

5-1-1977

# Jesus' Encounter with Culture as Evidenced by the Gospel According to Mark

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## Recommended Citation

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JESUS' ENCOUNTER WITH CULTURE AS EVIDENCED BY  
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

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A Graduate Research Paper  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
Western Evangelical Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Religion

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by

K. T. Joykuty

May, 1977

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The shackles of sin seem to be overpowering mankind at a much higher potential and speed than the challenge of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The dynamic truth of the Gospel which is Jesus Christ Himself, is alarmingly unwelcome in the midst of a highly technologically and materially advanced society. Man is becoming stubbornly impervious to the truth of the Gospel, and is subdued by the potent fetters of a social giant called "Culture." Christians and Christian organizations are no exceptions. The subtle secular culture has surreptitiously found its way into the Christian community. Christian organizations have become highly culture-oriented. The evangelical church has become so closely identified with contemporary culture that it has, in the words of Conservative Baptist Missionary Rufus Jones, "become success-oriented with the same feel for maintaining the status quo as the worldly institutions, even if it means the defense of unjust economic and political programs which rob the poor, and protect the affluent."<sup>1</sup> Richard V. Pierard writes in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, "we are as Carl F. H. Henry pointed out two decades ago, caught up in the evangelical predicament . . . the world-changing message of Jesus Christ has been narrowed in scope to the changing of the individuals."<sup>2</sup>

To say "Christ-Christianity and culture" is to echo a problem in itself. The problem of Christianity in culture was introduced into history with the very inception of Christianity. It has been a problem that has endured along with Christianity. "The problem evidently arose in the days



of Jesus Christ's humanity when He who was a Jew . . . and remained a Jew till His last breath, confronted Jewish culture with a hard challenge."

(Klausner),<sup>3</sup> "Rabbi Klausner defended the Jewish system against Christ in that Christ imperilled the Jewish civilization by abstracting religion and ethics from the rest of the social life."<sup>4</sup> "Judaism is a national life and Jesus came and thrust aside all the requirements of a national life . . . in their stead He set up nothing, but an ethico-religious system bound up with- in His conception of the Godhead."<sup>5</sup> Every culture that has taken root in history has rejected Christ, because they all found in Christ a real threat to their culture.

Richard H. Niebuhr in "Christ and Culture" points out the following facts concerning "cultural defenders against Christianity."

(1) The cultural defenders are annoyed at the Christian contempt for present life, and their confidence in immortality. (2) Jesus Christ encourages men to rely on His Grace, and does not summon them for human achievement. Modern philosophers of culture such as Nikolai and Hartman find in the Christian "God-reliance faith" "an ultimate antinomy to the ethics of culture with its necessary concentration on human effort." (3) The Christian belief in monotheism tends to destroy the unity . . . of any culture. The strength of the Roman culture depended mainly on its tolerance towards various religious and cultural systems found within the Empire. Christianity is said to imperil the religious life of the society by its constant attack on other religious groups. "It deprives social institutions of their cultic, sacred characters; by its refusal to condone the pious superstitions of tolerant polytheism."<sup>6</sup> Christianity in this manner is said to threaten the unity of the society.

In the secret depths of individual conscience the debate about Christ and culture is carried on today, not as a struggle and accommodation of belief

with unbelief, but as the wrestling, and the reconciliation of faith with faith.<sup>7</sup> Paul became aware of the Christ and culture problem when he had to struggle with the Judaizers and Millenizers in his endeavour to translate the gospel into their language and thought pattern. The early Christian church became aware of this problem in its struggle with the Roman Empire, and with the religions and philosophies of the Mediterranean world. The rise of the Papacy and the monastic movement is another chapter in the history of the Christ and culture problem. The problem was also enlivened by Augustinian Platonism, and Thomistic Aristotelianism, the Reformation and the Renaissance, the Revival and the Enlightenment, and liberalism, and the Social Gospel.

H. Richard Niebuhr gives five typical answers to the problem in his "Christ and Culture." These five historical answers will be the content of the next chapter. Reference will be made to John the Apostle, Paul, Tertullian and Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, Ritschl and Tolstoy.

### The Problem

The problem consists of an investigation into the type of relationship Jesus Christ maintained to the Jewish culture.

### Justification of the Problem

The writer assumes that although sufficient justification is already given in the introductory paragraph, the fact that Christ is Lord of human culture, especially for Christians, should make one want to know what Christ's ideal of culture is for His Church.

### Personal Justification

The writer was put to an increasing awareness of Jesus and His personal examples which represented the very essence of His personality. This

came about substantially as a result of his experience with certain groups of ~~the~~ evangelical Christianity. A gulf between preaching and practising what was preached was observed. Fellow-believers were observed as they conducted themselves in front of the writer. Fellow-believers were analyzed but not judged, because the writer thinks of judgment as attributing sin; only God is entitled to do that. Distinction is made here, between analysing the Christian nature and judging it. Judging, as said earlier, is attributing sin, whereas analysing is simply describing the Christian's nature as it is subjected to close association by others, especially people from a different culture.

#### The Purpose of the Investigation

It is the writer's purpose to study the instances of Jesus' confrontations with the Jewish culture of His day, and by studying them the writer may establish or determine to some extent the kind of relationship Christianity can maintain to culture.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

#### Encounter

The term "encounter" will be used to mean "Christ facing up to" specific instances; also to "challenge", and to react.

#### Christ

Christ of the New Testament; the Saviour of the Believers.

#### Culture

The writer wishes to define culture as the total circumstances under which man voluntarily binds himself to society, and society being a community of people on a regional or national level with common goals and ideals.

## LIMITATIONS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The primary source material will be the book of Mark. The main concentration is on the Gospel of Mark. Sources directly addressed to the title under consideration seem to be rather scarce. The theme of the study will be approached from two angles -- negative and positive. Positive study includes those instances where Christ did not raise His voice against, and the negative study includes those instances where Jesus did raise His voice against.

## Chapter 2

### FIVE HISTORICAL ANSWERS TO THE PROBLEM OF CHRIST & CULTURE

The content of this chapter consists of a survey of "Christ and Culture" by H. Richard Niebuhr. In his book he gives five typical answers to the problem of Christ and Culture. Of these five, three are closely related. These three endeavour to equally distinguish and affirm Christ and culture. The first category of answers is characterized by an opposition between Christ and culture. The following facts for example:

- (1) The Jews rejected Jesus Christ
- (2) The Christians rejected the Jewish culture
- (3) Rome outlawed the New Faith. The Christians in the Roman Empire suffered persecution.
- (4) The monastic movement appealed<sup>to</sup> the church to abandon the world.

In the second category there is fundamental agreement between Christ and culture. Christ is the hero of history. His life and teachings are regarded as the greatest human achievement. In Christ the ideals and goals of mankind are brought to a point of culmination. The "Social heritage" is "transmitted and conserved," and Christ is a part of this social heritage thus transmitted and conserved.

The third category of answers emphasize the difference between Christ and culture. However, attempt is made to some extent to hold these differences together in some unity. By trying to hold these differences together a certain attempt to combine the authority of Christ and culture is also made.

The fourth category of answers maintain "the duality and inescapable authority of both Christ and culture"; also they recognize the oppositions between the two. Man, according to this category is subject to two types of morality. "In the polarity and tension of Christ and culture life must be lived precariously and sinfully in the hope of a justification which lies beyond history."<sup>8</sup>

The fifth typical answer is called the Conversionist Solution. "Christ is the converter of man in his culture and society not apart from these, for there is no nature without culture, and no turning of man from self and idols to God save in society."<sup>9</sup> Evidence of this view was first discovered in the writings of St. Augustine. It was John Calvin who made the Conversionist Solution explicit.

## I. CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE

### New Testament Writings

In the Gospel according to Matthew Christ contrasts the new law with the old: "yet it contains very explicit statements about the Christians' obligations to be obedient not only to the Code of Moses, but also to the requirements of the leaders of the Jewish society."<sup>10</sup> The Book of Revelation portrays a radical rejection of this world; here the problem is complicated by the fact of persecution in which the Christians find themselves.

According to Richard Niebuhr, this view is much more evident in the first letter of John. For John, loyalty to Christ means rejection of cultural society.

Love not the world neither the things that are in the world.  
If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.  
For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust  
of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of  
the world.

(1st John 2:15-16)

The Christian loyalty is extended not only to a merely spiritual Christ, but also to the Christ who is visible and tangible in history. This Jesus is the Christ of history as well as the Son of God who is "inseparably united with the unseen father in love and righteousness in the power to achieve and authority to command."<sup>11</sup>

John's clear statements about positive Christian life is followed by an "Emphatic Negative". The cultural society is to be rejected by the Christians. John draws a clear line between brotherhood of the children of God and the world. To John, the world means every influence outside of church. It is the Philosophy of the System. It does not mean the literal world with its nature and all that goes with it. It is the world of human thinking; it is the world of culture in the true sense.

"The world passes away and the lust thereof" (John 2:17); not only because it is concerned with temporal goods, and contains the inner contradictions of hatred and lie, but also because Christ has come to destroy the works of the devil and because faith in Him is the victory which overcomes the world. Hence the loyalty of the believer is directed entirely toward the New Order, the new Society and the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

In the writings of the church fathers of the second century similar attitudes were found. It was Tertullian who radicalised this view. The best read books of this time such as the "Teaching of the Twelve", "The Shepherd of Hermas", the Epistle of Barnabus, and the first Epistle of Clement, all talk about Christianity as a way of life, yet quite separate from culture. Clement of Alexandria considered the Christians as a third race. For Clement Christians were a "peculiar people." Harnack summarised the belief of the early Christians as follows:

- (a) People are older than the world.
- (b) The world is created for our sakes.

- (c) The world is carried on for our sakes.
- (d) Everything in this world is subject to us and must serve us.
- (e) Everything in this world, the beginning, the course and end of all history is revealed to us and lies transparent to our eyes.

We shall take part in the judgment of the world and ourselves enjoy eternal bliss.

### Tertullian

Tertullian, who somewhat radicalised this view, recognized the authority of Christ. Along with the recognition of Christ's authority he built up a negative morality. Tertullian strongly rejected the authority and claims of culture on man. Because he believed that "sin" resided in culture, he came close to thinking, says Niebuhr, that original sin is transmitted through culture and society. He denounced the pagan faith and politics and philosophy and art. "Away," he exclaims, "with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of stories, to Platonic and dialectic composition. We want no curious disputation after possessing Jesus Christ. With our faith we deserve no further belief."<sup>13</sup> However, Tertullian could not entirely liberate himself and the church from reliance on participating in culture even though it was pagan.

