

Cultural Engagement - Introduction

What is culture?

- “We should make an important distinction between creation and culture. Creation is what God makes; culture is what we make. Now of course God is sovereign, so everything we make is also his in one sense. Or, somewhat better: creation is what God makes by Himself, and culture is what he makes through us.” —John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*
- “Culture is what we make of the world.” —Andy Crouch, *Culture Making*

Cultural engagement in the early church

- “I seek to know God, and not only the works of God. Who will aid me in my quest? We do not, if you have no objection, wholly disown Plato. How then, O Plato, is one to seek after God?” —Clement of Alexandria, 3rd century AD
- “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?” —Tertullian of Carthage, 3rd century AD
- “If those, however, who are called philosophers, have said things which are indeed true and are well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared, rather, what they have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessors and converted to our use. Just as the Egyptians had not only idols and grave burdens which the people of Israel detested and avoided, so also they had vases and ornaments of gold and silver and clothing which the Israelites took with them secretly when they fled, as if to put them to a better use.... In the same way, all the teachings of the pagans contain not only simulated and superstitious imaginings and grave burdens of unnecessary labour, which each one of us leaving the society of pagans under the leadership of Christ ought to abominate and avoid, but also liberal disciplines more suited to the uses of truth, and some of the most useful precepts concerning morals. Even some truths concerning the worship of one God are discovered among them.” —Augustine, early 5th century AD

Christ and Culture by H. Richard Niebuhr

Model	Christ against culture	Christ of culture	Christ above culture (synthesist)	Christ and culture in paradox (dualist)	Christ transforming culture (conversionist)
Denomination	Anabaptist	Liberal	Roman Catholic	Lutheran	Calvinist, Methodist
Summary	Withdraw from culture	Embrace culture	Build on culture (Christendom)	Live in tension within culture	Renew the culture
Critique	Minimizes the goodness of creation	Minimizes the fallenness of creation	Institutionalizes the gospel; minimizes sin	Spiritualizes the gospel; maintains the status quo	[Politicizes the gospel; immanentizes the eschaton]