

# Christianity and culture



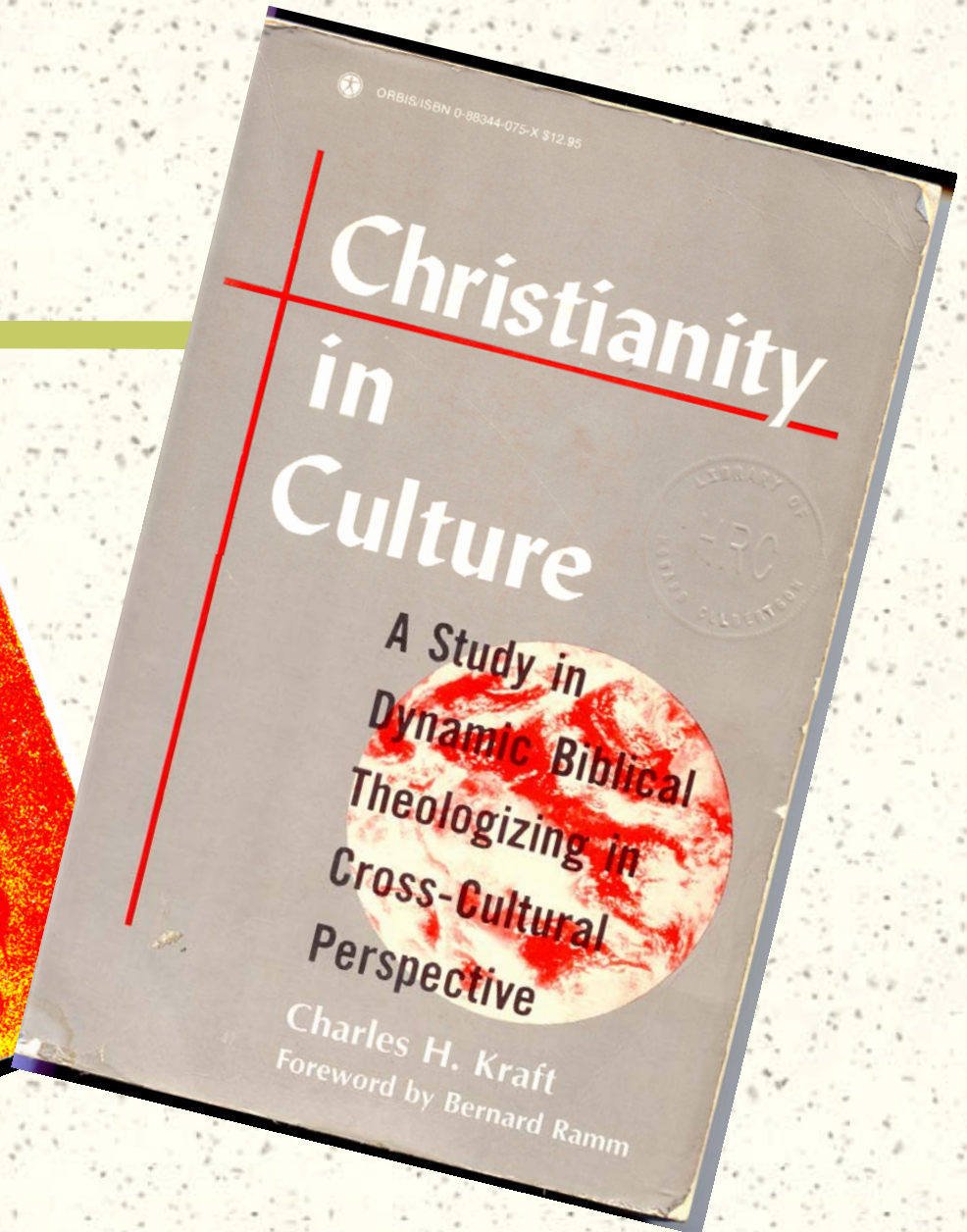
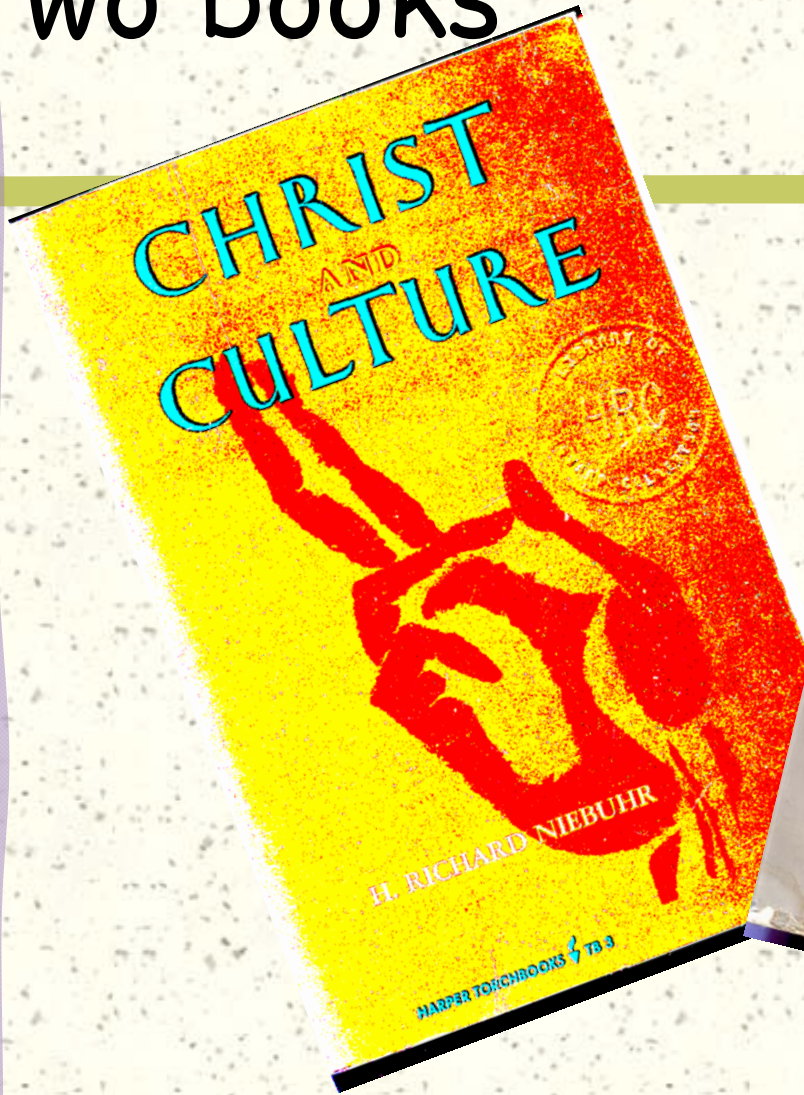
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# How do Christians view and interact with the larger culture surrounding them?

