# A Tale of Two Cities:

## Understanding the Relationship between Christ and Culture

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CHARLES DICKENS has arguably the best-known opening lines of any novel in classical English literature:

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way –*

At one level the cities of which he speaks are London and Paris but as the story unfolds, and as even the opening lines show, there is a deeper meaning concerning two different realms of thought and life (wisdom/foolishness, belief/ despair, heaven/the other place). The idea of contrasting, co-existing cities is also the theme of Augustine of Hippo's fifth century Christian classic, *The City of God*, which deals with the way that the heavenly city of God relates to the earthly city of man. He addressed the question that I also want to address in this talk, concerning the way in which the church discerns and works with God in the world.

Augustine developed the language of the apostle Paul who argued that the things of this world are of little account compared with what is to come. We Christians live in this world 'but our citizenship is in heaven' (Phil.3:20) and, consequently, questions continually arise as to the way in which Christians are to fulfill their responsibilities in this world. Christians can come to very different positions on a wide range of social matters. At the present there is before us the question of the appropriateness of the state funding chaplaincy services. Should the church expect the state to fund specifically religious people within state schools? And do the expectations placed on chaplains diminish their role as Christians? The state also puts an incredibly large amount of its welfare funding through Christian welfare bodies. Is this appropriate and what does it do to Christian witness in that context?

Nor are Christians united on other contentious matters such as abortion and euthanasia and, even if they were sufficiently united to have a single point of view, to what extent should there be an expectation that these standards should be required by law? How does one identify precisely when Christian morality should be supported by law? For a long time Australian law followed Christian principle and made adultery the basis for divorce. This was only eliminated by the Family Law Act in 1975. In some Christian countries adultery was itself actually illegal. I spend part of each year in the USA and I understand that there are still quite a number of states in the USA where adultery is, still technically, illegal! The penalty varies from a $10 fine in Maryland to a $500 fine or imprisonment for one year in South Carolina and a life sentence in Michigan! Needless to say, despite their presence on the statute books, these are no longer applied. I doubt that many Christians in Australia would, today, seriously suggest that adultery should be a criminal offense. There is, naturally, a moral objection to it but also a recognition that the law is a very poor instrument for compelling people to be good.

Similar issues arise with respect to same-sex marriage. Are objections to it general in nature or specifically Christian? And if they are Christian what role does the church have in seeking to have them addressed? Attitudes to these specific issues are connected with one's overall view of the relationship between the church and wider society and it is this broader question that I want to address in this lecture.

What method shall I adopt for this? Well both Paul and Augustine used the visual imagery of 'cities' – of being resident in one city but

a citizen of another – to explain their approach and I want to follow them in using visual images that can express particular approaches. But in recognition of the fact that there are a number of different possible approaches I shall utilise no less than eight different images that express different ways of conceiving of the church's role in society.

1. *Aliens* in a foreign land
2. *Examples* of an alternative community
3. *Rulers* in Christendom
4. *Residents* of two cities
5. *Reformers* of society
6. *Workers* in all spheres of life
7. *Citizens* of a pluralist culture
8. *Friends* of the world

Although the terminology is original the various approaches are all well-established positions. The primary purpose of the typology is to emphasise the way in which particular views on specific issues, such as those noted above, largely depend upon the overall approach a person adopts. One is not always forced into choosing a single option; some of the approaches are compatible, although others are not. Some people advocate for one approach alone, convinced that it is the most appropriate, either in principle or within a specific context. My view is that there is at least some biblical support for all of them, but also that some are more theologically sustainable and helpful than others and, finally, that contextual factors play an important role in determining the most helpful approach at any particular time. In this lecture it will be enough if it can be shown that each of them has something that can contribute to our understanding of the way Christians ought to live in relation to society. The aim, then, is to formulate eight principles that contribute positively to this.

## 1. ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND

The oldest model of the relationship between church and society is that which sees Christians as *aliens* (in the sense of 'temporary resident') *in a foreign land*. This was the situation of the early church for the first few hundred years of its life. It came into

existence as an unwanted religious movement that was opposed by Jews, and as a new and illegal sect that was restricted and persecuted by Romans. Christians lived with social alienation, legal discrimination, financial oppression and physical persecution. They were, to use images that people of the first century middle east were used to, as vulnerable as aliens in a foreign country and as susceptible to abuse as people held captive by a foreign army.

