

# WHAT IS (CHRISTIAN) CULTURAL RENEWAL?

## Part 1

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### **Resources:**

- Two excellent, recent, popular level books: Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Eerdmans, 2002); Paul Marshall, *Heaven is Not My Home: Living in the Now of God's Creation* (Word, 1998)
- Less accessible works but important: Brian Walsh and J.R. Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World-View* (IVP, 1984); Albert M. Wolters *Creation Regained: A Transforming View of the World* (Eerdmans, 1985); David K. Naugle, *World-View: The History of a Concept* (Eerdmans, 2002); James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World-view Catalogue* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (IVP, 1997); Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature* (Oxford, 1974)<sup>1</sup>

### **Outline:**

#### **(Part 1)**

- Why Christians are culturally marginal - *Dualism*
  - Common approaches
  - Reasons for failure
- How Christians can do cultural renewal - *World-viewness*
  - The *concept* of a Christian world-view- what is it?
  - The Biblical bases for a Christian world-view - why do we have it?

#### **(Part 2)**

- The *content* of a Christian world-view - what is *in* it? what does it consist of?
- The *application* of a Christian world-view - to art, business, journalism, entertainment, etc.
- Where do we go from here? - Cultural Leadership development

## **WHY CHRISTIANS ARE CULTURALLY MARGINAL**

**The desire for cultural influence.** Redeemer has spoken of Christian "cultural renewal" for years. But what is it? To many secular people this term sounds sinister--like a Christian political 'takeover' of society. But

- First, it is naive (or disingenuous) not to notice that every group that wants to see the culture move in a certain direction has a) some sort of a 'world-view' which b) they would like to see have more influence in the culture. Let's take an example:
  - It is typical to hear: "Keep your religion private. Don't bring it into your work as an artist, journalist, or manager. We don't want to see a 'Christian perspective' in your work. Be neutral. Don't try to urge your views on others in any way."
  - But that itself is a very western, late-enlightenment view of things. It is the (Kantian) view that we must keep separate the public world of empirically proven 'facts' from the private world of unprovable morality and faith.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This book is out of print and is not written from a Christian perspective, but it reveals a) how inevitable world-views are, and b) how they work.

<sup>2</sup> The philosopher Immanuel Kant has been enormously influential for the modern world. He divided reality into the 'phenomenal' and the 'noumenal.' The 'phenomenal' was the public world of empirical fact. If you could prove something empirically, with 'reason' alone, then it could be known 'for certain'--and you could encourage others to believe it in public. But the 'noumenal' world was the realm of morality and spirituality. In this realm we can't prove things rationally or empirically. Thus we cannot know these things for certain--all beliefs here are held only by faith. These should be kept private and were not for 'public world' pronouncements. Lesslie Newbigin in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* sees this view as the ruling assumption of the modern secular world. In the first 65 pages of his book, he rather thoroughly 'de-constructs' this assumption and shows how untenable it is. Ironically, it cannot pass its own test--it is

- Now, of course, this view of reality may or may not be true, but certainly it is a very specific philosophical ‘world-view.’ Most cultures have *not* believed you could separate convictions about God, human nature, moral truth, etc from public life and work.
- So when you say: “keep your religious faith-views private” you are doing the very thing you forbid. Why should I keep my (Augustinian) view of the world out of *my* work, when you not only won’t keep your (Kantian) world-view out of yours, but you want be to abide by it too?<sup>3</sup>
- Second, Christians who promote ‘cultural renewal’ traditionally have seen the limits of politics for influencing society. In this view, cultural trends cannot really be created through coercive legislation. Law can strengthen and harness movements already going on in the corporate ‘thinking’ of a culture, but it cannot by itself change or reverse it. If you try to reverse a cultural trend *simply* through legislation, it truly *is* ‘imposing your view’ on others. (For example, if laws against sexual harassment had been passed in 1910, it would never have worked!) So when we promote Christian ‘cultural renewal’ we are not at all going in the direction of a ‘takeover.’ While it is good and right for believers in Jesus to enter every profession and work in every field—including government—our ‘cultural renewal’ approach recognizes the severe limits of bringing about cultural change through politics.