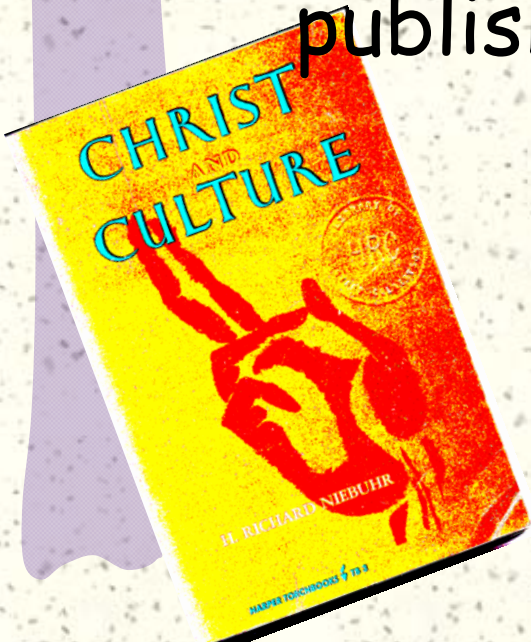
# In what ways do Christians allow the larger culture to shape and define them?

# Two books



# Richard Niebuhr

- # Pastor in Evangelical and Reformed Church (St. Louis)
- # Yale seminary professor when he published *Christ and Culture* (1951)



# Niebuhr's 5 classic positions

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## #1. Christ against culture

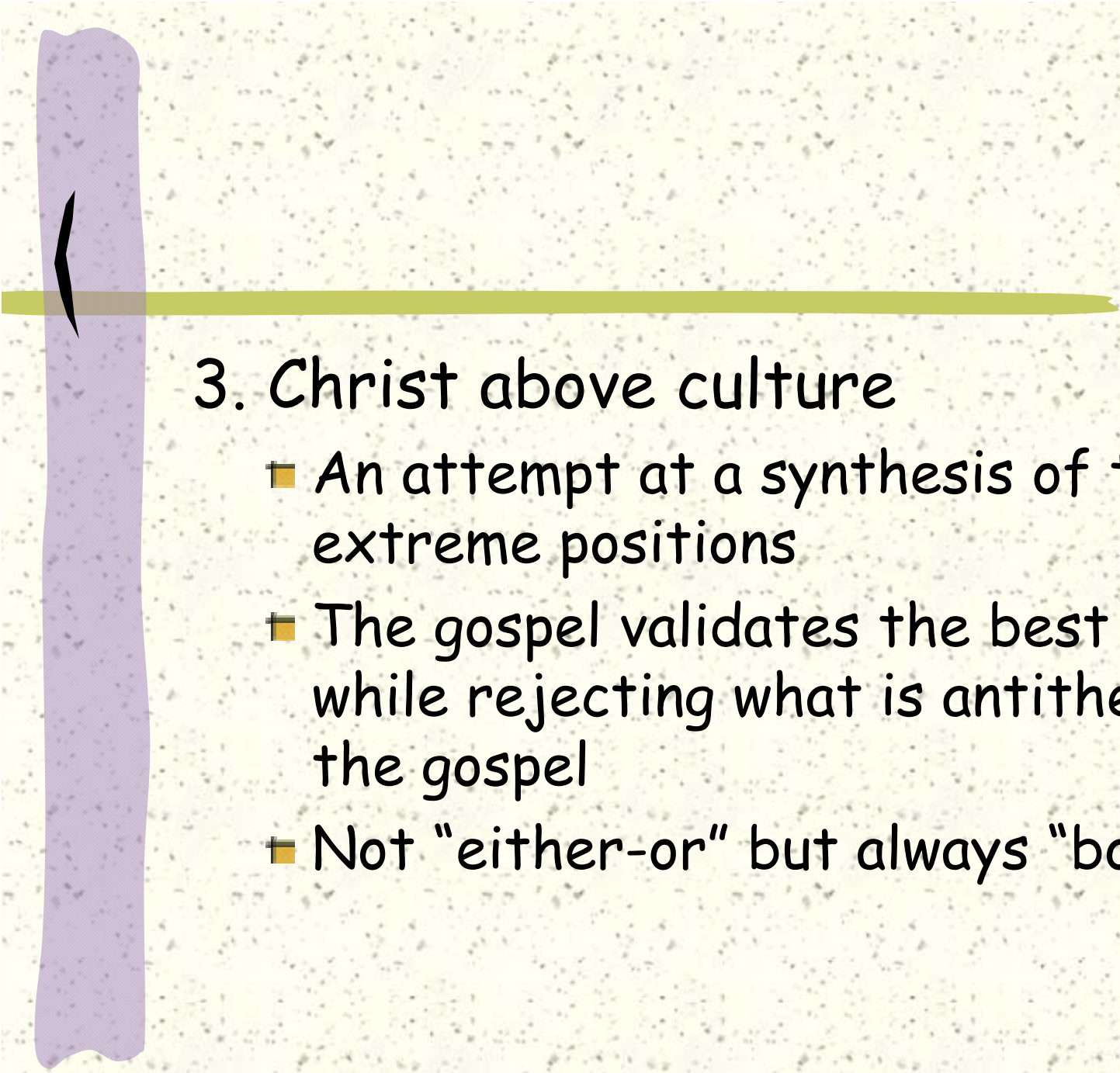
- Rejects any loyalty to "sinful" culture
- Church's primary identity: Resist cultural accommodation
- Result: "Holy huddle" of Christians who rarely dialog with outsiders

