

Two Cities, Two Loves. Christian Responsibility in a Crumbling Culture by James Montgomery Boice. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1996. Hardcover, 279pp.

Our Western society has become postmodern and post-Christian. Many who claim to be religious know and care little about the Christian faith. Our culture has even become aggressively hostile to it. Truth and moral values are regarded as purely subjective. There is moral disarray, a pre-occupation with self-fulfillment and gratification. American culture is also declining rapidly. How should Christians confront this alarming trend?

Boice believes that evangelicals have not done a very good job in relating to American culture. The influence of churchgoers on the country's values is almost negligible. And evangelicals have little to offer in the culture battles. They have forgotten their theology, even though they give lip service to the authority of the Bible. What Christians need to do above all, is to be God's people in the midst of this world's culture. And what will help us to do that is to take a new look at Saint Augustine's (354 - 430) *City of God*. Augustine distinguished between the City of Man, which is characterized by self-love, and the City of God, composed of those who love God and want to serve Him. Boice's book is an attempt to bring Augustine's classic up to date. In Part I, he gives a penetrating analysis of the collapse of American culture. In Part II, he traces the antithesis between the two cities - Babylon and Jerusalem. An in-depth and profound study of Scripture! In Part III he discusses the relationship between Christ and culture. He shows that God is sovereign over the city of man as well as the church and that Christians belong to both spheres - but as Christians. They have the responsibility to glorify God in every sphere of life. As citizens of God's city they are still in the world and need to conduct themselves as a renewing force in it. Part IV describes how the church should behave before a watching world.

Although I wholeheartedly agree with most of Boice's perspectives, I have questions about his interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's view of civil disobedience. Boice believes that Bonhoeffer did not have the right to be involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer went " beyond any possible biblical sanction." I believe that in this case Dr. Boice turned into an armchair theologian. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that " it is easier by far to act on abstract principle than from concrete responsibility." For Bonhoeffer, it was not simply a question of killing Hitler, but of achieving a political overthrow. In the midst of the terrors of Nazi brutality and war, Bonhoeffer came to the profound conviction that the assassination of Hitler was morally right and necessary.

I have read numerous Christian books on the decline of our culture. Most stated what went wrong; few offered thoughtful solutions. Boice's book is different. As pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, prominent Reformed theologian and prolific author, Dr. Boice is thoroughly conversant with contemporary culture, Biblically informed, and truly Reformed in his theology and outlook. *Two Cities, Two Loves* is a book I can heartily recommend for personal reading or study groups!

Johan D.Tangelder