

Christianity and culture



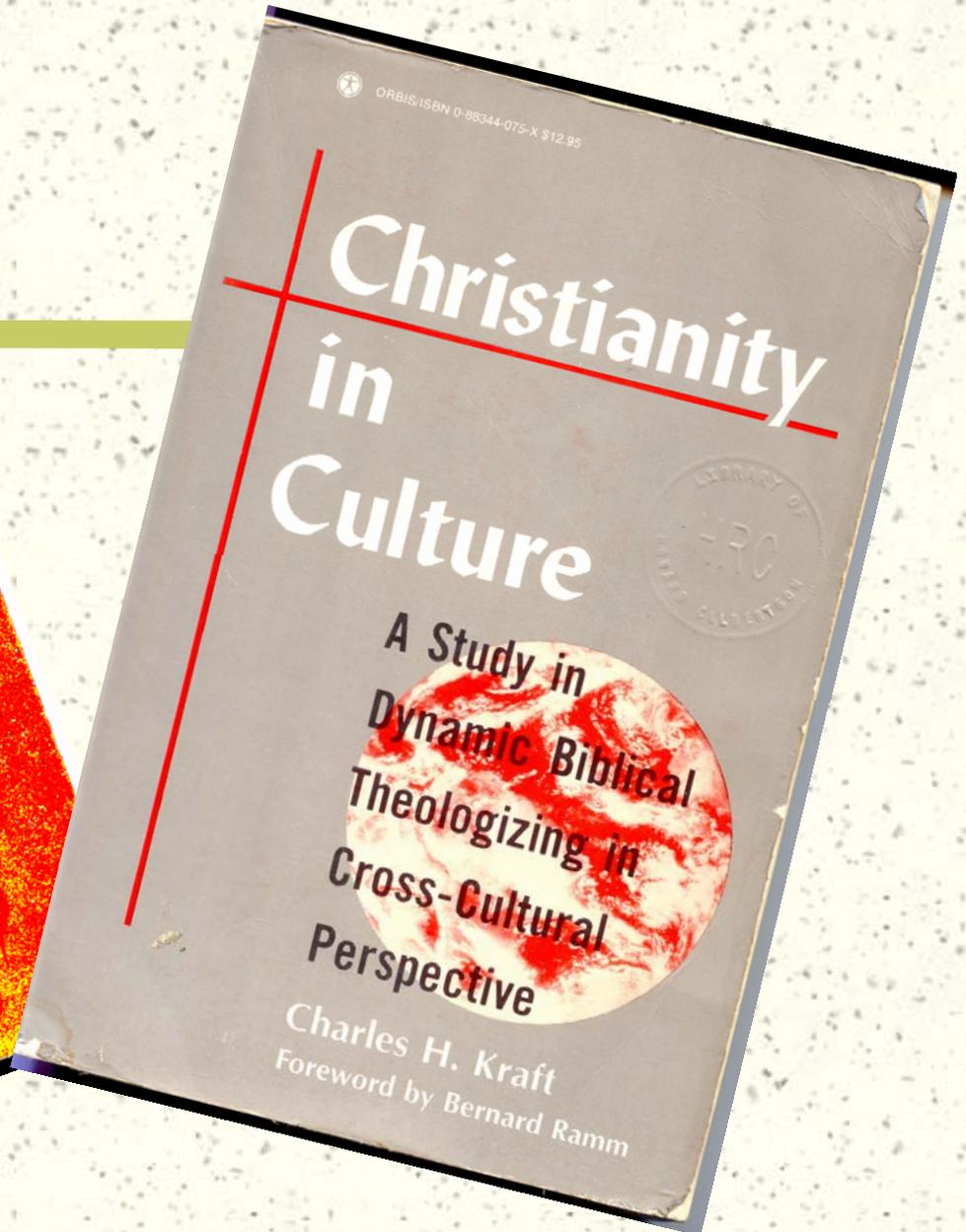
