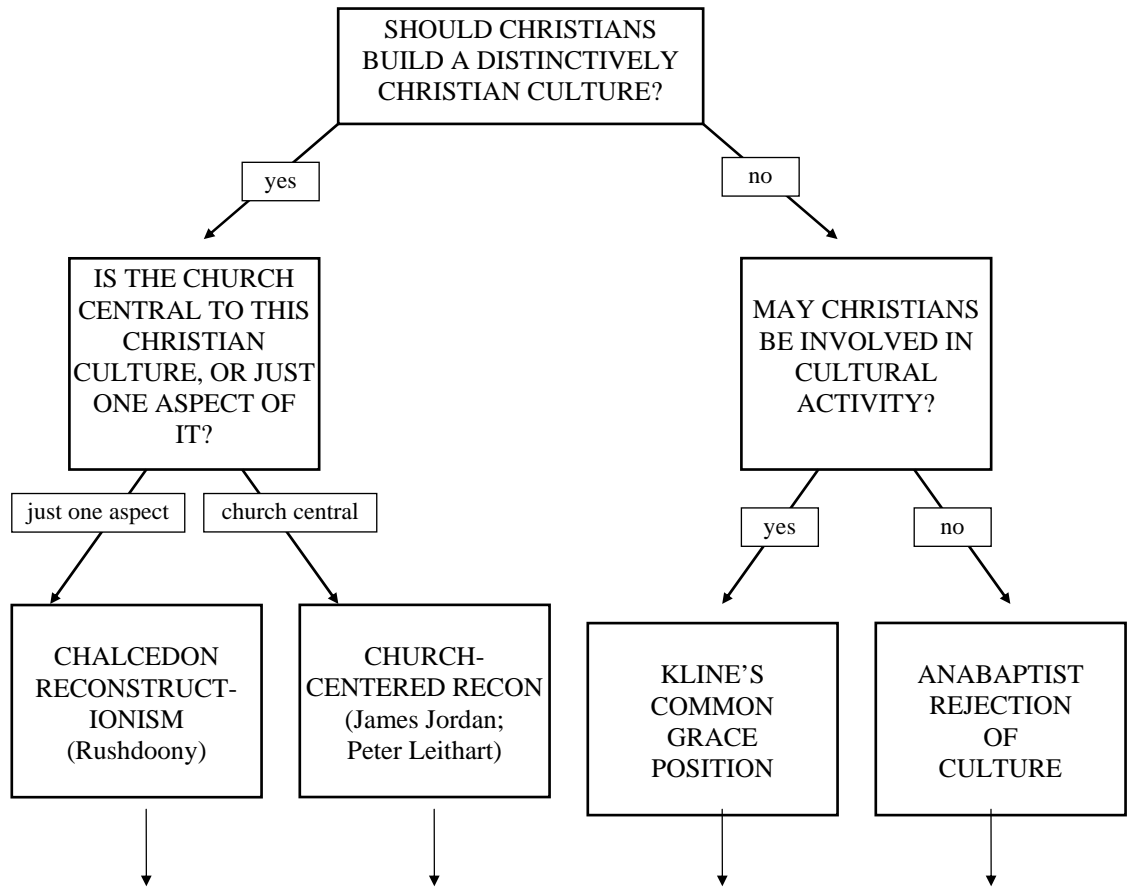


Christ and Culture

Four Views



HOLY	- CULT - CULTURE	CULT ↑ CULTURE	CULT	CULT
UNHOLY	- Pagan CULT - Pagan CULTURE	Pagan CULT ↑ Pagan CULTURE	Pagan CULT	- Pagan CULT - CULTURE in general
COMMON	--	--	CULTURE	--
VALUE PLACED on CULTURE	Culture is HOLY, a Kingdom GOAL	Culture is HOLY, a Kingdom MEANS	Culture is GOOD but NOT HOLY	Culture is EVIL, UNHOLY

Explanation

Cult: the priestly activity of worship. Before the fall, Adam was a priest who served God in the garden-sanctuary. During the patriarchal era, the saints built temporary altars where they worshipped and communed with God. After Sinai, cult was formally institutionalized in the Levitical ordinances of worship that were observed daily in one centralized tabernacle/temple where God placed his name (e.g., the glory-cloud). In the new covenant age, the cultic aspect of life is expressed in the gathering together of the Spirit-filled body of Christ as a kingdom of priests meeting with the entire heavenly assembly (Heb. 12:22-24). The administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper is cultic activity.

Culture: the kingly activity of exercising dominion over creation. Culture is human civilization in its totality: human reproduction, the building of cities, science, engineering, technology, mining the earth, agriculture, civil government, industry, trade, commerce, economy, education, the fine arts, literature, architecture, entertainment, etc. Before the fall, Adam's kingly or cultural work was subordinate to the priestly task and was therefore consecrated as holy unto God, with the eschatological goal of filling the earth as God's theocratic kingdom. After the fall, man (both believer and unbeliever) continues to exercise a degree of dominion over creation, but it has been frustrated by sin and the curse, and thus man's dominion cannot achieve any eschatological fruition. The cultural program has been radically transformed in redemption, under the headship of the second Adam, to be a spiritual reproduction through the effectual calling of the elect, through the outward and ordinary means of grace (including covenant nurture of Christian children), and a physical-spiritual civilization yet to come when the New Jerusalem descends out of heaven from God and the glory of God engulfs the new heavens and new earth. Man's present culture and civilization, including that portion of it to which the elect have contributed, will not survive the purifying fire of judgment (2 Pet. 3:10). The future New Jerusalem civilization is "made without [man's] hands" (Mark 14:48), "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). It is presently in the process of being built by the Spirit through the preaching of the gospel and the means of grace (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20-22; 4:11-16).

Holy: something is holy when it is consecrated or set apart from the common realm unto God. Before the final sacrifice of Christ the act of consecrating something as holy unto God was accomplished externally via sacrifice, so that certain physical objects were literally holy (e.g., all the furnishings and instruments of the tabernacle). Consecration now occurs internally by faith and prayer (1 Tim. 4:5). If something is holy, that is not the same as the absence of sin, since the whole realm of the common contains things that are not inherently sinful and yet not holy either. To be holy it must be part of God's ultimate kingdom program which does not terminate at the end of history but endures on for eternity in the new heavens and new earth. Thus, for example, the elect, including their bodies, are holy since they are sealed unto the day of redemption and glorification (Eph. 1:14; 4:30). But the cultural products created by the elect are not holy, even though they may be useful to men and glorifying to God, since such cultural products are not sealed with the Spirit for eschatological consummation.

Common: something is common when it is not set apart unto God. If something is common, it may be an occasion of sin to some, or it may be something that can be used and enjoyed in faith, as a good gift of the Creator, to the glory of God (Rom. 14:2, 23; 1 Cor. 10:26, 31; 1 Tim. 4:3-5). The realm of the common is a mixture of good and bad, but it is not exclusively bad, and thus it requires discernment. But even the good things are not holy in the sense of being bound for eschatological consummation. Thus, to the extent that we engage in the sphere of common, non-holy human culture, we do so in the realization that it is only a temporal and passing good, and not something in which we invest our ultimate hopes and energies. "But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none ... and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:29-31). "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).