The Issue: The Predisposition of an Ecclesial Heritage

In a popular and well-read book of the 1950s, the eminent and highly respected Bishop of London, J.W.C. Wand, made the following typical Anglican assertion:

The Church of England claims, as part of the whole Christian Church, to be in the position once occupied by the Jewish church. In this country it is as responsible for the spiritual guidance of the nation as was the Jewish church of ancient Israel. It does not deny for a moment that it may sometimes fall short of its purpose, or that its own vision may become dim. At such times there may be indeed some great leader of thought who will arise to make the old common truth shine with a new uncommon lustre. But, generally speaking, it is the whole authoritative body in which has been renewed the mandate from God and whose duty it is to fulfill His mission to His people. The Church claims, in other words, to be God's trustee in the sphere of religion. (Wand 18)

Although I and many Anglicans would challenge Wand's use of the Israelite precedent, I would have to agree that the general direction of the assertion — the Church of England as a national "trustee" church — is still in the minds of many Anglicans throughout the world to this day. The establishment of the Church of England has certainly had the effect of socializing all Anglicans — in
Britain and beyond — to at least being respectful of their state. At its best, this takes the form of being a “conscience” for a nation. At its worst, it takes the form of being merely a “servant of the state.” But perhaps the most provocative challenge to the Anglican style of church/state relation has come from seeing where a more extreme position of this might lead, as in the special resolution of the Raad Der Nederduitse Gerformeerde Kerkem in Zuid Africa of 1915:

1. That our Church, apart from its general calling as a Christian Church, has also received from God a more specific calling with regard to the Dutch-speaking Afrikaner people to whose existence she is intimately bound. It must therefore always be regarded as her responsibility to be a national Church, to watch over our particular national interests, and to teach our people to see God’s hand in their own history and origin. It is further to keep alive among the Afrikaner people an awareness of national calling and destiny, wherein lies the spiritual, moral and physical progress of a people. (Villa-Vicencio 207)

A more current position would see that national consciousness and allegiances should never become identical with the consciousness and allegiance of a church (i.e., the community faithfully living out the gospel), yet can the church ever disassociate itself totally from the national and political aspirations of a culture? Or further, how does the church(es) recognize that it might not be the only bearer of the “conscience of a nation,” and that other religious traditions (and non-religious traditions!) may also see themselves in the role? How do differing traditions co-operate in a particular culture or society?

This article, written by an Anglican who is struggling to find a theological perspective on religion and
nationalism, will attempt to gain a perspective on these issues by looking at the socializing characteristics of that church's tradition (of both thought and practice) and the socializing context in which it may be set. This means retrieving some of the insights into the social shaping of theology and ecclesiology made by Ernst Troeltsch, and developed subsequently by H. Richard Niebuhr and Avery Dulles. Continuing their trajectory, this article will add a further category of analysis to enable insight into how a nation or culture might view its relation to a church, rather than the more typical version of how a church views its relation to a culture or nation. The goal of the article is, however, to enable local and particular churches to become more self-conscious of their inherited structures and thought on this issue and therefore more evaluative and determinative of them.

The Cumulative Analysis of Troeltsch, Niebuhr and Dulles

Ernst Troeltsch attempted to function as a theologian focusing on the social and cultural factors which influence theological thinking (and acting). He saw Christian faith and western culture as so intertwined that the moralities of culture and of Christianity could seldom be differentiated (Troeltsch 1923, 21-35). To enable such distinctions, Troeltsch developed three “types” of religious behaviour and organization — a church (e.g., the medieval church, Church of England, Reformed Church of Geneva), a sect (e.g., the Waldensians, Lollards, Congregationalists, Pentacostals); and the mystical (more individualized spiritualities) — which he then used as a framework to analyze different movements and developments in Christian history (Troeltsch 1931). As a theologian, he was most concerned with “accommodation” and “compromise” between cultural and social values, and the values of the Christian ethic. He was concerned about the continuous cultural compromise of Christian values, yet he had a deep
awareness that religion is always set in a history and does not exist either above or beyond it.

In North America, Troeltsch is better known by his student, H. Richard Niebuhr, first for *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929) and later for the well-known *Christ and Culture* (1951). As with Troeltsch, Niebuhr examined the influence of social forces on faith, especially race, class and sectional interests. But by the time he wrote *Christ and Culture*, he was ready to undertake what Troeltsch had done in *Social Teachings*, but with a scale of five “types” of relationship between Christ and culture rather than Troeltsch’s three. These five are:

1. *Christ Against Culture* (Troeltsch’s *sect*-type) which represents the opposition between Christianity and culture; it is seen in Tertullian in the second century through to the ethics of a more recent Kierkegaard.

2. *Christ of Culture* (Troeltsch’s *church*-type) which represents the agreement between Christianity and a culture; it is typically seen from Christian Gnosticism through to Peter Abelard and the North American social gospel.

