

THE CONSEQUENCE OF CHOICE:
A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF CULTURE
APPLIED TO BUSINESS

This paper is a summary of a DMin Thesis prepared for
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Revised November 22, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Summary

Culture is a buzzword that has become important in how we see and understand the world around us. Culture is no longer just an academic concept to study from a distance but a means by which we attempt to explain real and often troubling phenomena that affect our lives in tangible ways. And yet, for people of faith, our concept of culture remains outside the parameters of biblical theology.

This paper proposes to define culture as the consequence of choice. This definition creates a starting point for examining culture within biblical and theological categories. From this view, culture as a consequence of choice is the expression of our ability, as those created in the image of God, to envision what does not exist and take steps to actualize that vision. This view of culture is then developed through the role of faith in business, particularly faith entrepreneurship and workplace discipleship.

Deficiencies in the Familiar Definition of Culture

The most familiar definition of culture is “the shared beliefs and values that drive the behavior of a group of people.”¹ Yet this definition does not include an objective point of reference against which to evaluate cultures. By this definition, cultures can only be compared to other cultures, meaning every culture is of equal authority to the next. To do so, the beliefs and values that make up cultures must be compared and evaluated, which serves only to make the observer the authority, and give the observer’s own cultural beliefs and values an authoritative position.

This limitation is highlighted when we consider that all members of any group completely share one set of values. Thus, the objective authority in viewing any culture becomes the observer, leaving us to evaluate cultures in whatever way best serves our

¹ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2016), 15.

needs. Considering this ambiguity, it is understandable that theologians have hesitated to wade too deeply into this conversation. However, that has not prevented the application of this understanding of culture from entering the church, bringing with it this ambiguous and observer-centered definition.

Under this definition, Scripture is applied to culture as biblical beliefs and values are applied to cultural beliefs and values. This implies that culture is unbiblical, but over time, others concluded that biblical beliefs and values can define and create “good” cultures in the church and other institutions.

This definition of culture has many useful applications, but it has limited the application of Scripture to matching biblical beliefs and values to the beliefs and values in the observed culture. This does not imply that Scripture has not been effective in changing culture by applying biblical truth to beliefs and values. However, the ongoing effect of defining culture as shared beliefs and values has resulted in an understanding of culture that allows only the piecemeal application of Scripture.

Culture as a Consequence of Choice

This paper presents a biblical definition of culture as this: culture is a consequence of choice. I will argue that this definition provides a framework to harmonize the existing conversations about culture and offers a perspective on God’s purpose for culture as a precursor to the gospel.

To choose, one must be able to envision a possible outcome from that choice, even if that outcome is unclear. One is acting on or actualizing that envisioned outcome in making the choice. This brings authors Myers and Olasky to observe,

The more we study culture in its total context, the more we are impressed with the fact that it is the result of billions of separate choices by millions of people.²

² Ken Myers and Marvin Olasky, *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture*, With a New Introduction / Redesign edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 32.

The movement from envisioned to actualized is the mechanism that animates culture as a consequence of choice. Thus, if we can identify the movement from envisioned to actualized in Scripture, we will have a biblical basis from which to view culture.

What We Observe in Culture

Let me begin with some general observations about this definition in light of the limitations we have discussed to the more familiar definition of culture as a group of people's shared beliefs and values.

An Objective Mediator of Consequences

Defining culture as “the shared beliefs and values of a particular group of people” is inherently man-centered. As we will see, man is the central actor in culture, but by defining culture as a consequence of choice, we reference an external means of determining those consequences. The only alternative to referring to an external mediator of consequences is to argue for the chaos and meaninglessness of life. Those of us who claim a Christian worldview have rejected that life is purposeless in light of what we see described in the Bible.

Culture as a consequence of choice helps expose the man-centeredness of our familiar view of culture. That perspective places the observer of culture in the role of defining the group of people and the objective standards for beliefs and values. When detached from biblical truth and societal norms influenced by biblical truth, it elevates any observed set of beliefs and values to the authoritative level of a “culture.” In that context, any identifiable “culture” can claim to be authoritative based on the perceived rightness of its beliefs and values.

The Significance of Choice

Defining culture as a consequence of choice underscores both our agency and our accountability. Our choices are significant, as each one has consequences for which

we are accountable. We do inherit the consequences of the choices made by others before us, but we are, to varying degrees, given the option to accept those consequences or to choose something else. Choosing something else causes a new consequence, thus altering the direction of that culture.

Affluence and technology exponentially increase the number of choices we face every day. Technology has been deployed to anticipate and automate many of these choices, with the effect of masking the choices and consequences on which they operate. This creates a tendency to focus on what is new over what is established since what is new is more visible to the observer than what has been institutionalized or automated.

An Emphasis on Process Over Product

The third advantage we realize from defining culture as a consequence of choice is that it focuses our attention on what produces a particular culture over the tangible elements or products that make up that culture. This means we must not observe and evaluate culture as the billions of choices being made in any given moment but can look for patterns that emerge in these choices and consequences.

