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The New Testament points to certain controls which hem us in, and which should prevent us from lapsing into extreme individualism in our interpretation of the biblical message. Paul made his appeal to the commandments of the Lord ([I Cor. 7:10](#)). The teaching of the canonical Gospels provides for us those commandments, along with the epistolary expansion of them by men on whose minds the spirit of God had worked ([In. 16:12-15](#)). There is also recourse to the collective body of believers, drawing upon the formulation of biblical teaching by past generations of Christians and those by contemporary believers. Past teaching provides a framework from which to make further developments, while the pursuit of the task along with the total church community provides a safeguard against excessive individualism. Finally, of course, there is the corrective activity of the Word of God itself ([Heb. 2:12, 13](#)). The Word of God is active and discerning, and we stand daily before as it comes to judge and to correct. That Word must not only be our source of knowledge but also be our teacher and corrector.

Whatever guidelines are adopted we are going to be left with cases in which there is uncertainty. On some issues we are going to have to admit that we do not know at this stage of the history of interpretation if the reference is to a principle or a custom. Clearly we do not want to elevate a human custom into a divine command. It would be better to lean the other way and consider a possible custom to be a matter of principle and so be overscrupulous in our obedience to our Lord, while reserving final judgement on the exact nature of the case before us.

The hermeneutical task is daunting and demanding, but two great principles stemming from the Reformation tradition of biblical interpretation give encouragement. The first of these is that of the Analogy of Faith. The Scripture is a unified whole, and in interpretation we need to compare Scripture with Scripture. The second principle really underlies the concept of the Analogy of Faith. It is that of the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. The biblical message is clear enough for ordinary people to understand, with obscure finding their explanation in another part. 'Perspicuity' is an epithet to the totality of Scripture, not its individual parts. It also relates to the basic message of the Bible, and it is not a description concerning the difficulty of the exegetical task. Exegetical difficulties and problems in applying the results to contemporary church life should not distract us from receiving and responding to the central message of Scripture.¹³

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Christ and Culture

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¹³ On these two aspects of Scripture see R.C. Sproul 'Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of Faith', *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Baker, 1980), pp. 119-135; S.B. Ferguson, 'The Book for All the People', *Christian Graduate*, (June 1982), pp. 17-20.

In a wide and comprehensive sweep of salvation history, the author focuses on the role of culture in God's redemptive plan. He critiques Richard Niebuhr's Christ and Culture and discusses the relationship of the kingdom of God to the principalities and powers. He notes that evangelicals have been slow to relate the gospel to culture. Editor

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Since earliest times Christians have been concerned with culture.¹ God placed humanity in a cultural context at the beginning of human events when he gave to our first parents a 'cultural mandate' ([Gen. 2:26–28](#)). Culture has been and remains therefore integral to human experience.

Our focus in this essay will be on Christ and culture. We would therefore begin by defining 1) worldview; 2) culture; and 3) religion. The central question is: How are Christ and culture related in the life of the Christian and the church at large?

WORLDVIEW AND PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy has generally been understood to be a comprehensive theoretical account of the basic issues that concern humanity. It is a general science. It deals with the nature of human knowledge (epistemology), with the nature of reality (ontology) and with the norms that impact on human life and the values that people cherish (axiology).

Philosophy also often designates what may be called a worldview, which is best understood to be *pre*-theoretical; it leads to philosophy. A worldview includes the origin, nature and destiny of the human race. It takes account not only of the philosophical stance but also of the religious position. It connects the religious position and the philosophy that is built on that position.

Religion may best be described as the human response to God's revelation. It includes but is not limited to worship. It is in its broadest sense service either to God or to a substitute for God.

Culture

To ascertain the meaning of culture, we begin with the history of the word. 'Culture' is derived from the Latin *colere* which meant originally the act of cultivating and the fruit of working the soil. Later it included the production, development and improvement of plants and animals. In modern times it has taken on a special meaning namely the growing of bacteria or micro-organisms in a specially prepared nourishing substance.

Culture is the development, improvement, refinement of the non-human creation. It *gives form to existing material*. In an extended sense it may mean the refinement of personal aptitudes and gifts. When used in that way we can speak of a cultured person who, for example, has developed her vocal capabilities to a high degree of perfection. She

¹ In recent decades evangelical scholars, in particular those who are engaged in the study and practice of transcultural mission, have subjected the idea of culture to intense scrutiny. Their attention has been on the 'contextualization' of the gospel, on the various ways, for good and for ill, culture has affected the content and the medium of the message. The study missiologists undertake covers the impact of culture on the formation of the gospel message in the early decades of our era, on the particular (usually western) culture of the transmitters of the gospel and the culture of the receptors of the gospel message.

has a 'cultured' voice. The same may be said of a painter who has developed a keen artistic sense.²

In this essay 'culture' will mean the forming, shaping, refining activity that produces the ideas, customs, skills, artifacts and arts of a given people in a given period. Taken together, the cultural acts and the products of those acts constitute human civilization.

Culture is a communal task. No one person alone produces a culture. Nor is it the product of one generation only but combines the work of past and present generations.

THE CHURCH LOOKS AT CULTURE

Before considering what the Scriptures tell us regarding culture, we shall look at a number of ways in which the Christian church has considered this relationship. For this we make grateful use of the book by H. Richard Niebuhr.³

1. 'Christ is Against Culture'

In the early post-apostolic church the people of God had on the one hand come into possession of a profound collection of writings, namely the NT canon, much of which the early church did not fully grasp. On the other hand they experienced oppression as a minority in a totalitarian empire with its impressive culture, its empire worship and its pervasive polytheism. Their ranks were not filled with the rich and noble but with the poor and the despised. Many were slaves with little or no available free time.

Four books, in addition to the NT writings that circulated at the time were *The Teaching of the Twelve*, *the Shepherd of Hermes*, *the Epistle of Barnabas* and *The First Epistle of Clement*. They presented Christianity as a way of life separate from contemporary culture. There was scarcely time to think about culture, much less to engage in it. Christians often thought of themselves as a new race, distinct from Jews and gentiles. Many Christians refused to enter military service. Their expectation was for a speedy return of Christ.