3. *Christ Above Culture* (the first of Niebuhr’s elaborations of Troeltsch) recognizes the distinction between Christ and culture, such that the fulfilment of Christian values are achieved through the search for all human values. Aquinas would represent this position (a synthesis of Christ and culture, in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle). It can best be understood through the image of horizon, a higher view which does not change anything previously seen, but introduces new data, such that all “maps” have to be completely redrawn.
4. Christ and Culture in Paradox (the second of Niebuhr’s elaborations of Troeltsch) recognizes the duality and opposition between Christ and culture, such that somehow both must be obeyed (as in Luther’s Two-Kingdom theology). This dualism is typically found in Pauline eschatology and in Kierkegaard’s protest against Christianized culture.

5. Christ the Transformer of Culture (the third of Niebuhr’s elaborations of Troeltsch) represents the option to convert the culture. The conversion of culture does not involve its repudiation but its transformation. Sources for this can be found from the gospel of John (Logos theology), Augustine’s vision of the City of God, to F.D. Maurice’s Christian Socialism. (Niebuhr 1951)

Still in the tradition of Troeltsch, Niebuhr has identified more of the theological styles and the particular dynamics between culture and the church (e.g., conversion, dualism, synthesis, integration and opposition). Use of this analytic tool enables one to identify where the expectation of this relationship between church and culture comes from, and whether this seems a mutually affirmed style of relationship.

Following the second Vatican Council, Avery Dulles, an ecclesiologist, wrote an important book Models of The Church (1974) that, among other things, was intended to help Roman Catholics recognize some of the ecclesial pluralism in their own church and to explore some of the possibilities opened up by the new teaching of the Council. To contrast the differing ecclesiastical options he found a key resource by utilizing Niebuhr’s five styles of relationship between Christ and human culture. These became for Dulles five “models” of the church, but they are not identical with Niebuhr’s five
types. Dulles intends the distinctions to be used constructively, to create new ecclesiologies by harmonizing the insights of each:

Our method must therefore be to harmonize the models in such a way that their differences become complementary rather than mutually repugnant. In order to do so, we shall have to criticize each of the models in the light of all the others . . . We shall be able to qualify each of the models intrinsically in such a way as to introduce into it the values more expressly taught by the others. The models, as I understand them, are sufficiently flexible to be mutually open and compenetrable. (Dulles 185)

Hence each of these models represents a theological insight into the church’s faithful living; a grasp of that particular insight may result in the devalvation of other possible insights. Dulles’s five models are as follows:

1. *Church as Institution.* Here the church is organized along the principles of a visible, political society, and by that fact it claims the final allegiance of all its members. Perhaps inspired by “Christ Against Culture,” the church is a self-contained society in its own right, and teaches, sanctifies and governs by that (divine) right. It offers ultimate life, i.e., “eternal life.” Dulles sees elements of a pre-Vatican II church in this model, and possibly exaggerated institutionalism and social isolation.

2. *Church as Mystical Communion.* Here the biblical notion of koinonia, a communion of persons with God in faith, hope and love, is the organizing principle of a society of grace. Because of its vertical dimension, it recalls “Christ Above
Culture,” yet it is expressed in horizontal relationships, as “Christ of Culture.” Dulles notes its tendency to seek only collective religious experience, and to lack a clarity of its contemporary mission.

3. *Church as Sacrament.* Here the church itself is seen as the instrument of grace, enabling its members to achieve a spirituality which they could otherwise not sustain. While promoting spiritual depth on an individual level, it is far less capable of promoting spirituality in human society — hence it somewhat recalls “Christ and Culture in Paradox.” Dulles sees its greatest challenge in being a human institution and a part of society.

4. *Church As Herald.* Here the organizing principle of the church is proclamation and evangelization (*kerygma*). The church, in a sense, becomes the Word of God as its proclaimer, but since only God converts, the church may be less sure as to how to live out conversion in society. While thus having elements of “Paradox” in it, this ecclesiology moves towards the “Christ Transformer of culture” on at least an individual level.

5. *Church As Servant.* Here the image of Christ the servant is the means by which the diaconal life (response to human need) of the church can be seen. This call to the universal salvation of the world is inspired by the “Transformer of Culture,” but quickly leads into the “Christ of Culture” since history is the context for salvation. Dulles sees its dangers in a possible uncritical acceptance of cultural values.
These models clearly are an attempt to clarify the direction of any ecclesiology and make plain the opportunities and dangers which each — or several in combination — may have. In a sense, all are a serious exploration of Troeltsch's "mystical" category for they all take seriously the spiritual dimensions of the church. And following Niebuhr, they take seriously the culture that the church's own living promotes. All promote a church that will undertake an analysis which will produce consciousness of its actual life and practice in relation to the culture in which it is set. It will also hopefully promote a theological re-evaluation of that life and practice as well.