### Tolstoy

Tolstoy attacked all aspects of secular and religious life. His attack was directed towards the church as well. He acknowledged the authority of Jesus Christ. But he ignored the authority of the church. Churches in Tolstoy's thinking were self-centered organizations asserting their own infallibility. Concerning churches Tolstoy said "the churches as churches . . . are anti-Christian institutions, utterly hostile in their pride, violence



and self-assertion, immobility and death, to the humility, penitence, weakness, progress and life of Christianity."<sup>14</sup>

Tolstoy considered Jesus Christ as the great law-giver. His commandments, he thought, were in accordance with the true human nature and with the demands of pure reason. His Commandments were a statement of God's "eternal law", that he had abolished the "law of Moses." Tolstoy summarized the new law that Christ gave in five definite injunctions. (p.59)

- (a) Live in peace with all men.
- (b) No sexual relations as an amusement. (One wife to one husband and one husband to one wife.)
- (c) Never take an oath to anyone, anywhere, about anything, "Every oath is extorted for evil purposes."
- (d) The fourth injunction destroys the "stupid and bad social order in which men live, for simply, clearly and practically it says, "Never resist the evil doers by force, don't meet violence with violence . . ."
- (e) The fifth commandment enjoining love of the enemy, Tolstoy considered as the "definite, important and practicable rule . . . not to make war or take part in warfare.

Among the Mennonites this view was very much alive about 25 years ago. They renounced participants in politics and refused to serve in the military. But they always followed their distinctive customs and regulations in economics and education.

Tolstoy found that the state and the Christian faith were incompatible; "for the state is based on the love of power and the exercise of violence, whereas love, humility and forgiveness, and non-resistance of Christian life draw it completely away from political measures and institutions."<sup>15</sup>

Tolstoy had a very peculiar idea about church. He thought that churches were an "invention of the devil." All churches betrayed the law of Christ. He criticized the church and the state as the "institutionalization of violence and fraud."

Tolstoy is said to have renounced private property. He was against owning private property. But he defended a certain amount of responsibility for its administration.

## II. THE CHRIST OF CULTURE

This particular group considers Christ as the Messiah of the Society. The defenders of this view endeavour to maintain community with other believers as well as the culture. No distinction is made between grace and human effort, and between the ethics of salvation and human progress. They interpret culture through Christ and understand Christ through culture. The transcendent realm continues in time and character with the present. Jesus Christ is the great educator of the society; he is the great philosopher and reformer. Christ's present task is to prepare men in the present existence in order that they might be ready for the life to come.

Movements along this line existed in the early days of the Christian church. Paul's conflict with the Judaizers and later references to Nazarenes and Ebionites indicate that there were group movements which were more Jewish than Christian. These so-called Christian groups sought to maintain loyalty to Jesus Christ as well as the cultural traditions of men. Jesus was "the promised Messiah, as well as the Messiah of the Promise" according to this particular group. The extreme defenders of this view interpreted Jesus Christ entirely in terms of culture. No tension was found between belief in Christ and observation of social customs and practice. "The Christ of culture" view was fairly well represented by the gnostics of the Hellenistic world in the

early times of the Christian church. The gnostic views were represented by Basilides and Valentinus, the author of "Pistis Sophia." The gnostics thought of themselves as true believers. But they were looked down upon as heretics. In their thinking the gnostics attempted to formulate a Christian theory of God and man. It was their desire to detach Christianity from the outmoded Jewish notions of God and Christ. They wanted to make Christianity a respectable religion. To achieve this respectability the gnostics had to interpret Christ and His work scientifically and philosophically. As a consequence of the philosophical and scientific interpretation Christianity became a religious and philosophical system. Jesus Christ, the gnostics believed, was an individual and spiritual matter, which had its place in the life of culture as the zenith of human achievement. The gnostics seemed to have alleviated the tension between "the new faith, and the old world."

Abelard of Medieval times represented the "Christ of culture" group fairly well. The content of Abelard's thought is very much different from the gnostic views. Yet Abelard is said to have had the same spirit as the gnostics did. He attempted to state the faith about God and Christ and immortality by reducing it to what conforms best in the current culture. Christ became the great moral teacher for Abelard.

The latest representatives of Christ of Culture School are the "liberals" or "the Culture-Protestants." Hundreds of other variations of this theme (Christ and Culture) were formulated by thinkers of all sorts in the west -- leaders of the society, church theologians and philosophers. It appeared in the rationalistic, romantic and conservative versions. It appeared also among the liberals. The Christ and Culture theme was also studied and reflected by the Lutherans, Calvinists as well as the Roman Catholics.

For John Locke "the reasonableness of Christianity commanded itself to all those who not only used their reason but used it in the reasonable manner characteristic of an English culture that found the middle way between all extremes."<sup>16</sup>

All the advocates of "the Christ of Culture" group thought of Christ as the Great "Enlightener" whose primary concern was to create a peaceful and cooperative society by reforming it through moral training.

### Schleiermacher

For Schleiermacher Jesus Christ was not offensive. He accepted the teaching and ceremonies of the church. Schleiermacher dealt with Christ in terms of religion. Christ belongs to culture because "culture itself without sense and taste for the infinite without a holy music accompanying all its work becomes sterile and corrupt."<sup>17</sup> This Christ who is understood in terms of religion does not call upon men to leave their homes and kindred for His sake. Instead Christ enters into their homes giving to all temporal tasks and ideas and "aura of infinite meaning."

Schleiermacher, according to Karl Barth, was determined to be both a christo-centric theologian and a modern man participating fully in the work of culture, in the development of science, and maintenance of the state, the cultivation of art, the involvement of family life, and the advancement of philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

### Albert Ritschl

Ritschl is thought of as the best modern illustration of the "Christ of Culture type." He stayed close to the New Testament church in his thinking. The modern scholarship with its intense concentration on the study of the Gospels and the early church, is attributed mainly to Albert Ritschl. In Ritschl's edifice of theology Christ and culture were two foundation stones. The content of theology was positive for Ritschl. The only source of this

positive theology is the New Testament. "Church is not the foundation of Christ, but Christ is the founder of the church, and the person of Christ is the key to the Christian view of the world and the standard of Christian self-judgment and moral effort."<sup>19</sup>

In his theology Ritschl emphasized the point of man gaining mastery over nature -- the will of man. Man, he thought was in constant conflict with nature, and he interpreted the human situation on the basis of this particular point. In order to achieve a virtuous society man had to overcome two natures -- his own, and the nature he is surrounded by, the external world of nature -- the physical universe. Christ is both Christ of the praying community as well as the cultural community whose primary task is to achieve a virtuous society by gaining victory over nature.

The concept of the Kingdom of God was a turning point in Albert Ritschl's theology. Through this concept Ritschl completely succeeded in reconciling Christianity to culture.

The Christian idea of the Kingdom of God denotes the association of mankind -- an association both extensively and intensively the most comprehensive possible through the reciprocal moral action of its members -- actions which transcend all merely natural and particular considerations.<sup>20</sup>

Here, the emphasis is on man and not on God. The Kingdom of God is not more than a virtuous society achieved through reciprocal moral actions of men. Followers of Ritschl considered the concept of the Kingdom of God as the "Brotherhood of Men."

Men and Christ, both are in the same predicament. Neither man nor Christ can gain victory over nature according to Ritschl. In this situation Jesus Christ simply assures men of a "super mundane" religion which alone wins over nature.

Everyone belonging to the "Christ of Culture" idea: the philosophers, statesmen, reformers of various kinds, poets, novelists, all consider Jesus

Christ as the Great Enlightener, the great teacher, the one who gives direction and guidance to all men in a particular cultural situation, to the attainment of wisdom, moral perfection and peace.<sup>21</sup>

### III. CHRIST ABOVE CULTURE

Here, the fundamental problem is between God and man and not between man and nature like the liberals think. Christ is considered the Son of God, the Father Almighty who created heaven and earth. Culture, founded on nature is good, and it is ordered by the one to whom Christ is obedient, and with whom He is inseparably united.

Under "Christ Above Culture" three particular groups are considered by H. Richard Niebuhr.

- (a) The Synthesists
- (b) The Dualists
- (c) The Conversionists

#### Synthesists

This particular group emphasizes both Christ and culture. Christ is both God and Man. These two natures must be clearly understood. They are not to be confused or separated from each other. Every culture has two aspects, the divine and human. It is both holy and sinful in this sense. It is a realm of necessity as well as freedom. Also, it is a realm to which both reason and revelation must apply.

The early church as well as the medieval and modern went along with the Synthesists view of Christ and culture. There are statements in the Gospels and the epistles which would more or less suggest the "Christ above Culture" view. (Matt. 5:17-19, 23:2, 22:21, and Romans 13:1-6)

The "Christ above Culture" view was advocated by Clement of Alexandria and Justin Martyr in the second century, especially in their thinking of philosophical wisdom and divine revelation. For Clement Christ became the Supreme Example of Conduct. A Christian must be a good man in accordance with the standards of good culture. Human conduct must be sober, there must be honesty in economic dealings and political authority must be obeyed. There is, however, a stage of existence beyond the respectable life of "the church-goer". Christ invites man to attain this particular stage of existence. He promises them the realization of a perfection even "greater than that of the passionless wise man". It is a life characterized by love for God without desire of reward or fear of punishment. It is a life of spontaneous goodness in which neighbors and enemies are served in response to divine love, life of a freedom being beyond the law. Such a life is attainable in the present existence. Clement's Christ is not against culture. Christ uses the best of culture as instruments of His task of bestowing on man what he cannot achieve by his own effort.

It is rather significant to note that Clement's efforts to combine appreciation of culture with loyalty to Christ were made at a time when the church was still outlawed.

Thomas Aquinas is considered the greatest of all Synthesists. His Christianity achieved full social responsibility for all great institutions. Thomas placed Jesus Christ far above culture. He accepted the gulf between the Western Church and culture. In no way does he attempt to cover it up. He rejected the world, and yet as a monk in the Catholic church he became the guardian of culture. Thomas combined state and church, civic and Christian virtues, natural and divine laws, Christ and culture, with no element of confusion in the area of philosophy and theology. Out of these

various elements Thomas Aquinas built up a great structure of theoretical and practical wisdom which "like a cathedral was solidly planted among the streets and market places, the houses, palaces, and universities that represent human culture"<sup>22</sup>

In his theories of man's end of human virtues, and of law as well as in other parts of his practical philosophy and practical theology he combined into one system of divine demands and promises the requirements cultural reason discerned and those which Christ uttered, the hopes based on the purpose in things as known by the cultivated mind and those grounded on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Culture is given by God; and it is built up in the nature which God created.

