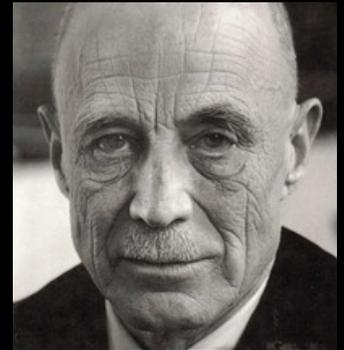


# H. Richard Niebuhr & His Christ & Culture Typologies

Series on Christ and Culture, Podcast 3



# OVERVIEW of presentation

- Some review
- An Introduction to Niebuhr's Five Types
- Conclusions

# Review #1: where is this series going?

- Analysis of Christ & culture from Niebuhr and Carson.
  - Getting the main thrusts of their position(s) correct and then...
  - Thinking about them critically
    - From Scripture
    - From logic and probability issues.
    - From metaphysics, epistemology and axiology points of view.
- Take what we have learned from that, enter into analysis of academic culture
- As Christian thought leaders, what might we need to address concerning cultural issues in the present?

## Review #2: why Niebuhr wrote

- “...to set forth typical Christian answers to the problem of Christ and culture and so to contribute to the mutual understanding of variant and often conflicting Christian groups...[in] the conviction that Christ as living Lord is answering the question in the totality of history and life in a fashion which transcends the wisdom of all his interpreters yet deploys their partial insights and their necessary conflicts...” p. Christ and Culture

# Niebuhr's Five Types

- Niebuhr's Typology is a sophisticated but non-technical explanation of the types of relationships between the **authority** of Christ and the **authority** of culture that Christians have held in history.
  - Christ against culture - roughly a hostile stance to the values and achievements of society (Tertulian and Tolstoy)
  - Christ of culture - culture is seen as an expression of the imminent presence of Christ in all people: Niebuhr sees them as distorting Christ to accommodate to culture. (many theological liberals & Gnostics)
  - Christ above culture - uniqueness of Christ, yet synthesis with culture (Thomas Aquinas, many R. Catholics)
  - Christ and culture in paradox - living with the tensions of the two authorities until Christ returns to straighten it out, a kind of double attitude, but without division (Marcion, Augustine, Luther,...)
  - Christ the transformer of culture - universal transformation of culture by the power of Christ (Augustine, Calvin,....)

# Conclusions

- A very sophisticated historical case made, yet not too technical or so highly rigorous that every assumption he makes is defended
- Niebuhr not only defines and explains his types, he offers nuances and qualifications.
- Niebuhr not only does what he does in the second point above, he evaluates the Types and in light of some exegetical considerations.
- Niebuhr's work allows us to see how the theoretical (the position taken by those in the types) has been lived out practically.
- The key to this exercise: we need to read Niebuhr (and everybody else) critically and carefully.