

Resources for Further Study on Christ, the Church, Christians, and Culture

Below is a list of resources that are helpful for reflecting on the relationship of Christ, the Church, Christians, and culture. Some of the books deal more with one or the other of these relationships. Also, their presence on this list does not indicate that they agree with one another, or that I agree with them. Rather, it shows that they are important resources for helping us think through how we are called as individual believers and as a local church to respond to the culture around us.

Along with the basic information on the resource, I will include a brief discussion as to why it is important, the level of difficulty in understanding and applying the resource, and the degree to which I agree with the author's conclusions.

DVD resources

Christ, Kingdom and Culture - This DVD set is a recording of the Christ, Kingdom and Culture conference held by Westminster Seminary, California in January 2010. It consists of six sessions covering topics related to Christ's rulership, two kingdoms theology, education, work, the state, and also includes a video of the question and answer session. This is an excellent resource for a basic introduction to two kingdoms theology and how it would approach various areas in our culture today.

Where Faith and Culture Meet - This is a DVD with an accompanying study guide. It is a supplement to the book *Culture Making* by Andy Crouch (see below for my comments on this book). It is intended as a resource for a small group study.

Internet Resources

Christianity, Culture, and Common Grace - by Ken Myers. Located at <http://www.marshillaudio.org/resources/pdf/ComGrace.pdf>. This is the single best resource for understanding the two kingdoms. Although he does not even argue for a two kingdoms model, his understanding of the relationship between Christ and culture, and the role of common grace is the underpinning for a two kingdoms view of how these all relate. Ken Myers is one of the most astute observers of culture that I know of (our church library has his *Mars Hill Audio* resources which are critical for understanding our culture), and this article is superb. It is shorter than the book length works below and is really the best place to start. Highly recommended.

Christianity and Culture: God's Double Sovereignty - by Gene Edward Veith. Located at <http://www.mtio.com/articles/aissar26.htm>. Veith is a Lutheran scholar who is Dean of Arts and Sciences at Concordia University. In this article he gives a good overview of the two kingdoms approach and how it works in our current context. A brief but helpful introduction to the two kingdoms concept from a conservative Lutheran perspective.

Lutheran Church of Australia Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions: The Two Kingdoms - Located at <http://www.lca.org.au/resources/csbq/twokingdoms.pdf>. This paper was written by the Lutheran Church of Australia and is a good overview of the two kingdoms doctrine as it appears in Scripture, as it developed in history, and as it applies to the difficult position Christians face in an increasingly ungodly and hostile Western culture. It also answers a few common objections. A very good introduction to the subject.

Book resources

Living in God's Two Kingdoms - by David Van Drunen. Dr. Van Drunen is a professor at Westminster Seminary California, and one of the leading proponents of two kingdoms theology in the evangelical church today. This is the best book length introduction to the topic of the two kingdoms. Overall, the content of this book is excellent. I would note that I think Dr. Van Drunen makes too sharp a distinction between creation and the new creation, calling for virtual total discontinuity between the two. I do not think this is really part of the two kingdoms understanding of the relationship between Christ, the Church, Christians, and culture. However, on the whole this is a highly recommended resource. It is available in our church library.

Christ and Culture Revisited - by D.A. Carson. Dr. Carson is a renowned evangelical scholar. As the title suggests, in this book Dr. Carson looks at the categories offered by H. Richard Niebuhr in his highly influential *Christ and Culture*. In general, his approach is that no single category of relating Christ (and more specifically the Church and individual Christians) to the culture will suffice. Different times and cultures will call for different responses. As always, I found Dr. Carson's insights to be thought provoking, balanced, and insightful. I highly recommend this book, especially if you are familiar with Niebuhr's work.

Dual Citizens - by Jason Stellman. Jason Stellman is a Presbyterian Pastor in the Northwest, and is a recent graduate of Westminster Seminary, California, so he is a student of Dr. Van Drunen and the other professors there. In this book he looks at how our dual citizenship is reflected in worship and life. I am not persuaded by some of his positions on worship, and found the book seemed to wander as it progressed. It had some very helpful insights, but I find Dr. Van Drunen's book to be more helpful.

Culture Making - by Andy Crouch. Andy Crouch is well respected Christian leader in thinking about the relationship of the Church to the culture. In this book he is not just thinking about how the Church and individual Christians respond to culture, but how we are called to make culture. This is not a call for Christians to confidently affirm their ability to conquer the culture however. Rather it is a very nuanced look at the complexity of culture, the overarching themes of Scripture, the importance of our callings. Crouch warns against over-confidence in shaping culture, as most attempts to direct culture have as far reaching unintended consequences as those that were sought. However, he gives great encouragement in way big and small that Christians can live lives more in line with the Gospel and its call. A very good book on understanding culture and encouraging us to create culture in small way each and every day.

A Secular Faith - by Darryl Hart. Darryl Hart seems to like to stir up controversy in his writings, and he is certainly provocative in this volume. However, I found his case that Christianity best thrives in a secular environment in which church and state are kept distinct to be persuasive in many ways. Mr. Hart is a historian and this work delves into a lot of American history. His ideas are provocative, but I was surprised at how much I actually found myself agreeing with his overall arguments and conclusions.

The Case for Civility - by Os Guinness. Os Guinness, a leading Christian thinker and scholar, is British, but in this book he argues that America's founders had the best solution for the interplay between church and state. Furthermore, he believes that we are in grave danger of losing this solution in the present culture wars - and that both the religious right and the secular left are to blame. He states that the genius of the founders was that they did not create either a sacred public square (establishment of one religion over others or over those who have no faith at all), nor a naked public square (where faith and religion are barred from display and discussion), but rather a civil public square where religion is not established or supported by the state, but where believers are free to exercise their faith in public, as are those of no faith. However, all must be civil in their discussions and treatments of others. This book is a call to tone down the heated rhetoric that is endemic to the culture wars, and I think it is badly needed. A highly recommended read.

Christ and Culture - by H. Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr was a liberal Protestant theologian in the middle of the 20th century. This book is the standard academic look at the relationship of Christ and culture through the ages. In it Niebuhr lays out five responses to culture by Christians throughout the ages, giving ancient and modern examples of each. He does not identify which he believes is correct, though it is fairly clear that he likes the "Christ the transformer of culture" model the best. Though Niebuhr was a liberal, this work has had massive influence on evangelicals. If one wants to study this topic in depth, Niebuhr must be read. However, some of the material will seem dated, and many believers will be better served by reading other works which give a synopsis of Niebuhr's view.

Resources to help Better Understand Our Current Culture

Mars Hill Audio Journal - This is a bi-monthly CD produced by Ken Myers (who wrote the article *Christianity, Culture, and Common Grace* that I highly recommended above.) Each issue is approximately 90 minutes and is filled with discussions and interviews of authors and leaders on a wide variety of cultural topics, including discussions on art, music, food, history, important thinkers, how cultural trends such as commuting and the internet make living the Christian life more difficult. This is a very thought provoking resource, and it has shaped my understanding of culture and the importance of incarnation and taking our humanity seriously more than any other resource. It is available in our church library and I highly recommend it.

WORLD magazine - This is a newsweekly magazine, similar in format to TIME or Newsweek, but written from a distinctly conservative position, both theologically and politically. It is available in our church library and is a good resource for seeing one possible Christian approach to current cultural trends and issues.