**Approaches to cultural influence.** Some ways Christians have sought to influence society:

- Change through individual evangelism. **Theory:** if we win enough individuals to Christ the society changes. ‘You change the world one life at a time.’ But 80% of the population could be Christian and still have almost no cultural influence, if
  - Christians’ do not live or work in cultural centers, and thus have little to do with the culture-forging fields and institutions of academia, publishing, the media, the arts, the entertainment industry, and so on and if
  - Christians’ daily practice in their work and life is ‘sealed off’ from their gospel-beliefs, because they are more influenced by the dominant ‘world-views’ of the central culture-setting institutions of the society than they are by the gospel. (See below for expansion.)
- Change through political action and power. **Theory:** if we have enough Christians in political power the society changes. But
  - this assumes that the Christians who get in to political power have really thought out the implications of gospel-beliefs for areas of public policy. (A big assumption!) and
  - there is plenty of evidence that our culture is not as effected by legislation as it is by the dominant ‘voices’ from art, literature, movies, the media, and from academia.
- Change through great individuals. **Theory:** if God raises up the right leaders then the society changes. ‘History is dominated by “giants”: Aristotle, St. Paul, Luther, Marx, Freud—whose brilliant insights captured whole centuries and changed civilizations. What we need is one or two great theologians or thinkers.’ But
  - Randall Collins (*The Sociology of Philosophies* (Harvard, 2000) shows that cultural change over the centuries happened not primarily through great individuals, nor even through popular movements,
  - but through networks of persons working very intentionally for cultural change Collins attributes all the major civilization/ cultural changes in history to strategic networks of no more than 3,000 people out of all the billions who have ever lived.

### **Reasons for continued Christian cultural ‘marginality.’**

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not provable, and therefore is a world-view adopted by faith. That means: a) it should not, by its own principles, be pressed on society as a ‘public-world fact’ though it certainly is in all sorts of judicial and legislative pronouncements, and b) this shows that you really *can’t* do anything in public without being influenced by your faith-assumptions about the nature of ultimate spiritual reality.

<sup>3</sup> Having said this--many secular people who object to Christians bringing their faith into public discourse do so because Christians do it so boorishly, clumsily, and ungraciously! This usually is because Christians don’t understand their own theology very well--especially concepts like ‘common grace.’

Despite all of these efforts through the above approaches, Christians are increasingly ‘marginal’ and uninfluential in our culture. Why? This comes to a great degree from **‘dualism’**--the lack of a comprehensive Christian world-view. ‘Dualism’ separates the spiritual/sacred off from the rest of life. It originally had roots in Hellenistic thought that viewed the material world as bad and the spiritual world as good. Kantian philosophy has only re-inforced this! Dualism has two effects.

- 1<sup>st</sup>, Christians do not do their work in the places and institutions where culture is forged. (At least, not in significant numbers.)
  - The first result of dualism is the widespread belief that the only way to truly serve God is through direct ministry--teaching, evangelizing, discipling. This has effectively removed Christians from places of cultural influence for generations. It sees the church and its activities as good and untainted, while the secular world is bad and polluting.
  - This feeling is understandable. Many work-places are so filled with excessive competition, superficiality, politics, greed, and cruelty--that it is tempting to ‘chuck’ the secular job and just minister within the context of Christian community.
  - But even if you don’t do that, you may still simply opt to live and spend your lives living in the parts of the country that are a) more affordable, b) far more filled with Christians and so have more traditional and ‘nicer’ local culture--rather than live and work in places like NYC, LA, DC, SF, Boston, etc. But the desire to live in more traditional, less ‘coarse’ environments has effectively removed most Christians from parts of the country that have the most cultural influence.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>, Christians do not in their work integrate their faith in thorough, distinct, creative way.
  - The second result of dualism is that it ‘seals off’ our personal beliefs and faith from the way we actually live and work in the world. Christianity is seen as a means of individual spiritual peace and strength and not as a comprehensive interpretation of reality that effects everything we do.
  - Under its influence Christians to look to their faith for personal salvation, but then the rest of their lives is shaped a) by popular culture, which brings a very different interpretation of the universe to bear on things, and/or b) the world-views of the dominant figures and groups in their particular field of vocation. We simply don’t think out the implications for our work of our faith in and experience of the gospel.

