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Defending Christian Freedom: Our Civic Responsibility (Part 1 of 3)

This article was originally a speech delivered at the Second Annual ECP Centre Conference in Burlington, Ontario on November 12, 2005.

1. Our present context

Freedom?

For centuries our society functioned within a more or less Christian framework that helped shape our values and goals. Now our culture is rapidly descending into the darkness of egoistic pleasure seeking and self-gratification with a growing disregard for the ethical norms rooted in biblical and traditional values. Indeed, what used to be called sin is now often exalted, admired, and virtually always tolerated. People on the whole don't seem to care. No matter how corrupt past Liberal governments got, they still enjoyed the confidence of surprisingly large parts of the population. The attitude seems to be: as long as the economy is okay, who cares about the rest. No matter how devastating it is for one's health and well-being, gay lifestyles are praised and promoted. No matter how obviously wrong it is to kill the unborn, the slaughter continues.

The only consistent norm is: my desire and my pleasure must be

satisfied. No one can tell me what to do. After all, we now live in a neutral society where everyone is free to do what they like. We are no longer restricted by our Christian past and its rules. Now we are free! Yes, people call this freedom, but what kind of freedom is this? It is a bondage to sin and evil that ultimately leads to death and death comes in many forms in our present world.

What used to be called sin is now often exalted, admired, and virtually always tolerated

Is this freedom? Also in a political sense, it certainly is not. Our Christian heritage has been exchanged for the religion of secular humanism. It is a religion that brooks no opposition and it is tyrannical and leads to bondage. All must bow to its ideals. The person of God is not to be mentioned in political discourse. It is not politically correct and divine norms are despised.

At the moment Canada is ruled by those who essentially champion

such secularism in the name of freedom and human rights. But the freedom is truly illusionary. It has been rightly said that "when a democracy does not recognize a transcendent moral standard, the only way to resolve the conflict within it is the exercise of force by one faction over another."¹ A recent blatant example of this use of force was Paul Martin's government not even allowing for a free vote of conscience on the moral issue of same-sex marriage. Because God is no longer recognized as the moral arbiter, immorality is being imposed on our land. This imposition is essentially tyranny – the opposite of freedom. For no government has the right or the authority to bind the conscience of its citizens with ultimate claims of what is just, right, or true independent of the standards of the living God of heaven and earth.

What we are witnessing is of course part of the gigantic clash between good and evil, the antithesis, the spiritual warfare between Christ and Satan. It was always there, but the gloves are starting to come off in Canada. Religion is being relegated to one's private life, but in public, toe the line and be tolerant and don't dare call sin a sin. That

could be a hate crime.² Indeed, along with the decline of religious freedom, there is a growing animosity against Christians that is sometimes openly fomented in the media.³

Where are the Christians?

But where *are* the Christians?⁴ Many still talk about a silent majority that is essentially Christian in outlook if not in name. But where are they? If we don't rise up to the challenge, who will do it? An old maxim puts it well: "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

Our Christian heritage has been exchanged for the religion of secular humanism

Now it is not unusual for Christians to be apathetic and stay on the sidelines, away from the fray in the world. It is remarkable that when a man like the nineteenth century Dutch Christian statesman Groen van Prinsterer complained that The Netherlands of his days was being abandoned to unbelief and revolution, then he also blamed the Christians. He suggested that Christians neglected their duty in society at large and said: "Though rightly apprehensive of the *philosophy of individualism*, let us be especially on guard against the individualism of our *hearts*." He continued by quoting Tocqueville who defined individualism as "a considered and peaceable sentiment which disposes every

citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of his family and friends, such that, after having thus created a small society for his private enjoyment, he is quite happy to abandon society at large to its own devices." He concluded with the comment: "The patriotic citizen dissolves into the devoted husband and father."⁵ In other words, as H. Ivan Runner put it, we abandon our political calling by assuming to an exaggerated degree our obligations as heads of our families.⁶

Surely a striking assessment and accusation! It is indeed easy for Christians to withdraw into the comfort zone of their family, church, school societies, and other obligations. After all, these *are* all every important! However, Groen's point is that if we spend so much time on them to the detriment of our duties to society at large, we fail to do an important part of our God-given mandate. Surely this is something to ponder. Indeed, more importantly Scripture teaches us, as we shall see, that we must be involved in the weal and woe of our country and we must be in the forefront of the fight for all that is pleasing to God also in the public life of our nation.

