

CHRISTIANITY & CULTURE

**St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church,
Fall 2013**

What does it mean to be in the world but not of it? How can the church convincingly present the gospel to non-believers without watering down the radical message it brings? To what extent can we actively support and work with the various kingdoms of this world? This 4-week course will explore these questions and more, with sessions focusing on specific areas of interaction between Christianity and culture.

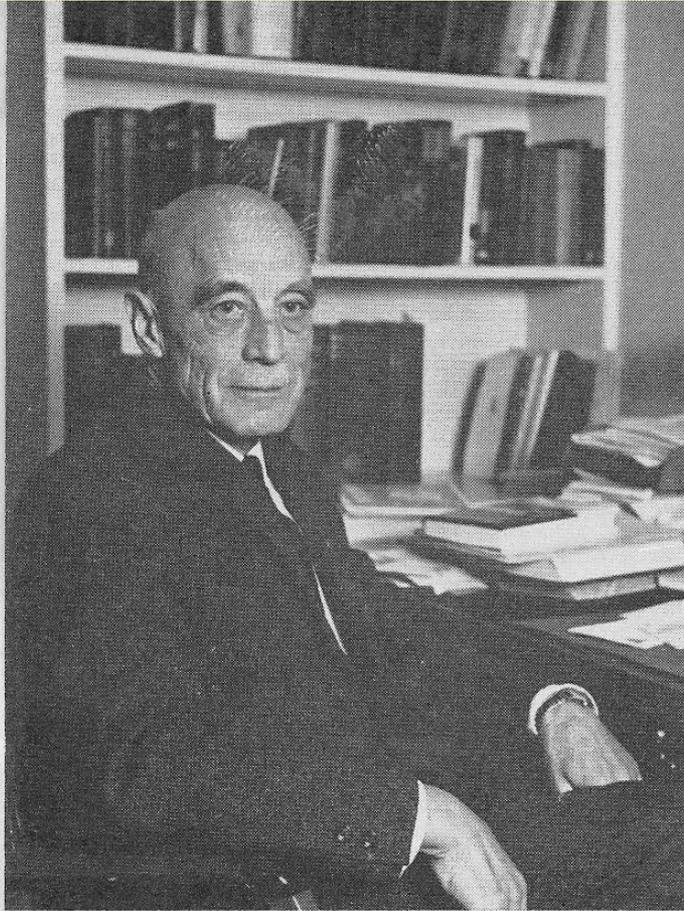
SCHEDULE

- ✘ Sept. 15: Christ & Culture: 5 models of Christian ethics
- ✘ Sept. 22: Faith & Reason: Friends or Enemies?
- ✘ Sept. 29: Secularism: Religion in the Public Sphere
- ✘ Oct. 6: Faith & Politics: Politics, Power, and Christian Mission

“A many-sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization is being carried on in our time. Historians and theologians, statesmen and churchmen, Catholics and Protestants, Christians and anti-Christians participate in it. It is carried on publicly by opposing parties and privately in the conflicts of conscience. Sometimes it is concentrated on special issues, such as those of the place of Christian faith in general education or of Christian ethics in economic life. Sometimes it deals with broad questions of the church’s responsibility for social order or of the need for a new separation of Christ’s followers from the world. The debate is as confused as it is many-sided.”

-H. Richard Niebuhr

WHO WAS RICHARD NIEBUHR?



H. RICHARD NIEBUHR
YALE UNIVERSITY, B.D. 1923, PH.D. 1924
Christian ethics . . . Contemporary
theology
Christianity and culture

- ✘ September 3, 1894 – July 5, 1962
- ✘ Ordained minister, Evangelical Synod, 1916 – 1918
- ✘ Ph.D., Yale Divinity School, 1924
- ✘ Professor of Theology and Christian Ethics at Yale, 1931 – 1962
- ✘ Neo-Orthodox (Barth, Bonheoffer)
- ✘ Christian Realism (Reinhold Niebuhr)

