PROPHETS, LEADERS, FOLLOWERS, LOSERS

by Gary North

You can select one of the four roles listed in the title of this exposition. I recommend the second.

I do not recommend becoming a prophet. A prophet confronts those of his generation with a warning; obey God’s law or come under God’s negative sanctions. Rarely does anyone believe a prophet. Nineveh was pagan. A prophet sent by God frightened them. In Israel, prophets were not taken seriously. Israel knew all about God. They believed that God was willing to tolerate anything they did, for dday’s sake, or for the temple’s sake. Jeremiah warned the people of his day “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and ywr doing, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these” (Jer. 7:3-4).

But as prophets go, Jeremiah was a Jerry-come-lately. He brought the message of destruction to Judah just before Nebuchadnezzar invaded: in 559 B.C. Think about Isaiah and Micah. They brought the same message to Judah just before Jeremiah came on the scene. Think about it. The prophets of Isaiah’s day were told by God to bring a warning of God’s wrath to a nation that would not experience this wrath for four generations.

Depressing, isn’t it? The prophet is asked by God to preach God’s law and God’s sanctions in history. Nobody pays any attention. They continue to ignore God’s law, generation after generation, and nothing abnormal happens. No sanctions come. This confirms their initial skepticism about the prophet and his message of repentance and obedience to God’s written law.

Prophecy

There are two kinds of propheta: God’s prophets and court prophets. God’s prophets serve as prosecuting attorneys of God’s covenant lawsuit. Court prophets serve as defense attorneys. God’s prophets announce: “Thus saith the Lord!” Court prophets announce: “We’re under grace, not law!”

Court prophets proclaim a message of antinomian deliverance from God’s negative sanctions in history (and very often in eternity). They preach this message to the princes and the people, and the masses of their covenant-bound followers say, “Amen!” The court priests pray whatever comforting and non-specific prayers that covenant-breakers want to hear. Am I exaggerating? Consider the formal prayers of any Chaplain of Congress. Meanwhile, court prophets in the United Statue come to blesse each new President when he is inaugurated. Consider the distinguished prophet who come to Washington to preside over the inaugural proceedings every fourth year. Consider also the word of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a true prophet in this century, regarding this world-famous court prophet: the only man who has served publicly as a court prophet in both the United States and the USSR. In 1983, at the awards ceremony of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, Solzhenitsyn said of this man:

It is with profound regret that I must note here something which I cannot pass over in silence. My predecessor in receipt of this prize last year – in the very months that the award was made – lent public support to communities by his ad porable statement that had not noticed the persecution of religion in the USSR. Before the multitude of the believers and those who have perished and who are oppressed today, may God be his judge.

No one ever asks Solzhenitsyn to attend President’s inaugurations, let alone speak at one. It is dear why this is the case. Solzhenitsyn gained the humanists’ wrath in 1978 when he delivered his scathing and accurate lecture to the graduating class at Harvard University. [Solzhenitsyn at Harvard, (Washington, D.C.: Ethics & Public Policy Center, 1979.)] The liberal American media turned on him like the pack of jackals they are. He cared not a whit. In 1993, he is still at it. [“The Relentless Cult of Novelty And How It Wrecked the Century.” New York Times Book Review, Feb. 7.]

He spent over a decade in a Soviet concentration camp. This experience made him tough. It gave him perspective on what is worth fighting for, no matter what the personal cost. It taught him to count the cost of serving as a prophet. He suffered expulsion from his country in 1974. But a century from now, or five centuries, scholars who want to study the works of the man who sounded the first warning that Western intellectuals believed regarding the horrors of the Soviet Union will study the works of Solzhenitsyn. He paid the price of being a prophet; public ostracism, first by Communist humanists and then by liberal American humanists. He did not thumb his nose at them; instead, he warned them of a looming disaster and called them to repentance. They preferred their materialism-worshipping ways. (Both sides had done the same thing a generation earlier to the brilliant anti-materfaliist Russian sociologist, PTrim Sorokin, who was imprisoned and condemned to death by Lenin’s government in 1918. He escaped prison and lived as a hunted man in Russia for four years. Then he escaped to the West. He founded Harvard University’s sociology department in the early 1930’s, but he was later forced to retire by Harvard and saw his work subjected to an Orwell-like memory hole by the sociology profession.)