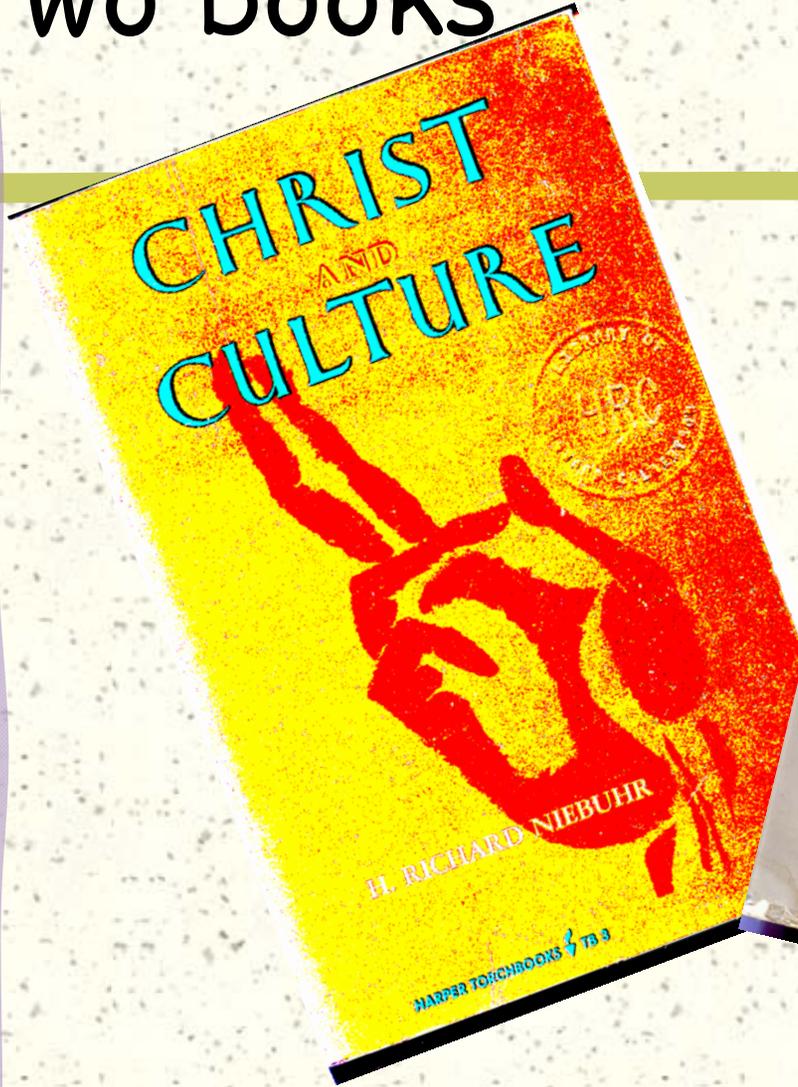
Ministry, Church and Society
Southern Nazarene University