As already noted, our choices have grown exponentially, and the resulting number of cultural products quickly becomes incomprehensible. The same series of choices and consequences may play out in seconds, but when observed as choice and consequence, that pattern can be related to the same pattern in different settings. This observation helps us be confident in our ability to respond to whatever culture the consequences of similar choices may produce in the future.

With these challenges in mind, we now turn to the task of examining culture as a consequence of choice from the perspective of Scripture.

A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Biblical Origins of Culture

If we are to develop culture as a consequence of choice as a biblically functional definition of culture, it would be helpful to identify where in Scripture culture begins. To talk about the consequences of choice in a biblical context, the obvious choice to focus on is the fall and the consequences of original sin. We begin by considering the different views on how the fall relates to culture.

The Post-Fall View of Culture

The post-fall view is the most common view of culture and also the narrowest. The language of speaking about “the culture” has become shorthand for Christians’ concerns with the secular and unbiblical messages of popular media. This view fits neatly within the definition of culture as the “shared beliefs and values,” as the perception is that those who consume this content share the values that the content portrays. In this view, the culture is sinful and is replacing a biblical worldview, leaving little room for any positive view of culture. As a result, many evangelical authors are rejecting this post-fall view even as they condemn the unbiblical content in much of our media.

The Pre-Fall View of Culture

A growing number of authors are looking for the origin of culture before the fall in the creation account in Gen 1-2, giving particular attention to Gen 1:26-28. This view sees culture as good yet affected by sin. Since culture originates before the fall, we do not have direct, first-hand access to it in its original form. Our attention to culture is to rediscover the purpose God had for it and pursue that purpose until God completes his work of restoration in the new heavens and earth. This view of culture draws heavily on themes of the kingdom of God and represents most of the recent authors I surveyed (See the Appendix for a survey of this literature).

A Pre-Creation View of Culture

If culture originates before the fall, it becomes necessary to determine whether its source is in God or mankind. Identifying the “cultural mandate” in Gen 1:28-30 is not the same as identifying the origin of culture.³ If we define culture as some human activity, then culture cannot begin before the creation of mankind. But mankind is created in the Triune image of God (Gen 1:26-27), and if choice is inherent to the image of God, something of it might be found in God that is expressed in the creation of mankind.⁴ Thus, we must look for biblical evidence of choice among the members of the Trinity.

Choice Among the Members of the Trinity

Our understanding of God includes his freedom to act. This freedom is most often discussed in relationship to the existence of evil, yet there is evidence of choice among the members of the Trinity during the time Christ was on earth.⁵ Matt 11:25-27 reveals that the Son chooses to whom he will reveal the Father, and that he makes that choice to please the Father.⁶ The idea that God is “willing”⁷ is used specifically in reference to each member of the Trinity.⁸ Taken together, this emphasizes the free relationship between the persons of the Trinity, and are evidence that the will, desire or choice of one person of the Trinity is exercised with another person of the Trinity in view.

³ Ibid., 39. Myers and Olasky identify Gen 1:28 as “the great flowering of human culture.”

⁴ The pre-fall view often identifies God’s creativity as the essential characteristic given to man. I do not disagree with that, but argue that evidence of God’s choice precedes his creativity.

⁵ John M. Frame, *Doctrine of God, The* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 2002), 241.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary - Matthew*, vol. 8, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984) Comment on 11:27.

⁷ This is translated from the Greek word βούλομαι (boulomai), meaning “to will,” or reflexively to “be willing,” which is used often to describe the choices, or desires of men to carry out good (Matt 1:19, Acts 15:37, 19:30, Phil 1:12), or ill (Mark 15:15, Acts 5:33, Jas 4:4).

⁸ Of the Son, see Luke 10:21 and 2 Pet 3:9. Of the Father, see Luke 22:42 and Jas 1:18. Of the Spirit, see 1 Cor 12:11 and Heb 2:4.

This choice in relationship is given greater meaning when Jesus states, “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (John 14:31 ESV).⁹ The impulse that moves Christ to complete his work of salvation obediently is his knowledge of the relationship he shared between him and the Father. Christ’s choice, motivated by love for his Father, to lay down his life creates the church.¹⁰ In this sense, the church is a consequence of Christ’s choice.

Choice and the Freedom of Inclination

This brings us to an important concept in our understanding of choice in the Trinity. God acts according to what he is inclined to do, meaning he acts by freedom of inclination. As opposed to the libertarian concept of freedom, which asserts that one must have two or more equal options to choose from, freedom of inclination requires only one desirable option in order to make a choice free.¹¹ This same concept of freedom is applied to us, although in our post-fall state what we desire is affected by sin. The central tenet of freedom of inclination is our ability to envision, and then act on, our greatest desire.¹²

Here is evidence of freedom of choice in the members of the Trinity, and consequences based on those choices. We do not have evidence in Scripture of the consequence of these choices before the moment of creation. However, freedom of inclination in God before creation establishes an essential tenant of our definition of culture away from creation and the effects of the fall. Thus, we have a theological basis for culture as the consequence of choice that remains unchanged after the fall.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Crossway Books, 2001).

