

## Book Review

**‘The Mission of God: A Manifesto of Hope for Society’,  
Joseph Boot, Wilberforce Publications, 2016, 683 pages, £15.99 (Kindle £7.99).**

Rev. Dr. Joe Boot is founder of the Ezra Institute for Contemporary Christianity and the Senior Pastor of Westminster Chapel, Toronto. He is also the Director of the Wilberforce Academy, and Head of Public Theology at Christian Concern. He has publicly debated a number of leading atheists, and written previously about apologetics. This book takes him into the whole area of how Christians should engage with culture, in a wide-ranging, bold and provocative tome.

Boot begins his introduction to the book by asking: ‘What is the kingdom of God and how does it manifest itself? What is the relationship between faith and public morality and policy? Are Christians called to transform culture? In short, what is the *mission of God* and what part do we have to play?’ This sets the tone for the book which is split into two parts, on the Mission of God, and the Reign of God. As the subtitle indicates, this book constitutes nothing less than a comprehensive manifesto for a Christian vision of society.

Boot sees himself as inheriting the Reformed puritan tradition in how he approaches the relationship of Christianity to society, and this means he is theonomic in his approach, with an acknowledged heavy debt to Cornelius Van Til and R J Rushdoony. The question theologians pose is, ‘Do you want autonomy (man’s self-law) or theonomy (God’s law)?’ There is a lot of truth in this – we can choose our own way or we can follow God’s way, in every area of life and society. Describing himself as a ‘new puritan’, Boot envisions an explicitly Christian society with laws based on the principles of the Bible. This is, after all, what the puritans sought, and even achieved in large measure in England with repercussions lasting to this day. Indeed, it can be argued that it was puritanism that effectively created Western civilisation.

Until reading this book, I was unaware that the Parliament of England made a solemn covenant with God in 1643, which explicitly promised to obey the God of the Bible. Nor was I aware that the rate of illegitimacy fell to 0.5% during Cromwell’s rule – the lowest rate in 500 years of records. Today, by contrast, we see the worst ever rates. Nearly half of all births occur outside marriage, with all the disadvantages that this brings for both the mothers and the children. Boot laments that most Christians in our generation lack the vision, or confidence in the relevance of the Bible, to seek to re-establish a Christian nation with Christian laws that will benefit everyone in society.

Boot makes the case for a comprehensive understanding of Christ’s lordship over every aspect of society, and for the relevance of God’s moral law for today. He takes the cultural mandate seriously, and articulates a Christian vision for culture with Christ at the centre. Christians today have too readily accepted the idea of a religiously neutral state, or morally neutral laws, or culture or education. In fact, no state or law or culture or education system can ever be religiously or morally neutral. Much of Boot’s book is taken up with dismantling the myth of religious neutrality in each of these areas. He concludes that what is best for society, and what Christians should be working towards, is a state which is formally Christian, with laws that are based on the Bible, an explicitly Christian culture, and Christian education.

Boot makes clear that this can only happen with the consent of the people. A Christian state is the very opposite of a dictatorship. It maximises freedom for everyone. It supports democratic accountability of power with open debate and competing parties. Boot argues that biblical laws cannot be imposed on people, but must be embraced by a society that is seeking righteousness. Currently, as we abandon our Christian heritage and move towards an increasingly pagan society, Christian freedoms are being eroded and Christians are starting to face a degree of persecution for manifesting their beliefs in the workplace. State doctrine is being imposed and freedom of speech is being restricted. The only way out of this vicious spiral is a recovery of Christianity in the nation.

What makes this book difficult to review effectively is that it is so wide-ranging. Amongst other issues that Boot discusses in some depth, often with a whole chapter, are: puritanism, eschatology, a Christian view of history, pagan statism, the social gospel, jubilee, biblical law, crime and punishment, culture, politics, liberation theology, education, family and sexual ethics, environmentalism, evangelism and apologetics. The wide-ranging nature of the book is both a strength and a weakness. A lot of ground is covered which helps to show the relevance of the bible to all these areas, but a lot more could be said in every area. If this leaves the reader hungry for more, then that is no bad thing. The book is well referenced, with twenty pages of bibliography and an index.

Boot is unafraid to criticise anyone who tries to find solutions to any of these issues without clear reference to the Bible. His sharp and pointed criticism is not reserved only for secular philosophers and commentators, nor is it restricted to liberal theologians who have self-consciously decided that the Bible does not provide all the answers we need. No less an evangelical luminary than Timothy Keller comes in for some fifteen pages of stinging rebuke for his muddled approach to Old Testament law and social justice.

Indeed, one criticism of the book would be that he often spends more time criticising others than he does building his own case. I would have liked to have seen a more thorough attempt to build his vision from biblical exegesis than is sometimes presented. Nevertheless, a significant part of what he is doing is demonstrating that all attempts to build a comprehensive vision of society aside from an explicitly Christian society, are fatally flawed and doomed to failure. Much political thought today envisages what is effectively salvation by the state. This can only ultimately lead to tyranny.

This quote from Charles Hodge, cited in the book, sums up Boot's thesis:

It is our duty, as far as lies in our power, immediately to organize human society and all of its institutions and organs upon a distinctively Christian basis. Indifference or impartiality here between the law of the kingdom and the law of the world, or of its prince, the devil, is utter treason to the King of Righteousness... There can be no compromise.

This book is Boot's *magnum opus*, in which a compelling biblical vision of society is articulated with passion and verve. It is a hard-hitting *tour de force* covering a wide range of issues with a clear desire to see the Bible applied to the whole of society. In a book of this scope, no-one would be expected to agree with all the points made. By the same token, no-one can expect to read this book without being provoked and challenged. Boot himself realises that his position is a minority one in the church today, and that there will be some legitimate areas of disagreement even amongst those who do take a more theonomic view. Nevertheless, there is a lot of muddled thinking about Christianity and culture in the church today, and Boot provides a much-needed corrective.

The transformation of culture will not be an easy task. Boot has provided a remarkable resource explaining how far we are from a Christian culture today, and what we should be aiming for. This book is essential reading for anyone seeking to promote a Christian vision of society. I hope it gains the wide readership and influence it deserves.

*Tim Dieppe*

*In the interests of transparency, we note that Tim Dieppe and Joe Boot are colleagues, both working for Christian Concern.*

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