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

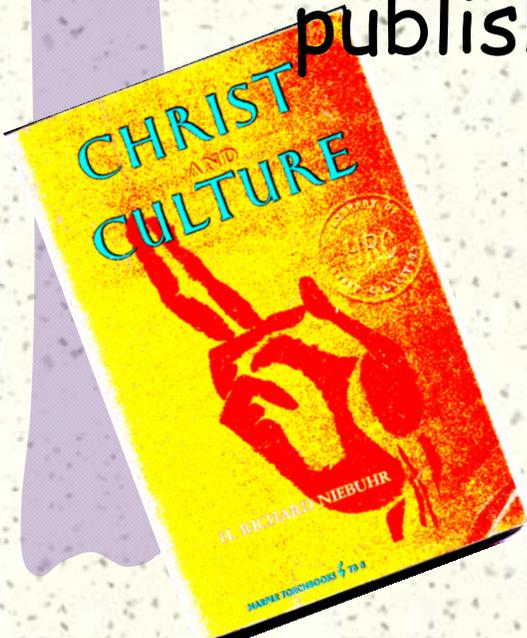
In what ways do Christians allow the larger culture to shape and define them?

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

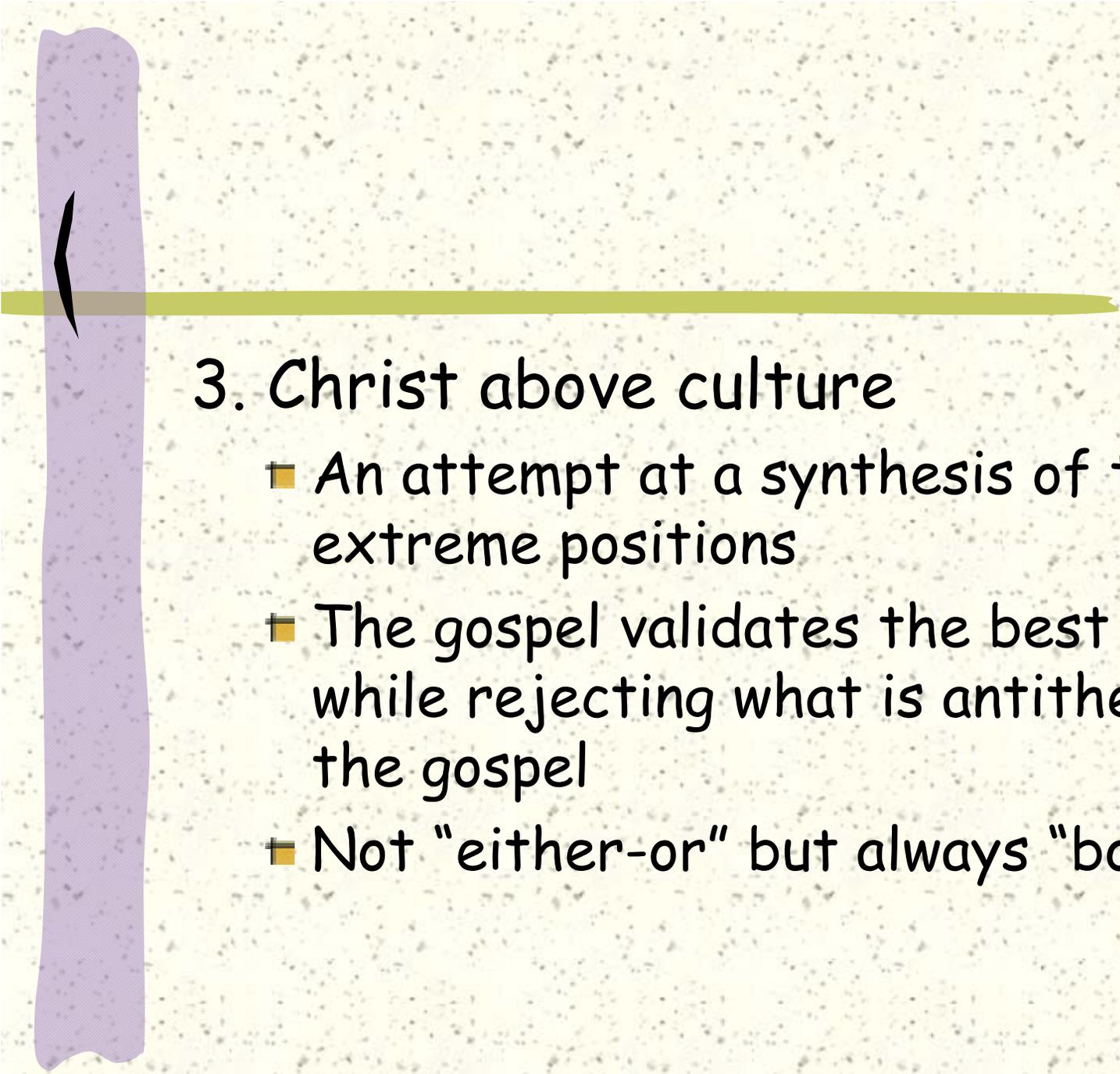
#1. Christ against culture

- 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

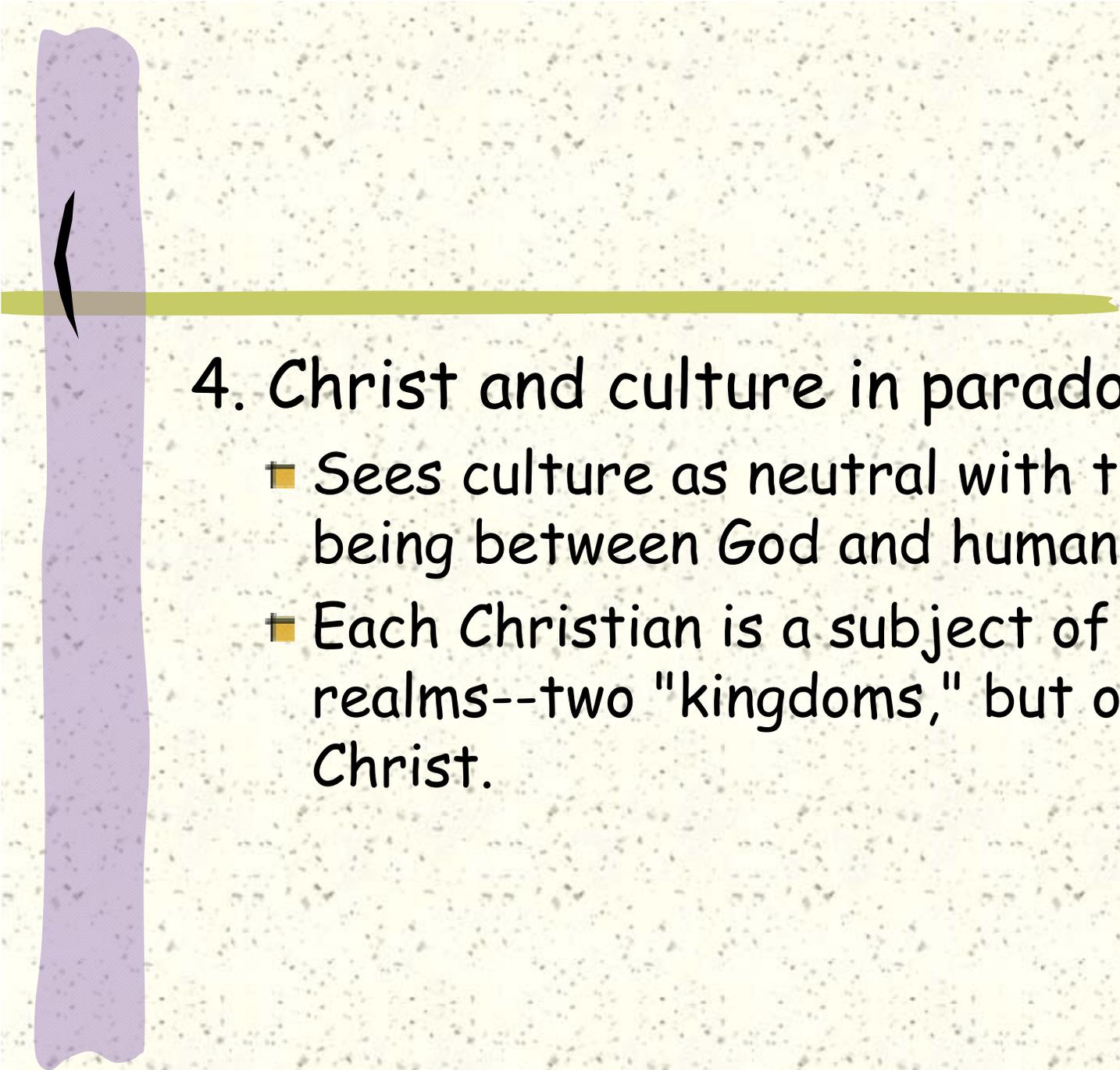
