Church and Culture: An Analytic Structure for the Relationship

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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 "con-
science" 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 exist-
> ence 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 strug-
gling 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, especial-
ly 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 Christi-
> anity 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 Christi-
> anity 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 distinc-
> tion 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 com-
> pletely 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 construc-
tively, 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 organ-
> ized along the principles of a visible, political
> society, and by that fact it claims the final alle-
> giance 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 bibli-
> cal notion of *koinonia*, a communion of persons
> with God in faith, hope and love, is the organiz-
> ing principle of a society of grace. Because of its
> vertical dimension, it recalls "Christ Above

Culture," yet it is expressed in horizontal rela-
tionships, as "Christ of Culture." Dulles notes its
tendency to seek only collective religious experie-
nce, 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 cul-
ture" 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 Cul-
ture," but quickly leads into the "Christ of Cul-
ture" 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 superceeded 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,

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

Issues in Relating Church and Culture

Theology	Culture	Ecclesiology
Christ Against Culture (opposition)	Culture Against the Church (persecution)	Church as Institution (self-contained)
Christ of Culture (agreement)	Culture and the Church (co-governance)	Church as Mystical Communion (collective spirituality)
Christ Above Culture (horizon)	Culture Above the Church (regulation)	Church as Sacrament (individual spirituality)
Christ & Culture in Paradox (dualism)	Culture & Church in Paradox (indifference)	Church as Herald (proclamation)
Christ the Transformer of Culture (conversion)	Culture Revolutionizing the Church (integration)	Church as Servant (human need)

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 prelimi-
nary way — this framework for my denomination in
Quebec.

First, a look at the historical pattern. The domi-
nant 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 over-
tones 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 "indif-
ference" 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," "sacramental-
ity" 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.

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