In this situation the writer to the Hebrews used the example of Abraham to encourage Christians. Abraham, he reminded them, obeyed God's call and left his home to travel through foreign territory to go to a place that he did not know: 'by faith he made his home… like a stranger in a foreign land… he lived in tents… (but) was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God' [11:8]. And the point was that this is what Christians should do: despite the circumstances they should look forward to the heavenly city. As the apostle Paul reminded the Philippians, our true citizenship is not here, on earth, but 'our citizenship is in heaven' (3:20).

We may apply this to today in two ways. Firstly, there is the situation of the church in many parts of the world today where Christians exist as minority groups in societies that discriminate, oppress and persecute them. This is a topic that is worthy of its own lecture, and also an issue that should constantly be to the fore of our attention. Christians in Afghanistan, Algeria, Cambodia, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, Vietnam, Yemen and other countries are treated as unwanted aliens in a foreign country. We must remember the oppressed.

Secondly, within Australia there are those who *feel* they exist as aliens in a society that is now controlled, socially at least, by non-Christian attitudes. These Christians regret the loss of influence; they see established moral patterns being lost, public religious symbols and institutions under threat; faith being mocked, regarded as dangerous, and Christians alienated for holding to allegedly outmoded views on

social institutions such as family and marriage. They *regret* what they perceive to be a loss of Christian influence. Of course, this is not a perception shared by all Christians. There are those who certainly feel the tension of being a Christian in a pluralist society but they believe that it is very *appropriate* to feel this way. That this is the way it should be! Christians *should* be out of step with culture and there is something wrong if we are not. Christians should not expect the culture to be following Christian principles. Christ did not tell us that that is what would happen. No, the church was warned that there would be opposition, and, in a very fundamental sense it is not the task of Christians to make the culture Christian – there are, they argue, more important tasks than that!

The primary lesson to be learnt here is well expressed in a well known passage from the second century epistle of Diognetus. This is obviously an apologetic piece, intended to present Christianity in the best possible light, but it nonetheless illustrates the motivating vision. Diognetus notes that Christians are not distinguished from others by country or language or the customs which they observe, but by their method of life. 'They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners… They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.' He then notes all the injustices that Christians face: 'They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned… they are dishonoured… They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers… the world hates the Christians'. But his conclusion is not regret, annoyance or anger but rather he observes that 'God has assigned them this illustrious position, which it is unlawful for them to forsake'. This position at the bottom of the social order, unloved and even oppressed, is not something to be hated, it is an 'illustrious position' which has been assigned by God.

This is the first of the lessons that are to be leant from these eight images of the relationship of church

and society. It is not part of the Christian vocation to seek to climb the social ladder but to serve Christ and, as necessary, to share in his suffering.

## 2. EXAMPLES OF AN ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY

Closely connected with the first model of being aliens in a foreign land is the imagery of Christians being an *example of an alternative form of community*. The emphasis here is not on changing society through direct action upon or within it, but by demonstrating in its own life the nature of a godly society. As Stanley Haeurwas says, 'the primary social task of the church is to be itself'.[1] What the church is called to be is really no different to what the whole of society is called to be, but the problem is that society is *simply not able to live as God's community* because most people do not have faith. The first step then has to do with *changing people's hearts, rather than the world* and a most effective argument for this is for the church to demonstrate in its own life the implications of being Christian.

There are a number of variations of this approach (including evangelical anabaptism and post-liberal narrative theology) and there are different views on the degree of isolation from the community, but all interpretations of this view see the church as a culture, a community in itself. This requires *resisting* the notion that there needs to be a close connection between church and state. Better to be separated. The church will not only be able to be a better church but *society will benefit* by having a clear example of an alternative way of life. The point is to let the church be the church. The church's job is not to 'clean up society', nor to impose Christian laws on people who cannot live up to them because they do not have the Spirit, nor to take society's money in return for a muted, second-class ministry. No, let there be a separation, and *let the church be the church.*

## 3. RULERS IN CHRISTENDOM

The third vision for society involves the imagery of being *rulers in Christendom* and it refers to the situation where the church has

taken on an official, established role in society to the point where the distinction between the two is almost non-existent. This idea is associated with the emperor Constantine (d. 337 AD) who made Christianity the official religion of the empire. It was also greatly influenced by the work of Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–c.340 AD) who connected Hellenistic ideas of divine kingship with a Christian monotheism, which itself modelled a political autocracy with one supreme earthly emperor as the image or representative of God, chosen to protect the people. This created a symbiotic relationship with no sharp distinction between the individual and society or between the church and the state.