2. Christ of culture

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



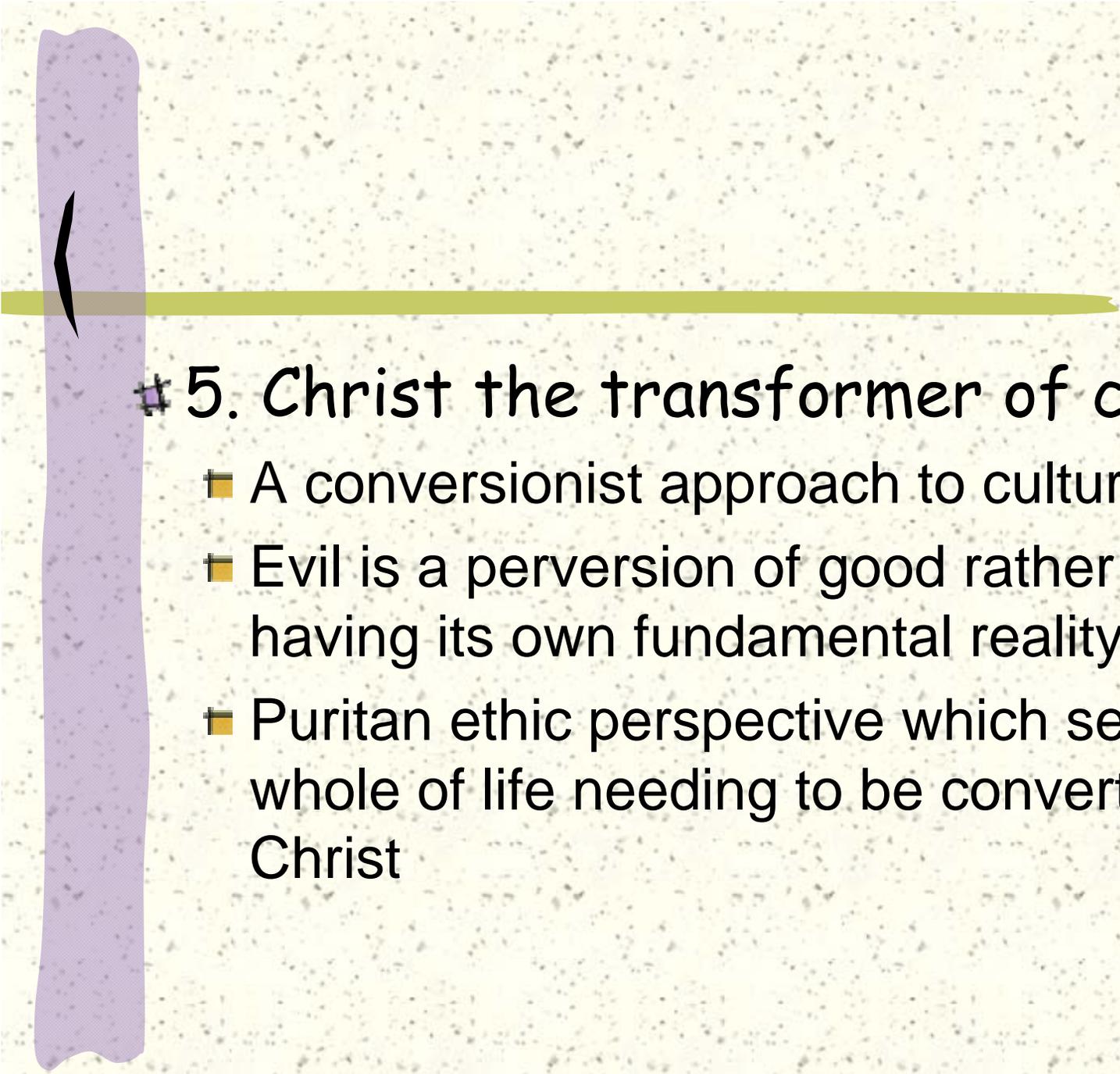
3. Christ above culture

- 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.

