

Column

Should Christians be actively seeking to build a Christian society? Or, should they be content with some private, interior piety, a piety quite detached from the world, one which leaves society at large to go to hell in the proverbial hand basket and which focuses solely on going somewhere else -- heaven?

If we adopt the first option – engagement rather than resignation and abandonment – related questions might include: Can a society in fact become Christian? If so, how can we tell when one has ceased to be?

Let's look at these last two questions in order, beginning with the first: Can a society in fact become Christian? I would want to argue, yes 'but not fully'.

What I mean by "but not fully" is that the Kingdom of God will come in its full resplendent glory only when the King returns and takes the throne. But in the interim, it is possible for a society to organize its common life around Christian principles and concerns. These would include: fairness, concern and care for the weak, faith and loyalty in married life, honesty and integrity in public and commercial life, etc.

Indeed, we have seen this happen in history. When Christianity came upon the world stage, not everyone became a Christian in the fullest sense, nor was every vice immediately done away with; nevertheless, the world was a different place. A common vision of how things *might be* and *should be* emerged, a vision we in this country have inherited.

Now to my other question: How can we tell when a society has ceased to be Christian? T.S. Eliot in his book, "The Idea of a Christian Society" offers this suggestion:

"A society has ceased to be Christian when religious practices have been abandoned, when behaviour ceases to be regulated by reference to Christian principles, and when in effect prosperity in this world for the individual or for the group has become the sole conscious aim."

If we take Eliot's words as our guide, I think we would have to say the society in which you and I live can no longer be described as Christian. Oh yes, we continue to derive benefit and blessing from our Christian

inheritance just as light continues to shine from an extinct star, but we mustn't expect this state of affairs to go on forever.

I say this not to be pessimistic, but rather as a call to arms. Christians of all stripes need to get busy evangelising the culture, but where do we begin?

I would say with that bit of society most immediately under our control – ourselves. Is our life under the lordship of Christ? One cannot reflect into the world a light one does not have.

Once our life is under the direction of the true King we can then go to work in the sphere of family and home . . . and then ever outward, your street, your community, Atlanta, Washington, the ends of the earth.

As Christians we are called to bring Christ to the culture. Look for creative ways of doing that this coming week.

O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee; Mercifully grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.