

The Free Reformed

STUDENT JOURNAL

CITIZENS IN A POST-CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

By Ray Pennings

A Publication of the
Free Reformed Student Society

- Spring 1993 -

February 1993

To our readers:

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the first issue of **The Free Reformed Student Journal**. This journal is published by the Board of the Free Reformed Student Society.

As a response to a felt need to assist our College and University students, the consistories of the Dundas and Hamilton churches appointed a board to organize meetings at which speakers would be invited to speak on topics relevant to FRC students. The Board plans to have a minimum of four meetings a year. Included in the Board's mandate was the publishing of speeches delivered at our meetings, for (further) study by an ever growing number of FRC post-secondary students.

On the following pages you will find the prepared text of a speech held by Ray Pennings at our first meeting held in December 1992. Ray graduated from university not too long ago. Most of us know him from his activities in the Christian Heritage Party. You will find his message to be both informative and stimulating.

Our next two meetings will take place, the Lord willing, on the following dates, in the meeting room of the Dundas FRC:

March 5 Rev. P. Vandermeijden on "Biblical Mysticism"

May 29 Rev. M. Roberts (Banner of Truth editor) on "The Providence of God in History"

We wish you the Lord's richest blessings in your studies. We hope to see you at our next meeting.

Rev. K. Hoefnagel, President
Mr. C. Keuning, Secretary

CITIZENS IN A POST-CHRISTIAN SOCIETY:

Media, Public Policy, and the Place of FRC Members

An address to the

FREE REFORMED STUDENT SOCIETY

December 18, 1992
Dundas, Ontario

by

Ray Pennings, B.A.

The year is 146 B.C.. The Roman army had already been busy for a few decades overcoming its' enemies and expanding the boundaries of the Roman empire. The ambitions of the Roman empire were expanded to nearly their extreme when it faced a surprise and daring attack on the city of Rome. In the second Punic War, Hannibal led the troops from Carthage across the Alps and pushed the Roman empire to the brink before retreating. Now the Roman empire, under the generalship of Scipio Africanus, is seeking revenge and the ultimate triumph of the Roman empire by defeating Carthage. A fierce battle had raged for three years and both Rome and Carthage had lost thousands of men in the battle. Now however, the result seems clear. Only a few Carthage soldiers are left, huddled in the temple. Scipio orders his men to burn the city and the temple and turns to leave. As he stands on the hillside watching Carthage burn, one might expect him to be elated and triumphant. After all, the Roman empire is now without enemy and in a position of absolute domination in the known world.

However, as the Greek historian Polybius records, this is not the case. Instead, Scipio Africanus "burst into tears and stood long reflecting on the inevitable changes which await cities, nations, and dynasties, one and all, as it does each of us men. In the fading fires of that once great city, the Roman general saw the ruins of Rome herself. Just as Rome had destroyed others, so one day would she be destroyed, for no nation, no empire, no culture, no matter how mighty, is immortal."¹

Our topic tonight is "Citizens in a Post-Christian Society." It is nothing new to suggest that all is not well in Canada and the Western world and it would not be very difficult to spend our time tonight cataloguing the

evidences of the malaise and decline in western civilization. However, that is not our objective. Neither is it our objective to reflect on the necessity and importance of evangelizing and being missionaries to our own society and culture. We recognize that the essential problem is a "problem of the heart" and that unless the hearts of men are changed, the "Christian-ness" of our society will continue to decline. We know and believe that "out of the heart proceed the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Although that is an important question and we acknowledge its primacy, the question we are focusing on tonight is "What is our responsibilities as citizens in this post-Christian culture?" Accepting the fact as a reality and our historical circumstance, how are we to respond and how ought we to act in the midst of this culture?

You will understand that the potential ground this topic might cover is vast. In the interests of time and providing food for discussion, I have organized my remarks around four propositions. They are neither a systematic review of the topic nor do they pretend to be exhaustive. Instead, they regard some of the specific areas where we, as Free Reformed Church members, have a distinct approach or particular concerns. If this exercise challenges us to think more critically and analyze our positions from the perspective of Scripture, our time will be well-spent.

