



Post-secular

Last fall, *Nederlands Dagblad* (ND) reported that post-modernism is past. The Scientific Council for Government Policy (a think-tank which advises the civil government) published a report in which it is stated that Holland has now become *post-secular*.

Post-secular? What in the world does that mean? Well, secular means “worldly.” The secular society has only disdain for religion, which is regarded as the greatest of all evils. So, if you are a Christian, you try to hide it. That’s how it was after the sixties. Religion was definitely out. Darwin was everybody’s hero. Post-modernism, too, was absolutely deadly on dogma. Teaching religion was like brainwashing.

But now there is post-secularism. That means: religion is again cool. It is okay to be a believer. You don’t have to hide it anymore. Christians, come out of the closet. The modernist secular society is gone. The post-secular society has arrived. Society has not gone from post-modernism to atheism (as you might expect) but to post-secularism.

God is back

Post-secular? Now I have to internalize a whole new concept. Modernism and post-modernism are passé and there is a definite change towards post-secularism. As ND put it, “*God is back.*”

This is important because post-secularism especially is found among *youth*. It is trendy to be spiritual. The older generation, the boomers, is still by and large of the opinion that religion is harmful and should not influence the state or government. But the younger generation is showing a renewed interest in matters of piety. Religion is cool, even in the public sector.

Most of us probably thought that many youth were on the way out. Some young people are, for all kinds of reasons. But in the post-secular society religion does matter and plays an important role in young people’s lives. Post-secularism is a new trend that stresses the importance of faith in all aspects of life. This is what *ND* reported in late 2006. Perhaps the Reformed churches have survived the onslaught of modernism.

The downside

But there is a downside to post-secularism. The downside is that today in a post-secular society it does not matter anymore whether you are a church member or to which church you might go. *ND* writes about the “*diminished meaning of the church.*”

The church does not play the role in society as it once did. Being a believer is fine, but church membership is unimportant. Young people can switch rather easily from a Reformed to a Baptist church or vice-versa. It’s not a big step for some. The Reformed today march side by side with Romanists, Pentecostals, and sundry denominations.

Faith has become strictly personal. I believe what I want to believe and attending a specific church regularly is not really required. You may shop around, attending all kinds of churches, and switch when you want. Because being a believer has nothing to do with any specific church.

As much as there used to be emphasis on church membership in the past, today in the post-secular world this is considered to be irrelevant. Very rarely do you still hear or read about the distinction between the *true and false* church. It is simply not done anymore. We are past that stage. This is the very heart of post-secularism.

The fall of the wall

Our era is one of falling walls. The Berlin wall and the iron curtain fell. Now the walls that have been erected between churches must fall. We are told that we must apologize for the past wrong of condemning other churches. Recently the chairman of the PKN (Protestant Church of The Netherlands), Dr. Bas Plaisir, apologized in an anniversary gathering of the Pentecostal Assemblies in The Netherlands for not accepting these churches as true churches and their members as true Christians. By all accounts it was a very moving moment.

Of course, we must always apologize for errors and confess our sins. Everyone understands that in a serious church struggle which leads to separation or schism, both parties make mistakes and can be wrong on certain points. We always have to consider our own history with a good measure of self-criticism.

But church history is not a matter of erecting walls or breaking them down. Church history is always a matter of faith. There are walls that have been erected for the sake of preserving the truth. Being a member of a true church is not a matter of condescension but of obedience. It is a faithfulness that the Lord asks of me and of all others.

The church of our choice?

I have always found it a matter of spiritual weakness when it is said: go to the church of *your choice*. Our Lord did not say,

"All you have to do is believe."

He said, *"Follow me."*

Paul writes to Timothy, *"Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you."*

(2 Timothy 1:13, 14).

We are exhorted to keep the pattern of sound teaching.

Jude urges us to *"contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."* Without being contentious, we must *contend* for the faith. That means: you have to resist vigorously if the truth of God's Word is compromised. That's not an option but a command.

Post-secularism says: believe what you want, where you want! But God calls us to be faithful to the Scriptures and go there where the truth of Scripture is taught. Everything passes, *"but the word of our God stands forever."*

Satan's scenario

Post-secularism may well be a final test. Satan's scenario is: be religious, but do not be committed to the Son. We are all religious in our own right and you have no business judging the beliefs of others.

No crusade mentality is allowed, be tolerant. Be tolerant even of Muslims. Some say that Muslims want to kill us, but that's overstated and unproven. Don't judge an entire religion by the actions of a few fanatics. Don't call your bear Muhammad, either.

I find it remarkable that the Bible does not tell us that in the last days that there will be a total lack of religion. On the contrary, there will be *much* religion. Paul describes the people of the last days as having *"a form of godliness but denying its power"* (2 Timothy 3:5). There may be cities full of temples but God is unknown (cf. Acts 17: 16-33). Idolatry abounds.

Post-secular: religion has become an outward, formal matter. It does not really touch the heart or change lives. People will be lovers of themselves and not lovers of God or their neighbours. That's why we always were on our own and that's how we'll be in the end. Satan's scenario calls for a lot of false religion but no true faith. Many churches will exist, but where is the true, faithful church?

Our Lord said, "*However, when the Son of man comes, will he find **faith** on the earth?*"

(Luke 18:8)

Reformed explainers used to stress that it says in the original: will he still find *the* faith on the earth, meaning the true faith. Nowadays *the* faith doesn't even exist anymore in the post-secular mind.

Especially now it is important to be a member of the true church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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