# Niebuhr's classic positions

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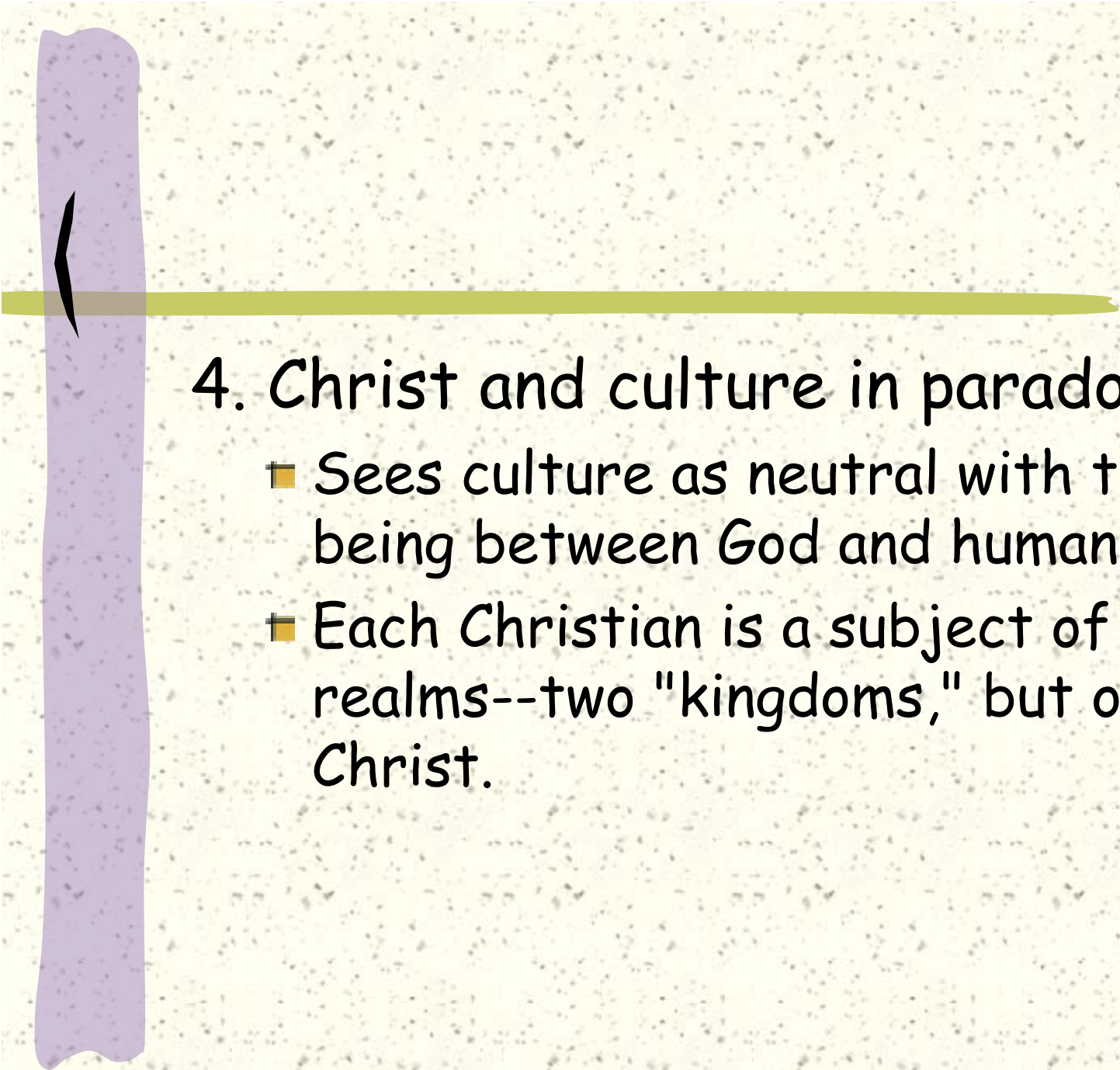
## # 2. Christ of culture

- Uncritical, accommodationist perspective
- Affirms both Christ and culture while denying opposition between the two.
- Christianity and culture become fused regardless of differences



### 3. Christ above culture

- An attempt at a synthesis of the two extreme positions
- The gospel validates the best of culture while rejecting what is antithetical to the gospel
- Not "either-or" but always "both-and"



## 4. Christ and culture in paradox

- Sees culture as neutral with the tension being between God and humanity
- Each Christian is a subject of two realms--two "kingdoms," but one king, Christ.