The Synthesis of Thomas Aquinas represented a philosophical and theological unification of church and state.

The Anglican bishop, Joseph Butler is also considered one among the Synthesists. He sought to relate science, philosophy and revelation, the outlawed ethics of rational self love, and the ethics of Christian conscience, and of the love of God and the neighbour.

#### IV. CHRIST & CULTURE IN PARADOX

##### The Dualists

Dualism should not be mistaken for Manichaean type of thinking -- good and evil, light and darkness, Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Satan.

The dualists who are considered existential in their thinking find themselves in a peculiar predicament. They are in conflict with God. Their righteousness against the righteousness of God constitutes the content of their conflict. Man is at conflict with God and not with nature.

For the dualists the starting point is the grace of God. God in His Grace gives them repentance by which they reconcile themselves to God in their



conflict, and assured them of salvation from the powers of darkness.

To understand the dualists' position two things must be borne in mind. When the dualist says that culture is corrupt "including man's achievements in science and philosophy he is not passing judgment on other men -- except as in sinfulness to which he is subject -- but testifies rather to the judgment that is being passed on him and on the whole of mankind with which he is inseparably united not only by nature but in culture."<sup>24</sup> The second thing is that man's attitude before God is the fundamental and ever present situation.

The dualists contend that all culture is sinful and is therefore filled with godlessness. The dualist would say he is under law yet not under it, but under grace; he is a sinner and yet he is righteous; he is assured of salvation and yet feels insecure.

The authority of the law of Christ for all men is maintained by the dualists. However, he objects to the attenuation of the gospel precepts by the Christ of Culture group. The law of Christ, the dualist would say, is not a code for super spirituality. It is a code for the average man. No human effort can free him from the sinful predicament he is in. The law of God in the hands of men becomes an evil tool, yet it is a means of grace.

Richard Niebuhr considers Paul the apostle as a dualist. The theme in Paul's letters has to do with the righteousness of God against the righteousness of man. Paul's encounter with the Lord helped revitalize for him all cultural institutions and distinctions, and all the works of men. They were all under the curse of sin, and in all of them men were open to divine ingression of the grace of God.<sup>25</sup> They all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

### Martin Luther

Luther found no major difference between the life in Christ and the

life in culture. They are closely related. For him it was a "how and when" of conduct. God gives us the grace and knowledge to do those things required by culture. God gives man the freedom, as well, to do these things faithfully, and he is activated by a God-given nature which therefore makes him a dynamic being. The content of man's action in culture must be looked for in reason and culture.

The Luther followers however adopted what might be called a parallel view of dualism. They attempted to separate the spiritual life from the temporal. Luther's dualism was one of "interactionism characterized by the gospel of faith in Christ working by the love of the world of culture."

#### Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher-theologian wanted himself to be understood not only as a man of his particular culture but also as a man of religion. For Kierkegaard Christian life meant "an inward relation to the eternal" as well as a wholly non-spectacular external relation to other men and to things.

#### Ernest Troeltsch

Troeltsch wrestled with the absoluteness of the cultural Christianity of the West. He was faced with two kinds of moralities -- the morality of conscience and the social morality. The social morality is directed towards the achievement and preservation of individual and social values. He studied the claims of Christ and identified them with morality or the ethics of conscience. The morality of conscience and the morality of values are closely related; yet they meet only to diverge. Morality of conscience is non-historical and the cultural morality is historical. The cultural morality or the morality of values is primarily concerned with the maintenance of perishable

and temporal things.

### Roger Williams

Roger Williams maintained that "man is a great amphibian who lives in two realms and must avoid using in one the ideas and methods appropriate to the other."

## V. CHRIST THE TRANSFORMER OF CULTURE

### The Conversionists

The central tradition of the Christian church is represented by the conversionist group. It makes clear distinctions between God's work in Christ and man's work in culture. This view seems to be more in line with the teachings of evangelical Christianity. For the conversionist the creative activity of God is a major theme, whereas, for the dualist it is only a prologue. In the thinking of the conversionists the fall of man receives a high degree of understanding. The fall of man, they maintain, is entirely an act of his will, and God had nothing to do with it. As a consequence of the fall, man's nature became warped, twisted and misdirected.

History is viewed by the conversionists as a "dramatic interaction between God and Man. For the radical Christian history is the rise of the Christian culture and for the cultural Christian it is the spirits' encounter with nature. For the Synthesists history is a period of preparation under the law, reason, gospel and the church culminating in an ultimate communion of the soul to the eternal God. For the dualists it is a struggle between faith and unbelief, and finally the conversionist thinks of history as the story of God's mighty deeds and man's response to them.

Evidence of conversionist views is cited by Hoskyns in the fourth

gospel. Richard Niebuhr quotes him as saying, "that the theme of the fourth gospel is the non-historical that makes sense of history, the infinite that makes sense of time, God who makes sense of men and is therefore their saviour."<sup>26</sup>

### St. Augustine

Human nature fundamentally, good is perverted and corrupted. It is transcendent and is under the curse of death. But Christ who is the transformer of culture, redirects, navigates, reinvigorates and regenerates the life of men. Human nature is so perverse that it corrupts the culture in which it exists. And corrupt culture produces corrupt nature. Here Augustine finds close relationship between the fallen nature of man and the corrupt culture. The corrupt culture or "the social sinfulness of man is attributed to the original sin." What sin has inflicted upon man Jesus Christ has removed. This was made possible through His vicarious sacrifice on Calvary's cross. His death on the cross of Calvary demonstrated in essence, the "depth of human sin."

### John Calvin

His views were very much alike in this respect. John Calvin found in the gospels a possible transformation of mankind into the Kingdom of God in which the laws of the Kingdom will be written upon the inward parts.

### John Wesley

John Wesley considered Jesus Christ as the transformer of culture. For him Christ is not someone "who separates a new people from the old by giving them the constitution for a new kind of culture." Wesley is concerned with the root of human action. God promises mankind a life of freedom in

response to His love that forgives men of their sinful actions. This freedom can be attained in the present life. He taught that the power of Jesus Christ cleanses believers from all sin.

### F. D. Maurice

The English theologian, Maurice, placed Christ at the very center of his thinking.

In Him all things were created to live in union with God and each other; He reveals the true nature of life, and the law of the created society, as well as sin and rebellion of its members; he redeems man in and for community with one another in God.<sup>27</sup>

He thought and taught that man could in this present existence turn himself from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness. It is a universal and present divine possibility.

F. D. Maurice understood the Kingdom of God as transformed culture.

### Summary

After examining the typical answers, the author concludes: "our examination of the typical answers Christians have given to their enduring problem is unconcluded and inconclusive."<sup>28</sup> The author in his conclusion widens the scope for further inquiry into the past, which according to him, would "bring into view a host of Christian leaders quite as significant as those mentioned."

For those who hold the first view Christ was all in all. They interpreted Christ and His teaching literally and endeavoured to follow his teachings literally. They were the exclusive Christians or the radicals. They were fanatically stubborn in their views.

The group that held "the Christ of Culture" view, considered Christ as a reformer of the society, an enlightener, and a great teacher. Man is in conflict with nature. Christ is also in conflict with nature. However,

Christ encourages man and promises him the hope of a "super-mundane" religion.

Three particular sub-groups were studied under the third group --

Christ above culture:

- (a) The Synthesists
- (b) The Dualists
- (c) The Conversionists

The Synthesists emphasize both Christ and culture. They emphasize the human as well as the divine nature of God. As far as its origin is concerned, culture is both human and divine. Clement of Alexandria, and Justin Martyr held the Synthesist view.

Thomas Aquinas made this view famous. He built up huge structures of practical and theoretical by combining the secular and the religious or the divine.

The fourth typical answer to the problem of Christ and culture is called "Christ and culture in paradox". Under this was mentioned the Dualist. He is under the law, and yet under grace. There is the righteousness of man and the righteousness of God.

Luther accepted this view. For Luther there existed a close relationship between the life in culture and the life in Christ. Christ gives man the knowledge and freedom to faithfully carry out his obligations to the society or in culture.

For Kierkegaard Christian life had an eternal as well as an "external" aspect to it.

Troeltsch made a distinction between social morality and the morality of the conscience.

The fifth view holds that Christ is the transformer of human culture. Under this view was mentioned the conversionist idea. The conversionist view

as portrayed by R. Niebuhr seems to match the evangelical Christian view of Christ and culture. They make distinctions between God's work in Christ and man's work in culture. To this group man's response to God's work in Christ is important.

## Chapter 3

### CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL PALESTINE OF BEFORE AND DURING JESUS' TIME

The culture of any nation is ultimately related to its political and religious life. So it is important that some background information be studied. This will greatly facilitate the study of the Book of Mark, and Jesus' encounter with the Jewish culture as evidenced by Mark in his gospel.

#### CULTURAL SCENE

"The world of the first century was a welter of conflicting cultures."<sup>29</sup>

There were three dominant cultures in the Roman Empire at this time (the first century).

- (a) Judaism
- (b) Hellenism
- (c) Roman Imperialism

Judaism gave birth to Christianity, and Hellenism provided it with an intellectual atmosphere. Roman Imperialism protected the fields of its growth.

#### Hellenism

The spread of Hellenism is generally attributed to Alexander the Great. His generals became rulers of much of the Mediterranean world. The Greeks retained their philosophical traditions. The power of Hellenism did not really consist in political sovereignty. The Greek ideas were penetratingly profound and the Greek culture was extremely enticing.



In Palestine the Greek language formed its "firm foothold". Under Seleucids the Greek culture and thought pattern became very common in Palestine. The writers of the New Testament were certainly influenced by the Hellenistic ideas. Early members of the church were deeply Greek-culture oriented. The inquisitive Hellenistic mind was reflected in the request "we would see Jesus" (John 12:20, 21) reported by John, and spoken by Greeks who had come to Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of the Passover.

During the dispersion, the Jews were highly influenced by Greek thought. They became partially Hellenistic in their thinking.

#### Roman Culture

The Romans were the pragmatic people of the ancient world. The early church is said to have made policies in the missionary field patterned after the "efficiency and resourcefulness of the Romans."

#### Judaism

The Jews, in spite of exile, always retained their religious and cultural identity.

