FIVE VIEWS ON CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THE STATE IN LIGHT OF JAMES D. HUNTER'S 'THEOLOGY OF FAITHFUL PRESENCE'

by

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Introduction

In his now classic work, David Bosch observed that “the relationship between the evangelistic and the societal dimensions of the Christian mission constitutes one of the thorniest areas in the theology and practice of mission” (1992, 401). This is certainly true with regard to diverse, and often contradictory, Christian political theologies. This field statement examines the views of five evangelical theologians and/or practitioners on the subject of Christian responsibility towards the state in light of James D. Hunter’s “theology of faithful presence.” The thinkers are John H. Yoder, Nicholas Wolterstorff, David VanDrunen, Charles Colson, and Ronald J. Sider. To keep this brief study focused, for each author I will first summarize the argument of a single book that, in my view, best epitomizes his political thinking as a whole (in the discussion I will refer to their other works when it is important to do so). At this stage comments or evaluations will be kept at minimum. Then I will analyze their specific views on two aspects of political theology: (1) the nature of the state, and (2) the identity of the church and its responsibility in the public square.[1] In the discussion section, I will briefly describe Hunter’ “theology of faithful presence,” which will become my main source of critique of some of the assumptions reflected in the five authors’ thinking. Occasionally, this field statement will also reflect my own assessment of the authors’ positions with a focus on their theological methodology.

[1] These points are based on J. Budziszewski’s suggestion that any adequate political theory should include at least three main elements: (1) an *orienting doctrine*, or explanation of the place of government in the world as a whole, (2) a *practical doctrine*, or an explanation in practical terms of how Christians should conduct themselves in the civic realm, and (3) a *cultural apologetic*, a way of explaining these proposals to those outside the church. Since this is an intra-Christian discussion, I skipped the last point (2006, 19).

John H. Yoder: The Church as a Social Ethic

John Howard Yoder was a prominent Mennonite theologian and ethicist who wrote from an Anabaptist perspective. His most influential book, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), forms the basis for the following discussion.

Summary of the Argument

The Politics of Jesus is a polemical text aimed at countering the concept of the irrelevancy of Jesus to social ethics, popular in mainstream protestant theology during the middle of the 20th century. Reacting to this, Yoder claims that "Jesus is, according to the biblical witness, a model of radical political action," a fact that "is now generally visible throughout New Testament studies" (1972, 12). To demonstrate his thesis, Yoder turns to the Gospel of Luke, which he claims shows that "Jesus was … the bearer of a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships" through the creation of "a new kind of community leading to a radically new kind of life" (Ibid, 63). The message of Jesus was focused on his inauguration of the year of jubilee, which reflected a key biblical theme of God taking care of, and protecting, his people. In view of this, "man's preoccupation with his own power as the instrument of his own surviving or prevailing is misdirected" (Ibid, 86).

Politically, Jesus modeled a "threefold rejection" of quietism, the support of the establishment, and "the difficult, constantly reopened, genuinely attractive option of the crusade" (Ibid, 98). In contrast to western theological ethics, which assumes that we need to choose between being political and sectarian, Christ's alternative was his own submission to the powers-that-be (which Yoder refers to as simply "the powers"). Yet this radical submission morally

broke their rules “by refusing to support them in their self-glorification” (Ibid, 148). The church is called to identify with Christ’s “substantial, binding, costly social stance” expressed in rejecting violence and choosing forgiveness and servanthood over hostility and dominion (Ibid, 134). The cross of Christ is the model of Christian social efficacy: even if this means suffering, that suffering is a participation in the eschatological victory of the Lamb of God.

The Nature and Purpose of the State

Yoder’s understanding of the state is closely tied to his interpretation of the Pauline concept of fallen powers, in which he “leans gratefully and heavily” on the work of Hendrik Berkhof (Yoder 1972, 142; Berkhof 1962). For Berkhof, the powers in the New Testament refer to “human traditions … morality, fixed religious and ethical rules, the administration of justice and the ordering of the state” (Berkhof 1962, 22-23). Originally parts of a good creation, these powers fail to serve people as they should: they absolutize themselves, enslave individuals, and demand from them unconditional loyalty.

Yoder believes that, according to Romans 13:1, the state “is to be counted among the powers” (Yoder 1972, 144; 1994, 55). God is not responsible for the existence of these rebellious powers; they already are. The text of Romans thus does not affirm a divine act of institution or ordination of a particular government, but rather act of bringing them up in line with his purpose: “God is not said to create or institute or ordain the powers that be, but only to order them, to put them in order, sovereignly to tell them where they belong, what is their place. … The sergeant does not produce the soldiers he drills, the librarian does not create nor approve of the book he catalogs and shelves” (1972, 203). In addition, Yoder believes that, besides

Romans 13, there is a strong strand of Gospel teaching that views secular government as "the province of the sovereignty of Satan" (Ibid, 195). As such, certain aspects of the state's nature are "incorrigible," which has important implications for the church (Ibid, 158).

The Church and Its Responsibility towards the State

Yoder sees the church as a counter-cultural community, a "sample of humanity within which … economic and racial differences are surmounted" as a result of their justification in Christ (Ibid, 154). It is "visible, identified by baptism, discipline, morality and martyrdom" (1994, 56). This community presents a social alternative to the structures; it "challenges the system as no mere words ever could" (1972, 40). Therefore, the primary task of the church, as God's "pilot project," is to *be* the church God intends by imitating Christ's style of life of which the cross is the culmination (1994, 126; 1964, 16-22; 1997, 187). Through this, the church is the conscience and servant within human society that demonstrates to the powers that their rebellion has been vanquished (1972, 153).