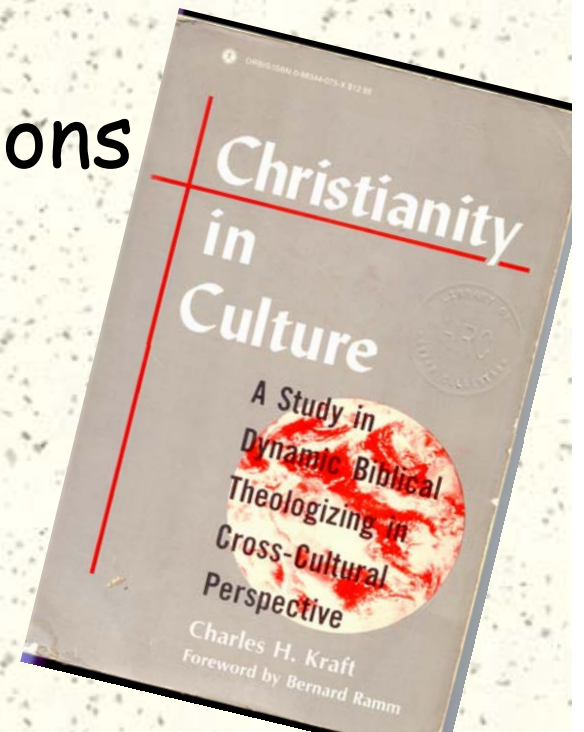


## # 5. Christ the transformer of culture

- A conversionist approach to culture
- Evil is a perversion of good rather than having its own fundamental reality
- Puritan ethic perspective which sees the whole of life needing 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

