

The Consequence of (Some) Ideas: A Review Essay of James Davison Hunter's *To Change The World* with Some Thoughts for Christian Scholars

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To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World. By James Davison Hunter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 358 pages. \$27.95.

No doubt, many of us view our vocation as scholars within the context of God's redemptive story. We live in a fallen world, but it was not always this way, and it won't always be either. Currently, Christians find themselves within the time between the first and second coming of Christ. In these "last days" (see e.g., 2 Timothy 3:1 and James 5:3), Jesus has left us with a command and a promise. The command is to proclaim the gospel into all the world (see e.g., Matthew 28:19-20) and the promise is that God will give us power: the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives (see Acts 1:7-8).¹ It is a Christian conviction that the only solution to man's chief predicament, which is alienation from God, is Christ. Perhaps this epic background is why some of us became scholars in the first place. After all, the world is moved by ideas, and as scholars, our job is to sort out the good ideas from the bad. And as *Christian* scholars, our job is to help show how all knowledge somehow illuminates the divine.

In 1997, George Marsden wrote an important book documenting how attempts to integrate one's faith with one's scholarship are perceived by the secular university (and some Christians) as outrageous.² The idea was that it is ludicrous, inappropriate and even absurd to

¹ For a good discussion of the over-arching story of Scripture, see Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2002). According to Roberts, believers today live within the "Proclaimed Kingdom."

² George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

blend the personal/private/subjective beliefs of a religious academic with the public/openly accessible/objective truths and knowledge of the scholarly enterprise. Marsden expertly argued that there is a place for distinctively Christian views within the secular academy. I concur. Today, the idea of Christian scholarship is not as outrageous as it was when Marsden wrote. Sure, there are those, such as Richard Dawkins and his ilk that continue to proclaim religion and religious folks as delusional, but by and large, Christianity and Christian scholarship are at least some-what respectable, even at the table, within some (even many) of the academic disciplines.

Consider my own discipline, philosophy. Thanks to the so-called renaissance in Christian Philosophy that has taken place over the past forty years, led by the likes of William Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga, it's easy for us Christian Philosophers to rest satisfied with our new standing within the academic world. We've fought hard and earned respectability—winning arguments (in our minds at any rate) on many issues of concern. Philosophical naturalists are on the retreat, or in need of a re-awakening, for as Quentin Smith laments, “God is not ‘dead’ in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s [beginning with Plantinga’s influential book *God and Other Minds* in 1967] and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments.”³ Christian philosophical societies are flourishing, and Christians are producing erudite works in every major subdivision of the philosophical enterprise. It's easy to believe, even justifiably so, that we have much to celebrate.

Yet, given all the advances we have experienced within the philosophical world, by and large, our influence has failed to crossover into the broader culture. Further, as one travels up the rankings in reports such as Brian Leiter’s *Philosophical Gourmet*, the presence of Christians within philosophy departments noticeably thins (the point being of course—our influence isn't as

³ Quentin Smith, “The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism,” *Philo* 4 (2001): 4.

pervasive or penetrating as we might think or hope). The same can be said for many of the academic disciplines. The university is largely secular and thus, the dominant voice of the university is largely secular as well.

That the modern university is secular is widely known and well documented.⁴ It is also well known and documented that outside the walls of the university belief in God is prevalent and strong. As a Christian myself, I often puzzle about this unwelcome state of affairs. Why is it that there are so many Christians in this country, yet our influence within the great culture-shaping institutions of western culture (i.e., the university, the media, the arts, politics, and so on) is so small (or at least disproportionately small)?⁵ Further, what can Christians do to change this reality?

James Davison Hunter's latest installment, *To Change the World*, addresses these questions, and he pulls no punches—Christians in general have gone about the task of world-changing in the wrong way.⁶ And perhaps, it seems, so have we Christian scholars. I think there is much to commend in Hunter's book, not only for Christians in general, but for Christian scholars in particular. Thus, in what follows, I shall summarize Hunter's main points, offer a

⁴ See e.g., Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Interestingly, while the university remains largely secular as an institution, a recent survey indicates that the American professorate is much more religious than what is typically supposed. According to a recent study conducted by Gross and Simmons, religious believers comprise 51.5% of all professors. More revealing however, religious belief is far more prevalent with professors who teach at community colleges or small liberal arts schools than at elite doctoral universities. As Gross and Simmons report, 36.5% of professors at elite universities consider themselves either atheists or agnostics, compared to 15.3% and 22% at community colleges and liberal arts colleges, respectively. See Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, "The Religiosity of American College and University Professors," *Sociology of Religion* 70 (2009): 113-114.