One of the most explicit representatives of the view that culture and Christ are incompatible was Tertullian of Northern Africa (165–216). For him culture is inherently sinful. A servant of God should not be engaged in commerce. The philosophers of Greece had nothing in common with the 'disciples of heaven'. Jerusalem and Athens had nothing in common.

The early advocates of Christ against culture promoted monasticism to protect themselves against the evils of the world. Later, advocates would as far as possible flee from the world. Yet, contrary to what one might expect, the monasteries, their places of

² In the course of history, one that continues to the present, culture has taken on an unfortunately truncated meaning. It is not what people do with nature as they follow their life's calling in their work, whether it is husbandry or homemaking or industry, or exercising an artistic aptitude; it is what they do when the day's work is done. Culture is then the refinement of human life which the more affluent and well educated can enjoy when they contemplate the fine arts and relish the taste of the beautiful things in life. In this view only the people who do not have to work for a living can become cultured, and then only if in their leisure time they apply themselves to life's finer activities. Unfortunately this elitist meaning enjoys wide currency, with the result that culture is often not closely related to one's work nor to education.

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper, 1951). He distinguishes five different approaches in the Christian church to culture. We have also consulted the book of the Reformed Ecumenical Council on *Facing the Challenge of Secularism* (1991). A recent book that requires attention is Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Eerdmans, 1994). Another is the work of Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth is not What it Used to Be* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

refuge, became the preservers of culture at a time when wide-spread chaos reigned in Europe.

Among the representatives of this view in later time we would mention the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). Deeply impressed with the meaninglessness of life and the tawdriness of the values of the society in which he lived, he militated, as in *The Death of Ivan Illich*, against culture.⁴ The evil with which people contend, he said, is to be found in society, not in the individual. There is no such thing as good government, and the churches have become self-centred organizations that are far removed from the Christianity of Jesus. He left his family of wife and nine children, sold his extensive property and sought to live a very simple, self-sufficient life, close to nature. Niebuhr calls him a ‘crusader against culture’ (Niebuhr p. 60).

2. ‘The Christ of Culture’

If the advocates of Christ against culture posited their antithesis, the promoters of the Christ of culture accommodated Christ to culture. The former view stressed the difference; the latter the similarity. This second approach is as old as the former one, going back to the Gnostics of St John’s day.

The Gnostics (Basilides, Valentinus) sought, in the words of Niebuhr, to understand the transcendent realm as continuous with the present life (p. 84). They offered an esoteric knowledge (Greek: *gnosis*) to which only the initiated could attain, a mystical knowledge which enabled one to escape from the world and from the body. Redemption was limited to people with esoteric knowledge which was passed on from teacher to follower. Christ was for them above all the great teacher.

F.C. Burkitt⁵ describes the work of the Gnostics as an attempt to reconcile the gospel to the science and philosophy of their time. Among the ideas then prevalent was the thought that the soul is the prisoner of the body. Redemption is for the soul, from the body. It was apparently against their teaching, namely that true knowledge was reserved for the enlightened few who really ‘know’, that John in his first letter told the believers that they all had an anointing of the Holy One and that they all knew the truth ([1 Jn. 2:20](#)).

The influence of Gnosticism through the ages upon the church has led to the depreciation of the body and to the depiction of Christ as the teacher rather than the sacrifice. In the 12th century Abelard presented Christ as the great teacher who excelled in doing better than Plato and Aristotle had done before him. Of the philosophers Abelard said that ‘in their care for the state and their citizens . . . in life and doctrine, they give evidence of an evangelical and apostolic perfection and come little short of the Christian religion. They are, in fact, joined to us by this common zeal for moral achievement.’⁶

In more recent time John Locke expressed the view that Christ is a piece with (Western) culture in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. In similar vein Thomas Jefferson saw in Christ the one who directs people to attain an ever greater height of culture. He also rewrote the gospels, eliminating from them all the miracles.

Albert Ritschl (1882–1889) proposed a reconciliation of Christ and civilization by means of the idea of the kingdom of God. For him the church is the true form of the ethical community in which members of different nations are bound together in mutual love for the sake of achieving that universal kingdom. Christ is our example. To be true to him, one should engage in civic work for the sake of the common good in faithfulness to one’s social

⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Illich*.

⁵ F.C. Burkitt, *Church and Gnosis* (1932).

⁶ J.R. McCallum, *Abelard’s Christian Theology* (1948), p. 90.

calling. The kingdom of God was for him the synthesis of the great values esteemed by democratic culture: the freedom and intrinsic worth of individuals, social cooperation and universal peace (Niebuhr p. 99). After he had selected from culture those elements which were most compatible with Christ, he interpreted Christ through culture. His may be called a 'culture-protestantism'.

In this view of the Christ of culture the distinctiveness of the gospel was lost. It easily drifted into a kind of humanism.

3. 'Christ above Culture'

Both the radical anti-culturalists and the cultural accommodationists remained until the 19th century somewhat on the periphery of the church. The 'church of the centre' has sought by means of a synthesis of Christ and culture to demonstrate that Christ is the fulfilment of the best of human achievement. As the subtitle, 'Christ above culture' suggests, this view posits in reality higher and lower areas. The church is higher than the rest of society; faith is higher than reason; church teaching is exalted over reason's wisdom; the sacred is higher than the secular. But both levels are joined, in this view, in the plan of God.

This trend, like that of the first two, goes back to the beginning of the Christian era. Mention should be made in this connection of Clement of Alexandria (died c. 216) and Basil of Cappodocia (c. 329–379). Attention should also be given to the theology of Thomas of Aquinas (1275–1274) and the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Clement taught both a Stoic detachment from things and the higher morality of not becoming engrossed in the things of the world. *The Instructor* corresponds closely to the injunctions of the Stoic handbooks current at the time. A Christian should be a good person in accordance with the standard of good culture. But there is a higher level to which Christ calls his followers. It is a life of love of God for its own sake, a life of spontaneous goodness in which neighbours are served in response to divine love. Christ is thus not against culture but uses its best products as instruments in giving to people what they cannot attain by their own efforts. Faith must supplement reason and take it to new heights.