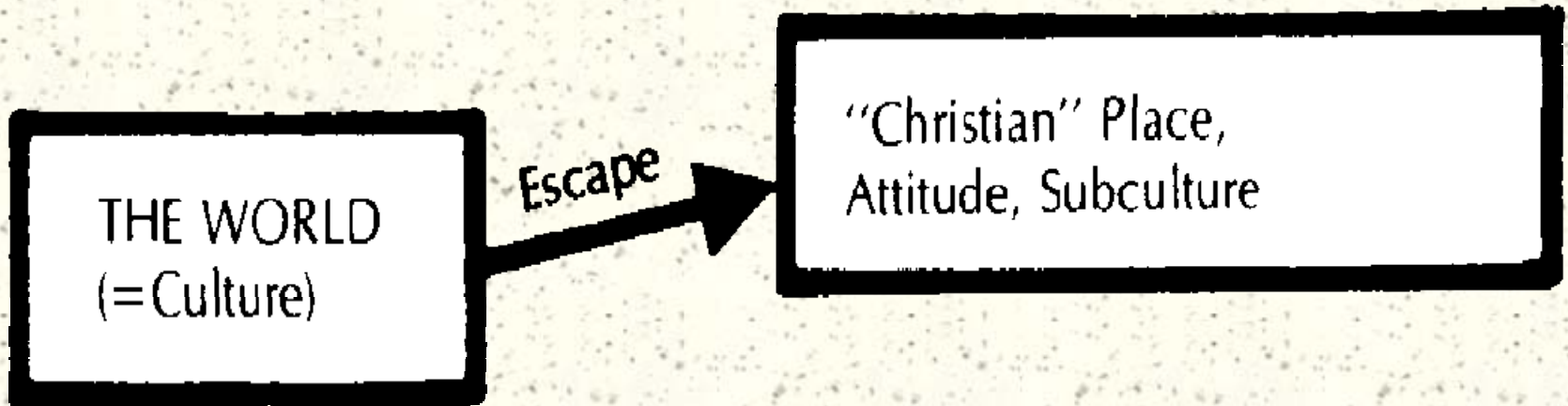
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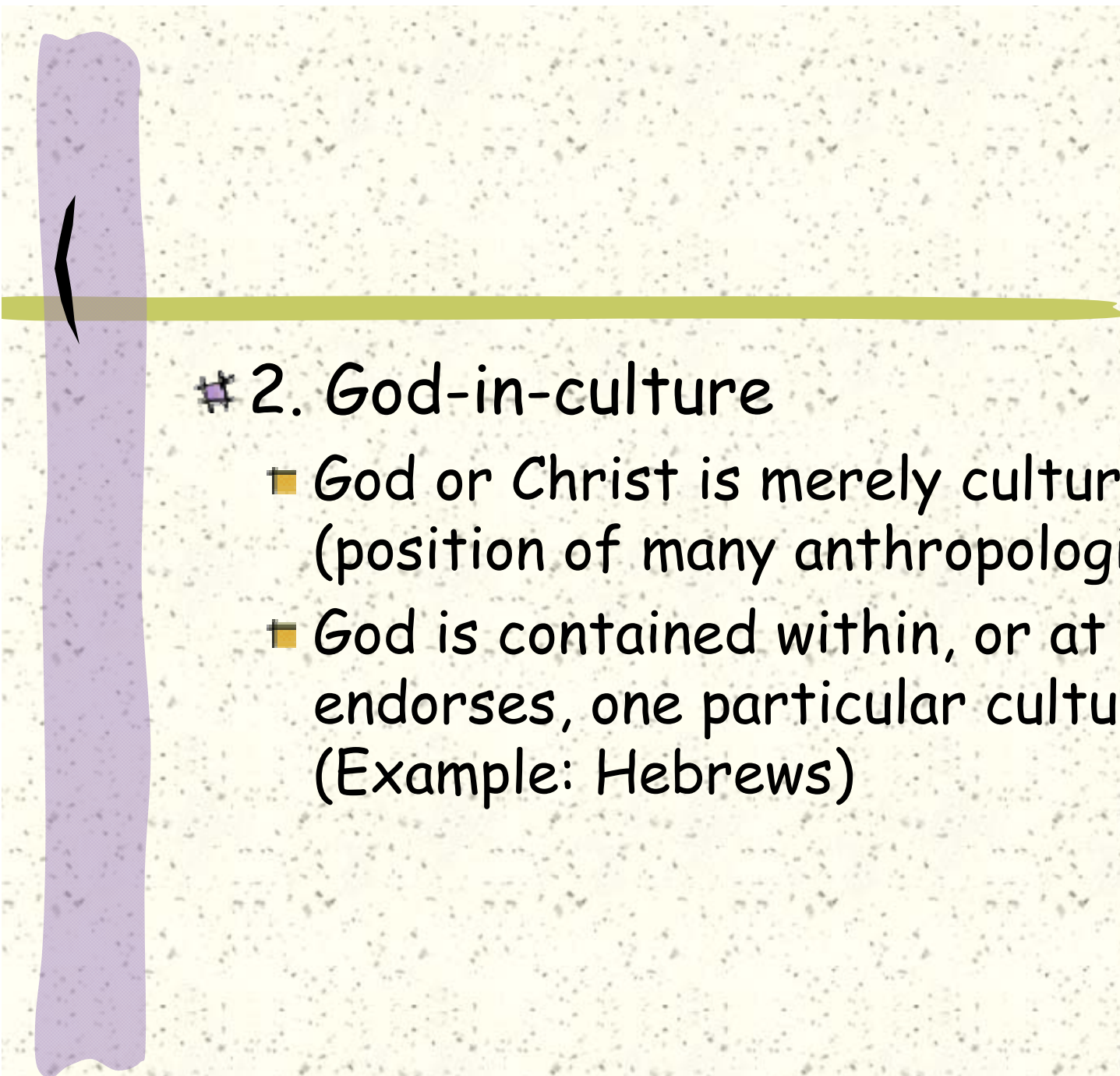
- # God against culture
- # God in culture
- # God above culture

