

Editorial

Paul Doerksen

Coincidentally, I write this editorial introduction to an issue of *Vision* that addresses the topic of faith and politics just as the results of the November 2016 presidential election in the United States are announced. Hillary Clinton has conceded victory to now President-Elect Donald Trump. My reading of even a little bit of the commentary is an exercise in noticing the proliferation of hyperbolic adjectives, as pundits try to make sense of an “improbable presidential win,” which has “shattered expectations and shaken the world,” according to the front page of my local paper, the *Winnipeg Free Press*. And yet my description of these adjectives as hyperbolic would be challenged by others who might see nothing improbable about Trump’s victory. In the midst of all the attention paid to this electoral process, it’s hard to think that politics is about anything other than this kind of thing, and that faith within those politics is anything more than figuring out whom

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Christians should vote for. In a sense, this issue of *Vision* tries to show that the issues addressed in discussions of faith and politics are far more than analysis of conventional electoral power.

Within the modern Western political tradition, it is most often taken as a given that church and state must remain separate. This notion has its roots in the work of such influential thinkers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes. Such an understanding might be seen as a reaction to more than a millennium of Christendom, when church and secular authority worked in close relation to govern society.¹ This arrangement, heavily criticized and subsequently dismantled in Western society, has given way to the current post-Christendom era. It is within this post-Christendom era that Anabaptists have begun to contribute to a renewed

emphasis on the study and writing of political theology, a pursuit that according to ethicist Oliver O'Donovan seeks to shed light from the Christian faith on the intricate challenge of thinking about living in late modern Western society. If he is right, then we have many areas of thought to consider: judgment, the nature of freedom, the possibility and shape of public deliberation and communication, the role of power and coercive force, powers that any given institution should or should not have, the nature of representation, the nature and locus of authority, the role and form of punishment, sharing and husbanding of resources, what constitutes meaningful action in history, the intelligibility of

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suffering—just to name a few. And presumably, Anabaptists (and others, surely) want to think about these matters without making a case for hegemony of the church or theocracy, for the revival of Christendom or even the establishment of the church. Clearly we have much work ahead of us.

This issue of *Vision* attempts to display how the ongoing task of shedding light from the Christian faith on the intricate challenge of living in our societies takes on a plurality of topics as well as several different forms. That is, this issue includes an essay that engages the formal, academic, theological

and political writing of the late A. James Reimer. This essay, along with several others, fits the description of academic discourse, which is surely an important enterprise. And academic discourse itself is not of a piece; the essays that fit this description deal with issues such as public activism, the politics of gender, politics and education, and so on.

Several other pieces contribute to important ongoing conversation regarding Indigenous peoples. These include theological reflections on the nature and possibility of reconciliation. This issue also includes several sermons, indicating by their inclusion the significance of the church in any conversation that addresses Christian faith and politics. These sermons provide samples of the first-rate theological work that is carried on in church settings on an ongoing basis, as Christians grapple with making our way in

God's world. We have also included a blog post written by a seminary president, bringing to view the possibilities of thoughtful and timely contributions in a more informal medium.

I have also included a short list of selected resources. Any such list is necessarily idiosyncratic; nonetheless, I hope that it will be useful to readers of *Vision* who may wish to pursue further some of the matters raised here. On a personal note, I am grateful to the writers for their fine, thoughtful contributions. I have enjoyed the contact with each one. I am also grateful to the *Vision* editorial council for the opportunity to edit this issue, and especially to Barbara Nelson Gingerich for her patient and careful work. Thank you.

Note

¹The term *Christendom* can describe a specific historical era in which the Christian church was identified with the whole of organized society, or the merging of the religious and political community. See R. W. Southern, *Western Society and Church in the Middle Ages* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), 16. As a concept, Christendom might be described as an attempt to take seriously the political nature of the church and its instrumental role in the salvation of the world. See William Cavanaugh, "Church," in *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), 397. In Craig Carter's use of the term, Christendom is "a concept of Western civilization as having a religious arm (the church) and a secular arm (civil government), both of which are united in their adherence to Christian faith, which is seen as the so-called soul of Europe or the West." Craig Carter, *Rethinking "Christ and Culture": A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 14.

About the editor

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