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17*, 1st edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 178.

¹¹ Frame, *Doctrine of God, The*, 136–37.

¹² Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God Of Scripture And The Christian Faith*, Kindle Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Crossway, 2004), 25.

Man Is Given the Inclination to Choose

The evidence of choice as freedom of inclination among the members of the Trinity points to where culture as a consequence of choice originates in Scripture. Yet, for this to become the basis for a biblically functional definition of culture, this choice must be communicated to and expressed by mankind.

Freedom of Choice in Genesis 1

Recent attention to the doctrine of creation has included the role of choice, both by God and given to man. Ron Highfield states, “God creates the world he wants, a world that includes our free acts whereby we, as free subjects, become causes of new states of affairs.”¹³ In part, this renewed interest in creation has come from a desire to move beyond the debate between Darwinian Evolution and Creationism.¹⁴ This has prompted some, such Richard Averbeck to assert that seeing a pattern in the days of creation, known as the framework view, is not akin to affirming theistic evolution.¹⁵

The pattern of days in creation reveals the literary structure of Gen 1:2-25 as the progression from empty and void to divided and filled.¹⁶ This creates a sense of movement from the non-ordered state of creation to an ordered state, which God pronounces good.¹⁷ This is observed by the church fathers¹⁸ and current scholarship.¹⁹

¹³ Ron Highfield, *The Faithful Creator: Affirming Creation and Providence in an Age of Anxiety* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 225.

¹⁴ Jonathan R. Wilson, *God's Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation*, First Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 16. Wilson observes that our focus on the debate between science and religion has left our theology of creation underdeveloped.

¹⁵ Richard Averbeck et al., *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 2013), 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 149.

¹⁸ Andrew Louth, ed., *Genesis 1-11*, 1st edition, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 4.

¹⁹ Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 34.

God Chooses to Create Man

The pattern established in the first five and a half days of creation is noticeably altered when man is created in the plural image of God on the second part of the sixth day (Gen 1:26).²⁰ Jonathan Wilson argues that the free choice among the members of the Trinity to give themselves to one another is “the superabundance of creation.”²¹ Further Scriptural evidence leads Wilson to conclude

The role of the Father is to envision and initiate the work of creation that is accomplished by the Son and completed by the Spirit.²²

The statement, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26) reverberates throughout the rest of Scripture, providing biblical evidence that God envisioned this creative act from before the creation of the world.²³ Thus, in the creation account, we have evidence of God’s choice to actualize what he has envisioned.

Culture as Envisioned to Actualized

The movement from what God envisioned to what he actualized is the key marker to identify culture. As previously noted, in order to choose one must be able to envision something that does not exist and take action to bring it about. We cannot speculate on how this operates in an all-knowing, all-powerful, eternal and Triune God,²⁴ but the pattern of envisioning and action in Gen 1 makes clear this is the pattern by which God created the world.

²⁰ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1-11: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1996), 173.

²¹ Wilson, *God’s Good World*, 18.

²² *Ibid.*, 95.

²³ See Eph 1:4, John 17:24, 2 Tim 1:9

²⁴ Proverbs 8:22-31 offers an intriguing perspective on this question, but the theological and literary challenges associated with the personification of Wisdom in this passage make it impractical to develop in a summary work such as this.

God's Choice Given to Man in Genesis 2

Gen 2:4 begins the second account of creation, which parallels the pattern of Gen 1, beginning with the emptiness of creation (2:5) and man's role in ordering and filling it.²⁵ The pattern is repeated, as man takes what God has created and "keeps" (2:16) and "names" (2:19) it. Throughout this process, man must actualize what he envisions of his purpose given by God to fill and subdue through the work of moving from non-order to order in creation.²⁶

Mankind's freedom of inclination is demonstrated when the woman is brought to him. Man's aloneness is the first thing that is pronounced "not good" (2:18), and when God creates the woman out of man and brings her to him, he recognizes her fit (2:23).²⁷ He then names her "woman," completing the process begun in 2:18. Gen 2 closes with a scene that reflects the rest after creation attributed to God in Gen 2:1-4. Thus, man and woman have assumed their role to continue God's creative work, expressing their inclination to actualize what they envision of God's purpose for his world.

The Inclination to Choose Corrupted by Sin

In Gen 2 the inclination of man's desire has been to continue the work God created him to do. That changes in Gen 3 when the serpent calls into question the clarity and purpose of God's command. Satan asserts that God's reason for this was to keep the full, divine knowledge of good and evil from the man and woman.²⁸ The woman is inclined to eat what was "good for food" and enjoy what is "a delight to the eyes," although these benefits are found in the other trees in the garden (2:9). The third

²⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 189.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 218 Mathews' observation that the man "exclaims in poetic verse" is an acknowledgement of man's unique ability to express abstract thought in speech.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

inclination, a desire to be wise, can only be satisfied in this tree.²⁹ Thus, Satan has tempted her to envision something outside of God’s design and to actualize that vision through her choice.