The New Testament calls believers not to an active moral or religious approval of the state, but rather to "subordination to whatever powers there be" (Ibid, 203). This "revolutionary subordination" means that Christians willingly accept their subordinate status while retaining their moral independence and dignity as those who belong to the eschatological order of things. The church refuses to impose this shift upon the social order; instead it is called to a renewed way of living within the present, with the attitude of willing servanthood in the place of domination. This includes a pacifist stance, a refusal to participate in judicial or police functions, and a rejection of the concept of "just rebellion." As Western Christians increasingly

find themselves in the minority status in their culture, they can finally be "freed from the compulsiveness of the vision of [them]selves as the guardians of history" and instead become "participants in the loving nature of God as revealed in Christ" (Ibid, 248).

Nicholas Wolterstorff: A Rights-Limited State

Nicholas Wolterstorff identifies his perspective as "the Dutch neo-Calvinist version of the Reformed tradition of Christianity," and is indebted to Abraham Kuyper (2012a, 290; Kuyper 1899). His book, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (2012b), is the main source for this section.

Summary of the Argument

Building on the story of the martyrdom of Polycarp in AD 156, Wolterstorff posits two dualities that political theology seeks to understand. The first duality concerns the relationship between two manifestations of divine rule, civil and ecclesiastical. The second one concerns the dilemma of dual citizenship peculiar to each individual Christian. After that, Wolterstorff presents two potential objections to his way of framing the issues. First, he anticipates Yoder would claim that these dualities are non-existent because states have no divine authority, but only coercive power over their subjects. Wolterstorff responds that Yoder's negative view of the state comes from his mistaken identification of the state with fallen powers. In reality, "our states and other social structures are *under the influence* of fallen powers. But they are not identical" (2012b, 23, emphasis original).

The second objection comes from those who claim that Christians should think of themselves as "resident aliens" because such is the nature of the church in the world (e.g. Hauerwas and Willimon 1989). Wolterstorff responds that, in baptism, "one acquires a new, additional citizenship; one does not renounce one's American citizenship … or whatever" (2012b, 46). He believes that the reason 1 Peter called its readers "aliens" and "sojourners" was that the original Jewish readers were living in diaspora, and so were literally political aliens.

Moving on to the concepts of authority and governance, Wolterstorff distinguishes between *positional authority* and *moral authority*. He believes that traditional interpretations of Romans 13 focus on positional authority and therefore emphasize submission as the main thrust of the text. Wolterstorff believes, however, that the first verse should be interpreted in light of Paul's more expansive comments in verses 4–6, which affirm that God has authorized government to curb wrongdoing and secure justice. So in cases when the state's directives actually promote evil, it has no moral right to demand obedience. Other limitations on the state's exercise of power come from the nature of the church as a transnational community, and individual and institutional rights of citizens or groups of citizens, respectively, which are natural, or God-given. In sum, Wolterstorff believes that a correct reading of Romans 13 supports the idea that the state is a "rights-protecting and rights-limited institution" (2012b, 123, 156).

The Nature and Purpose of the State

Wolterstorff sees the state as a social entity with an authority structure that God has authorized to be his servant in securing justice (2012b, 111). Whenever it acts for this

purpose, its directives are binding, but if government perpetrates injuries of "an atrocious and notorious character," it "has lost its legitimacy," and its officers have only the status of "private citizens who have committed criminal acts" (Ibid, 144). Moreover, he argues that the state is just one among other social entities authorized by God: society is pervaded by a multiplicity and variety of governance-authority structures. Wolterstorff believes that the vitality of social entities independent of the state is indispensable to the health of society, because it "puts a brake on the expansionist tendencies of the state" (Ibid, 159).

Wolterstorff focuses almost exclusively on the negative role of the state. He claims that nothing Paul says in Romans "suggests an answer one way or the other" to the question of whether the state should take responsibility for infrastructure or the needs of its people (Ibid, 114). Wolterstorff rejects what is sometimes referred to as a *perfectionist* view of the state, which believes it is the government's business to cherish the worship of God and defend sound doctrine (1983, 19). Instead, as citizens of liberal democracies, we should support a *protectionist* view of the state, which believes that the state should guard God-given rights of people and institutions (2012a, 1).

The Church and its Responsibility towards the State

Wolterstorff posits that while the church is one authority structure among others, it is of a fundamentally different ontological type: it is born not of the flesh but of the Spirit (2012b, 119). The church affirms a political claim that Jesus is Lord, but it is not a political movement and should not attempt to set up its own civil government. Thus, the most fundamental political principle is that "the social structure must exhibit that duality, that

fundamental institutional separation" between church and state (2012a, 292). Furthermore, as a transnational community of people, the church has never included everyone from an entire nation. As such, it seeks from any state the freedom to be that peculiar kind of community. Since God has authorized the church to be itself, he forbids the state to do anything that infringes on the institutional autonomy of the church or the religious freedom of its citizens.

A corollary of Wolterstorff's emphasis on the state's moral authority is the right of citizens to challenge their governments. He affirms that no serious Christian thinker has ever held that Christians should always obey the dictates of the state (1983, 143). In fact, active resistance and civil disobedience is "not only permitted but on occasion obligatory" (1983, 144). God desires the flourishing of the peoples, or *shalom*, but since the structures of our social world are fallen, they tend to spread misery and discrimination. Therefore the church should be "an active agent of resistance to injustice and tyranny and deprivation" (1983, 144). This vision is supported by his strong belief in the continuity of cultural efforts in the new creation:

> … in the eschatological image of the city we have the assurance that our efforts to make present cities of our humane places in which to live – will, by way of the mysterious patterns of history, eventually provide the tiles and timbers for a city of delight. (1983, 140).[2]

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[2] Wolterstorff's transformationist approach is inspired by the early Calvinists' vision of *world-formative Christianity*, which stands in sharp contrast to what he calls *avertive* forms of religion. In the latter, the "turning away from a lower reality and … establishing of a closer relation of with a higher reality is the fundamental goal" (1983, 5, 11).