The Palestine Jews were "fiercely loyal" to the traditions of their fathers. They were different from the Greeks in their thinking. Their thinking was primarily based on the law, and they were largely concerned with the development of Torah's implications.

Christianity is indebted to all the three cultures, Judaism in particular. It was God's stage of preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ. It provided the revelation in the Scriptures, and it interpreted the Old Testament in terms of Jesus the Messiah.

The intertestamental period (about four centuries) brought about a radical change in the religious life of the Jewish people. The infiltrators

of Pagan culture, and the invasion of Gentile kings "swept away the Jewish culture with all its evils". The Jews had either to survive or to become extinct.

The Jews under Babylonian captivity had the choice either to conform to the Babylonian culture or to retain their own religious identity. They chose to continue to worship Jehovah God. They stubbornly adhered to the traditions of their fathers. Instead of the temple they developed the Synagogue. They did not sacrifice while in captivity; the strict observance of the law took the place of sacrifice. The scribe took the place of the priests. The scribe was the scholar, the teacher and the interpreter of the laws.

#### The Samaritans

The Samaritans were the descendants of the Northern Israelites. They worshipped the pagan god as well as Jehovah. They were disliked by the Judeans for reasons of racial origin.

The Samaritans accepted the Gospel of Christ without resistance.

#### The Diaspora (Dispersion)

During the intertestamental period the majority of the Jews lived outside of Palestine, and Palestine was ravaged by a number of wars. In the Roman world of Christ the majority of the Jews belonged to the Dispersion. This was one of the reasons why these Jews of the Diaspora did not want to come back to their home land.

### RELIGIOUS LIFE

During Jesus' time there were three religious groups within the land of Palestine. They were:

- (a) The Pharisees
- (b) The Sadducees
- (c) The Essenes

### The Pharisees

They were the popular party. They were the strictest of the three groups. Their name is derived from the Hebrew term Parash meaning to separate. They separated themselves from the pollution of the people of the land. (Ezra 6:21, 9:1, 10:11)

And the children of Israel which were come again out of captivity and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel . . ."

Ezra 6:21

The Pharisees were strictly exclusive in the social and religious outlook. Their ideology was characterized by a transcendent concept of purity. The Pharisaical thinking developed a huge system of ritual observances based on revelation.

The Pharisees tried to apply these rituals to their society, "God predetermines in every detail Israel's destiny; but the people must contribute to its own sanctification and perfection through precise fulfillment of the law."<sup>30</sup> (Josephus)

The Pharisees descended directly from those who refused to compromise their monotheistic faith with pagan religions.

The feel of the Pharisees for the law appears in the allusions of the New Testament. They were meticulous about paying tithes, even of the small seeds and spices that grew in their gardens (Matt. 23:23). They studied the law assiduously to determine the duties that they owed to God, and often drew unnecessarily fine distinctions in their interpretation. They were excessively conscious of their virtues,

and paraded them before God when they prayed. (Luke 18:11-12) Because their ideals exceeded their performance Jesus called them hypocrites and blind guides. (Matt. 23:13-16). Nevertheless He recognized their loyalty to the law and agreed with the current concept that they 'sit on Moses' seat' as the successors of the Great Law-giver. Jesus took exception to the practice of the Pharisees rather than to their basic teaching.<sup>31</sup>

The extremists among the Pharisees were found to be rigidly adhering to the traditions of men.

#### The Main Tenets

- (a) Firm belief in an invisible God.
- (b) God is involved in Israel's destiny and is concerned for His people.
- (c) God had revealed Himself through the law given to Moses.
- (d) The law contains God's will for man's behaviour.
- (e) Obedience to the law is considered meritorious.
- (f) Disobedience to the law meant excommunication from the Synagogue.
- (g) The Pharisees believed in the existence of angels as God's messengers to men; and they believed in the resurrection of the individual after death.

#### The Sadducees

They were numerically smaller than the Pharisees. But the Sadducees were influential because they were composed chiefly of the upper echelon of the priesthood.

According to Josephus "the high priestly families belonged to the Sadducean party," says Merril Tenney.<sup>32</sup>

The Sadducees acknowledged the authority of the written law and readily rejected the Pharisaical traditions.

### Main Tenets

- (a) Denied supernaturalism.
- (b) Denied the existence of angels and spirits.
- (c) Denied resurrection of the body after death. (Acts 23:8)
- (d) Maintained a materialistic attitude; their worship was formal and not personal.

The involvement of the Sadducees with politics readily introduced the heathen culture into Jerusalem. They yielded themselves to the religious and cultural pressures of Hellenism under Seleucid Kings.

### The Essenes

The Essenes were not part of the normal Jewish community. They were withdrawn and isolated from the normal sphere of Jewish activities. They in their seclusion became ascetics and lived a communal life.

The Essenes could not have had much influence on the Jewish life. This is proven by the absence of any allusion to this group throughout the New Testament. Jesus ministered in the bigger communities, cities and villages of the Jewish society.

### The Religious Administration of the Jews

The procurator from Rome generally conducted the affairs of the Jewish community. However, the Jewish community was largely autonomous.

### The Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin, also known as the High Council, consisted of the High Priest and seventy members. The entire assembly consisted of seventy-one councillors. A plenary session was required in serious cases such as the condemnation of a false prophet. The seventy-one Jewish senators of the New Testament were divided into three groups.

- (a) The high priests - the rulers
- (b) The Elders
- (c) The scribes

During the conspiracy against Jesus these were the two groups that stood beside the High Priest. (Mark 14:1)

After two days was the feast of the passover and of unleavened bread; and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by craft and put Him to death.

Mark 14:1

### The Elders

The elders were members from the aristocratic families. Formerly the High Council consisted only of the elders. "So, Josephus writing around 250 B.C. called it (the Sanhedrin) the Assembly of the Elders."<sup>33</sup>

### The Scribes

The scribes were both theologians and authorities of law. Their expertise in interpreting the law was famous. The scribes devoted their energies to the study of the scriptures and "developing traditions of sacred law, with instruction and jurisdiction. The scribes organized themselves in guilds called the Synagogues."<sup>34</sup>

### The High Priest

The High Priest was the head of the Jewish state. During the first century there five High Priests.

- (a) Ananus (Annas)
- (b) Caiaphas, Annas' son in law
- (c) Jonathan, Annas' son
- (d) Ananias, a powerful financier
- (e) Ananus II, Annas' son

During the time of Jesus the High Priest had three particular duties to perform.

(a) It was the High Priest who represented all the Jews before Jehovah: at the festivals, for instance. The High Priest performed liturgical functions at other occasions as well. Also, the High Priest had to supervise the procedure of the Temple worship.

(b) The High Priest was also the political representative of the people of Israel. He represented them before the Procurator.

(c) The High Priest was the President of the Sanhedrin representing the jurisdiction and political life of Judea.

### The Synagogues

In the religious and national life of the Jewish people, the Synagogues played a very important part.

In his book New Testament Times Merrill Tenney has suggested that the Synagogues took the place of the temple for the Jews in exile. The Greek word means an "assembly" or a place of prayer.

The Jewish Synagogue system perhaps originated first in Ptolemaic Egypt, and was probably influenced by Hellenistic association. Whatever may have been the history concerning the origin of the Jewish Synagogues, they played a very important role in the Jewish life of Jesus' time. The writers of the Gospel talk about Christ entering in the synagogues and teaching. The synagogues of the New Testament as suggested by Tenney, may have been a carry-over tradition of what we read in Ezra 8:17 ". . . that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God." "The first extant literary reference to a synagogue is associated with the next of the Ptolemies (III Macc 7:20). The passage is legendary but the mention of a

synagogue in this context is not accidental. Most of the references to pre-Christian synagogues come from the Ptolemaic Kingdom."<sup>35</sup> (S. Knauss)

In Palestine the Jewish synagogues were built in border cities like Lyda and Caesarea. Synagogues were also built in Jerusalem for pilgrims. Later synagogues were built all over Palestine as Jewish Community Centers.

By Christ's time Galilee had already been completely Judaized and synagogues were meant to be centers of colonial missionary activities, but gradually they became community centers.

#### Gospel References

Matt. 4:23

Mark 1:35, 6:2, 5:22, 13:9

Luke 4:15, 7:5, 8:41, 21:22

John 9:22, 12:42, 16:2, 18:20

The synagogues usually consisted of a partition room, and a gallery for women. The worshippers usually sat in front of the "Nave". The elders and the rulers sat further back in the choir facing the people.

The last section was the "holy place". The ark containing the scrolls of the law and the prophets were kept in this section.

The ruler of the synagogue and an attendant were responsible for worship. Worship was held on every Sabbath and feast day.

#### The Content of Worship

(a) The Jewish Kerygma. It consisted of three biblical passages (Deut. 6:4-9, 11-21 and Numbers 15:37-41)

(b) The attendant would take the scroll from the ark and the appointed reader would read from it. None was allowed to recite any selection by heart. Everyone was to read from it.



(c) On Sabbath the leader of the prayers would read from the scroll. A leader appointed by the ruler of the synagogue usually pronounced the benediction.

During the time of Jesus any text could be chosen to read at the will of the individual. Jesus is said to have sat in the "Moses Seat" and read from Isaiah 61 (Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6) (Luke 4:17-19). The preacher of the synagogue would usually occupy "Moses Seat." Christ read from Isaiah and gave a dissertation not on scribal wisdom, but on Messianic revelation.

### POLITICAL SCENE

#### Galilee - Perea

The only common bond between Perea and Judea was their adherence to orthodox Judaism. Galilee had a comparatively high level of material civilization. The City of Tiberius built by Herod Antipas was declared unclean by the Jews, because it was a burial place. Jesus and the disciples seemed to have avoided Tiberius. Galilee was the home of Jesus. The religion there had already become the law-centered Judaism. The people were easily talked into joining protest movements directed against foreign influence. After the death of Herod Antipas there arose unrest all over Galilee. The people opposed the Romans. Quininius' tax enrollment project in 6 B.C. was met with much opposition. At this time a new political party arose in Galilee known as the Zealots. According to Josephus, "the nationalistic movement led by the Pharisees laid the ground work for the rise of the powerful popular party of the Zealots or the fanatics."<sup>36</sup> They were a party of extreme nationalists. This party played such an important role in Galilee, that to the people round about, "Galilean" sounded roughly equivalent to "anarchist" (Matt. 26:69, Mark 14:70; Luke 13:1)

## JUDEA AND SAMARIA

Post-exilic Judah consisted only of the northern part of the Old Kingdom. Ezra and Nehemiah built up Judah as a land of temples. The Maccabees and the Hasmonians introduced fresh national and political power. A major part of the Kingdom of Israel was made up of Samaria. The Assyrians conquered Samaria in 722 B.C. It had a mixed population with Persian, Macedonian and Greek elements.