Clement lived at a time when the followers of the way were still a persecuted minority. Basil of Cappodocia, who lived a full century later, gave guidance when Christianity had passed from being the faith of a persecuted minority to being the official religion of the Roman Empire. For Basil the best of Greek culture provided a preparation for the gospel. For as the Jews had the law, the Greeks had philosophy to prepare them to know God truly. This position allowed for a higher evaluation of pagan culture, as the basis for a discriminating use of pagan authors in Christian teaching.

Thomas of Aquinas wrote in the thirteenth century when the church had become the custodian of European culture. As a monk Thomas remained faithful to his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. His view was that it is from his superior position that Christ should be brought into harmonious relationship to culture.

Thomas took from Aristotle the idea of the superiority of the contemplative life. But contemplation for Thomas had for its object the Triune God, not the unmoved mover of Aristotle, the thought thinking itself. God for Aristotle was a human construct. For Aquinas the highest goal of humankind was the unblurred vision of God. The monastic life was for him not so much a protest against worldliness as the effort to attain to the deep vision of unchanging reality.

Thomas found the rules for social life, not in the gospels but in human reason. In their broad principles they constitute a natural law which is based ultimately on the eternal will of the mind of God and which all people of good will can discern through the proper

use of reason. For him, Niebuhr says, culture is the work of God-given reason in God-given nature (p. 135).

The synthesis of Christ and culture in the Thomist view should be maintained and monitored in society by the church as an institution, in this instance, the church under the Bishop of Rome. In the God-required order of things there is a hierarchy of rule, with the church occupying the highest level. This is often called subsidiarity. Thomas expressed it thus: 'The King and Lord of the heavens ordained from all eternity this law: that the gifts of his providence should reach to the lowest things by way of those that lie between'⁷. (quoted by Gerald Vann in *St Thomas Aquinas* p. 45).

The synthesis was carried further by Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) in his social encyclicals. In 'Christ our Redeemer' Leo wrote that Christ conferred on the church 'all effectual aids for human salvation, he ordained with the utmost emphasis . . . that men should be subject to her as to himself and zealously follow her guidance in every department of life'. The church was now officially proclaimed the guardian of culture.

'Christ and Culture in Paradox'

The advocates of the Christ of culture emphasize the importance of the kingdom of God that comprises human culture as well as the benefits of Christ. Martin Luther (1483–1546), taking another approach, advanced the idea of two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, where culture is pursued.

In his pamphlet *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* Luther wrote: 'There are two kingdoms, one the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world. . . . God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace and mercy . . . but the kingdom of the world is a kingdom of wrath and severity. . . . Now he who would confuse these two kingdoms—as our false fanatics do . . . would put God's kingdom and mercy into the world's kingdom; and that is the same as putting the devil in heaven and God in hell.'⁸

These two kingdoms, while they may be distinguished, may not be separated, for Christ, said Luther, is lord of both. Culture, no less than Christian piety, is the area in which Christ must be followed. But the rules which apply in culture must be set free from the church (contra Leo XIII). Christ has given us the freedom to do faithfully what culture requires. Luther spoke in paradoxical terms. God uses wrathful means to accomplish his mercy. And even as God does such strange works, so too the Christian.

In all the approaches to culture sketched thus far, one can detect a common overarching view of life, namely that of two areas commonly called nature and grace (sacred and secular). The differences that exist pertain to the primacy given to one or the other and how these areas are further interrelated.

The Christ against culture gives such primacy to grace that the world and its culture almost fade from view. Culture should be avoided as much as possible. The Christ of culture places such a premium on nature (the realm of culture) that grace is largely absorbed into it.

The Christ above culture makes a definite choice of the primacy of grace and of the favoured position of the church in society. This view is like the two storeys of a structure, neither of which can exist without the other. While culture is good, Christ is better.

The Christ and culture in paradox approach agrees with the Christ above culture in positing the two realms (now called kingdoms) and in attributing primacy to the realm of grace. Christ rules both in wrath and grace.

⁷ Quoted by Gerald Vann, *St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 45.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Works*, Vol IV pp. 265,66).

As we now turn to the next approach as to how Christ and culture are related, we encounter one that breaks in principle with the two-realm, two-tier mould and replaces it with a holistic perspective based on the universal lordship of Christ.

'Christ Transforms Culture'

The view that Christ transforms culture stresses the goodness of the creation that God made. In recognizing the basic distinction between the Creator and the creation, it maintains that the 'sacred' and the 'secular' are not separate realms. For the rule of Christ is over all and, since he has reconciled the world to God, all areas of life are under his sovereignty. The common life should not be negated or depreciated but seen as a holy calling from God. Soul is not higher than body for both body and soul form one integrated whole. Church, state and cultural agencies should be partners in obedience to Christ. The one is not subordinate to the other; they should function as coordinates in their service of Christ.

In the fifth century St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354–430), stressed that Christ is the converter of culture. But this is possible, he said, only because the creation was 'very good'. Evil is not an independent force and cannot exist on its own, but only from feeding on the good.

Augustine sought to give an appraisal of universal history in *The City of God*.⁹ History, said the Bishop of Hippo, provides the stage for an ongoing struggle between the kingdom of God and that of darkness. But the struggle is not between matter and spirit, but rather between opposing spirits active through all human experience.

Throughout the centuries the churchman who perhaps most clearly advocated Christ as the transformer of culture was John Calvin (1509–1564). Following Augustine, he emphasized the goodness of creation and held together its themes of fall and redemption in Christ. More than any other reformer he forced people to think about the social dimensions of the gospel. More than others he stressed the calling of the people of God, regardless of what work they did.

As one can learn from the history of the church, there are many attitudes among Christians to culture. We have seen how one or other of the approaches sketched above has emphasized this or that biblical theme. Those who place Christ and culture in opposition stress the need to distinguish between what Christ commands and what the society of human beings offer. They can appeal to passages that state that the whole world lies in the control of evil and those passages that warn against loving the world.