⁵ Gross and Simmons note this unwelcome state of affairs within the university as well: "it [i.e., the university] is a secular institution despite the fact that most of its key personnel are themselves religious believers." *Ibid.*, 124. Gross and Simmons cannot account for this reality.

⁶ James Davison Hunter, *To Change The World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

brief assessment, and then in broad strokes consider what implications his work has for Christians in general, and Christian scholars in particular.

Christians as World-Changers

The book is composed of three essays. In the first, Hunter grounds his project in our God given mandate to be “world-changers.” Hunter states, “To be Christian, is to be obliged to engage the world, pursuing God’s restorative purposes over all of life, individual and corporate, public and private. This is the mandate of creation” (4). Yet, for all of our efforts, 21st century western society is at its core secular, fragmented, contradictory, and often hostile to Christian faith. Why such an unwelcomed state of affairs?

The common response to this question, says Hunter, runs as follows: Christian theism is engaged in an epic battle (which it is currently losing) with other worldviews and in order to change, Christians need to consistently adhere to a Christian worldview *and* expose the falsehood of all worldview competitors.⁷ The aphorism “ideas have consequences” has become a rallying cry for many evangelicals. Bad ideas adhered to in hearts and minds lead to bad consequences—just witness Columbine or the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As Hunter states, “The point is always the same. Bad ideas form the basis of destructive values and these, in turn, lead to bad choices. In the end, these all cumulatively lead to an unhealthy and declining culture” (8). So, why is the influence of Christianity in America disproportional to the number of Christians? In short, because many Christians, let alone non-Christians, don’t adhere to a Christian worldview.⁸ We are losing the worldview battle—both within the church and without.

⁷ Hunter sets his sights on popular worldview champions such as Chuck Colson and James Dobson, but no doubt the common response can be found elsewhere.

⁸ The fact that many Christians don’t adhere to a robust Christian worldview is also well known and well documented. See e.g., the interview of the University of Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith in the October, 2009 issue of *Christianity today*, where Smith discusses the six religious types of emerging adults. A full 30% of emerging adults, according to Smith, are “selective adherents” to faith, in effect, picking and choosing which

On the common view, worldview considerations also hold the key to change. Hunter continues, “the same ideas work in reverse. If we want to change our culture for the better, we need more and more individuals possessing the right values and the right worldview and, therefore, making better choices....And so [Colson] poses the question directly: ‘How do we redeem a culture?...from the inside out. From the individual to the family to the community, and then outward in ever widening ripples’” (8).

Hunter argues that this implicit view of culture—that “the essence of culture is found in the *hearts and minds of individuals*” (6); and of cultural change—that change will come as *individual* lives are transformed, is fundamentally wrong. The fatal flaw that undergirds the common view and its resultant strategies for cultural change (whether they focus on spiritual, political, or social renewal) says Hunter, is “idealism”:

Idealism is a principle and tradition in metaphysics that maintains that something “ideal” or non-physical is the primary reality....In the basic (and, if you will, Platonic) formulation, physical objects are just pale imitations of the ideas and ideals that represent them. This being so, it is ideas that move history. (24-25)

But, Hunter asks, “are ideas, values, and worldviews singularly important to cultural change? Are ordinary individuals with conviction the main carriers and agents of that change” (26)? In answering his own questions, Hunter warns: “[e]very strategy and tactic for changing the world that is based on this working theory of culture and cultural change will fail—not most of these strategies, but all” (27). The reason is that idealism ignores the institutional nature of culture and the way that culture is embedded in structures of power. In other words, the history of ideas is *embodied*—within individuals, institutions, and networks of power that give life and lift to them as forces of cultural change.

doctrines will be followed and which will be ignored. Katelyn Beaty, “Lost in Translation,” *Christianity Today* Vol. 53, No. 10 (October 2009): 34-37.