Furthermore, let us remember that the apparently unstoppable drift to the left that we have witnessed ever since the French Revolution is not inevitable. There is no inevitable historical necessity. History is not autonomous. God is in control as sovereign Lord. Christians need to vigorously testify to the goodness and wisdom of God's will for our nation over against the leftist agenda. Biblical principles need to

be articulated over against the foolishness of men. Ultimately, the only force that will break the power of secular liberalism is the Holy Spirit as He converts the hearts of men to see the truth.⁷

It is easy for Christians to withdraw into the comfort zone of their family, church, school societies, and other obligations

Since the Word of God is authoritative for us, let us go through some of the biblical evidence of why and how we should be actively involved in shaping the future of our country.

2. Our relationship to the government

Our duty to the governing authorities

Obey and pray

First, we should note that the civil authorities are established by God. When Jesus was on trial before Pilate He said to this Roman judge and ruler: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11). In other words, not Rome, but God in heaven actually put you in this position of power, Pilate. And so today it is ultimately not the people who put our politicians in power in Ottawa and Queen's Park. It is ultimately the sovereign God, the ruler of heaven and earth, who is the one who uses the means of democratic government to place

people in authority in the capitals of our land.

Second, because all authority is from God, we need to realize that God expects us to obey those in authority over us. We read in Romans 13:1-2 that

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

This is clear language. God has ordained authorities so that society can benefit from rule by law.

Therefore, Christians must be at the forefront of respecting the rule of law. To rebel against the lawful authorities is to rebel against God. We live in a time when authority and governmental office is often derided and ignored. As Christians, we must refuse to be identified with that mind set. Christians must be known and recognized as those who are in the forefront of honouring those set above us and respecting the authorities that rule this land.

At the same time, the Apostle Paul also tells us that the reason we must submit to the established authorities is because "he is God's servant to do you good" (Rom 13:4; also see 1 Pet 2:13-14). This truth is further explained in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 where the Apostle Paul urges "that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for. . . all those in authority, that we may

live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." In other words, the authorities have to make it possible that we have the freedom and liberty to live in all godliness and holiness. They owe that to God who ultimately put them in power. Government is not a law to itself and it should never pretend to be its own legislator. There is a higher authority to whom it owes allegiance. Therefore the government has the

Christians need to vigorously testify to the goodness and wisdom of God's will for our nation

duty to lead the way in championing good over against evil. It has the duty to identify evil for what it is and to call sin what it is, sin. Yes, government has the duty to steer a nation into righteousness. As the book of Proverbs puts it: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (cf. Prov 14:34). The God-given task or office of government is not to condone or even exalt sin but to contain its influence as much as possible so that good can flourish in the land and so that there is freedom for God's children to live holy lives.⁸ When that freedom is threatened, or our Christian walk of life becomes very difficult, we need to be vigilant. After all, we are part of this country and we become co-responsible for the troubles of our nation.

Interact

This element of co-responsibility is built into our democratic system and it is also a biblical principle. One could say that there was a democratic impulse in ancient Israelite government. Let me take you back for a moment into Old Testament times to illustrate this.

One of the most important offices in Old Testament government was the office of elder. They ruled and judged the people. The people were, however, involved in placing them in their high position. They had to pick the elders and they had to choose men who were wise, understanding, and of good repute (Deut 1:13; 16:18).

Yet, the responsibility of the people did not end here. The people also had to work to safeguard justice and fight against corruption of the courts. The entire nation was admonished in this respect. Even when Moses specifically admonished the judges to uphold justice, he spoke this warning in the hearing of all the people (Exod 23:6-8; 20:22). The people were not to tolerate any injustice (Deut 16:18-20).

