

WHAT IS (CHRISTIAN) CULTURAL RENEWAL?

Part 2

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- 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?
 - The **content** of a Christian world-view - what is *in* it? what does it consist of?
 - The **alternatives** to a Christian world-view- what are the other, rival world-views?
 - The **application** of a Christian world-view - how does the CWLV apply to each basic area such as: art, business, journalism, entertainment, etc.
- Where do we go from here? - *Cultural leadership development*

Note: *Most of the following was sent to you in April. Since we covered a little less than half in the actual teaching time we will complete our discussion of the material May 5.*

Review - Why Christians are culturally marginal.

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 accentuated it. (Kant made a sharp division between the public world of 'objective facts' and a private world of subjective values and spirituality.)

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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 affects everything we do.
- 3) I would like Redeemer to be as known as much for moving people out of "dualism" as for moving people out of "legalism". The two are related! Legalistic Christianity leads to dualistic Christianity. **a)** When you don't grasp the gospel of grace, you tend toward a Pharisaical 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. **b)** Also, while the Bible does tell you a great deal about how the church should operate--it doesn't give details about 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 with knowing what the exactly right Biblical position is on everything.
- 4) The opposite of 'dualism' is 'world-viewish' Christianity. Christianity 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) everything in the world, in life. It must bring a distinct perspective on 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.

Note: Keep in mind that this is a very basic 'primer' and we will therefore discuss only the most broad, common features to all forms of a Christian world-view. Each of us is part of a human culture, and when we become believers the gospel 'comes in' and radically alters but does not eliminate the particular viewpoint of our native race/culture. The Biblical view of human cultures is complex: a) each reflects the image of God in its particular gifts, and yet b) in their present forms all cultures are based on idolatries (see below.) So there are valid cultural subsets within the overall consensual commitments of the Christian world-view.

BASES OF A CHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEW - *Why do we have it?*

This is a big claim--that Christianity does not simply give us inner peace and a future with God, but also provides us a distinct way to view everything in the world and life. How do we back this up Biblically? Why does Christianity provide us with a whole 'world-and-life view'?

Biblical Teaching on Creation (and the Incarnation) creates a CWLV

- 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.
- 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*¹ 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*.)*

Biblical Teaching on the Kingdom (and the Resurrection) creates a CWLV

- 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

¹ 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.

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, and 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-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 more radical and has far more implications than you may at first think!

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]..."²

² Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*, p.50.

- Some have defined culture as ‘naming the *good*.’ What differentiates one culture, philosophy, or world-view from another is in its identification of ‘what is the *ultimate* good? what is the non-negotiable? what is the *most* important thing of all?’ One culture designates family as the ultimate good, another individual freedom, and so on. Automatically, something else (the opposite or the most direct nemesis of ‘the good’ is demonized.) This cannot be avoided--every world-view deifies/glorifies *something*, and therefore demonizes something.

Art can lead you to God. I think that's the purpose of everything. If it's not doing that, what's it doing? It's leading you the other way. It's certainly not leading you nowhere. – Bob Dylan³

- 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'. Christianity is ultimately the most positive view of human life and culture, refusing to ‘demonize’ any part of creation--yet it is fiercely anti-utopian, un-idealistic.
- So we see that:
 - 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: In every psychological, cultural, or communal entity something besides the Lord serves as *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’

³ Quoted in Steve Turner, *Hungry for Heaven: Rock ‘n’ Roll and the Search for Redemption*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 159.

aspects of life by thinking out and practicing work and cultural production that is a 'sign of the kingdom.'

CASE STUDY #1 - Business (a very brief look)

- What is the 'bottom line'--the ultimate value, 'the *good*'--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.

Biblical Teaching on "Common grace" creates a CWLV.

What (if anything) can Christians assume they share 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?*⁴

- 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.

⁴ Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All that's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Eerdmans, 2010 p.14.