- ✘ “Along with the other Realists, Niebuhr...finds the root failure of liberalism in its superficial doctrine of human nature and history. It is to this defect that liberalism’s inadequate notion of God and salvation are traceable. For Niebuhr, a realistic doctrine of human nature must include recognition of the fact of sin as *disloyalty* – that is, the human failure to worship the true God, while giving one’s ultimate loyalty to something other than God. Positively considered, the essence of such sin is *idolotry*, and it is this idolatrous propensity that Niebuhr discovers in liberal anthropocentrism.” (James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, 168)

H. RICHARD NIEBUHR, *CHRIST & CULTURE*

CHRIST & CULTURE



H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

NEW FOREWORD BY MARTIN E. MARTY
NEW PREFACE BY JAMES M. GUSTAFSON AND
WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY BY THE AUTHOR

- ✘ Published 1951
- ✘ 1949 Lecture series, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, TX
- ✘ *“The one outstanding book in the field of basic Christian social ethics.”*

5 TYPES OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Competing solutions to “the enduring problem” of Christ and Culture.

- ✘ “Christ”: the imperatives and demands issuing from God in Christ as known through faith and the bible.
- ✘ “Culture”: the imperatives and demands issuing from God in nature as known through reason and culture.
- ✘ What is the relationship between the poles of Christ and Culture in shaping our thoughts and actions?



Christ *Against Culture* ✕ Theology:

- Direct opposition
 - The ways of the world antithetical to gospel imperatives
 - Creation and Fall as a single event
 - Inherently flawed vs. corrupted
 - Other-worldliness of Christianity
- ✕ *“Answers of the first type emphasize the opposition between Christ and culture. Whatever may be the customs of the society in which the Christian lives, and whatever the human achievements it conserves, Christ is seen as opposed to them, so that he confronts men with an ‘either-or’ decision.”*



Christ *Against Culture* ✕ Biblical Basis:

- 1 John 2:15, 5:19
 - *“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”*
 - *“We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”*



Christ *Against Culture* ✕ Historical Example:

- Tertullian (160 – 225 AD)
 - Original sin is a cultural phenomenon
 - “If it were not for the vicious customs that surround a child from its birth and for its artificial training its soul would remain good.”
 - “What then has Athens [culture] to do with Jerusalem[Christ]? Nothing.”



Christ *Against* Culture

✘ Theology:

- Harmony between Christ and culture
- Highest ideals of culture are consistent with the moral/spiritual demands of Christ.
 - Christ and culture are interpreted in light of each other, results in a limited representation of each
- This-worldliness of Christianity
- Christianity is really about social justice, preventing war, contributing to the body of human knowledge, etc.

Christ *Of* Culture



Christ **Against** Culture

✘ Theology:

✘ *“This Christ of religion does not call upon men to leave homes and kindred for his sake; he enters into homes and all their associations as the gracious presence which adds an aura of infinite meaning to all temporal tasks.”*

Christ **Of** Culture



Christ *Against* Culture

✘ Biblical Basis:

- ??
- 2 explanations
 - 1. Unbiblical
 - 2. Biblical support unnecessary

Christ *Of* Culture



Christ *Against* Culture

✘ Historical Example:

- Gnosticism; “sought to reconcile the gospel with the science and philosophy of their time”
- Liberal theology, enlightenment philosophy
 - John Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*
 - Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason*

Christ *Of* Culture



Christ *Against* Culture

✘ Theology:

- Hierarchical relationship between Christ and culture - both are God-given, but culture is subordinate
- Imperatives of culture operate in the cultural sphere, and imperatives of Christ operate in the spiritual/religious sphere
- Discontinuity, not antithesis
 - There are some things in the divine law that cannot be reached by natural reason

Christ *Above* Culture

Christ *Of* Culture



Christ *Against* Culture

✘ Theology:

✘ This type “recognizes that the two sets of values and of imperatives do not really lie on the same level, that the imperatives of the gospel do not adequately supply directives for the life of men in culture, and that the imperatives of nature do not supply adequate motivation or guidance for the life of man in spiritual relations to God and fellow-men.”

