Faithful Presence

In *To Change the World*, James Hunter argues that Christians today have badly misunderstood the way in which cultures change. Typical of this misunderstanding is the popularity of the “heart and mind” thesis that is offered by the likes of Chuck Colson and Nancy Pearcey. Culture will change, so goes this line of reasoning, if we penetrate the hearts and minds of people, one at a time. (This strikes awfully close to home when one considers the RTS motto: “a mind for truth and a heart for God.” In my judgment, however, *To Change the World* does not invalidate our tag line, though it may warn against torturing the metaphor.)

Hunter’s point is that cultures, especially in late modernity, are complex networks of institutions. The prevailing theories or paradigms of Christian transformation/redemption of culture all share a naiveté about culture and cultural change. His more excellent way is the cultivation of the “faithful presence” of Christians living in the exile:

A theology of faithful presence means a recognition that the vocation of the church is to bear witness to and to be the embodiment of the kingdom of God. To paraphrase St. Paul at the end of his letter to the Galatians, “what matters is the new creation (Gal 6:15).” The new creation he speaks of is a reference to the kingdom of God working in us and in the world; a different people and an alternative culture that is, nevertheless, integrated within the present culture. Whatever its larger influence in the world may be, a culture that is genuinely alternative cannot emerge without faithful presence in all areas of life.

Although I have problems here and there with the fine-print of this book (for example, Hunter fails to realize that at his best he offers a two-kingdom approach to culture), I have found this a challenging and stimulating read. I hope others at RTS are finding benefit as well. Please grace us with your faithful presence (bad pun intended) when Hunter visits our campus next week.

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