The advocates of the Christ of culture assume that there is still much that is good in human society. They appeal to passages that promise that the meek will inherit the earth, that the treasures of the kingdoms of the world will be brought into the New Jerusalem ([Rev. 21:26](#)).

The synthesizers, even when they speak of all people of good will and affirm the importance of human reason, place the greater emphasis on the power of grace. They reject the secularists who put the living of the here and now above all else.

The advocates of the paradox have seen that the kingdom of God is directly involved. They sense that at one and the same time we are justified and remain sinners, that although Christ does some works 'with his left hand', he is active in society.

Those who believe in the transformation of culture have built on the abiding gracious power of God for life in the world today. But they have no enviable track record to show where they, in following the teaching of Christ, have extensively transformed culture.

⁹ St Augustine, *The City of God three volumes* (Catholic University of America Press, 1951).

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF CULTURE

Evangelical Christians have recognized the need to shape and refine the personal life to make it conform to the gospel. Honesty, integrity, chastity and family values are all high on their list of priorities. The same cannot be said of their concern to make the social structures of society conform to Christian norms. Here their track record has been poor. Moreover, there has been a long standing and deep difference of opinion both among evangelicals and in the church at large concerning the legitimacy of engaging with contemporary culture.

Mark Noll in a recent book¹⁰ complains that evangelicals have fallen far short in their calling to relate the gospel to culture. Their record constitutes a scandal.

We shall have to proceed in our analysis with humility and modesty. It is not easy to grasp the full teaching of the Scriptures. Time and again people have stressed one theme to the neglect of others. We shall have to make a concerted effort to take in the full sweep of biblical teaching, neglecting no part of it. The pitfalls, as we may learn from the history of the church, are many. How can we both appreciate the value and avoid the pitfalls?

We shall seek to explain culture in terms of the central story line of the Bible, that is, creation, fall, redemption and consummation—all bound up in the Triune God's plan in Jesus Christ.

In doing this we shall tackle three difficult issues: 1) the different usages in the Bible of the term 'world' and the apparently contradictory prescribed attitudes toward it; 2) the role of the principalities and powers, the evil rulers of the present age; and 3) the significance for culture of the biblical idea of the kingdom of God.

It will be apparent that the biblical idea of culture as described above is as broad as life itself. Even as culture should not be limited to privileged people, so it may not be seen to exclude science and learning. Since science actually plays a dominant role in our modern culture it cannot be left out of the purview.

A Starting Point

A passage in Paul's letter to the church in Colosse is very important for a true understanding of Christ and culture:

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross ([1:15-20](#) NIV).

Christ, says Paul, is the Creator, the Sustainer and the Reconciler. In the creation, through the cross and by the resurrection he has the supremacy. Nothing is excluded from his creative, sustaining and reconciling work. Even the principalities and powers are subject to him. What is more amazing, he has reconciled these powers to God!

The Creation

The creation made by God through Christ, the Word of God, as the Genesis story tells, was thoroughly good. There was no inherent evil in nature. A definite order of dependence

¹⁰ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Eerdmans, 1994).

and responsibility in the creation was established, as indicated in the creatures that were formed on each of the successive days. Before finishing his creative work God made the first human parents and, viewing them against the background of all that he had created, pronounced all very good. As he contemplated it all he enjoyed his sabbath.

The masterpiece of God's work was humanity, male and female, made like God, made in God's image, made to be workers. The task of our first parents was to guard and till the garden which was their home. They might carry on where God left off. They would take what God had made and expand its order, as when Adam named the animals, and they would in general seek to develop the creation to its full potential.

God made man a steward, one who would work under God as his representative, placed over the entire creation. All man's work was to be done in obedience to God. The task of humankind in God's world is expressed in [Genesis 1:26-28](#): 'Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' This may be called our continuing life assignment. There is a reflection on this passage in [Psalm 115:14](#): The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man.

The place of man in the creation is well expressed in [Psalm 8:5-8](#):

You have made [humankind] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honour. You have made them ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Culture began with the mandate of humankind's original life assignment. In God's design for the creation and for humankind, he indicated that the mandate, the only law that was given, was also good. It would actually be the test of all future good or evil.

In Paradise there was as yet no culture. But the workers were ready to start. All the material that was needed was at hand. There was no disruption in the creation, no question as to who was in charge and no resistance in nature to man's formative work. There was no curse, only the gracious injunction to begin cultural activity. In the beginning God turned humanity toward the world.

In making its strong affirmation about the goodness of creation, the Bible resolutely sets itself against any thought that evil resides in the creation itself, or that there is an eternal struggle between a good God and an evil universe, or that an eternal conflict rages between good and evil within the world. The creation story also excludes the idea that the material world is eternal.

The goodness of creation is reflected in the word of the apostle Paul when he tells Timothy that all God's gifts are good and are to be received with thanksgiving ([1 Tim. 4:4](#)). It was at this stage unthinkable that people would give too much attention to the world. They could continue the work God had commissioned. At that stage giving full attention to the world was simple obedience.

The Extent of the Fall

To understand the place of culture in the life of people, it is necessary to see it not only in the light of the original creation but also against the backdrop of man's fall into sin.

The fall into sin had a threefold effect: 1) it alienated God from his image bearers and them from their God, as was apparent from the fear of God that developed in Adam and Eve after they sinned and the strong displeasure of God in his creatures; 2) it resulted in a mutual alienation between husband and wife, as was apparent in their effort to shift the blame; and 3) it brought opposition between our first parents and the world that they were told to govern in God's name. From then on the ground would work against them.

We shall limit ourselves at this point to the effects of sin upon man's relationship to the world. The first was a resistance and even a rebellion of the non-human creation against man. The fields would bring forth thorns and thistles and man's work would become a drudgery, a painful, frustrating exercise. As Paul says in his letter to the Romans, the creation groans inwardly, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God ([Rom. 8](#)). Only when the caretaker is redeemed will the creation once again be free.

A second effect of the revolt of humankind against God was a sinful worldliness, that is, a seeking to use and control the world, not as God's stewards to promote their own welfare in obedience to him, but as unfaithful servants who seek to reap the benefits of the world for themselves without regard for God. This was what the builders of the City of Babel had in mind.

