

THE
Hope
of
the
World

Christian Cultural
Engagement in a
Secular Age

ROBERT J. PACIENZA

The Hope of the World: Christian Cultural Engagement in a Secular Age

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Cover Design: Hampton Creative, www.hamptoncreative.com

Interior Design: Roark Creative, www.roarkcreative.com

Printed in the United States of America.

Published by:

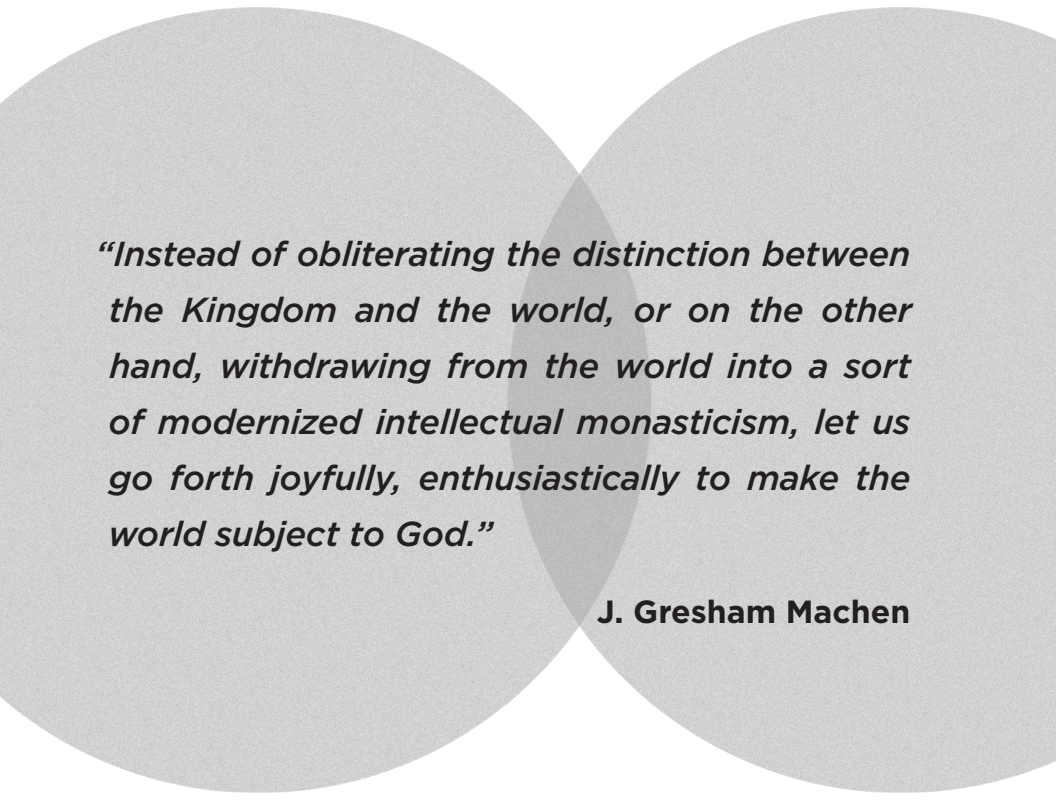


Published by Coral Ridge Ministries Media
P.O. Box 11786
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33339
1-800-988-7884
DJKM.org
letters@djkm.org

For Jen. Thank you for daily reminding me of our great hope.

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“Instead of obliterating the distinction between the Kingdom and the world, or on the other hand, withdrawing from the world into a sort of modernized intellectual monasticism, let us go forth joyfully, enthusiastically to make the world subject to God.”

J. Gresham Machen

PREFACE

In 1984, Richard John Neuhaus wrote *The Naked Public Square*. At that time, he recognized there was a missing voice in the culture. It was the prophetic voice of God's people bringing the mind of Christ into the public places where ideas are debated and shaped.¹ Three decades later, in our present time, we continue to see a dearth of Christian voices in our culture. This absence has drastic implications for the Church's influence in this cultural moment.

Consider that the American Church today faces a sobering paradox. In a 2020 survey on the religious life in our nation, George Barna reported that out of the roughly forty-two million Americans that attend a Bible-believing church on a regular basis, only twenty-one percent see the Bible as relevant to all of life.² Even though we might find our pews full on Sunday morning, we see compartmentalized congregants who remain content to keep their sacred and secular lives divided.