What is needed, says Hunter is a rethinking of culture and cultural change from the ground up. He proposes eleven propositions, seven about culture, four about cultural change, as axioms of such an alternative view. I will not discuss all eleven, but will provide a brief summary of some of the most novel and (as far as I can tell) important propositions for chartering a new vision of culture and cultural change.⁹

PROPOSITION THREE: *culture is intrinsically dialectical* (34). The primary dialectic informing culture is not between ideas only, but between (a) *ideas* and *institutions*; and (b) *individuals* and *institutions*. “To put it bluntly, culture is as much an infrastructure as it is ideas. It takes shape in concrete institutional form” (34). Hence, culture is generated and exists as an interface between ideas and institutions (including the individuals inseparably linked to such institutions). The dialectic taking place within culture is thus much richer and more complex than typically portrayed—it is the interplay of ideas within the context of a network of individuals and institutions—and it is the institution, says Hunter, which wields the most power.

PROPOSITION FOUR: *Culture is a resource and, as such, a form of power* (35). Once culture is thought of in *institutional* terms instead of *individualistic* terms, it allows one to realize there are other forms of capital, other sources of power, than merely intellectual or economic.

⁹ The eleven propositions are as follows:

- Proposition One: Culture is a system of truth claims and moral obligations;
- Proposition Two: Culture is a product of history;
- Proposition Three: Culture is intrinsically dialectical;
- Proposition Four: Culture is a resource and, as such, a form of power;
- Proposition Five: Cultural production and symbolic capital are stratified in a fairly rigid structure of “center” and “periphery;”
- Proposition Six: Culture is generated within networks;
- Proposition Seven: Culture is neither autonomous nor fully coherent;
- Proposition Eight: Cultures change from the top down, rarely if every from the bottom up;
- Proposition Nine: Change is typically initiated by elites who are outside of the centermost positions of prestige;
- Proposition Ten: World-changing is most concentrated when the networks of elites and the institutions they lead overlap;
- Proposition Eleven: Cultures change, but rarely if ever without a fight.

The knowledge, technical know-how, credentials, and cultural accomplishment coming from the institutions of a culture can be understood as “symbolic capital” or “cultural capital” that “translates into a kind of power and influence” (36). This proposition seems fairly obvious, even if under-appreciated: an editorial coming from the *New York Times* has more symbolic capital (i.e., exerts more influence into culture) than one from the *Dallas Morning News*; a Ph.D. has more symbolic capital (i.e., has more initial credibility to speak into reality and ultimately define it) than a car mechanic, and so on.

PROPOSITION FIVE: *Cultural production and symbolic capital are stratified in a fairly rigid structure of “center” and “periphery”* (36). One of the ways that cultural capital is different than economic capital is that *quality*, and not *quantity*, is paramount. This is why a book published by an evangelical press such as InterVarsity, Crossway, Baker, or NavPress might sell hundreds of thousands of books yet never be noticed or reviewed by the *New York Review of Books* or the *Atlantic Monthly*, but a book published by Oxford University Press or Knopf will, even if relatively few copies of a book are published. For as Hunter states, “the individuals, networks and institutions *most critically involved* in the production of a culture operate in the ‘center’ where prestige is the highest, not on the periphery, where status is low” (37).

PROPOSITION EIGHT: *Cultures change from the top down, rarely if ever from the bottom up* (41). “The work of world-making and world-changing are, by and large, the work of elites; gatekeepers who provide creative direction and management within spheres of social life” (41). The reason for this is that it is the elites, those who possess cultural capital, who define reality— what is right and wrong, important and unimportant, true and false, beautiful and ugly, and so on. And as we have seen, this cultural capital is not evenly distributed in society. Rather,

it is concentrated in certain institutions and among certain leadership groups who have disproportional access to the means of cultural production.

PROPOSITION NINE: *Change is typically initiated by elites who are outside the centermost positions of prestige* (42). Hunter points out that the idea of cultural production and capital as stratified within a “center” and “periphery” are not fixed points but are relative. In other words, within the center, there is a range of gradations of cultural production and capital—New York University is at the “center” but not as close to the core or nucleus as Yale or Harvard. And these kinds of distinctions are important because, Hunter claims, those outside the center’s nucleus often initiate change.

All of this leads to a fascinating conclusion: “[i]deas do have consequences in history, yet not because those ideas are inherently truthful or obviously correct but rather because of the way they are embedded in very powerful institutions, networks, interests, and symbols” (44). In short, *some ideas have consequences*—namely ideas propagated by those within society who possess cultural capital and a supporting network of other individuals and institutions also within the center of cultural influence and production.