The City of Babel

In outlining a biblical view of culture, insufficient attention has been given to the story of Babel in [Genesis 11](#). In this story three features related to culture stand out. The first is the mention of the cities of the line of Cain. He was the first to build a city ([Gen. 4:17](#)). In the line of Cain, Nimrod built Babylon, Erech, Akkad, Calneh, Ninevah, Rehoboth, Calah and Resen ([Gen. 10:10-12](#)). The city, the centre of culture, became the symbol of the combined power of the 'sons of men'. The early city culture culminated in the building of Babel.

The building of Babel was a response which was in direct opposition to the cultural mandate. What was intended to be an assignment to the glory of God became an undertaking to the glory of humankind.

The Babel goal was a unified world culture, one which would reach to heaven, but would have no place for the God of heaven. The narrative states that when God looked down and saw the consequences of the city's completion, namely a world in which humans would be supreme, a truly evil empire, he decided to intervene.

In this story God exposed the myth of humanist world culture. It shows how deeply God is concerned with culture, in this instance with culture of the wrong kind.

One has to keep Babel in mind as one follows the history of redemption narrated in the Scriptures. Until the time of the Incarnation the city was either the bulwark of evil power, or the place where God dwelled, or a mixture of conflicting spirits. Sodom became the symbol of corruption; Zion was the Old Testament city of God; other cities were made into havens of refuge. Abraham chose a tent for a dwelling rather than a city.

A new beginning in the fullness of time was signalled at Pentecost, where Babel's confusion of tongues was undone by the Spirit of Christ. The gospel broke all language barriers. A new international community of people of God was formed in the New Testament church.

But the Spirit did not at that time direct the disciples of Jesus to build a new city of Zion for saints only. Rather, he sent them out into the world to gather together the people of God in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Only at the end, when the history of redemption is complete, will there be a city exclusively for God's people. Then the city of Abraham's dream, whose architect and builder is God, will appear out of heaven. Only the redeemed will enter. Finally culture, in its fullness, in its societal systems and in its personal endeavours, will exist to the glory of God and the welfare and joy of humankind. In the meanwhile we live in the world as it is.

To some the world appears to be, at least in part, divine, taking the place of God. It would appear that [Genesis 1-3](#) was written to counteract this view. Habakkuk speaks of a fisherman who believed that his net was a god and so presented an offering to it when the net was full: 'The wicked foe pulls all of the [fish] up with hooks, he catches them in

his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet, and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food' ([Hab. 1:16](#)). The Babylonian myths attributed divinity to parts of the world; Greek stories of creation, such as Hesiod gives in the *Theogony*, likewise regarded the heavens and the earth and its component parts as divine.

In rejecting the widespread position that the world is in any sense divine, the opening chapters of Genesis make clear that God is the sovereign Creator, and the world is only world.

Sometimes the world is seen as embracing the entirety of existent beings and things. Such a view blots God out of man's mind ([Ps. 14:1](#)). In both instances the world in effect supplants God. This attitude of a self-styled mastery over the world the Bible calls the 'viewpoint of the world' ([1 Jn. 4:5](#)). It is this kind of worldliness that the Bible warns against when it tells us not to love the world for whoever is a friend of the world is an enemy of God ([Ja. 4:4](#)). This is what is at stake in the idea of secularism.

One thing is clear: even in its fallen state humanity still occupied an exalted place. Man who was made a little lower than the angels, has been crowned with glory and honour and God has placed all things under his feet ([Ps. 8](#)).

THE REDEMPTION OF CULTURE

After the fall, God continues to uphold this world. Having made it, not a wasteland but a habitat for humanity ([Isa. 45:18](#)), he preserves the law and order that make it possible for people to live and enjoy a measure of well being and prosperity.

The Faithfulness of God

The faithfulness of God to the world is expressed in a graphic way in the establishment of the covenant with Noah. In the account of the flood God promises, 'Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth' ([Gen. 9:11](#)). When God sees the rainbow in the clouds he will remember ([9:17](#)).¹¹

Jeremiah builds upon God's covenant with the creation when God promised to Israel the new covenant with humankind that would come in the new age of the Messiah. 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant can be broken' ([Jer. 33:20, 21](#)).

Hosea joins God's promise of restoration to apostate Israel with the promise that he will restore the good relation between the world and himself and between the world and his people:

I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. In that day I will respond, declares the Lord. I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'not my loved one'. I will say to those called 'not my people', 'You are my people' and they will say 'You are my God' ([Hos. 2:20-23](#)).

Peter builds upon the faithfulness of God to the creation when he promises a new heaven and a new earth, one that will be purified by fire and in which justice will be the order of the day ([2 Pet. 3:10, 13](#)).

¹¹ The bow was a weapon. If God were to break the covenant he would direct the arrows against himself.

Christ Restores us for Culture

As soon as man sinned, God went back to work, this time the work of redemption. There are glimmerings of this new work of God already in the Genesis story. God forthwith set out to re-establish the kingdom that had been invaded and overrun by the prince of the world. Adam and Eve received words of hope; the devil, the forecast of his destruction.

The work of redemption may rightly be called the restoration of humankind to its rightful place of work, work that culminates in rest. It is instructive to note that [Hebrews 2](#) quotes from [Psalm 8](#) which speaks of the place of humankind in the world. After speaking of the lofty position of man in the creation, that all things have been placed under man's feet, it adds: 'but we do not yet see all things placed under his feet, but we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honour'. Although Joshua did not give rest, Jesus gives rest to his people. Here was the promise that they could again be the imagers of God in culture.

Redemption means not only a change in the worker, but also in the material with which he/she is to work. This, however, is a restoration which will be completed only in the future. The groaning creation, the world that was subjected to vanity because man failed in his stewardship, will one day be restored to its full harmony. Even now it is waiting for the adoption of the sons of God ([Rom. 8](#)). Even in the state of sin and grace God acknowledges that nature is man's workshop and that its restoration to complete perfection will follow the restoration of humanity to the glorious state of God's redeemed people.

