

Men, Women, Modesty and Culture.

(What is Culture?)

Question 1—*What is the origin or source of culture?*

Answer—The words *cultus* and *culture* bear a resemblance because they are etymologically derived from a single root, *colō*, “till, inhabit, nurture.” Thus, the word *cultus*, by figurative extension, refers to *worship* and, significantly for our discussion, to *dress, clothe* or *adorn*. *Culture*, then, is the outward manifestation, or manner, of the beliefs of a particular group of people, Ezek. 23:15; moreover, this is transmitted through a series of traditions, or *customs*, sometimes enforced through societal or ecclesiastical discipline, Acts 26:3; other times enforced through laws, Acts 16:21. As these words have a single root, so, too, the departments of life which they designate stand in an organic combination, Ps. 135:15-18. As is the *cultus*, so is the *culture*, Ps. 115:1-8. Thus, the various ethnic divisions forming the nations and kingdoms, as *cultured* nations, the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans, exhibit in their *culture* the devotion found in their *cultus*, 2 Kings 17:27-33. So, the Greek *culture* stood in this undeniable fundamental connection with the religious *cultus*, and became its reflection, as noted throughout several places in the New Testament, *cf.* Acts 17:16-21.

Question 2—*What is the purpose or task of culture?*

Answer—The purpose, or task, of *culture* was given to man, as the image of God, from the beginning, in the form of a command, which may also be understood as a promise, Gen. 1:27, 28. Without the man, there was none to till (לְעָבַד; *abad*, “to perform acts of worship”), or cultivate (*i.e.*, impose *culture*), the ground, Gen. 2:5; a task continued to be given to the man after the Fall, Gen. 3:23. Yet, after the Fall, the wisdom, or knowledge, necessary for this task was not to be found amongst any but the people of God, Acts 17:22-25. This continued to be the privilege of the Jews until the time of Jesus, John 4:22, 23; hence, Paul notes that, prior to the coming of Christ, the Jews, who had that knowledge, sought a sign (a demonstration of proof) whereas the Greeks, or Gentiles, sought after that knowledge, or wisdom, 1 Cor. 1:22. Thus, when commenting on the Great Commission set forth by Jesus Christ, Mark 16:15; the apostle Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, gives a profound exposition of this command setting up a *culture-ideal*, which cannot be discovered outside of Christianity, Rom. 8:19-21. Therefore, any aspect of *culture* which reflects the Christian *cultus*, which has given rise to Western, or Occidental, *culture*, is to be cherished, Ps. 102:14. Strictly speaking, there is no fostering of morality without the fostering of religion; for where there is religion without morality, the religion is not real, Jas. 2:26; and where there is morality without religion, there is either a concealed faith, *e.g.*, an altar to the unknown God, Acts 17:23, or merely a self-imposed, subjective morality, Prov. 3:5. Furthermore, those who think that those aspects of *culture* which reflect Christian *cultus* ought to be replaced by a *culture* arising from purely human concerns, would do well to consider that here is an ethic arising from the sinful flesh, walking in darkness, and it ends in doom, Gal. 6:8. Even those moral elements of *culture* found amongst heathen nations may be traced back to the light of nature reflecting these higher concerns as the creature before the Creator, Rom. 2:14, 15; yet, even these amount to holding the truth in unrighteousness and fail to accomplish the true task of ` to make creation subject to the divine image, Rom. 1:18, 32. As for those who would defend the *culture* of the Christian *cultus* without defending Christianity, they act like the prodigal son, when he had reaped all the benefit of his father, reaching a man’s estate, he turned his back on him and his house, took a portion of his father’s goods, and in a strange land he forgot his origin, Luke 15:12-14. As difficult as the truth may seem, those who renounce heaven cannot genuinely possess the earth, whereas Christ says, seeking first the kingdom brings with it all things, Matt. 6:33; to which, the apostle Paul adds, that true *cultus*, godliness, is profitable for this life as well as the life to come, 1 Tim. 4:8.

Question 3—*How is modesty related to culture?*

Answer—Since *culture* is the result of man’s creative activity being imposed upon creation in order to fulfill the dominion mandate given to man from the beginning, Isa. 45:18; it must be conceded that *culture* is a very central concern of life and, since man is essentially a religious being, *culture* expresses his *cultus*, or worship of God, Ps. 8:4-9. Additionally, since modesty consists in a deportment of moral quality that frames both heart and mind to walk consist with the commandments of the LORD, this must be rooted in the *cultus*, which is our response to the presence of God, Mic. 6:8; for the *cultus* is the central action of the exercise of seeking a proper relationship to both God and man, Matt. 4:10. Modesty, then, is the mediating point between the interpretation of reality inherent in a *cultus* and the manifestation of that in a *culture*, Ps. 36:9 *compared with* Prov. 14:2, 12. Contrary to this modesty is the pride of sinful flesh which exalts itself against the divine determinations of what constitutes morality and its cultural implications, Dan. 4:37. Nevertheless, unbelievers are religious beings which remain inherently cultural creatures striving after the wind, Eccl. 1:2; because only genuine modesty can restore that which has been destroyed, Isa. 61:4.