### ***The way forward.***

- I would like Redeemer to be as known for moving people out of “dualism” as for moving people out of “legalism”. The two are related! Legalistic Christianity leads to dualistic Christianity.
  - A legalistic Christianity is much more likely to see the secular world as a ‘polluted’ place to flee from. When you don’t grasp the gospel of grace, you tend toward a Phariseeical obsession with ‘ritual purity’ or ‘cleanness.’ Since we are saved by the purity and rightness of our lives, it encourages people to stay very much within the church where we don’t have to deal with unbelievers.
  - Also, while the Bible does tell you a great deal about how the church should operate--it doesn’t tell you how to run your business in a Christian way. That takes reflection and creativity. The “everything black or white” world of legalists cannot cope with that kind of flexibility and uncertainty. They are extremely concerned to knowing what the exactly right Biblical position is on everything. So legalism tells lay people simply to be sexually pure and honest out in the business world--and give all your money to the ministers and the church where we *really* do the Lord’s work.

*“Martin Luther knew that understanding the acceptance of the sinner before a holy God would necessarily lead to revolutions...Released from inward focus, the believer was free to embrace the world...instead of separating from it with the misunderstanding that he was thereby separating from sinfulness.” (M.Horton, Where in the World is the Church? p.20)*

- Ministers have a vested interest in tacitly promoting dualism. If lay people get the impression that their lives are only significant for Jesus if they are working in the church or heavily financing the work of the church--then they are much more likely to become volunteers and make big donations!
- On the other hand, our culture's highly individualistic world-view (which denies the importance of submitting ourselves to accountability and community) and highly materialistic world-view (which puts great stock in money and status) has definitely limited the quality and quantity of those people seeking to work in full-time church ministry.
- The opposite of 'dualistic' Christianity is 'world-viewish' Christianity. If the main reason for Christian marginality in our culture is a lack of world-viewishness--then what is it and how do we develop it at Redeemer?

## HOW CHRISTIANS CAN DO CULTURAL RENEWAL

### ***The concept of a Christian world-view.***

Where did the concept of 'world-view'<sup>4</sup> come from? What does it mean?

- The Bible does not reveal a God whose salvation only gives individuals inner 'spiritual' peace and a ticket to the next life. The Christian doctrines of creation, kingdom, incarnation, resurrection, and even worship shows us God's interest and concern for all aspects of the world of space and time. Christianity, then, is not simply a set of beliefs to be held in order to save my individual soul. It is also an interpretation of (and a distinct way of understanding) the whole universe.
- The gospel and Christian teachings, then, must bring a distinct perspective on issues like: human nature, right and wrong, justice, beauty, and character. If you believe the universe happened by accident (rather than believing it was created, entered, and redeemed by a personal, Tri-une Creator God) then you will have to have a different view of every one of these fundamental issues. And these issues determine how you live your daily life.
- Christians who break out of the 'dualism' of truncated Christianity often experience a huge relief and sense of liberation. World-viewness means Christians are free (and incited!) to be take delight in the creation for its own sake. They are free (and excited!) to think of vocational alternative *outside* the church as dynamic ways to serve God. They are free and moved to take a deep interest in culture. Study and reflection on *any* part or aspect of the world--not just theology--is seen as related to Christ. All of these benefits flow from world-viewness-- thinking of Christianity not simply as an individual experience but also as a distinct interpretation of every thing in the world, everything in life.

***Biblical Bases for World-Viewness.*** The word 'world-view' doesn't appear in the Bible, so what is the basis for using it? Like the word 'Trinity', which also doesn't appear in the Bible, the term summarizes a broad ranger of Biblical teaching. What follow are the Biblical reasons for the claim that Christianity is a world-view--and what that means for the way we live.

### ***Creation (Incarnation)***

- First, the doctrine of creation tells that that the material world is *important*. Genesis 1 and 2 show us that God creates it deliberately. Psalm 145 tells us he has a delight in and love for *everything* he has made (vv.9, 16-17) and that *all* things he has made in creation, even inanimate objects, by simply being what he made them, are praising and glorifying him (Psalm 19:1-6; 148; 150.) This view stands against the traditional eastern (monistic) view that the material universe is unreal. This view stands against the other ancient myths of creation as either a) eternally existent, or b) an accidental result of a battle, the death of a monster, etc. The material world is a real thing, deliberately designed by God.