An important way for the people to ensure that justice would be done was to be involved in the justice system. If conscientious Israelites had been involved in the judicial process, some of the gross abuses of justice would probably not have happened, for God set standards of justice (Exod 23:1-3; Deut 17:7). It is telling, for example, that Queen Jezebel apparently had little difficulty in getting co-operation for the perversion of

Church News

Accepted the call from the church at Ancaster, Ontario, to work as missionary for *Streetlight Ministries*:

Rev. P. Aasman
of Grand Valley, ON.

Declined the call to Winnipeg (Redeemer) MB:

Rev. R.A. Schouten
of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

New Mailing Address:

Attercliffe
Canadian Reformed Church
c/o UPS Store
220 Broad Street E., Unit 11
Dunnville, ON N1A 1G2

justice in the judicial murder of Naboth. False witnesses readily stepped forward and secured his execution (1 Kgs 21:9-13). As a result, judgment would come over the house of Ahab (1 Kgs 21:17-29). One also wonders whether the high priest Eli, who also served as civil leader of Israel, would have been so lax in disciplining his corrupt sons if the people of Israel had vigorously complained about his sons' sins and demanded that the Lord's offering not be treated with contempt (1 Sam 2:12-17). The best ally of wickedness is an apathetic citizenry. But such a citizenry gets its due. Also in the days of Eli, the entire nation of Israel endured the judgment of God. The implication is they were co-responsible.

Indeed, it should be noted that God had warned his people that if justice was not upheld, God would punish the entire community and fulfill his covenant curses (compare Lev 18:26-28; 26:3-45; Deut 28). This fact alone would have provided considerable motivation for the believing Israelite to be active in maintaining the integrity of the judicial process. After all, "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the wicked and the good" (Prov 15:3). Thus the Lord repeatedly reminded his people that the people as a whole had the responsibility to purge the evil from among them by using the means available (Deut 13:5, 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7).

Surely all of this highlights the underlying principle that it is also our duty as godly citizens of our country to be vigilant. It is easy enough to sit on the sidelines and say: "I'm too busy." But we need to

be involved and to be active where we can to safeguard justice and righteousness in our land, that is, justice and righteousness according to the norms of the great lawgiver, our God. The Almighty expects it from us! And moreover, does not our very own Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) start off with the preamble: "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law. . . ." The judges in the Supreme Court may ignore this, but we can take encouragement from this preamble.

Christians must be known and recognized as honouring and respecting the authorities that rule this land

For it is true that God is the Almighty One! He is the "only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15). To Him we always owe first allegiance.

¹ J. Tangelder, "Freedom's Christian Roots," *Reformed Perspective* 24:11 (September 2005), 25.

² Bill C-250 was approved by the Canadian House of Commons on September 17, 2003. It includes sexual orientation to the list of those protected in the hate propaganda sections of the criminal code. See http://www.religioustolerance.org/bib1_hate3.htm.

³ See, e.g., Kevin Libin's editorial, "Fear of the Faithful: Evangelicals are this century's scapegoat," *Western Standard*, October 17, 2005, 4

and the news items in <http://www.christianity.ca/news/weblog/2005/9.21.html>.

⁴ For declining numbers of Canadians believing religion is important to them, see Centre for Research and Information on Canada website.

http://www.cucweb.ca/index_en.html.

⁵ See Groen van Prinsterer's magnum opus, *Unbelief and Revolution* as translated in abridged form by Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station, ON: Wedge, 1989) Lecture XV, note 17 (the emphasis is in the original).

⁶ H. Evan Runner, *Scriptural Religion and the Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge, 1974), 98-99.

⁷ See further H. Evan Runner, *Scriptural Religion and Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge 1974) 99-100.

⁸ On the proper role of government, see, e.g., the essay by Charles Colson, "The State Under God," in Kenneth S. Kantzer, ed., *Applying the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 277-290.

⁹ The text can be found at http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/const/annex_e.html#l.