The Disordering Effect of Sin in Genesis 3

The woman ate, and her husband ate with her (3:6). At that moment, their state of being “naked and unashamed” (2:25) is removed as the knowledge of good and evil comes with the shame of their nakedness (3:7). But the condition of creation after the fall is not a return to the non-ordered world before creation. Rather, disorder is introduced as the man and woman have asserted their sense of order over the order defined by God.³⁰

Man and woman make coverings for themselves, applying their creative ability to hide their sin from God and acting on the impulse to avoid fellowship with him.³¹ God calls for the man, who admits he is “afraid” because he is “naked” (3:10),³² and questions the man and woman, underscoring their responsibility for their actions.³³ God then curses the serpent, the woman, and the man, establishing disorder as a consequence of sin.³⁴

The Restatement of the Ordering Purpose of Man

Despite the entrance of disorder into creation through sin, God reaffirms mankind’s role in bringing order from non-order. The curses have not changed their responsibilities but have made them more difficult and painful, and Adam continues in his ordering role by naming his wife “Eve” (3:20). God also makes garments of skin for

²⁹ Ibid., 238.

³⁰ Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 150.

³¹ John D. Currid, *Genesis Volume 1* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2003), 120.

³² Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 241.

³³ Currid, *Genesis Volume 1*, 123–24.

³⁴ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 243.

them as a more permanent replacement for the coverings of leaves. Adam and Eve are then excluded from the abundance of the garden.³⁵ These consequences of their choice to sin are the defining realities of the world we live in today.

Cultural Implications of the Fall

The effects of sin and the curses pronounced by God are spiritually and physically devastating, but God also provides reason for hope. Not only has God planted the seed of the gospel in his curse against the serpent,³⁶ he has reaffirmed man's purpose in the movement from non-order to order.³⁷ The impulse to actualize what we envision of the world is still a dominant inclination, although what we can envision has been darkened by sin. The effect of sin presses us to withdraw and hide, envisioning an order that seems right to us, but which causes disorder in our relationship with God.

Yet God moves to reorder the world which has been disordered by sin. That reordering is brought into view through the unfolding promise of a Savior. The cultural movement in mankind from non-order to order is now paralleled by the movement in God from disorder to reorder in the unfolding revelation of the gospel.

³⁵ Ibid., 254.

³⁶ Ibid., 248.

³⁷ Highfield, *The Faithful Creator*, 216.

THE GOSPEL AS AN EXPRESSION OF CULTURE

Culture as Precursor to the Gospel

Culture as a consequence of choice describes the ability by which those created in the image of God are inclined to actualize what they envision. What we envision has been disordered by sin, but the New Testament reveals the reordering effect of the gospel.

Envisioned to Actualized in Romans 1

Romans 1 describes the ongoing effect of sin on mankind, drawing on “the creation of the world” as a way we can envision the “invisible attributes” of God (1:20). Paul’s argument assumes fallen humanity can still recognize the character of God expressed through creation,³⁸ not to degree required for salvation, but enough to hold us accountable for not honoring him (1:21).³⁹

This argument affirms that our ability to envision and actualize remains after the fall, as we are held accountable for that ability.⁴⁰ Rom 1 draws the parallel between the movement from non-order to order and disorder to reorder, describing our sinful condition as darkness. Since man’s view of God was darkened, so was his ability to act on the vision God had for his creation.⁴¹ Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is foundational to the NT understanding of the disordering effects of the fall.

Christ as God Actualized

The gospel centers on the person of Christ as the complete image of God and the means by which God created the world. He is presented as the fullest actualization of the nature of God, and the work he must accomplish moves from disorder to reorder in

³⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 103.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴¹ Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015), 109.

parallel to the work of moving creation from non-order to order.

The Word in John 1

The connection between Christ and the Word of God at creation is made clear from the outset of the Gospel of John (1:1-3).⁴² The parallels to creation continue as Christ is described as “the life which is the light of men” (1:4).⁴³ Mankind is held accountable for not knowing and receiving this light (1:10-11), affirming the movement from envisioned to actualized remains, evident in our darkened vision of the world.⁴⁴

John affirms that Christ is the fullest actualization of what we can envision about God (1:18).⁴⁵ Christ is the Word of creation who is now made flesh, and the promised Messiah, whom Israel had envisioned would actualize the kingdom of God in their midst.⁴⁶ Thus, the work of moving non-order to order in creation is paralleled in the work Christ will do to reorder a world disordered by sin.