David M. VanDrunen: Two Kingdoms Theology

David M. VanDrunen represents a distinctive theological position that he identifies as the two-kingdoms theology.[3] The focus of my analysis here is his latest book, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (2011).

Summary of the Argument

The text attempts to offer a biblical alternative to the concept of the redemptive transformation of culture (2011, 12). In so doing, he attacks the perspectives advocated by representatives of Neo-Calvinism (Wolters 1985; Plantinga 2002; Hoekema 1979; Bartholomew and Goheen 2004), the New Perspective on Paul (N.T. Wright 2008), and the Emerging Church movement (McLaren 2007). For VanDrunen, the whole concept of cultural transformation is misguided and not Scriptural. He offers the doctrine of the "two kingdoms" as an alternative, which he traces back to Augustine's concept of the "two cities." According to this doctrine,

> God is not redeeming the cultural activities and institutions of this world, but is preserving them through the covenant he made with all living creatures through Noah in Genesis 8:20–9:17 … Simultaneously, God is redeeming a people for himself, by virtue of the covenant made with Abraham. (2011, 15).

So, VanDrunen points to "the common kingdom under the Noahic covenant" as the first kingdom, and to "the redemptive kingdom" under the Abrahamic covenant as the second (Ibid, 167). To demonstrate his point, VanDrunen organizes his material in three sections. First, he seeks to root his theology in the Bible's grand-narrative by looking at its four major parts: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. The first two elements are centered on the first

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[3] VanDrunen is the Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and

Adam, and the last two elements on the last Adam, Jesus Christ. The second section of the book sets forth biblical principles for God's people living in Babylon (for VanDrunen it is the key metaphor for Christian life in the world). In the final section, he provides a more detailed account of how the two kingdoms theology should play out in education, vocation, and politics.

VanDrunen's main thesis is that the cultural mandate of using human abilities to care for the world and to develop human culture was never intended for all people. Instead, it was limited exclusively to the first human, Adam, and was connected to a specific purpose:

> By a divine covenant, Adam's righteous cultural labors would have earned him a share in the eschatological world-to-come ... If he completed his cultural task through faithful obedience to God's commands, God would have brought Adam into a new creation. (Ibid, 27).

The first Adam failed terribly, so VanDrunen argues that God send a second and last Adam, Jesus Christ, who took upon himself Adam's responsibility and has fulfilled the original task once and for all. As a result, God "does not call them [i.e. Christians] to engage in cultural labors so as to earn their place in the world-to-come. We are not little Adams" (Ibid, 28; cf. 2014, 35). In fact, to believe that one's cultural work somehow contributes to ushering in the eschatological kingdom is ultimately incompatible with a Protestant doctrine of justification by faith (2011, 58).

This theology does not require a low view of cultural activities. God's people are called to live under both covenants, and in each kingdom to render loving obedience to God, yet in different ways. What it does require is a distinction between "the holy things of Christ's heavenly kingdom and the common things of the present world" (Ibid, 26). VanDrunen rejects

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the idea of continuity between the original creation and the new creation: all cultural activities "will come to an abrupt end, along with this present world as a whole" when Christ ushers in the new heaven and new earth (Ibid, 29). Until then, Christians should acknowledge both "spiritual antithesis and cultural commonality" with the present world, as they live like exiles in the midst of "Babylon" (Ibid, 73-74, 99).

The Nature and Purpose of the State

According to VanDrunen, civil government finds its origin in the Noahic covenant of Genesis 9, when God ordained it for the maintenance of justice in a fallen world. Although its activities belong to the common kingdom, civil authority is ultimately of divine origin and not a human creation (Ibid, 194). VanDrunen focuses primarily on the state's negative role. Christians should not expect that civil authorities will ever make the political order conform to the redemptive kingdom of heaven, because it simply "cannot be superimposed upon our current political activity" (Ibid, 196). Under the Noahic covenant, justice should be enforced among all people according to "the principle of just proportionality," which requires the use of violence when needed (Ibid, 195). If the state wished to operate according to the ways of the redemptive kingdom, it would have to forsake the sword – "the very thing that Paul says it must not do" (Ibid, 122).

The Church and Its Responsibility towards the State

As a community created by the Holy Spirit, the church is "the only institution … in this world that can be identified with the redemptive kingdom" (2011, 102). In fact, "the

church is the kingdom of heaven here on earth" (Ibid, 116). All other institutions are ruled by Christ through the Noahic covenant, whereas the church can claim the privileges of the Abrahamic covenant of grace. Therefore, the chief actions of the Christian life take place in the church, with all other institutions or cultural activities being secondary. With regard to internal discipline, the people of God should follow a pattern that is nonviolent and seeks reconciliation and repentance, but since the commands of Scripture are not a universal human ethic, they should treat outsiders according to the basic moral requirements that unbelievers also recognize as bearers of God's image (Ibid, 110, 132; 2008, 222).

VanDrunen believes that God expects Christians to engage in the normal cultural activities of the social and economic institutions of their time. This engagement should be characterized by modesty, a critical attitude, and detachment; it must be practiced "not with a spirit of triumph and conquest over their neighbors but with a spirit of love and service toward them" (2011, 124). The following four principles constitute a summary of what he thinks is biblical political involvement.