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<sup>4</sup> The following paragraphs are indebted to Mars Hill Audio Tape volume 60, "World-view," edited by Ken Myers (www.marshillaudio.org)

- Second, the doctrine of creation tells us that the material world is *good*. Genesis 1 and 2 show God continually saying that everything he made is very good. There was not a thing wrong with it. Biblically considered, Shakespeare was wrong when he wrote, “*To err is human*”. That may be so now, but it was not so originally. God made all things good and whole. Matter and human nature are not flawed and weak by design.
- The ultimate proof of God’s commitment to the absolute goodness of concrete material reality is the doctrine of the incarnation. There is no other religion with a view of material world as that real or that good. The fact that God became physical, flesh, affirms the goodness of creation and matter, so in one sense this doctrine only confirms what the doctrine of creation already revealed. But the incarnation also has ramifications all its own. It means that God is working in the ordinary, if we only have eyes to see it. It means that, if Jesus became incarnate to live among the ordinary, we should not despise ‘ordinary life.’
- *Implications:* There is a fundamental principle here. The world is a good in itself. The arc of an eagle’s flight, the sound of the ocean’s waves on the shore, growth of a tree, and a piece of great music-- all of these things are beautiful and good *in themselves*<sup>5</sup> because God does not simply spend his time saving souls by his Holy Spirit, but also renewing the material world by his Holy Spirit (See Psalm 104, especially v.30.) A major part of God’s work is his delight in continuing to care for, sustain, cultivate, and grow the creation (Psalm 65:9-13; 145:21; 147:15-20.) If *he* does both of these things, how can we say that one of these things is ‘the Lord’s work’ and one is not? The view that, for example, an artist or banker is simply doing ‘secular work’, not really ‘the Lord’s work’--does not fit with this view of creation. For God is also an artist and an investor in the material world.

*“Who formed the world of nature (which provides the raw material for physical sciences)? Who formed the universe of human interactions (which is the raw material of politics, economics, sociology, and history)? Who is the source of all harmony, form, and narrative pattern (which is the raw material for art?) Who is the source of the human mind (which is the raw material for philosophy and psychology?) And who, moment by moment, maintains the connection between our minds and the world beyond our minds? God did, God does.”* (Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.)

### **Kingdom (Resurrection)**

- First, the doctrine of the kingdom tells us that human sin--rebellion against the rightful kingship of our Creator-God, has led to breakdown and disintegration in absolutely every area of life. The world was created as a place of complete flourishing and harmony (*shalom*) under God’s rule. Sin, resistance to God’s authority, led to the ‘unraveling’ of creation.
  - Relationships with God, other races and classes, individuals, and physical nature itself disintegrate where God is not acknowledged as King.
  - The alternative to Christ’s kingdom in your psyche, your vocation, or your culture is to be controlled by an idol. Some other ‘god’, ‘king’, hope, or ‘bottom line.’ Every field of human endeavor puts forth something other than God--financial profit, individual rights or happiness, human reason, group power--as the ultimate value and goal. This always leads to disintegration and breakdown--spiritually, psychologically, socially, physically, culturally. (Thus when we do our work with kingdom values, it will be distinctive from the work carried on under the power of ideologies.)
- Second, the doctrine of the kingdom tells us about the re-entry of God’s ruling power through Christ’s death and rising. If every part of the world is broken by sin, then the goal of Christ’s salvation--the restoration of God’s ruling power--must be the renewing of every part of creation. Hearts, relationships, communities, and practices are healed and ‘re-

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<sup>5</sup> Some might think we are ‘mixing apples and oranges’ to put music in with an eagle’s flight. An eagle is ‘part of nature’ but music is ‘man-made.’ But an eagle is skillfully using the physics (aerodynamics) of the material world, and a musician is doing the same thing with sound.

woven' with one another to the degree that they come under the authority of Jesus, through his Word and Spirit. (Ps 72; Col 1:16-20 and Ephesians 1:9-10.) Redemption is much more than simply saving souls. It will ultimately entail the complete healing of creation, including social justice, the reunification of all humanity, and the end of physical decay and death (Is 11:1-10.) But even now it means bringing the health and coherence of Christ's lordship back into every aspect of human life. The Christian church is to be a new society in which the world can see exhibited what family life, business practices, race relations, and all of life can be under the kingship of Jesus Christ.