Christ Actualized in Creation

Christ’s unique place in both the Trinity and creation means he alone can act in creation to change the spiritual reality, and His physical death on the cross changed the nature of our relationship with God. Our ability to envision that new reality is the gift of faith God gives us through the Holy Spirit. Thus, our ability to envision and then actualize a new life in Christ is the means by which saving faith sustains us in the hope of a new spiritual reality.

⁴² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Hardcover (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴⁵ Graham Cole, *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 108.

⁴⁶ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 127 See Hebrews 1:3.

The Firstborn of Creation in Colossians 1

The context of false teaching in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians underscores the importance of what we envision about God and how sin affects that vision, even for those who are saved.⁴⁷ Paul focuses on the exalted Christ, including the resurrection and ascension in the vision he describes (2:12, 3:1). He prays that the believers would be "filled with the knowledge of his will" (Col 1:9) and bear "fruit in every good work" (1:10-14). Thus, the reordering of the disorder of sin is accomplished by the movement from envisioned to actualized in the life of the believer.⁴⁸

Christ is the creator of all things and the end of all creation (1:16), making explicit the parallel movement between non-order to order and disorder to reorder.⁴⁹ This movement is given stability by Christ's unique role in holding together the spiritual and physical worlds (1:17),⁵⁰ and this preeminent role for Christ satisfies God's desires (1:19) as the full actualization of what God envisioned.⁵¹ Believers envision this spiritual reality through faith (1:23), and our choice to continue in that faith is the actualization of what we envision about Christ.⁵² Thus, the salvation God envisioned before creation has been actualized in creation by Christ in the formation of the church.

The Gospel Reorders Culture

The church is created as a consequence of God's choice to send his Son to

⁴⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Hardbound, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 48.

⁴⁸ Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2011), 489.

⁴⁹ Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 152.

⁵⁰ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, The Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament 12 (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2010), 47.

⁵¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 1st Edition, 1st Printing edition (Downers Grove, Ill. : Leicester, England: Intervarsity Pr, 2001), 178.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 272.

redeem a people for himself. Christ's work on the cross brings reorder from disorder in parallel to the work of bringing order from non-order at creation.⁵³ The church is the place where that reordered culture will be most visible.⁵⁴ This work of redemption in the church is accomplished through a renewed ability to move from what we envision to what we actualize.⁵⁵

Envisioned to Actualized in Colossians 3

In the opening verses of Col 3, Paul exhorts his readers to “seek the things that are above” and to “set our minds on things above” in contrast to earthly things (3:1-2).⁵⁶ Specifically, what is above is “Christ, who is your life” (3:4). The actions of someone envisioning a world with themselves at the center are developed in 3:5-9,⁵⁷ which are then shown to be incompatible with our new identity in Christ (3:10-11).⁵⁸ The church's culture is formed by the actualized choices made by those who have seen a new vision of their identity in Christ.⁵⁹ Our ability to move from what we envision to what we create through our choices is central to our concept of salvation and life in the Christian community of the church.

The key activities of this reordered community align with the nature of the Trinity expressed in creation.⁶⁰ In contrast to the actions of a self-centered person, the actions of someone who envisions their identity in Christ are bound together by love

⁵³ Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son*, 563.

⁵⁴ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 126.

⁵⁵ Cole, *The God Who Became Human*, 28.

⁵⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 246.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁸ McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 311.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁶⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 273.

(3:12-13), reflecting how Christ chose what pleased the Father in love.⁶¹ The peace that must rule our hearts is akin to the rest God and mankind enjoyed at the end of creation (3:15). The word about Christ reorders the church as the Word that Christ ordered the non-ordered world (3:16).⁶² Finally, all things should be done in submission to Christ (3:17), in whom “all things hold together” (1:17).⁶³ Thus, the church is the actualization of the nature of the Triune God in reordering a world disordered by sin.

Conclusion: A Biblical Definition of Culture

Culture is a consequence of choice. What we describe as culture is the cumulative effect of mankind’s ability to choose based on what individuals envision a more desirable world to be. Our ability to choose reflects God’s freedom of inclination expressed in mankind made in his Triune image. The pattern of choosing among the members of the Trinity moves from non-order to order in the pattern of creation. That pattern is transferred to mankind in the garden before the fall.

With the entry of sin and shame into the world, mankind’s view of God and himself was darkened. This introduced disorder into creation, affecting mankind’s ability to fulfill the purpose God had for him within creation. Yet God offers the hope of a reordered creation, described through the fulfillment of the promise of a Savior.

The pattern of creation in Scripture moves from non-order to order. The message of the gospel follows that pattern moving from a world disordered by sin to the fulfillment of a reordered new creation. As those created in the image of God, our innate familiarity with culture facilitates the move from disorder to reorder in response to the gospel. Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor to the gospel.

⁶¹ McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 325.

⁶² Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 286.

