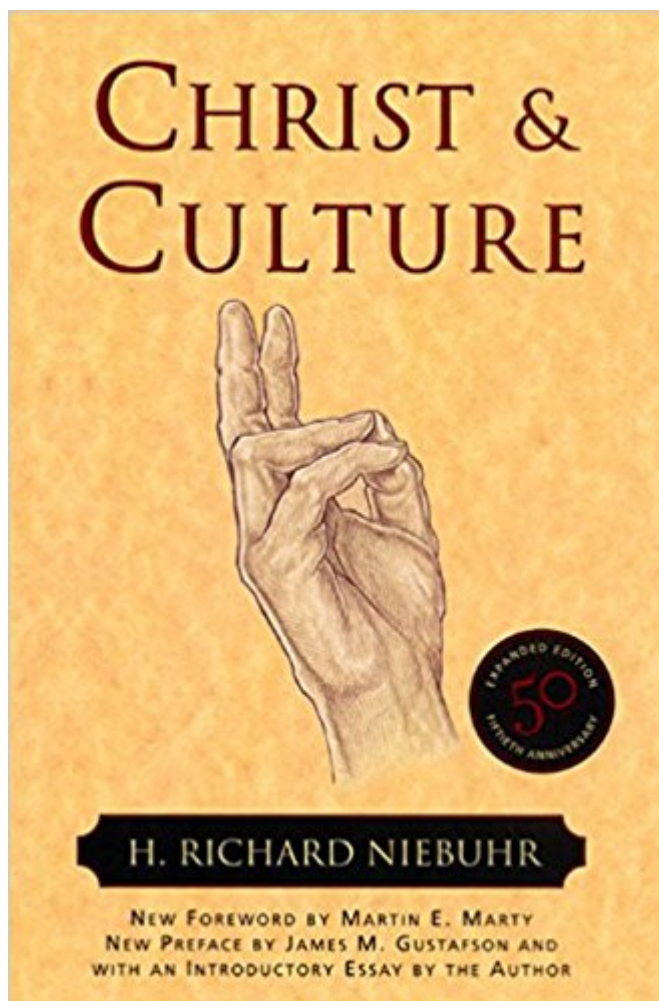


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# Christ And Culture (Torchbooks)



## Synopsis

This 50th-anniversary edition, with a new foreword by the distinguished historian Martin E. Marty, who regards this book as one of the most vital books of our time, as well as an introduction by the author never before included in the book, and a new preface by James Gustafson, the premier Christian ethicist who is considered Niebuhr's contemporary successor, poses the challenge of being true to Christ in a materialistic age to an entirely new generation of Christian readers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Being fully God and fully human, Jesus raised an enduring question for his followers: what exactly was His place in this world? In the classic *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr crafted a magisterial survey of the many ways of answering that question--and the related question of how Christ's followers understand their own place in the world. Niebuhr called the subject of this book "the double wrestle of the church with its Lord and with the cultural society with which it lives in symbiosis." And he described various understandings of Christ "against," "of," and "above" culture, as well as Christ "transforming" culture, and Christ in "paradoxical" relation to it. This 50th anniversary edition of *Christ and Culture*, with a foreword by theologian Martin E. Marty, is not easy reading. But it remains among the most gripping articulations of what is arguably the most basic ethical question of the Christian faith: how is Christ relevant to the world in which we live now?

--Michael Joseph Gross

"This is without any doubt the one outstanding book in the field of basic Christian social ethics."--Paul Ramsey in the "Journal Of Religion""A superb piece of analytical writing in tackling what is just about the toughest problem face by Christians. The problem: In what way, or degree, is Christ relevant to the situation in which the Christian must live....Mr. Niebuhr distinguishes five typical answers to the Christian's problem of setting the relation between the Christ he calls Lord and the culture which holds him as the sea holds its fish."--Paul Hutchinson in "The New York Times Book Review""This book is one of great significance, and anyone who claims to be at all "au courant" with modern theological thought will certainly wish to become familiar with it."--"Time And Tide"

I didn't know anything about Niebuhr. I learned about him one day from a material maintaining that to shape your spirit you should start with a classic language (Latin or Greek); also for getting a large religious perspective, beyond any dogmatic seclusion, any parochial confinement, you should read Niebuhr. Actually there were two brothers Niebuhr; both of them were great theologians. They lived in the US and belonged to the Protestant Church. Reinhold Niebuhr was the most famous; but I started by buying a book of the other, H. Richard Niebuhr, for a very cheap reason (as I was completely ignorant on both brothers, I bought the cheapest book I found). It was a very small book, annotated on almost all pages. The annotations were in Chinese: the guy who had read the book before me was a Chinese. The book was Christ and Culture. I think it is one of the most important theology books I have read. Christ and Culture - you can think also at it as Faith and Culture: what is the relationship between them. Niebuhr considers five different types of Christ-Culture relationships (of course, nobody could be strictly framed in one type or another): 1. Faith against Culture (Tolstoi) - faith denies culture, you should make the choice - the risk is that denying the culture can lead to denying the world, it means denying God's Creation - also denying culture is actually a cultural fact, which leads to paradox 2. Faith framed in Culture (Jefferson, Renan) - faith is a cultural phenomenon, explained through cultural facts - it means that faith is rationalized - which leads to keeping from faith only the rational 3. Faith and Culture in sync (St. Thomas Aquinas) - faith and culture do not deny one another (as it was in the first case) - they live in agreement - the elements of faith that cannot be explained rationally belong to the realm of Revelation 4. Faith and Culture in paradox (Luther, Kierkegaard) - though faith and culture do not deny one another (as it was in the first case) they do not live in agreement (as it was in case 3) - any act beyond faith (it means any