- The ultimate proof of God's commitment to redeeming the entire world--not just spiritually save us out of it--is the fact of the resurrection. This shows that God not only made both the spiritual and the material but he will redeem both the physical and the material.
- *Implications*: Things in the world are only properly understood when viewed through an understanding of the kingdom. We only understand a thing if we realize: 1) it was created originally good in itself, 2) it is fallen and marred by sin, 3) it can eventually be redeemed under Christ the healing king. This simple statement is much more radical than you may think!

*"St. Augustine wrote that...this physical world is good because it proceeds from a divine source. The artist...penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality. This in no way hinders his perception of evil but rather sharpens it, for only when the natural world is seen as good does evil become intelligible as a destructive force....For the last few centuries we have lived in a world which has been increasingly convinced that the reaches of reality end very close to the surface, that there is no divine source...."*<sup>6</sup>

*Sin...attaches itself to [every good] created thing like a parasite. Hatred, for example, had no place within God's good creation. Nevertheless, hatred cannot exist without the creational substratum of human emotion and healthy assertiveness. Hatred participates simultaneously in the goodness of creation...and in the demonic distortion [falleness]...*

*The great danger is to always single out some aspect of God's good creation and identify it, rather than the alien intrusion of sin, as the villain. Such an error conceives as the good-evil dichotomy as intrinsic to the creation itself...something in the good creation is identified as [the source] of evil. In the course of history, this "something" has been variously identified as... the body and its passions (Plato and much of Greek philosophy), as culture in distinction from nature (Rousseau and Romanticism), as authority figures in society and family (psychodynamic psychology), as economic forces (Marx), as technology and management (Heidegger and existentialists....As far as I can tell, the Bible is unique in its rejection of all attempts to either demonize some part of creation as the root of our problems or the idolize some part of creation as the solution. All other religions, philosophies, and world-views in one way or another fall into the trap of [idolatry]--of failing to keep creation and fall distinct. And this trap is an ever-present danger for Christians [as well]..."<sup>7</sup>*

- Compared to Christianity, other views of reality (and thus cultures) identify some created thing as being 'the problem' with the world and some created thing as 'our hope, our trust' to get us through. But Christianity says that the answer to the first question is 'sin', and the answer to the second question is 'Jesus only'. Without the gospel, you have to make *something* besides the Lord into a savior, and thus something else into the demonic 'other' or 'enemy'.
- So we see that:

<sup>6</sup> Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (Noonday, 1969) p. 157-158.

<sup>7</sup> Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*, p.50.

- That *every* cultural activity has both creationally good elements in it. Yet
- Every cultural artifact that is not produced from a very solid Christian perspective (and often even those that are) will lay out *some* kind of world-view that makes an idol and a demonic 'other' out of some finite aspect of creation.
- Christians should thus be the most 'nuanced' of cultural observers, not 'trashing' many things, not dividing the world into 'good, OK, holy, safe' and the 'bad, off-limits, prohibited'.
- Note: Notice that because non-Christian world-views demonize some part of the good created order (or idolize some part of the fallen created order) they also will tend to create a 'good guys' and 'bad guys' way to divide up the human race.
  - Thus Marxism assumes all our problems come from the powerful, greedy capitalists who won't share the means of economic production with the people. The solution is a totalitarian state. Freud on the other hand believed all our problems comes from repression of deep desires for pleasure. The solution is the unrepressed freedom of the individual--thus the villains become repressive moral 'gate-keepers' in society like the church. Plenty of people have a "traditional values" world-view (which is the very opposite of Freud's.) They think the problem with the world lies in bad, undisciplined, selfish people who won't submit to traditional moral values and family responsibilities. The solution is a moral 'revival' in society of religion and morality and virtue.
  - Only the Christian world-view locates the problem with the world *not* in any one part of the world or in any one group of people but in Sin itself. And it locates the solution in God's grace and the coming of the kingdom. Sin infects us all, and so we cannot simply divide the world into the 'good guys' and the bad. Without an understanding of the nature of the kingdom, we will be either naively utopian or cynical and disillusioned. We will be demonizing something that isn't all that bad and we will be idolizing something that isn't all that good.
- Summary: Every area is 'broken' by sin, by making something besides the Lord our functional savior and master. In an individual life, it means psychological disintegration happens by making a 'god' of human approval. In corporate life, it means that cultural and community disintegration happens by making a 'god' of profit, or individual freedom. That means that we can bring redemption into even the 'secular' aspects of life by thinking out and practicing work and cultural production that is a 'sign of the kingdom.'
- An example:
  - What is the 'bottom line'--the ultimate value--in a business? In the dominant ideology today the ultimate, non-negotiable, controlling value is "profit" and therefore "economic efficiency." Ultimately, everything the company does it does to maximize economic efficiency and profits for the owners. The business may a) contribute to local community charities, b) promote ethical behavior among its workers and managers, and c) try to be sensitive to worker needs, concerns, and morale--but it does all of these things as a means to the end of making more money. They are only done in order to promote long-term profits. Thus whenever there is a *real* choice to be made between profit and a) community/neighborhood interests, b) ethical principles, or c) worker needs, it is "profit" that always wins. That is the 'bottom line,' and thus the ruling factor--the idol.
  - What would happen to a company that was operated on the principle of being a 'sign of the kingdom'?
    - One of the signs of the kingdom is helping the company's broader community and neighborhood flourish. Another is promoting personal character such as integrity and love. Another is promoting the whole welfare of its workers so they flourish not only professionally but also personally. (All of these stem from kingdom of God as "*shalom*"--comprehensive flourishing.)