Given this alternative view of culture and cultural change, what is Christianity’s place in contemporary America? The answer, according to Hunter is, largely on the periphery. Consider Evangelicalism. Since the late nineteenth century, Evangelicals have invested much energy in creating parallel institutions to compete with secular institutions. Witness the energy, growth, and vitality of Christian publishing, Christian magazines (e.g., Christianity Today, World), Christian radio programs and music (e.g., Breakpoint, Adventures in Odyssey), Christian television (e.g., Trinity Broadcasting Network), the Christian university, and even evangelical film-making (recent examples include *Amazing Grace* in 2006 and *Fire Proof* in 2008). Yet,

Hunter notes, this cultural productivity is almost exclusively directed toward internal needs of the faithful, operating at the margins of the broader field of cultural production, and is overwhelmingly oriented toward the popular (see pages 87-88). To be sure, there are individuals present within elite universities, university presses, think-tanks and the like, but this fact seems to be “more by accident than by design; certainly more as a statistical aberration than through the deliberate cultivation of the churches” (88). The point, says Hunter, is institutional:” Since the 1960s, none of the movements in contemporary Christianity have been prominent in creating, contributing to, or supporting structures in the arts, humane letters, the academy, and the like” (88). Hence, the main reason Christians have not had the influence within culture to which they aspire is not because they don’t believe it enough, or think Christianly enough, but rather because “Christians are absent from the institutions at the center of cultural production. The cultural capital American Christianity has amassed simply cannot be leveraged where it matters most” (91). By the end of Hunter’s first essay, his point has been forcefully argued: Christianity has so little influence in culture because it represents a weak culture itself which exists at the margins of cultural influence and production in America. The seeds of a new vision of culture and cultural change have also been laid, and it is the burden of Hunters final two essays to show how Christians can begin to fulfill the cultural mandate with which they have been entrusted.

“Faithful Presence Within” as a New Way Forward

How can Christians faithfully engage the world? Part of the answer, Hunter insists, is to move beyond mere sincerity of intentions: “God save us from Christians who are well-intentioned but not wise” (276)! To be sure, there are many aspects of being a faithful Christ-follower that transcend specific times and cultural boundaries. But, faithfulness in *this* generation “requires that Christians understand the unique and evolving character of our times” (197). Many

of the challenges to faithfulness in our own time are unique and different than anything we have seen before. One challenge that Hunter calls the challenge of difference is the reality of *pluralism*. In America and the Western World in general, pluralism has emerged as one of the defining features of the contemporary world order. Yet, because there is no single dominant culture within which pluralism exists (in contrast, e.g., to 19th century America where Jews and Catholics learned how to survive in a dominant Protestant culture), pluralism represents not only a multiplicity of ways of perceiving and comprehending the world, but also a multiplicity of plausibility structures within which such world-views are judged credible. The result, argues Hunter “is that pluralism creates social conditions in which God is no longer an inevitability” (203).

Another challenge unique to this day and age, which Hunter calls the challenge of dissolution, is how to view the relationship between word and world. The Enlightenment’s own quest for certainty has resulted in a pervasive skepticism where *doubt* is often viewed as a virtue, and claims to *knowledge* as a vice. New communication technologies represent an “epoch-defining” (208) transition that has fostered a “reality that exists primarily if not only within the surfaces of sensory awareness and understanding” (209). The result of such a dissolution and fragmentation has served to undermine the confidence of an objective reality to which Christian belief and faith point.

Hunter argues that the old paradigms of cultural engagement, embodied in the three political theologies of the Christian Right, the Christian Left, and the Neo-Anabaptists, will not help Christians in our day and age to live integrated faithful lives. Instead of a “defensive against,” “relevance to,” and “purity from” posture toward the world, Hunter suggests a new

paradigm of the Christian's relationship to the world that he calls "faithful presence within."¹⁰ This alternative way forward, grounded in a theology of God's faithful presence, is claimed by Hunter to be the only adequate reply to the challenge of difference and dissolution. In the creation and incarnation, we see a close relationship between word and world, between presence and place—God spoke and it was so (see Genesis chapter 1), Christ became flesh and dwelt among his creatures (see John 1:14). Hunter claims that the incarnation is the only adequate reply to the challenge of dissolution because the link between word and world is securely grounded in the truth of God's faithful presence. Similarly, the incarnation is the only adequate reply to the challenge of difference because human flourishing and shalom is made possible as God's word of love is embodied in and enacted through Christians.

