Religion and culture: How religious people often view the larger culture

Cultural Anthropology
Southern Nazarene University
Two books
Richard Niebuhr

- Pastor in Evangelical and Reformed Church (St. Louis)
- Yale seminary professor when he published “Christ and Culture” (1951)
Niebuhr’s classic positions

- Christ against culture
  - Following Christ means rejecting any loyalty to culture
  - Disengagement from the world because of the world’s rebellion against God
  - A “holy huddle” of Christians who do not dialog with anyone else
Niebuhr’s classic positions

- Christ of culture
  - Christianity and culture become fused regardless of their differences
  - Affirming both Christ and culture and denying any necessary opposition between the two.
Christ above culture

- An attempt at a synthesis of the two
- The issues of culture find an answer in Christian revelation
- The church perceives that her role is fundamental if there is to be any cultural achievement
Christ and culture in paradox

- A tension between the church and the world around it, even as they interpenetrate one another
- Each Christian is a subject of two realms--two "kingdoms," but one king, Christ.
• Christ the transformer of culture
  • the kind of Puritan ethic which sees the whole of life as in some sense requiring to be converted to Christ
Charles Kraft

- Missionary anthropologist
- “Christianity in Culture,” 30 years after Niebuhr
- Sees 3 groupings of positions
  - God against culture
  - God in culture
  - God above culture
Charles Kraft’s listing

- God against culture
  - Commitment to God is a decision to oppose culture
  - Assumes all of culture is evil
    - Speaking in tongues
2 God-in-culture positions

- God or Christ is merely culture hero (position of many anthropologists)
- God is contained within, or at least endorses, one particular culture (Example: Hebrews)
5 God-above-culture positions

- God is above culture and unconcerned about human beings
  - Deism, African religions
  - Ignore God while holding tightly to some of Jesus’ teachings
- Christians follow requirements of both Christ and culture, but each in its own place (Thomas Aquinas)
5 God-above-culture positions

- Dualism in which Christian is like an amphibian
- Conversionist (Augustine, Calvin)
  - Culture is corrupted but usable and even redeemable
- Christ above-but-through-culture

Summary web page
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