

February 5, 2006 AM

THE CHURCH AND THE CULTURE

GENESIS 1:26-28; 4:17-26

False dilemma = you are made to choose between two things that aren't necessarily mutually exclusive.

1. THE FOUNDATIONS FOR CULTURAL MISSION

The image of God: three-fold relationship: with God (man is to be a worshiper; a lover of God), with man (man is to love his neighbor), with non-human creation (man is to be a servant-king).

"The cultural mandate" - man had the responsibility of developing an entire culture with all that this entails. Being created in God's image is a *vocation*. It is what we are called to be and to do before God and for the world.

Does man in the image of God have anything to do with culture? If the image of God has anything to do with community, then a "culture" is involved. Why is this? Because *culture* is essentially what you believe and how you live as a community. I.e., Culture involves how the community relates to God, to one another and the non-human creation around them. Culture is inevitable. To bear God's image is to have a culture.

OC evidence of "new humanity" as cultural mission: Re-creation of *man* involves the re-creation of *culture*. Man as God's image-bearer will develop the world and bring it to its intended end as God commissioned him to do.

The story progresses: Noah, the head of the "new" human race re-commission with "cultural mandate." Man opposed to God (like the family of Cain) seeks to build his own culture (The Tower of Babel). God raises up a new *man*—Abraham and Sarah—and through Abraham all the families/nations of the earth will be blessed (cf. Ge 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4).

Communities *as communities*—whether families or nations—will be given new life through the seed of Abraham (blessed = new life; cf. Gen 1:26-28; and also Gal 3). This will reflect the life of the Divine Community.

God makes the family of Israel into a "holy nation" (Ex 19:6). The law given at Sinai was not given to individuals as individuals for their personal piety—although individuals as individuals must abide by it—but it was given to the divinely constituted society to live as the people of God, God's image-bearing community, in the world. The law intended to create and maintain a particular culture.

Israel was to be a "prototype," in some ways, of how all the nations were to live and relate. Cf. Deut 4:5-8. As Israel was appointed to be God's new humanity, she was to be an image for the nations.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ as the NC basis for culture/city building: Jesus and his people = the new "Adam." In Jesus the Abrahamic promises are fulfilled in which all the nations of the world are brought back to life. The communities of people large and small, families as well as nations, are called to repentance and faith so that they may live like God intended them to be.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for cultural mission and transformation in this new age. In the death and resurrection of Jesus as God's appointed representative, the last Adam, the old creation dies and the new creation is born. We are informed by this that God is *transforming* the creation.

As concerns cultural matters, this means that we are concerned about visible, tangible creation. We are concerned about the way people relate to one another or what the culture is like. We are now "a holy nation" that we should show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1Pet 2:9). Jesus is the great City-builder (cf. Rev 21-22).

2. THE UNBIBLICAL SPLIT BETWEEN RELIGION AND CULTURE

Understanding "culture": The way our society understands "culture": separate "religion" from "real life;" secular/sacred split. "Religion" is a private matter confined to private experience.

Culture and religion are inseparable. Culture necessarily involves what a group of people believe about God or no God, about morality, about how people should relate to one another, etc. Henry Van Til gives a good summary definition of culture. "Culture is religion externalized and made explicit" (Schlissel, Christian Culture in a Multicultural Age, 95).

Culture involves the ideas, skills, arts, philosophies, etc. of a group of people that are transferred, communicated or passed along to subsequent generations (Ibid.). Culture is the shared belief system of a group of people which determines their mores, laws, philosophies, the shape of their art, etc. Generally how they determine what is good and right from what is bad and wrong.

Human culture is inevitable. As long as you have two people existing on the earth there will be some type of culture. Man created in the image of the divine culture will have some relationship with one another. Therefore some belief system (for lack of better term) will determine how they relate to one another.

So then, the question is not, Will there be a culture? The question is, Who or what determines what type of culture we will have?

The choice that faces the Church and her mission is this: Will the culture be one in which Jesus is acknowledged as Lord? Or will the culture be one that acknowledges another lord?

The myth of “multiculturalism”: a “pluralistic” society; i.e., we do not recognize one culture as superior to another. All cultures are created equal. This cashes out into the belief that we hold as a society that all religions are equal.

Many Christians have bought into this in one way or another. We have taken the attitude that (1) there should be no such thing as a “Christian culture” (because we are a wholly “invisible”/“spiritual”/private religion); and, consequently (2) that we should just play our part as one of the sub-sets of the multicultural set of beliefs (i.e., we need to vie for equal place at the table).

This compromises our faith for at least two reasons: a) You have said that the Christian faith is on the same plane as all other religions. There is no superior “culture,” no superior religion.

This forces us into the view that our religion is a private set of abstract beliefs that have no bearing on real life; i.e., the culture. Because of this, we cannot press our private beliefs upon the culture. But the message we proclaim keeps “getting in the way” because it proclaims that there is only one true Lord of the world and his name is Jesus.

b) It denies that the gospel of Jesus Christ is about re-creating humanity holistically.

Present day missions, evangelism and discipleship have taken on the great “split” and have taught people how to be individually pietistic, but they have not had the biblical worldview tools to tell people what it means to make widgets, play music, build buildings or make laws for God’s glory.

3. MOVING TOWARD A CHRISTIAN CULTURE

Should Christians think about culture building? Well, the fact that cultures will be built and the fact that they are part of what God mandated in creation and redemption means that we should have a worldview that encompasses what it means to build Christian culture. Our mission should involve it. Indeed it does involve it whether we acknowledge it or not; we either do it well or do it poorly, but we do it nonetheless.

Our mission as the Church of Jesus Christ must deal with man as God created him to be: a whole person and a part of a larger community. Therefore, we must have philosophy of missions and evangelism that is culture-building.

Why should we think this way?: because Jesus is raised from the dead and the Lord of the world. He ascended to sit at the right hand of the Father as the world’s true Lord until all enemies are put under his feet (cf. Ps 110:1; Act 2:34-35; 1Cor 15:25; Heb 10:12-13). As Lord of the world Jesus calls for submission from every individual, every family and every institution. He expects there to be a particular culture in the world.

Another reason: *because Jesus commissioned us with this task.* Mt 28:18-20: “disciple the nations.”

Another reason: *because Jesus promised us that the church would prevail in her mission.* Cf. Mt 16:18 We are to trample the gates of hell wherever they are found.

How do we get there from here?:

1) We are to be true worshipers. 2) We witness. 3) We work.

Problems to avoid: 1) Political Messiahism - The answer to everything is making a new law. While laws are good for restraining evil, they will not be ultimately effective outside of a culture that does not recognize good and evil properly.

2) Isolationism - “Retreat!” Jesus’ incarnation speaks against this. He got involved in the “mess.”