish a Christendom of virtuous living and Christian vocation.
- Examples: Thomas Aquinas, Medieval Western Christendom



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CHRIST ABOVE CULTURE – ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

- All good works are carried out in the context of culture as enabled by the grace of Christ.
- Love flows from grace to the neighbor who can only be found within culture.
- The grace of Christ nurtures both the *cardinal virtues* (prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude) and the *spiritual virtues* (faith, hope, and love).
- The cardinal virtues are nurtured through law in society also in unbelievers who may be recipients of God's common grace.



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CHRIST TRANSFORMING CULTURE (CONVERSION OF CULTURE ITSELF)

- Christ rules over both Church and world. No realm in which Christ does not rule and reign as sovereign Lord.
- Old creation perverted and impaired.
- Through the life and commitment of his people, Christ works in the world -as a leaven - transforming and reforming all orders and endeavors according to his will and redemptive power.
- Christians draw upon his grace and the teachings of his Law to bring each and every order and endeavor of temporal life under the reign of His Lordship.
- Reformed and Dutch Calvinist view.



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CHRIST TRANSFORMING CULTURE (CONVERSION OF CULTURE ITSELF)

- To what extent can the corruptive effects of the Fall be transformed back into a reflection of God's original design?
- Does God need those of faith to be faithful to accomplish his purposes on the stage of human history?
- Luther was convinced that faithful Christians in diverse vocational service can render works that make things in this fallen world *a little better*.
- What might be accomplished from efforts by the faithful to transform human activity and civil structure by divinely revealed principles drawn from God's Word?
- Answers have involved a spectrum of thought - some more optimistic, some less so among Reformed thinkers.



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CHRIST RULING BY LAW AND GRACE: TWO KINGDOMS, ONE KING

- A polarity exists between Christ and culture as between Law and Gospel.
- Christ rules over both Church and world according to two governments: one heavenly and another earthly.
- As Savior, Christ rules by grace in His Church. And, as Lord over all creation, He rules by Law in the temporal orders of the world.
- The Christian life and the Church are present and lived out in the context of culture and earthly domain.
- The Christian lives under Christ through His Law and Gospel. Law orders the temporal life of culture, and Gospel orders eternal life in the Kingdom of God.



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- There are two different spheres in which the Christian lives a life of faith and faithfulness.
 - Luther explained this as flowing from *Two Kinds of Righteousness*:
 - A righteousness that the Christian possesses before God
 - A righteousness that is exhibited before others in the temporal orders of life.
 - The former is the righteousness of Christ, the latter is an outward set of virtues and works normed by the standards of justice and consideration inherent in the Law.
 - One is a righteousness of faith, the other of works.
 - Corresponding is the Christian's dual citizenship in the Kingdom of God, and in the temporal orders of earthly life.



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- Christ exercises his Lordship over all aspects of human life.
 - And as Robert Kolb observes, every corner of human life is subject to God's prescription and providence.
 - He is Lord of both realms ruling in his Kingdom by grace, and ruling in the temporal orders of life, including the state by principles, standards, and values derived from Law.
 - These realms are not divided from one another, rather they are distinguished. There is a unity in God and there is a unity of the Christian life that is lived in culture.



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CHRIST RULING BY LAW AND GRACE: TWO KINGDOMS, ONE KING

- He produces a modicum of peaceful temporal living by curbing gross sin through temporal authorities and civil law.
- The motivation for civil righteousness is self-concern. Life will go best for me if I follow the rules rather than break them.
- A modicum of peace by just civil governance provides culture for the spreading of the Gospel.
- However, we have seen how persecution of Christianity and the church and suffering of Christians has attended times and places where Christianity has thrived and grown.