Redemption, it should be abundantly clear, is not a freedom from work but a freedom in work. It is also the enjoyment of accomplishment which is essential to rest. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them ([Eph. 2:10](#)). This sense of accomplishment is confirmed by the words of the seer in Revelation: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for their works follow them' ([Rev. 14:13](#)).

In establishing more firmly the relationship between creation and redemption which has been disturbed by the cosmic fall, we note four interrelated biblical ideas: 1) Christ is the second or last Adam; 2) Christ has updated the cultural mandate; 3) Christ has re-established the kingdom of God; 4) Christ has sent his people into society where there is a conflict of kingdoms and of cultures to proclaim redemption.

Christ is the Last (Second) Adam

In his profound insight into redemption's plan, the apostle Paul called Jesus Christ the last Adam ([1 Cor. 15:45](#)). This means that Christ not only took the place of sinners in order to redeem us, but he also took the place of our first parents to restore us as stewards of the creation.

Developing this thought, we note that Christ assumed the office that was given to humankind. Even as all things had been placed under the feet of humankind, so Christ has all things placed under him.

There is however this difference between Christ and Adam, namely that Adam was only the human steward. Christ is both the human steward and the Divine Lord. All authority has been given to him in heaven and on earth. As the second Adam, he is also the new Lawgiver. He makes this clear in what is commonly called the Great Commission, which should not be viewed apart from the cultural mandate. When he tells his disciples that they must teach all that he, the sovereign Lord, has commanded he assumes the role of the Restorer to office and the ruler of all. The closing words of Matthew's gospel should be seen as an updating and contextualizing of the words originally spoken to humankind at the beginning. This commission takes into account the redemption from sin that is

accorded to humans through Jesus Christ. Because Christ fulfilled his work which was to destroy the works of the devil, who turned meaningful work into meaningless drudgery, the disciples may go forth with the assurance that their Redeemer is Lord of all.

CHRIST AND THE KINGDOMS

Not only has there been historical progress in the flow of human events but also in the life and work of Christ the Restorer of culture. This brings us to the teaching of the kingdom of God.

The Bible which shows the way of redemption may also be called the Book of the Kingdom. The basic truth behind the teaching of the kingdom is that God rules over the creation. Jesus began his ministry by urgently calling people to repentance in view of the coming kingdom. Jesus' teaching on the gospel of the kingdom includes his many parables of the kingdom; the gospels tell about miracles which indicated that he reestablished the kingdom. During the last forty days on earth before his ascension Jesus again spoke to his disciples about the kingdom ([Acts 1:3](#)). Luke begins and ends the book of Acts with reference to the kingdom of God.

The Conflict of Kingdoms

We cannot speak of the kingdom of God unless we see it in the context of a great struggle throughout the whole of human history. Likewise, we cannot rightly understand humankind's cultural task except against the background of the cosmic power play that began in Paradise and which has continued to the present. In other words, there is a conflict of kingdoms that has been waged since Satan fell and began to oppose God. That conflict of kingdoms came to include people when Satan won over our first parents from the service of God to his servitude.

Near the end of his earthly ministry Jesus said that the Prince of the world would then and there be driven out and that he, Jesus, would draw all people to him ([Jn. 12:32](#)). Paul began his letter to the Romans by declaring that Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead ([1:4](#)).

It was necessary for Jesus not only to dethrone the Usurper but also to win back the citizens of the kingdom, delivering them from the servitude of the evil one and restoring them to his service. This too is a part of the coming of the kingdom. Paul expressed it succinctly when he wrote to the Colossians that God has rescued (Greek: metastasized) us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins ([1:13](#)). In another passage Paul states that Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the living and the dead ([Rom. 14:9](#)).

The Scope of the Kingdom

There was never a time when the outcome of the conflict of kingdoms was in doubt. The opening chapters of the book of Job make clear that the Usurper can do only what God allows, but what God allows him to do is not insignificant.

The kingdom entails more than forced submission. It also means winning back the love and loyalty of the citizens who had been lured away from God. This happens when God's law is written on the heart and the Spirit makes us ready and able to obey it. To those who are reconciled to God and seek to do his will comes the promise that it is God's good pleasure to give them the kingdom ([Luk. 12:32](#)).

Christ Sent His Disciples into the World

As we noted earlier, there is a certain unity between different cultures. At the same time the directions that culture takes can be and often are diametrically opposed.

We should therefore distinguish between the structures of created reality, within which our cultural activity must be performed, the direction which this activity takes place and the situation in which it is performed.

The *structures* were given with the creation. They include the stewardship relation of humankind to the cosmos, the abiding order in the creation, the world as the common cultural workshop and cultural activity as humankind's service.

These structures hold for each and every age and for each and every place. (We are not thinking of the many different societal systems and institutions which have been built up in the course of history but of the basic framework, the Word that is forever settled in the heavens, to which the human constructs are a response). There is a dynamic creation order that sustains us in being through Jesus Christ ([Col. 1:17](#)).

The functioning of humankind in these structures reveals a difference in *direction*. God structured created reality in such a way that there would be a difference according to whether his Word of command would be followed or disobeyed. Direction indicates how people respond to the common structures of God's command and to the order he has maintained in the world. Here is the great difference among people, between those who serve God and those who do not serve ([Mal. 3:18](#)).

The World of Western Culture

Western culture, which has largely dominated the culture of the world, is a whole way of organizing human life that rests on and validates ideas that can be traced in very large part to either the gospel or the Enlightenment. The central citadel of our culture, says Lesslie Newbigin¹² is the belief in the immense achievements of the scientific method. Behind this faith is the conviction that the final court of appeal lies in the human consciousness. Friedrich Schleiermacher, says Newbigin, expressed it clearly: 'We must declare the description of the human states of mind to be the fundamental dogmatic form, while propositions about the second and third forms, (i.e., about the attributes and the acts of God or the constitution of the world) are permissible only in so far as they can be developed out of propositions of the first form' (Newbigin p. 44). Paganized western culture poses a more formidable mission field to the Christian missionary than does the non-western culture.

One of the most pervasive and influential oppositions to Christianity affecting our situation comes from the Enlightenment. Here we have nothing less than worlds in conflict in modern dress.

