

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 23, Neo-Orthodoxy and Social Crisis, Part 3 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 23, Neo-Orthodoxy and Social Crisis, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Green's lecture explores the relationship between Christianity and culture through the lens of Neo-Orthodoxy, a movement that sought to provide a robust theological alternative to both liberal Protestantism and fundamentalism. The session specifically examines H. Richard Niebuhr's framework from his book *Christ and Culture*, outlining three primary models: **opposition**, where Christians radically separate themselves from culture; **synthesis**, which sees harmony and little tension between Christ and culture; and **tension**, a middle ground recognizing the inherent conflicts while advocating for Christian engagement within culture. **Examples like monasticism and American fundamentalism illustrate the opposition model, while deism and liberal Protestantism exemplify synthesis. The lecture highlights Niebuhr's own inclination towards the tension model, seeing it as a necessary and challenging way for Christians to live as citizens of both heaven and earth.**

2. 26 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 23 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → American Christianity).



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3. Briefing Document: Green, Session 23, Neo-Orthodoxy and Social Crisis, Part 3

Briefing Document: Neo-Orthodoxy and Social Crisis - Christ and Culture

Overview:

This briefing document summarizes Dr. Roger Green's lecture on H. Richard Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture" within the context of Neo-Orthodoxy's emergence in response to early 20th-century American Protestantism. Green outlines Niebuhr's analysis of various stances Christians adopt towards culture, focusing on three key models: opposition, synthesis, and tension. He highlights Niebuhr's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition and synthesis models while emphasizing Niebuhr's own leaning towards the tension model as a necessary and challenging middle ground.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Context of Neo-Orthodoxy:

- Neo-Orthodoxy, a European movement that influenced American Christianity, sought to address the perceived shortcomings of both liberal Protestantism (seen as "bankrupt") and American fundamentalism (perceived as "anti-intellectual" and "emotional").
- It appealed to the "broad middle of Protestants" by offering a "very strong, biblically-based movement, seeing the Bible mainly through the eyes of the Reformation, through the eyes of Calvin primarily," while also being "very intellectual" and capable of engaging with modern issues.
- Key figures in this movement included the Niebuhr brothers, with H. Richard Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture" being a pivotal work.

2. Defining "Christ" and "Culture" in Niebuhr's Framework:

- **Christ:** Niebuhr refers to "Christ, the incarnate Christ... God in the flesh as the Lord who brought a kingdom reality to this world and is the Lord of history." This encompasses the multifaceted nature of Christ as revealed in the biblical narrative.
- **Culture:** Niebuhr defines culture as "what we place upon the natural world to form social reality," including "politics, it could be the arts, it could be science, it could be architecture." Language is also highlighted as a crucial shaper of culture.

3. The Opposition Between Christ and Culture:

- **Core Belief:** This position affirms the "sole authority of Christ" in all aspects of life, asserting that "culture has no claims to our loyalty. Only Christ has the claim to our loyalty."
- **Characteristics:** Views Christianity as a "new order," a "new kingdom," and a "new world" demanding exclusive allegiance.
- Finds biblical support in the "radical call to come and be apart from the world" and follow Jesus only.
- Often (but not always) incorporates a "dynamic kind of eschatology," believing in the imminence of the end times and the passing nature of all cultural realities.
- May view human institutions as "evil and really kind of perverse," leading to the shunning of certain aspects of culture (e.g., political life, military life, philosophy, the arts).
- **Examples: Monasticism:** Historically, monasticism embodied an "opposition to the Christ and culture movement" by withdrawing from cultural engagement and focusing solely on Christ. The Trappist monastery example illustrates vows of poverty, chastity, and silence aimed at separating from worldly concerns.
- **American Fundamentalism (in some aspects):** Green suggests that some American fundamentalists exhibit an opposition mentality through "a lot of rules and regulations, a lot of do's and don'ts" designed to keep believers away from a perceived "fallen culture."
- **Niebuhr's Assessment: Necessary:** This position is necessary because "it reminds Christians of ultimate loyalties" to Christ alone and highlights that "culture often makes compromises contrary to the teachings of Jesus."
- **Inadequate:** It is inadequate because "human beings are cultural beings" and inevitably create their own cultures. Furthermore, it fails to recognize that "Jesus is Lord over all, all the world, including over all the cultures." Even seemingly anti-cultural movements like monasticism can become influential forces within culture over time.

