

THE CHURCH, THE CHRISTIAN, AND CULTURE

PART 1: THEORY

Mark A. Snoeberger
Asst. Professor of Systematic Theology, DBTS

Introduction:

Definitions:

Culture (evolutionary definition): *a broad collection of human responses to reality. This approach assumes that people come into the world with neutrality and produce neutral, ever evolving results.*

Culture (biblical definition): *a product of one's religious worldview. There are two kinds of worldview: one that submits to God and one that does not. (Key Texts: Colossians 2:3-9; Ephesians 4:17)*

Contextualization: *penetrating culture for the sake of the gospel (Key Texts: John 17:14-17; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)*

Models for Engaging Culture:

Christ Against Culture — Isolation
Christ Transforming Culture
Christ and Culture in Paradox
Christ Above Culture
Christ of Culture — Imitation

1. Christ Against Culture:

- a. Explanation: *culture is irreparably and entirely bad (ex: Amish)*
- b. Weaknesses: *ends up not in the world, no evangelistic engagement with the world.*
- c. Governing Rubric: _____ *holiness* _____

2. Christ of Culture:

- a. Explanation: *everything in culture is either good or neutral (ex: drink alcohol if that's what it takes to connect or celebrate Lent if that's what it takes)*
- b. Weaknesses: *not only in the world, but of it and loving it.*
- c. Governing Rubric: _____ *love and assimilation* _____

3. Christ Above Culture:

- a. Explanation: *this is the least common position today, but most prevalent in church history. The idea is that we surround the non-Christian with Christianity, with or without ever speaking the gospel directly (ex: Roman Catholicism & the Magisterial Reformers. Contemporarily—sometimes the practical approach of lifestyle evangelism).*
- b. Weaknesses: *doesn't adequately account for depravity, surrounding the lost with Christian art will not just rub off.*
- c. Governing Rubric: nurture into faith (synthesis)

4. Christ Transforming Culture:

- a. Explanation: *conversionist/take over of culture—eliminate abortion, gay marriage, etc., get a good Christian in the high courts.*
- b. Weaknesses: *forcible, perverts the mission of the church, low view of human depravity*
- c. Governing Rubric: reclamation / transformation

5. Christ and Culture in Paradox:

- a. Explanation: *Luther's idea of 2 kingdoms—the world and the church—Christians are ambassadors of heaven in this world.*
- b. Weaknesses:
- c. Governing Rubric: antithesis / paradox

The Biblical Demands of a Valid Model for Engaging Culture:

- A valid approach of the believer to culture recognizes that the Christian's evangelistic intersection with the world is both possible and necessary to fulfilling his God-given commission (Matt 28:18–20). It also recognizes that the credibility of the gospel message is directly connected to the believer's godliness (Matt 5:16; John 17:20–23; 2 Cor 10:5 Titus 2:6–10; 1 Pet 3:1, 18).
- A valid approach of the believer to culture recognizes the extent and implications of human depravity (1 Cor 1–2).
 - *Some forms of contextualization are little more than a front for worldliness.*
 - *No amount of contextualization can turn the heart—contextualization has limits.*
 - *Non-Christian cultural expressions are not neutral.*
 - *All expressions of the non-Christian are not necessarily entirely evil.*
- A valid approach of the believer to culture recognizes that while some contextualization of the believer's person and presentation may occur at the cultural level (1 Cor 9:22–23), contextualization of his message cannot, since this resides at the religious worldview level and is non-negotiable (1 Cor 2:4–5).