Samaria remained in the hands of the Jews until the fall of the Hasmonian Kingdom. In 63 B.C. Pompey added Samaria to the Province of Syria, and Hellenism was restored. Samaria became "a Gentile and a semi-Gentile enclave" between Judea and Galilee. During Jesus' time there existed no friendship between the Samaritans and the Jews. The Jews hated the Samaritans.

Hellenism was restored by Pompey, and promoted by Herod I. Culturally and commercially Samaria was far superior to Judea, and maybe this is why the Roman "Procurator" made Caesarea his official residence.

### Coins in Palestine

Coins were minted locally without any portrait of the ruler. The Jews prohibited any kind of images. Roman and other foreign coins were also in circulation. Even though the Jews prohibited images, there were coins with the portrait of the emperor in circulation. Christ's answer to the Pharisees in Jerusalem about the tribute money proved that there were coins in circulation with the portrait of the Caesar on it.

### Summary

Christianity was born in the midst of three dominant cultures:

- (a) Roman Imperialism
- (b) Hellenism
- (c) Judaism

Each of these three made specific contributions to Christianity. In Judaism Christianity found its roots; the Romans provided political protection that opened the field of its expansion; and Hellenism provided the intellectual atmosphere in which it grew.

The Jews in exile retained their national and religious identity. They had the freedom to continue Jehovah worship in the strange lands in which they were taken captive. New elements in the Jewish society began to rise during the captivity. The Synagogue idea was born in the mind of the Jews during the captivity. It replaced the Jerusalem temple worship. A group of scholars known as "scribes" arose during the time of captivity. The scribes made themselves experts in the interpretation of the laws.

Even though Rome had a high hand in the day-to-day affairs of Palestine, yet the Jews were autonomous. They exercised their autonomy through the Sanhedrin or the High Council. The High Priest presided over the affairs of the Sanhedrin. It was a 71 member senate with the High Priest as the president. In the first century there were five High Priests in Palestine.

The members of the senate consisted of three distinct groups. The elders, the scribes, and the rulers.

On every feast and Sabbath day there was worship in the Jewish synagogue. The synagogues were stages of evangelistic preaching. During His ministry Christ constantly entered the synagogues and taught from the scriptures, or ministered to the physically needy. During Jesus' time the synagogues in Palestine were largely controlled by the Pharisees and the Scribes.

The Pharisees of Jesus' time revered the law. For the Sadducees the written law was the only norm. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection; the Pharisees believed in the resurrection as well as spirits and angels. The Pharisees attempted to transfer to the covenant people the purity revealed by God through scriptures and tradition. They rigourously observed the superficial rituals of the Jewish religious life.

## Chapter 4

### I. CHRIST'S INTERACTION WITH CULTURE

"Jesus Christ was no ethereal being born in a historical vacuum. As a flesh and blood person he lived and died in the midst of a particular culture, and as any society first century Isreal had its accepted traditions and values. A study of the Jewish custom which Jesus met can shed light on New Testament interpretation, and can even enrich a mere relaxed reading of the Scripture.<sup>37</sup>  
(William Coleman)

#### POSITIVE INTERACTION

BAPTISM: The Jewish Baptism was a corporate religious and cultural activity. The idea of Baptism was very much characteristic of the Hebrew religious thought. "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Host." (Isaiah 6:5)

Cheyne in the "Encyclopedia Biblica" says that the Baptism was meant to give the Baptized as representatives of regenerated people the final participation by an outward symbol which attested the reality of their inward change.<sup>38</sup>

Jesus, as a member of the Jewish community, had sufficient ground for participating in the ritual act of Baptism. Christ participated in it without any inference as to His personal consciousness of sin.

His sense of solidarity with God's people is to be measured only by His love or sympathy, and He who would fulfill all righteousness, i.e., every divine ordinance for God's people preparatory to the Coming Kingdom, and so take his due part in furthering it, could not hold aloof from the symbolic rite -- which denoted a dutiful attitude to God's call, and a recognition of the Baptist as the divinely sent forerunner of the Kingdom.<sup>39</sup>

The Jewish people were very much aware of the ritual washing. Leviticus

Chapters 11 - 15 explain in detail, the Jewish ritual cleansing. The Jew washed himself every day, because every day he is defiled. Ritualistic cleansing and purification were part of the daily routine of the Jewish community. Anyone seeking conversion to Judaism had to undergo circumcision, sacrifice and finally Baptism. Baptism was a symbol of cleansing from all the past defilement of life.

#### Interpreting the Significance of Jesus' Baptism

William Barclay mentions four points of interpretation:

- (a) A moment of decision for Christ.
- (b) Baptism meant identification -- an identification for the sake of the people.
- (c) For Jesus, the Baptism signified the moment of approval. It was a seal of the Father's approval of the ministry of the Son.
- (d) It was also a moment of equipment to conquer the world in love and peace.

The Baptism of Jesus, however, was more than a moment of decision, equipment or identification. It was a symbol of significance of the coming substitutionary death of Christ, fulfilling the divine righteousness on behalf of all those who would believe. It was the fact of Christ's work on the cross that God the Father was pleased about. Jesus Christ satisfied the wrath and justice of God by dying on the cross. The voice of God from heaven was more than a word of loving approval. It was a voice in response to a sweet smell saviour of sacrifice.

The Bible says that many -- all the land of Judea, and all of Jerusalem -- were Baptized of John confessing their sins. But Jesus had no sins to confess, and in this sense He needed no Baptism. Therefore, the significance of Christ's

Baptism must be interpreted in terms of the fact that it was a foreshadow of the climax of Jesus' ministry and not the beginning. It was more than an accidental, cultural or religious interaction with a people who were indoctrinated for years in the matter of personal cleanliness and purification.

### Jesus and the Synagogues

It is not the writer's intention to go into any details here concerning the origin and development of the Jewish synagogue system. A rather sketchy study in this respect was already done in Chapter 2 of the current project. Here, the main concentration will, therefore, be on interpretation of the significance of Jesus' association with the synagogues.

For Jesus the synagogue was a place of challenge. Christian character is well brought out or brought to light in strong opposition. Synagogue was a place of opposition because the Pharisees and the scribes who controlled the synagogue did not want the Jewish community to be exposed to anything else besides the law and the ancient traditions of the father. Christ faced the opposition with unusual courage, thereby revealing His unique authority in word and in deed to the utter amazement of His spectators.

"To the Jew first" is the divine order in preaching the Gospel. In Romans 1:16 Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Before His ascension Jesus told the apostles, ". . . and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

The Jewish synagogues were the stronghold of their religious and social life. Therefore, it was important that Jesus' mission be first started at

the very center of Jewish activities. The birth of Christ in the Jewish community clearly indicates God's continued mercy and love toward His chosen people.

By constantly going into the synagogues, it may also have been the purpose of the Lord to attract the Jewish leadership to His message, which would probably have made His task among others easier. It could be interpreted as a mission strategy.

Also, Jesus entered the synagogues constantly, and read from the scriptures. At one occasion he entered the synagogue, sat at the "Moses Seat" and read aloud from Isaiah 61. He found the synagogue a fitting lecture hall to expound on the scriptures.

#### Jesus and the Tax

It cost the Jewish nation an enormous amount of money to have rituals and sacrifices done in the temple. The individuals had to pay for this sacrificial expense out of their own pocket. Ex. 25:38-41. The incense used in the temple was also costing the attenders of the great festivals. For a long time the temple expenses were met by the king. But by Jesus' time it had become a national expense. To meet this national expense taxes were collected from the people.

The Jewish authorities once met Peter and inquired if his master was in the habit of paying the temple tax. The tax collector probably wanted Jesus to refuse so that they could make Him a law-breaker. Christ in a very real sense did not have to pay the temple tax, but He paid it anyway.

Jesus was a great patriot and a good citizen. Christians must follow Christ's example in conducting themselves in the midst of their respective political community. As good citizens Christians should oblige the authority of the superiors in economic and political matters.



### Jesus and the State

(Mark 12:13-17) Herod the great died in 4 B.C. as tributary king over Palestine. At his death the kingdom was divided among Herod Antipas, Herod Philip, and Archelaus. Archelaus was a complete failure. So the Roman authorities intervened and put his kingdom under a procurator and Palestine was required to pay tribute direct to the Emperor. The fanatical Jews raised their voices against the practice of taxation.

The cunning and crafty Pharisees and Herodians worked up a masterpiece trap for Jesus Christ. They asked Jesus if it was lawful to pay tribute. The Herodians wanted Jesus to give a negative or positive answer. If a positive answer was given Christ would lose his stand with the public and a negative answer would make Him a traitor before the Roman authorities.

The wisdom of Jesus heavily stung on the cunningness of the Pharisees and the Herodians. Christ, by pointing to the image of Tiberius, asked them to give Caesar what in any event was his own. By doing so He also warned them that there was a sphere in life which belonged to God as well.

### Jesus' Philosophy of the Ecclesiastical and the Secular

The state and the church may either be said to be explicitly implicit here or implicitly explicit. He seemed to assign two different spheres for church and state. The fact that the state is ordained by God does not mean that the two should interfere in each other's business. E. A. Abbot has a suggestive thought, writes William Barclay,

the coin had Caesar's image upon it and therefore belonged to him. Man has God's image upon Him (Genesis 1:26-27) and therefore belongs to God. The state legitimately deserves the loyalty of the individual citizen in exchange for its services. In the final analysis, however, both belong to God, and therefore, should the claims of state and God conflict, loyalty to God must come first. But it remains true that in all ordinary circumstances a man's Christianity should make him a better citizen than any other man.

In his "The Social Teachings of Jesus", Shailer Mathews says,

Jesus nowhere gives systematic teaching in regard to politics. His attitude towards the state is to be seen, if at all, in his own life, in scattered statements and in general comparisons and implications. Jesus certainly obeyed the local and imperial governments under which He lived. He refused to be made a King. He refused to be involved in any political revolution, in fact He preferred death to agitation. While it is of course in the main true that His attitude of conformity was due to the conditions which governed His work as a religious teacher, it is nonetheless probable that in it there was a recognition of the necessity and the rightful claims of the state . . . the most celebrated text, render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, is rather an avoidance of specific teaching than an enunciation of a specific principle.<sup>41</sup>

### Jesus' Philosophy of Wealth

Jesus did not warn men against possessing wealth. But He warned men against the danger that lies within wealth itself. Wealth can make man selfish. It can turn an individual into a "rich young man" type person.

