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On January 31, 1949, Professor H. Richard Niebuhr stood to deliver the first of five lectures he had been invited to present as a part of Austin Presbyterian Seminary’s annual Mid-Winter lectures, a series Dr. Niebuhr had titled “Christ and Culture.” I wonder if those who were privileged to hear him that evening, and who listened to him lecture during the subsequent four days, sensed that they were hearing something very special, namely, presentations which would have broad and deep meaning and influence in the church and in academic circles for years to come. How I wish we had been recording our annual lectures fifty years ago as we do now.

Well, no matter what the impression of that 1949 audience, those lectures were published in 1951 in a book bearing the same title as the original lecture series, and this published version has become what many regard as a classic. Its enduring quality is found not in the fact that it demonstrates no shortcomings or is unassailable in all of its presuppositions, claims, or categories. Rather, I believe, it continues to have value for Christianity, the church, and scholars because it addresses in a useful and substantive way issues that have been critical from the beginning of Christianity, are equally critical today, and doubtless will be critical for the Christian faith and the church in the future. Therefore, this issue of Insights is intended not only to celebrate the delivery of Niebuhr’s “Christ and Culture” lectures half a century ago, but also to highlight their utility for today.

Accordingly, the 1999 Currie Lecturer at Austin Seminary, Dr. George M. Marsden, professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, was encouraged to focus his lectures on Niebuhr’s work fifty years later. He was excited about doing so, and he titled his lecture series “Christianity and Cultures: Transforming Niebuhr’s Categories.” His initial lecture in that series “Can These Categories Be Saved” is presented in this issue of Insights as a provocative piece for us all. In it he summarizes some of the more critical and fundamental objections to Niebuhr’s work that have been voiced and analyzes their consequences for Niebuhr’s views.

In addition, the Reverend Laurel Neal writes about how Niebuhr’s work continues to be useful for her as a working pastor, and one of Niebuhr’s former students, Jack L. Stotts, recounts his personal remembrance of Niebuhr and his appreciation of the volume Christ and Culture.

And back to that original audience. You will find in this issue published interviews with three persons present in 1949: the president of the seminary at that time, a faculty member, and a student. I am confident you will find their comments interesting.

As always, we send out these materials in the hope that you will find them stimulating for your personal pilgrimage and for your ministry.

Robert M. Shelton
President

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INTRODUCTION

From the foreword of
CHRIST AND CULTURE

... I recollect with gratitude the kindly reception given me at Austin by President Stitt and his colleagues and the part they played in helping me to bring this work to its present, tentative conclusion.

—H. Richard Niebuhr
New Haven, Connecticut
1951

H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

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Christianity and Cultures

Transforming Niebuhr’s Categories*

George Marsden

Exactly fifty years ago, in 1949, H. Richard Niebuhr delivered the lectures at Austin Seminary that became the book, Christ and Culture. I have long been an admirer of Niebuhr and, even though our theologies are rather different, throughout my career I have been influenced by his work, especially by Christ and Culture. I have often used his typology as a tool in teaching. Also, throughout my adult life, the question it poses—of how Christians should relate to their surrounding culture—has been a central one to me, both intellectually and spiritually.

Despite its enormous influence in the past fifty years, I think Niebuhr’s analysis in its present form could be near the end of its usefulness. Although Christ and Culture still is very widely used as a teaching tool, much of the scholarly attention it attracts is along the line of saying that its categories are wrong or misleading. Often they are said to be hopelessly wrong and misleading. My good friends from Duke, Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon, argue that “few books have been a greater hindrance to an accurate assessment of our situation than Christ and Culture.” As a historian I can also appreciate the force of other historians’ critiques that see Niebuhr’s categories as simply not helpful. I deal every day with the particulars of how Christians have negotiated their relationships to culture and can see countless illustrations of the problems inherent in describing these in any neat theological categories.

Moreover, as a historian I am acutely aware of the degree to which Christ and Culture is a product of its time. The theological and cultural questions that Niebuhr took for granted in the post-World War II era were vastly different from those today. The 1940s are virtually a lost era to most of us today. We can hardly imagine what it was like to be an adult in that time. Just to mention the most obvious difference that separates us: we live in an era in which we take multiculturalism for granted. Niebuhr wrote at a time when “Amos ‘n Andy” was a top radio show, racial segregation was still legal, and the principal agenda for himself and his audience was building a unified culture, e pluribus unum. To what extent can categories generated in that context be relevant to ours?

So the question I want to deal with is: Can these categories be saved? In answering that question I do not intend to present an analysis of Niebuhr or his theology. There are many helpful such analyses already and many who could do that better than I. Rather I think it may be more of a tribute to Niebuhr to take some of his most helpful thoughts of a half-century ago and to see if we can translate it so that it may continue to be useful in this very different era. I want to clear the way for that by briefly looking at some of the principal critiques of Christ and Culture and offering some answers to those critiques.

First, however, it will be helpful to provide a brief review of what Niebuhr himself says. Here I will not go into any great detail, but simply try to clarify the essential points. “A many-sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization is being carried on in our time.” So Niebuhr begins, setting his lectures in the context of a debate that has since been forgotten. After the debacle of Nazism, the Holocaust, fascism, the horrors of World War II, the rapidly rising threat of international communism, and the danger of the bomb, American and British cultural leaders were engaged in intense debates over the future of Western civilization. Was there any way of strengthening its moral base so that it could meet the challenges of the technological age? How could the civilization avoid falling back into barbarous tribalism or succumbing to pseudo-scientific Marxist moralism? What is often forgotten is how prominently Christianity figured in these debates. While some cultural leaders (such as John Dewey and Sidney Hook) were saying that the open-minded attitudes of liberal secular science were the only ways to build a civilization free from prejudice and irrational intolerance, many other prominent spokesmen were saying that Christianity and the Judeo-Christian tradition could provide the best basis for a truly tolerant and liberal civilization. For people like Niebuhr, totalitarianism abroad and racism at home provided the most immediate context for thinking about the reforms that a progressive Christianity might bring to civilization. Tolerance was therefore a central issue. While Niebuhr had no illusions about building the Kingdom of God on earth, he favored a unified civilization to which Christian influences could make positive contributions.

* Niebuhr’s five categories are Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture.

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This article is the text of Professor Marsden’s First Currie Lecture, delivered February 2, 1999, in the Austin Seminary Chapel. Part of the Seminary’s 1999 Midwinter Lecture Series, Marsden’s address commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of H. Richard Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture lectures, given at Austin Seminary, January 31 - February 4, 1949.
In the context of this debate, Niebuhr begins by addressing accusations that Christianity has no positive contribution to make to civilization or culture (he uses the two terms more or less interchangeably). The secular proponents of a healthy tolerant civilization are thus those who really set the terms for Niebuhr’s analysis. These cultured despisers of Christianity say, in effect, that civilization is the supreme value and that Christianity is essentially a threat to its health. They say that Christians either become so otherworldly that they are irresponsible citizens or they take over civilization and become intolerant. In effect, these critics say that Christianity should therefore be subordinated to cultural ideals. Progressive cultural ideals should reign supreme and traditional religion is either best abandoned or brought into line with those higher ideals.

Niebuhr responds to this secular culturalist critique by developing his famous typology. The relationships of Christianity to culture, he points out, have always been far more complicated than the critics recognize. True, some Christians have withdrawn from culture and some have been intolerant, but these are not the only Christian cultural attitudes. In fact, we can identify five distinct motifs that describe how Christians typically have related to their cultures. Each of these has biblical precedents and each has been advocated by some of the leading thinkers in the tradition. These categories, he recognizes, are what sociologists call “ideal types.” No person or group will conform to them precisely and exemplars of one type will often show traits of others. So he acknowledges that they are “historically inadequate.” Nonetheless, he believes, they are helpful for identifying recurrent motifs in Christians’ typical stances toward culture.

Niebuhr’s categories have been subjected to numerous critiques and present a number of problems if we are to continue to use them. Without attempting to be exhaustive, let me summarize what I see as the major criticisms that bear on our purpose, which is to see if we can refine and clarify his categories so that they may be useful to future generations.

1. Niebuhr’s abstract category of “Christ” is inadequate and misleading.

One of the most basic critiques of Niebuhr is that his very use of the terms “Christ” and “culture” in defining the problem sets up a theological dualism that will be unacceptable to many people today. Niebuhr, following his teacher Ernst Troeltsch, on whom he wrote his dissertation, is working in the Kantian tradition which posits a gulf between the transcendent truths of faith, such as the ideal of “Christ,” and the historically conditioned culture, which shapes everything else. The problem for modern theologians is how to bridge this gap between faith and history. Hence the whole “Christ and culture” problem depends on a dichotomy that many theologians today may find unacceptable. Niebuhr, for instance, like a lot of his contemporaries, tended to separate the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history.

The practical implication, many people will say, is that Niebuhr’s Christ and culture terminology seems to imply that “Christ,” or more strictly speaking, Christian attempts to follow Christ, are not themselves culturally conditioned. Niebuhr seems to be working with an idea of a transcendent Christ who stands above culture. One can understand how someone might argue for such a transcendent ideal. For instance, if one believes that Christ is in some sense God incarnate, then there is a sense in which the divine second person of the Trinity stands above history. There is also a sense in which the teachings of Christ might be said to have some trans-cultural character, despite being embedded in very particular cultural forms. Whatever Niebuhr’s theological intentions, his examples all suggest that what he is really talking about is various Christians’ efforts to follow Christ. These conceptions of what the Christian ought to do, the objector will point out, are themselves very much shaped by culture. So to speak of them as “Christ” and everything else as “culture” is very misleading.

