Have you read a good book lately? This is the question a good friend of mine asks me from time to time. In a way that is a strange question to ask a minister. Preachers should be reading all the time, first of all the Bible and commentaries for sermon preparation and personal devotions. But they should also find time to read other types of literature, for instance, books about church history and culture, social trends and current events. Well, I could tell my friend that I was presently reading a book that a lot of people are talking about namely, America Alone: the end of the world as we know it, by Mark Steyn. The issues dealt with in this book are the future of Europe and the West, the threat of Islam and its implications for Christianity worldwide, particularly Europe.

Europe’s Dwindling Population

Mark Steyn was born in Canada but resides in the USA in the state of New Hampshire. He is a leading neo-conservative political analyst and writes for such magazines as the Western Standard and Atlantic Monthly.

In America Alone, a bestseller in North America, he paints a rather gloomy picture of what Europe will look like by the year 2050. Writing in a lucid and humorous style, underlying message is nevertheless one of great seriousness. His thesis may be summarized this way: Based on current birth rate statistics, Europe’s Caucasian population will be drastically reduced and the vacuum will be filled with Muslims whose reproduction rate far exceeds that of European and other Western nations. The only exception is the USA, whose birthrate of 2.1 enables it to sustain itself, although barely.

According to Steyn, native Europeans reproduce themselves at a rate that is far below the minimum required. To keep the population at a sustainable level, women need to give birth to an average of 2.1 children. The problem is that the average birth rate in Europe is a scant 1.3. Seventeen nations, including Germany and Austria, are underproducing babies at the rate of 1.3. Russia and Italy are at 1.2, Spain at 1.1, the UK at 1.6 and the Netherlands at 1.7. Conclusion: All European nations are sitting “on the edge of the death spiral,” as Steyn puts it. Incidentally, Canada is in negative territory as well, with 1.5.

Muslim’s Burgeoning Populations
While Europe has a much too low birth rate, the birth rates of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt and Somalia run three times higher than necessary to keep the population going. These, and many other Muslim nations, are producing a giant surplus of young people who have no future in their fatherland and therefore look for opportunities to migrate to other countries, preferably those belonging to affluent Western Europe.

It speaks for itself that European populations will increasingly be made up of elderly people. That is already true today. But Europeans are reluctant to admit it. There are plenty of youths, but most of them are imports from Muslim countries.

The Main Cause of Europe’s Population Decline

How could Europe end up in this situation. This is how Steyn sees it: In 1945 the Americans had taken upon themselves the cost of European defense; as a result the Europeans were relieved of the most important responsibility a nation has: the protection of its citizens against foreign invaders. The money thus saved, could be spent on the advancement of the welfare state, which has taken over, for the most part, the responsibilities of adults: relief for the poor, health care, and elderly care. As a result, European citizens live under the illusion that they have no need for more children for the well being of their country and their own future comfort. That illusion has been reinforced by secularization, which itself encourages a welfare state. Why do you need God when “Big Daddy Government” already answers all your foreseeable needs? Thus the welfare state greatly contributes to its own demise.

A Solution That Backfired

Europeans, of course, are not so blind that they don’t recognize they have a serious fiscal problem. So they have tried to postpone their impending demise by importing foreign workers from Third World countries, mostly Islamics. But these ‘guest workers’ who initially were supposed to be employed temporarily, have by and large stayed, bringing their extended families with them, with the result that by now they constitute 50 million residents, many of whom are on welfare and thus a huge drain on the European treasuries. Far more important is that the presence of so many Muslims presents also a spiritual and cultural problem. But few in Europe seem to be too concerned about this danger. Europe’s real problem, says Steyn, is that it has gotten rid of religion, exchanging it for secular humanism.
Europeans have gone out of their way to safeguard secular values for everyone. But secularism is not the solution; it is part of the problem. It has created a spiritual vacuum, which is being filled by Islam. Multicultural Europe is less interested in preserving its own (Christian) culture than adopting other, especially Muslim cultures as their own. Multiculturalism is the suicide bomb of the West, says Steyn.

