

ENTERING its second year, *Religion and the Free Society* continues to go from strength to strength. In terms of publications, the Occasional Paper *Economics and Ethics: The Dispute and the Dialogue* was released in December 1999, with reviews appearing in several journals. Another publication, *Beyond Romanticism: Questioning the Green Gospel*, is complete and will be released at the end of July. CIS has already received several inquiries about its contents. A set of essays on the approach of churches to public policy is also being collated, with writers from the Anglican, Uniting and Catholic churches calling for a significant rethink in the way their churches engage in public policy issues.

But perhaps the most exciting development was the holding of the first *Towards a Free Society Conference* in late January this year. Over the course of two days, topics ranging from the rights and responsibilities of corporations, the mandate for economic creativity and the meaning of freedom, to the rule of law, tariffs, protectionism and free trade were covered in much detail. Demonstrating, for example, that if you want to hurt the poor, then tariffs are a very good means of doing long term damage to their interests, usually causes people who purport to be concerned about the poor to rethink their position very quickly.

'Thank you for opening my eyes', one participant wrote. 'I will never use phrases like social justice in an ill defined, loose and emotive way ever again. I see now that if I am to speak the truth, then I must take more time to consider the economic evidence before voicing my thoughts on public policy matters to my parishioners. Neither economists nor businessmen are the demons that I used to imagine they were'.

The busy lecturing schedule continues, with *RFS* people addressing many diverse audiences on a regular basis. Sam Gregg, for example, has already delivered three of a series of six lectures to the Thomas More Society of Lawyers at the New South Wales Supreme Court. Upon completion of the series, the lectures will be published.

Lastly, *RFS* is very pleased that George Weigel, one of America's most respected theologians and commentators, is delivering this year's annual Acton Lecture on Religion and Freedom. The Lecture, to be held in October, is sure to be one of the most important of its type held in years.

For more information, please contact
 Sam Gregg at the Centre
 ph: (+61) (2) 9438 4377
 fax: (+61) (2) 9439 7310
 email: sgregg@cis.org.au



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above: Sam Gregg and the participants of *Towards a Free Society*, January 2000