(Mark 10:17-21)

Wealth stood in the way of this young man's salvation. It had already corrupted his soul. His wealth had made him a self-centered individual; and his selfish individualism stopped him from going to heaven or to eternity.

Jesus' indifference about specific teachings on wealth and His readiness to oblige the economic authorities in matters of tax may also be accounted for by the fact that He intended that no earthly concerns interfere with His primary task, which was the Proclamation of the Kingdom. His primary concern was not to create an ethical society, but to create a regenerate society. His primary concern was the souls of unregenerate men.

Shailer Mathews portrays Jesus as someone close to the general position of socialism in his philosophy of wealth. He may be right. Perhaps, Jesus

thought of the greedy filth wealth can generate in the human heart and how it can destroy man's concern for the things of God.

### Jesus and the Family - Marriage

In the family system Jesus found the expression of man's social character. Marriage is a divine institution. God in creation determined marriage to be "monogamous." Jesus considered marriage to be monogamous. Jesus disapproved of any kind of plural marriage. Jesus emphasized the spiritual as well as the physical side of marriage. "Between man and wife there is to be a union in spirit that springs from a love that is not mere passion, but is volitional and moral."<sup>42</sup>

### Jesus on Divorce

Jesus regarded divorce as impossible, except as a formal recognition of an already broken union. "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder" was his general teaching on the matter of divorce.

The Jewish woman was considered a thing. A man could divorce her at his will. The women did not have the freedom to do so. A woman could not divorce her husband against his will.

Divorce was an acute problem in Jesus' Palestine.

The Pharisees heard the Lord quoting the Mosaic regulations concerning divorce. Jesus made it quite clear that Moses' regulation applied to a specific situation and therefore it was not binding forever. Christ derived his authority from the book of Genesis as well. Marriage was meant to bind a man and woman permanently and indissolubly.

Mark points out a Jesus who forbids any kind of divorce. But Matthew portrays Jesus as permitting divorce on the ground of adultery. (Matt. 19:3-9)

Marriage, during Jesus' time was, simply a means of gratifying one's physical pleasure. Jesus wanted to put an end to the bad principle of lovelessness that characterized the essential content of all marriages.

## II. JESUS' NEGATIVE INTERACTION WITH THE CULTURE OF HIS TIME

A series of attacks were unleashed against the Lord by His opponents. This can be accounted for by the fact that the Jews did not admit or accept the identity of Christ among them, and that they had preconceived ideas about the Messiah. Perhaps, it was those preconceived Messianic ideas that made them stubborn in rejecting Christ's identity in their midst.

The Jews always considered themselves as chosen of God. This is a title they treasured though they constantly failed to live up to it.

The Jews were always at watch for the coming of their promised Messiah. The peak of Jewish history was the line of King David. The Jews were looking forward to one coming out of the Davidic line to rule the nation of Israel in peace and righteousness.

Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.  
(Isaiah 9:7)

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
(Isaiah 11:1)

For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people.

(Jeremiah 22:4)

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise  
unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and  
prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.  
(Jeremiah 23:5)

The Jews were overcome with disappointment as time went on, because they had become captives in Assyria and Babylonia. They were fettered by the Assyrians, Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Persians. They were captives for centuries. So the Jew began thinking differently.

The literature of the intertestamental period was full of dreams and forecasts of the New Jewish Era. They are called "Apocalypse". This body of literature gives evidence of the beliefs of the Jews about the coming Messiah during the time of Jesus. The activities of Christ were against the Jewish dreams of the New Age.

Before the Messiah came there would be a time of terrible tribulation. The present world would be terrified; there would be moral and physical chaos on earth.<sup>43</sup>

And honour shall be turned into shame  
And strength humiliated into contempt  
And probity destroyed  
And beauty shall become ugliness . . .  
And everyone shall rise in those who had not thought ought of themselves  
And passion shall cease him that is peaceful  
. . . And in the end everything shall perish . . .<sup>44</sup>

"There would be quaking of places, tumults of peoples, scheming of nations, confusion of leaders disquietude of princes." (4 Ezra 9:3)<sup>45</sup>

From heaven shall fall fiery swords down to the earth. Lights shall come bright and great flashing into the midst of men; and earth the universal mother shall shake in these days at the land of the Eternal. And the fishes of the sea and the beasts of the earth and the countless tribes of flying things and all the souls of men and every sin shall shudder at the presence of the Eternal and there shall be panic. And the towering mountain peak and the hills of the giants he shall send, and the murky abyss shall be visible to all . . .

and God shall judge all with war and sword, and there shall be  
brimstone from heaven, yea stones and rain and hail incessant  
and grievous, and death shall be upon four-footed beasts . . .  
Yea the land itself shall drink the blood of the perishing, and  
beasts shall eat their fill of flesh.

(The Sibylline Oracles)

That arrogance increases, ambition shoots up, that vine  
yields fruit yet vine is dead. The government turns to heresy.  
There is no instruction. The synagogue is devoted to lewdness.  
Galilee is destroyed, Gabeon laid waste . . . the son depre-  
ciates the father, the daughter rebels against the mother.<sup>46</sup>

(The Mishnah)

Into a chaotic world Elijah would come as herald of the Messiah.

Elijah would head the chaos and prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

Also, Elijah was to correct disputes of all kind.

The Messiah was often considered a great superhuman figure "crashing  
into history to remake the world, and to vindicate God's people in the end."  
The Messiah was also considered a king from the line of David.

After the advent of the Messiah, the nations of the earth would ally  
themselves against him. There would be total destruction of the hostile  
powers. Philo said "the Messiah would take the field and make war, and de-  
stroy great and populous nations. He will make His enemies become extinct."<sup>47</sup>

The revolution of Jerusalem was to follow. This revolution was in-  
tended to purify the existing city. It was sometimes thought of as a coming  
down of the "New Jerusalem" from heaven. "The old house was to be folded up  
and carried away and in the new one all the pillars were new and the ornaments  
larger than those of the first." (Enoch 90:28-29)<sup>48</sup>

The dispersed Jews would gather from all over the world in the city  
of Jerusalem.

Palestine would become the center of the world and the world will be  
subject to it. The nations of earth will be subdued and there will be utter

destruction of the Gentiles.

And He will appear to punish the Gentiles

And He will destroy all the idols

Then, thou, oh Israel, shall be happy.<sup>49</sup>

(Assumption of Moses 10:8)

The New Age of peace and goodness will be ushered in next.

The preceding information furnished by William Barclay from the inter-testamental literature should serve as a general background against which the Jewish opposition of Christ must be studied. Against this background it was only natural that Jesus had to educate his disciples thoroughly in the Messianic idea. In the Messianic idea of the Jew, there was no room for a cross, and there was no place for suffering love.

#### Jesus and the Sabbath

John Calvin in his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels says,

The keeping of the Sabbath was indeed a holy thing, but not such a manner of keeping it as they imagined, so that one could scarcely move a finger without making the conscience tremble. It was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees that made them so exact in trifling matters. They spared themselves in gross superstitions and neglected the important matters of the law. It is the invariable practice of the hypocrites to allow themselves liberty in matters of greatest consequence, and to pay close attention to ceremonial observances. The worship of the Pharisees was "carnal" . . . it was malevolence and envy, still more than superstition that led them to censure the disciples' act of plucking the corn on Sabbath.<sup>50</sup>

The malicious disposition of the Pharisees is seen in Mark 2:23.

The Pharisees attached great significance to matters of no consequence. They were scrupulously superstitious, and from them holiness consisted in the negative observance of things. The incident in Mark shows "the malicious and implacable nature of superstition, and particularly the proud and cruel disposition of hypocrites, when ambition was joined to hatred of the person.

It was not the mere affectation of pretended holiness that made the Pharisees so stern and rigorous; but as they expressly wished to carp at everything Christ said or did, they could not do otherwise than put a wrong meaning in cases where there was nothing to blame as usually happens with prejudiced interpreters."<sup>51</sup>

The occasion gave Christ the chance to reinterpret the meaning of the observances of the Sabbath. He established that human need will have priority above the observance of tenets. He also made use of the occasion to establish Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus in a rather apologetic fashion referred the Pharisees to the example of David. Abimalech, the priest fed David with the holy bread while he was on his flight from the rage of Saul. The necessity of David excused him for breaking the law of the Sabbath. The same argument should be admitted in the case of others as well.

Now, Christ takes for granted that David was free from blame, because the Holy Spirit bestows condemnation on the priest who allowed him to partake of the holy bread. When he says that it was not lawful to eat bread, but for the priests alone we must understand him to refer to the ordinary law.<sup>52</sup>

And they shall eat of those things wherewith the atonement was made, to consecrate and sanctify them; but a stranger shall not eat thereof, because they are holy.

(Exodus 29:33)

If David had violated the law of the Sabbath, Christ's pleading his example would be of no avail, for nothing could make it lawful what had been prohibited for a specific reason.<sup>53</sup>

"Sabbath was made for man and not man for Sabbath." Through this statement the Lord was trying to reinterpret the meaning and significance of



the Sabbath. His statement contained a double interpretation. He not only interpreted the meaning of Sabbath but also the meaning of the needs of man. Jesus put the concerns of man above the observance of Sabbath. This indicates how much value Christ attached to the individual human being. Of course, His concern for mankind was demonstrated at His death on the cross of Calvary.

No rules and regulations can be meaningful unless there is room for interpretation in them in a rather positive and feasible manner. The primary purpose of the law was to free the individual and not to bind him.

### Jesus and the Pharisaical Traditions

In matters of "tradition" the Jewish opposition of Christ reached its climax. The Pharisaism was characterized by rituals, whereas the ideals of Christ were characterized by service. For the Pharisees the scriptures became of no effect. They placed human tradition above the scriptures. This is what Christ mainly raised His voice against. Jesus very well knew the scribes and the Pharisees, and the Lord is not afraid to describe them in accordance with their particular attitudes.

. . . beware of the Scribes which love to go in long clothing and love salutations in the market places. And the chief seats in the synagogues and the uppermost rooms at feasts; which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

(Mark 12:38-40)

Mark in Chapter 7 provides the readers with another climactic moment of Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees and the scribes. The word of God or the tradition of man is the issue here. The indignation of the Lord made Him to face up to His opponents courageously, and He surprised them with an exclamation mark !Hypocrites! Only the Lord could see through the hearts of the scribes and the Pharisees; and only He could have called them hypocrites.