Before I begin, allow me to make a few preliminary remarks. Our topic tonight might be described as a discussion of "Christian social action." In the Free Reformed Church are very careful in our use of the noun "Christian," usually reserving it for "true Christians" - those who have experienced the new birth and can speak of their relationship with the Lord. Tonight, we will most frequently be using the term as an adjective, describing "actions" or "attitudes" as being Christian. While it may be stating the obvious, it is worth repeating that nations, policies, or attitudes cannot be properly understood as being definitively Christian in our preferred use of the term. For our purposes this evening, I will use the term in reference to any action in the public setting which links or justifies itself by an appeal to Scripture or Scriptural principles. Even if in my view those claims have little or no merit, I will use the term "Christian" to describe them.ⁱⁱ

As a second preliminary comment, I would observe that most Free Reformed people are political conservatives (perhaps libertarians might

be a better word?) who have a special interest in moral issues. While moral issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and Sunday shopping may even determine our voting decisions in a given election, there is little attempt to reach and defend our positions on economic matters, foreign policy matters, or constitutional/legal matters based on a Christian perspective. This is not to say that our people are not open to such arguments; it is only an observation that few of them take the time to make or consider these arguments before they cast a vote in a given election or otherwise participate in public affairs. This makes my job quite difficult tonight. Because discussions of this type are relatively infrequent within our community, I am not sure that there is an informed, orthodox FRC position on most of the issues I will mention.

This leads me to my third preliminary observation. Since I am unsure of the reigning 'FRC orthodoxy' on some of these issues, I have two options. I can sanitize my comments so that they are innocuous and will offend no one, or I can stick my neck out and give you my best understanding of these issues, realizing that some may disagree. I have chosen the latter trusting that you will take my word, not as a final authority, but at best as an informed opinion that has been formed by struggling with the issues. I by no means pretend to have come to grips with all of these matters and their complexities so I also ask that we allow each other to grow in our understanding of these issues and, even admit the fact that we may be wrong from time to time.

One final preliminary remark. It is easy to fall into the trap of extremes. As Reformed people, we reject the Anabaptist view which says that Christians are to stay clear of public life, that governments are of this world and that we should live focused only on the next world. When discussing public affairs, Free Reformers are quick to turn to Romans 13 and cite the divine institution of government and I Timothy 2 commending us to "pray for kings and those in authority over us." We identify with Jeremiah's message to the children of Israel living in exile:

And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof you shall have peace.

Jeremiah 29:7

However, many have gone into public lives and lost perspective, pursuing

the peace of the city with such vigour that the matters of eternal peace lost their proper priority. While we have a clear responsibility to conduct ourselves as light and salt in the world - not to be invisible by-standers of public affairs -, we must recognize that we are "strangers and pilgrims" and that we seek a greater city in the life to come. While a discussion like the one we are having this evening is focused on this life, may we do so in a balanced perspective in both our views and communications about public affairs.

PROPOSITION #1: We live in the midst of a transformation to a post-Christian society.

In order to establish that ours is becoming a post-Christian society, one needs defend the premise that it once was a Christian society. If you will allow me to grossly over-simplify a complex 1500 years of history into a few sentences, I will argue that western civilization has been directly shaped by Christianity. Whereas prior to the fourth century, the Christian church was a persecuted minority, with the conversion of Constantine the Christian faith became the official imperial religion. That essentially held true until the Enlightenment and French Revolution of the eighteenth century. During that fourteen-hundred year period, there was a constant struggle between the state and the church for authority and power, and there was little tolerance or status within society for those who were not members of the church. Society agreed that faith was the ultimate source of truth.

The Enlightenment and French Revolution marked the end of that era. With its celebration of the primacy of reason over against faith, it became acceptable to express non-Christian perspectives. Church and State were officially separated and Christianity lost its place as the "official" religion however, it remained in its dominant and influential cultural position. Although there was official separation of the institutions of church and state as well as toleration for those who were not of the Christian faith, Christianity shaped the morès and laws of the society.

In understanding the changes which are now taking place, I think it is helpful to realize that between Constantine and the Enlightenment, few would have argued with the premise that *faith* is the ultimate source of truth. While there were many ways in which this faith was defined, used, and worked out, public life and morès operated within the framework of

faith as a basic first principle. The Enlightenment constituted a challenge to this premise. Not faith, but reason, was the first principle and ultimate source of truth. Since that time the battle between faith and reason has been raging.