The term 'Christendom' is used extremely broadly. It encompasses the eastern version (Byzantinism) which extended, in various forms, for a thousand years, and occurs in the west in John Calvin, many Puritans and in what became known as Erastianism, named after Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), a Swiss theologian who argued that the sins of Christians should be punished by the state. There are those today who want to reinvent Christendom, that is, nations with overt, legal Christian control. In England there are proposals for the re-establishment of the Church of England as a state religion with real influence and in North America there is a theonomy movement and Christian Reconstructionism.

But when church and culture come together in this way the common good can be both helped and hindered. It certainly ought to provide opportunity for the values of the kingdom to permeate society and, despite the widespread (and justified) criticism of Christendom, there is evidence of this happening. For example, one of the most important biblical principles that has influenced the world in which we live is the Christian concept of the inestimable value of each person. That is, the person as body and soul, created in the image of God and destined for redemption and life in glory. This creates the idea of the sanctity of human life, a doctrine which has for nearly two thousand years permeated the cultural values western society has inherited. And although it may be taken for granted in many quarters,

it is a doctrine which has the most profound implications for the way we live and treat one another, especially the weak and defenceless, whether a new-born baby, disabled or dying. Without this doctrine the world would be unrecognisable. It is not the case that a society or culture will naturally, or always treat human life with reverence or that each and every culture will protect the weak. It is by no means even certain that a culture which is profoundly influenced by Christian thought will in fact do that. But a culture that lacks that influence will be greatly diminished. The historian W.E.H. Lecky examined the influence the Christian doctrine of the person had on the way the western world treated people and said, 'it was one of the most important services of Christianity... [it] asserted the sinfulness of all destruction of human life as a matter of amusement, or of simple convenience, and thereby formed a new standard higher than any which then existed in the world... it was produced by the Christian doctrine of the inestimable value of each immortal soul'.[2]

It was this which ended gladiatorial battles, the exposure of unwanted infants and slavery. What had been taken for granted as a normal part of civilised life in a totalitarian empire was completely undercut by the Christian insistence on the value of every human being. It was the Christian doctrine of the person which led to the care of the dying in hospices. This was an innovation and, perhaps not surprisingly, those who were loved and cared for sometimes survived their illness. This lead to the development of hospitals where the aim is now to help people be healed rather than simply loved in their dying.

The belief that everyone was valuable also led to a stress on education. Over time the rightness of all this was simply taken for granted to the point that it all seems self-evident and the idea that Christian faith is behind it seems to some to be a little boastful but the reality is that it was this new, Christian, understanding of God and the world that was influential for nearly a thousand years and 'shaped the barbarian tribes of the western extension of Asia into a cultural entity that we call 'Europe' – it was this way of thinking that shaped

public discourse.'[3]

Support for this claim comes from an unlikely place. Peter Singer agrees with Lecky that it has been Christianity that brought 'the distinctively Christian idea of the sanctity of all human life' and has protected new born babies and others from untimely death in Western culture but, significantly, he does so as part of his own argument in favor of active euthanasia and optional infanticide (of any child up to the age of about 6 or 8 weeks). Singer argues 'If these conclusions seem too shocking to take seriously, it may be worth remembering that our present absolute protection of the lives of infants is a distinctively Christian attitude rather than a universal ethical value'.[4] The doctrine of the sanctity of human life is a product of Christianity and therefore, argues Singer, can be disposed of. The contribution that Christian thought made to the world cannot be taken for granted and it may need to be reasserted for the sake of the common good.

The lesson to be learnt here then, is the possibility of the promulgation of distinctively Christian principles throughout society as a whole. This stands in contrast, but not necessarily in contradiction, to the view that the focus ought to fall upon the life of the church. However, as noted above, there are frequently noted problems associated with the idea of Christendom. When political power falls into the hands of the church then the church finds itself in a strange and unusual position. Our Lord's commands to love one another and to take the gospel to the world do not include the instruction to make sure that Christians are in control and have political power. Exercising democratic influence is a responsibility of citizenship. But power can corrupt. True faith is found in faithfulness rather than political influence.

Jeremy Taylor; author of the 17th century spiritual classics, *Holy Living*, and *Holy Dying*, ministered during the time of the English Civil War when both state and church suffered greatly and were terribly tested as to what their roles were. He saw the church adopt tactics involving the use of wealth, great power and military force: 'When religion puts on armour' he said, 'then the gospel is lost... a lack of worldly power is not a mark of God's displeasure. Indeed, if the brethren can show the marks of persecution, then they need not be troubled... the marks of the Lord Jesus and the character of a Christian and good religion are prayers, worship and life without power... The things of this world are good to be used when they may be had... but they are not of the Constitution of the Church'.