1. Believers should live in submission to authorities, rendering them proper honor, paying their taxes, and praying for them. The clear exception to the obligations is when magistrates command believers to do things contrary to God's will.
2. The church's authority is ministerial; it devotes itself to exercising its spiritual functions as directed in Scripture. But individual Christians may serve in political offices as a legitimate and God-pleasing vocation.
3. Christians should believe in limited government. The state is to support and protect the lawful exercise of authority within other common kingdom institutions and not usurp that authority for itself.
4. Finally, there is no objectively unique Christian way of pursuing cultural activities. The goal of cultural involvement is not to provide a way to earn or to attain the new creation but to foster the temporary preservation of life and social order until the end of the present world. (Ibid, 165, 197-98).

Charles Colson: Building a Christian Culture

Charles Colson's political theology is best understood within the broader framework of his view of culture. For Colson, redemption in Christ "empowers us to take up the task laid on the first human beings at the dawn of creation: to subdue the earth and extend the Creator's dominion over all of life" (1999, 279). Christians are called "to help bring Christ's restoration to the entire creation order" (Ibid.). For this purpose they must learn to see Christianity as a "total worldview and life system," and "to seize the opportunity of the new millennium to be nothing less than God's agents in building a new Christian culture" (Ibid, xiii).

A Summary of the Argument

This section is based mainly on Colson's text *God and Government: An Insider's View on the Boundaries Between Faith and Politics* (2007).[4] The book centers on the conflict between the kingdom of God and worldly kingdoms: "the City of God and the city of man are locked in a worldwide, frequently bitter struggle for influence and power" (2007, 48). Colson believes that despite Western civilization's explicit secularism, human nature remains irresistibly religious, so unless its social and religious aspects coexist, mankind will continue in turmoil. The kingdom of God is already present in the world as a rule, not a realm, in the form of God's absolute sovereignty over the "total order of life in this world and the next" (2007, 93). This order invaded the stream of history, but its progress depends on the personal transformation of individuals.

[4] Coauthored with Ellen Santilli Vaughn.

This reasoning lays the foundation for the rest of the book which deals in detail with specific expressions of the kingdom in the public square: the concept of Christian patriotism, opportunities and perils for Christians in politics, the role of small citizen associations in the life of society, etc. Colson realizes that ultimate peace and harmony cannot be reached through human efforts, yet the kingdom of God manifests itself through God's people today. He believes that this fact should give Christians hope and encouragement as they struggle to build a culture informed by a biblical worldview. The book ends on an optimistic note: "the fact that God reigns can be manifest through political means, whenever the citizens of the Kingdom bring His light to bear on the institutions of the kingdom of man" (2007, 420).

The Nature and Purpose of the State

Colson argues that the state was instituted by God to "restrain sin and promote a just social order" (2007, 101). Its task is primarily negative: to protect life and property and preserve peace and order in society. Figuratively speaking, it acts "as a referee, making sure that everyone follows the rules and plays fair" (1999, 390). While the state serves a divinely appointed task, it is not in itself divine: its authority is legitimate, but limited. Otherwise, the state itself can easily degenerate into tyranny and oppression.[5]

In addition to the state, God has provided two other institutions that help provide societal order: the family, for the propagation of life, and the church, for the proclamation of the

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[5] In fact, the belief that government is somehow autonomous from God, the ultimate repository of power and the solution to all of society's ills, was "the greatest imposter of the twentieth century" (2007, 379).

kingdom of God. Unlike the state, the family upholds nonmaterial values, and its humanizing force can never be replaced by political or bureaucratic means (Ibid, 101). Additionally, Colson stresses the role of voluntary associations of people in promoting justice and kindness in society. Governments cannot create virtue, make people good or find a remedy for sin; virtue comes from the citizens themselves – "acting through smaller groups such as family, church, community, and voluntary associations" (Ibid, 292).

The Church and Its Responsibility towards the State

Colson believes that the church is the community that administers and encourages the worship of God and meets the spiritual needs of God's people by teaching, offering the sacraments, and encouraging us to bear one another's burdens (2007, 103). This community is not the actual kingdom of God, but is called to reflect the love, justice, and righteousness of the kingdom within society. While the primary purpose of the church is evangelization, it would be a tragic mistake to think that evangelization is the *only* task of the church. Colson argues that this is the reason we have lost so much of our influence in the world (1999, 296). The church's mission is defined by the nature of salvation it proclaims to the world: redemption in Christ empowers Christians to be the agents of both redemptive and common grace in restoring the created order.

As a result, Colson argues that Christian obedience should extend to all areas of life, including politics. There is no invisible dividing line between sacred and secular: everything must be brought under the lordship of Christ. In fact, Colson thinks that Christians can and must

bring transcendent moral values into the public debate (2007, 315).[6] In doing so, the church should avoid utopianism but still strive to work through civil authority for the advancement of justice and goodness. As citizens of nations-states, individual Christians have a duty to participate in public affairs because "it is a part of [their] responsibility to bring all areas of life into conformance with the created order" (Ibid, 134). This includes the following:

1. They are to respect and live in submission to governing authorities through praying for them, paying taxes, voting, and supporting the candidates they think are best qualified.
2. Christians should have a view of power that seeks to serve rather than control people. In this, they are setting an example for their neighbors and exposing the illusions power creates.
3. Finally, as "the chief institution with the moral authority … to hold the state to account for its obligations to its citizens," the church becomes an effective source of moral resistance. (Ibid, 275-279, 312).