What is important to realize is that both of these positions accept that there is such a thing as ultimate truth. They may disagree on what it is or how it is arrived at, but they both accept and believe that it exists. To that extent, there has been a basis for debate and it is within that context that the "isms" of public discord have taken place. Some of responded to this debate by saying that do not know whether it is faith or reason that determines ultimate truth and they are even quite content not knowing. They too, however, acknowledge that ultimate truth exists.

Allow me to develop this point for a moment as it is an important concept in understanding the trends in our society. T.S. Eliot, in an 1948 essay entitled *The Unity of European Culture*, describes the effect of Christianity on our culture.

Against the background of Christianity all our thinking has meaning. It is quite possible that an individual European does not believe in the truth of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, everything this unbelieving European says, does and makes, stems from his legacy of the Christian culture. The meaning of what he says, does or makes depends on this Christian culture."ⁱⁱⁱ

What is curious about our time - and what causes me to argue that ours is a time of transformation to a post-Christian society - is that the basic framework for the debate is crumbling. I am not sure that Eliot could say of the 1992 Canadian what he said of the 1948 European. No longer does the public, or academic, debate take place within a framework which assumes there is an ultimate truth, a framework I would argue is a legacy of our Christian tradition. Consider the following quotation from Marilyn Ferguson, one of the gurus of the New Age Movement.

For the first time in history, humankind has come upon the control panel of change—an understanding of how transformation occurs. We are living in *the change of change*, the time in which we can intentionally align ourselves with nature for rapid remaking of ourselves and our collapsing

institutions...Human nature is neither good nor bad but open to continuous transformation and transcendence. It has only to discover itself.^{iv}

No longer is the debate between faith and reason as the source of ultimate truth! A new morès has set in which has said "Ultimate truth no longer exists. You are both right. If you want to believe faith is the ultimate source of truth, go ahead. If you want to believe reason is, that is fine too. Do you want to find a third way? That is quite all right."

On the surface, this seems incredibly nonsensical to our structured minds. After all, how can $2+2=4$ and $2+2=5$ at the same time. One of them must be wrong. Well in today's public thinking, that is not necessarily so. Because who are you to impose your morality. Are we not free? Do we not have the right to believe that $2+2=5$ and live accordingly?

Lest you think I am musing some philosophies out-of-sync with current affairs, consider this example. It is a simple one I pulled out of the December 12 *Toronto Sun*. There are such examples in almost every paper but December 12 happened to be the day I was working on this speech. In an article entitled "Christmas past?", Rosemary Jones reports on the attempts in various Toronto schools to deal with their ethnic students and the celebration of Christmas. We have all heard of the many examples of changing the names of such "seasonal celebrations" to avoid any reference to Christmas. In fact, this is such a priority that the principal of Lambton Park Public School, in west-Toronto, said matter-of-factly "Religion doesn't enter into it...We treat Christmas as just another celebration." Interestingly, at Lambton-Park, kids and their parents are being invited to a "Family Craft Night."^v It really doesn't matter what the calender of 2000 years of tradition say. Marilyn Ferguson would celebrate this as "the rapid remaking of our institutions" and celebrate it as "the change of change." We don't want to believe that the celebration of December 25 has anything to do with religion and so we don't have to. Facts don't matter; they don't exist. You have to discover and listen to your inner self. $2+2=5$.

This is significant to our consideration of Christian citizenship. The nature of public discourse has changed. Whereas for 1500 years Christianity has had "special status" in western civilization, today that status exists

only in the history books and in a few outward traditions left over from the past. An inscription of Psalm 72:8 on the Peace Tower; the acknowledgement of the Supremacy of God in our constitution, and the swearing of oaths on the Bible are reminders of our past and roots, but bear little relevance to present political discussion.

So what does this mean for our current discussion? There are three possible responses for us. The first is to ignore these developments and try to continue to debate that faith in God is the source of ultimate truth, and not belief in the primacy of reason. (The inherent contradiction in the phrase "belief in reason" is one we will have to leave sit for the moment.) The second response is to acknowledge that our culture no longer operates within the framework of ultimate truth and that the Christian community should line up with the other minorities seeking "official recognition." In effect, this is accepting that in the public arena, 2+2 may equal three, four, or five, depending on what you believe, but we go on believing it equals four. The third response is to address the issue of our society and point to the necessity of an absolute truth and transcendent vision, not only for our individual lives but also for the life of a society.

Malcolm Muggeridge in his lecture series *The End of Christendom*, reminded his listeners that we should despair because although Christendom may well be over, Christ is not.