4. The Synthesis of Christ and Culture:

- **Core Belief:** This view sees "no tension between Christ and the world," with the gospel and social laws perceived as "beautifully in harmony with each other."

- **Characteristics:**Emphasizes the harmony between divine grace and human effort, and between the ethics of salvation and the ethics of progress.
- Tends to view Jesus as a "good moral teacher" and a "perfect person at home in the culture, at home in the world, but at home with God."
- Sees the goal of culture as "a shalom," a "peaceful, cooperative human existence" that can be achieved through human effort.
- Promotes a "multicultural effort" and a "multi-religious effort" where all cultures and religions are welcome without judgment.
- **Examples:Deism (18th Century):** The ideals of deism, as exemplified by Thomas Jefferson, align with the concept of a harmonious relationship between natural law and divine principles.
- **Classical Liberal Protestantism (19th-21st Century):** Illustrated by the example of Judson Memorial Church, this movement often embraces cultural expressions and sees all expressions of culture as equally valid, sometimes blurring the lines between the sacred and the secular.
- **Niebuhr's Assessment:Necessary:** This position is necessary because "you cannot associate Christ with any culture" as he is the creator of all humanity. It also allows those comfortable within the culture to "speak to the cultural despisers of Christianity" and minister to the cultural elite.
- **Inadequate:** It is inadequate because "it fails to see how radical the call of the gospel is," which does not allow for dual allegiances to Christ and inherently sinful cultures. By not recognizing sin and evil within cultures, this view struggles to offer judgment against profoundly immoral cultural expressions (e.g., Nazi Germany).

5. Christ and Culture in Tension:

- **Core Belief:** This middle ground acknowledges and seeks to reconcile the inherent tensions between Christ and culture.
- **Characteristics:**Affirms that "Jesus Christ is the Lord of all," including cultural expression, which is built upon a "natural world" created by God and therefore "inherently good."
- Recognizes that while the natural world is good, the cultures humans create can often be evil.

- Operates on the principle that "all truth is God's truth," encouraging Christians to be "obedient in serving the culture where they find truth."
- Emphasizes obedience as a practical engagement in the everyday world where God has placed believers.
- **Examples: St. Thomas Aquinas:** His work integrated theology and philosophy, viewing "our ability to reason in this world" as "a gift from God" to be used in all areas of culture. Catholic universities often draw upon this tradition in their philosophy of education.
- **The Letter to Diognetus (2nd Century):** This letter beautifully illustrates the tension of Christians living "in the world, but not of the world." They participate in local customs but maintain a distinct heavenly citizenship, loving everyone while being persecuted, and living according to higher principles than secular law. The quote, "**Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language, or customs... They live in their own native lands but as aliens. As citizens, they share all things with others, but like aliens, they suffer all things... They are in the world, but not of the world.**" encapsulates this tension.
- **Niebuhr's Assessment:** Green emphasizes that Niebuhr himself aligns with this middle ground and does not offer a critique of it. Niebuhr sees this as the difficult but necessary way for Christians to live, holding allegiance to both Christ and the culture in which they operate through God's grace. He believes Christians should not retreat from culture nor naively embrace it without recognizing the inherent tensions.

Conclusion:

Dr. Green's lecture provides a valuable overview of H. Richard Niebuhr's influential framework for understanding the relationship between Christ and culture. By outlining the models of opposition, synthesis, and tension, and highlighting Niebuhr's own preference for the challenging middle ground, the lecture encourages a nuanced and critical engagement with the complexities of Christian life within diverse cultural contexts. Niebuhr's work, particularly "Christ and Culture," remains relevant for understanding the ongoing dialogue and tensions between faith and the world.

