



## SASKATCHEWAN CONFERENCE

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Pastoral Letter from the President of Conference

The movie "O God II" was not as good a movie as the original "O God", but it had one ingenious idea in the plot. George Burns as God manages to get a campaign started in which school children write "Think God" in every conceivable place, on fences, blackboards, T-shirts, sidewalks, bumpers, etc. etc. until no one in the entire country can avoid thinking God, if only in exasperation over the graffiti. "Think God" is a plea for a theo-logical approach to life and the world. It would not be a bad slogan for any of us to have around. It is something like the Jewish "Shema" which Moses commanded the people of Israel to teach to their children, to write on the doorposts of their houses, and to tie onto their arms and foreheads (Deut. 6:8-9). "Remember this, O Israel, the Lord—and the Lord alone—is our God."

Are we teaching our children to "Think God"? Are we even "thinking God" ourselves? Jeremy Rifkin, in a book called The Emerging Order, gives a brief history of the ethos which has characterized the vast majority of people, capitalists and communists alike, for the past two hundred years or so. This ethos is a way of looking at the world in which nature is regarded as the raw material for making money; progress for humankind is conceived mainly in terms of increasing wealth; reason and other human abilities are primarily useful for gaining personal advantage in competition with others (John Locke, the philosopher, said, "He who applies reason the best will benefit the most"); religion is a private affair; the world can be understood quite well without any reference to God. This ethos or mindset pervades the modern world. It is committed to unlimited economic growth even at the expense of nature. (Locke also said, "The negation of nature is the way to happiness".) It is comfortable with economic inequalities and confident that human beings can look after themselves without any help from God or anyone else. This secular, materialistic, competitive, acquisitive thinking is so much in the air around us that it is far more pervasive than any graffiti campaign could possibly be. To "Think God" in our times is like trying to whistle something from the "Messiah" in the middle of a Rock Concert. We end up throbbing to the prevailing drumbeat with the tune of the Messiah forgotten.

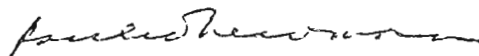
Rifkin's theory in The Emerging Order is that the prevailing secular mindset is doomed to failure in the near future because nature simply cannot sustain the unlimited exploitation to which it is being subjected. Pollution, depletion, and population increase spell the end of our present era. The options facing the world are to develop a new mindset, a new ethos in which cooperation and sacrifice replace competitive acquisitiveness, or else there will be a catastrophe as nuclear armed masses fight to gain an iniquitable share of the diminished resources of the world. A new cooperative ethos will require "a massive spiritual upheaval". The majority of people in the world will have to start to "Think God"; to see nature as God's Creation; to understand human "dominion" (Gen. 1:26) in terms of stewardship of the earth under God; to respect all other living things as the creations of God; to honour other people as equally beloved by God. A theo-logical understanding of reality is the

mindset necessary for an ethos of cooperation and sacrifice that would make human life on this planet possible.

Meanwhile, back in our public education system, our children are being taught a theory of evolution that stresses "chance mutation", "natural selection", and "gradualism" which logically precludes the operation of any purpose in the process or any initiative by God. There was no doubt some kind of evolutionary development in the creation of the world as we know it, but the existing theories of evolution are thoroughly deficient and inadequate, even from the strictly scientific viewpoint. It is being increasingly recognized in the scientific community that there is no satisfactory scientific explanation of why new developments emerged in the creative process, and that the "gradualism" of Darwinist theory does not fit the facts of evolution as seen in the fossil records. This is not to say that our religious explanation should be taught as "science" in the schools when it is clearly not scientific either. The point is that we have a right and duty to stop the teaching of an erroneous explanation of human origins especially when it contributes to a mindset about the world and humanity that is patently destructive. "Neutral" nature, governed by chance, is fair game for unlimited exploitation.

In any case, it is really urgent that we teach our children to "Think God" about creation and about human society. The great commandment says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind..." For too long we have lost by default in the application of this commandment in our education systems. One cannot pretend that there are easy answers about how to change our education systems. The teaching of "creation science" is clearly not the way to go. We live in a pluralistic society, and we must respect those of different faith. But, we had better start thinking about how to do it if we have any realistic intention of nurturing a new ethos of cooperation and sacrifice to cope with the age of scarcity that faces us and succeeding generations.

The peace that passes understanding be with you.



Paul W. Newman