The world's way of responding to intimations of decay is to engage equally in idiot hopes and idiot despair. On the one hand, some new policy or discovery is confidently expected to put everything to rights: cold fusion, a new fuel, a new drug, detente, world peace. On the other hand, some disaster is as confidently predicted to be our undoing. Capitalism will break down. Oil will run out. Plutonium will lay us low. Atomic waste will kill us off. Overpopulation will suffocate us, or alternatively, a declining birth rate will put us at the mercy of our enemies.

In Christian terms, such hopes and fears are equally beside the point. As Christians, we know that here we have no continuing city, that crowns roll in the dust and every earthly kingdom must sometime flounder, whereas we acknowledge a King men did not crown and cannot dethrone, as we are citizens of a city of God which men did

not build and cannot destroy."^{vi}

There is an important consequence of this confusion which we must consider. For when there is no common values, no common language, communication becomes very difficult. Without a framework within which to understand and place a priority on public events, there is a disjointedness and confusion in public communications. Since we all need to shape our own views, since truth is totally private, since 2+2 equals whatever you want it to equal - we need to know in order to decide.

One of the features of a society without a moral framework is that we are being inundated with information but lack the perception to understand and organize that information. Dan Veldman refers to this at the beginning of each of his presentations when he outlines the difference between those who observe what is going on and those who perceive. It is difference between knowing "What?" and knowing "Why?"

An all-news radio station advertises itself with the slogan "Something is happening right now, and the sooner you know about it the better."^{vii} Is that so? Consider last Saturday's *Hamilton Spectator*. On the first three pages, the main stories involved the snowstorm which caused considerable chaos on Friday; the House of Commons which ended its 1992 session with frustration and sarcasm; Operation Somalia which was proceeding slower than expected, and an Orlando woman who was charged with child abuse after trying to infect her two-year old with AIDS by biting her. Without trying to minimize the impact of these events on individual lives, the question is "How does knowledge of these events help you understand the world?" Is the radio station right in saying that the sooner you know about these things, the better?

You see, there is a tension which arises in a society which accepts the premise that there is no ultimate truth. We all have a need to know, not simply to be informed and current, but to help us answer the questions of life. This elevates the media to an important position as it is through them that we learn. But how do they determine what we need to know? And how do we know that they are telling us what is, or what they think ought to be? How are we to believe that the important events of news take up exactly five minutes on a newscast every hour, fill exactly 28 pages of

news in the main section of a weekday *Globe and Mail*, and be summarized weekly in the 60 pages of *Macleans* magazine?

In our culture, we depend on the media to provide us with information. Consider the word – media. Information mediated by others. Something that comes to you through an intermediary. Each person in our society is seeking for meaning and is told that the source of meaning rests in what happens. Ultimate truth does not exist and so we depend on the instantaneous miracles of modern technology to show us what reporters think is important about Somalia, Ottawa, and Washington.

Carl Bernstein was the reporter for the Washington Post whose investigative journalism exposed Watergate and led to the fall of Richard Nixon some twenty years ago. Earlier this year, he wrote an essay describing the state of the media today. In part, he said:

For more than fifteen years we have been moving away from real journalism toward the creation of a sleazoid info-tainment culture in which the lines between Oprah and Phil and Geraldo and Diane and even Ted, between the *New York Post* and *Newsday*, are too often indistinguishable. In this new culture of journalistic titillation, we teach our readers and our viewers that the trivial is significant, that the lurid and the loopy are more important than real news...

We are in the process of creating, in sum, what deserves to be called the idiot culture. Not an idiot *sub*-culture, which every society has bubbling beneath the surface and which can provide harmless fun; but the culture itself. For the first time in our history the weird and the stupid and the coarse are becoming our cultural norm, even our cultural ideal.^{viii}

So here we are, in a post-Christian society, where everyone is on their own to figure out what 2+2 equals, with any answer acceptable as long as you don't hurt anyone else. The media feeds pre-digested and pre-chewed fast food to us. Even the Bernsteins, who more seriously and objectively attempt to communicate, face difficulties. Why? Because communication presupposes a common language. We can send a lot of radio signals out – a lot of noise – but unless there is a receiver set at the right frequency, all that is heard is static. Communication is not what is

said; it is what is heard. And that is what we are facing. Our society is busy telling people that there is no such thing as a right frequency, that no one is allowed to tell you what station things are at, and so we are fiddling with our dials and signals and producing a great deal of noise. One can hardly call this communication! When we refuse to say that there is a right answer to the question 2+2; when you allow any answer to stand with equal validity, what happens to the study of mathematics? It disappears. There is no common language, no sense of right and wrong, no rules - just chaos.