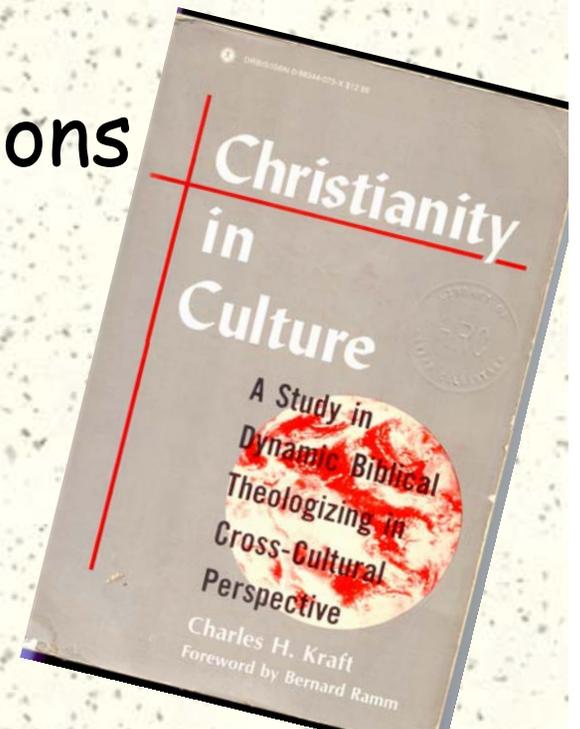


5. Christ the transformer of culture

- 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