The disciples had shed a lot of Jewish traditions after they joined the wise company of Christ. They did not bother to wash their hands. The Lord knew more about the Pharisees than the disciples who grew up among them. The break from the conventional routine by the disciples cannot be considered as a mere accident. It was a result of the Lord's influence upon their lives during the short time they had been with Him.

The Lord in His answer to the Pharisees cuts right across the scribal and Pharisaical traditions. The Lord condemned their contempt for the scriptures, and their high regard for the traditions of men.

#### Sources of the Traditions

The scribes of the Jewish society were experts in matters of the law. The Pentateuch contained the great moral principles for the Jew. The scribes of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. were not quite content with these moral principles. They had a "passion for definition". The scribes set themselves to the task of "amplifying, expanding and breaking down the moral principles until they issued in thousands and thousands of little rules and regulations governing every possible action and every possible situation in life." Life was no longer to be governed by moral principles. The moral principles became rules and regulations. These rules and regulations made what was known as the "oral law" which later on became the traditions of the elders. (Here, the word should not be confused with the officials of the synagogue. Elders here means legal experts.) Among these legal experts the names of Hillel and Shammai were famous.

In the 3rd century B.C. the Mishna came into being. It was a summary of all the rules and regulations in black and white.

John Calvin in his commentary on Mark lists three kinds of traditions:

- (a) Wicked
- (b) Tradition consisting of profane trifles with the worship of God thereby destroying the purity and holiness of the worship.
- (c) Those which are more plausible and are not chargeable with any remarkable fault are condemned on the ground that they are imagined to be necessary to the worship of God.<sup>54</sup>

Calvin relates the passage in Mark 7 to the last description. This is not to say that the worship of land itself is a wicked superstition. The fault lies in the fact that they did not think that God could be worshipped in any other way. The rigid divine laws demanded that people be free of any spiritual defilement, and be guarding against it very carefully. The law preserved some moderation in washings. But the teachers who came later made some appendage to the word of God. Gradually human traditions became part of the routine worship. Hand washing thus was a tradition handed down by the "legal monsters" and "brain-nuts" of the ancient scribal community.

In our passage it is the ceremonial uncleanness that is at stake. People used to eat with fingers. So hands were washed before and after every meal. There were special ceremonial water pots for hand washing. William Barclay gives a description of hand washing.

The hands were held with finger tips pointing upwards while the hands were still wet. Each hand had to be cleaved with the fist of the other. At this stage the hands were wet with unclean water. So the reverse process, hands pointing downwards would let the water drip down. Water had to be poured over the hand in such a way that it began at the wrists and ran off the finger tips. After this was done the hands were clean.<sup>55</sup>

### Jesus' Accusation

Jesus called the scribes and the Pharisees "hypocrites". The Greek

word originally meant "one who answers." Then it came to possess the meaning of an "actor." Finally the term was used to mean one whose life is a piece of acting without any sincerity behind it at all. In the Jewish religion hand washing and hatred and despise for man went hand in hand. Legalism stressed the external. It had no inner conscience. In the Jewish system the significance of the individual as a creature of God was hidden by its ultra-enthusiasm in observing rules and regulations.

God was holy and holiness consisted in observing His laws.

Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes that they had substituted the commandment of God with the traditions of men. They substituted the commandments of God with clever arguments and debates. They followed the ingenious interpretation of the legal experts.

### Corban

The word Corban means a gift -- a gift that is dedicated to God. This gift, since it was dedicated to God, was set apart from all ordinary purposes. Corban would then be the property of God. Once a gift is declared "Corban" it could not be used in any other sense.

A creditor for example was able to intimidate his debtor by proclaiming the debt "Corban." Barclay calls this practice a "religious blackmail." The needy and the helpless could find no help, because everything was "Corban." Family relationship was breaking down; there was no sense of compassion towards needy parents. "Corban" became a way out of helping those who needed help.

### Jesus in the Temple

(Mark 11:15-17) The temple and the area surrounded by it remained sacred for the Jew. The wide outerspace of the temple area was known as the

court of the Gentiles. This place had become a place of trade and commerce during the time of Christ. The Gentile court was originally purposed for prayer and preparation.

Buying and selling took the place of prayer and preparation.

During feasts pilgrims from all over came to Jerusalem. The pilgrims brought different coins with them. But to pay the temple tax they all had to change their currency into shekels. So these traders were money changers. They exploited the pilgrims by charging them exorbitant rates. Maybe this was why the Lord was angry. William Barclay observes so.

Here is a typical analogy of secularism invading the church. The secular culture of today has already undermined the practice and preaching of the Christian believers. The materialistic world always seizes upon every opportunity to advance itself. The practice of the materialistic world to engage itself in money making businesses during religious occasions is nothing new. Thousands of businesses prop up during Christmas and Easter. The world is in business and the Christians are taken advantage of.

### Conclusion and Summary

Religious acts like going to church or doing good cannot be identified with goodness. The fundamental issue before God is the heart of men. It is naked before the Lord, and He sees it and judges it. The religious activities that go along with disrespect, and hatred for fellow men, is utter hypocrisy. It is a religion that serves God with the lips and not with the heart.

Jesus did not break the Jewish law. He simply violated the false conceptions. G. Campbell Morgan says, "Jesus violated the false conceptions of the Jewish traditions systematically, intentionally and resolutely."<sup>56</sup>

Christ violated the false conception of the Sabbath.

He resolutely set Himself to do the same thing over and over again. He healed people on the Sabbath, violating their traditions, and trampling them under His feet, shocking them with the irreligiousness -- as it seemed to them of His attitude toward Sabbath. He flung Himself persistently against all those traditions that stood between the soul of the people and their God, in habit, word, deed and attitude.<sup>57</sup>

The religiosity (perhaps this has a negative connotation) of a man should not be measured in terms of his observance of man-made creeds and regulations. Christ should become the standard and the content of the Christian worship. No one should be deprived of the church fellowship in the name of creeds or church policies of any kind. Policies are man-made which gradually become part and parcel of man's religious culture.

True religion is not a ritualistic culture. It is Christ. It consists of service for God, and therefore to man as well.

Christ made it clear that the tradition of men missed its own aim. Jesus contended that what really defiled man was neither what he eats nor how he eats. It is what comes out of man that defiles him. The problem as Jesus saw it was within. "External ceremony never reaches the inner life. External observances therefore are not valuable for the inner life."

The words of Jesus stung heavily on the traditions of the Jew. It must have broken the heart of the Lord that the Jewish traditions were hindering people from coming to the knowledge of the truth of God, and from truly worshipping Him. The righteous indignation of the Lord became a sharp sword that cut right through the traditional stupidity of the Jewish religious culture.

Christ hardly conformed Himself to the Jewish culture. The seeming instances of Christ's conformity to culture were only His response to temporal obligations, which otherwise would have interfered with His primary task --

preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. He insisted that the fundamental human problem was internal and not external. So His primary concern was for the inner life of the individual. To this end did he direct his teaching and preaching life.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

#### God and Man

The Christ-culture problem in the ultimate analysis is metaphysical in nature. It is a problem of reconciling two natures -- the sinful nature of man and the holy nature of the Almighty God. All human problems are ultimately a matter of reconciliation to God.

Culture is a reflection of human nature which is sinful. It is either a citadel of sin or an edifice of the energy of the flesh, where the lustful desires of the human beings dwell in.

According to the Bible, God created man. Man was created in God's own image. This image of God in man is characterized by his free will, and his freedom to choose the good -- which is the way of God. When man chooses the bad he is disfiguring the image of God. Man is given freedom only to choose the good. Where this is violated man should expect the divine interference to punish and judge him. Here, the word freedom should not be defined as the capacity of man to bend his will any way he desires. It should be defined as a necessary standard prescribed by God for regulating the behaviour of man. So, when the first human pair disobeyed their Creator they were stepping out of the limits of their freedom. God's standard was violated, and therefore God must respond. To reveal His justice God responds to man in LOVE.

Inherent in the divine nature is the desire to reveal. It is more than a desire. It is an inevitability characterized by the very nature of God. It is His characteristic that He reveal Himself. This revelation is



possible only in creation. So God created the universe and the human being to whom He can reveal Himself. Revelation was the primary purpose in God's creation of man. The secondary purpose was fellowship. If God created man primarily for fellowship this very purpose was defeated in the Garden of Eden.

The activities of man and God in the Garden of Eden are fascinating to study. The Garden of Eden was the backstage for God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The fall of man in the Garden was permitted by God as a stage in His progressive purpose of revelation. It is God's nature to permit things to happen in creation that are normally contrary to His will. When that which is permitted by God happens in creation He intervenes and reveals aspects of His nature. Through revelation several attributes of God are gradually revealed. Disobedience demands that God's justice be revealed. His love demanded that man be redeemed from the condemnation of sin. This was made possible through the revelation of His love. Redemption would never have happened if God were not love. God poured out His love for man in the person of Jesus Christ who poured out his life for the believers.

In the context of the preceding reflections a definition of history is a possibility.

### Revelation and History

History is a temporal stage through which the progressive purpose of God is revealed. Revelation and history then, go side by side, and both are progressive. God, therefore, is the author of history. He uses history to reveal Himself. In His progressive revelation the Cross marks one of the highest points. Christ was born in history. He lived and died in history. God raised Him up from the dead in history, and finally Christ pulled Himself behind the scenes of history that He might appear again in history. This second appearance would perhaps mark the highest point in God's revelation.

### Sin and Evil

The disobedient act of the finite but perfect will of Adam (perfect to the extent God intended it to be) was sin but no evil. Sin which is disobedience to the will of God is no evil unless God declares it to be so. Man is not capable of understanding evil apart from its effect upon himself, and this effect of sin upon man is a result of God's judgment. So sin was no evil until God pronounced His judgment upon it. God cursed man and evil emanated out of this judgment. The prophecy and fulfillment of the origin of evil can be seen in the judgment that God pronounced upon man and the rest of creation. Neither sin nor the act of judgment was evil. It was the effect of the divine judgment that was evil. Man was not separated from God until He pronounced judgment upon him. God had contact with man even after he sinned.

