KINGDOM CONSPIRACY

Posted on February 4, 2015 by Eddie

When comparing kingdom to church, most people make fundamental logical errors. The most common is to compare future kingdom and present church. Kingdom is both-and, a now and not yet. The church also is a both-and, now and not yet. The church, then is an eschatological reality. To compare kingdom to church, one must compare now-kingdom with now-church and not-yet-kingdom with not-yet-church...

Category: Reviews

For those who like their blog posts nice and simple; Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local ChurchÂ is an thought-provokingÂ book and if your interest is in mission, evangelism, justice, Christians and politics or the Gospels, you should read it.

McKnight starts off by talking about two groups of people. Skinny jeans Evangelicals who believe that working for the Kingdom is primarily a search for justice and relief from poverty and the pleated pants Christians, who see the same the Kingdom as essentially a spiritual question of redemption and forgiveness. The fashion statements don't quite work this side of the Atlantic, but the division into secular and sacred views of the Kingdom and Christian mission certainly does.

Having sketched this broad dichotomy, he then goes on to develop his own picture of the Kingdom, through a careful unpacking of the biblical evidence.Â His conclusions are summed up in a series of 'theses' at the end of the book; I'll quote a couple of them here.

> *1. The word "kingdom" in Judaism (the Old Testament, Josephus etc.) has a natural synonym in the words "nation" and "Israel", not the words "redemption" or "salvation." Thus, kingdom is front and centre about a people and cannot be limited either to a social ethic or a redemptive moment.*
>
> *2. Kingdom is - almost always, with varying degrees of emphasis - a complex of king, rule, people, land, and law. Church is also a complex: a king (Christ), a rule (Christ rules over the body of Christ), a people (the church), a land (expanding Israel into the diaspora) and a law (the law of Christ, life in the Spirit).*

It should be clear that McKnight sees a close correlation between the kingdom and the church. Though we must compare like with like when we look at them, as another of his 'theses' explains:



> *4. When comparing kingdom to church, most people make fundamental logical errors. The most common is to compare future kingdom and present church. Kingdom is both-and, a now and not yet. The church also is a both-and, now and not yet. The church, then is an eschatological reality. To compare kingdom to church, one must compare now-kingdom with now-church and not-yet-kingdom with not-yet-church...*

The bulk of the book is given over to working out what the mission of this kingdom-church looks like. According to McKnight one of the Church's great mistakes is to try and work out it's mission through the political realm rather than through the life of the church. For him, Christians on the right and the left in the US make the same mistake of confusing the kingdom with political processes.

> *We are, of course, called to be salt and light in this world, but the best way to be salt and light is not to coerce the rest of the nation through political power but to witness to an alternative reality by living out the kingdom vision of Jesus in our local church.*

Not everyone will agree with this conclusion, I'm sure. Especially as he develops it further:

> *Christ came to build the church/kingdom, not to make the world a better place and not for the â€œcommon good.â€*

My colleagues who work in language development and literacy will find this approach very thought provoking and perhaps a little unsettling.

From my perspective, I very much appreciate the thoughtful way in which McKnight places the local congregation at the centre of mission. Though he doesn't get into the issue of church-mission agency relationships, he does provide a useful foundation to build upon.

As I said at the outset, this is a thought provoking book. So much so that I have it earmarked for a second reading. There is a good deal here that needs further reflection. I'm not convinced I agree with all of this book, but it certainly deserves to be read and thought through.

On a slightly different note. I read this book on my Kindle and feel that this gave a rather mixed experience. I like the way that Kindle allows me to highlight passages which are then saved online and can be cut and paste into my note keeping software and blog posts. However, because I didn't hold a paper book, I wasn't really aware of how long or 'heavy' the book was. Because the introduction was light and conversational, I wasn't really prepared for the length of the book or the detailed argument. It took me a while to adjust my expectations and study the book rather than just read it.