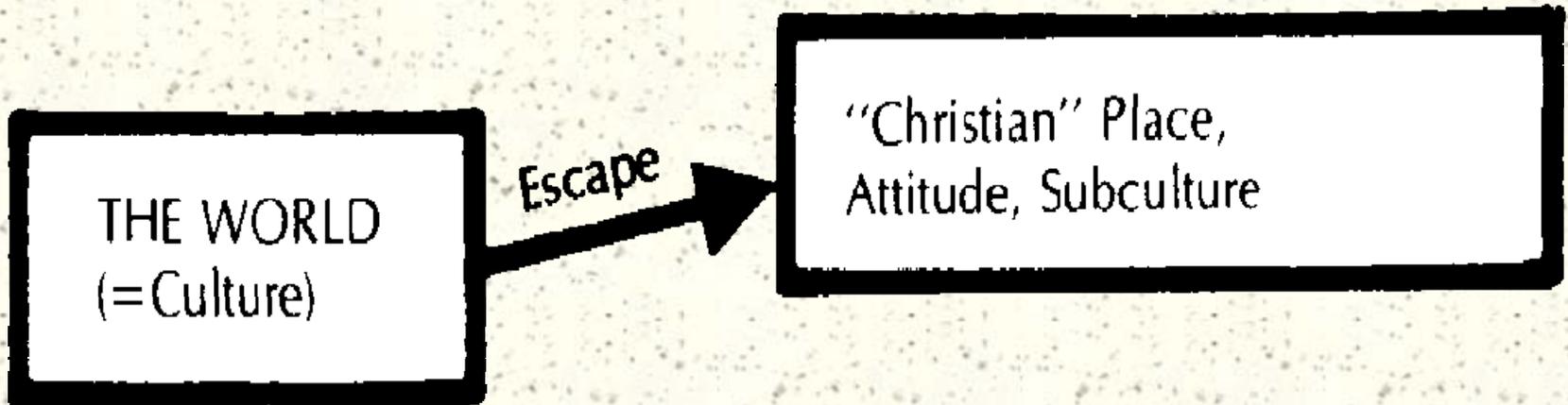
Charles Kraft's listing

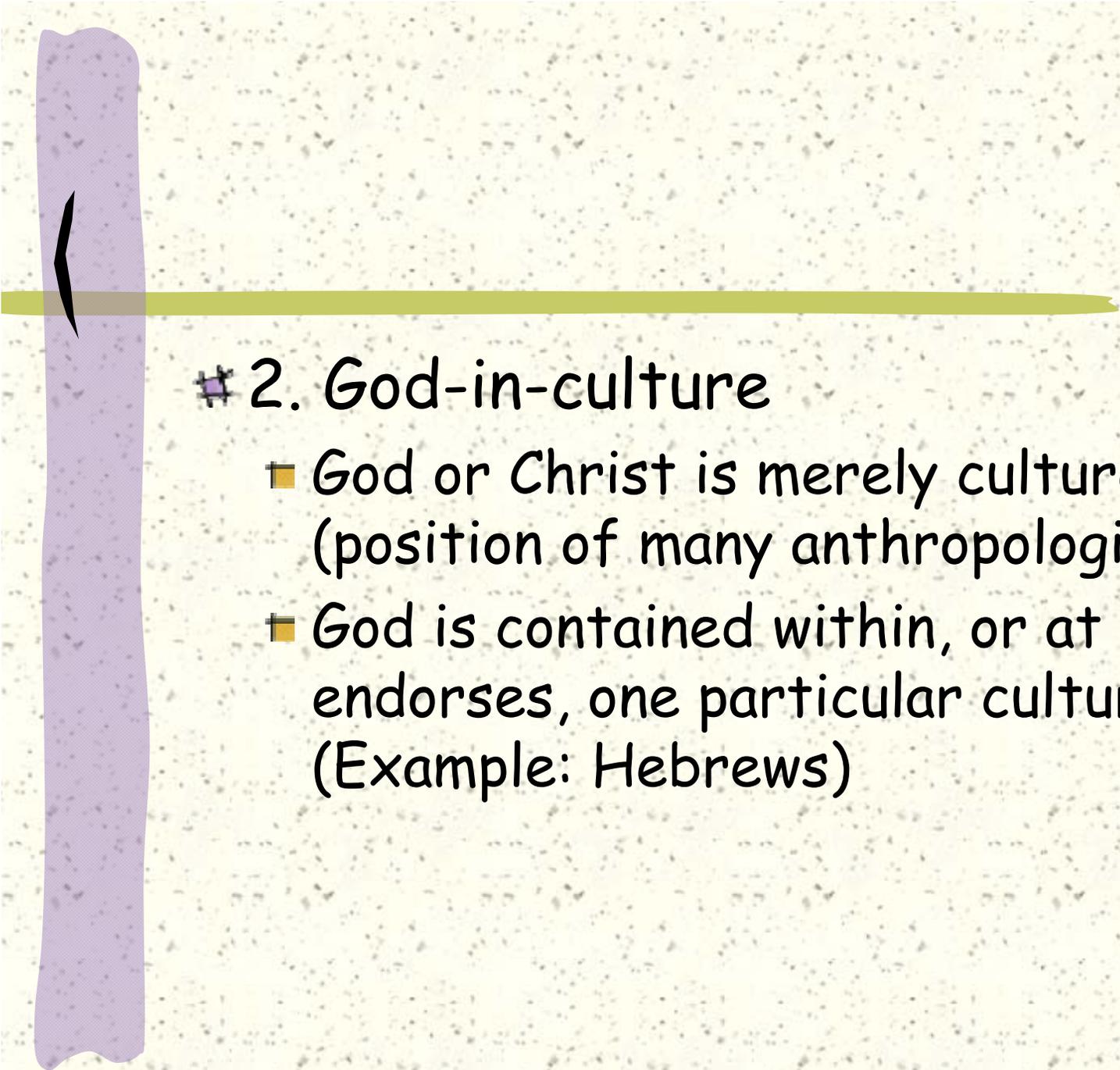
- # God against culture
- # God in culture
- # God above culture