This theology of faithful presence has important implications for the Christian posture of engagement with the world. First, a theology of faithful presence means that Christians are to seek the flourishing and well-being of others within the community of faith as well as those outside. As it is often said, the church is to *be* the hands and feet of Christ within a needy world. Second, a theology of faithful presence means that Christians be fully present and committed to their tasks. In all aspects of life, believers are to serve the Lord wholeheartedly (see e.g., Colossians 3:23), and this includes seeing work as intrinsically valuable, not merely as a means to providing a platform for evangelism. And finally, faithful presence in the world means that

¹⁰ In his second Essay, Hunter discusses each of these political theologies in great detail. It is not necessary to discuss these here in order to understand Hunter's positive proposal. I shall briefly summarize his main point. Basically, Christians of many persuasions have misunderstood the nature of power as political and therefore erroneously turned to the state in order to see problems solved and society changed. Hunter focuses on three "political theologies"—the Christian Right (i.e., a "defensive against" posture toward culture), the Christian Left (i.e., a "relevance to" posture toward culture), and the Neo-Anabaptist (i.e., a "purity from" posture toward culture)—arguing that each of them, in its own distinctive manner, misconstrued the nature of power and effective cultural engagement. Hunter suggests a rethinking of the relationship between power and faith modeled after the life and teaching of Jesus. This alternative model is his "faithful presence within."

Christians are fully present and committed in their spheres of social influence, working to create conditions in the structures of social life they inhabit that are conducive to the flourishing of all.

So, in the end, Hunter's proposal of "faithful presence within" is set up as an alternative to the common view. Christians have a marginal influence within society because they exist at the periphery of society—where cultural capital and symbolic power is the lowest. But, in seeking God with all of their lives, enacting shalom and seeking it on behalf of others through the practice of faithful presence, Christians can "help to make the world a little bit better" (286).

"Faithful Presence Within" Assessed and Applied

There is much to like about Hunter's penetrating analysis of culture and cultural change. Here are four positive aspects of his proposal. First, his use of theology in explicating his own view of cultural engagement is refreshing considering the fact that the dominant academic methodology, for non-Christians and Christians alike, is some version of methodological naturalism, where only "scientific" or "publically observable" phenomenon are permitted in theory construction. Importantly, Hunter grounds his proposal within the over-arching story of Scripture and calls us to locate our lives within this alternate story: "the entire biblical narrative centers around the shalom God intended and that he will, one day, restore. The details of the story, however, focus on the Fall, its consequences, and finally God's response to it" (228). Hunter correctly notes that all human reasoning, understanding, and morality is rooted in the particularity of tradition, narrative, and community and thus Christians "must renounce the dominant script of the world and embrace the alternative script that is rooted in the Bible and enacted through the tradition of the church" (237). Thus, Christians live in tension with the world. There is much to affirm in the world, after all, God is the creator of all things and we Christians share a common humanity with nonbelievers. Yet, there is much to be critical of as

well, given the fallenness of creation and humanity, and the violations of shalom that result.¹¹ Hunter's use of Scripture and theology in formulating his positive proposal is admirable given the pressure within the academy to keep one's faith commitments latent. In doing so, he provides not only a helpful way forward but also a concrete example of what faithful presence looks like within the context of the secular academy.

Second, his call to live a fully integrated life is right on—in every relationship, every task and every sphere of influence, we are to seek the well-being of others (including ourselves). There is no need to separate work and play, secular and sacred, spiritual from non-spiritual. Hunter argues:

When the Word of all flourishing—defined by the love of Christ—becomes flesh in us, in our relations with others, within the tasks we are given, and within our sphere of influence—absence gives way to presence, and the word we speak to each other and to the world becomes authentic and trustworthy. This is the heart of a theology of faithful presence. (252)

The incarnational life envisioned by Hunter, where the denial of self becomes natural and our thinking, loving, and working are for and because of Christ, will bring glory to God and shalom to others.

Third, his affirmation of the importance of the church as the locus of spiritual formation is an important corrective to the rampant individualism that infects our day and age. The church is “a community of resistance” (235) and institution in its own right with the power to change lives. “It is the church's task of teaching, admonishing, and encouraging believers over the course of their lives in order to present them ‘as complete in Christ,’ ‘fit for any calling’” (236-

¹¹ On this point, Hunter is in agreement with Nicholas Wolterstorff who talks about the need for Christians to learn to say both “yes” and “no” to the reasoning, understanding, and morality of the modern world. In other words, we need to engage in “normative discrimination” with respect to the culture. Wolterstorff states, “Normative discrimination is what [the church] has always regarded as the appropriate stance, coupled with the attempt, once the discrimination has been made, to change what is wrong when that proves possible, to keep discontent alive when change proves not possible, and always to be grateful for what is good. In short, to act redemptively.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Should the Work of Our Hands Have Standing in the Christian College?” in *Educating for Shalom* (eds) Clarence Joldersma and Gloria Stronks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 272.