- What if these things were ends and not means? And what if then making a profit was the means not the end? (In other words, we *must* make a profit in order to promote the welfare of our community and our workers. If we don't make a profit how can we create jobs, produce products that really meet human needs and make world better, or help workers grow?) Yet what if the profit was only the means to the end, not the end?
  - From the outside there might not be immediately noticeable differences between a company run according to these kingdom values and some other very well run company.
  - But inside the company the differences would be quite noticeable. Good stewardship means efficiency, but there would be a noticeable lack of adversarial relationships, a lack of any sense of being exploited, an extremely strong emphasis on product quality, and an ethical environment that goes 'all the way down', even when high ethics mean a loss of money.
- To be a "Christian in business" then means much more than just being honest or not sleeping with your co-workers. It even means more than personal witnessing and holding a Bible study at the office. Rather, it means thinking out the implications of the gospel and God's kingship for your whole work-life.

**Common grace.** What is it that Christians can assume they have in common with people who apparently have not experienced saving grace?

*Is there a non-saving grace that is at work in the broader reaches of human cultural interaction, a grace that expedites a desire on God's part to bestow certain blessings on all human beings, elect and non-elect alike--blessings that provide the basis for Christians to co-operate with, and learn from, non-Christians?<sup>8</sup>*

- Positive Biblical data. The answer is "yes."
  - Psalm 19 differentiates between 1) a kind of "wordless speech" about God which comes through nature and tells us about God's glory, and 2) a propositional revelation which comes through the Bible.
  - Romans 1 and 2 confirms that there is a primordial knowledge of God that all human beings have. In Rom 2:14,15 he says that God's law is written on the heart of every human being. They have innate senses of honest, justice, love, the 'golden rule' and so on.<sup>9</sup>
  - James 1:17 says that "*every good and perfect gift comes down from above...from the father of lights.*" This means that every act of goodness, wisdom, justice, and beauty--no matter who does it--is being enabled by God. It is a 'gift', and therefore some form of grace. For example, Exodus 31:1ff. we read how Bezalel was "*filled with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts--to make artistic designs....*" Here we see artistic skill is something that comes from God. (As per James 1:17--it would have to!) In Isaiah 45:1 we read of Cyrus, a pagan king that God *anoints* with his Spirit and chooses for world leadership. On the other hand, in Genesis 20:6ff we read how God prevents another pagan king from falling into sin. This is an indication of how God's Spirit does not just function as a non-saving *ennobling* force in the world, but also as a non-saving *restraining* force in the world.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All that's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Eerdmans, 2001) p.14.

<sup>9</sup> Frances Hutcheson, 18<sup>th</sup> century moral philosopher used a famous illustration to demonstrate this. He asks us to imagine that we hear of a man who discovers buried treasure in his backyard--worth millions. But then you hear that he gives it all away to the poor. Even if you would never do so yourself, and even if you swagger publicly that such an act is stupid, you cannot help but admire what was done. There is an indelible sense of the moral beauty of the action.