Charles Kraft's listing

#1. God against culture

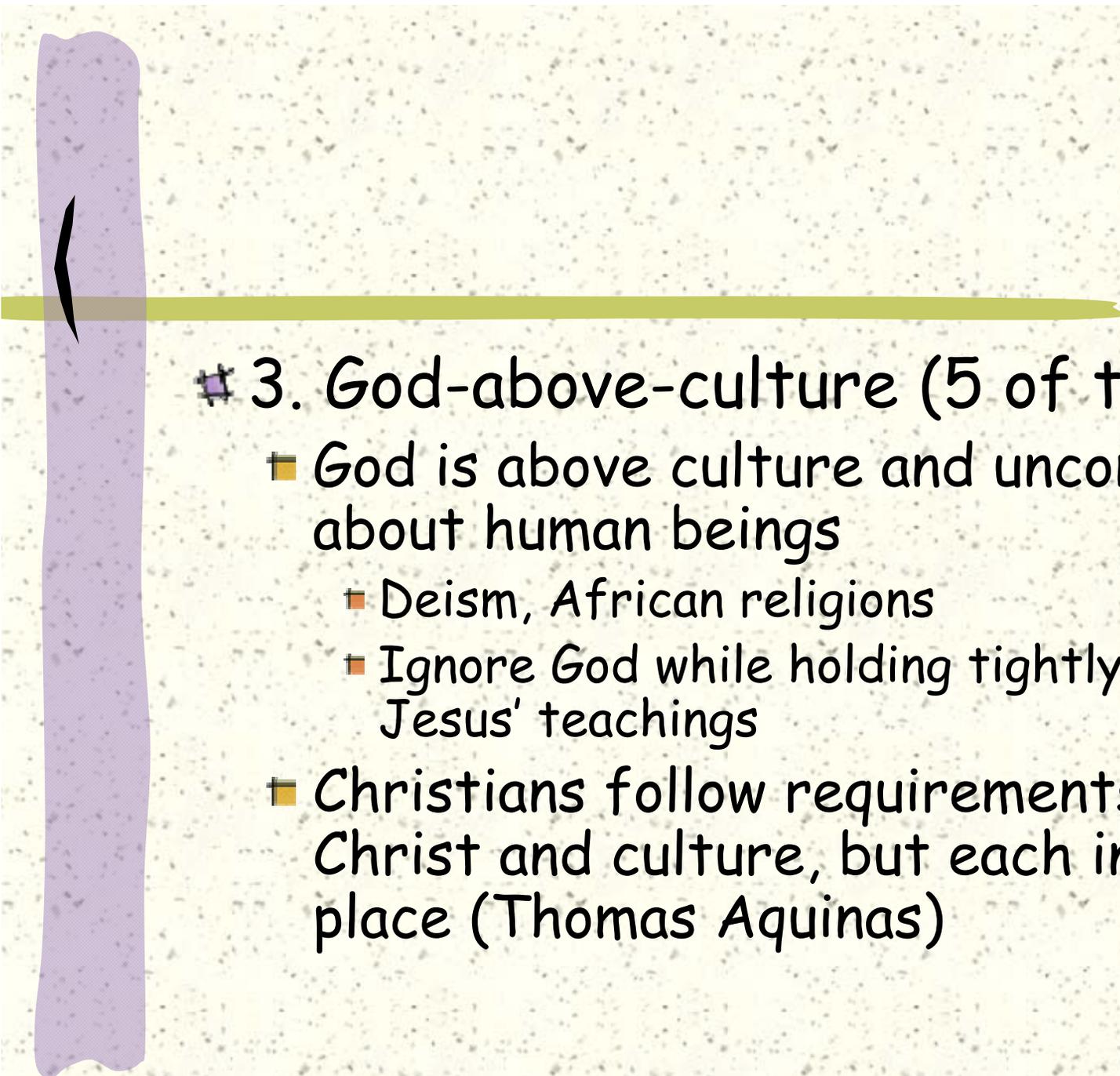
- Commitment to God is a decision to oppose culture
- Assumes all of culture is evil
 - Speaking in tongues





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](#)