# Charles Kraft's listing

## #1. God against culture

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





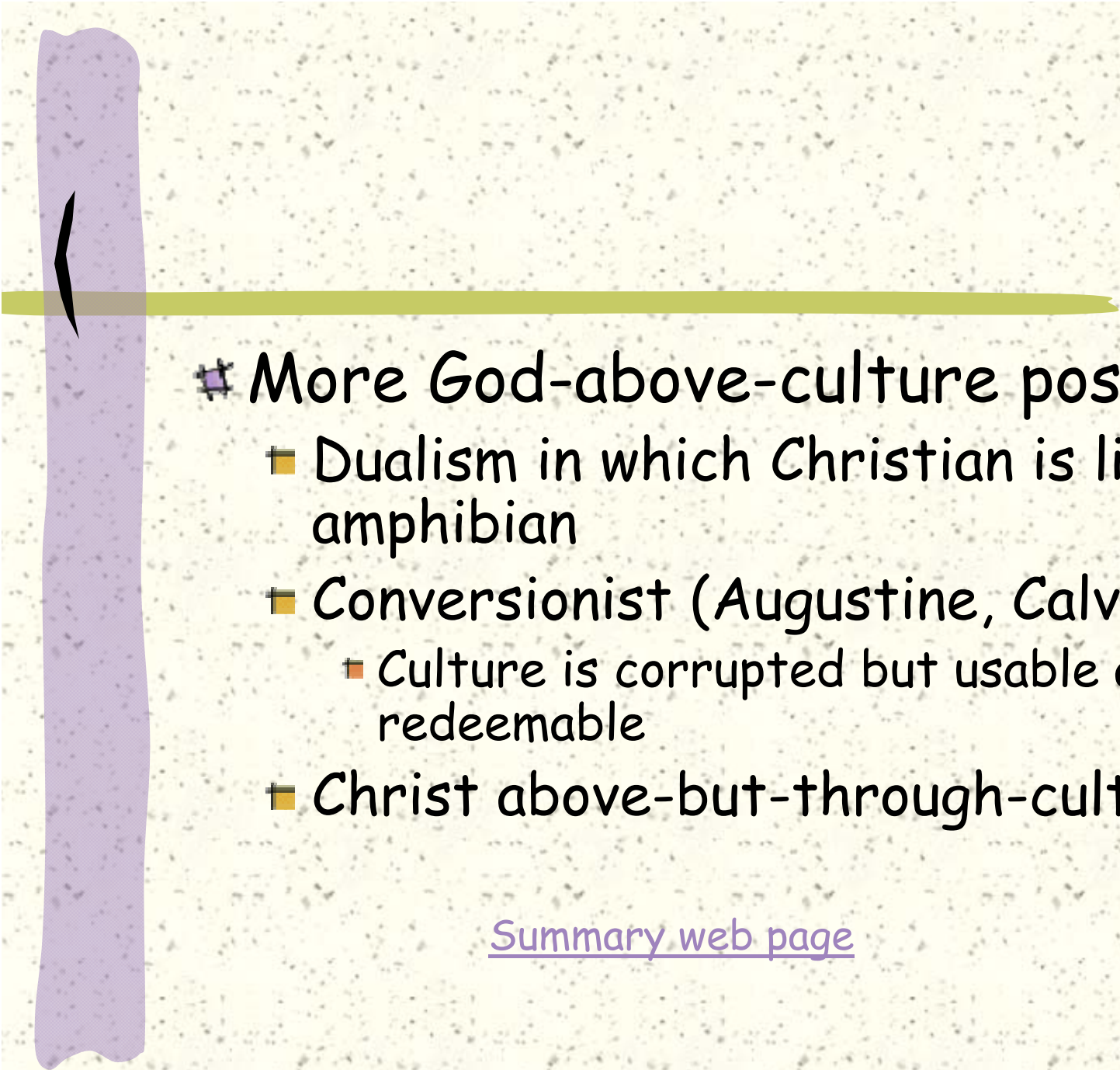
## # 2. God-in-culture

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



### # 3. God-above-culture (5 of them)

- 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)



## # More 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](#)