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Defending Christian Freedom: Our Civic Responsibility (Part 2 of 3)

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Obey God before men

The basic principle

It is obvious that if matters deteriorate to the extent that a choice must be made between obeying either God or the government, then God must be obeyed before man. This principle is clearly vocalized in the rhetorical question that Peter and John raised before the rulers and elders of the Jewish people: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:19).

When necessary, Christians have the duty to remind the government of these things. If the lawful authorities were nevertheless to ask what God would forbid, then God must be obeyed before men. This has happened more often in the history of God's people. Think of the following examples. The believing midwives did not listen to Pharaoh's decree that they kill the baby boys when they were born. They let them live. These women were as wise as a serpent, for when the Pharaoh asked why the

baby boys were not killed, they gave the excuse that the boys were born before they arrived (Exod 1:15-20). Another example: the high government official, Obadiah, did not obey the royal house of King Ahab. When Queen Jezebel was persecuting the prophets of the Lord, he hid one hundred of them

God wants our heart, mind, and soul, our total love and commitment

(1 Kgs 18:3-16). A final example: when everyone in Babylon had been commanded to worship no one but King Darius, Daniel still kept on praying three times a day to the true God and he did not attempt to hide that action from those who hated him (Dan 6:7-11). Like his fellow countrymen, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3), Daniel was prepared to pay the ultimate price for his obedience. He was thrown to the lions, but the Lord shut their mouths and so rescued Daniel (Dan 6:22).

Now all these examples are taken from situations which are far removed from our present

democratic context. Pharaoh and Darius were absolute monarchs and King Ahab and Queen Jezebel also clearly acted like they were. What they wanted happened, even if it meant corrupting justice and disregarding the rights of the people (cf. 1 Kgs 21). But notice, in all these examples, the believers simply did what they could. They disobeyed man in order to honour God and left the consequences to God.

If necessary, we must be prepared to do the same. When push comes to shove and when a clear choice must be made, then we disobey the human authorities in order to obey God. God always comes first.

Give to Caesar . . . and to God

Christians are often in a bit of a dilemma in how to respond to the demands that the state can impose on them. Our Saviour gave as guideline: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Matt 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25). How should we interpret that? Does this mean that life is divided into two parts: one part for Caesar and one part for Christ? Is freedom of religion honouring the government in public and doing what it says while, in the privacy of your home or church, exercising

your religious activities? Is that what the Lord envisages as freedom of religion? Let's take a closer look at this saying.

The Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus and so discredit Him before the people. So they asked, "'Teacher. . . we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Matt 22:16-17)

Now if Christ had answered "yes," He would have alienated the Pharisees, the zealots, and every devout freedom-loving Jew. They all hated paying the poll (head) tax to the Romans. But if Christ had said "no," that would have made Him liable to being charged with treason. And so Christ gave neither answer.

Instead He asked, "'Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought Him a denarius, and He asked them, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?'" (Matt 22:19-20) When Christ said, "'Whose portrait is this?'" He literally said, "'Whose image is this?'" It's Caesar's. His image is on the coin. The coin belongs to him and thus to him it should go. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's!"

Well, if the coin is Caesar's because his image is on it, what belongs to God? Or, in the context of this situation the question is: what bears God's image and so belongs to Him? Well, people bear God's image. After all, as the Jews knew full well, humans were created after the image of God and

they bear the likeness of the Most High (Gen 1:26-27). If a man or woman bears the image of God, then he or she ultimately belongs to God and should therefore render to God what He has coming! And God who created us after his image and likeness does demand our everything! He is not satisfied with a denarius or dollar bill; God wants our heart, mind, and soul, our total love and commitment. God must always come first. He made us and He has first rights to us. No government can ever supplant this right of the Creator.

Secularism has banished God from the public square and government is now virtually taking the place of God

So the point the Lord Jesus is making is this. Honour the government and pay taxes that are due, but in this all, honour God first of all for He made you after his own likeness and image. He owns you and it is to Him that our first loyalty must therefore always go. Indeed, to Him we must offer our very selves! (Rom 12:1-2)¹ The government can never legitimately go that far. Their demands must of necessity be much more limited, for they do not own us. But God does.