When Adam sinned he did not commit an evil act. His act brought in a shade of evil as God pronounced judgment upon it. So, here, we have man under sin and judgment. His nature becomes evil and corrupt. As time went on this man becomes the man of culture. His cultural ideology is based on his very nature which is sinful. Culture becomes an effort of man to correct himself (to redeem or lift up) in his fallen estate.

### Christ and Culture

Looking at the helpless estate of man and driven by his eternal love God takes a hard look at human history and decided to descent upon it.

God, who severed man from His fellowship through his judgment upon him, now wants to communicate with him through his culture. This He did by appearing in the midst of the cultural man in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was born a Jew, surrounded by an enormous fabric of political and religious culture. Through their culture Jesus spoke to them, through

their culture. Jesus corrected the Jewish culture, but did not conform to it. He was the Judge of the Jewish culture. He rebelled against aspects of it on several occasions. If Christ was part of the Jewish culture He could not have rebelled against it. This thought is in accordance with Christ's own logic that, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." The Jewish culture certainly outlived Christ's rebellion against it. He had to judge the present culture by impressing upon the community the message and content of the Kingdom of God. For His Kingdom of God will not accept human standards. The Kingdom of God has a definite standard which is arrived at only through the substitutionary death of Christ on Calvary.

The Gospel of Mark hardly speaks of any particular instance in which Christ could be understood as conforming to the Jewish culture. He did not come to conform. He came to confound. The message of the Kingdom was confounding. In Christ's message the Jews found no element of hope for their long expectation of a political Messiah.

Christ's conformity was to the written word of God, and He spent most of His public ministry in teaching, preaching and expounding it through words and deeds. People were amazed at His wisdom and extreme depth of His understanding and knowledge. His audience was astonished so much at the profundity of His teaching that they asked themselves "from where hath this man these things. And what wisdom is this which is given unto Him, that even such mighty works are wrought by His hand." (Mark 6:2)

A modified or a rather radical definition of culture by the writer would make it further impossible for Christ to have belonged or conformed to any type of culture at any time in the history of man.

Culture should not be understood as civilization or human progress of any kind. What we see as culture in the realm of human progress and

civilization is only the product of culture. Progress or advancement of any kind in itself is no culture. Culture, therefore, is a state of the human mind in which man seeks to fulfill and cherish his desires and aspirations in the most tangible and visible form. Distinction is made here, between the state of mind as culture, and the fulfilled desires of man as the "product of culture."

To fulfill his desires man needs the constant companionship of the physical universe. So, no culture is possible without the existence of the physical universe or the world of nature. Culture, then, would be a combined effort of the mind of man and the things of nature. The physical universe is the creation of God, and Christ is the creator. In this situation there is a sense in which Christ could be called the fulfiller or the completer of human culture, in that he provided man with the physical universe. To the secular culture of the universe Jesus introduced the culture of God. The divine culture -- the wishes and desires of God -- was fulfilled in the person and works of Jesus Christ. It was God's desire to inject the mind of Christ into man through the person and works of Christ. Jesus crucified the old culture. Today Christ provides a new culture to all those who believe.

It was the original purpose of the writer to determine in some fashion, the relationship between Christianity and culture. This is to be done by looking at Jesus' encounter with the culture of His time as evidenced by the Book of Mark. According to the definitions of culture considered in this project, the Lord could not have belonged to the culture of His time. His interaction with the culture of His day was that of a "Judge." Christ was the judge of the Jewish culture. He is judge, not only of Jewish culture, but of all cultures of the civilized world.

The presence of Christ on earth automatically brought all cultures under judgment. Christ was judging the world by dying on the cross of Calvary. When the Lord offered Himself upon the cross of Calvary, mankind was, for the second time, faced with another choice. Man, once again, came under what might be called the "dilemma of the free will." The first dilemma of the free will made death inevitable. The second dilemma of the free will sees the possibility of eternal life.

Jesus Christ was born in the midst of a culture consumed in corruption, of a culture the content of which consisted mainly in the observance of petty rules and regulations.

Though the Lord was born into this culture He could not have belonged to it. Because His message was different; His Kingdom was different He could not have concerned Himself with the outward form of religion. Christ's mission was man, and the message of the Lord was love. He was concerned with the heart of man, and not with his way of life. "It is the heart that defiles man." It needed regeneration.

Christ judged the Jewish culture. He in the midst of severe opposition pointed out its eccentric superstition, its hypocrisy. It was a culture that replaced the Holy Scriptures with the profane human traditions. The individual was bound by the petty rules and regulations he had to observe in the day to day life. Christ came to set men free -- freedom of the spirit through faith in Him.

The long expected Messiah was in the midst of His people. But they would not recognize Him. They would not accept Him or His teachings. To some He was a "Galilean" -- one who stirred up trouble. To some He was a great teacher -- a miracle worker. John the Baptist pointed out Herod's sin. He was beheaded as a result. Christ pointed out the hypocrisy of the Jews. They

murdered Him on the cross of Calvary.

Christ faces the cultures of today with the same type of challenge and courage He did the Jewish culture. Today the task belongs to Evangelical Christianity. What is needed today is a Christianized culture. The reverse, however, seems to be the truth -- a culturized Christianity. The Christians have failed to keep the secular culture from the door of Christianity.

Thousands of variations in interpreting the scripture have produced thousands of variations of doctrinal Christians. These doctrinal Christians accommodate tenets of secular culture into their doctrinally regulated church life thereby mocking the chastity of the content of Christianity. The interpolation of culture has added "respectability" to Christianity. In the West Christian respectability was achieved through the philosophic and scientific interpretation of the scriptures.

Paul said,

There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God, they are all gone out of the way. They are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one.

(Romans 3:11-12)

If Paul were living today this would have been his commentary upon the Christians of today. People have gone out of the way of Christianity-Christ and have become unprofitable. Culture and the petty doctrines they have invented have replaced the truth of the Christian way. Doctrines of today, and the preaching to preserve it is no different from the preservation of the Jewish traditions which the Pharisees stood for. The doctrines have replaced Jesus Christ at the center of Christianity. As long as Christ is not the center, Christianity cannot be what it should be. It will have no concern for man, no compassion. It will lose sight of the eternal value of the individual soul.

Christians who adhere themselves to the much disputed doctrines, doctrines of convenience, are no less in religiosity than the Pharisees of Christ's time.

Christians make rules and regulations for example. In the name of "principle" they want to observe their rules and regulations to the letter. There is no room for flexibility on the basis of compassion or concern. This situation is no better than the Pharisaical.

Christianity is far, far above all rules and regulations and traditions. Man is its primary concern -- man under all circumstances. This is a principle Christ enunciated over and over again in the Gospels. "Sabbath is made for man and not man for Sabbath." Compassion is the story of Christianity and love is its eternal banner. Christ is its content, and the Holy Scriptures are its guide; and the Holy Spirit its freedom, and salvation is its message. It is time for Christians to wake up. Christianity needs a serious self-examination. Just as "an unexamined life is not worth living, so an unexamined Christianity is not worth living and proclaiming. Jesus Christ must, once again become the content of Christianity, not even His teachings or doctrines. Concentration on His teachings apart from His person has deprived Christianity of its real vitality, the vitality of His living presence. The doctrinal Christianity must become "Christ-Christianity." Doctrinal Christianity can become stereo-typed. Christ-centered Christianity is dynamic and life-changing.

It is this type of Christianity that can withstand the challenges of the secular culture. Christianity has become a religion -- a religion of accommodation and compromise. Christians must speak out against the enemical forces of Christianity. In today's world the relationship between Christ and culture should be the same as Jesus' day. Christ was the judge of the

Jewish culture. In today's world Christianity has the right to judge the culture in which it lives. This is not to be done at the expense of the Gospel. It is by proclaiming the truth of the Gospel that Christians should judge the secular culture. It is simply conveying the message of the judgment of the Lord upon all cultures. God shall judge all cultures in Jesus, according to His Gospel.

In principle what the Christians since the time of Christ have done is no different from what the Pharisees of Jesus' time did. The scribal passion for interpretation of the law and its application to the day-to-day life of the individual reached an eccentric proportion. They became fanatics in their egotistic, fleshly human nature. They revered their rules and regulations. The more the rules were the greater was the individual's fear of religious life. It became a positive religious persecution. The more the rules were the harder it became for people to observe them. The rules made them insecure and fettered by the merciless shackles of blind religion. Man became a worshipper of religion. This religious worship of rules and regulations is no different from the Israelites worship of the golden calf.

The scribal sickness was communicated into the Christian church. There arose among the Christians a passion for interpretation of the scriptures. Thousands of doctrines, as mentioned earlier, came into being. People became defenders of their doctrines. Hundreds of wars were fought in the name of doctrines and the preservation of them.

Through these innumerable interpretations the content and character of Christianity were overlooked. Jesus became a teacher for several groups. For several others He became saviour but with no consequence in the current existence.



Christ's main attack against the religious culture of His day concerning the observance of rules was directed more towards the principle of observance than the precept. His attack was directed against the false conception of these rules.

The most God-oriented religious people on earth were the Jews. They were a chosen people of God. The more God-oriented they were, the more God-conscious they became -- they became conscious of His unique holiness. The Jews wanted to protect His holiness at any expense. They thought that the keeping of the laws and observing more rules and regulations made them a holy people. Jesus proved them wrong. He called them hypocrites. He pointed out the fundamental problem of men. It stemmed from the heart.

It was very significant that the Lord directed His attention to the problem of human heart. The heart is the very core of the individual. It is the heart that required regeneration in order that the individual might obtain salvation. So Christ, while rebuking the Pharisees and scribes for their "hypocrisy" was also referring to man's need for regeneration.

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>7</sup>Niebuhr, p. 10

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<sup>8</sup>Niebuhr, p. 43      <sup>9</sup>Niebuhr, p. 43      <sup>10</sup>Niebuhr, p. 45

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<sup>11</sup>Niebuhr, p. 47      <sup>12</sup>Niebuhr, p. 48

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<sup>13</sup>Niebuhr, p. 54

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<sup>14</sup>Niebuhr, p. 61      <sup>15</sup>Niebuhr, p. 61

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<sup>49</sup>Barclay, p. 197-203

<sup>50</sup>Calvin, p. 46

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<sup>51</sup>Calvin, p. 47

<sup>52</sup>Calvin, p. 48

<sup>53</sup>Calvin, p. 48

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<sup>54</sup>Calvin, p. 247-48

<sup>55</sup>Barclay, p. 167

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<sup>56</sup>Morgan, p. 161

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<sup>57</sup>Morgan, p. 161

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