

Final Paper

(Personal Reflection on Perspectives Christ/Culture)

By:

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PH522: Perspectives on Christ and Culture

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At the risk of sounding redundant (I mentioned this information in a prior paper), I want to begin this paper by explaining why I am at Fuller. I am a second-year student in the MAT: Biblical Studies program. My calling is to help other people find theirs so they can support themselves in this rapidly changing world. Before coming to Fuller, the Lord showed me that this calling would require the implementation of several institutional structures. Consequently, I have begun that process by developing a ministry, “Understanding God’s Masterpiece” based on the Myers-Briggs Personality inventory. In this class we teach our participants to understand and value how God has uniquely designed them. This class is open to believers and unbelievers alike. Our participants usually undergo a paradigm shift as a result of taking this class. This paradigm shift allows the Holy Spirit to inspire them to do something positive with their inherent giftedness. It should not be hard to realize that teaching people to see themselves as God’s unique masterpiece as opposed to totally depraved could be asking for trouble in some Christian communities. I think understanding this potential problem is what prompted me to take this class. – I wanted to clarify what I believe about God, Christ, believers, and how they should interact with the world around them.

Ever since I accepted Christ, I have had a conviction that since we become saved, but not taken up to heaven, there is a reason why we are still here. I believe this has been a principle that has guided me throughout my Christian journey, even though I may not have known it. However, reflecting on how this class has influenced me, helps me to articulate my theology regarding how we are to relate to the culture, and to help me walk boldly in that understanding.

The aspects of this class that have helped me to articulate my philosophy regarding how I am to interact with my culture are: H. Richard Niebuhr’s typologies, common grace, and Dr. Mouw’s role modeling.

Perhaps the most influential thing I have learned during this class was Niebuhr's five typologies. I mentioned in my paper on that book that since becoming a Christian, I have had some serious disagreements with other Christians about how much and how often I should be involving myself in the "world." For example, I had several Christians object to the fact that I attended, and ultimately, was employed by a state university. Yet, other Christians I knew also thought that attending Azusa Pacific University, and Fuller Seminary were also examples of my "having been led astray by the world" since they are more progressive than other schools such as Biola or Masters. What I learned from Niebuhr's five typologies was that I simply had a different worldview than these other people – whom I now understand to be fundamentalists. Their worldview is one of Christ Against Culture: "whatever does not belong to the commonwealth of Christ is under the rule of evil" (p. 50). Consequently, when they would learn of my call to be in the world and helping people to change careers so they can compete in a rapidly changing world, these critics would perceive that to be "of the world." Since I was fairly new in my faith at the time, I would take those criticisms personally – I assumed there was something wrong with me because I had no desire to join them in their "Holy Huddle." However, what I learned in this class is that I simply have a different worldview. Whereas they have a Christ Against Culture worldview, I have more of a Christ as Transformer of Culture worldview: That the culture is perverted good, not evil (p. 194). Therefore, like most conversionists, I seek to make a difference through my presence here on earth. The Christ Against Culture people simply cannot understand that. Now, I do not take their perspectives as personally as I used to.

In addition to the Christ as Transformer of Culture, the idea of Common Grace has also helped to solidify my worldview. I must admit that when I became a Christian about 12 years ago, I had a rather self-righteous and legalist attitude towards the world. I would have been the

first person to point to another person's failure as the cause of their sufferings. However, this journey I have been on has given me an opportunity to see God's loving grace demonstrated to me over and over again. I have personally experienced the scripture "He who has been forgiven much, loves much." Consequently, I have come to better see, understand and value God's abounding love for believers and the entire creation alike. Consequently, I am now at a point in my life where I cannot accept that God's love would end with the elect. The three-fold ideology of Common Grace (Bestowal of natural gifts; Restraining of sin in human affairs; Ability of unbelievers to do acts of civic good) has helped me to better articulate my belief that God does indeed care about the world beyond the elect.

I must admit that in addition to the theories presented in the class, Dr. Mouw's role modeling has also significantly helped to solidify my theology. Having been "raised" (in the Christian world) in a fundamentalist worldview meant that I was shaped to have an attitude that "anything that hints of progressivism is of the devil." As my own worldview started to shift in that direction, I found myself experiencing some cognitive dissonance. I find that I still tend to judge progressive thinkers in that light – even though I have become one myself. Yet, for me to sit in this class and listen to Dr. Mouw lecture has been very reassuring to me. This man is obviously very grounded in the fundamentals of his faith. Yet at the same time, he has a willingness and interest in trying to build bridges with groups of people who have traditionally been demonized by the Christian community. In his dialog with and about these groups, his firm but loving attitude shines through. Having this attitude modeled by my professor and president of my seminary helps me to believe that it is possible to be progressive, yet firmly grounded in Christ at the same time. Like Dr. Mouw, I too, hope some day to be able to build bridges with communities who have previously been ostracized by Christians.

In conclusion, this class has not so much shaped my theology regarding how I am to interact with my surrounding culture; but rather it has solidified that theology. The concepts that have had the greatest influence on that process are Niebuhr's Christ As Transformer of Culture, Common Grace, and Dr. Mouw's role modeling.

One area of personal growth in which the Lord has been dealing with me lately is to rid me of various forms of inappropriate guilt. One example of inappropriate guilt is that I frequently find myself feeling guilty because it feels more natural for me to be engaging with the world than spending all day reading scripture and in prayer. This class has helped me to understand and believe that it is indeed acceptable and even biblical for Christians to engage themselves in their surrounding cultures. For me personally, this has given me an opportunity for personal growth. I notice as these inappropriate burdens are being lifted off my shoulders, I am finding myself walking with more self-confidence.

I have also come to realize that this self-confidence is truly necessary and important for me, because God is preparing, through my ministry, to break new ground and do something that has never been done before. As I increasingly understand this, I am also increasingly learning to realize that as a female, Christian "trail blazer", I unfortunately, will experience quite a bit of persecution. Someone who is insecure and/or carrying burdens of false guilt would not survive under such pressure. When I felt God calling me to go to seminary two years ago, I did not really understand why. – I am beginning to understand now. The reason is twofold: 1) This is where I am developing my knowledge and my theological grounding that I need to do what I have been called to do. 2) It has been relieving quite a bit of stress I had been carrying. – Before coming to Fuller, I was starting to question my sanity as the Lord showed me what he was preparing me to

do. My studies here have been continuously confirming that I am not crazy – other people can see what I see, and other Christians can value what I value.