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

Diagram:

THE WORLD (=Culture) → Escape → “Christian” Place, Attitude, Subculture
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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