237). Hunter's faithful presence is a challenge to the church—to self-consciously develop Christian character and community all the while affirming the calling of its members to be a blessing to those outside its walls. As Hunter states, faithful presence “is a vision for the entire church” (278).

Finally, his refinement of the well-worn aphorism “ideas have consequences” to include the interplay of institutions and symbolic or cultural capital is a needed corrective to the simplistic thinking expressed in the common view of culture and cultural change. His critique of the common view is powerful and persuasively argued. His eleven propositions on culture and cultural change ring true and in some cases seem so obvious that one wonders why they need mention. The genius in Hunter's critique is in his pulling together of these disparate points and helping to make connections between what a culture *is* and how a culture changes.

Still, his positive proposal of cultural engagement as faithful presence is problematic in its simplicity. Specifically, I think Hunter has failed to take into account, or failed to *adequately* take into account, the particular moment of redemptive history we find ourselves in with his prescribed way forward.¹² Hunter says we ought to be about seeking shalom for all, and to do that under the model of faithful presence will result in “Christians and the church as a whole...creating structures that incarnate blessing, beauty, meaningfulness, and purpose not just for the benefit of believers but for the good of all” (270). I agree. But noticeably absent from Hunter's discuss is how his proposal looks in terms of the progress of the gospel. If the goal is to make the world “a little bit better” by ushering in shalom *and* the chief human predicament is

¹² As Carson reminds us, “Sociologists will ... find ways to categorize diverging Christian responses to the broader culture. The descriptive power of such grids may be insightful in various ways, and of course they can also be challenged on assorted grounds. But once grids like those proposed by Niebuhr or Carter (or anyone else) claim some measure of prescriptive power, they must be tested by Scripture.” D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 226.

alienation from God due to sin, then the progress of the gospel ought to be paramount. Hunter misses an important opportunity to answer Lesslie Newbigin's pressing question: "What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call 'modern Western culture'?"¹³ Faithful presence must include *faithful proclamation* of the gospel to a world in desperate need of a Savior. Undoubtedly, Hunter would not disagree. He explicitly affirms the importance of gospel proclamation: "to proclaim [the gospel] and live out its meaning is a calling for all believers" (236). However, in discussing how the notion of faithful presence plays out in the world, gospel proclamation is never addressed. Rather, "we are to pursue others, identify with others, and labor toward the fullness of others through sacrificial love" (244-245). Again, I totally agree. Yet, each of these tasks centrally involves helping others understand their need for Christ as Savior and Hunter's lack of willingness to address this issue head on is troubling, given its necessity.

What does faithful presence look like when the progress of the gospel is paramount? I suggest the following: The faithfully present Christian, fully present to God and others, will proclaim (in appropriate ways) the gospel, work toward transforming the social structures within his/her sphere of influence and meet the needs of the world (both locally and globally). Gospel proclamation and meeting social needs are inseparably linked, but helping others to understand their fallen nature and need for a Savior is preeminent. Thus, faithfulness to Christ in this day and age requires an answer to Newbigin's question. In other words, faithfulness to Christ must involve considerations related to the progress of the *gospel message* in this day and age, not merely meeting the needs of others and letting our actions and lives "proclaim the good

¹³ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel in Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 1.

news...that the light of life of heaven itself is available to everyone through the person of Jesus” (269).

In conclusion and in a cursory fashion, what does faithful presence look like for the Christian scholar? I shall offer four proposals for future discussion and action.¹⁴ First, a challenge: God wants to use Christian scholars *as scholars* to reach others (students, colleagues, administrators, etc.). Undoubtedly this does not mean passing out gospel tracks in departmental meetings or cancelling class to hold revival meetings. As Hunter has ably demonstrated, faithfulness to Christ requires wisdom—such wisdom is needed here. However it is embodied, being a witness entails actively looking for and taking appropriate opportunities to speak into other’s lives about the hope and love of Christ. The issues addressed within each academic discipline and the relationships faithfully developed within provide unique doors of opportunity to make appropriate connections at appropriate times to the gospel.

