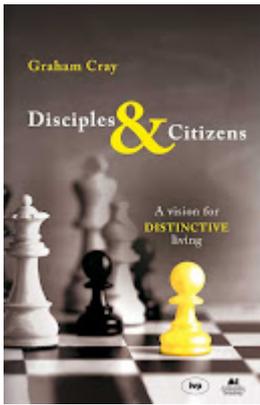


Review: Disciples & Citizens



I obtained a copy of Graham Cray's *Disciples & Citizens* at last year's EFAC Conference where Graham was speaking. I was enthused by Graham at that time and that enthusiasm continues having now read his book.

For those of us who are caught up in the perpetual lurch from creative crisis to creative crisis that so often defines church planting and fresh expression ministry this book is immensely valuable. Without prescribing or proscribing direction or methodology +Graham unveils and delivers substance, weight and foundation to those wrestling with on-the-ground applied ecclesiology of the Christ-centred kind.

The key consideration is the promotion of a biblically-grounded framework for the essential mission of the church – corporate and individual spiritually applied publically and with integrity. As he explores the necessary distinctives between the ways of the world and the way of Christ we have a useful lens for observing the world, that of *citizenship*:

Citizenship is becoming increasingly passive... Perhaps most serious of all is the decline in concern for or confidence in the concept of the 'common good.' (page 19)

This finds its clear expression in a correlation with the biblical city of Corinth:

Corinth was a materially ambitious, multicultural city. It was governed by personal ambition and self-promotion, sustained by a culture of spin. (page 31)

If Christ came to such a world as this, how, then, does the church? +Graham lets us grasp a view of what it means to be a Christian citizen:

Our nation needs a vision of the public good, combined with a proportionate willingness for self-sacrifice. As citizens, Christians need to respond to these challenges... we will serve our nation and world best by being ourselves, by offering our nation a genuinely biblical vision (page 21)

Indeed, citizenship for the Christian can be defined as “public discipleship” (page 19) – the simple, obedient following of Christ in the world. This means living lives of “involved distinctiveness” (page 32ff) and “subversive engagement.” (page 41ff)

***Involved distinctiveness** can be summed up as a call to be a countercultural community which also seeks common ground with its society whenever possible. (page 32)*

***Subversive engagement** involves a proactive community, actively doing good in its society (because the good can last, in the light of the kingdom of God), while subverting many of society’s key social values (because they cannot last, in the light of the kingdom of God). (page 41-42)*

The middle parts of the book explore how public discipleship can be disinctively involved, and subversively engaged with issues such as individualization, consumerism and constructivism through Christ-focussed discipleship and cultivation of character. (As an aside, this includes a short discourse on the characteristics of Generation Y which explicitly mentions an aspect of Generation X that I very rarely read or see but keenly feel – “Generation X was a hinge generation, experiencing both the old and new modernities in conflict.” Page 91).

The eleventh chapter (“The role of the church”) and the final section (“The Transformation of Community”) connects it all together – the engine of biblical citizenship is attached to the vehicle of the church. Church is begat by and begets disciples of Christ and so provides the location for distinctive, subversive citizenship of the life-giving kind.

The statement... that governments do not and cannot create the values upon which both government and citizenship depend, raises an obvious question. Where are they formed, then? Worship provides a major part of the answer, not just for religious communities, but for all people, because all people worship... What we serve shapes us. Our heart will always be where our treasure is... Christian worship is transformative. (page 122)

Just as 1 Corinthians ends with the vision of resurrection hope in chapter 15, so the involved transformative church, producing distinctive, subversive public disciple-citizens, can only do so when it lives out its eschatological identity. The church can only be the church when it lives on the truth that in Christ the kingdom has come and in Christ the eternal things of this life and this world will pass through to eternity.

Earth and heaven will be shaken. Only those things which can endure the consuming fire will remain. But then there will be Sabbath, as the new creation is complete...

Jesus... saw human history as divided between two ages... the critical dividing point was not the final judgment, but his own proclamation and ministry...

In the new heaven and earth there would be no more blindness, lameness, deafness or death. There would be no poverty. The Son of God would be at the heart and centre of the new creation. But this was no longer completely future. In and

through Jesus, it was starting now. (pages 148-149)

And, quoting Backham and Hart,

Christians are called to identify and to become involved with God's Spirit in all that he is doing to fashion a genuine presence of the new within the midst of the old, drawing it into self-transcendent, albeit partial, anticipations of what will ultimately be. (page 172)

And so the fundamental call of the book is to be Christlike, to follow Jesus. Jesus, who did not self-actualise but lived only in obedience to the father, by the power of the Spirit. Jesus who came to the world, identifying with it, having compassion on it, teaching, taking action, building community and counting the cost – the cost of suffering – that would make it happen. That way doesn't just dictate the labels of individuals, it transforms lives and shapes hearts, and, when done well in public, it changes the world and lasts for eternity.

This book is theologically firm and kerygmatically fervent. It captures the heart of Christ-focused emerging churches around the world – from Driscoll to Church Army to the Imagine Project here in Tasmania. I will be using this book again and again because it shines a light.