- Balancing Biblical data: The answer is “yes---but...”
- In Romans 1:18, Paul says that we “hold the truth down in unrighteousness.” This statement has two edges to it:
  - John Calvin strikes the balance of the Reformed tradition when first he wrote about secular (he was thinking mainly of ancient pagan) authors:

*Let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it where it shall appear unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God....Those men whom Scripture (1 Cor 2:14) calls 'natural men' were, indeed, sharp and penetrating in their investigation of inferior things. Let us, accordingly, learn by their example how many gifts the Lord left to human nature even after it was despoiled of its true good. (Institutes, II. 2.15)*

Nevertheless, he also wrote that while it is true that...*in man's perverted and degenerate nature some sparks still gleam, [the light is nonetheless] choked with dense ignorance, so that it cannot come forth effectively. [His] mind, because of its dullness...betrays how incapable it is of seeking and finding truth. (Institutes, II. 2.12)* How could the same person write these two seemingly contradictory things within just a few pages of one another? Are non-believers capable of the truth or not? `Yes and no. Calvin is just reading Romans 1 carefully!

- On the one hand it means that there is no neutrality in the world. Everyone who does not acknowledge Christ as Lord is operating out of a false view of things. No one is objective. Everyone has to live for something; everyone therefore has to idolize some fallen thing(s) and demonize some good thing(s.) Everyone is operating from a world-view that denies Christ as the center or honors him. There is no such thing as a ‘view from nowhere.’ We must remember this or you make the ‘liberal church’ mistake of simply assimilating too much to the culture.
- On the other hand it means that despite the ‘false world-views’, everyone grasps and to some degree acknowledges truths about God, creation, human nature, and so on. Paul says we “hold down the truth in unrighteousness”--which means that we all “have” the truth in some way. How else could we hold it down?
- How do we integrate these two ‘sides’ to the doctrine of common grace?
  - This universal knowledge of God and of good has been called “first order beliefs.” Romans 1 and 2 tells us that all people do know that there is a glorious creator-God. All people have these beliefs, even if often their conscious, intellectual “second order beliefs” deny him.
  - This means that much--maybe even most--of what non-Christians will do will point to or honor or be based on basic truths that they ‘know’ at one level and yet ‘not know’ at another. For example, Leonard Bernstein’s “second order beliefs” were secular and naturalistic. But in a famous TV show he said: *Listening to Beethoven's Fifth, you get the feeling there's something right with the world, something that checks throughout, something that follows its own laws consistently, something we can trust, that will never let us down.* What he was saying was that music gave him not simply good feelings--but *meaning*. Despite the fact that his formal beliefs were that life was a cosmic accident, and therefore there could be no meaning to anything or

hope--music made him feel that there was meaning to it all, that it did matter how you live! Some things really matter.

- *The importance of the doctrine.*
  - Without an understanding of this--the world is a pretty confusing place! In the play/movie *Amadeus*, Salieri is totally confused and bitter that he, a morally good person, has so little talent, while Mozart (in the movie, a morally despicable person) has very obviously received a major gift from God in his soaring talent. Salieri's problem was (at least) a failure to understand the doctrine of common grace. God gives out good gifts of wisdom, talent, beauty, skill 'graciously'--that is, in a completely unmerited way. He casts them across the human race like seed, in order to enrich, brighten, and preserve the world. By rights, sin should be making life on earth here much more unbearable than it is. One of the main reasons it is not is because of common grace.
  - Without an understanding of this--Christians will think they can live self-sufficiently. We might feel like we should only go to Christian doctors, work with Christian lawyers, listen only to Christian counselors, buy only Christian artists. Of course, we remember the balance of this doctrine! Every non-believer has serious blindness and is operating out of a false world-view. There is no neutrality. But the fact remains that many of the gifts God has put in the world *for us believers as well as the rest of the human race* are out there in 'un-believers'! Mozart was a gift to us--whether he was a believer or not (James 1:17.) *"He makes the rain to fall and the sun to shine on the just and the unjust"* (Mt 5:45.)
  - Without an understanding of this--Christians may feel no need to study the world and other human cultures in order to get to know God. But we need to appreciate truth and wisdom wherever we find it.
  - Without an understanding of this--Christians will have trouble understanding why non-Christians so often exceed Christians morally and in wisdom. A doctrine of sin means that believers are never as good as our 'right world-view' should make us. A doctrine of grace means that unbelievers are never as messed up as their 'false world-view' should make them. The differences between believers and non-believers across the board is often not striking. One of the reasons is of course "sin"--but the other reason is grace!