Worlds in Conflict

The conflict of kingdoms of which the Bible speaks finds expression in the world, the cultural arena. This conflict is reflected already in the way the Bible speaks about the world, to which we referred earlier. In one passage we are told that God loved the world so much that he sacrificed his Son to save it. In another passage we read that he considers it his enemy. The seeming contradiction should be understood in the light of differing responses to God's revelation, the conflicting forces in the world, and the correspondingly different attitudes of God to these manifestations.

God did not forsake the work of his hands but continues to hold the cosmos in place and works out his plan which will one day mean the full restoration of the creation which,

¹² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Eerdmans, 1996).

as Peter says, will be purified but not annihilated ([2 Pet. 3:10](#)). This is the world that will be renewed and incorporated into the realized kingdom, a new heaven and a new earth in which justice will be the order of the day ([2 Pet. 3:13](#)).

That there is a deep conflict being waged in the world, exerting impact on human culture we learn from the somewhat enigmatic reference to ‘principalities and powers’ of which the apostle Paul speaks. Unless we take due account of these powers we shall not understand human culture today.

Principalities and Powers

Here we draw primarily on the writing of Hendrikus Berkhof.¹³ In [Ephesians 2:2](#) both *aeon* and *cosmos* are used to mean the age of this world which is ruled by sin. Paul speaks elsewhere of the powers of darkness that exercise control in the world ([Col. 1:13](#)). The world in its unity and its totality is the dominion of demonic powers ([Rom. 8:38](#); [1 Cor. 15:24](#); [Col. 2:14](#)). These powers are also called evil spirits in the heavenly places ([Eph. 6:12](#)), and of these Satan is the god of this age ([2 Cor. 4:4](#)). But their sphere of operation is the earth.

The teaching that the world is under the influence of evil powers does not derive from an original dualism between God and the world or between God and the powers. For all that is in heaven and on earth, including these powers, have been created by Christ ([Col. 1:16](#)). The crucified and resurrected Christ is the ground and purpose of the world. Among these powers we should include the state which according to [Romans 13](#) is an ordination of God for our good but which, as [Revelation 13](#) indicates, can become the arch-enemy of the people of God.

Berkhof remarks that the powers were intended to be links connecting God and his creatures. All of them were to be for our good. As it is, we know these powers only in a world in which the powers no longer seek to fulfil their original purpose. Their effect is not to bring us to God but to alienate us from him.

When Paul then speaks of the world under the sway of evil powers, he is indicating the extent to which the fall into sin has brought the creation: the fall involves structures (principalities) as well as people. It has affected the powers that function in such a way that instead of serving God and benefiting people they now separate God from man. Nevertheless, even in their enmity against God and in their tyrannical hold on people, the powers remain creatures of God. They have no original authority but are subjected to God ([Rom. 8:20](#), [Isa. 54:16](#)). They still function as the ‘crossbeams’ of the creation, preserving life from chaos. These powers function both as a cohesive force among people and a divisive power driving a wedge between God and his creatures.

These are the powers that produce the ‘vanity’, the valuelessness, the sense of meaninglessness. To these powers the entire creation has been subjected, all because of the sin of man. At the same time the groaning creation looks for redemption ([Rom. 8:19–23](#)).

Besides teaching that Christ created the powers and that they rose up in opposition to God, Paul teaches that Christ has disarmed the principalities and powers and has made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross ([Col. 2:15](#)). Here for the first time it became apparent that the powers operate, not on their own strength, nor as God’s willing instruments, but as his opponents. It all changed with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke of the prince of the world being cast out when he was lifted up and he would then draw all people to himself ([John 12](#)).

¹³ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Eerdmans, 1962).

Christ's victory does not mean that the powers have been eliminated, nor that they are without influence. They have been disarmed but not destroyed. In principle they have been defeated, but the struggle goes on. The complete victory will come only at the time of the consummation ([1 Cor. 15:24](#)).

The powers can no longer attain their goal and cannot wipe out the remembrance of Christ from the earth. Further, in their opposition against God, as in the events of the crucifixion, they became unwilling functionaries of God to fulfil his purpose of redeeming the world in Christ.

Yet the principalities and powers continue to play an opposing role in the lives of God's people. For, as Paul informed the people in Ephesus, they must put on the whole armour of God in order to withstand the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm ([6:10-12](#)). The effect of this opposition on culture and mission is enormous.

Paul also claims that Christ has reconciled the world to himself, not imputing their sins to them ([2 Cor. 5:19](#)). God has seated Christ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, not only in this present age but also in that which is to come ([Eph. 1:21](#)). He has even reconciled (pacified) the powers which will once again become a part of God's restoration. They will again be the connecting links between God and his creatures.

It is obviously not easy to identify the powers. The Bible uses many names such as powers, angels, authorities, rulers of this age. They are not separable from persons, nor are they to be identified with them. They are not flesh and blood ([Eph. 6](#)) but they find embodiment in people. They may be said to refer to the structural elements of human life such as laws, rulers, authorities, customs, traditions and norms. They were meant to serve but they have all too often become demonic.

OUR CULTURAL TASK

It is in this world, with its conflicts caused by the principalities and powers that we are called to culture and to evangelization. It is of prime importance that we assume an appreciative/critical approach to western culture.

If we now draw together the threads of our presentation we can single out certain aspects of our cultural responsibility: 1) We should not take flight from the world of culture; 2) We should not simply affirm the world of culture; 3) We should engage creatively in culture as co-workers with God.

Neither world flight nor a flight from culture is an option for the Christian. For God has given us the exalted position of being managers of his creation. To flee from culture is to desert that office. Worldliness cannot be eliminated by world flight because it is basically a matter of the heart.

Nor can we simply affirm the world of culture. To affirm the world without qualification means to claim that it is fundamentally good in its present state. That is an oversimplification; it cannot provide a basis for being active in society and participating in the governance of the world.

The simple affirmation approach fails to take into account the devastation humankind through its revolt against God has brought on the creation. It fails to see the conflict of kingdoms and of worlds and of cultures. Which world, which culture should we affirm?

