



Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Ockenga Fellows Retreat 4

Jeremiah 29:4-14 | Politics

TO
CHANGE
THE
WORLD

THE IRONY,
TRAGEDY, &
POSSIBILITY OF
CHRISTIANITY
IN THE
LATE MODERN
WORLD

JAMES DAVISON
HUNTER

How should Christians live in exile?

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles scattered
throughout the provinces of Pontus,
Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,
[and Westford MA...] (NIV)

Philippians 3:20

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, (NIV)

God calls exiles to “faithful presence.”

Jeremiah 29:4-7

“[Shalom] is a vision of order and harmony, fruitfulness and abundance, wholeness, beauty, joy, and well-being.”

- *To Change the World* (p. 228)

Clearly it would have been justifiable for the Jews to be hostile to their captors. It also would have been natural enough for them to withdraw from engaging the world around them. By the same token, it would have been easy for them to simply assimilate with the culture that surrounded them. Any of these three options made sense in human terms. But God was calling them to something different—not to be defensive against, isolated from, or absorbed into the dominant culture, but to be faithfully present within it..

On the face of it, this was not a posture of radical and prophetic challenge to the powers that be, but neither was it a passive acceptance of the established order. The people of Israel were being called to enter the culture in which they were placed as God's people—reflecting in their daily practices their distinct identity as those chosen by God. He was calling them to maintain their distinctiveness as a community but in ways that served the common good.

- *To Change the World* (p. 277-278)

God doesn't call exiles to be
“defensive against.”

Jeremiah 28:1-4; 29:8-10

Jeremiah 28:1-4

“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³ Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord’s house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. ⁴ I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.’” (NIV)

Defensive against

1. **Objective:** retain right belief and right actions within the world.

Defensive against

1. **Objective:** retain right belief and right actions within the world.
2. **Challenges:** try to preserve the nation and Christian faith in the midst of secularization.

Defensive against

1. **Objective:** retain right belief and right actions within the world.
2. **Challenges:** try to preserve the nation and Christian faith in the midst of secularization.
3. **Strategy:** call for national repentance and faith while confronting opposition.

Defensive against

1. **Objective:** retain right belief and right actions within the world.
2. **Challenges:** try to preserve the nation and Christian faith in the midst of secularization.
3. **Strategy:** call for national repentance and faith while confronting opposition.
4. **Outcome:** creation of walls between self and world, self protection; creation of parallel institutions (music, education, media); anxiety and alienation.

God doesn't call exiles to be "relevant to."

Jeremiah 29:11

Relevant to

1. **Objective:** connect with the world, people and issues of the day.

Relevant to

1. **Objective:** connect with the world, people and issues of the day.
2. **Challenges:** try to impose ethical restrains and changes on a society that resists.

Relevant to

1. **Objective:** connect with the world, people and issues of the day.
2. **Challenges:** try to impose ethical restrains and changes on a society that resists.
3. **Strategy:** focus on relevance and felt needs but neglect right beliefs.

Relevant to

1. **Objective:** connect with the world, people and issues of the day.
2. **Challenges:** try to impose ethical restrains and changes on a society that resists.
3. **Strategy:** focus on relevance and felt needs but neglect right beliefs.
4. **Outcome:** loss of distinctiveness and historic Christian faith, creeds and confessions; alienation.

God doesn't call exiles to “purity from.”

Jeremiah 29:12-14

Purity from

1. **Objective:** preserve the historic Christian faith and witness.

Purity from

1. **Objective:** preserve the historic Christian faith and witness.
2. **Challenges:** the world is so broken we can't do anything for it.

Purity from

1. **Objective:** preserve the historic Christian faith and witness.
2. **Challenges:** the world is so broken we can't do anything for it.
3. **Strategy:** withdraw from world and culture to restore true witness.

Purity from

1. **Objective:** preserve the historic Christian faith and witness.
2. **Challenges:** the world is so broken we can't do anything for it.
3. **Strategy:** withdraw from world and culture to restore true witness.
4. **Outcome:** disengagement with world; closed communities; feelings of “us-against-them;” alienation.

God calls exiles to faithful presence.

Faithful presence

1. **Objective:** be faithful and present wherever God calls us.

Faithful presence

1. **Objective:** be faithful and present wherever God calls us.
2. **Challenges:** temptation to fight back, forsake beliefs, or disengage.

Faithful presence

1. **Objective:** be faithful and present wherever God calls us.
2. **Challenges:** temptation to fight back, forsake beliefs, or disengage.
3. **Strategy:** the great commission—go and make disciples in every level of society; incarnate the Christian faith; be in the world but not of it.

Faithful presence

1. **Objective:** be faithful and present wherever God calls us.
2. **Challenges:** temptation to fight back, forsake beliefs, or disengage.
3. **Strategy:** the great commission—go and make disciples in every level of society; incarnate the Christian faith; be in the world but not of it.
4. **Outcome:** shalom; hope and joy; patient endurance; finding the common good; reconciliation.

God calls exiles to faithful presence.