

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS of POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Catholic: “Christ above culture” / “synthetic”

- After beginning in exile, marginalization, and persecution ...
- ... moving from the apologists toward Augustine’s *City of God*
- The “Constantinian” paradigm, or “Christendom”: from two cities to two swords
- The medieval, Thomist synthesis: natural law; grace perfects nature
- “Subsidiarity” relates government to other institutions that God created
- After the Reformation: wrestling with political pluralism and the Enlightenment while championing a “culture of life”; “subsidiarity” ...
 - Catholic Workers’ Movement
 - Liberation theology
 - *Humanae vitae*

Lutheran: “Christ and culture in paradox” / “conversionist”

- “Two kingdoms,” temporal and eternal, with natural law retained to an extent
- Grace (ultimate) is dialectically paralleled with nature (penultimate)
- Government seems to be a function of the fall, to restrain evil (provisionally)

Anabaptist: “Christ against culture” / “antithetical” or “separatist”

- Sharp difference between “Christ” and “culture,” OT and NT; no natural law
- Jesus’s ethics of non-violence forms the church as an alternative community
- Grace supplants (fallen) nature
- No clear account of government vis-à-vis creation or even as God-given restraint

Calvinist: “Christ transforms culture” / “transformationist”

- Strong continuity between Israel/OT and church/NT, but not between “Christ” and “culture” (e.g., Abraham Kuyper’s “antithesis”)—ambivalence over natural law
- Grace restores nature
- Government is a structure God created (related to others by “sphere sovereignty” in Dutch neo-Calvinism)
- Recent Westminster recovery of earlier “two kingdoms” elements (toning down transformationist tendencies)

Modern America?

- Baptist / dissenting influence: individual soul liberty yet promotion of biblical virtue or even civil religion

- Methodist moral reforms, e.g., abolition of slavery; temperance
- Prophetic community organizing and civil disobedience in the Black church
- Contrasts with (dis)establishment and “secularization” in Europe
- Contrasts with new “Christendom” opportunities, places of persecution, and some “pentecostal” tendencies in the global South

Contemporary Anglican varieties ...

- “Radical orthodoxy” from John Milbank: the “heresy” of secular social theories assuming an “ontology of violence” rather than peace
- Evangelical Augustinianism from Oliver O’Donovan: the resurrection reaffirms the moral order of creation; Christ as king is the desire of the nations who triumphs over political powers but temporarily reauthorizes them for the sake of judging right and wrong; social life goes beyond the political, being rooted in common objects of love ...

For further reading (in chronological order of publication) ...

- H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (the classic account of the five theological “types” of approaches summarized above)
- Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order; The Desire of the Nations; Common Objects of Love; The Ways of Judgment* (demanding arguments for the claims summarized above)
- Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture* (an Anabaptist theologian’s critique of Niebuhr’s types along with an alternative addressing approaches to violence)
- D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (a Reformed Baptist New Testament scholar’s engagement with Niebuhr’s types in light of biblical theology)
- P. C. Kemeny, ed., *Church, State and Public Justice: Five Views* (essays from Catholic, “classic separation,” Anabaptist, “principled pluralist,” and “social justice” perspectives)
- Amy E. Black, ed., *Five Views on the Church and Politics* (essays from Catholic, Lutheran, Anabaptist, Reformed, and Black Church advocates)
- Bethany Hanke Hoang and Kristen Deede Johnson, *The Justice Calling* (a readable, broadly Reformed, practical theology of social justice)
- Jonathan Leeman, *How the Nations Rage* (popular Baptist treatment from his academic study *Political Church*, which treats the church as the “embassy” of God’s kingdom)
- Matthew T. Martens, *Reforming Criminal Justice* (forthcoming treatment from a theologically-trained lawyer who has been both a prosecutor and a defense attorney)