- 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. All have innate senses of honesty, justice, love, the 'golden rule' and so on.⁵ All people *know* at some deep level (see below) that there is a God, that we are his creatures, that we know we should serve him, and so on.
- There is a general understanding among Christians that 'raw' nature *reveals* God apart from the Bible. That is, most understand that apart from the Bible and saving faith, God reveals himself generally to all people through the magnificence of nature--as they view the ocean, the mountains, etc. But God also shows common grace (reveals knowledge of himself) through human culture. For human culture is simply a wise recognition of and cultivation (thus the very word 'culture') of nature.
 - Isaiah 28:23-29 *When a farmer plows for planting...when he has leveled the surface... does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way...Grain must be ground to make bread...all this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom*" This is remarkable. Isaiah tells us that anyone who becomes a skillful farmer, or who brings an advancement in farming 'science' is being taught by God. One writes about this text: "What appears as a discovery (the proper season and conditions for sowing, farm management, rotation of crops, etc.) is actually the Creator opening his book of creation and revealing his truth."⁶
 - Now all human culture is ultimately the same thing as farming. (Remember the Mark Noll quote above.) Isaiah says that every advancement in human learning, every work of art, etc. etc. is just God "opening his book of creation, revealing his truth, and teaching us." Of course, the vast majority of farmers in the history of the world did not know that God was doing this, but Isaiah says that was what was happening. It is 'general revelation' or 'common grace.'
 - All terrific music, skillful farming, new advances in the ability to travel by air, and great political leadership--all of these things are expressions of God's grace. See--
 - 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.
 - 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!) Salieri (in the play and movie) was right--Mozart's music was the voice of God, regardless of the moral and spiritual condition of Mozart's heart.
 - 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. This is not the

⁵ Frances Hutcheson, 18th 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.

⁶ Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP, 1993) p. 235.

Spirit working as a *converting* or a *sanctifying* agent. Rather he acts to give wisdom, courage, insight, and to restrain the effects of sin.

- 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:

On the one hand, he writes: *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)

On the other hand, Calvin 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 then 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 understanding common grace.*
 - Without an understanding of this--the world is a pretty confusing place! As we just noted, 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. But that is not unfair, really. 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!
- **Note:** Among strands of Christianity (ironically) Roman Catholicism and Reformed Protestantism have had the strongest understanding of common grace (though Catholicism, tellingly, prefers to call it 'natural law' or 'natural revelation.') Catholic and Reformed Christians have a better basis, then, for distinctively Christian approaches to scholarship and non-church vocation.

CASE STUDY #2 - Popular Culture (a very brief look)⁷

- In general, Christians' reaction to popular culture has been some form of dis-engagement. Music, movies, and television are sweepingly evaluated as dangerous, polluting, and/or degrading. The withdrawal has taken different forms. One form is complete withdrawal. Another form is the creation of a 'sub-culture' filled with sanitized, overtly evangelistic forms of music, movies, TV shows, etc. A third form of dis-engagement is uncritical

⁷ This case study is heavily based on Ted Turnau, "Reflecting Theologically on Popular Culture as Meaningful", in *Calvin Theological Journal* 37 (2002) pp. 270-296. We will not go into the differences between popular culture and so-called 'high' culture that Turnau explores.

consumption of popular culture (simply imbibing it without any sifting of world-view analysis.) Why this dis-engagement?

