

THE PURPOSE OF CULTURE—TRUTH

Man, according to Calvin's Genevan Catechism, has but one purpose in life, viz., "to know God and enjoy him forever." Scripture certainly corroborates this statement, but we must qualify ourselves somewhat. "To know God," says the apostle John, "is life eternal." When we talk about knowing God, therefore, we must always be careful to distinguish just exactly what we are talking about. Everybody knows God. Everyone that God exists and that he is sovereign. Romans 1 testifies to this fact. But, everyone does not know God in the sense in which John speaks. This knowledge entails everlasting life. This is a spiritual knowledge based upon a spiritual communion of faith with the Father-Creator. To know Him in this sense is to be one with Him, it is to be His disciple, it is to worship Him in every sphere of life. This type of knowledge is limited; it is limited to those that are his own, to those whom he has called and elected from before the foundations of this world.

As soon as we talk about God, however, we are talking about the infinite, incomprehensible One, the One "whose ways are past finding out." Man, of himself, cannot know Him, not even intellectually or intuitively. If we are going to talk about God, therefore, we must always reckon with the fact that he has revealed Himself to us in two main ways, viz., through His Word and through His creation. God tells us Who he is and what He has done. Any attempt of man to posit his own conception of God is nothing less than idolatry.

As we stated above, God reveals Himself through His word and His creation. Man, then, when he is placed in the creation, comes face to face with this revelation of God. And, seeing God, he cannot help but respond. It lies in the very nature of the case. Romans 1 states very clearly that the very idea of God is impressed into the minds of every man. Man works with creation, he digs in it, he dissects it, he analyzes it with his telescopes and microscopes. He builds, he constructs, he writes, he paints, in a word, he produces culture. The important thing which we must see in this respect is that we have to learn how to properly handle this culture. We must be able to evaluate it, analyze it, and, by all means, criticize it. We must ask ourselves what does that culture say and why does it say what it does. Never must we fall into the idea that somehow this culture is neutral, that the Christian miraculously transforms it. Never must we accept it at facevalue. We have to make judgments, value judgments, spiritual-ethical judgments, judgments as to whether it is good or bad.

That this is the case lies in the very nature of culture itself. Culture cannot be neutral but it is necessarily colored by the particular viewpoint of its progenitor. A consideration of the idea of what culture is, however, is necessary to determine just why this is so.

The term culture is derived from the Latin word *colere* which literally means to till or to cultivate. It was first used to denote exactly that, viz., the cultivation and tilling of the soil. The first culture was agriculture. Throughout the process of history, however, many other "cultures" have been developed and the term has now come to include all of the activity of man as he belabors the earth in his attempt to advance himself and the universe. It shows man as attempting to fulfill the command of God in Genesis 1:28, as fulfilling the command to subdue the earth.

It must be noted further that man is not laboring with a chaotic heap out of which he is trying to create form and order. In doing culture, man is busy with God's creation.

Man is working with a cosmos, an ordered universe. Man is not a creator but merely a discoverer. As man works, then, he comes into contact with the revelation of God.

Adam, of course, in his perfect state saw this very clearly. Created in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness as the friend-servant of God, Adam perfectly obeyed God's commandment. He subdued all things to himself with the sole purpose of using all these things in the service and praise of his Creator.

Adam fell, however, and with the fall sin comes into the world and, with sin, comes the antithesis. The creation was changed, man was changed. Sin had an effect upon his ability to produce culture. The creation was cursed, man was darkened. God's speech in the natural world, so clearly evident to Adam, was lost to him; being spiritually blind, he cannot see God. But we must remember that man, though fallen, still remains man. He does not become beast or devil. He is still a rational-moral creature. Sin, rather, changed man's spiritual-ethical nature. His light became darkness, obedience became disobedience, truth became the lie. He is no longer an office-bearer of God but a servant of sin. Sin posits the antithesis, the antithesis between sin and grace. After the fall, we have two types of man, viz., the elect and the reprobate, the believer and the unbeliever--two types of men, then, but both, however, still engaged in producing culture but now with an entirely different purpose. By grace, and by grace alone, the regenerate can again obey the command to "subdue the earth." He has been called from his darkness into light, he works, he dissects, but not for self but rather in praise and worship of his Creator. The unregenerate, however, is left in his sin. He, too, works, but he is working for himself, he attempts to subserve all things for his own glory and benefit. He is working to erect his Babels and Babylons and New Deals and Great Societies.

Such is the distinction in all spheres of life, none excepted. Two types of men, similar in all respects except the redeeming grace of God. The one is spiritual, the other carnal. The one has meaning in life, the other is hopelessly caught up in a vicious circle trying to make things relevant. The one deals in the realm of truth, the other in the realm of the lie. The one exalts, the other perverts.

As one approaches culture, then, and as one strives to do culture, he does so from a definite perspective and with a definite purpose.

The perspective which I propose is summed up pretty well in the words of St. Augustine: *credo ut intelligam*, I believe in order that I may understand. Faith, faith in the Word of God, precedes all of the activities of reason. Reason never searches unattended and in isolation.

We must view culture and the revelation of God in creation as Calvin suggests, through the spectacles of the World of God. Only in the light of the Word and only from its perspective can we obtain any meaning at all from the creation of God. Faith seeking understanding, faith seeking meaning, faith seeking to relate all things to its Creator, faith finding ultimate meaning in Jesus Christ, faith seeking The Way, The Truth, and The Life, this is the perspective from which I choose to view and to do culture.

As far as the purpose of studying cultural products and actually doing culture is concerned, the point certainly can be made, then, that it is only the Christian, the elect child of God, who can arrive at truth. The history of ideas is certainly replete, you might even say crowded, with the products of men who have attempted to arrive at truth. There is to my mind, however, only one Truth. Jesus said it: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Man apart from God, reason unaided by faith, intellect segregated from the spiritual

heart will never produce truth. Only when man works with the aid of faith, only when he strives to produce 'culture and to understand this creation in relationship to Jesus Christ, who alone gives meaning to any thing and any work, will truth result.

The question may legitimately be asked, however, as to what we will do with the works of the unregenerate. Can we not gain anything from these works. I would answer that we certainly can but I would hasten to add that we will never gain truth. We must insist that his work can at best reveal what is real. He can merely uncover reality. He can discover, as he has, the laws of physics and mathematics; he can tell us the composition of the earth and the human body. He, too, paints and composes. The difference, however, lies in his ultimate purpose in life. He never really gets beyond the temporal meaning of his discoveries. This is naturally so. His life is not that of a pilgrim and stranger, but that of an empire-builder and an eternal earth-dweller. His purpose is not to exalt the Creator but rather to create his own God and his own salvation. We can gain knowledge from him; discoveries certainly have been made by unregenerate men but, notice carefully, Truth escapes them. They do not want it and they simply can not have it.

The conclusions we can draw, then, are somewhat obvious. Both regenerate and unregenerate share this creation, both work with the cosmos, both discover real things about it, both produce insights which are real and true. The difference is grace. Truth (I prefer to distinguish it from that which is real and true by a capital T) is the sole possession of the regenerated Christian. He alone can offer all things to God in servitude to Him. He alone can obey, by grace, the cultural mandate to subdue and replenish. His alone is the privilege to possess a true and meaningful conception of what this creation is all about. "The truth," says Paul, "shall make you free." Jesus Christ, the TRUTH, has indeed given to his own the spiritual eyes to discern and to interpret creational revelation aright.

—Jon Huisken