One Further Extension of the Analysis: Culture "Versus" the Church

From Troeltsch through Niebuhr and Dulles the analysis has been that of theologians and the acknowledged allegiance has been to the Christian faith. But since in none of the models are basic social and political realities seen as identical to those of the church, then how can one take equally seriously the attitude and approach of society to the church — just as one has taken seriously the attitude and approach of the church to society? In a sense, this is to return to some of Troeltsch's primary issues, cultures as the inevitable medium for churches as a manifestation of faith. I would, therefore, propose that we extend the trajectory of the analysis of these three theologians to one more set of relationships: the attitude and approach of the culture or society itself to the church (or churches) for it seems to me that most social and cultural behaviour, as with individual behaviour, is generally habitual and therefore somewhat predictable. If a culture or society generally expects a church to behave in a certain way, then it generally will behave in that way — unless, for some reason, it has become converted to some other mode of action.
Let me explore the approach of a culture or society to the church by reversing each of Niebuhr's Christ and culture categories:

1. **Culture Against the Church.** There is nothing merely theoretical about this possibility; *persecution* has been a well-known attitude to the church throughout its history, from the Neronian and Decian persecutions through to pre-*glasnost* U.S.S.R. Stalin's abolition of the Patriarchy of Moscow in 1925 and subsequent extermination of over 50,000 clergy and religious shows us that this approach can still be alive and well. Christian values and practice were seen as superceded by the revolution, and thus an impediment to its progress. In retrospect, more recent events in Poland and the Georgian Republics show that the church represented (and, in fact, became) an organizational framework capable of a political challenge. But current lack of awareness of the faith in modern Russia, shows also how effective prolonged persecution can be.

2. **Culture and the Church.** Here again, since Constantine and the conversion of the Roman Empire, *co-governance* of nation and church has always been possible. When such co-governance includes appropriation of such fundamentals as law and philosophy, as occurred in the western Roman church, separate identities become either blended or blurred and Christian values may be indiscernible from merely the values of the party in power. There are many versions of co-governance in recent history, from "national" churches in England and Scotland, pre-1967 Catholic Spain, to the various cultural and regional patriarchates of Orthodox and eastern Catholic churches. Its danger lies in the lack of a clear distinction
between a “folk” or civil religion of cultural convenience, and a church actively living the gospel.

3. Culture Above the Church. This possibility seems to emerge after a culture or nation goes through a major and decisive change, e.g., immediately after a revolution. A nation may decide to license or regulate the church. This was the case in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union where the church was first deprived of its legal rights, its property subsequently seized and church services regulated by the government. Examples from Yugoslavia to Cuba and various South American regimes abound. Depending upon how the church’s allegiance to government is perceived during the initial period of regulation, the relationships would likely develop into one of the other models, and could also develop back into this model — as John Keble charged in his Assizes sermon at Oxford in 1833 on “National Apostasy.”

4. Culture and the Church in Paradox. The essence of this possibility is seen in Luther’s Two Kingdom theology, which really sets up two “worlds” of norms and allegiances the only condition being that one must not interfere with the other. To operate, it requires the people to remain silent or indifferent to the obvious contradictions between the two worlds. This likely was true in Germany, as the Barmen Declaration of 1934 makes clear. It would have been true of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America prior to Vatican II and the Medellin Conference of 1968, when the church was able to maintain its sacramental allegiance but generally did not interfere in the political and cultural affairs of any particular regime. It would be a relationship such as this
that prompted Marx to label religion the “opiate of the people.”

5. Culture Revolutionizing the Church. This possibility again seems to emerge after a culture or nation has made a decisive and revolutionary change, and is very much “on the move.” In this century, the best example would be the Roman Catholic, Anglican and other churches in China during and after the Communist Revolution. Once China “re-opened” and each church contacted its parent and sister churches, it became apparent that some of the churches had integrated aspects of Mao's cultural philosophy, especially in the Chinese Christian Three-Self Movement. What was a great surprise — particularly to the Vatican — was to hear this church arguing that these integrations were authentic to being the church in China, and should not be revoked by outside authority.

The Integrated Analytic Structure

As the analysis of Niebuhr, Dulles, and myself are all part of a general analysis of the relationship of church with a culture begun by Troeltsch, it is useful to put these side by side. However, as was evident with Dulles, one of Niebuhr's categories does not imply a specific correspondence to one of Dulles' models. Each analysis is designed to focus on a different aspect of the relationship: Niebuhr on the operative theology, Dulles on the ecclesiology, and my own on the stance of the culture. Therefore, almost any combination of the three analyses is at least theoretically possible. I therefore put them together to create for churches of a particular culture, an analytic framework which can help them see the pattern of their historical relationships, the tendency of current relationships and,
Church and Culture

most important of all, what they would *intend* for future relationships.

