

"TALK ABOUT IT"

SCRIPTURE • CHRISTIANITY • SOCIETY

EPISODE 2: PT 2/4

"CHRIST & CULTURE"

JULY 21, 2020



INTRODUCTION

OUR METHOD

1. Raise a controversial issue or nuanced theological topic
2. Share different perspectives
3. Invite you to see where you stand and why
4. Come to understand (and validate) the opinions of others
5. Consider the variations, nuanced, implications of all sides and how a person gets to that that place

CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE

Tertullian (155-240)

- Christ mediates God's will to humanity and prescribes **obedient** moral living
- Creation is good, but the "world" is corrupted/perverted
- Devotion to pagan and cultic rituals proves corruption
- EX: Military activism is contrary to Christ insofar as it requires participation in and swearing oath to that which is NOT the Christian community

Monasticism (from the Greek word *monos* meaning "alone")

- Two Types:
 - *Cenobitic* | Communal monasticism - think Rule of St. Benedict
 - *Eremitic* | meaning desert - Desert Father and Mothers who practiced extreme forms of asceticism (extreme renunciation)
- Saw issue between the State sanctioning the Church and the Church, subsequently, growing culturally powerful

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

- Christ is the "new lawgiver" who fulfills the old law and provide a new law
- New Law summarized:
 - Live at Peace
 - Do not even desire sexual relation as amusement
 - Never take oaths to anyone, anywhere, about anything
 - Practice non-violence
 - Do not distinguish between your own and other nations, races, ethnicities, or anything that divided
- The state and culture are incompatible with the values of Christ and the Christian community

Pros

- Zealous faith
- Led Christian / faith reforms (and transmitted Christian spirituality)
- Led cultural reforms

Challenges to *Talk About*

- All or Nothing -- requires a logical consistency
- How do you explain the cultural conditions that shape your understanding of:
 - Scripture
 - Doctrine
 - Christ
 - Theology
 - Etc.

Three Areas

- Where Christ & culture agree/are compatible - social welfare, orphanages, etc.
- Where Christ's message is hidden but present - non-Christian writers, muscians
- Where Christ & cutlure are conflated - think nationalism and Christian identity

Gnosticism (*gnosis* - knowledge)

- Cosmology: Supreme God > Demiurge (malevolent being) > material world
- *Soma-sema*: theory that body is the soul's tomb
- EX: Messianic Secret in Mark's Gospel or 1 Cor. 2:7
- Christ is either:
 - Divine & Supreme God incarnate
 - Human being who achieved *gnosis* and therefore obtained enlightenment
- Indifference to culture because "too enlightened to participate = too enlightened to reject"
- Saw other philosophies as (incomplete) avenues to *gnosis* that Christ fulfills (ex. Stoicism and Jesus' composure prior to His crucifixion)

Peter Abelard (1079-1172)

- Christian "nominalist"
- Nominalism = the metaphysical belief that *things* only have values insofar as that value is ascribed by the particular community that holds that value
- Christ, and Christian community, provides values in that Christ provides is a **moral exemplar** for how to live a moral life
- Salvation looks like judgment based on the morality of our lives here and now
- Niebuhr on Abelard: *"The Christ of religion does not call upon people to leave homes and kindred for His sake; Christ enters into their homes and all their associations as the gracious presence which adds an aura of infinite meaning to all temporal tasks."*

Abretch Ritschl (1822-1889)

- Emphasizes moral development based on bringing about the Kingdom of God
- Ethical development can only occur within a particular community
- Church *can* aid in instruction, *but* so can culture

Pros

- Allows for Christians to participate in culture
 - Can lead to massive reforms (ex. Civil Rights movement)
- Allows (leaves room) for a more critical approach to our faith

Challenges to *Talk About*

- Abstracting Jesus - have you reduced Jesus to a moral teacher or worse an idol of the actual fully human, fully divine New Testament figure?
- Reason & Revelation - what is the primary source for knowledge of God? If revelation, then what is the role of reason in our faith? If reason, then what is the role of revelation?
- Grace & Obedience - what is the role of spiritual disciplines in the activating a moral and righteous life?

Talk About It!

Consider the practice of holding property. Both as an individual and as a Christian community (i.e. the Church). The Christ AGAINST culture might find this practice incompatible with Christianity. The Christ OF culture act indifferently toward this practice. Look at these passages about ownership:

- *Leviticus 25:23*
- *Jeremiah 25:9*
- *Philippians 4:19*
- *Matthew 5:5*
- *Matthew 19:21*

What does your ownership of land or property reveal about which of these two typologies you might best align with? Looking at these passages, what is your understanding of the nature of God that allows for you to own land/property?