⁶³ Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 127.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF CULTURE IN BUSINESS

Culture Is Common to Faith and Business

Smaller communities across our nation are failing economically. Changing work and globalization are generally blamed for this failure, but the effect on local businesses has been clear. The situation of failing communities has been an economic reality for decades now and is now gaining attention in ministry circles. The decline in churches has been slower than that of their surrounding communities, yet the long-term effect is that an increasing number of pastors are finding it necessary to work outside of the church to supplement their ministry income.

The Stigma of Bivocational Ministry

In the Greater Dayton Association of Baptists (GDAB), a recent report by the Associational Missionary noted, “many of our smaller churches are dying.”⁶⁴ The report notes that the overall baptism rate has dropped over 60% in the last 25 years and that 63 of the 99 churches in the association have an average worship attendance of below 100.⁶⁵ The reported annual budgets for 2018 would indicate that few of these 63 churches are able to support a full-time pastor,⁶⁶ and about one third of ministers report relying on outside income, although some in the association suspected that number may be close to half.⁶⁷

Statistics on bivocational pastors are not kept by the GDAB, and many are

⁶⁴ Steve Stiglich, “The Flyer: The Greater Dayton Association of Baptists Newsletter,” June 2019, 2, http://www.gdab.org/editor_upload/File/Newsletters/May%20%26%20June%20Newsletter%202019.pdf.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “2018 Greater Dayton Association of Baptists Book of Minutes,” 127–33, accessed August 31, 2019, http://www.gdab.org/editor_upload/File/2018%20Book%20of%20Minutes%20Website%20Format.pdf.

⁶⁷ Stiglich, Steve, Associational Missionary, personal interview with Gary Wilkins, Greater Dayton Association of Baptists Office, Dayton, Ohio, June 19, 2019. Stiglich stated that an increasing number of churches in the GDAB are not turning in their Annual Church Profile reports which would provide more information.

hesitant to discuss it because of the stigma of failure.⁶⁸ The State Convention of Baptists in Ohio also estimate of 50% of pastors in the state are bivocational, where the same stigma of failure exists.⁶⁹ Yet bivocational ministry is seen as one of the few viable options for revitalizing failed churches, as funding for full-time revitalization work is not available.⁷⁰

Covocational Church Planting

The challenge of funding creates a tension when a pastor desires to serve a population that is not able to financially support a church revitalization or new church plant.⁷¹ The tension church planters face between providing for themselves and developing the ministry has been commented on by Brad Brisco, Director of Bivocational Church Planting for the North American Mission Board. He wrote in 2017,

Often the language of bi-vocational invokes the thought of two distinct vocations. We bifurcate, (divide into two) or compartmentalize, seeing little, if any, overlap between what a leader does to earn a living and his or her full-time ministry.

In response, the SEND Network of the North American Mission Board, of which Brisco is a part, has started referring to bivocational as covocational. He writes,

Co-vocation embodies the reality that if a person is called to be a dentist, a teacher or a plumber; and at the same time are called to start a church, the different callings are not isolated from one another, instead they are actually interlinked and equal.⁷²

Brisco's vision is developed in his in his e-book where he observes "that in the Incarnation of Jesus, God revealed something about Himself—that He is with and for

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hopkins, Steve, The State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, phone interview with Gary Wilkins, August 1, 2019.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Brad Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*, Ebook (Alpharetta, GA: SEND Network, 2019), 26, <https://www.namb.net/send-network-blog/ebook-covocational-church-planting/>.

⁷² Brad Brisco, "Co-Vocational Church Planting: Rethinking Vocation," *NAMB*, September 20, 2017, <https://www.namb.net/send-network-blog/covocational-church-planting-rethinking-vocation/>.

creation,” and by implication, we in the church “are to be with and for the world.”⁷³

Brisco has identified an obvious benefit for covocational ministry, which is that “covocational planting provides the opportunity for funding entities to embrace more sustainable church planting practices.”⁷⁴ Yet he also discusses the broader challenges faced by church planters today and the need for contextualization in the communities in which they hope to work.⁷⁵ He encourages church planters to gain “an accurate understanding of the social, economic, physical and spiritual climate” of the community they are targeting, and determine the “methods and models” that would be most effective.⁷⁶ Covocational ministry as described by Brisco would accomplish these goals.

Covocational Ministry and Theology

Beneath the surface of the stigma of failure lies the belief that ministry and business are separate and unrelated pursuits, and time spent on one requires short-changing the other.⁷⁷ This leads to the conclusion that any blend of business and ministry should be temporary, until a church is large enough to support its pastor full-time. Yet some organizations are pursuing entering the realm of faith and business holistically,⁷⁸ and an increasing number of resources are available to believers offering encouragement and instruction on how to live out one’s faith at work.

Despite these efforts, no comprehensive theological framework yet exists for integrating faith and business. This leaves such efforts on the fringes of the evangelical church and often fails to overcome the skepticism of pastors trained under the full-time

⁷³ Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*, 50.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁵ Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷⁷ Stiglich, Steve, personal interview with Gary Wilkins.