## 4. RESIDENTS OF TWO CITIES

The alliance that the church made with the Roman empire initially appeared to be a great blessing because it brought to an end the persecution of the church, but when, a century later, the barbarians were at the gates of Rome then a nominally Christian empire was, morally and militarily, in imminent danger of collapse. Consequently, Augustine found in necessary to write to Christians wondering whether this was a punishment for turning away from pagan gods to Christianity. In *The City of God* he wrote about the way that Christians are residents of two cities and, he argued, they should be concerned with spiritual matters rather than earthly politics. He therefore offers little in the way of advice about involvement in political life but he does establish some fundamental principles: that God cannot be ignored in society; that a clear distinction between the spiritual and the temporal is essential and that they can neither be merged nor completely separated. There is, for example, the peace that this world enjoys as well as the true peace of God. Christians must recognise the significance of both, while, naturally, seeing God's peace as more fundamental.

> Even this people has a peace of its own which is not to be lightly esteemed, though, indeed, it shall not in the end enjoy it, because it makes no good use of it before the end. But it is our interest that it enjoy this peace meanwhile in this life; for as long as the two cities are commingled, we also enjoy the peace of Babylon. For from Babylon the people of God is so freed that it meanwhile sojourns in its company. And therefore the apostle also admonished the Church to pray for kings and those in authority, assigning as the reason, 'that we may live a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and love'. And the prophet Jeremiah, when predicting the captivity that was to befall the ancient people of God, and giving them the divine command to go obediently to Babylonia, and thus serve their God, counselled them also to pray for Babylonia, saying, 'In the peace thereof shall you have peace,' Jeremiah 29:7 – the temporal peace which the good and the wicked together enjoy.[5]

Some use the work of Augustine to argue for the need for a secular realm within society where religious views are not automatically preferred, while others argue that although Augustine does not want a theocracy, nor can he envisage a place without God and that it would be anachronistic to turn Augustine into a modern liberal arguing for a modern secular society. Nonetheless, even on this view there are certainly elements of his thinking that can be used in a theological defence of a secular, pluralist state.

## 5. REFORMERS OF SOCIETY

The Reformation brought with it elements of a new form of relationship between church and society with Christians being *reformers of the world*. There were elements of the Reformation which tended towards a continuation of theocratic social control (including using scripture to provide detailed basis for laws, establishing official churches and supporting Christian principles by military means) but there were other aspects of Reformation principles (including the role of individual conscience and the concept of Christian freedom) which led to an understanding of a more dynamic relationship between church and society, one neither as fixed as Christendom nor as divided as the two kingdoms. It argues that God's will is for all, but it is combined with a recognition that many aspects of Christian life need to be taken voluntarily rather than by legislation or force. But it may well disrupt the status quo. As Catherine Booth (1829-1890), co-founder of the Salvation Army observed 'there is no improving the future without

disturbing the present'. It is the church, rather than the state that is to bring about change in the world through example, persuasion and active involvement. This is a strong, biblical, effective approach to the transformation of society. It relies on demonstrating the practical value of biblical principles. This is the lesson from this model: the importance of biblical principles being lived out and applied in society.

One of the greatest challenges for pastors today is to take and apply theological principles beyond the four walls of the church. Often it is assumed that important themes like baptism, grace, covenant, freedom, forgiveness, love and worship only relate to what we do within the life of the church. At least that is what one might assume from many sermons. And yet, if we consider it properly, the principles which control the practice of worship, the use of gifts, the life of the community, and even the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper have profound implications for the life of the *world*.

Baptism, for example, is rarely understood as having broad public implications or a radical social agenda. It is usually understood as a *personal* commitment of faith, the sign of *spiritual* union with Christ and the point of entry into the life of the *church*. But when the apostle Paul gave his teaching on the meaning of baptism for the Galatians, which he does in chapter 3, he did not just discuss these personal, spiritual implications. In verse 26 he talks about how the Galatians were children of God through faith, and, as such (v.27) they were baptised into Christ, and clothed themselves with Christ and therefore the implications of this are (in v.28) that 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'. In this he was addressing three pairs of relationships which 'cover in embryonic fashion all the essential relationships of humanity, and so need to be seen as having racial, cultural and sexual implications.'

He was addressing the profound social implications of three fundamental sets of human relationships which extend beyond the limits of the church. Galatians 3:28 has been referred to as 'the Magna Carta of Humanity', a fundamental statement of equality before God, and a kind of constitutional statement which sets a foundation for the way life is to be lived. Christ came to redeem the whole world, not merely individuals from within it. He came to inaugurate a new kingdom and to transform relationships as well as enter into union with each believer. As long as we continue to understand salvation individualistically then people will have a deep suspicion of what should be an equally essential social dimension to God's salvation of the world. The fact is that what begins with the mystical ends with the political.