I think this point is well taken and an important reminder not to misconceive what Niebuhr is talking about. However, I expect that he would heartily agree with the point. He had no intention of talking about a culturally disembodied “Christ” as opposed to culture. Rather he is simply adopting a language to juxtapose that which we see as duties shaped by Christian commitment and the dominant culture.

It is curious, I think, that Niebuhr in this book puts his emphasis on the seemingly more abstract “Christ,” rather than on the church or Christianity. In earlier writing he had become known for his outspoken declarations that the church must distinguish itself from the world. In a well-known essay published in 1935 in a collection titled The Church Against the World, Niebuhr deplored the captivity of the church to the spirit of capitalism, nationalist idolatry, and anthropocentrism. He even wrote that “no antithesis could be greater than that which obtains between the gospel and the capitalist faith,” by which he meant faith in wealth. And far from sounding like a transformationist he deplored that “the church has often behaved as though the saving of civilization and particularly of capitalist civilization was its mission.”

Nonetheless, these earlier remarks may also suggest why he does not usually speak simply of “the church” or “Christianity” in this book. If one talks about “the church” or “Christianity,” one is talking about people, entities, or traditions that are obviously so compromised with their cultures that it would be hard even to state the problem. The term “Christ,” on the other hand, makes it clear that the problem that he is dealing with is the teachings of Christianity, especially with respect to what various groups have meant by “following Christ.” For the same reason, I think, he deals primarily with leading Christian theologians, rather than with denominations or historical movements. He wants to get at the problem of how Christian faith should be related to the dominant surrounding culture and to point out the various types of ways leading thinkers have addressed that problem. Certainly he recognizes that the views of these thinkers were themselves historically conditioned.

Further, though it is true that Niebuhr developed his categories in a particular theological context for his own theological purposes, that does not necessarily mean that we cannot appropriate them for other purposes or adapt them to other theologies. True, if we hold to another theology, we should not be taken in by the specifics of his theological formulations. But, as with anything else that may have origins in an ideology with which we may disagree, once we recognize those origins we are in a position to selectively appropriate tools that may be employed in the framework of our own outlooks.

Nevertheless, if we are to continue to use the Christ and culture language, we have to do it with a warning label that using the term “Christ” as opposed to culture can be misleading. The Christ and culture juxtaposition may reinforce the tendency of Chris-
tians to forget that their own understanding of Christianity is a cultural product.

The importance of underscoring this warning becomes clearest if we think of the cross-cultural exchanges involved within world Christianity. British Anglicans and African Anglicans, for instance, may differ in many ways that are shaped by their cultures, despite the formal similarities of their creeds. Western Christian missionaries inevitably bring with them the Gospel message, but it is already embedded in Western cultural forms. So missionary work is not simply a matter of bringing Christ to an alien culture, it also always involves a cultural dialogue and an exchange between two cultures. The two cultures learn from each other and the mission is shaped by “Christ” only as part of this cultural exchange. So it is also when Christians encounter non-Christians within one country, such as the United States. One sub-culture encounters other sub-cultures. Properly speaking, we should frame the question as “the culture of Christianity,” e.g., urban American Catholicism, “and other cultures,” e.g. American urban political culture.

One step in the right direction to remind us of this essential point is to shift the terminology, as I do here, from “Christ and culture” to “Christianity and cultures” and to point out that this is shorthand for saying “The culture of Christianity and other cultures.” With Niebuhr we still want to say that we are talking about the teachings of Christianity or what it means to follow Christ and that these have some transcendent features. “With Niebuhr we still want to say that we are talking about the teachings of Christianity,” e.g. urban American Catholicism, “and other cultures,” e.g. American urban political culture.

2. Niebuhr’s undifferentiated use of “culture” confuses the issue.

Closely related to these latter points are what have been the most devastating critiques of Niebuhr’s actual analysis, those aimed at his use of the term “culture.” These critiques, which have been best articulated by the Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder, grow out of underlying differences in theological viewpoint. What Yoder recognized is that Niebuhr’s use of “culture” is loaded against traditional categories such as the Mennonite, which Niebuhr classifies in the “Christ against culture” category. The problem is that Niebuhr uses culture almost indiscriminately as equivalent to “anything people do together.” So it includes everything from language to warfare. Having defined culture in this monolithic way, Niebuhr then turns around and criticizes “Christ against culture” advocates for not being consistent in their anti-worldly profession. They may reject the pleasures of sex and of wealth, renounce learning and the fine arts, and refuse to participate in civil government or warfare, but they inevitably adopt some other cultural forms, such as language, learning of earlier eras, or agriculture.

Yoder points out, however, that this is precisely what Christians should be doing, at least by most accounts. His summary is worth quoting at length:

Some elements of culture the church categorically rejects (pornography, tyranny, cultic idolatry). Other dimensions of culture it accepts within clear limits (economic production, commerce, the graphic arts, paying taxes for peacetime civil government). To still other dimensions of culture Christian faith gives a new motivation and coherence (agriculture, family life, literacy, conflict resolution, empowerment). Still others it strips of their claims to possess autonomous truth and value, and uses them as vehicles of communication (philosophy, language, Old Testament ritual, music). Still other forms of culture are created by the Christian churches (hospitals, service of the poor, generalized education).

Clearly if we are to save Niebuhr’s analysis from this critique, we must adopt much more discriminating and specific meanings when we use the term “culture.” It seems to me, however, that this can be done. In fact, Yoder illustrates some very good ways to do it. The real question is whether one wants to use this flaw in Niebuhr’s own account in order to dismiss Niebuhr’s analysis or whether one might want to correct the flaw so as to better use Niebuhr’s analysis.

Most of the time Niebuhr was not thinking about things like language, agriculture, or hospitals, and his examples have to do with just two general areas of culture toward which Christians have characteristic stances. The first is toward higher learning, secular reason, and the arts. The second is toward the dominant cultural structures as represented by government, business, and the common ideologies and values that underlie these. It should be obvious, however, that when we describe various Christian groups as having characteristic attitudes on these matters, we are not saying that they have monolithic attitudes toward them. Almost all Christian groups accept some higher learning and employ some of the arts, even if they characteristically reject most of their culture’s versions of these. Furthermore, attitudes toward government or business or the cultural ideologies on which they are based will vary greatly depending on the particular culture we are talking about. Christians of a particular theological heritage may find themselves to have very different attitudes toward a seemingly benign liberal democracy than they will have to a tyrannical Marxist police state.

Closely related to these observations is what might be called “the multiculturalist” objection to the entire Niebuhr project. Niebuhr wrote in the “consensus” era of American history. His principal concern was with building a healthy and unified mainstream culture to which socially progressive Christianity might make a contribution. Today there is much more awareness that “culture” means different things to different people. Often people define themselves against the mainstream culture by defining themselves in terms of a sub-culture, particularly an ethnically based sub-culture. That was true in Niebuhr’s day as well. He had even grown up in a German ethnic community. Nonetheless, he pays little attention to how one’s sub-cultural identity may cut across attitudes toward “culture” generally. Similarly, he says little of how social class may be a factor in determining cultural attitudes, though that also is a factor he was well aware of and had even written about in The Social Sources of Denominationalism.

Once again, the proper response to the various objections that Niebuhr uses the term “culture” too monolithically is therefore not to throw out his categories but rather to start using the term “culture” in more specific and discriminating ways. We always need to ask what general culture or sub-culture we are talking about and further what specific aspect of that culture is our matter of concern.
3. The categories are not historically adequate.

This brings us to a further potentially decisive difficulty, that the categories are simply not historically adequate. A few years ago two conferences were held at Vanderbilt University to discuss the legacy of Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*. One of the major components of these conferences was that historians of Christianity were asked to assess the usefulness of the categories for actual historical analysis. The results were fairly negative. While the historians expressed respect for Niebuhr and for his influence, a number argued strongly that his categories would not work for real history.

At the root of such complaints is that Niebuhr’s categories are a theologian’s ideal types, derived from logic more than they are from history. History is simply a lot more messy than that. If we look at particular groups who are supposed to be representatives of one of the types, we find that there are many ways they do not fit the type at all. That is why Mennonites, such as Yoder, have been up in arms about being classified as “Christ against culture,” when they actually fit that category in only a few respects. (Neither did it help that Niebuhr apparently confused the Mennonites with the Amish), Charles Scriven in *The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social Ethics After H. Richard Niebuhr* argues that the Anabaptist position provides the most adequate means to transform culture. Or one can find Lutherans who are transformationists and Calvinists who withdraw from culture.

My response to this complaint is to say, if the categories are too abstract and seemingly inflexible as Niebuhr presents them, why not translate them into terms that are historically more adequate? Then historians, theologians, other scholars, and ordinary people would still have very useful analytical tools for thinking about certain fundamental issues.

The way to fix up the categories is to get away entirely from the idea that the cultural attitudes of each spokesperson or group can be fit neatly into one of the categories. Niebuhr himself recognized that the types were “historically inadequate” and that actual historical figures or groups sometimes displayed all of the traits. But since he was developing a new typology, he played down the complexities and emphasized the typology’s heuristic or explanatory powers. He also lapsed from his own cautions at one notorious point by criticizing the “Christ against culture” representatives for not being consistent in their position. That was an unfortunate inconsistency on his part, as he does not criticize any other group on that ground, and often notes that a group might be classified under more than one motif.