God is sovereign over all, but not the government. There is always a tendency for government to keep adding power to its already vast portfolio of authority and

control. Indeed, in our day, secularism has banished God from the public square and government is now virtually taking the place of God. After all, government is even in the business of legislating morality, audaciously passing laws that are diametrically opposed to what God has said in his Word. Tolerance is preached from the pulpits of parliament but it is only tolerance for what they wish to hear and bear.

This tendency of government to take for itself ever more power and authority we must resist. According to Scripture, God has given the government a relatively limited mandate which includes upholding God's norms. Other spheres in society such as the family, the world of business, the sciences, the arts, and last but not least the church, all have their own God-given rights and responsibilities and these should also be acknowledged and honoured.

However, when government banishes God from public life and debate, there is no outside arbiter of morals. Then indeed, morals will need to be imposed through sheer force and power. And so, in effect, government gives itself the place once reserved for God. This is not the legacy that the western world has inherited from Christianity.

True freedom is the freedom to observe the will of God and to live according to his Word. The law of God and obedience to it is true freedom. In Christ this can be done and He sets us free (cf., e.g., Ps 119:44-45; John 8:31-34). Sin enslaves and condemns to bondage.

3. The need to participate in the public square

The biblical rationale

We have seen a couple of basic biblical reasons why we need to participate in the public square. Like the Israelites of old, we too share responsibility for the maintenance of justice and righteousness in our land. Furthermore, if we are to give to God what belongs to Him, then we must give Him our everything in holy service in the fullness of life. After all, God claims to be and is sovereign over all areas of life, including the public square. As those well known words of Abraham Kuyper put it, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"²

What a powerful truth for us living in a culture of "no God and no master but ourselves. We want to do what we want to do." Over against that individualizing and self-serving principle, Christians confess that Christ is sovereign Lord. He rules everything and He must therefore be honoured. Indeed, all creation and power and rule is held together in Him and makes sense only in Him (Col 1:15-20). And so we need to serve God in our homes, churches, and Christian schools. God claims all of life for Himself.

We also need to serve Him in the public square, in the political arena, in the city halls and town halls, in the courts and elsewhere. There is not a millimetre that the Lord of lords does not claim for Himself. Christians are in the service of this great Lord to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given (Matt 28:18).

Practical necessity to act

Besides these biblical reasons, there are also some very practical reasons why we have to be involved in the public square and the political process. To begin with, the person who says "I don't really want to get involved" is both mistaken and naive. As citizens of this country we are already involved in the political process! We are already in the government computers. We do pay taxes and our tax dollars are used to fund the agenda of those currently in leadership. Every day we are affected by decisions made in Ottawa or our provincial legislature. Christians are no less prone to complain than other citizens of our land about the direction our country is going. But unless we are actively involved and at least informing our elected representatives of where we stand and why and get involved in the political process, we have no reason to lament the strong drift to the left.

There really is no room or excuse for us as Christians to be apathetic. If we are truly convinced that the Lord our God is the ultimate ruler of this world and also of Canada and that He in his sovereign ways has placed the present government in power, we will do everything possible to understand the issues of the day so that we can interact with parliamentarians and have our input in the current economic, social, and international issues. After all, government should be a minister of God for good.

There is much wisdom in Scripture and in many ways our country continues to be, often unknowingly, a beneficiary of that wisdom even today. One can think of issues such as good legal principles derived from English common law that still function,

limitations of government, protection of individual liberties, and a healthy work ethic. It can be argued that these are largely due to the biblical nurture that once undergirded much of western society. But it is this biblical wisdom that is so badly needed today for it exalts virtues such as honesty in high places, a strong family structure, the bedrock of society, a concern for the poor, and last but not least, the limitations of power inherent in good government. Government should not become all-encompassing and totalitarian, regulating every segment of human life. That is not its task. As those ultimately placed in power by God, the task of government is to represent God's will and justice and righteousness. Instead, as mentioned, the state today is claiming for itself the position of God, deciding what is right and wrong while consciously keeping God out of the discussion.