⁷⁸ Praxis is an organization that has developed and funded an integrated model (<https://praxislabs.org/business/program>). Another example is Ocean (<https://www.oceanprograms.com>).

ministry model. During my interview with Steve Hopkins, Director of Church Revitalization for the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, I asked him what the greatest need was to develop a bi-vocational model for church revitalization. His response was one word: “Legitimacy.”⁷⁹ Overcoming such resistance will require an effort from within churches, Bible colleges, and seminaries, and such an effort will require a theological framework to address the concerns of an illegitimate ministry model.

Business Insights from a Biblical Definition of Culture

The day-to-day realities of ministry and business may seem to have little in common beyond their common problems. But culture is a concern of both. Here, a biblical definition of culture could identify an area of common ground where the efforts applied to one would benefit the other.

The biblical definition of culture as a consequence of choice speaks to the common concerns in the church and business and creates a common ground for viewing the solutions to these concerns through the shared pursuits of business and ministry. As I have argued, choice relies on our ability to envision what does not exist and take steps to actualize it. This is true of business, and in particular, entrepreneurship. Since our view of the world is darkened by sin, that darkened vision will be expressed in the steps we take to actualize that vision. But if our view of the world is changed through the light of the gospel, the entrepreneurial opportunities we see will reflect that brighter vision.

Faith Entrepreneurs

The ability to see new opportunities has been studied in the role of religiously motivated entrepreneurs. In a recent article in the *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, a team of researchers “introduce religion into the theory of entrepreneurial action because

⁷⁹ Hopkins, Steve, phone interview with Gary Wilkins.

of its unique contribution to knowledge, motivation, and behavior.”⁸⁰

Smith et al. discuss the entrepreneurial process of evaluating opportunities and the likelihood of success and observe that “these imagined scenarios...can be influenced by religious beliefs.”⁸¹ They note other research has concluded

An entrepreneur who is deeply involved in Christianity, participates regularly in church groups, and reads extensively about Christianity may generate entrepreneurial opportunity beliefs that integrate their religion that are not desirable to others.⁸²

These motivations “may lead to the implementation of religious beliefs and practices (e.g. prayer meetings), and may shape the culture and identity of the organization.”⁸³

Outcomes of Religious Motivation

Smith et al. identify four specific religious outcomes observed in these organizations. The first is providing financial resources for themselves, their families, employees, and investors, often with a commitment to “support religious work based on the concept of tithing.”⁸⁴ The second is service of others, including solving problems of “education, health, and poverty for some of the poorest and marginalized people in the world.”⁸⁵ The third outcome is a means for those in the organization to share their faith by seeking “to provide evidence of Christianity through the way it operates, moving beyond ethical decision-making.”⁸⁶ And the fourth is “honoring God,” asking the

⁸⁰ Brett R. Smith et al., “Why Believe? The Promise of Research on the Role of Religion in Entrepreneurial Action,” *Journal of Business Venturing Insights* 11 (June 1, 2019): 3, doi:10.1016/j.jbvi.2019.e00119.

⁸¹ Ibid., 7.

⁸² Ibid., 4.

⁸³ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

question, ““What is good for the world, according to its Creator?””⁸⁷

These four outcomes effectively demonstrate the transition that is possible in business between the work of non-order to order to the gospel work of disorder to reorder. They are measurable indicators of a God-centered vision of the world that is actualized in economic, physical, social, and spiritual ways. As Smith et al. observe,

The more one identifies with a particular religion, the greater the degree to which he or she will internalize the goals, ends, or desires it endorses... Here, deontological arguments of right and wrong as determined by religious beliefs may trump utilitarian claims that the ends justify the means.⁸⁸

One can envision in this description some of the “wonderful possibilities”⁸⁹ envisioned by Wilson for a fuller Trinitarian view of creation in business.

Theologically Functional Business

But a note of caution must be heard. These outcomes are visible to the degree a business leader internalizes the “goals, ends, or desires” of their religion. Smith et al note that “individuals must also possess prior knowledge about their religion” including “a theological outlook... to identify potential areas for entrepreneurial action.”⁹⁰ That formation responsibility falls to the church (Gal 4:19), and as this thesis has observed in its survey of recent literature, there is still work to be done in defining this outlook.

Conclusion

Culture is an area of interest in the church and business community. And the culture of business has already made its influence felt in the church through applying organizational frameworks.⁹¹ Indications are that religiously motivated entrepreneurs

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁹ Wilson, *God's Good World*, 19.

⁹⁰ Smith et al., “Why Believe?,” 4. The authors note on pg. 2 that articles about the impact of Islam on business have also been published.

⁹¹ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 126. The authors draw on Edgar Shein, business culture

may be a way the church makes its influence felt on the world of business.

Culture as a consequence of choice offers a common language and framework to develop this influence. And business may be just the beginning. As the measurable outcomes show, business can influence a broad range of individuals' personal and collective lives. As Brisco envisions, these types of businesses are well-positioned to serve those who would plant or revitalize churches. Thus, in business, culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor to the gospel.

researcher, for their structure of church culture.