4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 23, Neo-Orthodoxy and Social Crisis, Part 2

Study Guide: Neo-Orthodoxy and Christ & Culture

Key Concepts:

- **Neo-Orthodoxy:** A 20th-century theological movement that reacted against liberal Protestantism and fundamentalism, emphasizing the transcendence of God, the sinfulness of humanity, and the authority of Scripture as interpreted through the lens of the Reformation.
- **Social Crisis:** The various challenges and upheavals faced by society, including political instability, moral decay, and social injustices, which Neo-Orthodoxy sought to address.
- **Christ and Culture:** The complex relationship between Christian faith and the surrounding society, explored in H. Richard Niebuhr's influential book of the same title.
- **Opposition (Christ Against Culture):** A model where Christ and culture are seen as fundamentally opposed, requiring Christians to separate themselves from worldly influences and prioritize allegiance solely to Christ and his kingdom.
- **Synthesis (Christ of Culture):** A model where Christ and culture are seen as largely harmonious, with Christian faith aligning with and affirming the values and goals of the surrounding society.
- **Intention (Christ Above Culture/Christ Transforming Culture):** A middle ground that recognizes the tension between Christ and culture. It emphasizes Christ's Lordship over all creation, including culture, while acknowledging the fallen nature of human-created cultural expressions. This view calls for Christians to engage with culture discerningly, seeking truth and working for transformation.
- **Ultimate Loyalty:** The primary and unwavering commitment that Christians owe to Jesus Christ and his kingdom, which should supersede any loyalty to cultural norms or societal expectations.
- **Cultural Beings:** The understanding that human beings are inherently shaped by and participate in the creation of culture through their communal existence.
- **Eschatology:** The theological study of the "end times" or the ultimate destiny of humanity and the world.

- **Monasticism:** A religious practice involving individuals or communities withdrawing from secular society to dedicate themselves fully to spiritual work and contemplation.
- **American Fundamentalism:** A 20th-century conservative Protestant movement that emphasized biblical inerrancy and opposed liberal theology and modern cultural trends.
- **Deism:** An 18th-century religious and philosophical movement that believed in a God who created the universe but does not intervene in its affairs, emphasizing reason and natural law.
- **Liberal Protestantism:** A theological movement that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries, emphasizing the immanence of God, the goodness of humanity, and the compatibility of Christianity with modern science and culture.
- **Shalom:** A Hebrew word often translated as peace, but encompassing wholeness, well-being, and harmony in all aspects of life.
- **Letter to Diognetus:** An early Christian apologetic letter from the 2nd century that beautifully describes the paradoxical existence of Christians living in but not of the world.
- **St. Thomas Aquinas:** A 13th-century Catholic theologian and philosopher who synthesized Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology, emphasizing the harmony between faith and reason.
- **Natural World:** The physical universe and creation, which Neo-Orthodoxy affirms as good, having been created by God.

Short-Answer Quiz:

1. What were the two theological movements that Neo-Orthodoxy saw as inadequate in addressing the broad middle of American Protestantism?
2. According to Dr. Green, what does H. Richard Niebuhr mean by "Christ" in the context of "Christ and Culture"?
3. Describe the core belief of those who hold to the "opposition between Christ and culture" model.
4. What is one reason why Niebuhr considers the "opposition between Christ and culture" position to be a necessary one? What is one reason he considers it inadequate?

5. Explain the central idea behind the "synthesis of Christ and culture" model.
6. Give one example of the "synthesis of Christ and culture" mentioned in the lecture and briefly describe how it fits this model.
7. Why does Niebuhr consider the "synthesis of Christ and culture" to be an inadequate position?
8. What is the fundamental premise of the "Christ and culture in tension" model regarding Christ's relationship to the world?
9. How does the example of the "Letter to Diognetus" illustrate the "Christ and culture in tension" model?
10. According to Dr. Green, where does H. Richard Niebuhr place his own allegiance in the "Christ and Culture" framework?