Western culture, which has in many respects become a world culture, offers greater opportunity now to spread the gospel than in any previous age. All or nearly all the means of communication are at our disposal. We would be negligent not to make full use of these modern means of communication.

But the situation is not at all simple because the major opposing forces, namely the Gospel and the Enlightenment, both operate in our culture. Neither open conflict nor uncritical use offers a solution.

Newbigin calls our attention to the radical discontinuity between all human wisdom and Scriptural teaching. Because of the impact of spirits in our culture, we need to assume a very cautious attitude, testing the spirits, using what is good and rejecting the evil.

If, as we have sought to demonstrate, culture manifests both the redemptive force of the gospel and the disruptive power of evil, it is both the field of operation for the gospel and the enveloping shroud that shuts out the gospel light. For the ordinary educated person the real world is not the world of the Bible but a world that can be explained ever more fully without reference to the hypothesis of God (Newbigin p. 67). To the extent that religion is still granted a place in society it is in the private sphere.

Standing within culture, knowing that it is highly resistant to the gospel, we must continue to proclaim the redemptive grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Creative Co-workers with God

The people of God are no longer minors as in the age of the Old Covenant when they lived under tutors and guardians ([Gal. 4](#)). Now Christ has made his disciple-servants into friends ([In. 15:14, 15](#)); and with the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, they have entered upon full maturity ([Gal. 4](#)). They need no longer be directed in all details by prescriptions for this and proscriptions of that. Redeemed by Christ, they can test and approve what is the perfect will of God for their lives ([Rom. 12:2](#)). This is their life's calling, their spiritual service.

Maturity means freedom and power. It is freedom from the bondage in which the people of God were entangled before they were liberated by the gospel. They who were in bondage to the 'elements' of the world, as people come of age now must stand fast in their freedom in Christ and not again let themselves be burdened by a yoke of slavery ([Gal. 5:1](#)). They should use their freedom, not to cover up evil but to live as servants of God ([1 Pet. 2:16](#)).

The freedom in Christ that constitutes their maturity is therefore not only a freedom *from* but also a freedom *for*. They are called from servitude and into the service of God.

Before coming of age in Christ the people in Galatia lived under the influence of the world powers. At that time the powers performed the positive function of preserving the people in life, even though it was a life of servitude. This allowed them to exist but not to reach their life's goal. But when they were saved in Christ they were redeemed from these powers and became children of God, fully and solely dependent on him and obedient to him ([Gal. 4](#)).

The transition is from a state of minority to the liberty of sonship. The son no longer lives at a distance from the father but enters into a relation of intimate confidence. The father can entrust his affairs to the son for the same Spirit dwells in both of them. God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts so that we can call God *Abba*, Father ([Gal. 4:6](#)).

Having reached the age of maturity every Christian is his/her own priest (just as each Christian is also his/her own prophet and king). All God's people must offer their lives as living stones for the house of God ([1 Pet. 2:5](#)). In short, maturity for the Christian does not in any sense mean pulling away from the hand of God. It is rather living in such a way that Christ is formed in us. For us to live is Christ.

Those people who are not led by the Spirit of Christ have also come of age but in a different way; their maturity consists in a life without God. What they regard as maturity is their presumed independence of God and their use of power which they assume they

can exercise on their own. Here again we can trace the beginning of this counter-maturity to the Enlightenment, in particular to the writing of Immanuel Kant.¹⁴

There are thus two kinds of maturity: the one that recognizes that without Christ, in spite of all the liberty we have in him, we can do nothing ([Jn. 15](#)). He is the vine and we are the branches, and the branch can bear fruit only as long as it remains in the vine. The other kind of maturity takes the opposite position, such as our first parents took when they sought to be like God, wanting to be a law to themselves. For them, maturity is autonomy.

Whether or not they are aware of it, whether or not they rejoice in it, as they participate in the discoveries in the creation, the unbelievers, like the worldly powers, contribute to the realization of God's plan. Here as elsewhere, the wrath of people leads to God's glory ([Ps. 2](#); [76:10](#)).

Maturity in Christ lays on us the task to test the spirits that have gone out into the world, whether they are of God ([1 Jn. 4:1](#)). We can do this because Christ has given us an understanding, and by the anointing of his Spirit we all have knowledge.

The Call to Ambivalent Attitudes to Culture

Just as God has a twofold attitude to the world, Christians too should see their relation to the cosmos and human society as ambivalent. On the one hand, the world is God's great and good creation that continues to display the generosity and goodness of God, a creation that lives in the hope that one day it will be restored when the people of God are fully redeemed.

At the same time, in recognition of the principalities and powers that rise up against the Lord and his anointed, the people of God see the world as an evil kingdom that must be opposed. Like their Lord, they should reject the presumed sovereignty of the Prince of this age. The time will come, said Jesus to his followers, that the world would rejoice but they would mourn ([Jn. 16:20](#)). They should seek the things that are above, where Christ is, and not the things of this earth ([Col. 3](#)). Their citizenship is in heaven from which they expect their Lord to return ([Philp. 3:21](#)). Their basic loyalty is to that kingdom which will come in its fullness only when the end of the age has arrived.

Until the end, the people of God will say that they, like their fathers, are aliens and tenants on the earth ([Lev. 25:23](#)). Peter urges God's people as strangers (*paroikos*) in the world to abstain from sinful desires ([1Pet. 2:11](#)). Yet these same persons who look for a saviour from heaven ([Philp. 3:30](#)) should do their utmost to resist the tendency to remove any area of life from the sovereign rule of Jesus Christ. The meek will inherit the earth. We are both strangers and stewards.

In summary, God's people who are not 'of the world' are sent into the world ([Jn. 17:14, 18](#)). Being in the world and yet not of it, they are kept from the evil one through the intercession of Christ ([Jn. 17:12](#)). In the world they will have trouble but they may be of good cheer for Christ has overcome the world ([Jn. 16:33](#)). They should use the things of the world (cosmos) but not be engrossed in them. For the world in its present form is passing away ([1Cor. 7:3](#)).

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¹⁴ Maturity à la Immanuel Kant and maturity in Christ.