APPENDIX 1

Survey of Current Literature

The number of books published on culture has exploded in recent years, including books written from a Christian perspective. As such, it was necessary to survey books that were representative of broad categories of discussion about culture and the church. These categories are the Historical Perspective, Culture as Worldview, Culture as Christian Living, and A Theology of Culture.

The Historical Perspective

The roots of our current interest on culture in the church are found in H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, published in 1956. Niebuhr's tracks the movement of the church between Christ and the world, discussing five categories of interaction between Christ and culture. His approach is theological, but uses Scripture sparingly, limiting its observations to the interaction between Christ and the NT church. Within this narrow view, Niebuhr concludes that the "critical present decision of loyalty and disloyalty to Christ"⁹² is most important in the Christian's interaction with culture. Thus, Niebuhr identifies choice as a key component in our understanding of culture.

D.A. Carson's *Christ and Culture Revisited*, looks back on the half century since Niebuhr, and comments on the "huge cultural forces" of secularism, democracy, freedom, and power.⁹³ Carson observes that our democratic reveals the divisions between cultural consequences, noting that "the Bible encourages freedom ... toward living our lives as those who bear God's image and who have been transformed by his grace."⁹⁴ Thus, Carson affirms culture is a consequence of choice.

⁹² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1 Reprint edition (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975). 248

⁹³ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 115.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

Culture as Worldview

Francis Schaeffer drew on history and philosophy in *How Shall We Then Live* (1976) to identify the progression of Western civilization toward secularism. Schaeffer significantly influenced many who would become prominent voices for the return of Christian values into the institutions of American society, including Chuck Colson, who wrote *How Now Shall We Then Live* (1999), to revisit and update Schaeffer's primary themes. Colson's earlier book, *Against the Night* (1989), established the phrase "culture war" in the lexicon of the American church.⁹⁵

Colson's co-author, Nancy Pearcey, published *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, in 2005. Pearcey follows Schaeffer's lead in looking to creation for the foundation of our creativity and purpose as those created in the image of God, and applies Colson's hostile language to the philosophical separation between sacred and secular.⁹⁶ Colson and Pearcey move away from Niebuhr's focus on the individual's choice within culture, rather calling Christians to join the battle of truth against the forces of secularism in our society.

Culture as Christian Living

Recent efforts have sought to turn our broader awareness of culture to the work of equipping Christians.⁹⁷ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck's *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (2016) state that culture can be a force for good or bad, and we must choose how to "manage and shape" it.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Charles Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1989), 11.

⁹⁶ Nancy R. Pearcey and Phillip E. Johnson, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, Study Guide Edition-Trade Paperback (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004). 122

⁹⁷ Andy Crouch, "Stop Engaging 'The Culture,' Because It Doesn't Exist," *ChristianityToday.Com*, 1, accessed September 5, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/julaug/theculture-doesnt-exist.html>.

⁹⁸ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 208.

In *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today's World* (2017), John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle provide a well-rounded view of culture. They highlight the importance of choice, asserting that “culture refers not to what humans do by instinct or nature ... but to what they do freely.”⁹⁹ These choices have consequences, as they observe “ideas and their consequences become embedded in a culture.”¹⁰⁰ Thus Stonestreet and Kunkle offer a clear affirmation that culture is a consequence of choice. Both these books offer a more hopeful view of culture, yet they still revert to a secular academic understanding of culture for practical application.

A Theology of Culture

Perhaps the most helpful book is Andy Crouch’s *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (2013). Crouch focuses on culture as the tangible goods we make, but points to how those good help us make sense of the world. He draws heavily on the opening chapters of Genesis, where he observes “God was the first gardener, the first culture maker.”¹⁰¹ Crouch is joined in his theological effort by William Edgar, who’s objective in *Created and Creating, A Biblical Theology of Culture* (2017) is to show “the Bible teaches that cultural engagement before the living God is, along with worship, the fundamental calling for the human race.”¹⁰² Both Edgar and Crouch center their discussions of culture in “the cultural mandate” of Genesis 1:26, and both emphasize the choice Christians face to participate in the cultural work God has given mankind to do, and discuss the consequences of that choice.

⁹⁹ John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle, *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today's World* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2017), 32.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰¹ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, Kindle (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Books, 2013), 108.

¹⁰² William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 87.

Void in the Literature

The various approaches of these authors trend in a similar direction, emphasizing the importance of our role in shaping culture, and calling us to live by biblical truth in our efforts to do so. With the exception of *Culture as Worldview*, each offers a hopeful perspective of culture as a means by which we can accomplish the work God placed us on earth to do. Culture as a consequence of choice emerges in each of these books, but more as a passing observation. What is yet to be defined is a framework for choice that opens the possibility of integrating our view of culture with Scripture.

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