Answer Key:

1. Neo-Orthodoxy viewed classical Protestant liberalism as bankrupt and American fundamentalism as anti-intellectual and overly emotional, neither of which adequately addressed the needs of mainstream Protestants.
2. Niebuhr understands "Christ" as the incarnate God in the flesh, who brought a kingdom reality to the world and is the Lord of history.
3. Those who believe in the opposition between Christ and culture affirm the sole authority of Christ in all aspects of life and believe that culture has no claim to their loyalty, as their allegiance is to a new kingdom order.
4. Niebuhr sees it as necessary because it reminds Christians of their ultimate loyalty to Christ and highlights how culture often compromises Jesus' teachings. He considers it inadequate because humans are inherently cultural beings and even those who oppose culture end up creating their own.
5. The "synthesis of Christ and culture" posits that there is no inherent tension between Christ and the world, seeing the gospel and social laws, divine grace and human effort, and ethics of salvation and progress as being in harmony.
6. Deism in the 18th century, exemplified by Thomas Jefferson, is an example as it viewed Jesus primarily as a moral teacher whose ethical principles could guide the construction of a peaceful and cooperative human existence without the need for specific religious doctrines.

7. Niebuhr finds it inadequate because it fails to recognize the radical call of the gospel for singular allegiance to Christ and overlooks the inherent sinfulness of cultures created by sinful people.
8. The "Christ and culture in tension" model asserts that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all creation, including culture, which is built upon a good natural world created by God, even though human-formed culture is often tainted by evil.
9. The letter describes Christians living within their local cultures in terms of clothing and customs yet maintaining a distinct citizenship in heaven, facing persecution while loving all, and embodying a paradoxical existence "in the world, but not of the world."
10. Niebuhr aligns himself with the "Christ and culture in tension" model, believing that Christians live in a continuous interplay between their loyalty to Christ and their engagement with the culture in which they find themselves.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Compare and contrast the "opposition between Christ and culture" and the "synthesis of Christ and culture" models, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective as presented by Dr. Green.
2. Analyze why H. Richard Niebuhr considers the "Christ and culture in tension" model to be the most appropriate way for Christians to engage with the world, drawing on the lecture's explanation and examples.
3. Discuss the role of culture in shaping human identity and consider how the different models of "Christ and Culture" might influence a Christian's understanding and participation within their own cultural context.
4. Explore the concept of "ultimate loyalty" for Christians in light of the three main models of "Christ and Culture" discussed in the lecture, considering the potential challenges and implications of each perspective.
5. Evaluate the relevance of Neo-Orthodoxy's critique of liberal Protestantism and fundamentalism for contemporary American Christianity, considering the ongoing tensions between faith and culture.

Glossary of Key Terms: (See list at the beginning of the study guide)

5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 23, Neo-Orthodoxy and Social Crisis, Part 3, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Neo-Orthodoxy and Christ & Culture

1. What is Neo-Orthodoxy and why did it emerge in the American context? Neo-Orthodoxy was a significant theological movement originating in Europe that gained traction in America. It arose as a reaction to what it perceived as the shortcomings of classical Protestant liberalism (deemed theologically weak) and American fundamentalism (seen as anti-intellectual and overly emotional). Neo-Orthodoxy, championed by figures like the Niebuhr brothers, offered a biblically robust and intellectually rigorous approach for mainstream American Protestants struggling to find a solid theological footing in the face of modern challenges. It emphasized the authority of the Bible (interpreted through a Reformation lens, particularly Calvin), while also engaging deeply with philosophy, arts, culture, and the complexities of the modern world, including politics and social constructs.

2. According to H. Richard Niebuhr, what does "Christ" represent in the context of his book *Christ and Culture*? When H. Richard Niebuhr discusses "Christ," he is referring to the incarnate Christ – God in the flesh. However, his understanding goes beyond a simple historical figure. Niebuhr sees Christ as the Lord who inaugurated the reality of God's kingdom in the world and as the active Lord of history. This multifaceted understanding of Christ invites a deep exploration of the biblical narrative to grasp the full scope of what Niebuhr intends by the term.

