

Is there a Christian Culture and Civilization? REVISED

Written by Calvin Fox

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What is Culture?

Popular Culture has to do with preferences and tastes in manners, food, clothing, music, decorative arts, customs and traditions such as Rites of Passage (coming of age rituals, weddings, anniversaries, birthdays). There is, and should be, a lot of diversity in all of these matters. Although they can be very important to people, all such matters are peripheral to what is the core of culture.

Essential cultural consists of those core beliefs, morals and values that are shared by any group of people and bind them together as an identifiable body. These are not peripheral matters. Christians as individuals may enjoy and value a diversity of peripheral cultural matters, but we are joined together as a recognizable social group by core beliefs, morals and values which are Biblical. These together are our core Christian Culture-

The 7 marks of an essential Christian or Biblical Culture-

Life- emphasis on life, including the natural world. ItCore Christian Culture is very pro-life in every sense.

Marriage- defined as a life-long, committed relationship between a man and a woman is very highly valued. Divorce is disapproved. Virginity before Marriage and Chastity during it are greatly valued.

Family- parenthood and children are desired and valued; abortion is strongly disapproved; extended, cross generational families are the norm; children honor (respect) their parents and the elderly are respected by all.

Individual Responsibility- individual persons are accountable and responsible to God, themselves, their family and community for their decisions and actions

Work- everyone who is able works throughout life for the welfare of the family and community. Social, Economic and Political Freedom to work is highly valued.

Charity (Biblical Welfare)- People who become destitute due to circumstances beyond their control are the responsibility- first, of their extended family and then, of the Church and then, of the local community

Biblical Religion- Christian Culture, above all, is Christian. It is centered on the worship and

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service of the God who has revealed Himself in Creation, Scripture and, particularly, in Jesus Christ. People who share Christian Culture see themselves as the Covenant People of God. This is their primary identity, no matter what their ethnic origin, first language or country of origin may be.

The above seven distinctives are the essential or core marks of Christian Culture. In practice, American Christians often disagree about the peripherals as well as mix them in with the essentials. The peripherals should reflect or manifest the essentials, but often do not. The essentials are meant to influence and shape the peripherals, but often it is the other way around. It is especially important that the peripherals do not overcome or undermine the essentials. In practice that often happens. An important task for the Church is to help Christians understand the difference between the two and how they relate.

In this time when Multiculturalism is so highly valued by many, it is very important that Christians understand what a Biblical Core Culture is and unashamedly commit to develop and maintain all its core essentials as outlined above.

Biblical Civilization-

Culture and Civilization are not the same, but they are interconnected. Both are essential. No Culture can be sustained without Civilization and vice versa.

All Civilizations require Government; Laws; an educated or skilled, co-operative citizenry and a productive economic system.

A good Civilization's Government functions under just Laws and its citizens have a Bill of Rights such as those Americans have, are educated and moral and share in a productive, equitable and free economic system and are committed to the common good

The foundation of a Christian Civilization is Christian Culture (particularly well grounded in Biblical Religion and Morality, as outlined above). The Education System of a Christian Civilization is based on Christian Epistemology and Pedagogy; its Civil Government is based on Biblical Principles and is therefore a Republic under a Constitution and Laws that are in harmony with the Bible. Its Economic System is based on Biblical principles and would therefore be a compassionate, market-based Capitalism without greed or corruption.

Christians should not be apologetic about believing that Christian Civilization is "exceptional". How could they believe otherwise? This is not to identify America with Christian Civilization or the Kingdom of God. The latter is an Ideal for which we pray and strive ("Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth"). The Ideal was the Vision of the First Founders of New England and many aspects of it survive and are still strong today, although seriously challenged. There is no other Nation that comes as close as America to the Ideal. A major part of its unique Heritage are the contributions of-

"Old Dead White Men" and Others

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We should all greatly value the Languages and Literature, the History and the Intellectual and Cultural Heritage of Western Europe and Great Britain and want to see them preserved and taught and given priority in schools throughout America:

- Ancient Greek, Medieval, Renaissance and Reformation Philosophers, Theologians, Artists and assorted "Leaders" and people of influence
- European mathematicians, philosophers, scientists, political figures
- European and American Literary authors (the traditional Western canon)
- European "Classical" music composers and performers
- The Founding Fathers of the United States

I definitely do not agree with, or endorse, all that all these men (and I do mean men) taught or stood for. But there is a very real and fundamental connection between these Thinkers, Writers and Artists and Christian Culture and Christian Civilization. This Heritage and Tradition provides the major roots from which America comes. Much of the greatness and many of our highest achievements may be attributed to them and their influence. We neglect or disparage them and their influence to our peril as a Nation.

Redemption of Culture and Civilization: what sin has deformed, we must seek, in Christ, to reform

Evangelicals believe in the redemption of the physical body, both Christ's and ours. The Apostle Paul tells us of the necessity to use our physical bodies as instruments of righteousness. The entire Bible says that all things are to be done to the glory of God. It necessarily follows from all this, that our Culture and Civilization, our civic body, can and must be redeemed as well and made to glorify God.

Both Culture and Civilization were commanded by God when He gave the Stewardship Mandate to the first men and women. They were to multiply and fill the earth, representing Him everywhere as Cities and Civilization. Human beings are put all their God-given faculties to work in the effort. It could be said that building cities and the rest are the very work of God. He is the City-builder (Heb 11:10) The Biblical Story began in a Garden, but it ends in a City.

Of course, the fallen sinful nature of Human beings is clearly evident in their Culture, Cities and Civilization. That does not cancel the Mandate, but it required the work of Christ on the original Easter Event Weekend. It is ultimately the regenerated People of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and guided by Scripture as a rough blue-print, that will need to do the heavy lifting to reclaim and redirect Culture, Cities and Civilization back to what God intends. Of course, they will not succeed completely, that is not the point. The Church can make a difference and make real progress toward that end over time, but success is not the goal; faithfulness is. Our efforts are the witness that God will use to glorify Himself.

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