Essay 1, Chapter 7: "For and Against the Mandate of Creation"

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What makes this ch. so interesting is that Hunter starts wrestling w/the implications of his own theory.

You'd think that he'd be all for elitism, but he recognizes that Christianity by its very teachings is radically anti-elitist.

"The sign. of ev. person before God irrespective of worldly stature or accomplishment and the care for the least are the ethical hallmarks of Christianity, for they mark every human being and every human life in the most practial ways with God's image and therefore as worthy of respect and love. W/o these, Christianity is a brutalizing ideology. This is why elitism - a disposition and relationality of superiority, condescension, and entitlement by social elites - is so abhorrent for the Christian. Its foundation is exclusion on the implicity (and sometimes the explicit) view that people are *not* equal in love and dignity bef. God. Thus, by its very nature, elitism is exploitative. So far as I can tell, elitism for believers is dispicable and utterly anathema to the gospel they cherish." (94) Sorry for the long quote, but it needed to be said: Hunter's not a cheerleader for elitism.

On the other hand, elitism often leads to "an oppressive egalitarianism that will suffer no distinctions btw higher and lower," better and worse," and leads to a "tyranny of the majority" and a commitment to cultural mediocrity rather than excellence. (94)

So #Hunter sees tension btw Am Christianity's "populism" and "what we know about the most historically significant dynamics of wld-changing."

The central question is, then, how can we have an elite-type influence and resist the elitism that comes with it? Or in his words.. "Is it possible to pursue excellence and, under God's sovereignty, be in a position of influence and privilege and *not*be ensnared by the trappings of elitism?" (94) Another thorny problem is that of power. Our creational call leads us to engage culture, but

"Whether we like it or not, merely engaging the culture implies the issue and exercise of power. The matter of power is unavoidable." (94)

This might lead us to think that we must try to gain power through politics. Not so, says Hunter. "Speaking as a Christian myself, contemporary christian understandings of power and politics are a very large part of what has made contemporary Christianity in Am. appalling, irrelevant, and ineffective - part and parcel of the worst elements of our late-modern culture today, rather than a healthy alternative to it." (94-95)

So Christians shouldn't be oriented toward winning the "culture war" (much to the relief of @chrisoldfield, I'd imagine).

Why not? "The reason is that so much of the discussion surrounding this kind of world-changing is oriented toward the idea of controlling history." (95). And that is an idol, a usurping of God's role, presumption.

And such presumption can have unforeseen and tragic consequences. Rather, he advocates a theology of "faithful presence." That means the Church should call its people into every sphere of society, even if we don't see immediate influence.

One interesting insight he gives is that "theology moves in the opposite direction of social theory." (95) That is to say, soc. theory would lead naturally to elitism, but theology can't. But neither can theology ignore soc. theory.

So what he proposes is, in line w/the "new creation," is "an alternative culture that is, nevertheless, integrated w/in the present the present culture. Whatever its larger influence in the world may be, a culture that is genuinely alternative cannot emerge w/o faithful presence in all areas of life." (96) So we need to build networks and institutions to support "counter-leaders operating within the upper echelons of cultural production and social life generally." (96) Elite, but still important for the "renewal of the church and its engagement in culture."(96)One wonders whether Hunter might be writing himself into the script here.

But I think the point is still valid. That's the end of essay one. Essay two is "Rethinking Power," and it will have to wait.

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