

On Earth As It Is In Heaven, Pt. 2
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(Based on Brian Mattson's series)

Review:

Examples of Christians relating to their surrounding culture.

Inherent conflict between our calling as Christians and literally everything else. There's an uneasiness...

Difference between nature and culture—blink and a wink.

Culture—what groups of people think and do. It's inescapable.

“OK—I'm saved—thank God! Now what?”

Q: How does our heavenly citizenship relate to our earthly life? Or, (1) how can we be in the world but not of the world? World-affirming (all that God created is good) while at the same time be rejecting of the world in the bad ethical sense—it's not “all good” as it stands. (1 Jn. 2:15)

Or, how does the Kingdom of God connect to the rest of our lives? *Does* the K of G even connect?

We pray weekly “Your will be done On Earth As It Is In Heaven”. We are asking for something momentous—that (2) the earth will be ruled as heaven is ruled. We are asking God that the world where we reside and with which we intersect will more and more resemble heaven. Really mean it?

H. Richard Niebuhr “Christ and Culture”.

Christ Against Culture

Christ of Culture

Christ Above Culture

Christ in Paradox with Culture

Christ Transforming Culture. Going for the big picture today overview today.

Our Christian response to the surrounding culture will also be based on 3 crucial, vital points: (3)

1. Our view of creation itself (What is this thing that God made?)
2. Our view of creation post-fall (What is this thing that God made that we messed up?) and
3. Our view of creation in the future, or “eschatologically” (What's it going to be at the end?)

These issues will crop up over and over... overview:

1. Christ Against Culture. Simon the Stylite—extreme example of very black-and-white view of things.

(4) Christ=good, culture=bad. So simple—only two options.

Devotion to Christ is antithetical to culture. It demands our complete separation from human culture, which is viewed as hopelessly corrupt, non-salvageable, and destined for destruction (see the 3 diagnostic questions above). (5) Tertullian—what does Jerusalem have to do with Athens? Calling into question the value of philosophy relating to Xianity. Monastic movement—vows of poverty (economics bad), recently anabaptist movement.

Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites. Amish live more or less in their own communities. (Already we see an inconsistency here—buggies and harnesses are cultural items)

Hutterites are the 'liberal' anabaptists...

“Baptists” have also have some traditional theological commitments in this direction—midwest fundies are known for associating sin with things—with created stuff. Cards, movies, electric guitars...sin attached to cultural activities. We also call this “pietism”.

2. Christ of Culture—the opposite.

Jesus came to affirm us. His morality, ethics, even His kingdom is merely the revelation of the highest universal human aspirations. Cultural progress is it! Wealth redistribution is simply the realization of Christ's justice being manifest on Earth. Radical green movement is simply the realization of Christ's stewardship. Empire-building was also sometimes seen as an extension of Christendom.

This is just as radical is the first—where the CAC model sees an extreme antithesis between C and C, this view sees the very opposite—a synthesis between C and C: they're (6) one and the same.

The problem is that complete synthesis between Christ and culture is that we lose the ability to distinguish between them at all. It insulates culture from any critique from the outside—there's no outside.

* These first two views are all-or-nothing views. The next 3 are what we call mediating views—recognizing a distinction between the 2, and yet not rejecting culture nor fully embracing it.

3. Christ Above Culture –usually associated with RCC. It loosens the antithesis, and sees culture as fine, yet incomplete. It needs the kingdom (hovering over all) in order to bring it to full potential. For example, nothing inherently wrong with Aristotle—he just needs some 'Christ'. So, (7) human beings are perfectly capable of knowing God and the world around them without any special revelation, but special revelation adds to the knowledge they already have. It doesn't displace it, nor does it necessarily critique it. This can get very complicated, but we find it in unexpected places—(8) much Christian counseling today, is simply secular psychology with Christianity added in. It doesn't really need critiqued—just supplemented. Or a Christian plumber—not sure what adding Christ does to improve the art of plumbing, but it's completed by the Jesus fish on the business card.

4. Christ in Paradox with Culture. A paradox is a mystery (9), and in this view the relationship between the two spheres of Christianity and culture are mysterious, because both spheres are legitimate. On the one hand, as Xians we're to submit to the authority of Christ, and on the other hand, as citizens we're called to submit to the ethics and morays and laws of our own societies. It's "both/and", and it's like the two spheres of authority are (10) strangers to one another—it's a paradox. Culture is good, but it's a very 'relative' good. Going to take a lot of time on this one coming up.

5. Christ Transforming Culture. The grace of the gospel is not opposed to culture as such, nor is it identified with culture. Not just a helpful accessory, not is it a stranger to culture. No, the grace of the (11) gospel is a transformer of culture. Notice that in 3 of the other views, the tension is never resolved—in fact, it can never resolve by their very designs—they remain fundamentally separate. It's like a (12) drop of oil in water—they touch, but never mix.

In this view, however, the gospel doesn't just touch culture, it actually does something to it. It changes its character—its norms—its purposes. We see both restoration and perfection taking place. In this view creation in and of itself isn't bad, and it isn't of lesser value than other things. God made it, and God loves it—and we corrupted it. But God hasn't given up on it—He cleanses it and renews it not by getting rid of the thing itself, but by removing the sin that corrupted it in the first place. John 8:12: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The gospel, in this view, is like an ultraviolet light that burns away all of the bacteria and viruses with which we have stained God's good creation. By the gospel we learn to rightly 'do' culture, not for self-seeking, sinful pleasure, but with new goals and standards. It restores culture from the corruption of sin—it's restoration. But we're also engaged in the perfecting of culture. (13) The gospel is transforming cultural activities and institutions, not by changing them into something else, but by turning them into what they were *always meant to be*.

The objection sometimes takes the form of "Well, you're just wanting to turn businesses into Churches, or bosses into pastors!" No, no, no—not trying to be sure that Xian businesses hold weekly devotionals for their employees. No, we're talking about making businesses into what businesses were always intended to be. Institutions that bring material good, blessing, and benefit to humanity in ways that glorify God. So—what do we mean by perfecting? Taking all of our cultural pursuits and doing them all with skill and excellence, and making them what God intended them to be, and *for His glory*. Transformationalist model is not rooted in the over-valuing of earthly things or under-valuing heavenly things, either. It is rooted in the very work of God in Christ, who Himself took on our sin-stained humanity and cleansed and purified from all of its sin through His death on the cross—humanity restored. Then He was resurrected in a perfected and glorified, incorruptible body to the glory of God the Father—humanity perfected.

This is the logic of the gospel. It's what we would expect of ourselves. God doesn't cleanse us and then dump us—no, He then makes us partakers of glory! Implications not just for our souls or our heads and our hearts, but also for our hands and our feet—what we do and how we live. It's like yeast—a transformative agent—it transforms us, and also our world.