In the Roman empire of the first century slavery was not thought of as immoral and it is reckoned that a majority of people were actually slaves. Paul's claim that in Christ there is neither slave nor free was, therefore a radical statement which challenged prevailing moral attitudes, although it was, no doubt, popular among slaves! It was a revolutionary step to suggest that the lowest of the low in social terms could become a son or daughter of God! There were profound political and social dimensions to what he said.

Paul also spoke about there being 'neither Jew nor Gentile' and consequently any distinction between them became irrelevant in matters relating to salvation; any actual separation of Jew and Gentile in the church had to end. Christian Jews could no longer regard themselves as superior in any way or require Gentiles to embrace Jewish law. The implications of this began within the life of the church but they did not stop there –as we see in Acts 6 there was to be no discrimination in charity given to Jewish and Greek widows. And believers could not remove discrimination and bias in terms of ministry within the church and then walk out and continue either the kind of political oppression that Gentile Romans exercised over the Jews or the religious disdain that Jews had for Gentiles! For Christian believers that was impossible.

What are the implications of this for today? What divisions would Paul address today?We have our identity as Australian or New Zealander or whatever, as well as ethnic and racial heritages – and often we are proud of them. But if these national or geographic distinctions mean that we treat people morally differently, and if they encourage us to feel and behave less responsibly towards people in other places than we do towards those in our own then something has gone very wrong and we need to listen to Paul, James and the other apostles. Should moral distinctions be made on the basis of geographic boundaries? Of course not, but the truth is that we do treat people morally differently according to geography and nationality. This occurs whenever there is an acceptance of poverty, sickness or suffering in other countries which would not be accepted in our own.

This moral dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' came home to me very sharply some years ago when I became aware that the clearly stated fundamental Australian government aid and development policy objective was (as stated at that time) that 'Australian overseas aid is given in order to advance Australia's national interests'! And this was the headline declaration of the whole program. I suppose I had naïvely assumed that the primary purpose of overseas aid was to relieve poverty and deal with injustice! Well, it was – in part. But the framers of this policy had, with surprising honesty, detailed what many governments in fact do – give aid on the basis of self-interest. This principle had practical ramifications that conflicted with other, very genuine intentions to do good. A program conflicted between help for the poorest and supporting Australian interests had the potential for prioritising aid to counties strategically useful to Australia, and it could also mean preventing companies in recipient countries from implementing aid programs in order to give preference to Australian suppliers who could profit from it. It also diverted money into pseudo-aid programs primarily aimed at preventing terrorists using other countries to attack Australia (itself a noble cause, except that it took money from the budget set aside for aiding the poorest people in other countries).

In 1970 most developed countries agreed to move towards putting 0.7% of Gross Domestic Product towards development aid. In over 40 years only a handful countries have achieved that. Australia currently commits 0.34%. A moral dualism exists when we treat

people in other countries differently than people in our own country and we accept situations overseas that we would not tolerate here. Note that my main point is not to debate overseas development aid but to ask whether our national borders have become moral boundaries, and whether biblical principles have anything to do with removing them.

## 6. WORKERS IN ALL SPHERES OF LIFE

The model is represented by Dutch journalist, theologian, politician and Prime Minister, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) who wrote various works on politics and faith and developed the notion of 'sphere sovereignty'. Kuyper famously said, 'No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and 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!"' Christians are to be *workers in all spheres of life.*

There are at least two aspects of Kuyper's view that have relevance for us today. The first is that I think that many people today are feeling the frustration of an extremely hierarchical political structure. Decisions are made at the highest levels: debate within a party is stifled by cabinet solidarity, party-room rules, and factional decisions. As Barry Jones, Malcolm Fraser and Lindsay Tanner have all said in recent times, the political environment at the moment works to stifle real thinking and debate.