3. How does Niebuhr define "culture" in his framework? Niebuhr defines "culture" broadly as everything that humanity superimposes onto the natural world to create social reality. This encompasses a wide range of human endeavors, including politics, the arts, science, architecture, ethics, and significantly, language. Language, in particular, is highlighted as a crucial element that shapes and reflects a people's culture.

4. What are the key characteristics of the "Christ against Culture" model, and what examples are provided? The "Christ against Culture" model posits a fundamental opposition between the sole authority of Christ and the claims of culture. Proponents of this view believe that ultimate loyalty belongs only to Christ and his new order or kingdom, not to the surrounding culture. They often find biblical support for this stance in radical calls for separation from the world and may hold strong eschatological views about the passing nature of cultural realities. Examples of this model include monasticism, particularly its early forms emphasizing withdrawal and contemplation away from societal norms, and aspects of American fundamentalism that advocate for strict separation from perceived worldly corruption through numerous rules and regulations.

5. While acknowledging its importance, why does Niebuhr consider the "Christ against Culture" model to be inadequate? Niebuhr argues that while the "Christ against Culture" model serves the necessary functions of reminding Christians of their ultimate loyalty to Christ and highlighting cultural compromises that contradict Christian teachings, it is ultimately inadequate. This is because human beings are inherently cultural beings, living in communities and inevitably shaping their own cultures, even in attempts to separate from broader society. Furthermore, this model can overlook the fact that Christ is Lord over all creation, including all cultures, and that even seemingly separate communities develop their own cultural norms and priorities.

6. What are the central tenets of the "Christ of Culture" or "Christ and Culture in Synthesis" model, and what historical movements exemplify it? The "Christ of Culture" or "Christ and Culture in Synthesis" model proposes a harmonious relationship between Christ and culture, suggesting no fundamental tension between them. This view often sees Jesus primarily as a moral teacher and guide whose principles align with the goals of a peaceful and cooperative human existence (shalom). It tends to emphasize human agency in constructing a culture pleasing to God, often leading to a welcoming stance towards diverse cultures and religions. Historical examples of this model include 18th-century Deism, exemplified by figures like Thomas Jefferson, and classical liberal Protestantism of the 19th and 20th centuries, which often sought to integrate Christian teachings seamlessly with prevailing cultural values and practices.

7. What are Niebuhr's criticisms of the "Christ of Culture" or "Christ and Culture in Synthesis" perspective? Niebuhr critiques the "Christ of Culture" or "Christ and Culture in Synthesis" model for failing to recognize the radical nature of the gospel's call and the inherent sinfulness of human-created cultures. He argues that the gospel demands a singular allegiance to Christ, which cannot be fully synthesized with the often-compromised values of culture. By not acknowledging the presence of sin and evil within cultures, this model struggles to offer a basis for judging harmful cultural expressions and practices, such as Nazism.

8. What is the "Christ above Culture" or "Christ and Culture in Paradox/Tension" model, and why does Niebuhr find it compelling? The "Christ above Culture" or "Christ and Culture in Paradox/Tension" model represents a middle ground that acknowledges the tensions between Christ and culture while seeking to reconcile them. This perspective affirms Christ as the Lord of all creation, including the natural world that forms the basis of culture, which is seen as inherently good. However, it also recognizes the corrupting influence of sin on human-shaped cultures. A key tenet is that "all truth is God's truth," leading to a call for Christians to engage with culture, discerning and embracing truth wherever it is found and speaking the gospel into those truths. Niebuhr finds this model compelling because it reflects the paradoxical reality of Christians being both citizens of heaven and residents of earthly cultures, requiring a continuous navigation of these tensions. Examples provided include the theological and philosophical synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas and the description of early Christians in the Letter to Diognetus, who lived within their cultures while maintaining a distinct identity and loyalty to Christ.