### ***Worship.***

- One of the great messages of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ has completely fulfilled the Old Testament worship ritual. He *is* the altar, the sacrifice, the High Priest. He *has* once for all opened the way in to the 'Holy Place'--the presence of God (Heb 10:19-21.) In passages like Luke 6:1-11 Jesus very explicitly says that the Old Testament worship regulations were provisional and were fulfilled by him. What does this mean for us?
  - 1st it means that Christians are called to see *all* of life as worship. The Old Testament language about the temple, priesthood, and sacrifice is now applied to believers' entire lives. Our deeds of service to others (Heb 13:16) and God (Rom 12:1) are now seen as priestly 'sacrifices' (Rev. 1:6.) We no longer go one day a week to the house of God to see the priests offering sacrifices to get us near to God. Rather we *are* the dwelling place of God (I Peter 2:5; Eph 2:19-22), we *are* all priests and everything we do for our neighbor or for God is a 'holy sacrifice' (Heb 13:15-16.)
  - The implications are quite important and far-reaching. Here is another stroke against 'dualism.' We cannot separate our spiritual lives from our so-called 'secular' lives. Every part of our life--vocational, civic, family, recreational, material, sex money power--is now to be a 'living sacrifice' to God (Rom 12:1ff; cf. 1 Cor 10:31.) We cannot conduct our business in the world with the same values and attitudes as everyone else, and then confine our spiritual life to the weekend and evenings. The 'glory of God' means his

ultimate importance. We are now called to worship--to respond to the glory of God--in absolutely every area of our lives. We must ask questions like: "if God is the most important thing--how should I be conducting my business? how should I be spending my money? how should I live in my neighborhood and municipality? how should I acting and living in this area of my life?"

**Work.**

- The goodness of work. Human beings were put into paradise and given work to do (Genesis 2:15.) This is before the Fall, before sin and before anything was wrong with the world. Work is something we were designed to do.
- The purpose of work. What *is* work? This is a more complex question than may first appear!
  - In Genesis 1-2 God cultivates the world. First, he brings about more complexity where there was sameness (separating light from darkness, land from water, plants from animals.)
  - But second, he then 'interweaves' all these new entities into a coherent *fabric*, interdependent with one another.
  - So our work--whether splicing a gene or doing brain surgery or collecting the rubbish or painting a picture--further a) develops or b) maintains or c) repairs the "fabric of the world". Our work--whether as humble as cleaning a floor--brings 'order out of chaos' and creates new entities and inter-weaves the human community.<sup>10</sup>
  - Human work means being partners with God in *his* work. That is the obvious implication of Genesis 1-2. Since (as we saw above) God does not simply spend his time saving souls by his Holy Spirit, but also sustaining, cultivating, and renewing the material world by his Holy Spirit (Psalm 104:30; 145, 147) then you use your gifts in work--whether by making clothes, practicing law, tilling the field, mending broken bodies, or nurturing children--you are participating in God's work. God does not only send ministers to give the world sermons, but doctors to give medicine, teachers to impart wisdom, and so on.

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<sup>10</sup> The difference between life in a [wilderness] and here is work. In the [wilderness] you must do everything for yourself. But civilization is sharing in the work of others. Look at the chair you sit in. Imagine making it yourself--even if you had the skills, you'd need the tools. Do you have the skill to make the tools? And even if you had the skills for that, could you mine the ore to get the metal? And if you had the skills to do that, how would you get the ore down from the mountain? Would you make the truck? In other words, to simply make a chair from scratch, in a sense is a lifetime of work for one person. But through the work of others, you can buy it with the fruit of a few hours labor. Civilization is sharing in work of others. Your paycheck, whatever it is, can buy you the use of far more than you could possibly make for yourself in the time it took to earn the check. Work makes us interdependent. Work is cultivating the resources of the material and human universe.... Work is the form in which we make ourselves useful to others; civilization is the form in which others make themselves useful to us. Work unifies the human race and carries out the will of God. -- Lester DeKoster, Work (Christian Library Press, 1982)