So the question arises, how have we come to this predicament?

PROPOSITION #2: Christians should view themselves as co-responsible, rather than the victims of, this transformation.

I don't think that you would dispute the suggestion that our community - and I don't want to suggest by any means that we are alone in this - view public policy and morès as something that happen **to** us rather than **by** us. I think it is fair to suggest that the church community often views public life as something which has a character and life of its own. We are innocent bystanders to the events of public affairs and in an increasing secular world, public life and decisions conspire against us.

As we consider the reasons our society has transformed from a Christian to a post-Christian society, it is necessary to consider some of the specific ways Christianity has shaped our society. Let me cite you just a few examples as they are formulated in a 1990 book entitled *The Political Meaning of Christianity* by Glenn Tinder.

Tinder notes how the doctrine of man created in the image of God leads to the political principle of the "exalted individual." No person may be casually sacrificed in the pursuit of majoritarian goals. We may not be indifferent to the destiny of other human beings anywhere on the earth. Tinder shows clearly how Christianity, and not enlightenment or socialist thought, is the clear source for these societal values.

Tinder also notes that the exalted individual is also a "fallen individual." Governments operate within a world of sin where perfection is not possible. "A sinful society is not like a malfunctioning machine, something to be checked and quickly repaired," says Tinder. "The political value of

the doctrine of original sin lies in its recognition that our evil tendencies are not in the nature of a problem that we can rationally comprehend and deliberately solve."^{ix}

I trust that it is not a point of debate with this audience that western civilization can trace many of its basic values to Christian principles. The point is that this has been lost and the question is "How has this happened?" Tinder deals with this and asks why in the midst of the decay our society has not totally disintegrated. His answer? It is

...because customs and habits formed during Christian ages keep people from professing and acting on such a maxim even though it would be logical for them to do so. If that is the case, our position is precarious, for good customs and habits need spiritual grounds, and if those are lacking, they will gradually, or perhaps suddenly in some crisis, crumble. To what extent are we now living on moral savings accumulated over many centuries but no longer being replenished? To what extent are these savings already depleted?^x

If Tinder is right, it is the failure in our society to make the clear link between the spiritual grounds for our practices and the practices themselves which has led to our transformation to a post-Christian society. And whose task was that? If it was not the task of the Christian community to keep these values at the forefront of society –to the extent that they shaped the attitudes of unbelievers as Eliot noted earlier - who then would we expect to raise the banner?

It is easy to moan about the awful trends of society but the challenge we face is "What have we done to remind society of her roots? How much truth is there to the charge that religion is a foxhole into which we retreat to avoid the missiles of modern culture?"

Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to suggest that Free Reformed Church members need to shoulder the blame for our transformation into a post-christian society. But we must ask ourselves what role we did play in keeping an awareness of the spiritual roots of our freedoms and culture in the forefront. I would suspect that some of these clear links and the efforts of the Puritans and Reformers would be surprises to our own

members, let alone to society at large.

Which leads us to Proposition #3.

PROPOSITION #3: FRC members need to maintain a conscious defence of our distinct heritage in order to remain active in this post-Christian society.

Let's review the argument to this point. Our culture is in the midst of a transformation from a Christian to a post-Christian society. The Christian community must consider itself co-responsible for not holding up to our society the clear link between our culture and its Christian roots. To put it another way, we have not been the salty influence we should have been to preserve society. In fact, we have left the salt in the saltshaker.

So what do we do with this? Well, we need to shake the salt in our society. As I noted in my preliminary comments, I do not observe a great deal of thought among FRCers how our Christian principles apply to the "non-moral" issues of public life. We all know about abortion and Sunday shopping, but what about economics, constitutional, or foreign affairs policies. I also believe that most of our people recognize this as a problem and are quite open to consideration of these matters from a biblical perspective but are uncertain about where to turn and on whom to depend to lead this discussion.

This confusion is quite understandable as there are an abundance of perspectives which call themselves Christian, many of which conflict with each other. From Jerry Falwell to Jesse Jackson, from Dan Quayle to Bill Clinton – all have quoted Scripture to support their views on issues. A recent book by James Skillen, entitled *The Scattered Voice*, provides a fair survey of these perspectives.

