Two events of the past week got my attention. On Nov. 2, the nation witnessed a major shift in its centers of political power, and on Nov. 3, the sociologist Dr. James Davison Hunter addressed a gathering of students, faculty, and members of the Orlando community on the topic of his critically acclaimed book *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford, 2010). Though Hunter did not explicitly address the events of the day before, it was hard not to appraise his thesis in light of the big story that was omnipresent on every news show and website and intermittently bemoaned and celebrated in status updates and tweets.

It should be noted that Hunter’s argument is, true to the sociological type, complicated and nuanced and cannot be fully appreciated in the current column (I recommend John Muether’s previous two “Prolegomenon” posts), but a nutshell account is that the current paradigms of Christian engagement with culture are idealist at their core, and therefore misguided at best and fatally flawed at worst. Instead, Hunter calls for a new theology of “faithful presence,” which involves dense networks of Christians engaging with and supporting dense networks of cultural producers (Ivy League schools, mainstream media outlets, publishing houses, and so on). Hunter warns his readers (and listeners) to have realistic expectations, and he is uncertain whether “changing the world” is a livable goal at all. On this point, he confesses that the title of his book is itself ironic.

So how do we hear Hunter’s message in light of the week’s other big event, the Nov. 2 elections? I have many Christian friends who felt they witnessed a grand victory Tuesday night, and many others who remain distraught at what they see as a terrible loss. What are we to expect from the ebb and flow of political tides? Is this really how the world is changed? Or to put it another way, does the current paradigm for Christian involvement in politics result in an effective strategy for real change? For Hunter, the answers are “more of the same, no, and no.”

Hunter describes his project as primarily methodological in nature meaning that he is interested in changing the method of cultural engagement. Method seems to me to fall under the purview of wisdom, the first premise of which is the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). While I find much of what Hunter is saying to be appealing, even compelling, I wonder how much one can expect from the field of sociology particularly when it comes to the work of a God who, among other things, tends to show his strength through perceived weakness. How does sociology account for the activity of such a God and his people in society? Can it account for such things? Should it?

One might say that the preacher of Ecclesiastes argues in part for a type of “faithful presence,” but the biblical wisdom tradition seems to make room for a methodological diversity on this score, particularly in light of wisdom’s culmination in Christ. Is it possible that wisdom allows for more than one way up the mountain of cultural engagement, and “faithful presence” is but one path?

To be sure, it is not that the theology of “faithful presence” cannot be discussed in terms of biblical wisdom, just that such a discussion remains a desideratum. Hunter confesses that he only wishes to start a conversation. Judging by the responses I have heard and read, it seems that this goal has been mightily achieved.

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