Second, Christian scholars bear the burden of helping to make the gospel plausible. Christian scholars ought to be, among other things, actively engaging the dominant plausibility structures embedded within culture, so that the gospel message can gain a fair hearing. Yes, in the face of pluralism, we need to move beyond Constantinian Christianity. As I’ve argued elsewhere, we ought to be *principled pluralist*.¹⁵ But such a posture does not rule out the need to vigorously argue for the truth of Christianity over its competitors. And it is precisely on this

¹⁴ I stress, for discussion *and* action: “An occupational hazard of academics is...talking about things, even things that themselves are essentially a matter of thinking and talking, instead of actually getting in there and doing them.” Alvin Plantinga, “Christian Philosophy at the End of the 20th Century,” in James Sennett ed. *The Analytic Theist: an Alvin Plantinga reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 344.

¹⁵ Paul Gould, “The Two Tasks Introduced: The Fully Integrated Life of the Christian Scholar,” in *The Two Tasks of the Christian Scholar* eds. William Lane Craig and Paul Gould (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 17-54.

point that the worldview champions Hunter so maligns have got it right—there is a battle going on for the hearts and minds of those we seek to reach with the gospel.¹⁶

Christian scholars need to play a key role in refurbishing the ancient idea that all knowledge some how connects to and illuminates the divine. We need Christian scholars to engage the underlying presuppositions of every discipline—in the sciences and the arts—correcting assumptions where needed and making connections which have hitherto gone unnoticed, to demonstrate the unity and elegance of the Christian worldview within the fragmented academy. As Hunter states when discussing the need for critical engagement with the dominant culture, “such a task begins with a critical assessment of the metaphysical, epistemological, and anthropological assumptions that undergird modern institutions and ideologies” (235-236). And I say this task falls primarily to Christian scholars.

Third, Christian scholars need to re-engage the worldview battle at a new level—taking into account the interplay between ideas, individuals, and institutions. A spirit of expectation and adventure is called for. Foot soldiers are needed. But so too more leading Christian intellectuals placed in key institutions both within the academy and elsewhere.¹⁷ This re-engagement will also include Christian scholars thinking through how their research can meet the tangible needs of the world. New water-purification technology can help in earthquake ravaged Haiti, bridge building

¹⁶ Plantinga agrees: “I believe that there is a conflict, a battle between the *Civitas Dei*, the City of God, and the City of the World. As a matter of fact, what we have, I think, is a three-way battle. On the one hand there is Perennial Naturalism....Second, there is what I shall call ‘Enlightenment Humanism’....the third party, of course, is Christian theism.” From “When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible,” *Christian Scholars Review*, (September 1991): 16.

¹⁷ The experience of philosopher Robert Koons at the University of Texas is illustrative of the kinds of things Christian scholars need to do more of as well as the challenges that lay ahead. Koons poured six years into developing a UT program on Western Civilization and American Institutions, a program designed to introduce students to the great books and ideas of western culture, only to have the administrators take it away from him. While it is not entirely clear why, it is safe to say that Koons conservatism regarding certain social issues and his Christian faith contributed to his disfavor in the eyes of the UT administration. See Marvin Olasky, “Losing a Beachhead,” *World Magazine*, Vol. 24, No. 18 (September 12, 2009): 46-52.

technology can cut commute distances for food and water in African villages and so on. Connecting the expertise of scholars with the institutions that can meet real needs in the world will incarnate blessing and shalom and powerfully demonstrate the love of Christ to the world. Christian scholars, motivated by a vision of God as Lord over all, can play a key role in meeting these needs directly and by providing leadership in relevant institutions.

Finally, Christian scholars need to play a key role in the life and leadership of the church. As Hunter points out, the church is an important community and the locus of spiritual formation for the believer (227-230). As the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga advised years ago in his “Advice to Christian Philosophers,”¹⁸ the Christian community has its own set of questions and concerns, and part of our task is to serve this community *as scholars*. Shallow thinking, anti-intellectualism, and confusion abound in the church and Christian scholars can play a key role in helping the body of Christ along in the process of spiritual formation unto Christ.

Hunter’s *To Change the World* is a must read for Christians who desire to faithfully and effectively live out their calling in this day and age. It is also a reminder for those of us who are scholars that God has called us to faithfully and humbly lead both within and outside the church, so that others will find life and hope in the savior of the world.

¹⁸ Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (October 1984): 253-71.