I will only focus on two groups which are directly relevant to FRC members living in Canada. I want to caution that identifying groups is by definition a dangerous endeavour. Each person has their own unique emphasis and perspective and to lump people into groups can be quite unfair. Grouping also tends to emphasize only those things one has in common, or points of difference, and can easily leave a false impression about other people. I am sensitive to that and want to emphasize that both of these perspectives are far more complex than I will describe. I

think we also need to emphasize the sincerity and conviction with which many of these leaders try to work out their faith in everyday life. I am only highlighting a few points where I believe we as FRC members need to be particularly aware of tendencies and concerns.

Theonomic Reconstructionists

The first group I will mention are Reconstructionists or theonomists. Theonomy might be described as the belief that "Old Testament laws still govern life today in exhaustive and minute detail and must be fully applied and enforced in our modern society."^{xi} "There will be no democracy, as we know it, but society will be a theocracy, completely governed in every detail by God's law and by religious obligations. The Bible is the only charter of rights and functions also as a constitution of the state."^{xii}

Reconstructionists have written many volumes explaining how this all works in practice. One of the features of these books is their scholarly tone and extensive quotations from authors whose names we recognize. Calvin, the Puritans, Cornelius VanTil – we usually identify with these as orthodox and reliable sources. Reconstructionists frequently quote from these authors and consequently, there is a tendency for FRC members to assume that their perspective is biblical because of our trust for their sources.

Let me cite just a few reasons why I reject the theonomist interpretation as the model for Christian political action. I readily acknowledge that when it comes to many of the issues, we share concerns and I admire their attempts to apply the Scriptures to every area of life. That having been said, there are some fundamental flaws which I will only mention at this time and why I believe this model is not the one Free Reformers should follow.

1. I do not believe that one can make the connection between Old Testament law and the New Testament church that the reconstructionists make. In article 25 of the Belgic confession, we confess that "the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ and that all shadows have been fulfilled." While there is some application for the New Testament church, I am not sure that holds for the New Testament state.

2. Reconstructionists depend on a particular post-millennial eschatology which is certainly debateable. Their expectation is that theocracy will be restored before the second coming of Christ.

3. Reconstructionists reject the doctrine of common grace. The careful reconstructionist will argue that Christian influence will grow as a result of a revival and spiritual transformation until almost everyone in society accepts the principles of God's law. While usually theologically careful not to cross into this heresy, I think the criticism can fairly be made that the tone of Reconstructionist writing is not one that emphasises the preaching of the word and the application of the Holy Spirit as the means by which God is pleased to call his people. Rather the focus is on the kingship of Christ which will be manifested in a theocratic society.

I think it is important that we recognize this growing phenomena and the literature which is increasingly available. It seems to provide many biblical answers to the questions of our time in "orthodox" language with which we identify, however, it contains fatal flaws which I believe need to be exposed.

Neo-Conservatism

The second category I would like to explicitly mention are the sophisticated neo-conservatives to use Skillen's term. It is into this category that I would place the leadership of many of the Christian organizations in our community which have their roots in post-World War II immigration. It is this influence which characterizes places like Redeemer College, the Institute for Christian Studies, and the organization I work for, the Christian Labour Association of Canada. Many of these leaders appeal to Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. Like the reconstructionists, this movement is disparate and varied and some of its leadership might not identify eagerly with others whom I would categorize in the same group. I will also emphasize that among both the Reconstructionists and the neo-conservatives, I do not want to imply that personal experimental religion is not important. Because in our circles we place a particular emphasis on experimental preaching and religion, we sometimes may leave the impression that we have a monopoly on this. That is certainly not the case! That being said, I think it is fair to characterise the movement as placing an emphasis on the cultural mandate and responsibilities of Christians.

To grossly oversimplify, this movement places a lot of emphasis on "the created order." Creation has a set of laws, not only in terms of nature, but also for language, aesthetics, economics, juridical matters and the like. God has created all of these laws, or norms. They are part of the created order. They may not have all been clearly evident or understood in the times of Genesis, but they were there and created by God. Adam may not have understood the laws of physics and aerodynamics, the laws of architecture, or the law of supply and demand in economics, but they are basic norms of creation which God has created.

