

The Road from Eden
Studies in Christianity and Culture

a Book Review
of

[Barber, John](#). *The Road from Eden, Studies in Christianity and Culture*.
Palo Alto, CA: Academica Press, 2008.

by

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Christ is in culture. If one were to walk into the headquarters of the *Central Intelligence Agency* today he would see the words inscribed on a wall before him saying, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Even within a culture of spies and secrets, Christ is there. Christ is in culture – *all types of culture*.

John Barber, Ph.D., in his new book, *The Road from Eden, Studies in Christianity and Culture*, has written a masterful 566-page work concerning Christ in culture. More culturally definitive than Augustine’s, *City of God*, and more current than Richard Niebuhr’s, *Christ and Culture*, Barber reveals the redemptive-cultural Christ of history.¹ As Barber states, “...while as a cultural thinker you may join me in the fold of “Christ-the-transformer of culture,” a category coined by Niebuhr, I hope you will also join me in recognizing the need to build true, Christian *colere*... So go. Blaze new frontiers.”²

With a telescopic view of history and microscopic precision, Barber gives the reader 20/20 vision of the Christ of the earliest believers, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, European Romanticism, Christian Romanticism, and into Modernism itself. He not only answers the question, “How Should We Then Live?”³ biblically, but also, “How then did they live?” Barber seeks out

¹ What Niebuhr called, “Christ the transformer of culture.” Karl Niebuhr (1892-1971) was a theologian known for his study of the task of relating the Christian faith to the reality of modern politics and diplomacy. He is a crucial contributor to modern just war thinking. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reinhold_Niebuhr [last accessed on 3 April 2008].

² Page 566.

³ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, Crossway Books.

how God was gloried in the cultures of the past and present and how he should be glorified in the future! He discovers and defines the Christ of eschatological-culture.

Moreover, Barber takes the reader on an easy to read historical trek of art, architecture, beliefs, organizations, politics, and a brief tour of some great churches and cathedrals of Europe. He interacts with Luther, Calvin, Kuyper, Schilder, and several philosophers such as Locke, Kant, and Bacon. He covers such issues as *Imago Dei*, the work of culture, and my favorite, “Eschatology” and Life with a purpose.”

What is outstanding throughout is most of the chapters in this historic work offer “a reflection that seeks to apply some insight from the reading to our contemporary situation.”⁴ An example of statements, which make the reader pause and think, is that while Barber is writing on humanism, religion, and culture,⁵ he states:

To the modern student of culture the classical humanism of the Italian Renaissance invariably presents a model of productive scholarship, artistic and scientific genius, and encouragement to always see that the shape of culture is never static but always open to transformation.

Thus, the reader has an opportunity for instant life application.

This is a life changing work. It will change the way the reader thinks, acts, and interacts with culture. It will bring one closer in his relationship with Christ. It will assist one in becoming a more able witness for Christ. The reader will more fully understand why he has been created for “such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). We all impact culture. The only questions remaining are (1) how should we impact culture to glorify God alone and (2) how will we impact it today?

In my opinion, this book would be a rich asset to any pastor, professor, or seminary student studying Christian history, culture, and ethics. Moreover, it should be mandatory reading for any individual desiring ordination. As John Frame, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at *Reformed Theological Seminary*, states, “This book sets the Christ and Culture discussion on a higher plane. It should be the starting point of all further conversations about these matters.”⁶

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⁴ Page 5.

⁵ Chapter 9, page 187.

⁶ Foreword, page XV.

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