Not many people are willing to pay this price. There are few
prophets in any generation, They must sound the alarm, no matter what They must identify the specific evils of their age that are such stupendous representative infractions of God’s law that they constitute the basis of God’s sanctions in history. They must sound the alarm to anyone who will listen. And they must recognize in advance that few will listen, and fewer will still change. The prophet receives negative sanctions from the court he warns (and warns against) and from those Christians who wish only to eat at the table of the court. Their name is legion.

The prophet must identify the fundamental evil of his generation. He must also identify long in advance the most likely specific evils that will consume the society and bring God’s wrath. There is no doubt what this evil is in our day: abortion. Rushdoony, virtually alone among Protestant evangelicals, warned against it publicly in 1970: [Rushdoony on Abortion: Distant Early Warning, ICE, 1989.] No one paid any attention. This is normal.

Then the U.S. Supreme Court issued Roe v. Wade in 1973. What did the evangelical seminaries say in response? Nothing. What have all but one or two small ones said ever since? Nothing. The academically certified theological leaders of our generation cannot make a moral distinction between abortion and a cesarean section. These are both just surgical procedures, as far as their academic theology informs them. As a result, spiritual leadership has shifted to those who have not attended seminary or who did attend but refused to take it seriously. They are rarely ecclesiastically ordained people.

When Beverly LaHaye came to Tyler, Texas, a few years ago to speak at a meeting protesting abortion, she admitted publicly that she and her husband had paid no attention to the abortion question for almost a decade after Roe v. Wade. Then they saw the light and got involved. She now runs the largest Christian activist organization in the world: Concerned Women for America. This tells something very important. In the land of the spiritually blind, the first person to receive a spiritual eye transplant became queen.' This leads us to the next office on the list: the leader.

Leaders

The ‘leader is rarely a prophet who sounds the initial warning; he is an early listener who obeys the prophet. The prophet’s job is lonely. He is usually a one-man verbal demolition team. He must attack the root of the evil, which goes very deep and affects everything. He does not criticize this or that evil; he criticizes the system that has produced a forest of bad trees and bad fruit. He is not a tree-trimmer; he is in the tree-uprooting business.

It takes many decades to identify a successful Christian prophet. Isaiah was successful, but the evidence came late, in 589 B.C. We have no modern examples of successful Christian prophets. We do have examples of successful humanitarian prophets. Jean Jacques Rousseau is one. So are Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

The prophet attracts a few followers, as Jesus did, and these men subsequently become leaders. They do not lead, however, until the prophet is removed from the scene. Jesus’ disciples are the best example. Leaders learn from the prophet to count the costs of discipleship. Then they teach others to count these costs. They slowly begin to attract others who become aware of the evils of the day and the likelihood of God’s sanctions in “history. They are willing to begin preparations for the transition to a better world - a transition that normally involves horrendous negative sanctions. Leaders must be able to announce blueprints for the world to come, as well as develop strategies and tactics for undermining the enemy’s strongholds today. They must develop long-run plans for the future and short-run tactics, both defensive and offensive, in the proverbial David and Goliath battle. It is the leader who must live the truth and recruit others to live the truth. The only role model. In this respect, he too failed: his heirs did not have in this century is negative; Lenin. The second-best example is Mao. Most of the others are also Communists: Stalin, Ho Chi Min, Fidel Castro, etc. Hitler tried, but he failed. The European leaders - Adenauer, Erhart, De Gaulle, and even Churchill - attained their victories only because of the military might of the United States. Only one European leader did it on his own: Francisco France. But nobody wants to use him as a role model. In this respect, he too failed: his heirs did not maintain the inheritance. This leaves Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt - again, not reliable role models for Christians.

Christians in this century have not experienced a significant political or cultural victory. They have never sewed under a leader who has successfully mobilized men for this kind of long-term fight for a new civilization. Instead, Christian leaders have invented new theories of law, sanctions, and time that conform to the humans’ vision. Christians preach natural law, the absence of God’s sanctions in history, and the defeat of Christianity in history. Thus, Christian leaders are capable at best only of launching short-term resistance projects against the most outrageous public evils. They do not preach victory in history, for they do not believe in victory in history. American Christian leaders-preach some version of “Let’s just get back to 1955.” They believe that James Madison was God’s political prophet and Dwight Eisenhower was his legitimate heir. They do not acknowledge to themselves that what we have today is a consistent extension of the political humanism of 1955, and that 1955 was a consistent extension of the political humanism of 1787.