cultural act, even keeping God's commandments, even good deeds) is alien to faith, alien to God, because it fatally belongs to this world, so it is idolatry - the faithful has to realize this tragic paradox; there is no escape from culture as we have to live in this world - keeping faith is the only way to salvation (while living in the world)<sup>5</sup>. Faith transforming Culture (Calvin) - the faith should be used as a driving force in transforming the culture (the society), leading it towards Divinity. Let me quote here a little bit from the foreword (written by Martin E. Marty): Augustine left us *The Two Cities*, Pascal left us *the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, Kierkegaard brought us *the Either/Or* - they polished the archetypes; we have in the twentieth century *I and Thou* (Martin Buber), *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Reinhold Niebuhr) and *Christ and Culture* (H. Richard Niebuhr). I tried to read *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, but I was not in the mood - I should take it sometime later. I also started to read *I and Thou*, several times, I was too lazy. But *Christ and Culture*, I read it breathlessly. It's not my first theology book. I have read some books of the great Christian Orthodox theologians of the Twentieth century (Schmemmann, Lossky, among others) and I could talk days in a row about them - about their rigor, about the beauty of Eastern Christianity, that I belong to. The book of Niebuhr is different, and maybe one should start with it, to read then Tillich, to continue then in his own ways, while free of any parochial closeness.

This is a well organized argument presenting five sides to a critical problem between Christ and culture. Niebuhr argues Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox and finally Christ transforming culture. Although his postscript to these arguments is inconclusive, he does call for a decision, not from the community of faith but from the individual to decide. He begins with an impasse that Christ is sinless but culture is sinful overlaying this with veneers of scripture that seem to contradict. For instance, we are called out of the world but are also sent into the world. Throughout each argument Christ is presented as central but the application to culture swings from rejecting homes, property and the protecting hand of government, seen in the life of Tolstoy, to a harmony of Christ and culture. The latter has a danger of interpreting culture through Christ, but also Christ through culture. Although each of the five arguments is persuasive, Christ and the transformation of culture appear to be stronger theologically. Niebuhr calls the Christian with this view a 'conversionist.' The argument is that God is our Creator and that his creation was 'good'. The work of the Christian is to bring Christ into culture transforming it for our 'good'. Culture itself is something God made and cannot be the source of sin. Therefore culture is neither good nor bad. The Christian who lives for Christ by keeping their focus on him in a positive and productive manner will bring a Christ-centeredness into culture. Virtues of hope, love and peace

become part of everyday life. My disagreement is not with the various arguments presented but an agreement where there is no conclusion. Christ against culture has probably done more harm in creating separatists not only between Christ and culture but within the Body of Christ. Niebuhr correctly notes that very little has been accomplished in this view of Christ against culture within any point of history. Sin does not find its origin in culture although it finds a place there. Therefore culture must not be opposed and rejected escaping the community Christ came to serve. The first chapter of John's Gospel ratifies that Christ 'became one of us' along with Philippians chapter three. Christ was born under Roman rule in occupied Judea (two cultures colliding together) yet He influenced both. Niebuhr's work still touches on the obvious debate among Christian leaders today of Christ and culture. It is strong in presentation but weak in current application of a postmodern culture. It leaves too much for the reader to interpret for themselves, even in Niebuhr's call for decision in his final chapter. Written near the end of a modern culture the examples are more historical. If this can be overcome by the reader it is vital material for arguing intellectually with a postmodern culture and presents five different perspectives. Unlike material that wants to make a 'statement', Niebuhr crosses a difficult bridge that can appear dismantling of the church and its fundamental belief in Christ. He does not challenge the doctrine of Christ (eternal, incarnate, became man, died, buried, resurrected and ascended) but the commission given to the church concerning all that Christ has done. His tone is subtle avoiding all political overtones making the material relevant for our day fifty years after it was written. If each chapter could have a short journalistic story, from any time in history, explaining how a culture was impacted through Christ against, of, above, as a paradox and transformation of culture, it would attract far more attention in a postmodern culture of today. By Andrew Fox author of Change Through Challenge

I've been reading theology for many years and have been a volunteer in the Catholic Church and employed by the Church at several levels. In light of my own experience, I found the book--as stated elsewhere-- "dated, but not outdated." As such it is still useful in helping one to reflect on how Christian teaching and belief can make a positive impact on the larger culture. The book provides a systematic approach and interesting insights for those interested in the "new evangelization" on how they can impact the culture with the Christian message.

This is one of the most significant books I have read to help the reader understand different Christian denominations and their approaches to culture. The last chapter has significant implications for so-called "Non-denominational churches" regarding their relationship to other

Christians past and present.

This is a great book, but it is not written in laymen's terms; the book contains advanced theological jargon.

I am just getting started on reading this one as I first read the book entitled, "The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders " first. This book on Christ and Culture is an excellent study in the five ways that Christians can live their Christianity in the culture in which they live. The fifth option is certainly the best and consistent with Biblical teachings.

This book is still relevant - perhaps more relevant now than ever, given the unholy alliance these days between the evangelical Christian movement and the populist right-wing segment of the Republican party.

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