Nonetheless, by usually speaking as though his ideal types characterize real historical figures, he leaves the impression that each Christian or group can be adequately typed by one or the other of the cultural attitudes. To correct this misleading impression, what we need to emphasize is that the categories are simply, as Niebuhr himself acknowledges, leading motifs. A motif should be seen as a dominant theme with respect to some specific cultural activities. It suggests a musical analogy. A dominant motif may be subordinated in one part of a symphony while another takes over. Identifying a dominant motif in a particular Christian group toward some specific cultural activity should not lead to the expectation that this group will not adopt other motifs toward other cultural activities.

This brings us to the crucial point that the categories work if we emphasize that they are not mutually exclusive. Virtually every Christian and every Christian group expresses in one way or another all five of the motifs. With respect to one cultural activity they may typically express one motif, with respect to another they may characteristically adopt quite a different stance. Even with respect to a particular category of cultural activities, as regarding learning, the state, the arts, contemporary values, popular culture, business, leisure, and so forth, Christians are likely to manifest something of all five of the attitudes.

One might ask then, why bother? If we all express at one time or another all of the attitudes and our attitudes are so complex, do not the categories simply leave us with a muddle? Perhaps so. But the very point is that we will be even more in a muddle without some such categories with which to talk about these complexities. The reason for the muddle is that history—like individual life—is extraordinarily complex and filled with complications and ambiguities. Such analytical categories help us to begin to sort out these complexities. They provide a workable way to think about our attitudes toward these questions and to help evaluate what our attitudes should be. Furthermore, even though we can now see that everyone is likely to adopt all five of the attitudes, still, with respect to particular cultural questions, we can usually identify one attitude as dominant. So we really do have a clarifying set of classifications. Moreover, these classifications, or some combination of them, might be helpful in establishing rules of thumb for thinking about how we should characteristically relate to some particular types of cultural activities.

Let me give an example of how this more complex analysis might work with respect to one historical case with which I am most familiar, the history of fundamentalism and post-fundamentalist evangelicalism in twentieth-century America. Writing from the vantage point of Yale Divinity School in the late 1940s, Niebuhr had little interest in this tradition and little notion of its potential for continuing vitality. He delivered his lectures just a few months before Billy Graham hit the big time in Los Angeles. Niebuhr talked about this movement, as was then common, as simply “Fundamentalism,” and it was clearly an outlook for which he had little time. Accordingly, he relegates fundamentalism to, of all places, the “Christ of culture” category. This in spite of the fact that he must have known well that fundamentalists defined themselves primarily as militant opponents to many cultural trends. Niebuhr, however, saw them as simply leftovers from the past, opposing twentieth-century cultural trends only because they were so deeply committed to nineteenth-century outlooks and mores. They accepted a pre-Darwinist cosmology, and insisted on prohibition of various vices, thus reflecting the mores of nineteenth-century revivalism more than the New Testament.13

It is certainly true that there is some justice in this critique. One of my interests in the study of fundamentalism and American culture was to understand the degree to which this religious tradition, which claimed to be based purely on New Testament Christianity, was actually shaped by American cultural traditions. Fundamentalists, like many other Christians, have often confused Christianity with certain dimensions of their culture. The clearest examples of such a “Christ of culture” attitude is that they...
have sometimes lapsed into nationalism that has virtually merged American patriotism with the cause of Christ. They sometimes speak as though America is the new Israel.

Nevertheless, one can find all the other motifs within fundamentalism as well. They are militantly against some dimensions of the culture and often speak of America not as Israel, but as Babylon. At other times they adopt a “Christ above culture” attitude, for instance, in adopting the prevalent American attitude that “business is business,” while adding to it higher spiritual practices. At still other times or toward other issues, they often have taken a “Christ and culture in paradox” view, perhaps best expressed in the pietist motto, “In the world but not of the world.” Yet while they have sometimes been political quietists, they have at other times, as in the recent rise of the Christian Right, been ardent transformers of culture.

What can be said for fundamentalists can be said for virtually any Christian tradition. We can understand far better how its proponents deal with particular issues by sorting them out with these categories. For instance, even American Protestant liberals whose theology may seem as bland as a Hallmark card, can be shown to stand firmly against the culture on certain issues. Let them be confronted by overt racism, sexism, or sexual exploitation and they will be up in arms thundering anathemas and warning their constituents to stay away from certain cultural practices.

These observations also bear on the inevitable objections of today’s politically correct that Niebuhr’s categories are useless because he himself does not deal with issues such as gender or race, or that he deals with the thought of elites instead of what the ordinary people thought or did. The fact of the matter is that once we get away from Niebuhr himself and try to use the categories constructively, they are extraordinarily useful for analyzing the attitudes of almost any Christians on almost any cultural issue. To what extent is contemporary Christian feminism shaped by adopting the views of the dominant culture, and to what extent might it represent an attempt to transform or Christianize those views? How have they negotiated the relationship between Scripture, Christian tradition, and their feminist views? Why do many women resist feminism? Or to what extent has Christian African American political thought in the past half century been shaped by a desire simply to be full-fledged participants in American culture and to what extent has it been shaped by a separatist impulse? One could do a lot worse than to employ Niebuhr’s categories for sorting out these issues and clarifying how participants should think about them.

4. We need more categories.

Once we have dealt with the central issue—that almost all Christians exemplify something of all the types, but that on particular issues we can find dominant motifs—it is easier to deal with this last objection, that we need more categories.

Many people who have commented on Niebuhr have suggested that this or that group does not fit any of Niebuhr’s categories and that new ones need to be constructed. To suggest just two examples, where does militant liberation theology fit? Or what about the many Christians who see the conversion of souls as the preeminent task and will embrace any cultural means to further that end?

My view is that one can deal with most such anomalies by emphasizing once again that actual historical groups will be characterized by combinations of dominant motifs. So, even though we start with only five unhistorical ideal categories, various combinations of these can help us understand a much larger number of actual historical types.

Further, we have to recognize that dwelling on the Christ and culture question does load our discussion in ways that does not do justice to some groups. Many revivalist Christians, for instance, who see the conversion of souls as their preeminent task are simply not thinking much about their attitudes toward culture, even though they have some very definite attitudes. Niebuhr’s categories would help them think more clearly about their actual approaches to various aspects of culture, but we can not impose on them an agenda that seems to say that this is the most important thing they should be thinking about.

As to the possibility of adding categories, one of the most constructive suggestions comes from University of Chicago Law professor Michael McConnell. He suggests that if one approaches the question not on the basis of theological rationales, but rather on the basis of what Christians actually do, new categories will emerge. For instance, he thinks that “Christ against culture” could be divided into “Church apart from culture” and “Church in conflict with culture.” On the other hand, he thinks the third and fourth types could be consolidated under “Church accommodated to culture.” Despite differing theological rationales, he argues, they do not make any difference in practice. “Christ transforming culture,” he suggests, might better be called “church influencing culture.” He also thinks we should add two additional types, “church controlling culture” and “culture controlling church.”

I can appreciate the usefulness of these suggested revisions of the categories. I certainly think there is a distinction that can be made between “Christ against culture,” by which Niebuhr means Christ separated from aspects of culture, and “Christ against culture,” in the sense of Christians feeling at war with aspects of the culture. However, as my analysis of fundamentalism suggests, the sense of warfare can already be expressed under the rubric of any of three of the existing categories. Some who see themselves at war choose to separate from the mainstream culture, some live militantly in a paradoxical relation to that culture, not of the world but still in it. Or others might be engaged in warfare of transformation, as in recent culture wars or in liberation theology. So in this case I would not suggest adding any category, but simply making clear that, for Niebuhr, “Christ against culture” means “Christ separating from culture.”

Generally my attitude is that if the categories are to remain useful, we should take a conservative approach to them, preserving the five we have and not adding new categories. Five is as large a number as most people can easily remember anyway. And there is very little chance that a new set of categories will catch on the way Niebuhr’s set has.

Each of the major objections, then, can be adequately answered. If we adopt the flexibility and interpretations I have suggested, recognizing the complexity of any real historical subjects, then Niebuhr’s five categories can be extremely useful analytical tools.

I should say in closing that they are introductory tools. They are useful primarily for getting people to begin thinking more clearly about these issues. Once that has hap-
pended they may want to modify the tools to suit their purposes and will likely want to keep them out of sight in their finished work. Like any typology they invite simplistic thought and too easy categorizing of other Christians. Nonetheless, if used properly, they can continue to be a rich resource for helping Christians think about their relationships to the world.

One final potential criticism may be mentioned in the light of what follows. It is sometimes argued that the way Niebuhr frames his categories makes it inevitable that his own transformationist position turns out to be the most favored. Yet while Niebuhr is clearly an advocate of such an outcome, I see no reason why the use of his five categories should dictate that result. For now it is sufficient to give just one counter example—which is my own view. I think that “Christ and culture in paradox,” or some version of a two cities or two kingdom view, should be the most usual rule of thumb for Christian attitudes toward mainstream culture, although each of the other attitudes is sometimes appropriate as well.