The modern Christian leader has no contemporary role models. He has no biographies of successful Christian political or cultural reformers other than William Wilberforce, whose work to abolish slavery in the British commonwealth ended in victory in 1838. The best way to learn how to lead is to serve under a successful leader, but Christians have shunned leadership positions in the twentieth century. About the only secular office that fundamentalist Christians have believed is worth pursuing is being elected Grand Master of the local Masonic lodge.

The modern Christian leader is therefore forced to bootstrap his unfamiliar calling. He must discover the truth, proclaim the truth, and mobilize others to extend and defend the truth. He must live the truth and recruit others to live the truth. The only models we have for this are missionaries and Communists. What Douglas Hyde described in Dedication and Leadership (Notre Dame University Press, 1956) is not found in Protestant evangelicalism except among a handful of missionaries, who are too far distant to provide role models for national leaders.

Followers

Most people are followers. The Bible calls them either sheep or goats. Christians are sheep. They follow. They bleat a lot, and they provide wool for those who know how to wield shears. Thus it has always been; thus it will always be in history.

The institutional question is: Who should serve as the shepherd? The twenty-third psalm sets forth the biblical model: the Lord is our shepherd. This heavenly shepherd provides earthly surrogates. Adam was a shepherd, but he had a problem with a woman. David was a shepherd, but he had problems with a woman. Solomon was a shepherd. He set the world record for problems with women. This is why church officers are required to be the husbands of one wife (1 Tim.3:2, 12). Shepherds need sheep to follow them and rods to beat them with. They need wisdom regarding the care and feeding of sheep. But most of all, they need courage. David was able to defeat a lion and a bear, and in both cases saved his sheep (1 Sam 17:34-37). This is the model for shepherds. This should warn sheep: don’t entrust yourself organizationally to those who do not have David’s courage and David’s concern for his
creeds, constitutions, or by-laws, they have no interest in such matters. They defer to others. They are not interested in exercising leadership or followership. They are bystanders. They react; they do not initiate. When crises hit, they know not what to do. Unless they have been raised by parents who know right from wrong and have instilled such knowledge in them through love and discipline, they will generally make bad decisions during crises. The twentieth century has had more man-made crises than any other century in man’s history. The result has been a string of bad political decisions all over the world, with each one ratified in the early stages by a majority of the losers.

The god of the losers today is the television set. Their sacrament is televised sports. Rather than attend church, most men in the United States invite in their friends to eat beer and pizza on Sundays: the closest thing ritually that most Americans ever come to participating in a weekly communion meal. This ritual participation peaks on Superbowl Sunday in the middle of January, when millions of American families watch members of a pair of labor union locals battle for the national football championship. In the United States, Superbowl Sunday each January occurs very close to Pro-life Sunday - that Sunday closest to the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision: Jan. 22, 1973. There is no question which celebration is better attended. Games normally attract more attendees than moral reformations do.

Losers have few pretensions and fewer long-term hopes except perhaps at election time. But today, this act of civil covenant renewal almost invariably produces leaders who betray their supporters, election after election. Participation in this pseudo-sacrament produces cynicism within the electorate. The long-term impotence of the political system to screen out cheats and charlatans encourages cheats and charlatans to seek political office. Their continued success through manipulation and betrayal makes cynics of them, too. Cynics do not make reliable leaders or reliable followers.

**Suicidal Reforms for Jesus!**

To become a successful leader, you must first serve as a dedicated follower. You should be under the jurisdiction of a church that actually excommunicates people once in a while. A church that refuses to excommunicate people is like a police force that refuses to arrest people and a legal system that refuses to bring people to trial.

Next, you must be able to recognize meaningful reforms from suicidal reforms. This may take years if experience. For over a century, Christians have actively pursued poorly timed reforms, illegitimate reforms (the Eighteenth Amendment “Prohibition” - is the best example), and suicidal reforms. The worst reforms are suicidal: illegitimate to seek morally, impossible to achieve permanently, and ruinous to achieve temporarily.

Let me provide a graphic example: a campaign to reduce venereal disease by licensing brothels. State public health physicians will examine the girls medically on a monthly basis. To see to it that customers frequent only these licensed brothels, the State should provide subsidies to licensed brothels. (Free market advocates will instantly see the monopolistic evil of this suggested reform and will no doubt suggest vouchers as an competition-enhancing alternative.)