This last point occupies a prominent place in Colson's theology. Whenever the state becomes an instrument of the very thing God has ordained it to restrain, Christians must resist and their role in organizing a state overthrow may be justified (Ibid, 282).

Ronald J. Sider: Politics as the Cultural Mandate

Sider identifies his theological stance as Anabaptist, but in many important aspects his approach is sharply different from that of John H. Yoder (2007, Kindle Location 1885). Below, I focus mainly on his book *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics: Why Are Christians Missing the Chance to Really Change the World?* (2008).[7]

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[6] This does not mean that religion should dominate politics. Colson is consistently critical of the evangelical right that wants to "impose religious and cultural values by force of law, irrespective of the wishes of the electorate" (2007, 132; 1986, 11).

[7] Sider is the founder and president emeritus of Evangelicals for Social Action

Summary of the Argument

Sider begins with formulating a methodology for developing a conceptual framework to guide Christians into an effective political activity. He argues that a "faithful methodology" should be both "uncompromisingly biblical" and grounded in "an honest and accurate reading of history and the social sciences" (2008, 27). In addition, we should also listen to and interact with historical and contemporary Christian and secular thinkers whose thought has profoundly shaped the current debate. All together, the methodology should include four interrelated components:

1. A *normative framework* that includes a biblical view of the world and persons, and comprehensive summaries of biblical teaching related to specific issues, such as family, work, justice, etc.
2. A *broad study of the world* which includes reflections on the historical development of society, the economy, and political systems.
3. From the study of both the Scripture and the world, there should emerge a coherent *political philosophy*, which serves as a road map in making political decisions.
4. Finally, one needs a *comprehensive socioeconomic and political analysis* of everything relevant to a particular political question. (Ibid, 41-43).

The rest of Sider's text attempts to explain these four components. First, he looks at the implication of the biblical story for politics, beginning with creation, the fall, and ultimately Christ's final victory. The emphasis falls on creation: the themes of the communal and creative nature of God, the *imago Dei* in human persons, the dignity of individuals and their communal nature, and the importance of the body and stewardship over the material world are carefully elaborated. Sider then looks at a number of specific issues, such as the state, justice, human rights, marriage and family, peacemaking and just war, creation care, etc. The final

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and professor at Palmer Theological Seminary in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania.

section of his book suggests some specific ways to love one's neighbor by being politically involved in light of current opportunities.

The Nature and Purpose of the State

Sider defines the state as an organization that "has a monopoly on the use of coercion to help achieve its purpose of overseeing just relationships among all the individuals and institutions in the society" (2008, 45). Even without the fall, a growing humanity would have needed cooperative efforts and leaders in order to carry out God's mandate. Such inference comes from Sider's belief in the importance of the material world and human role as co-workers of God. The state is therefore part of the good created order, and will be restored to wholeness in the eschaton.

The concept of a "just relationship" for Sider is theocentric: since God is just, He commands people to imitate Himself. This is the "source and foundation of human justice" (2005, 169). The state's responsibility, therefore, cannot be defined only in negative terms. In fact, Romans 13 refers to the state's positive role before talking about its negative function (2005, 187). The positive task of the church is also reflected in biblical pictures of an ideal monarch in the royal psalms and messianic prophecies. Besides administering legal justice, the state has the responsibility to advance economic justice by making sure that every person has access to productive resources and socioeconomic benefits. In other words, Christians should affirm both the civil/political and socioeconomic rights of individuals and institutions. These rights, however, can be secured only if the state is appropriately limited. Whenever an all-

powerful state makes all of the decisions, people simply cannot carry out the creative mandate (2008, 89).

The Church and Its Responsibility towards the State

Sider believes in a free church of committed Christians who "consciously chose to embrace and follow Jesus Christ" (2007, Kindle Location 1887). This countercultural community is "a visible, public and, in some very real sense, political reality" (Ibid, Kindle Locations 1937-1939). The church's countercultural nature does not imply an anti-cultural stance; rather, it affirms culture by demonstrating, through its common life, a new model of transformed, redeemed culture. The lordship of Christ, properly understood, gives the church some responsibility to shape every area of live: family, education, business, the arts, and the state. He believes, however, that the church as an institution should not seek to run the state because they have two different mandates (2008, 180).

Within a democracy, the believers' calling to let Christ be Lord of their whole lives includes their responsibility to shape governmental decisions. They can fulfill this it in a number of different ways:

1. *Prayer*. This is the essential service that the church owes the state. It precedes all the other their obligations to the state.
2. *Modeling*. This is the gift of simply being the church, a visual demonstration of the racial, economic, and social reconciliation that God wills for all humanity.
3. *Shaping culture*. Christians help shape cultural norms by their common life, ideas, writings, and artistic productions. If Christians fail here, they will also fail in the political arena.
4. *Educating church members to think biblically and wisely about politics.* Christians need to be taught to embrace a faithful methodology; otherwise church members will simply borrow their political views and agendas from secular sources.

5. *Prophetic challenge*. God's standards of justice apply to all societies, so Christians must raise their voices to call attention to current examples of societal injustice.
6. *Political participation* in its many forms: (1) promoting a biblically grounded framework for political engagement, (2) open dialogues on specific issues, platforms, and candidates, (3) supporting or opposing specific pieces of legislation, (4) working to elect specific candidates, and (5) running for and serving in elected political offices. (2008, 182-83, 235).

Sider discourages church leaders and official church structures from political participation because this is not their proper task. But even if only a quarter of today's evangelicals embraced a biblically balanced agenda and supported it in an honest, confident yet humble way, he believes they could drastically change the world for better (Ibid, 240).