If we as those who believe in the God of heaven and earth don't get involved to seek betterment for our country, who will? The church as an institution has no business getting involved in politics. The church has her task cut out for her. She has to preach the gospel, the glad tidings of Jesus Christ. But members of the church, as citizens of this land, they should take the implications of the gospel into all of life, including the political. In a sense we, as the Christian part of the population, may have been silent or ineffective far too long.

¹This is an old interpretation. See Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 526, n. 207; David T. Ball, "What Jesus Really Meant by 'Render unto Caesar'," *Bible Review* 19:2 (April 2003) 14-17, 52.

²A. Kuyper, *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring* (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1880) 35-36.

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4. How must we do our duty?

Salt and light

I must begin with a warning. There is no quick fix for our country. The present moral crisis in all areas of life is not just a sudden phenomenon. For example, it took much patient and tenacious work over the long haul for the gay community to come where it has today. It has come slowly over time. It will take a long time to turn things around. All the important political, legal, educational, media, and cultural institutions of our land are firmly in the grip of the prevailing secular liberal spirit.

Where do we begin? In a sense we can feel powerless and marginalized in our own country.

We must begin with the basics, in our homes, neighbourhoods, towns, and cities, with a clearly articulated Christian walk and talk. The early church did not have it easy. They, much more than we, certainly were marginalized and excluded from the corridors of power, the political processes, and the educational institutions. But eventually their faith conquered the world! We are sliding into a new paganism. But our task is clear. Christ said: "You are the salt of the earth." Salt is a preservative, but it works slowly. It needs time to infiltrate the surrounding tissues. So we must be realistic. As the salt of the world our contribution to turning society around to a more biblical

orientation will go very slowly, with small increments – as long as we are faithful (cf. Matt 5:13).

At the same time, we must not be shy. We have something that the world needs. We need to project that. Christ said:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matt 5:14-15).

Even though we may not have ready access to the power brokers and influential judicial activists, it is clear that we need not be bashful or shy about the contribution we can make to our

society. But there are no quick fixes that Christians can initiate for the difficulties Canada faces.

Ultimately, the real power that will bring change is the power of the gospel (cf. Rom 1:16). It is the sword of the Spirit who alone can renew the hearts of men. And in the end that is what is needed (1 John 5:4; cf. Zec 4:6). And so the first order of the day is for us to live Christian lives and to do our tasks in society as those who confess Christ.

We need to study the issues, become well-informed, and seek to make our arguments clear and comprehensible

Society must see that Christians are not some weird extremists from the prehistoric past, but law-abiding and loving citizens who truly seek the good of their community and country. This can be demonstrated by becoming involved in local civic affairs and volunteer organizations. In this way the salt and light of the Christian hope can spread. We need to step beyond the comfort zones of our churches and Bible study groups and engage others outside our own intimate circles. People need to get to know us so that they realize we face the same issues and problems that our secular neighbour wrestles with: raising a family, balancing the budget, and trying to cope with the stresses of our fast-paced society. We need to bond with our neighbourhoods in a positive sense and show we are also conscientious citizens. We can mention to people that we pray for the government, realizing their

task is difficult and often thankless.

From low key neighbourhood and civic lifestyle witnessing, we need to move further into being involved in organizations that project a Christian understanding of the issues and into writing letters to the editor. We have to try to persuade. This means that we need to study the issues, become well-informed, and seek to make our arguments clear and comprehensible to those who do not see it our way. We must also be able to demonstrate why the biblical way is good for society. Issues such as abortion and marriage are fairly clear cut and Christians are united on what Scripture requires. However, with other issues the biblical way out of modern dilemmas may not be as obvious. Christians can differ on how to apply biblical principles to complex areas of modern life such economic or fiscal policy. But it is important that Christians make a contribution to the more difficult issues so that we are not simply known for what we are against but also positively make a contribution to other problem areas. Biblical wisdom has much that is positive to offer for our culture! Here Reformed specialists in different fields can make a big difference.