**Nonsense, you say? Not really. I can point to a much more dangerous reform campaign, one which is widely accepted by most Bible-believing Christians: “Let’s clean up the government schools!” This is a familiar battle cry of most contemporary Christian leaders. They refuse to recognize that the presence of tax money in education means the presence of political coercion as a substitute for parental responsibility and authority. The presence of political coercion in this instance leads straight to the humanists’ doctrine of the messianic State.**

Proclaiming as their sole guideline for civil law the myth of neutrality and the myth of political pluralism, Christian leaders...
today find it impossible to identify the public schools for what they are: anti-Christian by confession and financing. Leaders
do not acknowledge this: the only biblically valid solution
to the evils of tax-funded education is the abolition of
tax-funded education. From the year 1642, when the General
Court of the Massachusetts say colony legislated local tax
funding: local schools, Christian educational reformers have
had as their primary educational god the preservation of the
public schools.

What if a Christian leader came to you with a reform
proposal to clean up America’s brothels? He presents his
case: “We all know about the threat of AIDS. If we send health
inspectors to test all prostitutes for venereal disease, a major
threat to public health will be reduced. To insure that men
frequent only State-regulated brothels, the State should license
all of them. In fact the State should even finance them, making
private brothels illegal.” Would you take him seriously?

Then along comes another reformer. He is outraged at the
thought of a State monopoly of brothels. This is a threat to the
principle of consumer sovereignty. He recommends what he
calls a free market solution. “The State should provide vouch-
ers for brothels. The vouchers can be redeemed only by State-
licensed brothels that meet health standards. This will help run
the non-regulated brothels out of business.”

You would probably conclude that both reformers had lost
their minds. But there are well-meaning Christians who believe
that the way to reform public education is to create a system of
vouchers. If enacted into law, this would bring all voucher-
accepting private schools under the regulations of the State,
especially the laws against using tax money to support
sectarian religious views.

Public education cannot be reformed; it can only be
abolished. Christians do not believe this. They waste precious
resources passing petitions against this or that humanist
outrage in the public schools, but rarely do they pull their own
children out of those schools in the meantime. They do not
say, “I will not send my children back into the cesspool of
public education until we are successful in redeeming the
public schools.” No, they say, “I’ll pass a petition, keep my
kids in the local schools, and hope for the best.” Why?
Because it appears to be less expensive in the short run to
pass a petition than to pay tuition. Thus, the humanists always
win these school battles: never facing the negative sanction of
Christians who pull their children out until the schools are
reformed, they never suffer any real threat to their control over
education. The Christians continue to fund their tenured
enemies: taxes.

The Robes of Authority
To exercise authority over nature, God told Adam, “Acknow-
ledge your subordination to me. Keep your hands off that tree.”
Adam refused to wait for God to invest him with the authority
produced by the knowledge of good and evil. He refused to
eat from the tree of life. He went straight for the tree with God’s
verbal “No Trespassing” sign in front of it. That is to say, he
grabbed prematurely for the robes of authority. So have men
done over since.

When it comes to the quest for formal authority, start at the
bottom. Move from bystander status to leadership. The conser-
ervative political operative Paul Weyrich tells me that he can line up all the candidates he could
ever use to run for the U. S. Senate if he promises to provide
the funds for the campaign. What he cannot easily locate is
someone who will employ his program’s successful electoral
techniques in a locally funded political campaign.

Christians, file Adam in the garden, much prefer to grab
prematurely for the robes of authority. They want to serve in
church as elders before they serve for years as deacons. They
want to run large raautants before they wait on tables. The
result? Poorly run restaurants and many bankruptcies.

Conclusion

Christians era to exercise leadership in the world. The
lowest sheep, Paul said, is a more reliable judge of deputes
between Christians than the most skilled pagan judge (1 Cor.
6:4). But we must learn to exercise righteous judgment before
we serve as judges. This is true in every area of life. We are
required to start at the bottom. Societies that are under God’s
curse are afflicted with amateurs. “As for my people, children
are their oppressors, end women rule over them. O my people,
they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of
thy paths” (Lea. 312). Although baptism has made judicial
equals of men end women except in church offices that
must reflect God’s masculinity, Isaiah’s warning is valid: amateurs
make poor rulers. It is the task of Christians to serve as low-
level followers until God raises them to positions of authority.
They are not to seek such positions apart from the discipline
involved in years of hard service in lower jobs and callings.

Right: Ready to Lead. Let us not write similar books or entertain
similar illusions in our day.