Question 4—*What does a culture exhibiting modesty reflect?*

Answer—A *culture* that exhibits modesty reflects a proper subjection of society, in its outward manifestations, to the true divine *cultus*; Col. 1:17; and this it transmits through a series of customs which are designed to conserve this manifestation faithfully, *cf.* Acts 28:17. To the extent that the *culture* of a given society exhibits the reality revealed within the *cultus*, it will necessarily exhibit modesty, Acts 17:28; for that reality strikes the hearts of men with humility, which is internal modesty, Prov. 22:4. *Culture* penetrates everywhere, carried by the light of nature, independently of the Gospel, somewhat like the atmosphere, which penetrates even the most closed rooms, Job 12:10. Thus, even those heathen nations which are, or have been, most *cultured* (e.g., India, China, Japan, *etc.*), are those having more defined and organized expressions of their attachments to a *cultus*, giving those shimmerings of natural revelation deeper penetration into their respective societies, John 1:9. For this reason, traditionally, or customarily, these societies have exhibited greater modesty, as witnessed in their clothing, manners and regard to maintain order (including maintaining proper distinctions between the sexes), than more primitive societies, which are often lacking in these respects, Rom. 1:19-22; Jude 10. However, the *culture* that should, and will, most exhibit this modesty is that which arises from the Christian *cultus*, because this receives the light of the Gospel bringing much needed correction to heathen departures from natural revelation together with the power to live according to the law, Rom. 8:3, 4.

Question 5—*How should the distinction of the sexes be reflected in culture?*

Answer—There are several ways in which the distinction of the sexes should be reflected in the *culture*, which is itself rooted in the *cultus*, and these must begin with upholding natural morality in all of its implications, Jas. 1:23, 24. It must begin with the fundamental recognition of these sexes as distinct, Matt. 19:4; and, that these distinctions are the beginning of all order in society, whether familial, ecclesiastical or civil, 1 Cor. 11:8, 9. This distinction, then, has implications for vocations, women being trained and encouraged in the domestic circle, Tit. 2:3-5; whereas men are to be formed for the public business of life, including war, Ruth 4:1, 2; Jer. 48:14. Additionally, this distinction has implications for clothing, Deut. 22:5; as well as the manners, or conversation, Rom. 13:13, 14 (“chambering;” *κοίταις*; sexual excesses/“wantonness;” *ἀσελγείαις*; lack of self-constraint violating what is socially acceptable); including the verbal communications between men and women, 1 Pet. 3:6.

Question 6—*How does culture enforce this distinction of sexes?*

Answer—*Culture* enforces the distinction of the sexes by establishing societal expectations associated with each, Num. 1:3; 1 Tim. 5:13, 14. This distinction has been maintained after the entrance of sin but, because the curse placed upon the man and the woman, it is more onerous to be borne by them, Gen.

3:16-19. Therefore, when the lineaments of nature are ignored in the *culture* of a nation, it is an emblem of corporate sin and the mark of divine judgment, Isa. 3:12, 13. On the other hand, the introduction of the Gospel not only enforces the real demands of nature, it also meliorates the blasting effects of sin which make maintaining this distinction so difficult since the Fall, *cf.* Eph. 5:22, 28.

Question 7—*What does culture have to do with conversation?*

Answer—Like when *culture*, particularly to the extent it reflects natural law and the reality of creation, enforces the distinction between the sexes, because it forms the social environment, it finds expression in the conversation, or manner, of nations, *cf.* 2 Kings 17:26, 33. This relation is so close that quite often we speak of *culture* by referencing the manners, of conversation, respecting this or that particular societal action, *cf.* Ezek. 11:12. Just as *culture* is observed through the lens of the nation in which it is found, being more or less *cultured* as it reflects natural revelation, so the conversation, or manner, exhibits those characters, Judg. 18:7. Again, the most *cultured*, considering the effects of the entrance of sin, are those nations most wrought upon by the influences of grace, amongst them alone is found acceptable conversation which is applicable to all of its members, whether believers or not, Num. 15:13-16.

Question 8—*How does culture dictate custom?*

Answer—If we understand *culture* to form the social environment, customs are those national or local traditions which function as means to articulate this *culture* for ease of transmission, Luke 2:42. Because these customs are expressions of *culture* and *culture* is grounded in *cultus*, we should expect that all customs arising from heathen devotions, so far as they depart from natural light, can only transmit the vanity of their origins, Jer. 10:3. Moreover, the people of God are expressly told not to defile themselves with such things, Lev. 18:30. Instead, Christians ought to study to see that their customs are Scriptural and conformed to the dictates of the Gospel, Ezra 3:4.