America’s Key Role

As the title of his book suggests, Steyn also has something to say about America and its role in the world, especially vis-à-vis the Muslim threat against Western civilization. He firmly believes that America is the free West’s only hope of survival, as it is the only superpower with the resources and the will to take on the Muslim threat. America is the only Western democracy that is reproducing itself on a sustainable basis. That is why Steyn believes the USA will be there long after Europe vanishes as a Western democracy and has become part of a Muslim caliphate.

He is aware, however, that also from within the USA there is much opposition to the present administration’s involvement in the war with Iraq and its determination to fight Islamic terrorism worldwide. Whether he is right about this remains to be seen, but it is true that so far America has not been getting much help from the Europeans, with the exception of Great Britain, and even her support has been half-hearted at best.

Reactions to Steyn’s Thesis

Amazingly, Steyn’s book has not only been welcomed by conservative thinkers, as could be expected, but also some liberals are reading his book with interest and even reluctant praise. Commenting on Steyn’s thesis, one Dutch reviewer writing in De Volkskrant (a socialist newspaper!), says this: The temptation is great, with Steyn’s satirically written doomsday scenario, to put it aside as heavily exaggerated. If we extrapolate the current birth rates, we still have at least two hundred years before the Muslims will be in the majority. And then it is still a question whether radical Islam will also win the ideological fight. But Europe has been warned by the attacks in Madrid and London, and in the Netherlands by the assassination of Theo van Gogh. It is true that religious communities everywhere have higher birth rates than secular communities; and that, given its strict prohibition against leaving the faith, Islam will not lose many converts to secularization. Europe can only prove Steyn’s
forecast wrong by taking his lessons to heart. The most important lesson is to shut down the welfare state. Individual self-sufficiency must become the basis of our existence. Furthermore, the free world must support the Muslims in their ideological fight against radical Islam. And the US must continue the war against Islamic terrorism. So far the comment of De Volkskrant.

Chuck Colson’s Comments

This is what Chuck Colson, director of Prison Fellowship, thinks of Steyn’s book. Calling it an excellent new book, he agrees with its fundamental thesis and says this:

As Steyn points out, an important factor in radical Islam’s spread is simply a matter of demographics. Native Europeans, addicted to an affluent and self-centered lifestyle, are not having babies, and radical Muslims are. But there is more to it than that. Observing the rapid growth of radical Islam in Europe, Steyn writes, ‘if you’re a teenager in most European cities, these days, you have a choice between two competing identities--a robust confident Islamic identity or a tentative post-nationalistic cringingly apologetic European identity.’

Colson agrees that radical Islam is not luring Europeans away from a solid belief system; it’s providing many of them with the first real belief system they have never had. It’s filling a void for people who have nothing else to believe in or hold on to. Secularists in Europe--and in America as well--do not understand this. The Muslim brand of religion offers people a sense of belonging, something worth living and dying for, that people need--the very thing that postmodern secular societies do not offer. This is a big part of what makes radical Islam so dangerous.

As Steyn said in a recent interview: ‘Radical Islam is a weak enemy, and its strength is determined by what it is pushing against.’ The problem is that Europe and increasingly, America [and Canada, C.P.] are putting up very little resistance. If Christians won’t stand up for our worldview, and secularists won’t stand up for anything, one day we may have no one but ourselves to blame for the triumph of radical Islam. The greatest offense against aggressive Islam is a strong, vibrant Christian faith, which, of course, comes right down to you and me.

Steyn is right, but our greatest defence against these and all our enemies is the Lord, not
America. When Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah were threatened by a formidable coalition of Moabites, Ammonites and others, he was afraid and “set himself to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.” Then he prayed, “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but out eyes are upon Thee” (2 Chron. 20:3,12).

No, it is not America Alone that can solve the Muslim threat. How can we put our trust in a nation that changes its policies with every change in administration? We may hope and pray that God will raise up other strong leaders like George W. Bush after he leaves office, but even if someone should succeed him who does not understand the danger we face and will pursue a policy of appeasement and surrender, God is still in control and He will fulfill the counsels of His sovereign will, even if Islam will prevail, as it did several times already in history.

Of one thing we may be sure: the Lord will never forsake the Church, which Christ has purchased with His own blood. The question is, are we true and living members of that Church by grace alone and faith alone?

*Rev. Cornelis (Neil) Pronk is an emeritus pastor of the Free Reformed Churches and the editor of the FRC Messenger. This article was printed in the FRC Messenger and is republished here with permission.*