

Christ & Culture World View

(Personal Reflection on H. Richard Niebuhr)

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Introduction

The challenge of articulating my current position regarding Christ and culture requires understanding a little about my background. I grew up in an unbelieving home and considered myself to be an Atheist until Christ entered my life at age 32. He diligently sought me, even though I resisted Him for some time. Eventually, however, I became tired of fighting Him and decided to give in. I had falsely assumed that accepting the reality of his existence would be enough to get Him to leave me alone. However, it took another three years for me to understand that accepting Him was not the end; but rather just the beginning. – The beginning of a transformed life; a life that would be used to transform other lives. This statement should provide a clue to my perspective on Christ and culture: I personally believe that Christ is all about the task of transforming culture; and that he expects his followers to join him in that process.

When I finally learned to submit to God, I joined my first church; which could probably be best described as separatist fundamentalist, with Conservative Baptist roots. This was a good fit to facilitate my early Christian growth as I had a rather conservative worldview. I could not understand it at the time, but I now realize that this church clearly held to the “Christ Against Culture” philosophy. For example, they not only refused to engage with the surrounding community, but they also elected not to involve themselves with most parachurch organizations for fear that they would become too secular. However, as I began to grow in my faith, I became increasingly uncomfortable with what I called their “Holy Little Huddle” philosophy. I eventually began to notice an increasing difference in worldviews between that church and myself. That is what prompted me to change churches. The church I now serve has a philosophy, which is more similar to my own.

Just after joining that first church, I had just been laid off from my clerical job of nine years and sensed the Lord calling to go to school to finish my bachelor's degree. Since that time, I have finished a master's degree in education and am pursuing a second master's degree here at Fuller. Shortly after calling me to go to school, the Lord revealed to me what he wanted me to do with my life. I have now come to understand that his call on my life is to help other people to find their calling in this rapidly changing world so that they can better understand how to live a focused and purposeful life.

In response to this calling, I have developed a ministry, "Understanding God's Masterpiece." It is an eleven-week class where we administer the Myers-Briggs personality inventory, and teach people to see themselves as one-of-a-kind masterpieces uniquely created by God to be gifted in specific ways so that they can serve God and the church through their giftedness. This ministry and its teachings fully reflect my worldview about God, his people and their place in this world. I shall illustrate through this paper how this philosophy reflects my ministry and teachings, but it is also somewhat universal regarding my overall outlook towards Christ and culture. I will also show how this philosophy correlates with H. Richard Niebuhr's fifth type: Christ the Transformer of Culture.

My audience may note, that this ministry I have created is based on certain assumptions:

- 1) God's creative work is always good;
- 2) God's creation becomes perverted by a sinful world;
- 3) God is continually at work to restore his creation to his original intentions.
- 4) He has placed his people in this world for a purpose.

The first assumption of my philosophy is that God's creation is always good. My ministry is scripturally based on Psalms 139:14 "I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works." We teach our students that God's handiwork is

always good. We help them to see the potential for giftedness and contribution to a greater society inherent in the 16 MBTI personality types. I agree with Niebuhr when he states that man's good nature has become corrupted – what God originally intended was good, but that humans tend to corrupt it by using it in wrong ways.

The second assumption of my philosophy is that while God's creation is always good, that goodness has often been perverted as a result of living in a fallen world. We teach our students to understand that while each of the personality types have their strengths; they also have common weaknesses as well. These weaknesses are usually a result of sin, failures, and lack of proper understanding on the part of their families, their communities, and even themselves. This also reflects Niebuhr's idea that the good has become corrupted and is used in inappropriate ways.

The third assumption that my philosophy holds to is that God is continually working to restore his creation to his original objective. In this class, we teach people to understand: 1) How their personality was supposed to develop according to God's design; 2) Environmental factors which might either positively or negatively affect their development; and 3) Show them how God is continually working throughout their lives to restore them to wholeness. This demonstrates God's redemptive work in their lives. Like Niebuhr, I believe that the problems we face in this world relate to converting the perverted bad back into what God originally intended.

The fourth assumption of my philosophy is that God saves us for a reason – that He intends to use us for His grand plans for this world. This philosophy is also reflected in my ministry, illustrated by how we teach our students to understand that God wonderfully created them with an intentional purpose in mind: that God wants to use them to bring about His

purposes in their earthly lives. Like Niebuhr, I believe that God's redemption happens through a combination of God's deeds and man's responses to them and to God.

Conclusion:

In this class, I learned about the five types of views that Christians hold towards Christ and culture: Christ Against Culture; Christ of Culture; Christ Above Culture; Christ and Culture in Paradox; and Christ the Transformer of Culture. I certainly understand them all, and can see some theological validation for each point of view. I also know people who seem to subscribe to each of them as well. However, I personally find that the Christ as Transformer of Culture perspective resonates most specifically for me, as it seems to reflect my own worldview.

Learning about these different perspectives has had a tremendous impact on me personally. It is not so much that this information is very new to me. Rather, it clarified for me differences in worldviews that I have experienced, with key people in my life, but could not understand or articulate. It has helped me to understand why we disagree on so many things. It has also helped me to realize that as I continue to strive to achieve God's will for my life, I will continue to encounter Christians who hold fundamentally different worldviews from mine; worldviews with which I must interact. Consequently, I believe this newfound understanding will simply give me additional tools for interacting with others.

Also on a personal level, this information has proven to be very useful in another way as well. I made the mistake of overextending myself academically for this past year. Now I am paying the price – I am mentally exhausted. So much so that I would not be in school this quarter, except that I am in my third quarter of Greek, and need to finish. (I also really wanted to take this class because it sounded very interesting.) My challenge at this point is to stay focused and disciplined enough to complete this quarter. I have several people praying with me and for

me about this. My concern is that I may run out of “mental gas” before the quarter ends. I have had a few people suggest that perhaps I should not be in school. However, I have responded by telling them that I know this is where I need to be; but I do need to take a break after this quarter. Learning things such as these five types of views of Christ & Culture reminds me why the Lord has me in school. Consequently, this new understanding tends to give me the “emotional and mental gas” that I need to continue. My prayer is that the rest of the class can continue to offer me more of such gas.