- One is a legalistic or *'thin' view of sin* (treated above as 'dualism.')
- A theologically 'thin' view of sin sees it as a series of discrete acts of non-compliance to God's regulations. Christian growth is seen mainly as seeking environments where you are less likely to do these sinful actions. Sin is something that can be essentially removed from the person. (This view of sin comports with a lack of understanding of the thoroughness and richness of Christ's gracious work for us. If we have to earn our salvation, we need a view of sin that is easier to deal with by conscious effort.)
- But a theologically 'thick' view of sin sees it as a compulsive drive of the heart to produce or discover idols. [*Not a single person has ever been found who did not fashion for himself an idol or specter in the place of God. Surely, just as waters boil up from a vast, full spring, so does an immense crowd of gods flow forth from the human mind...* Calvin *Institutes* Book 1, V, 12;
- If we have a 'thin' view of sin, we will remove from our view anything that could tempt us to do overt actions of sexual immorality, profanity, violence. By withdrawing such cultural 'texts' from our view we may feel less sinful, but that is not the case. the complex organic nature of our sin will still be at work making idols out of things that are not overt forms of law-breaking--like our moral goodness, or financial security, or our family, or doctrinal purity, or pride in our own traditional culture, and so on. In fact, too much emphasis on 'withdrawal' makes the likelihood of slipping into 'respectable' idolatries greater.
- If, instead, we have the 'thick' view of sin--as idolatry that pervades all we do--should lead not to withdrawal or to uncritical consumption, but rather to 'humble, critical engagement.' We should identify cultural idolatries in popular culture as ways of repenting for the seeds of the same in our own hearts and avoiding them. (There is certainly room for specific withdrawal from some texts of popular--or 'high'!--culture, especially when we are younger. We are talking here of blanket withdrawal or uncritical consumption.
- Another cause of dis-engagement is an intellectualistic or *'thin' view of common grace*.
- As we noted above, Christians have long recognized that all people have 'knowledge' of God that they suppress, according to Romans 1-2. But many conceive of this knowledge mainly (or strictly) as cognitive information that can be retrieved somehow as we argue with people about the existence of God, the truth of Christianity, and so on. In other words, innate *knowledge of God* is thought of in intellectualistic terms.
- But the language of Rom 1:18-25 gives us a much more comprehensive and dynamic picture of how 'general revelation' or 'common grace' works in lives. The *'truth'* is being *'suppressed'* (v.18) but it continues to bear down on us. The NIV translation of verse 20: "*Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities...have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so men are without excuse.*" But the verbs *nosumena* ("are being understood") and *kathopatai* ("are being seen") are in the form of present passive participles. That is, the reality of God's nature and our obligations to him are continuously present to us. It should not be thought of as static, innate ideas or information, but as a continually fresh, insistent pressure on the consciousness of every human being. In short, every artifact of human culture is a response to God's general revelation (cf. Isaiah 28 above) but always marred by an idolatrous heart that doesn't want to acknowledge the total sovereignty of God (Rom 1:21.) So all cultural production of a dialogue between God's general revelational grace and the idolatrous nature of the human heart.

Loss of faith in a given religion does not by any means imply the eradication of the religious instinct. It merely means that the instinct, temporarily repressed, will seek an object elsewhere. – R. C. Zaehner, Oxford University, 1959⁸

- In short, every human being producing culture (and everyone is!) is in a deep ‘dialogue’ with the general revelation of God. Therefore human culture is an extremely complex mixture of brilliant truth, marred half-truths, and overt resistance to the truth. Here is an interesting example of this ‘dialogue.’

“One of the movies we have shown students is the Vietnamese/American co-production *Three Seasons*, a collection of four intertwining vignettes. One story has to do with a cyclo (sort of a cross between a bicycle and a rickshaw) driver named Hai and his infatuation with an ambitious prostitute, a young woman who is sure she can sleep her way out of poverty into the cool, clean world of the luxury hotels near where she works. After winning some money in a cyclo race, he pays \$50 to spend the night with her. He rents a room in the luxury hotel and the scene leads you to expect a typical, erotic love scene. Against the viewer expectations, though, he does not have sex with her. Instead he simply requests to watch her fall asleep, to watch her rest in the world she dreams of joining. Slowly, comfortably, she falls asleep. And he is gone in the morning, having demanded nothing from her except the chance to fulfill her desire to belong. Something snaps in the prostitute, and she finds she cannot return to her old job. [There is some similarity here to how the grace of the bishop transforms Valjean into an honest man in *Les Miserables*.] It is a powerful scene, a completely unexpected glimpse of fragile beauty and self-less, life-changing love. To my knowledge, director/screenwriter Tony Bui is not a Christian, and perhaps has never even heard the gospel...But moments of beauty and truth [and incredibly poignant images of Christ’s saving work] are evidence of the work of God who preserves the noble, creative image of himself in us despite the distorting effects of sin.”⁹