I have, of late, been writing to politicians about one particular matter concerning the way that the law now treats certain migrants. Very briefly, the issue relates to people, like me, who came to Australia as child migrants 30 or 40 years ago and who have lived here ever since. But, unlike me, some of these people have fallen foul of the law, been sent to jail and then on finishing their sentences they have been deported from Australia to countries where they have not lived since, for example, they were four years old and where they may not speak the language! All this despite having, in the intervening years, grown up perceiving themselves to be Australian, having the right

to vote, an obligation to pay taxes, being subject to conscription in order to fight and possibly die for Australia, and having wives and Australian-born children. Now, knowing that all this is perfectly *legal,* my communications to to local members of different parties and the federal minister responsible have focused upon asking them whether they think that this is a *moral* action. Let me tell you, after having numerous communications with two local members and the minister involved, that getting an answer to that question is exceptionally difficult. Indeed, getting any answer is difficult. The closest I have come so far is, 'I respect the minister's decision' (which *could* mean 'I think he's probably wrong but I can't publicly criticise him'. I am reminded of the words of W.S. Gilbert in the musical *HMS Pinafore* in which Sir Joseph Porter explains how someone (in his case so obviously incompetent) could become Minister for the Navy.

> I grew so rich that I was sent
> By a pocket borough into Parliament
> I always voted at my party's call
> And I never thought of thinking for myself at all
> I thought so little, they rewarded me
> By making me the Ruler of the Queen's Navy

I do not wish to be overly cynical, and I am certainly not equating any members of parliament with Sir Joseph (I actually do have respect for members of parliament) but I believe that Gilbert does point towards the way our *systems* can prevent independent thought. In contrast, what is good about Kuyper's view is the way that he avoids any vertical or hierarchical view of the structure of society in which government dominates. He stresses the need for a more horizontal concept which reduces the overall role of the state and enhances the role of people in the various spheres of life (arts, education, trade, business etc) to determine their own structures and controls according their particular needs.

A second valuable aspect of Kuyper's approach is the way that he argues for for Christian

involvement in *every sphere* of life. It has a distinctive approach to the way society should operate and links Christian with non-Christians in the pursuit of the common good on the basis of principles of life that are built into society. The contemporary church does not, by and large, do a good job of empowering people in their Monday to Saturday roles. The church today needs a theology of everyday life. The gap between Sunday and Monday has to be addressed. Many Christians feel that their work lives are marginalised from their church life when, in fact, going into the workplace ought to be a calling and an act of mission. Our work is a vocation, a calling from God in which we ought to commend God to the world through our integrity, industry, honesty and quality of work. The workplace is where many Christians spend one third of their waking hours. What does it mean for their understanding of faith if work concerns are not a part of worship, a topic of reflection from the pulpit, a focus of attention in study groups or a subject of prayer or a part of pastoral care? Why do we commission Sunday school teachers, pastors and youth leaders but not builders, plumbers, businessmen and state school teachers? Do only the former group have a commission? Are only some Christians called to serve God?

Yes, the principle that we might derive from Kuyper is the positive value of seeing Christians as workers in every sphere of life, a view that stresses the value of every area and of the contribution of every person.

## 7. CITIZENS OF A SECULAR CULTURE

The next approach may be referred to as 'new Christendom'. It is a modified form of the Christendom approach, but one that recognises the problems of Christian rule. Nonetheless, it does not want society to forget the contribution that Christianity makes to society, not merely in regard to ethical principles that will lead to the common good but particularly in regard to the principles that underpin the kind of free, secular, pluralist society that exists in the west. It is a mistake to think (as according to a common but mistaken view of secularism) that a free, secular, society in which all people are

respected and all points of view are taken into consideration emerges by eliminating religion from the public arena. This is the opposite of the truth. Historically, it is demonstrable that one of the greatest influences on this form of society, a secular one, is Christian theology. It has been Christian principles that have contributed in a major way towards the framework for tolerance and the notion of a 'secular' democracy where all views are permitted.

The problem is that so many people misunderstand what it means to be a secular society. So many assume that it means that the public arena is to be kept clear of any religious matter. But 'secular' does not mean 'no religion', it simply means that no one religion or worldview (including atheism) is automatically preferenced. All can have their say. It is necessary to challenge the hard, prejudiced secularism that wants the complete removal of faith from the public arena, and to reaffirm the legitimacy of a genuine secularity that allows faith to engage non-faith and other faiths on shared ground without seeking to dominate it. It is essential that a civil society be able to seek consensus and to identify differences between world-views.

