

On Earth As It Is In Heaven, Pt. 6
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(Based on Brian Mattson's series)
Christ Of Culture

How does our heavenly citizenship relate to our earthly life?

Last time it was a simple solution—a radical separation—this week it's a radical synthesis.

Why study this (since it's ultimately not Xian)? They're ba-a-a-ack...

Proponents of this model think they are Xian, think of this as a Xian option, and historically it's been tempting to go this route.

While the C Against C says that Jesus is distinct from culture; that Xianity is totally other-worldly—drawing a red line between all culture and the things of God—this C of C is completely the opposite.

(1) It is this-worldly, and identifies Christ with the surrounding culture. It takes an eraser, and begins to rub out that red line, and any distinctions between the two. Jesus is not radically divorced from culture, but is accommodating culture.

There's a prior commitment to their own culture, and Jesus affirms it! After all, how could Jesus not approve of all this?

Of course the issue is this: How then could the Bible ever offer any critique, if Xianity is our culture, and doesn't come from the outside via revelation?

(2) It's tempting because it's the *idolatry of ourselves*.

We're such good people, right? Human rights—material blessing—missions!

Exactly what God warned Israel of in Deut. 8:11-20. God's favor is proof, not of God's grace, but of their superiority. Bad place to be in...

This is easier in small doses—in the American south, Xianity is seen as propriety, hospitality, sweet smiles, and genteel behavior. Closer to home, it's the fear that evangelicalism is so closely identified with conservative politics. So you have the reality of God being associated with Republican principles. Or wait—maybe He's associated with Democratic, liberal, and social principles?

On the one hand you have the “The American Patriot's Bible: The Word of God and the Shaping of America”:

“Never has a version of the Bible targeted the spiritual needs of those who love our country more than The American Patriot’s Bible. This extremely unique Bible shows how the history of the United States connects the people and events of the Bible to our lives in a modern world. The story of the United States is wonderfully woven into the teachings of the Bible and includes a beautiful full-color family record section, memorable images from our nation’s history and hundreds of enlightening articles which complement the Bible text.”

So to be a good Christian means to be a good patriotic American, right?

And on the other you have “The Green Bible”: “*The Green Bible* will equip and encourage you to see God's vision for creation and help you engage in the work of healing and sustaining it. This first Bible of its kind includes inspirational essays from key leaders such as N. T. Wright, Barbara Brown Taylor, Brian McLaren, Matthew Sleeth, Pope John Paul II, and Wendell Berry. As you read the scriptures anew, *The Green Bible* will help you see that caring for the earth is not only a calling, but a lifestyle.”

So to be a good Christian means to be a good Democrat. Or Republican.

Or, to be a good citizen of Great Britain in 1880.

Or—to be a good citizen of Germany in 1934...

(3) See, now we have Jesus and His Word supporting and affirming whatever we are up to!

Nothing new here—in early Church history you had Tertullian—what does Jerusalem have to do with Athens? And Justin Martyr and Irenaeus thought that Plato and Aristotle *had* to be familiar with Moses, or how could they...?

Now *they* didn't accommodate Christ to their assumptions, but others interpreted Christ through their philosophy, taking their own thoughts and baptizing them in Xian terminology. Gnostics. Instead of interpreting the culture through the lens of Xianity, they interpreted Xianity through the lens of their own philosophy and culture! For them, Jesus was the ultimate 'enlightened One', or Plato's "philosopher/king".

Medieval period it was really complex, since the Church and the State were the same thing—Christianity was identified *as* the culture.

But—the age of "Reason", or the enlightenment. Some cultural ideas are so influential and become so entrenched that they become like a golden calf. Human reason is the golden calf of the enlightenment, or 'modernistic' period. Age of discovery—Columbus, Cook, Gutenberg, Copernicus/Galileo—reason! Nothing is too difficult for thee, er, us! Reason became the very ground of human existence. (1793—built an altar to "goddess reason" in the cathedral of Notre Dame) (4)

With this cultural idolatry (much like individual idolatry) everything is made to submit to the idol. So Xianity is not seen as revealed wisdom and salvation from God, but as the realization of our highest human aspiration. 1793, Kant wrote "Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason". See what he did there? Kant sees in Jesus Christ the affirmation of a "pure moral disposition of the heart" that "can make man well-pleasing to God".

Totally gutted the faith of its unique character.

Remember—this is progress, and you Christians better get with it! Don't want to be on the 'wrong side of history', you know... (5) Hegel said that "The state is God walking on the earth". Progress, reason, objectivity—this must be the essence of Xianity *because it's the essence of our modern world*.

When Jesus becomes the 'rubber stamp' of value to what you already cherish, it is over—you are lost. (6) It often takes lonely men to prophetically call the judgment of God and call their own cultures to repentance.

It took Wilberforce *40 years* to convince Xian Britain that the slave trade was at odds with their Xianity. Modernism's "God walking the earth" gave us the 20th century.

Progress is good—like indoor plumbing—it's the idol of progress and reason that destroys.

So—did all of this C of C foolishness go bye-bye when arrogant modernism was exposed for what it was? Sadly, no. We are still up to our ears in it, and the stepchild of postmodernism has arisen to slay its modernist parents, and the weapon that it uses is suspicion. Suspicion of reason, power, truth, authority, worldview. That cleaning solution is pure acid, remember. "Says who?"

Good and healthy to reject the arrogance of the enlightenment—but what replaces it? Skepticism.

The claim is that the oppressed, the maligned, women, gays, minorities, etc...all benefit from this. Wrong.

(7) Carl Trueman: "When the metanarratives are thrown down; when the foundations are pulled away, they are thrown down and pulled away for *everyone*."

(8) IOW, if there's no over-arching worldview to support raw power, then there's no over-arching worldview to *prevent* raw power.

So it's quite the opposite—it is the *powerful* who benefit from this. For the pomo, everything is up for grabs. Which theologians are now promoting a C of C model today? Emergent.

John Franke: (In "a non-foundationalist conception envisions"?)

"In addition to listening for the voice of the Spirit speaking through Scripture, theology must also be attentive to the voice of the Spirit speaking through culture."

Hear that? The proposed solution to modernism's arrogant identification of Jesus with the dominant culture is being replaced by an equal opportunity, “we are the world” identification of Jesus with *all* cultures. This is nothing less than pernicious nonsense—(9) and a capitulation to the spirit of the age.

Let's flesh this out:

- a) Abortion is viewed as a carbon-footprint reducing virtue in our culture
- b) The Spirit is speaking to us through our culture.
- c) We then must re-imagine our own pre-commitments.

Or, to quote another C or C proponent, Rob Bell: “...and the church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense.”

(Let's out pomo the pomo's and ask “Who says?”!)

Paul Helm: “To be sure, there is the warning about not allowing the intellectual and conceptual tools of a particular culture to control theology, though no suggestions as to how this might be achieved. Apart from this, not a word about critiquing the culture. Rather, it is the beliefs and practices of the church that are to be critiqued (by the culture: what else?) in order that the church may live in relationship to God and be the mission of God in the world.”

This is exactly why this C of C model cannot in any meaningful way be considered as “Xianity”.

(10) By embracing it, we lose the Bibles' ability to act as a mirror for ourselves.

Xianity is not to be identified with culture. This model accommodates Jesus to everything.

Romans 12: 2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

1 Cor. 2:6: “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.”

2 Cor. 10:5: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Colossians 2: 8: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”