NOTES
3 H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 43-44. He also acknowledges in this same passage that “traits will appear that seem wholly unique and individual,” so he does not regard his types as exhaustive.
6 Stanley Hauerwas, who has been one of the most vocal critics of Niebuhr for loading his account in favor of transformationism, nonetheless concedes that the categories have heuristic value. A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 246-47.
9 Yoder, “How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture,” 69. Yoder adds “egalitarianism, abolitionism, and feminism,” which are more confusing, since they both reflect wider cultural trends, yet in their particular church forms are cultural products of churches.
11 Gabriel A. Almond, Emmanuel Sivan, and R. Scott Appleby, in Fundamentalisms Comprehended, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 426 and 447, argue that world “fundamentalisms” can be classified into four types: “the world conqueror, the world transformer, the world creator, and the world renouncer.” They also suggest that fundamentalist groups progress historically from one type to another.
12 Niebuhr himself recognized the additional type in which culture controls the church, but uses it only to state the problem of defining what the Christian alternatives ought to be. Historically there might be a category for the church controlling the culture. I would say, however, that such attitudes could be absorbed in the category of “Christ transforming culture.”
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REMARKS ON CHRIST AND CULTURE

STEPHEN CROCCO
James Lenox Librarian, Princeton Theological Seminary

By any measure Christ and Culture is H. Richard Niebuhr's most popular book. Time will tell if it is the most influential one. Since it was published in 1951, generations of students have used Niebuhr's typology to understand denominational differences, approaches to social ethics, church-state questions, and the relationship of Christian thinking to philosophy, psychology, religion, business, etc. Because of this widespread use—into areas far beyond Niebuhr's original scope—John Howard Yoder called Niebuhr's book a classic and his types the "common coin of contemporary thought."

When Christ and Culture appeared, Paul Ramsey called it "the one outstanding book in the field of basic Christian social ethics." John C. Bennett said it was "impossible to suggest the richness of the analysis of each one of the thinkers discussed." Joseph Haroutunian spoke of the book as "a masterly clarification of a subject which has been and still is a source of disastrous confusion in the church." Even so, these reviewers were among those who were more or less dissatisfied with Niebuhr's argument for the final or recommended type, "Christ the transformer of culture." Some questioned Niebuhr's historical selections to represent types. Haroutunian, for example, was puzzled by Niebuhr's selection of Augustine and F. D. Maurice for the transformationist type when he thought John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards were more obvious and useful choices. Some reviewers criticized Christ and Culture, wanting to dislodge their traditions, denominations, or theologians from Niebuhr's assignments to the less flattering types. Still others begged Niebuhr to "flesh out" his analysis. What does transformation look like? These questions, some of which were substantial, did not stop Christ and Culture from becoming a classic. It is unfortunate that they did not generate a sustained conversation about the overall approach of the book, especially at a time when Niebuhr could have participated in the discussion.

It is also unfortunate that one of the most substantial discussions of Christ and Culture circulated only privately from 1958 until it was published in 1996 as part of a larger volume on Niebuhr and Christian ethics. In an essay published as "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture" John Howard Yoder did not argue against a typological approach per se. Rather he argued that a properly constructed and tested typology would allow representatives of the types to recognize themselves in a positive way. Yoder did not find this true of Christ and Culture, particularly in the discussion of the "radical" Christians in the "Christ against culture" position. In his critique Yoder carefully laid bare what he called Niebuhr's partisan use of the typology as well as some of his methodological presuppositions (relativism and a monolithic view of culture). The end result is a penetrating but respectful treatment of Niebuhr's typological approach to the enduring question of the relation between Christ and culture.

Yoder's essay was published in Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture. The book also contains Niebuhr's previously unpublished "rough draft" of Christ and Culture called "Types of Christian Ethics" and three other essays about Niebuhr's ethics by D. M. Yeager and Glenn H. Stassen. Following Yoder's critique of Niebuhr and his own attempt at a typology, Yeager gave voice to Niebuhr's evangelical conception of social Christianity, and Stassen promoted a new and improved relationship between Christ and culture in the spirit of Niebuhr's categories of conversion and faithfulness. This is an important book for anyone interested in Christ and Culture.

Yoder's work inspired other critiques of Niebuhr's typology. Charles Scriven took Christ and Culture as a "fixed landmark" for investigating recent Christian social ethics. In The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social Ethics After H. Richard Niebuhr, Scriven argued that Niebuhr's preference for Augustine and Calvin kept him from seeing the radical Christian tradition as the true heir of the transformationist type. Or, as he put it, "the true Niebuhrian way is the Anabaptist way"(20). In Resident Aliens Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, both in debt to Yoder, took Niebuhr to task for similar reasons.

In spite of these critiques, Niebuhr's Christ and Culture has shown an enduring quality just like the questions it addresses. Perhaps the book's status as a classic explains why it is assigned to students year after year while managing to avoid foundational questions about its approach and ongoing usefulness.

Some of the best recent discussions on the relationship between Christ and culture are taking place in missiological circles. While Christ and Culture is still invoked as a classic and presupposed as part of the intellectual landscape, arguably the vital discussions have moved beyond Niebuhr. For example, in his seminal book, Transforming Mission, David Bosch refers to Niebuhr some two dozen times without one reference to Christ and Culture. Perhaps this issue of Insights will spark fresh discussions of typological approaches in general and of Christ and Culture in particular. It is conceivable that Niebuhr's book has reached the end of its useful life. These are points worth discussing. Having said that, could it be that some of Niebuhr's other writings, such as The Kingdom of God in America (1937) (which was quoted extensively by Bosch) or The Meaning of Revelation (1941) will prove to be his more enduring contributions to the question of the relation of Christ and culture?

NOTES
Bennett's review appeared in Christianity and Society 17:1 (Winter 1951-2: 23-4); Haroutunian's, in Interpretation 6:1 (Jan. 1952: 113-5); and Ramsey's, in The Journal of Religion 32:3 (July...
I suppose we all have special treasures that mean a great deal to us personally, but are just one thing more to others. I have many of those. One of them is the book *Christ and Culture*. Physically it is a worn out book, held together by tape. But it is rich in meaning and in the memories it invokes. It was given to me by the author, H. Richard Niebuhr. Not signed, I regret to say. But the signature of its content is what is important.

The occasion was a party H.R. Niebuhr and his wife gave at their home in Hamden, Connecticut, in 1958. Those present were Niebuhr's graduate students and their spouses. Not knowing what to anticipate and being very anxious about how one should behave in the home of a giant, Virginia and I entered his home with great trepidation. We need not have worried. The reception was warm and friendly. The evening's activities bore no resemblance to the often threatening and always erudite seminars with which we were all too familiar. Instead of discussing Barth, Aristotle, Kant, or some such luminary, we played games, games like Clue or hearts, familiar to us all or at least quickly learned. There were winners. Competition was not exiled. The prizes were copies of Niebuhr's books, which he said he would appreciate our taking because his wife needed some space for herself in the bookcase. We left the party carrying treasures.

Mine was *Christ and Culture*. As it turned out, *Christ and Culture* has been an intellectual treasure for many generations now. It has proved to be a classic, if one defines a classic as having enduring power to inform one's own and others' understandings and behaviors, and to yield fresh insights with each re-reading. It has stood the most challenging test for any book, the test of time.

Why has this tightly argued and analytical study endured? There are many reasons. One, I think, is that it helps us to think about an issue that is always contemporary—the relationship between Christ and culture. The spark that ignites that question may come either from the side of Christ or the side of culture. Thus the Christ who says "my kingdom is not of this world" provokes us to think about what we do about the world which inhabits us and which we inhabit. And from the side of a culture such as our own that is contaminated by a consumer-oriented mentality which leads to pos-
Niebuhr compressed his five categories into three. I have found it helpful to use the categories as ways of looking at dominant patterns rather than as being monopolistic or exclusivistic in character. Relations between Christ and culture are, as Niebuhr insists, fluid and dynamic, not static. The types are ways of discerning various currents in the ongoing relationship between Christ and culture. They do not encompass the fullness and vitality of ongoing life in the symbiotic relationships of Christ and culture.

For example, in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and in other mainline churches in the last century we have seen the continuity of a Christ transforming perspective. But that dominant perspective was accompanied in the first sixty years by a Christ of culture bias. In the last four decades the church has become more critical of the culture and less willing to identify its understanding of God's purposes with those of the political and economic orders. There is more tension between church and society. There has been more skepticism about the society's motives, processes, and goals as being extensions of the church's ministry and mission. The most important categories now become Christ transforming and Christ against culture. That does not mean the absence of a Christ of culture perspective, only its relative decline.

Another source of this volume's staying power is that it invites reflective decision making, while respecting the good faith and authenticity of whatever answers have been given and are being given to the question. "It is helpful also to recall that the repeated struggles of Christians with this problem have yielded no single Christian answer, but only a series of typical answers which together, for faith, represent phases of the strategy of the militant church in the world. . . . It is the purpose of the following chapters 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." The belief which lies back of this effort, however, is 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 employs their partial insights and their necessary conflicts." (1)

This is a generous ecumenical vision which combines humility about one's own perspective with radical faith in the one God, a theological and ecclesial stance that would later be called a theology of radical monotheism. It is a rare book which incorporates so cogently context-specific seriousness with a monotheistic faith. Christ and Culture does.

