

# Problems of liberal democracy



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The myth of government in liberal democracy is that it is value neutral and functions only to create a space of freedom in which citizens may pursue their own goals whatever they may be, as long as they do not encroach on other people's pursuit of theirs. In reality, liberal democracy is not neutral but imposes a view of the world dominated by the market and by the idea of accumulation. The state has much to gain by asserting the market is natural and that the one motivating force in society is self interest. It is up to the church to protest that, although the market is important, it may not be turned into the one determining force, it may not become idolatrous.

This has all come about because the debate about religion has ignored its primary aspect: the church as the body of Christ as hope for the world. This is where the rubber hits the road, not in endless and futile discussion about the existence of God or the origin of the world. The church carries the Christian story that frames humanity and its pain, joys and purposes in opposition to the story carried by the secular state. A debate that contrasts these two stories will reveal the truth and richness of the former and the shallowness and falsity of the latter. This is how the church must bring the battle to the door of secular society.

We can no longer accept that the secular story is based on concrete realities while that of the church is mythological. What person who has experienced the love of another would assert that self interest is the highest motivating factor? Why would this person believe that the state is his saviour? Again, why would this person be persuaded that the other, who is beyond certain borders, is his enemy? It is time for us to wake up and realise that we have been sold a lie and that liberal democracy, which we seek to export all over

the world as the only form of government, represents an untrue conception of the human. While we may enjoy its fruits and its freedoms, it can only lead us into a wasteland of the spirit. As William Cavanaugh says: A public Christian presence cannot be the pursuit of influence over the powers, but rather a question of what kind of community disciplines we need to produce people of peace capable of speaking truth to power.

The church has long since been relegated to sniping from the sidelines when it comes to questions of morality. We cannot expect the secular state to take it seriously. Why should the victor take notice of the vanquished? Rather, the church must look to its own and go about making disciples who will be members of the body of Christ. It must become its own society. This does not mean that the church has to be separate, but it does mean that it knows the source of its own life and thus ignores the temptation to participate in society on the terms allowed by the state.

The church must get used to the fact that it exists as an alien body in a strange land.