Christ *Above* Culture

Christ *Of* Culture



Christ **Against** Culture

✘ Biblical Basis:

- Matthew 22:21
 - *“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”*

Christ **Above** Culture

Christ **Of** Culture



Christ *Against* Culture

✘ Historical Example:

- St. Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274 AD)
 - Adopts Aristotle's philosophy, synthesizes it with biblical teachings
 - Natural reason pertains to social life; biblical principles apply to Christian, though not necessarily political, life

Christ *Above* Culture

Christ *Of* Culture

Christ **Against** Culture

✘ Theology:

- Contradiction, but inescapability of culture
 - Christ and culture conflict, but we nevertheless live in culture
- Recognize the necessity – and divine origin – of politics and coercion, but refuse to synthesize it with the Christian duty to turn the other cheek.
- The Christian lives in anticipation of the beyond, in which the tension between Christ and culture will be resolved.

Christ and Culture
In Paradox

Christ **Above** Culture

- ✘ *“In the polarity and tension of Christ and culture life must be lived precariously and sinfully in the hope of a justification which lies beyond history.”*

Christ **Of** Culture

Christ *Against* Culture

Christ and Culture
In Paradox

Christ *Above* Culture

Christ *Of* Culture

✘ Biblical Basis:

- Paul, cultural ordinances are merely lesser evils, to deal with wickedness of culture
 - *“Because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.”* (1 Corinthians 7:2)
 - Romans 13 – government is only necessary because of human wickedness

Christ **Against** Culture

Christ and Culture
In Paradox

Christ **Above** Culture

Christ **Of** Culture

✘ Historical Example:

- Soren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855)
 - Danish philosopher/theologian
 - Christianity as a passionate affair
 - *“An objective uncertainty held fast in the approximation- process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual....The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite....If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.”*

Christ **Against** Culture

Christ and Culture **In Paradox**

Christ **Transformer of** Culture

Christ **Above** Culture

Christ **Of** Culture

✘ Theology:

- 3 Fundamental theological convictions:
 - Creation, Fall, History-as-redemption
- All creation is to be affirmed
 - No part of culture is inherently wicked
- Creation has fallen from its original goodness
- History is the story of God's restoration of creation to its original goodness
- All aspects of culture can be redeemed/transformed by being grounded in Christ/gospel.

“To mankind with this perverted nature and corrupted culture Jesus Christ has come to heal and renew what sin has infected with the sickness unto death.”

Christ *Against* Culture

Christ and Culture *In Paradox*

Christ *Transformer of* Culture

Christ *Above* Culture

Christ *Of* Culture

✘ Biblical Basis:

- Gospel of John
 - Reinterprets concepts from pagan philosophy through Christ, gives them “new levels of meaning.”
 - Logos, truth, eternity, etc.
 - “The work itself [i.e. John’s gospel] is a partial demonstration of cultural conversion.” (196)

Christ **Against** Culture

✘ Historical Example:

- St. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD)
 - *City of God, Confessions, On The Trinity*
 - Rhetorician, hedonist, late conversion

Christ and Culture **In Paradox**

Christ **Transformer of Culture**

Christ **Above Culture**

Christ **Of Culture**

“Augustine not only describes, but illustrates in his own person, the work of Christ as converter of culture. The Roman rhetorician becomes a christian preacher, who not only puts into the service of Christ his training in language and literature given him by his society, but, by virtue of the freedom and illumination received from the gospel, uses that language with a new brilliance and brings a new liberty into that literary tradition. The Neo-Platonist not only adds to his wisdom about spiritual reality the knowledge of the incarnation which no philosopher had taught him, but this wisdom is humanized, given new depth and direction, made productive of new insights, by the realization that the Word has become flesh and has borne the sins of the spirit.”

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- Christ ***Against*** Culture ← Emphasis on Christ
 - Christ and Culture ***In Paradox*** ← Emphasis on both; contradiction
 - Christ ***Transformer of*** Culture ← General direction of influence is from Christ to Culture
 - Christ ***Above*** Culture ← General direction of influence is from Culture to Christ
 - Christ ***Of*** Culture ← Emphasis on Culture

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- ✘ Niebuhr's view?
 - Explicit vs. implicit statements
 - Contradiction?
- ✘ Foundation vs. set of answers