There are other reasons why Christ and Culture remains useful and helpful today. One is its continued usage, in both colleges and seminaries. My own experience is that students still find the study as one which provides ways of seeing the church, the culture, and themselves in ways not thought about or articulated previously. They are able to put names to people and groups who are brothers and sisters in Christ, without stereotyping them. "Oh," one will exclaim, "Now I understand where I am coming from." Or, "Now I understand better why ____ acts that way." At the same time, Niebuhr’s theology of radical monotheism muzzles those who would be dismissive of those whose position differs from their own.

If some students find in this book interpretive devices which illumine their own and others’ shape of thinking and acting, many of them also find it very difficult to read. This used to surprise me. I once thought we could cover the whole book in one three-hour session, but I have become wiser. The historical references in the main body of the text are often unfamiliar, requiring more attention to the context of those who are cited as representative of differing “types.” For some, the text presumes a knowledge of church history that is beyond their reach.

On the problematic side I have also found that many who read Christ and Culture become ideal type “fundamentalists.” That is, they want to make the typology into rigid categories into which they seek to locate people without remainder. They fail to grasp the fact that the Christ and culture types are fluid and often overlapping. Even

...
When H. Richard Niebuhr delivered the lectures that became the classic book, *Christ and Culture*, Austin Seminary had only sixty-five students (compared to 304 today) and only eight faculty (compared to twenty-two today). The campus was smaller, and in many ways, our country was “smaller.” Our geographical boundaries have not changed, but almost everything else has.

In 1949, most of Niebuhr’s hearers considered their culture to be homogenous. “American culture” or “United States culture” had definable elements encompassed in the ideals of the U.S. Constitution and the Judeo-Christian value system. Despite the reality of a multiverse of races and creeds, for Niebuhr’s listeners, cultural diversity—and multiculturalism—were ideas of the future. Indeed, the only religious diversity Niebuhr’s hearers would have stopped to consider was that among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.

In order to get a firsthand sense of the lectures themselves, we asked the president of Austin Seminary at the time of the lectures, a faculty member who hosted Niebuhr in his home during the visit, and a student who listened to the lectures to briefly reflect on what they remember about that week.

Following are their reflections on the *Christ and Culture* lectures.

—Terry Muck
At the floor?
Yes, Robert Gribble, our professor of Hebrew, introduced him at one of the lectures later in the week and asked, “Dr. Niebuhr, what is it you look at on the floor when you look down?” His reply was “I’m trying to find the sacred cloth, no doubt!” He was a delightful person, and the warmth of the reception he received really meant a lot to him.

Who came to the lectures?
Mostly ministers from the Synod of Texas. The Synod was small but cohesive. We were a large family. This was our annual family gathering.

The lectures became classics in book form. Did you sense either while they were being delivered or after they were delivered that a great book would come out of this?
No. We realized they were superbly done. Later Richard Niebuhr wrote and asked if we would release him from our agreement. Cokesbury offered him a better deal—$7,500, I believe. I immediately wrote and said yes, we would release him. I don’t know whether the professor of ethics at Yale got it on his conscience or not, but he decided not to do it. He went ahead and fulfilled our agreement.

That must have impressed you.
Yes, it did. When James McCord left us as dean to be president at Princeton, I got on a plane and flew to Yale and talked to Richard Niebuhr about coming down as our dean.

He decided not to come.
He thought it over for several weeks and then wrote and said that he had another book in his system that he wanted to write, and he knew that as dean he’d go to the office thinking about a scholarship for this student or graduate fellowship for that student, and he’d just rather not. He’d rather stay and finish what he was doing. I tried to get Robert McAfee Brown next. He thought about it a long while and then called me and declined the invitation.

Who did you end up with?
Nobody. We looked at four or five others but none measured up. So I decided to do it myself. For the rest of my presidency I was both president and dean.

Did you use Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture paradigm in your preaching?
Many, many times. I thought it explained a lot of things, particularly in the 60s when the Deep South was so conflicted about racial issues. We Reformed struggled with those issues. Lutherans had an easier time of it with their “two spheres” theory. For them, societal failures weren’t necessarily the church’s failures. But we had a unified view. The Old South very piously took Christian teachings and built them into the
Ellis Nelson was serving on the Austin Seminary faculty when H. Richard Niebuhr was invited to deliver the 1949 Midwinter lectures. He went on to become professor of religious education at Union Theological Seminary, New York, and President of Louisville Seminary. Professor Nelson and his wife, Nancy, now live in Austin where he is Research Professor of Christian Education at Austin Seminary.

Why did the faculty extend the invitation to H. Richard Niebuhr to lecture?
It was part of an effort on the part of the seminary to move up a notch by bringing in recognized people of competence to provide students and faculty with intellectual stimulation.

How did you involve faculty and students in the lectures?
We divided the student body into three groups and assigned each group a professor. The speakers rotated around to each group. This was at night after each of the evening lectures.

What did you do in the groups?
The lecturers answered questions. We did it in faculty residences. The groups were about fifteen students and a faculty couple. We got a lot of mileage out of the lectures that way—more than we do now. The students got to know the lecturers a bit.

And the lecturers got to know the students.
Yes. Richard Niebuhr was at our home. We had a student that evening who was very conservative and a little restless about being at Austin Seminary. But he was here. In the discussion period at our house that night—about halfway into it—this student asked, “Dr. Niebuhr, do you believe in prayer?” Dr. Niebuhr looked a little taken aback because it had nothing to do with what we had been talking about. The student, in my opinion, was already suspicious about this northerner from Yale and decided to settle things once and for all. Niebuhr waited a second and then he said, “No.” I was look-
What do you remember about H. Richard Niebuhr as a person?
My problem is I keep comparing him to Reinhold whom I knew at Union. Reinhold Niebuhr was very friendly. You'd see him in the hall, and he would stop and talk. But he always took charge of the conversation and often overstated his views. He was a little more theatrical. He was one of the best people I ever met when it came to “theological sound bites.”

Theological sound bites?
Yes. Just capturing a theological idea in three or four words. They just flowed out of him. Once we were walking over to the Jewish Seminary next to Union where Reinhold lectured once a week, lectures which nearly always ended up in a book. Eisenhower was president at the time, and someone asked Reinhold about Eisenhower’s religion, and he said, “Eisenhower’s deeply religious but his religion isn’t very deep.”

And Richard?
In contrast to that Richard, if you talked to him, got very thoughtful. He would work the question around, ask your view of it, then give his—he would create a conversation. He engaged people fully.

What was he like as a lecturer?
Funny, but I don’t remember much about that. What I do remember was that as a person he was very approachable. Didn’t get off trying to be clever or displaying his knowledge.

What was the immediate impact of the lectures?
The typology was very handy. I think several of us started using it. But I don’t think any of us had in mind that this would become a classic book.

James Wharton attended the 1949 lecture series as a seminary student. He graduated from Austin Seminary in 1951 and became a member of the faculty of Austin Seminary where he taught in the area of Old Testament. He retired from teaching in 1996 and resides with his wife, Charlotte, in Montreat, North Carolina. He delivered the Westervelt Lectures of the 1999 Midwinter Lectures series.

JAMES WHARTON

What do you remember as a student listening to H. Richard Niebuhr’s lectures?
Somebody here said after those lectures that if the Niebuhr brothers had played instruments that Reinhold would play the trumpet and H. Richard the flute. When he was here he really played the flute.

How so?
His whole presentation was marked as much as anything else by its urbanity, its gentleness, its lack of pomposity. Meticulous erudition was there. But not a bit of arrogance.

So he related well to students?
We lived with the myth, I think, that theology was something done by great men. You made your way theologically in the world by deciding which great man—whether Bultmann, Tillich, Barth, or one of the Niebuhrs—you would follow. You had to choose one or the other. Richard Niebuhr changed that for me. To have one of the really big people in the field in our midst and being able to have a conversation with him was life-changing. One of the vivid memories I have of H. Richard Niebuhr was the way he handled himself in conversation with not very bright students. He never answered questions, he answered people. He tried to fish for where that question was coming from and say something useful and helpful. And he managed to keep us all focused on the questions, not himself.

Sounds like a gift.
Yes. Actually I encountered it again in Karl Barth’s old age when I was sitting around...
his table. He’d get these same dumb questions every semester—like “Karl Barth, are you a universalist?”—and he’d respond as if that were the freshest question he ever heard.

**Did you realize when you were listening to the lectures that Niebuhr was saying something that would become a classic book?**

We knew they would become a book. Niebuhr was a renowned scholar after all. But I don’t think that even after the lectures we knew they would become a classic.

**But they made an impression.**

Oh yes. Of course those were different times. Lectures were still an important part of cultural information dissemination. And the church was still an important part of society. The New York Times was still publishing sermons most Monday mornings.

**It’s been 50 years since those lectures. Have you noticed a difference in the way academic lectures are given since your time at Austin?**

Two thoughts: First, I think people today are more conscious of the need for brevity and common language. Less taking it for granted that you’ll understand a complex word. So the language used in lectures is less classic, more utilitarian. Second, the main difference is not the way lectures are given but the eagerness with which people attend such lectures—or should I say lack of eagerness. For Niebuhr we filled a church sanctuary. Today we have trouble getting seventy-five people out to hear Jürgen Moltmann.

**How did Niebuhr deliver the lectures?**

He was very intimate and personal. But also in a remote way that called attention to the ideas, not his personality.

