

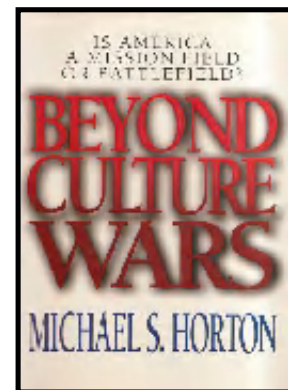
What's Wrong with Culture Wars?

BEYOND CULTURE WARS BY MICHAEL S. HORTON

To begin at a likely – even necessary – place of essentially defining the purpose of this book, Horton is writing as “an evangelical”...for a like audience. With the purpose is the position of neutrality; that is, that he is not taking sides in the “culture war”. Before going further, the war must be decided between two or more...which he describes as:

- Those who believe that revelation, salvation, and the kingdom of God come down from heaven as the sovereign intervention of God breaking into history.
- Those who assume that we can save ourselves (either as individuals or as a nation) and usher in the kingdom of God by our own righteousness.

With the purpose, the position and the players described above, the next subject or step in the first chapter is the subject of political parties and their various factions. In his view, the effort and insistence upon associating and assimilating the parties (and/or factions) to Christianity; **or in other words, defining faith and orthodoxy by one's political affiliations.**



As always the dilemma of summary, the detail of the dialogue is lost amid a few quotes and bullet points; but further still is the duty at which the material is read, understood and lucidly summarized. With that said – and repeated as necessary – I continue with the desirable “duty” amid the threatening dilemma.

Mr. Horton entitles a section of chapter 1 as “**The Ideological Shift**”. This shift is not just one movement, but what seems like a collection and series of shifts that started in Europe and crossed the ocean. Keeping the focus of the shift to the shores of America is my intent – and may be Michael's as well. Anyway, he continues to describe the shift in some detail with names, places and church denominations. To summarize his description:

In the 1920's, the Presbyterian Church expelled J. Gresham Machen; the split within the denomination was followed by similar divisions in other Protestant churches.

Why the split; what caused this series of divisions...amid denominations?

In some scant description of the cause (or causes) is that, in simple terms, some believed the church should be somehow associated and involved with the duality of the “American Dream” and Christian Gospel; furthermore, that the church should be “spending their energies...trying to preserve their control over their political and social empire.”

What's Wrong with Culture Wars?

BEYOND CULTURE WARS BY MICHAEL S. HORTON

The “other side” of the shift or split apparently split again! Called “fundamentalist”, this segment of the shift has seen further division between those that are “world-affirming, cognitively-oriented, and rooted in a particular confessional tradition” and those “world-denying, “emotionally-oriented”, and anti-intellectual. Mr. Horton notes that eventually the latter (of the two) has “marked the movement.”

Continuing with his topics, the next is a rather big word called **eschatology**; a word to mean doctrine that addresses the afterlife. In the introduction of this word is also some relatively recent, but key, keepers of the faith that follow the “cognitively-oriented” side; but steered clear from the modernist view of active involvement and influence in the political forums as an evangelical – rather than simply as a citizen. Such thinking, as explained by Horton, is not one of isolation when it comes to civic duty, but, as he explains:

I am not for one moment arguing that Christians ought in principle to abstain from civic affairs; in fact, coming from the Reformed tradition, I am in agreement with John Calvin that public service is one of the highest callings.

With civic duty sanctioned, or even admired, why should Christians steer clear of the culture wars?

The greatest risks or threat for the church is that such engagement (in culture wars) will distract the church from the “greater mission – the proclamation of the Gospel and worship of God.” In this engagement is also the proven consequence of polarizing segments of society; those that share such strong sentiments versus the rest...

As one reason to refrain from war, **the church is not a culture** – says Michael. As a marked difference, the church has historically succeeded in a variety of cultures and, ironically, has often prospered under oppression and weakened under prosperity. Quoting Billy Graham, he continues: “It is an error to identify the Gospel with any particular system or culture...”

But the error of our ways has established a “history” of using Christian truth and absolute values to justify evil.” Horton asserts that Christians “must face the reality that our agenda has more to do with preserving the dominance of while, middle-class values than with the clear ethical commands of Scripture.”

Perhaps the perverted application of Christianity is the outcome and, at a deeper level, is the need for Christians to reassess what they believe and why they believe it – says Michael; after all, Christianity is not justified by the potential morality offered to a culture, but because it is truth and life – it is Christ.