A key aspect to this perspective is the fact that creation is a source of revelation. Proponents will frequently quote passages like Psalm 19 where it speaks of "the heavens declaring the glory of God" or point to the Belgic Confession where creation is cited as a source of revelation. We learn about God from creation.

Now sin has come into the world and man disobeys not only the written law of God, but also the created order, or normative law. Now normative law is an area where individuals must choose in everyday life. For example, an architect may draw a design which violates all of the laws of architecture. That would be a-normative – a violation of God's created order – and sin. On the other hand, if he obeys the law of architecture but does it for reasons of pride or other wrong motives, we know that too is sin. It is important to understand that as we work and discover new things, we are discovering creation and God's work. Man is a co-worker in discovering what God has placed in creation.

The work of Christ applies to both creation and redemption. Usually proponents of this view will quote Colossians 1:14 -20 where it says that Christ will "reconcile all things to himself...whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven." How does this happen? Through redemption and God's people living holy lives is one way. But also through the common grace. While the actions of the unbeliever do not have saving value, he is given by the grace of God the ability to obey, at least to a degree, the creation norms and even to discover and participate in creation.

It is in this context that the statement of Kuyper, "there is not a square inch of creation over which Christ has not said 'It is mine'" takes new meaning. Dooyeweerd took this concept and tried to develop a

comprehensive Christian philosophy which tried to develop the normative principles, or rules of creation. One of these rules is sphere sovereignty, which applied to public life, means that there are some things which belong there and other things which do not.

Much more can be said. But the question is, "How do we respond to such a philosophy?" It is clear that the comment I made about FRCers not having distinct "Christian" perspectives on matters of economics or foreign affairs does not apply to those who advocate neo-conservatism. Allow me, however, to make a few remarks about the distinction between our approach and this approach.

1. The emphasis on the creation order and the "cultural mandate" of Genesis 1:28 in practice can override the emphasis on redemption. We believe that our calling in the world takes place within the framework of Christ's redemptive work and we are called to walk in obedience, not first of all to discover or unfold creation, but rather to show gratitude to our Redeemer.

2. The emphasis on viewing creation as a source of revelation in practice can lessen the value of Scripture as ultimate revelation and final authority. While it is only the more extreme neo-conservatives who would place the "revelation of creation" over against the "revelation of scripture," I do not think one can separate some of the current debates regarding the literal translation of Genesis regarding creation from this particular perspective.

3. The focus on Christian involvement in other structures besides the church has led some to place more emphasis on the church as an organism rather than on the church as an institute. This ties directly to a de-emphasis of the missionary mandate of the church. This is not to say that the vertical relationship between man and God is ignored; it is to say that there seems to be a greater concern for being "culturally busy redeeming creation" than there is for proclaiming the gospel of redemption to the far corners of the earth and society. Again, this is not a question of either or, but rather a subjective comment about emphasis.

I have very crudely sketched in outline form some of the characteristics of this philosophy. I do not for a moment pretend to have been precise or thorough. I would recommend Rev. Pronk's thesis on Ten Hoor as an excellent (and to my knowledge, only) explanation of some of these

differences from a Free Reformed perspective.^{xiii} I will also warn that from first-hand experience, I can say that these characteristics manifest themselves to widely varying degrees between different leaders and spokespersons for this movement. It is easy to take the most radical statements of the most radical leaders and paint the whole movement with the same brush. That would be unfair. At the same time, however, I do believe there are differences between us, especially as they regard the task and makeup of the church and the primary calling of the Christian.

That being said, we are discussing this evening how we are to act in the public arena. In that sphere, I believe we can learn much and work together with those of this philosophy. While we may differ on some of the "whys" and "wherefores", when it comes to current issues there is a great deal that our community can learn in applying Christian principles to public affairs. It is too easy for us to retreat into our foxholes and moan about the poor state of society and point out where we think other Christians err. The challenge for us is to be faithful in applying our faith to every area of our life, also our life as citizens.

And that leads us to our fourth proposition.

PROPOSITION #4: We have the opportunity, and responsibility, to be 'salty' in this post-Christian society.

I have used the image of salt and the salt-shaker before and I want to return to it. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus uses the images of salt and light to illustrate Christian calling in the world. What are the characteristics of salt?