Discussion

James D. Hunter and his Theology of Faithful Presence

James Hunter's book *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (2010) focuses on the Christian task of world-changing from both theological and sociological perspectives.[8] Theologically, Hunter is a strong believer in the cultural mandate: Christians are obliged to engage the world and pursue God's restorative purposes over every aspect of life. In this creative labor, "we mirror God's own generative act and thus reflect our very nature as ones made in his likeness" (2010, 3). Hunter then identifies and sociologically evaluates the three most prominent paradigms of cultural engagement followed by different groups of evangelicals: "Defensive against" (the Christian Right),

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[8] Hunter is the Labrosse-Levinson Distinguished Professor of Religion, Culture, and Social Theory at the University of Virginia and Executive Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. http://www.jamesdavisonhunter.com/

"Relevance to" (the Christian Left), and "Purity from" (the neo-Anabaptists). He argues that despite much of the good each of these groups brings to the church and the public square, the evangelical strategies based on them typically fail to achieve their purpose of changing the world. He attributes this to their mistaken understanding of the two core concepts, culture and power (Ibid, 32-92).

Hunter argues that a popular evangelical view of culture understands it as worldview or values that are found in the hearts and minds of individuals, manifested through our choices. This notion reflects the strong influence of idealism and individualism and, he says, is fundamentally flawed. Instead, Hunter develops an alternative view of culture, which sees it as a system of truth claims and moral obligations that are rooted in history and embedded in very powerful institutions, networks, interests, and symbols (Ibid, 44). The deepest and most enduring forms of cultural change typically occur from the "top down," through the work of elites, or cultural "gatekeepers" who provide creative direction and management within spheres of social life.

With regard to power, evangelicals usually think of it in primarily political terms, regardless of whether they strive to obtain or renounce it. But what really counts for culture change is symbolic and social power. By the first he means the fact that "symbols in the form of knowledge, technical know-how, credentials, and cultural accomplishments can … be thought of as a form of capital" (Ibid, 35). In this regard, American evangelicalism is weak and lacks unity. Social power is "exercised every day in primary social relationships, within the relationships of family, neighborhood, and work in all of the institutions that surround us in daily life" (Ibid,

187). The church as a social structure inevitably has this power, but the question is how the people of God will use it.

Hunter believes that "the heart of any method for thinking about the church and its engagement with the world" is to be found in Christology (Ibid, 187). He calls this alternative a "theology of faithful presence," based on the model of God's presence with us in the incarnation of Christ. This presence is revealed in God's pursuit of, identification with, and the offer of life through sacrificial love (Ibid, 240-242). Practically, a theology of faithful presence obligates us:

> … to do what we are able, under the sovereignty of God, to shape the patterns of life and work and relationship - that is, the institutions of which our lives are constituted - toward a shalom that seeks the welfare not only of those of the household of God but of all. That power will be wielded is inevitable. But the *means of influence* and the *ends of influence* must conform to the exercise of power modeled by Christ. (Ibid, 254. Emphasis original).

Thus, Hunter believes that the practice of faithful presence requires that we reject not only "the Constantinian temptation" of political domination, but also models of being defensive against, isolated from, or absorbed into a dominant culture. Rather, the church as a community should offer alternative formation to what is offered by popular culture. Its primary purpose is not changing the world, per se, but rather worshipping and honoring God in all it does. To do this, the church must live "within a dialectic of affirmation and antithesis" with respect to culture (Ibid, 281). In other words, the church, when faithfully present in the world, strengthens the world's healthy qualities and humbly criticizes and subverts its most destructive tendencies (Ibid, 285).

Faithful Presence and Yoder's Revolutionary Subordination

Yoder's deep and thoughtful work emphasizes the radical nature of discipleship and the centrality of ecclesiology for Christian life. It also highlights the church's role of humble challenging the absolute domination of the powers. At the same time, Yoder's extreme emphasis on the fallenness of the created order, skepticism towards natural law, and the neglect of the cultural mandate are hardly biblical. In fact, such stance reminds of Niebuhr' criticism of dualists who "move creation and fall into very close proximity and in that connection … do less than justice to the creative work of God" (Niebuhr 1956, 188). As a result, general revelation, common grace, and the creative aspects of the image of God are almost completely lost.

Another point of concern is Yoder's view of culture. A closer look at what he lists among the powers reveals that he speaks primarily about social and cultural realities, yet neither concept plays any significant role in his thinking.[9] His peculiar theology of culture, or rather, the lack thereof, makes humans the objects rather than the subjects of cultural activity and places the locus of sin in culture rather than in fallen human agents.[10] Not surprisingly, the concept of cultural engagement as a "divine vocation … imbued with great dignity" is practically absent in Yoder (Hunter 2010, 93). For him, not only the state, but culture as a whole, remains outside the

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[9] Walter Wink observes that more than 75 percent of the occurrences of the languages of "powers" in the New Testament refer to human social organizations and cultural institutions. At the same time, he also notes that occasionally it is used to designate spiritual beings (Wink 1984, 15-16). While it is not always easy to distinguish between the two usages, they are clearly identifiable in many of cases and so should not be confused (cf. Dunnett 1996, 619-620).

[10] Paul Hiebert reminds us about the danger of understanding sin as merely personal or collective evil; rather, it is both personal and collective (1994, 86).

scope of redemption. Hunter harshly, but in my view, correctly, criticizes such tendency to pit the church's identity against society as "a passive-aggressive ecclesiology" (Ibid, 164).