**The ideas really stuck.**

Yes. Once Niebuhr interrupted a lecture at a divinity school. Right in mid-sentence he stopped, and looked down. And after a moment he said, “I think we need to have a moratorium on the use of the word God until we recover the meaning of awe.” It put a shock of ripple through the entire theological community.
The categories of Christ and culture, it seems to me, belong among such oppositions. The reality and authority of Jesus Christ are facts of our existence, but so are the reality and authority of the culture(s) in which we find ourselves. Niebuhr describes five principal ways in which believers through the centuries have tended to interact with their cultural contexts. Each has its place, and its liabilities—and none constitutes a final answer to the problem of Christ and culture. The benefits and liabilities are starkest at the two ends of the spectrum—in what amounts to a detachment from either culture or Christ in favor of the other. What Niebuhr seems to do is mark out the boundaries and dangers at the outer limits and then urge us toward a life lived in between those limits—a life of grappling our way up the ice, suspended between abandonment of either Christ or culture and carefully choosing our manner of life as Christians in the midst of dynamic and particular cultural realities.

II

So what ongoing usefulness does *Christ and Culture* have for those of us who are engaged in pastoral ministry? In the first place, the book serves as a strong encouragement to me to lead a reflective Christian life and, in my role as pastor, to stimulate and nurture reflection in others. There is certainly plenty to notice and contemplate—about Jesus Christ and about our cultural contexts.

Such reflection is unnatural to many people. I remember, for instance, teaching an adult Sunday School class whose focus was comparative religions. We had developed a sort of “grid” for looking at a variety of religious groups and comparing them with what we as Christians believed. All was going well, I thought, until we came to the New Age movement. On that particular Sunday we spent what I thought was a frustrating and unilluminating hour together, and for the next several days I tried to figure out exactly what had gone wrong. I eventually concluded that culture was the culprit: the culture of southwestern Colorado, where New Agers and New Age ideas had become commonplace and held considerable appeal; the culture of late-20th-century North America, in which all kinds of factors have combined to undermine the notion of truth and to make belief primarily a matter of personal choice and personal preference; and the culture of late-20th-century mainline Christianity, which had apparently failed as yet to make a cogent or compelling impression on the people in my class—people of a generally cosmopolitan bent who hailed from all over the country.

Forsaking all my assumptions about their groundedness in orthodox Christianity and their sensitivity to cultural influences, I returned to the class the following Sunday prepared to compare a historically orthodox Christian worldview with the worldview of the New Age movement, point by point. The result was interesting and may be summed up by saying that nearly everyone wanted to go by the name “Christian” while exchanging several Christian beliefs for their New Age counterparts—largely, as far as I could tell, on the ground that the overall result was more in line with how they preferred to think of God and themselves. When questioned about the inconsistencies or about what was at stake, they showed little interest in thinking about their decisions and preferences in any kind of deep or thorough way.

Now there was a lot going on that day, all of it pointing toward the complexities involved in what Niebuhr calls “the problem of Christ and culture.” But one thing that was going on was a demonstration of the disinclination of many people to be reflective Christians; and another was the laying bare of the need to awaken in Christian people a desire to think about whom they are and where they are in the whole cultural scheme of things.

Helping people notice and contemplate Jesus Christ and culture is an enjoyable aspect of pastoral ministry for me. Of course, Bible study isn’t the only vehicle for awakening people’s reflective tendencies, but good Bible study is surely essential for good reflection about Christ and culture. Partly because so many people lack a methodology for entering into the biblical text, many have not really encountered Jesus in a firsthand way or experienced the cultural significance of Scripture. People know how to read, but they often don’t know how to observe what’s going on in a passage of Scripture. They don’t, for instance, know how to ask and answer some of the basic questions that arise from biblical texts and that lead them into a sharper understanding of the world of the Bible and the biblical worldview. They know how to read, but they often don’t know how to take what they’ve observed and begin to draw meaning from it. If anything, they are eager to interpret without observing, which makes for erroneous interpretation almost every time. Further, while they know how to read, they often don’t know how to apply the Scriptures to life in the world—not life in the ancient world, not life in the modern world, not life in their own personal world of relationships, work, and character.

I continue to be amazed at what happens to people as they observe, interpret, and apply their way through Scripture, particularly a Gospel. I remember one woman in a small group I led. A nominal and unchurched Christian in her early fifties, she was studying Scripture for the first time in her adult life. As we made our way through the Gospel of Mark, she exclaimed one day, “I never knew Jesus was like this!” By this she meant three-dimensional, real, interesting, personal, hard to pin down, alive. Jesus was no longer merely an idea to her, or a person locked in an unfamiliar and ancient past. He had come to life for her. She felt she was getting to know him and, through him, getting to know God. She found she was able now to reflect on Jesus Christ himself—not just on her ideas about him—as well as on his connection to her own life and circumstances.

Bible study is also a good way, in my experience, to help people learn to reflect on culture. It’s easy and commonplace for people to overlay modern cultural assumptions, experience, and questions on the ancient cultural realities that infuse the Scriptures. Guiding people into some awareness of the salient differences between a typically modern worldview and a typically ancient one promotes deeper reflection about their own culture and the cultures of other times and places. Modern people get stuck less often in Bible study when they realize that the way they think isn’t necessarily the way an ancient Jew would think; when they realize, for example, that while modern people like to define, ancient eastern people liked to allude and tell stories.

It’s been my experience that as people begin to get a sense of what life was like and what people were like during Old and New Testament times, they begin to be more interested in thinking about their own cultural contexts in a more nuanced way than
they have before. They find that they themselves know something about the presuppositions and values that swirl around them, and they begin to be interested in how those presuppositions and values intersect with the gospel and the demands of the Christian life. So, for example, it is no longer enough to try to tease out from the synoptic story of the healing of the paralytic the ancient understanding of the relationship between sin and sickness; one must also grapple with the modern tendency to believe there is a biological or genetic cause behind almost every experience of human suffering. It is this kind of reflection on cultural realities that enables people to see the ways in which their culture has claimed them so that they can then begin to understand the impact or challenges the gospel poses within their cultural milieu and within their own lives.

Of course there are many ways in which my cultural contexts claim me personally and as a pastor. For me, one of the most compelling wake-up calls has come from Eugene Peterson, who argues that modern culture has tragically redefined pastoral ministry. No longer supported by our communities and congregations in devoting ourselves to praying, reading Scripture, and giving spiritual direction, many of us are merely busy. I am as guilty as anyone of succumbing to the culture's shallow expectations of me, but the commitment to lead a reflective Christian life helps me to lead a reflective pastoral life as well. I do well when I pay attention not only to the culture(s) "out there" but also reflect on the culture(s) "in here": congregations and denominational bureaucracies and hierarchies that are active in setting expectations and priorities for me that may or may not be in keeping with the expectations and priorities of Jesus Christ and his gospel.

III

Niebuhr's book also serves as a strong encouragement to grapple with the tensions raised by Christ and culture and to make decisions—and to be willing to keep on doing so in the absence of formulae and final answers. I imagine everyone who reads this book keeps looking for himself or herself in the positions Niebuhr describes. There is something in each one to attract us, but there are also exaggerations and dangers in each that should repel us. Niebuhr, of course, elucidates the tensions but doesn't resolve them—but also reflect on the culture(s) "in here": congregations and denominational bureaucracies and hierarchies that are active in setting expectations and priorities for me that may or may not be in keeping with the expectations and priorities of Jesus Christ and his gospel.

I remember what it was like when I went ice-climbing for the first time and found myself "fastened" to the ice by my hands and feet. Initially it was hard to know what to do—which limb to move first and where. The only thing that was clear was that I couldn't stay where I was and do nothing. I either had to come off the wall altogether, or I had to climb it. So I began to observe the ice around and above me. Reflecting on things, and to decide what manner of life befits their status as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Like other female clergy, I imagine, I occasionally receive a compliment from lay people that goes something like this: “You know, I’ve always had a problem with the idea of ordaining women as pastors, but after being around you I feel fine about it.” I’m aware of feeling genuinely glad whenever I serve as a positive example of women in ministry, but something inside me is always a little disappointed as well. I discover I am disappointed whenever someone opts out of the struggle to understand and decide—even when, in my opinion, they’ve arrived at the right answer. There has always been more to deciphering the question of women in ministry than either the demonstration of a particular woman’s pastoral giftedness or a change of feeling, and the same is true of many questions and issues we face as individuals and as the church.

In any event, as a pastor I’m always curious about what sort of person I’m talking with—a grapper and decision-maker, or a bystander or accommodationist; someone who’s bent on obtaining a formula or someone who can live with uniqueness and ambiguity. Either way, I try to stir up questions and possibilities, to promote a sense of responsibility and a tolerance for uncertainty and unsettledness. This, in my experience, is where God does the best work in our lives and in relation to our cultural contexts.

Take, for example, the phone call I received from a man and woman—both single parents—who had been dating for a time and were engaged in making a decision about whether to become sexually intimate. They had done some Bible study on the subject, but this had not answered their basic question so much as it had enlarged the issue by raising questions about covenantal relationships and the theology of human sexuality. They told me that many people in their church had blithely assumed they were already sexually intimate—though they had been dating for only several weeks—and that they very much wanted to resolve this question in a way that would honor their redeemer Jesus Christ. I confess I encouraged their unsettledness with the common assumptions of the surrounding culture, pushing them to think more deeply about what was at stake biblically and theologically, personally and as members of the Christian community. They told me later they’d made a commitment to postpone sexual intimacy until they married each other or someone else.