- Let’s get an overview of, then, the different ways we can approach popular culture, according to our World-and-Life view.
 - One widespread approach to popular culture is to look at it *Foucauld-ishly*.
 - Over the past decades, the dominant view in cultural studies has been marked by a deep bias against any real *meaning* in culture. That is, any notion of a deeper meaning (what life is all about, what is good, what is evil) in culture is an illusion. Culture is really just about competing power groups within society that appropriate symbolic resources in order to represent their group or movement and gain leverage over others.
 - Because this has been the dominant view in the academic world for a good while, this view has filtered down so that it dominates the way (for example) movie critics review films. Each weekend the pages of the *New York Times* arts section will tell us that ‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer’ is not really about good and evil but about female power, while ‘Lord of the Rings’ is not really about good and evil but about male power. (We will look (in future installments of this subject) of the problem with this and other non-Christian world-views.)
 - A second widespread approach to popular culture is to look at it *dualistically*. As we noted above, the average Christian, with ‘thin’ views of sin and common grace tends to divide life into the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane.’ This dualism leads to two very different (but inadequate) responses to culture.
 - Some dualistic Christians *withdraw* from popular human culture and insist that we create our own overtly Christian music, cinema, literature, and so on. We talked about this approach above.

⁸ Quoted as the epigraph in Turner, *Hungry for Heaven*.

⁹ Turnau, p.279.

- Other dualistic Christians *uncritically consume* popular human culture. They think of their 'Christian walk' as what they do on Sunday. The rest of the week they have no ability to think world-viewishly about what they are imbibing. The idolatrous aspects of popular culture--the tremendous emphasis on appearance, on sexuality, on material prosperity, on absolute individual freedom, etc, etc--are not viewed critically. The sources of the various powerful images are not recognized as idolatrous and so the heart is shaped by them. This happens at a deep level. For example, if you totally hate yourself because you are mildly overweight, it is because you have let the idolatrous images of popular culture a foothold in your heart.
- A third approach to popular culture is to look at it *Christian world-viewishly*.
 - We should be willing to be very engaged with general human culture produced by non-Christians. Why?
 - First, a 'thick' view of sin means that even overtly Christian-produced culture will always have some idolatrous discourse within it. When we become Christians we continue to have powerful amounts of remaining sin in us. We continually struggle with remaining idolatrous impulses. Our 'Christian-cultural production' will not be free from these.
 - Second, a 'thick' view of grace means that even overtly non-Christian-produced culture will always have some witness to God's truth in it. Even the angry, overtly anti-God culture is to a degree a testimony to God's reality. Many of these have an air of desperation about them. They are vainly trying to 'put out' what they know in their hearts.
 - In short, Christians are never as good as their 'right beliefs' should make them and non-Christians are never as bad as their 'wrong beliefs' should make them.
 - In general, then, this means a stance of *critical enjoyment* of human culture.
 - On the one hand it means to recognize the half-truths and to resist the idols. How do we do this? It means when you recognize a cultural artifact that is a blatant, overt (even angry) resistance to God's general revelation, there is no need to delve deeply into it or expose yourself to it repeatedly.
 - On the other hand it means to recognize and celebrate the wide-spread expressions of justice, wisdom, truth, and beauty in culture.

Biblical Teaching on Worship creates a CWLV.

- 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?"

Biblical Teaching on Work creates a CWLV.

- 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.¹⁰
- 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.

¹⁰ 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)