Additionally, Yoder's highly polemical style in *The Politics of Jesus* leads him to frame questions in binary ways: total subordination vs. violent resistance; governing history vs. completely giving up on it.[11] While he is definitely right in his critique of any sort of "Constantinian projects," he does not address the real question which is not whether the church should or should not choose powerlessness, but how to properly use the power that the church inevitably has as a social institution (Hunter 2010, 181). Practically, this makes Yoder more pessimistic about the prospect of social change than is warranted (cf. Keller 2012, Kindle Location 5879). No wonder he offers little positive agenda beyond spiritual formation. In Hunter's words, such negativism about culture produces a strong "separatist impulse" in which the language of politics becomes "a bid to translate social marginality into social relevance" (Hunter 2010, 163).

Faithful Presence and Wolterstorff's Rights-Limited State

Unlike Yoder, Wolterstorff seeks to do full justice to God's creative and providential sovereignty over all creation. No sphere is left completely to sin and its consequences; the kingdom of God is one and comprehensive in scope. This emphasis allows Wolterstorff to integrate into his thinking themes of general revelation, common sense, and natural law. Theologically, the most innovative part of Wolterstorff's thinking is his rereading of

[11] Yoder is somewhat less polemical in his later texts on church and social involvement (1994; 1997, 180-98).

Romans 13 with the emphasis on the moral authority of the state. At the same time, from the standpoint of the "theology of faithful presence" two potential weaknesses of Wolterstorff's political theology are his more individualistic approach to Christian engagement with the state, and his protective stance that lacks a positive agenda.[12]

Methodologically, Wolterstorff builds his argument on Scripture and common sense reasoning. He appeals to history, experience, and draws parallels from everyday situations. This makes his argument consistent but at the same time raises some questions concerning his exegesis. For instance, he manages to extrapolate the idea of just rebellion from a text in which the central thrust is submission (Romans 13). Likewise, his conclusion that the initial readers of 1 Peter were diaspora Jews does not take into account the rest of the epistle that strongly suggests it was written to a mixed, or even primarily Gentile audience (2:10; 4:3; cf. Achtemeier 1996, 51; Davids 1990, 8). This makes Wolterstorff's political reading of Scripture border on what Budziszewski calls "inflationary" political theologies that tend "to draw more money than the bank contains" (2006, 28).

Faithful Presence and VanDrunen's Two-Kingdoms Theology

There is much to commend in VanDrunen's position, including his emphasis on the centrality of the church for Christian living and repeated warnings about the danger of aggressiveness and triumphalism in transformationist approaches. Methodologically, VanDrunen

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[12] The latter is true regarding the perspectives reflected in his later texts (2012a; 2012b), not in his earlier ones (e.g. 1983; 2008). On neo-Calvinists' "under-appreciation" of the church see Hunter 2010, 31; Yoder, 1997, 184-85; Mathonnet-VanderWell 2008; Wolterstorff 2008.

reads the narrative of Scripture carefully and consistently. However, the reader might wonder if his conclusions are dictated more by a peculiar version of covenant theology than the biblical text itself. Here are some of the most obvious theological assumptions that are inconsistent with the theology of faithful presence:

1. VanDrunen's legalistic view of Adam's cultural task distorts the very idea of the creation mandate. His insistence that "we are not little Adams" denies an important element of the *imago Dei* in humans. (Hunter 2010, 99).
2. His "annihilationist" eschatology effectively denies any enduring value of the material world and human cultural efforts. (Hoekema 1979, 39-40, 280).
3. The idea of the two kingdoms begets dual ethics, dual authority, and two sharply divided kinds of people. This is far from the biblical picture of the kingdom of God, which is cosmic in scope and is to "come to the earth as it is in heaven." (Mat 6:10; cf. Hunter 2010, 95, 244; O'Donovan, 137; VanDrunen 2008, 222).
4. Finally, VanDrunen view of the church's role is almost entirely inward-focused and future-oriented. The condition of the world tends to be accepted as the status-quo; there is no inherent conflict between the two kingdoms since both come from God and are ruled by him. Practically, there is little theological motivation to work and live "toward the well-being of others, not just to those within the community of faith, but to all." (Hunter 2010, 230; VanDrunen 2008, 223).

Faithful Presence and Charles Colson's 'Christian Culture' Project

Charles Colson's political theology is characterized by a strong emphasis on the creation mandate and complete sovereignty of Christ. In this, it serves as an important counterbalance for those theologies of mission that focus exclusively on evangelism or spiritual formation. At the same time it lacks any serious sociological and anthropological insights into how cultural change happens. As Hunter observes, Colson's emphasis on worldview as the main

instrument of culture change goes back to the traditions of pietism, idealism, and individualism in Western thought (Hunter 2010, 24). It completely ignores the fact that the deepest forms of cultural change typically occur through the work of the elite and the institutions they lead (Ibid, 41).

Second, Colson's rather individualistic and cognitive approach to Christian formation does not leave much room for community life. As such, it does not take in account the fact that worldview is also comprised of the hopes, loves, and heart attitudes that are the result of experience, community life, and worship rather than adopted consciously and deliberately (Smith 2009, 133-139; Keller 2012, Kindle location 5879). Third, Colson's optimistic hope that "historic Christianity may be on the verge of a great breakthrough" appears to be grounded more in his overly realized eschatology than in observations of current events (Colson 2008, x).[13]

Finally, Colson's language of "extending God's kingdom" and "building a Christian culture" conjures up images of dominion and conquest that expose what Hunter calls *politicization*, or the proclivity to think of the Christian faith and its engagement with the culture around it in political terms. In Hunter's words,

> Politicization has delimited the imaginative horizon through which the church and Christian believers think about engaging the world and the range of possibilities within which they actually act. … It is essential, however, to demythologize politics, to see politics for what it is and what it can and cannot do and not place on it unrealistic expectations. … At best, politics can make life in this world a little more just and thus a little more bearable. (Hunter 2010, 185-186).