Grappers and decision-makers. God bless them, and God bless us—everyone who continues to sort out who they are and where they are in the whole cultural scheme of things, and to decide what manner of life befits their status as disciples of Jesus Christ.
What is obvious when you’re ice-climbing may not be as obvious when we’re just living our Christian lives, but it’s just as true. We are always surrounded by and attached to particular cultural realities that influence our faithfulness and progress as Christian disciples. One of the things H. Richard Niebuhr surely wanted us to see is that while the tensions inherent in Christ and culture may vary, they will always be present—and they will always require our ongoing reflection, engagement, and decisiveness.

NOTE

After extensive research and consultation, attempting to be “fair, inclusive, balanced, and comprehensive,” Anderson determined the 2,400 persons, representing Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. The response has been enthusiastic. For people who ask why he didn’t include certain individuals, Anderson’s answer is “I could name 500 more I wanted.” I missed Nestorius, known to some as heretic, to others as missionary.

This who’s who of Christian missions is presented in a convenient alphabetical format and contains biographical data including dates and places of birth, mission service, and death; nature of mission work and writings; and contributions to mission issues. The cloud of witnesses ranges from Irenaeus to Bishop K.H. Ting, from David Livingstone to Mother Teresa, from Origen to Julian, from Eulalia Cook González to Sundar Singh, from Amy Carmichael to James Kwegyir Aggrey. Lesslie Newbigin figures as contributor and subject of an article. Eerdmans paperback edition includes the dates of death of Newbigin and at least seven other contributors or subjects who died since the Macmillian publication.

The articles comprise fascinating information. For example, French Carmelite nun Therese of Lisieux was a saint and patroness of missions. John A. Mackay, “influential missiologist, theologian, and leader of the ecumenical movement” served as mission educator in Lima, Montevideo, and Mexico City before becoming President of Princeton Theological Seminary. Orlando Costas taught in six continents and “blended the best of the evangelical and ecumenical missionary experience.” Karl Barth’s “influence on contemporary theologies of mission can hardly be exaggerated.”

An extensive index of almost 5,000 items facilitates research. The forty-five pages of elaborate appendices are extremely useful. They render lists of biographies according to categories of interest: time period; women; martyrs; region of service; selected major agencies, orders, and religious traditions; non-Western persons; and type of work.

A fitting closure to Anderson’s ambitious and tedious task occurred on January 28, 1998, when he and the assistant editor, Robert...
Coote, had an audience with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican and presented him with a copy of the *Biographical Dictionary*. This unique volume comes at the close of the second millennium as a gift to the global church in six continents which is debtor to the 2,400 heroes of faith and many more who responded faithfully and sacrificially to the call of *masio Devi*. As an interdisciplinary tool the *Dictionary's* inclusion of figures like Origen and Jonathan Edwards reminds us that the church has history and theology because of its missional nature, that most theologians developed their theologies in the context of mission. One challenge would be to read the articles on people we know, but never considered as influential in missions.

Unfortunately for Anderson, more documentation on women and non-Western missionaries was not available, helping to perpetuate their “invisible” status; he includes only 380 women and 283 non-Westerners. That said, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* attempts to dispel myths restricting missions to the early church and modern missionary movement of the “Great Nineteenth Century” which ignore the faithful missionary activity throughout all periods of the church’s history. Such myths imply that virtually all important missionaries were from North America (excluding Mexico) and Western Europe, overlooking the Asian and African missionaries who crossed continents with the good news and the missionary zeal of Latin American Pentecostals today.

I would challenge Anderson to select articles on people we have never heard of and whose names we struggle to pronounce in order to foster an appreciation of the globalization of mission. It is up to us to propagate the articles contained in this volume and join Anderson in the search for and registry of stories untold.

This is an invaluable resource tool for mission educators who teach classes of all ages; for parents who enrich their preaching with narratives; for Christians around the globe who are curious about the missionaries from and to their countries; for seminarians whose thirst for knowledge leads them to cross-reference persons mentioned in texts and classes; for seminary professors committed to an integrated curriculum; for short-term and long-term missionaries who should know the history and names of notable figures in countries they visit or work; and for missiologists engaged in teaching and research.


**Upon** his death in November 1997, the *New York Times* eulogized Isaiah Berlin: “A staunch advocate of pluralism in a century in which totalitarianism and utopians claimed title to the one, single truth, Sir Isaiah considered the very notion that there could be one final answer to organizing human society a dangerous illusion that would lead to nothing but bloodshed, coercion and the deprivation of liberty.” In preparation for this first full-length biography of Berlin, Michael Ignatieff, who spent several years interviewing him, speaking with relatives and friends, and combing through a variety of unpublished papers and documents, seeks to bring us face to face with this man whose beneficence and generosity of spirit are acclaimed by virtually everyone who knew him, and whose fierce opposition to coercion and political oppression was a constant refrain.

Isaiah Berlin came honestly by his suspicion of totalitarianism (whether in the political or the intellectual realms). Born into a Russian-speaking Jewish family in Riga, Latvia, in 1889, Berlin witnessed the descent of his world into violence and forced conformity, as his family moved from Riga to Andreapol then to Petrograd. Berlin never forgot the images of mayhem and violent force he observed as Russia underwent its “White Christmas.” After some moments of prime ministerial embarrassment, Churchill discovered that his assistants had invited Irving Berlin, not Isaiah Berlin, to Number 10 Downing Street. At the close of the war, Berlin continued in the diplomatic ranks long enough to journey to Russia, where he met Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova, among other writers. These meetings were to have enormous consequences, not only for Berlin and the writers involved, but for the relationship between Western Europe and the Soviet Union.

Returning to Oxford and All Souls College, he left the field of philosophy to pursue the history of ideas. It was during these years, spanning the 1950s and 1960s that Berlin produced many of his most influential writings, including *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (1953) and *Four Essays on Liberty* (1969). Throughout his life Berlin maintained that he owed his fame to a systematic overestimation of his ability. His colleague Maurice Bowra once remarked of Berlin: “Though, like Our Lord and Socrates, he does not publish much, he thinks and says a great deal and has had an enormous influence on our times.” For most of Berlin’s academic life, Bowra’s observation was wildly held. In fact, he never did write that single authoritative book—expected him to produce. Since the late 1970s, however, opinion on the quantity of Berlin’s scholarly output (the quality was never in doubt) has shifted, largely due to the tireless efforts of Henry Hardy, a scholar who took it upon himself to collect and edit Berlin’s astonishingly large body of written work. The most recent bibliography of Berlin’s writings prepared by Hardy lists two hundred and thirty-nine items, including thirteen books.

A wit, who once said of teaching at Oxford that it was like casting fake pearls before real swine, and a conversationalist, who was given a knighthood “for talking,” Berlin’s most crucial work, at least from the perspective of leadership in the faith communities, concerns his concept of pluralism. Berlin criticized that aspect of Western thought, especially dominant from the Enlightenment forward, which assumes: (1) all real questions must have only one true answer; (2) an answer, in order to be regarded as true at all, must be true for everyone, everywhere, at all times; and (3) the true answers must all cohere, must be compatible with one another, and must work together to form a single, indivisible whole. Berlin recognized the real and irrefutable diversity of human communities and the manner in which communities come to value certain ideas and goals in ways that other communities will not. He also observed the inevitable feature of life in any given community in which the values shared in that community may frequently be in conflict with one another (for instance, there are times when we must choose between the value of freedom and the value of order). “We are doomed to choose,” he once wrote, “and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.”

These ideas which Berlin put forward can be found in any number of his essays, the most recent collection of which are *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (1990) and *The Proper Study of Mankind* (1997). Ignatieff’s biography puts flesh on the ideas, helps us to understand the living historical contexts for Berlin’s thought, and ultimately assists us in comprehending the importance of his work.
for those who care about and seek to provide leadership in a variety of communities. While the book does not provide us with the kind of critical appraisal we have come to expect in the best biographies, and while we shall want to turn to other studies to provide an analysis of Berlin's thought (John Gray's 1995 Israel Berlin, for instance), Ignatieff does provide us with that singularly important step in the study of any major thinker: the first biography on the subject. Those who read this biography will likely find themselves eager to read or re-read Berlin for themselves and to study his thought more carefully. In the final analysis, that may be the ultimate goal of any good intellectual biography.


If the purpose of an introductory text to the New Testament is to provide balanced, fair, and erudite accounts of the ongoing scholarly discussions of New Testament texts, then it would be hard to find someone better qualified than Raymond Brown. Brown had been known his entire career for the breadth of his knowledge, his fairness to diverse opinions (even those critical of his own), and his capacity for producing comprehensive analyses of both texts and our debates about them. There are, perhaps, other New Testament introductions equally balanced in their treatment of scholarship as Raymond Brown's, but none of them approaches the thoroughness and range of his 1997 An Introduction to the New Testament.

Actually, few things are less clear in the world of New Testament studies than the proper function and design of an introductory text. Oversimplifying slightly, we might divide the multitude of New Testament introductions into three kinds. First, there is the classic European analysis of the traditional introductory questions of who wrote each book, to whom, when, and why. Second, there is a more North American style text which includes an abbreviated version of the traditional introductory questions combined with readings, summaries, and theological commentaries on the texts. Third, there is an indescribably diverse collection of brief or tendentious readings of the texts, usually offered from, and on behalf of, a reading strategy currently in vogue in the academy or church. Raymond Brown's text is self-consciously and explicitly of the second variety. He finds the first variety to be so dull as to endanger students' ongoing relationship with the New Testament. He finds the third, at least as introductory texts go, to be almost irresponsible, since an introduction should at a minimum give a balanced account of current scholarship.