It has a preserving character. Does not someone who takes a stand for his faith resist the ungodly influences of those around him? Think of a peer group at school. Will not the presence of someone who openly confesses his Christianity silence some of the dirty jokes and profane language? So too, will a Christian presence in the public square.

As this happens, there is also opportunity to speak out more explicitly. Salt has zest, it has a flavour. Whether that is the opportunity of reminding society of the Christian roots of our practices, as we discussed earlier, or whether it is pointing to the laws of creation, instituted by the Creator – the opportunity is present to give flavour to the public discourse

of society.

Will this regenerate our society? No. We continue to have our calling to preach the gospel. It is through the word, applied by the spirit, that men will come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Yet, our walk and conversation, also in the public arena, can be a powerful witness. It provided Daniel the opportunity to speak in the courts of Nebuchadnezzar of his Lord.

We began by observing Scipio Africanus on the hillside, watching Carthage burn and seeing in the destruction of Carthage the future demise of the Roman empire. In a certain way, we too have stood on a hillside this evening, observing our crumbling culture. But let us remind ourselves of our title, "Citizens in a post-Christian society." We must return from the hillside into the city, for we are called to be citizens, not observers. Even though strangers and pilgrims in the earth, we do have certain responsibilities clearly placed on our shoulders.

We realize that Scipio was right. Rome was destroyed. No nation, no empire, no culture, no matter how mighty, is immortal. And as Rome fell, so too will western civilization. I cannot predict what will happen to our post-Christian society. But I do know that when a society is building around a relativism which says ultimate truth does not exist, it is like the man with his feet firmly planted in mid-air. He may think he is standing, but he is really floating.

G. K. Chesterton once said:

Men will more and more realize that there is no meaning in democracy if there is no meaning in anything; and that there is no meaning in anything if the universe has not a centre of significance and an authority that is the author of our rights.^{xiv}

We know that there is meaning and a center of significance to the earth. The Westminster confession tells us the chief purpose of man is "to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

As citizens, we have a responsibility to glorify our King, also in the way we exercise our earthly responsibilities. But we do so with the knowledge that our King is one whose kingdom is immortal and whose kingdom will

not fall. "For every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord." May we be given the grace to be faithful witnesses and obedient citizens, to the honour of God's name, also in this post-Christian society.

Endnotes

- i..Colson, Charles. *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*. (Ann Arbour: Servant Books, 1989), 15-16.
- ii..The more usual definitions of 'Christian' in an academic context are effectively summarized in Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch and George Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989 [1983]) 30-31. The three options identified are a.) in reference to all activities which have some connection with a Judeo-Christian heritage; b.) all actions by persons who are apparently Christian; and c.) all actions performed by persons who are apparently Christian and which are reasonably successfully at achieving Christian standards.
- iii..I am dependent on a quotation from Eliot in a translated article by A.C. Zijderveld, "Old and New Christians: Culture and Religion and the CDA" in *Christen Democratische Verkenningen* (September 1990) in an unpublished translation by Ed VanderKloet. The translators notes indicate that he did not have a copy of Eliot's original and so is retranslating into English Zijderveld's translation into Dutch.
- iv..Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (J.P. Tarcher, 1980) 29.
- v..Rosemary Jones, "Christmas past?" in *The Saturday Sun*, December 12, 1992, 34.
- vi..Quoted by Professor Ian Hunter, "From Amidst the Rubble" in *Canada's malaise: What to Do?* (Dundas: Dundas Valley Foundation, 1991) 12.
- vii..Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 3.
- viii..Carl Bernstein, "The Idiot Culture: Reflections of post-Watergate journalism.", *The New Republic* (June 8, 1992) 24-25.
- ix..I have taken these quotations from an article "Can we be good without God?", *The Atlantic Monthly*, (December 1989), 77. The book which elaborates the arguments more thoroughly is Glenn Tinder, *The Political Meaning of Christianity*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1990).
- x..Tinder, 81-82.
- xi..Clarence Stam. "Theonomy: Reconstructing the Shape of Society", *Reformed Perspective* (May 1989)22.
- xii..Ibid., 22.
- xiii..Rev. Cornelius Pronk. *F.M. TenHoor: Defender of Secession Principles against Abraham Kuyper's Doleantie views*,. A thesis submitted to the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary for the degree of Master of Theology, April, 1987.
- xiv..G.K. Chesterton quoted in Os Guinness, *The American Hour: A time of reckoning and the once and future of faith*, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1993) 411.**