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[13] His chapter on "restoration" in *How Now Shall We Live* focuses almost entirely on how Christians should live today with only casual references to the future aspect of the kingdom of God (1999, 283-488).

Faithful Presence and Sider's Cultural Mandate

Sider's work is a good example of a (relatively) comprehensive methodology for political reflection. First, he interacts with the entire biblical cannon rather than with a selected theme, be it subordination, covenant, human rights, or anything else.[14] Second, an important role in his approach is given to general revelation: "By itself, the biblical framework is insufficient … We must develop a political philosophy that is firmly rooted in both the biblical worldview and careful, persistent analysis of our complex, glorious, and broken world" (Sider 2006, 47). This understanding underlies the need for historical, social, and economic studies.

Finally, Sider's political philosophy is dialogical and eclectic. He is distinctively Anabaptist in his view of the church and nonviolence, yet he strongly leans towards the neo-Calvinist position in his view of culture and the state. Sider draws from Augustine, Aquinas, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, James Skillen, John Paul II and other theologians from both Catholic and Protestant traditions. However, Sider's text is dominated by theological considerations and suffers from a lack of a substantial sociological analysis of the nature of culture, albeit to a much lesser degree than the other four writers in this field statement.

Summary and Conclusion

Theologically, the fundamental diving line between the views presented here seems to lie between "Kuyperian" transformationists and dualists of two different types. The former emphasize the goodness of creation and are open to the input of natural theology. For

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[14] Sider draws extensively from such authors as Christopher J. Wright (2006), Oliver O'Donovan (1996), and N.T. Wright (1996; 2008) who also work out their theologies of

them, the state is God's gift to protect natural rights, both those of individuals and institutions. Because these transformationists believe in the cultural mandate and the continuity between the old and new creations, they highlight the value of cultural activities. Whether they take a more protectionist stance toward the state (Wolterstorff), view it as an instrument of extending the kingdom (Colson), or stress its positive role in advancing justice (Sider), they all believe that Christians have an important role to play in the public square.

The second group focuses on the fall and its consequences. They therefore see the state either as God's restraining answer to the problem of sin (VanDrunen) or as a fallen power itself (Yoder). They stress the fact that any justice in this world is only "the justice of the common, not of the redemptive kingdom," or they completely disparage the very idea of justice as "an interplay of egotisms" (VanDrunen 2011, 195; Yoder 1972, 214). This negative view of the state is counterbalanced by a high (and somewhat idealized) ecclesiology, which occupies the central place in their theological systems. In terms of political engagement, they advocate either total non-involvement or a form of detached involvement.

Two decades ago Mark Noll observed that a primary reason for the weakness of evangelical political reflection is its "common-sensical biblicism" (Noll 1994, 160). In a recent article he repeated that a "reliance on Scripture is imperative" but "naïve biblicism" is dangerous. Instead, Scripture must be applied "contextually, culturally and theologically" (Noll 2014, 55). J. Budziszewski also stresses the need for contextual application of the Bible when he identifies general revelation as "the missing piece of the puzzle" in evangelical political

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political engagement from the grand story of the Bible.

reflection (2006, 30). These considerations suggest that an evaluation of the theological methodologies presented here is best done against the backdrop of what Paul Hiebert and Tite Tiénou call missional theology (2002). This way of theologizing attempts to answer specific questions arising from particular human contexts by seeking to build the bridge between biblical revelation and human contexts. The goal is "thinking biblically about God's universal mission in the context of the world here and now, in all its particularities, paradoxes, and confusions" (2002, 48; cf. Priest 2006).[15]

Applying Scripture *theologically* requires, among other things, an intentional effort to continually hold together the realities of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration (Carson 2008, 59; Bartholomew & Goheen 2004; Christopher Wright 2006; Wright 2008). The holistic biblical narrative helps the church understand the continuing tension between what Hunter calls its "affirmation and antithesis" toward the broader culture, or what Walls calls the "indigenizing and the pilgrim principles" (Hunter 2011, 237; Walls 1996, 14). This tension, in turn, helps build a (tentative) framework within which we can generously yet critically appreciate the contributions of general revelation, and be aware of the ever present temptations of both Constantinian triumphalism and pessimistic withdrawal.

Applying Scripture *contextually* requires understanding of specific social and cultural dynamics. Unfortunately, as we have seen, a major methodological weakness of some of the authors in this paper is that their theological assumptions are not integrated with a careful sociological and cultural analysis. But as Hunter convincingly demonstrates, when our

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[15] Missional theology also learns from the historical experience of the church and strives to chart a practical course of action for the church today (Shenk 2009, 131; Hiebert 1994,

understanding of culture and cultural change is wrong, "every initiative based on this perspective will fail to achieve its goals" (Hunter 2010, 273).

In view of all the above, Sider's theological methodology appears to be most comprehensive. His positive vision of *shalom* combined with distinctively Anabaptist ecclesiology that shuns thinking in terms of "domination" and "cultural war" comes, in my opinion, closest to what Hunter puts forth as a "theology of faithful presence." As an eclectic approach, it also integrates a number of valuable insights from the other four writers. Practically, Sider offers a balanced biblical framework for positive yet humble engagement in the public square for the sake of social justice and human flourishing (Sider 1979; 1993; 2005).

35; Hiebert and Tienou 2002, 38-52; Skreslet 2012, Kindle location 459; Priest 2012).

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