Thus, if you are looking for a creative or new way to think about the New Testament or about New Testament scholarship, Brown's book is not necessarily the place to go. But if you are looking for a comprehensive, generous, and balanced account of the New Testament, an account which represents the mainstream of New Testament scholarship, Raymond Brown's book is at this point the single best place to go. As Brown himself says, "[T]his book aims to be centrist, not idiosyncratic… . An introduction has the duty of reporting what scholars stand today" (xi).

This balance makes the book a wonderful text to hand to beginning students. You can give it to people without any need for an attached explanation or apology. Brown is unfailingly fair, even if his impatience with the Jesus Seminar surfaces from time to time.

Brown is also incredibly knowledgeable of New Testament scholarship. It is difficult to overstate the breadth of information that is contained in this book. He seems up-to-date on almost everything. From the basic debates about Jesus, gospels, and Paul to textual problems in Jude. Furthermore, he does not seem to be overly enamored of either the latest or the oldest opinion. He constantly insists on academic modesty on what we should claim to know. He even brackets his own well-known opinions with various cautions.

Brown organizes his text based on a combination of background questions, canonical, historical, and historical order. Thus "Part I: Preliminaries for Understanding the New Testament" includes comments on ancient books, current Western academic hermeneutics, ancient manuscripts, and the political and social background of the New Testament. Part II on the Gospels begins with the question of what a gospel is and then moves in the "historical" order of Mark, Matthew, Luke, Acts, John, and the letters of John. Part III on Paul also begins with several introductory issues, then moves in historical order from 1 Thessalonians to Romans. Then there is an intervening chapter on pseudonymity followed by treatments, in "historical" order, of the disputed letters. Part IV treats the "other New Testament writings," again in a combination of historical and canonical order.

Although this is a logical and even common way to organize a New Testament introduction, it creates some awkward problems. Most strikingly, scholarship on the historical Jesus is relegated to an appendix. The book, in fact, lacks a portrait of the historical Jesus (the appendix focuses on giving an account of modern scholarship on Jesus—not on providing an account of Jesus himself). Brown's argument is that this book is an introduction to the books which comprise the New Testament, not an introduction to the history of Jesus and early Christianity. Nevertheless, many readers will think (justifiably?) that an account of the New Testament should begin with an account of Jesus’ ministry, since the texts are so thoroughly imbedded in and dependent on that ministry. Furthermore, an exclusive focus on the books of the New Testament means that other key early Christian texts, such as the Didache, receive only passing comment in an appendix and the deep connection of New Testament texts to ancient Judaism and the larger Greco-Roman world must remain inadequately articulated.

Within this larger framework, Brown will organize his treatment of different books in various ways. For example, each treatment of a Pauline letter begins with a background analysis of Paul's relationship to that community, while treatments of the Gospels lack this since the information is not known. Nevertheless, each chapter includes a selected treatment of introductory questions along with a “General Analysis of the Message” and a discussion of “Issues and Problems for Reflections.” In these general analyses Brown offers a brief reading of the entire book. These sections come out of his wish to have the students engage not simply New Testament scholarship but the New Testament itself. Such readings are enormously difficult to do, and Brown succeeds reasonably well. “Issues and Problems for Reflections” constitute Brown's attempt to connect these readings and these accounts of scholarship to modern lives. These “issues” will range from comments about modern sacramental debates to brief theological sermons to an admission, in the case of Jude, that modern relevance is puzzling.

The book contains excellent bibliographies (although only titles in English are given) and appendices. All of this means that Brown's introduction may be the safest and most useful introduction to put in the hands of beginners. Furthermore, its balance and range, coupled with its excellent bibliographies, make it not only a wonderful introductory text but also an excellent resource for any pastor's shelf.

Finally, Brown is acutely aware of the danger of having secondary literature replace primary literature. He constantly points away from scholarship to the texts themselves, often explicitly urging readers of his text to read the New Testament itself. Nevertheless, it is part of the internal logic of biblical scholarship to master its subject. Even Brown's attempts to summarize the flow of the texts and to offer suggestions of meaning in his "general analyses," which he envisions as returning to the text, move inevitably in the direction of explanation, mastery, and thus replacement.
The store she had seen two drinking fountains, one labeled “white” and one labeled “colored.” Aching with anticipation she rushed past the boring “white” water fountain and pressed the “colored” pedal, expecting a stream of cold, beautiful, blue, red, and green water. Seeing the shocked and disappointed look on her face, her father took a few painful moments to explain segregation to her.

Hearing this story on the radio jarred loose a long forgotten childhood experience I had when we moved from California to Texas. Just learning to read, I remember sounding out “Tex-a-co” when we paused for gas and puzzling over what I thought was “color-red” on a water fountain. I too was eager to try that beautiful water.

What was the first book someone read to you? What was the first book you read?

When I went to see Gustavo Gutierrez lecture at the Mexican American Cultural Institute in San Antonio, I listened to this gentle but powerful theologian, author of The Power of the Poor in History, and kept wondering, what did he read as child? What is the connection between his early childhood reading and his spiritual formation?

In recent years, discussions of spiritual formation have become more important in many Protestant seminaries including Austin Seminary. Ideally, that discussion should include the spiritual formation of children. We recently devoted an issue of Insights to this topic and one of our faculty, Laura Lewis, wrote an article, “Forming and Confirming Young Christians,” to lead off that issue. As Laura points out, there is a wealth of material available to us on this subject, particularly on the role reading plays in spiritual formation. One place to begin is with On Writing for Children, a book in which C.S. Lewis suggests that children's books should inspire thinking about wonder, grace, love, and imagination so that when children hear the gospel they will embrace it as familiar. Other good starting places might be Madeleine L’Engle's pioneering Trailing Clouds of Glory: Spiritual Values in Children's Literature or Bruno Bettleheim's The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales.

Clearly one of the best ways of gaining insight into the genre of children's literature is for a pastor and children from the congregation to read some books together and discuss them. An excellent selection is Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown, based on Psalm 139. Books by Katherine Paterson, child of Presbyterian missionaries in Asia, winner of Newberry and Caldecott awards and 1998 Austin Seminary Midwinter Lecturer, are also excellent choices. Many think her best and most popular book is The Bridge to Terabithia.

Since I missed my opportunity to ask Gustavo Gutierrez what he read as a child, I began a small unscientific survey of people whom I admire. I asked them only one question: What is the first book you can remember reading? I wanted to play with the notion that there might be some interesting connection between what they first read and how they turned out.

On December 31, 1998, at Celebrate III, a national gathering of students in North Carolina, I was blessed with a few private moments with Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

“What is the first book you can remember reading?” I asked the Archbishop.

“What a good question!” he answered with a smile. “No one has ever asked me that question.”

Of course I was pleased as I waited for his answer.
After a moment he said, “It happened like this. I was having a little difficulty learning to read and my father, even though it was against our family standards, went to the store and bought and secretly gave me a Superman comic book. Oh how I loved that comic book! It helped me to learn to read. A little later I read Lamb’s Tales of Shakespeare, but my first book, well, that was our little secret.”

I have always admired Ernest Gordon, formerly the chaplain at Princeton University and author of a book I read in college, Through the Valley of the Kwai, his account of life as a chaplain in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. When I was in Princeton working with the campus ministry there, I made an appointment with Dr. Gordon. He told me that his father also influenced his early reading. A Scottish working man, Dr. Gordon’s dad saved a few shillings each week to buy young Ernest books. The first book he can remember—this man who was the light to so many in the camp, later in Japan where he helped found the International Christian University, and then with young people at Princeton—was Bellrock: The Building of a Lighthouse.

On the way back from Princeton I sat on the plane beside Bobbie Nelson, Willie’s piano-playing sister. She was returning from Washington, where Willie had been honored with a Kennedy Center Award. “Bobbie,” I asked after we got to talking, “what was the very first book you can remember reading?” Without hesitation she said, “The Bible. Bible stories. Willie and I didn’t have many books, but our Grandmother read to us from the Bible every night as children. And when we got older we loved to read those Bible stories.”

I was on a roll now. Every time I met someone is my work as director of the higher education ministries program at Austin Seminary, I asked them “the question”: Laura Bush wife of Texas governor and presidential candidate George W. Bush, remembers her mother reading her Little Women.

Doug Oldenberg, last year’s Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), said he remembers trying to read fairy tales at a young age but his most vivid memory of childhood reading is the Hardy Boys series.

George Marsden, Notre Dame historian and author of The Soul of the American University and The Secularization of the Academy, thought his first book was either Dr. Doolittle or A Child’s Version of the Iliad.

Molly Ivins, syndicated newspaper columnist, was thrilled by Dick and Jane.

The very first book Jack Stotts, president emeritus of Austin Seminary, read was Lad, A Dog, “a story of faithfulness and loyalty” as he remembers it.

Among the faculty, Old Testament professor Kathryn Roberts was aware even as a young girl that when she went to the library there were not many books about women for young women to read. Happily this is no longer the case. Systematic theologian Cindy Rigby loved the controversial Harriet the Spy.

My first book, one I read and re-read, was Richard Haliburton’s Book of Marvels.

How about you? Who’s read the Harry Potter series?

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