Issues in Relating Church and Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theology</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Ecclesiology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christ Against Culture</td>
<td>Culture Against the Church</td>
<td>Church as Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(opposition)</td>
<td>(persecution)</td>
<td>(self-contained)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ of Culture</td>
<td>Culture and the Church</td>
<td>Church as Mystical Communion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(agreement)</td>
<td>(co-governance)</td>
<td>(collective spirituality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Above Culture</td>
<td>Culture Above the Church</td>
<td>Church as Sacrament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(horizon)</td>
<td>(regulation)</td>
<td>(individual spirituality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ &amp; Culture in Paradox</td>
<td>Culture &amp; Church in Paradox</td>
<td>Church as Herald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(dualism)</td>
<td>(indifference)</td>
<td>(proclamation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ the Transformer of Culture</td>
<td>Culture Revolutionising the Church</td>
<td>Church as Servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(conversion)</td>
<td>(integration)</td>
<td>(human need)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A Concluding Reflection*

The best way to illustrate how these analytic frameworks can be useful is to share one's own use of it. Since this article appears in a McGill Journal, and since I was a part of the Anglican church in Quebec for nearly fourteen years, I would like to utilize — in a very preliminary way — this framework for my denomination in Quebec.

First, a look at the historical pattern. The dominant position of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec established a certain pattern. It was set by the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church, which was the ecclesiology of
“Church as an Institution.” Although it may have attempted a theology of “Christ Above Culture,” the laws and institutions of the Quebec government showed a distinct “Christ of Culture” bent. Of all non-Catholic groups, Anglicans in Quebec were most familiar with the cultural rights of a church in a nation (the Church of England), and their bishops expected — and generally received, at least until the 1960s — direct recognition and access to the seats of governmental power. “Co-governance” of Culture and the Church characterized both Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches of that era, and the Anglican Bishops were, frankly, a convenient way for the government of dealing with the English. The ecclesiology of both Anglican and Roman Catholic churches could (and did) divert to other versions (Mystical, Sacrament, Herald) provided that their “Institutional” requirements (social-sacramental, vital records, and education) were met. That leaves me with an analysis of a church whose ecclesiology was largely “Institutional,” whose theological stance to culture was largely “Christ of Culture,” and whose response by culture was largely “Culture and the Church.”

Second, an examination of some current tendencies. Both Vatican II and Quebec society itself have charted a new course for culture and church. The culture is going through a “Quiet Revolution” (but a revolution nonetheless) such that its self-appropriation of a distinct Québécois identity indeed leads it into a period of revolutionary allegiance. While the 70s and 80s involved the church being dealt with in relative indifference (“Paradox”) the current head of steam resulting from the failure of Meech Lake has shifted Quebec culture into a “Culture Above the Church” frame of mind. During the “Paradox” period, the church(es) was exploring new ecclesiological options (especially the “Church as Servant”). But while the church and culture seem “out of sync,” the church (and state?) longing is to return to the habitual pattern — in this case, the “Culture and the Church”/“Christ of Culture” pattern.
of co-governance and agreement. Yet the "head of steam" of culture and self-identity is promoting the relationship into "Culture Above the Church" in which culture is clearly taking the lead. Without speculating about Roman Catholic theologies and ecclesiologies, one can only say of the Anglican church that the "Church As Institution" is clearly an archival position, while the church as "Mystical Communion," "Sacrament," and "Herald" all have overtones of avoidance of the social and political issues in the culture. That leaves the "Church As Servant" as the final option, with the cultural response ranging from "indifference" to "regulation" to "— —"? Little wonder that the theology is at least in "Paradox," and struggling between "opposition," "conversion," and even "agreement."

Finally some comments about the intentional future of the church. This entire analytic and reflective exercise presses a church (and individual) back to its theological foundations and, in particular, upon its evaluation of the degree to which human endeavour can realize its God-given opportunities for goodness without (or with) the guidance of the church. Could one trust the cultural aspirations of Quebec to be, at least in part, providential or are they suspect without the human values that only Christianity should provide? Ought a church to chart its course "safely" — within "evangelization," "sacramentality" or "spirituality" — but not within "Servanthood," which requires common vulnerability to human need? Is this not all the more threatening to Anglican (and other non-Catholic) churches, since they still retain much of their non-Québécois cultural origins, and the theological and ecclesiological mandate of "Transformation" and "Servanthood" requires collaborative and cooperative participation in the development of a new social and political constitution?

As a former citizen of Quebec, I can only ask but not answer questions about intentional options for either church or Québécois culture. But with Troeltsch and those challenged by his analysis, I remain at least concerned
with the form of compromise and accommodation that is historically possible between culture and the church, if not actually possible. The church should not proceed without consciousness of how it is choosing to give historical manifestation of the Christian faith.

Works Cited