This freedom that a secular, pluralist society offers is grounded in the gospel. If there are any 'human rights' in the world at all there is none greater than the right to be able hear the gospel and to be able to respond to it and receive the salvation which God offers. This universal right to the gospel for all people is really the fundamental right to liberty for all people. It is the foundation for all religious, philosophical and political liberties because the gospel of grace implies a liberty to accept or reject the truth and, by implication, the right to reject it and choose to follow another 'gospel' or another system of belief or philosophy. The 'right' to the gospel is connected to the right to believe something else. And in this regard the most influential force in the development of free, western society is the New Testament. Its availability in the Reformation period, at the time that modern society was developing, was critical. Although the mainline Reformers themselves did not practise much toleration towards those with different beliefs, the teaching of the New Testament gradually gained influence, especially through the work of Anabaptists, Puritans and Baptists, who all claim a significant role in the development of toleration (though it would be anachronistic to assume that they all embraced a modern form of generosity). As historian A.G Dickens argues, the real hero in the development of religious toleration is no individual or movement but the New Testament itself. At a time when the scriptures were more widely available it must have occurred to many 'that Christ and his Apostles nowhere envisaged or advocated the winning of human hearts through juridical persecution or physical duress.'[6]

This view argues that it must be recognised that the Christian faith has formed contemporary western society and that just as it is foolish to climb up a ladder onto a roof and then to kick away the ladder and pretend you got up there without one, so it is foolish to ignore the origin of the principles that have formed our society today. This is a lesson that the imagery of 'citizens in a secular culture' offers to us.

## 8. FRIENDS OF THE WORLD

This is an image that draws on two important sources. One is the classic description of society and the common good that is found in Graeco-Roman philosophy where the public dimension of friendship with its focus upon self-knowledge and moral transformation was a major theme. For Cicero the whole of society is dependent upon friendship ('if the mutual love of friends were to be removed from the world, there is no single house, no single state that would go on existing').[7] Plutarch saw friendship as ethically and politically vital to society,[8] and Aristotle devoted two out of ten books in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to friendship because it was the relationship on which democratic society depended. He argues that the exercise of justice is dependent upon pre-existing social relationships like friendship. He argued that 'friendship seems to hold states together, and lawgivers care more for it than for justice'.[9] His writing has been foundational for Western society and yet one of the main points in his classic description of virtue and the common good is underplayed today.

The second major source, of course, is scripture which encourages us to be friends with the world. I have deliberately chosen to express it as friends 'of the world' in order to challenge the more common notion that Christians are perhaps to keep away from 'the world'. Worldliness, or the wrong sort of focus upon the world is, indeed, inappropriate but we need to recall that if there was one significant name by which the Lord Jesus was known by the people to whom he primarily ministered it was that he was 'the friend of sinners', and the incontrovertible fact is that if we are friends with Jesus then we must be friends with his friends! Friendship, by its very nature, coincides happily with other roles. It is not everything, but it is an attitude that should permeate everything we do.

Jesus was widely known for his association with those who were socially outcast. Indeed, the teachers of the law could not comprehend this and demanded to know of his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners'? (Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30; 15:2). It was considered such unusual behavior for a man of God that he probably became more well-known as 'the friend of sinners and tax collectors' (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34) than as a prophet or a teacher. Jesus did not merely treat the sinners, the unclean and the outcast as objects of mercy and compassion; he treated them as human beings, as real people and even as friends, and in the eyes of his enemies this was the worst sin of all! Ultimately, Jesus was not condemned so much for being an unorthodox teacher or social activist as for being a friend to sinners. It was this that they found most offensive. Perhaps it would have been easier for the scribes and Pharisees to understand his manner of dealing with sinners if he had related to them, to use an anachronistic term, in a purely 'professional capacity'.

The Pharisees also came into contact with poor and outcast people and would sometimes have related to them with charity and kindness, for they were teachers and leaders who knew what the law said and they sought zealously to obey it.

They were religiously committed people and it is wrong to assume that they never engaged in any kind or charitable deeds. Indeed, they are not condemned by Jesus for a complete absence of such actions or because they were the worst of all people, but because they considered themselves among the best and relied on their actions to save them. Although Pharisees could abuse the law, the real problem that led to their condemnation by Jesus was not that they were more sinful than anyone else, but their refusal to understand the nature of grace. The real problem for them – and also potentially for us – was not sin, but self-righteousness and the failure to understand grace. They could have understood a ministry that offered the services of education, liturgy, counsel or charity, but they could not understand the grace of friendship.

There are other examples of the way that friendship changes social relationships in a way that the law cannot. The apostle Paul has been criticised by some for apparently conforming to the acceptance of slavery which existed in his day. And it is true that he called for no change to the law which controlled it. He did not, for instance, when he wrote to Philemon, a believer in Colossae, about one of his slaves, Onesimus, who had apparently run away, demand that Philemon release Onesimus.