Hope for a Hopeless World

Despite its sad state today, for centuries the Church has been referred to as “the hope of the world.” Christians must not lose perspective. We must keep a strong faith in God's sovereignty and a long view of his providence in history. **Christians have always faced immense opposition and yet God continued to build his Kingdom. He will do the same today. This is the hope we offer to a hopeless world!**

No matter how significant the opposition, no matter how great the social and cultural storm, God will empower his people to fulfill their calling as members of the city of God in the midst of the city of man. He calls us to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Thus, the Church needs to equip every Christian to faithfully carry out his

or her responsibility as a citizen of the eternal city, serving as a divine agent of redemption and restoration. In an age of extreme individualism, pragmatism, relativism, and skepticism, we need today's Church to be the counter-cultural institution it has been for the past two thousand years.

God has created and called his people to advance the gospel of the Kingdom and the hope of cosmic redemption. Although our faith is deeply personal, it is never to remain private. Our purpose is to live out a public faith, bringing the mind of Christ into every cultural sphere.

The Purpose of This Book

The aim of this book, therefore, is to outline a basic vision of cultural engagement for every Christian. This vision will be grounded in a robust Biblical theology that will clarify the relationship between culture and the Kingdom of God in the Old and New Testaments. My prayer is that the Church would fully embrace the calling to live in light of the truth that Jesus is Lord of all. The Church, with this message, is truly the hope of the world.

I have personally chosen to write on the topic of Christian cultural engagement for the following reasons:

- 1. Christians need to recover their divine, God-given mission.** Many Christians live aimlessly, with no meaning or purpose. We must remember our primary calling established at the beginning of history and consummated at the end of history. Christians living in the twenty-first century do not need a new mission, a new message, or a new strategy. We have been commissioned by the King, beginning with the Cultural Mandate in Genesis. We must embrace the Biblical vision for cultural engagement established by God at Creation. The

Church needs to answer the question once again, “Why am I here?”

2. **Christians need a Biblical theology of culture.** Faithful cultural engagement requires a Biblical theology that is grounded in the Scriptures and then practically applied to the mission of God’s people. While there are many approaches to culture, I am only interested in the one that is prescribed in Scripture. God’s Word is a light unto our path. In the fog of the cultural storm, we can rely on its authority and power.
3. **Christians need a Biblical worldview informed by the Lordship of Christ.** Beginning with the next generation, we must place the highest priority on equipping all Christians with a worldview that sees the totality of life through the lens of Scripture. Every member of God’s Kingdom is a missionary sent out to declare and demonstrate the relevance of Christianity to everything under the sun. Christ is not only Savior, but Lord. He calls the Church to a faith that proclaims the gospel as public truth.

Abraham Kuyper, 19th century theologian and Dutch Prime Minister, faced the rapid rise of secularism in the Netherlands. He reminded Dutch Christians that God saves a person for the express purpose of being “an agent of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, wherever they are called by God to serve.”³ But Kuyper not only talked the talk; he walked the walk. His life reflected what he believed as he exerted himself as a change agent in Dutch society, founding a Christian university, national newspaper, and political party. Both in word and in deed, his life is exemplary of the fact that “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”⁴

A Personal Word

Let me end this preface with a personal story. In 2017, my wife and I tragically lost our three-year-old daughter, Lily. The week before she entered the presence of her heavenly Father, she was singing with our son Preston after dinner. He was teaching her some of the hymns his class was learning at school. There was one hymn that she seemed to really enjoy, *This Is My Father's World*. However, Lily would only sing the opening line throughout the entire song. She simply repeated the phrase, "This is my Father's world."

This is a beautiful memory for our family but also can serve as a profound reminder for the Church. "This is my Father's world" should be the anthem of God's people in our secular age. This truth is our hope regardless of the cultural moment. Our culture is broken and desperate for the good news of Jesus Christ. People long to know the unknown God, to have wrongs made right, and to see the broken made whole. We are called to advance God's mission of restoration and redemption.

This world—every square inch of it—belongs to our Father. In the midst of the present darkness, therefore, we must shine the light of Truth into the dark corners of our world. We must do so through our words *and* our deeds. And we must do so in every sphere of culture, not only from the church pulpit, but also in the workplace, the community, and the public square. Let us never forget that "though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet."⁵