*To Change the World*

James Davison Hunter, [*To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*](http://www.amazon.com/Change-World-Tragedy-Possibility-Christianity/dp/0199730806/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1411740717&sr=1-1&keywords=to+change+the+world)(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Summary:

Dr. Hunter is a sociology professor at UVA, and his vocational expertise certainly comes out in this book, though not enough to over-burden the reader with distracting jargon, for his writing style is direct and evocative. He divides his book into three essays where he highlights the failure and folly of Christians who attempt to change the world through political engagement, those who compromise the faith to be accepted, and those who extract themselves from “secular” culture in favor of Christian isolationism. Hunter offers an alternative framework of culture where Christians engage with the world as a “faithful presence.”

Themes:

* World-changing. Social change is most often pursued through means that attempt to alter the “hearts and minds” of the people. History shows that this view is flawed.
* Culture as institutions. Change most often comes from elites acting in influential institutions, “high-prestige centers of cultural production.”
* Power. Power is more than “conquest and domination,” more than political power.
* Cultural engagement. Theological consideration for “faithful presence” is examined in the creation mandate, the Great Commission, the *imago Dei*, and the exilic passage Jeremiah 29.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the book’s tone? Is it too combative and contrarian, or not enough?
2. Why should we abandon language regarding “changing the world,” “redeeming the culture,” or “advancing/building the kingdom”?
3. What are the dangers of overemphasizing “values,” “worldviews,” and “artifacts”?
4. Do you agree with and/or see evidence in culture of Hunter’s classification of Christian attempts to change the world: the Christian Right (“defensive against”), the Christian Left (“relevance to”), and the neo-Anabaptists (“purity from”)?
5. How can people participate in the proposal to be a “faithful presence within” as part of acts of shalom and a “new city commons”?