Furthermore, we should cooperate with others wherever and whenever we can do so with integrity to achieve attainable goals. In politics one must also consider what is attainable and possible.

As Christians, we should become more involved politically and also support or continue to support institutions in our country such as advocacy groups and think tanks which promote ideas consistent with biblical teaching.

One thing, however, needs to be stated clearly. No matter how meek we may live as Christians and seek to propagate our message in a peaceful way, once we start projecting our wishes, we can expect strong opposition. For at bottom the conflict is spiritual.

Handling opposition

Yes, we can expect resistance and strong opposition. Our credo as Christians is diametrically opposed to the prevailing philosophy of our day. The religion of our land is essentially secular liberalism. This is a religion, a fervently held belief system. In the view of secular liberalism, there are no absolute rights and wrongs. Everyone must be free to make their own moral choices.

Our struggle is not to make a Christian society and to force others to accept our world view

There are no overriding norms. Indeed, secular liberal politicians consider the mentioning of absolute norms of right and wrong such as are found in Scripture horrendous, for that questions their authority to impose their idea of what is right or wrong on the land. This moral imposition of what is right and wrong, independent of God or Scripture, amounts to immoral tyranny as recent legislation has illustrated. However, after years of aggressive secular liberalism in the Canadian chambers of legislative and judicial power, many people are not ready for the message that our country needs to return to the divine norms of right and wrong.

This reluctance is evident from the successful sleazy campaign waged against Christians during recent federal elections. Christians were pictured as scary and bad for the country and for human rights and many voters bought into this. We can therefore most probably expect more of the same, for the conflict is ultimately spiritual. Also in Scripture we see that wherever the gospel of the risen Christ went, conflict broke out and Christians were accused of being troublemakers. Think, for example, of how the civil peace was disrupted on account of the gospel in Thessalonica (Acts 17:6-9). The gospel and the Christian life in a secular or neo-pagan world brings a clash and a confrontation.

But the important thing is that we must simply carry on and carry on in such a way that we do not dishonour God and bring disgrace to Christianity. The Lord never promised us a bed of roses in testifying of his will. The Lord Jesus encountered hostility to his testimony and He said that it would be hostile to ours as well. "No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). As a matter of fact, in Revelation 11, the two witnesses, representing the faithful testimony of God's people, are eventually killed (Rev 11:1-8).¹

However, we still have all kinds of opportunities to serve our country by opposing the aggressive secularism of the day. We can oppose the evil of the day by lobbying the authorities, using the courts, and by educating fellow citizens on the issues at stake. But as Christians we do all this within the law. Christians are not rebels against lawful authority or anarchists. They respect the rule of law, and if necessary seek to undo

unjust law or to improve legislation through the legal channels.

The task before us

How concretely can we be effective? Besides the basics of living an exemplary Christian life and being involved in our communities, consider the following. Advocacy groups are often a very effective way to get the Christian point of view across. One could begin, for example, by joining the ECP Centre and urging others to sign up. The ECP Centre is a Christian advocacy organization that educates, motivates, and mobilizes Christian participation and leadership in the public square and that defends, initiates, or supports legal challenges (www.ecpcenter.org). So, that's just what is needed! Join this organization and get others to sign up.

Apathy will cost us dearly

Other advocacy organizations such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (www.evangelicalfellowship.ca), which does much work on parliament hill as well as in the courts in defending Christian freedoms, also deserve our support. Christian think tanks which seek to influence policy making and provide solutions consistent with biblical thinking, such as the Work Research Foundation (www.wrf.ca), are also important and likewise merit our support.

We should also not hesitate to get involved politically, be it through the Christian Heritage Party, Family Coalition Party, or a mainline party. If there is no biblical obstacle to working with or

through a party such as the Conservative, such can be considered. Christians can make a vital difference in mainline parties as well, as history has shown, since a positive Christian influence on policy can eventually be reflected in law.