All he did was make reference to his own friendship with Philemon and then indicate that Onesimus, as a new believer, was also a friend and therefore that Philemon ought to consider the implications of their friendship in Christ for they way that they treat each other. This friendship in Christ over-rode all other roles and relationships and called for equality rather than slavery. In short, friendship is an important expression of Christian love for the world. At the very least, irrespective of what other model is adopted, we ought to be the kind of radical friend that Jesus was.

## THE VALUE OF THE VARIOUS APPROACHES

At this point we are coming close to the end of our survey and it is perhaps time to makes general observations about the lessons that there are to be learned. One of the obvious conditions of our present world is continuous, ongoing change, and it is unlikely that there will be any change to that in the near future. Consequently, there are many, many social, cultural, ethical and political issues that Christians need to engage with, and one's ability to make good decisions will be enhanced by an understanding that goes beyond that of individual issues and recognises the underlying philosophical and theological issues involved in the engagement of church and culture.

Indeed, many disagreements even among Christians about the best way to deal with specific issues will be helped by an awareness of the various frameworks that people utilise. Someone who believes that the best way of expressing discipleship is by the church being somewhat separated from society and living as an example of an alternative community needs to understand the perspective of someone who believes that the church needs a higher level of integration with society that is aimed at actually reforming it. Without that mutual understanding one person's engagement is seen as compromise while the other's separation is seen as capitulation.

Understanding and having a consistent approach to engagement also makes it possible to deal more effectively with those challenges that come from different worldviews, including the hard secularist opposition to religious involvement in social issues and the alternative religious perspectives that challenge the cultural implications of the gospel.

A greater understanding of these various approaches will also help Christians deal appropriately with what is sometimes perceived as a loss of influence and guide an appropriate response, which may mean not being worried about it!

Some of these positions are closely related and compatible; others are less so but there is something to learn from each of them. It is good to see the way the biblical principles relate to them and it is important to understand that they need to be applied contextually. That is, there is no avoiding the hard work of considering what is appropriate for the conditions in our own culture today. The answer of another era simply may not be what is needed now. We would do well to remember all eight of these images:

1. *Aliens* in a foreign land – remembering our 'illustrious position'
2. *Examples* of an alternative community – the church as a model community
3. *Rulers* in Christendom – with Christian values permeating society
4. *Residents* of two cities – keeping the distinction between church and culture
5. *Reformers* of society – allowing Scripture to speak to the world
6. *Workers* in all spheres of life – the value of every sphere and every person
7. *Citizens* of a pluralist culture – recognising Christian underpinnings to society
8. *Friends* of the world – radical friendship that transforms lives

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## Endnotes:

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3. Lesslie Newbigin, 'The Trinity as Public Truth' in K. Vanhoozer, (ed), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1997, 3.
4. For these quotes see, respectively, Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed., Jonathan Cape, London:, 1990, 7; and Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 172.
5. Augustine, 'The City of God ', Translated by Marcus Dods, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, Edited by Philip Schaff, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, NY, 1887, Book 19, chapter 26.
6. A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation,* Rev Ed, Collins, Glasgow, 1967, 440.
7. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Friendship*, Trans. Alexander Inglis, Newton and Cartwright, New York, 1908, 7:23.
8. Graham Smith, 'Friendship and the State' (presented at the 9th Congrès de l'Association Francaise de Science Politique, Toulouse, 2007), 104–105.
9. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis; Cambridge, 1985, 8.1.

A Tale of Two Cities is an 1859 historical novel by Charles Dickens, set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution. The novel tells the story of the French Doctor Manette, his 18-year-long imprisonment in the Bastille in Paris and his release to live in London with his daughter Lucie, whom he had never met. The story is set against the conditions that led up to the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. Written in 1859, A Tale of Two Cities was published in weekly installments in Dickens' own journal, All The Year Round. It was an instant hit. Families read it by the firelight; crowds waited for the next edition to be released. Of course, the fact that Dickens was by this time one of the most prominent writers and editors in England didn't hurt its selling powers. Because it's a bit more straight-forward plot-wise than many other Dickens novels, A Tale of Two Cities is also one of the most frequently-taught of Dickens' novels today. Chances are you're encountering it for the first time (or th Share this Rating. Title: A Tale of Two Cities (1958). 7,1/10. Want to share IMDb's rating on your own site? The English 1958 interpretation of Charles Dickens' great novel "A Tale of Two Cities", directed by Ralph Thomas, is a really terrific picture, capturing the essence of Dickens' tale deftly. Thomas' craftily directed black and white adaptation lends itself quite tangibly and nicely to the purposes of the story, I would say more succinctly than the 1935 interpretation directed by Jack Conway.