Christians can make a difference! As Reformed confessors, we have, generally speaking, kept ourselves out of the public square and politics far too long. We need to get more involved. The example of Christians being a force to reckon with in the USA can be encouraging, although the Canadian context is different.

The second thing we need to keep in mind is that we be realistic. This is going to be a long and hard struggle. It is not for those looking for quick fixes and easy solutions. Even if we should gain political power tomorrow, it will not significantly change society. You cannot quickly change people's secular mind set. In today's secular and atheistic context, this means we have to commit ourselves and our resources for the long haul struggle and seek to regain the ground and institutions we have lost.

Thirdly, we also need to keep in mind that our struggle is not to make a Christian society and to force others to accept our world view. Rather, our desire is to have a society where church and state respect the limitations of their authority and competence and where both can do their God-given task. A society where there is freedom for Christian values and norms and where the gospel can be freely proclaimed. We also desire a society where the freedom of conscience which we claim for ourselves is there for others as

well. Even if a distinctively Christian government should ever be formed in Canada, it should never force Christianity on the nation. That is not the task of government. However, a Christian government will see the mandate and wisdom of applying the principles of the Ten Commandments to our society. These have nationwide applicability. Such principles include: acknowledgement and respect for God in public life; the importance of a weekly day of rest; giving full freedom to proclaim the gospel both within and outside of church; enhancing the dignity of work in all segments of society; guarding the place and authority of parents and recognizing the importance of the family unit; protecting human life, including the unborn; defending the institution of marriage; revisiting the issue of lotteries and the social grief it brings; encouraging respect for truth in speech and communication.²

Fourth, and this is somewhat related, we also need to remember that we will never be successful in the sense of politically getting everything we would like as Christians. Christ Himself said that the wheat and the weeds would grow up together to the day of Christ's return. Only then would perfection arrive (Matt 13:30). Ultimately, only the Holy Spirit working through the gospel can change the hearts and minds of our fellow secular citizens. But this does mean that we need to work wherever we can as Christians and seek to influence society and its institutions in a positive way.

And surely now, at this juncture of history, is the time to take a stand. The foundations have been shaken with the redefinition of marriage and Christians cannot

remain silent. Other issues like euthanasia will come up and indeed are already being discussed. As life issues and current problems are run through a secularizing mold, Christians and their beliefs and solutions will more and more be sidelined and marginalized unless we protest and raise our voice and work through the democratic and legal channels available to all citizens of our land.

Let us leave our comfort zones and fight for freedom

We need to get more and more involved. Apathy will cost us dearly. When Israel was apathetic in the days of Eli, who also let everything go, the country went to ruin. Principally it is no different today. We cannot say, "Let the church do it." It is not the church's responsibility. It is the responsibility of Christians working together. Let us leave our comfort zones and fight for freedom, freedom to be Christians in a country where the family unit is protected and marriage is promoted, where justice and integrity will be advanced, where there will be true freedom of religion, where justice and compassion will embrace the poor and vulnerable.

Let us fight for the freedom to live according to our Christian convictions in a land where biblical and traditional values are upheld by Parliament and thus by the courts, a land where we are full participants in the democratic processes and institutions of our great country. A land where the



Church News

Declined the call to the church at Taber, Alberta:

Candidate Hendrik Alkema

SERVICETIME CHANGE

The Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto has changed the time of its morning worship service from 10:00 a.m. to **9:30 a.m.** beginning September 3, 2006.

rights of Almighty God are not despised but honoured. A land where the Bible can be quoted without being charged with a hate crime. A land where the preamble to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms functions. As you know, this preamble states that *Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law.* May that preamble not just be an empty phrase but a conviction that translates into reality.

Part of our national anthem is a prayer. It is a cry to God for the true freedom of our land. "God keep our land glorious and free! O Canada, we stand on guard for thee." May all those who love God and Canada be used by the Almighty to make that prayer a reality.

¹ See the clear but brief exposition of Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 129-132. Similarly, Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 328-329.

² See on such issues, e.g., "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility" 6-12, by following the links at: www.nae.net. See also John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke, Hants, UK: Marshalls, 1984) 45-61.

