

# BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

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## 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 listened to Jonah, but 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 old time'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 your doings, 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 589 B.C. Think about Isaiah and Micah. They brought the same message to Judah sometime in the middle of the eighth century, over a century and a half 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.

### Prophets

There are two kinds of prophets: 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 the U.S. Senate, with the possible exception of Peter Marshall. Meanwhile, court prophets in the United States come to bless each new President when he is inaugurated. Consider the distinguished prophet who comes to Washington to bless 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 communist lies by his deplorable statement that he had not noticed the persecution of religion in the USSR. Before the multitude of those who have perished and who are oppressed today, may God be his judge.

No one ever asks Solzhenitsyn to attend Presidential inaugurations, let alone speak at one. It is clear 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-materialist Russian sociologist, Pitirim 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 still will 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 an abortion and a caesarian 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 Tim 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 humanist 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 present. This is not an easy task. The best example we

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 Franco. 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 served 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 humanists' 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 (I 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 (I 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

sheep.

The problem is, there are very few men like David. So, Christians prudently look for shepherds who keep their flocks far from the hunting grounds of bears and lions. They say to themselves: "Lions and tigers and bears, o my!" Unless forced by circumstances into a pilgrimage down the yellow brick road of Christian activism, they remain in munchkin land, ruled by humanist witches and their munchkin subordinates, who keep telling the Christians that "politics is dirty," and "we're under grace, not law." On the contrary, they are under humanist lawyers. But until some bureaucrat steps on their toes, or threatens to amputate one of their arms, they keep quiet. Only when Johnny or Susie comes home from the first grade with a manual on safe sex do a few of them think to themselves, for as long as a month, "We really need to clean up the public schools."

In Texas, a school board could authorize a mandatory high school course in "bestiality as an alternative life style," but if the school's football team had recently enjoyed a 10 and 2 season and had made it to the second round of the state playoffs, local Christians would look the other way. (The only way you could get a liberal to oppose the course would be if you could persuade him that this sort of thing is degrading to beasts.) The only way you could get Baptists in East Texas to picket an abortion clinic would be to spread the rumor that after the abortion, the physician always gives a glass of beer to the woman to steady her nerves.

To be a follower, as distinguished from an observer, a Christian must be publicly identified as a follower. **Follower** is a public office: a **member**. A follower takes a covenantal oath. Baptism is the oath-sign in the church. Proof of citizenship is the oath-sign in civil government. For women, a wedding ring or a change of last name is the oath-sign in marriage. For non-covenantal organizations, there are similar marks. To participate as a **member of**, you must be a **follower of**. There is no escape from hierarchy.

This is why it is important for members to be wholeheartedly committed to the standards of, and the leadership in, the organizations in which they serve as official followers. This is why followers must take seriously such things as creeds and constitutions. These are the standards which allow them to judge the performance of the leaders. If the leaders deviate from the official standards, members must work either to replace the leaders or revise the standards. Sheep must train themselves to recognize when their shepherds have formed an unofficial partnership with the bears. It is clear who is about to become food: not the shepherds, surely.

Sheep must seek to become shepherds when their existing shepherds make such dangerous and illegitimate alliances. Sheep must master both the constitution and the by-laws of the organization in which they find themselves subordinate to corrupt shepherds. If the sheep believe that the system is stacked against them, they have two legitimate choices: try to capture leadership or else leave the flock. In most cases, the first attempt is suicidal. This is not an era in which sheep are well-versed in creeds and constitutions, let alone by-laws. They are therefore unfit for leadership. Until they are fit, they must seek shelter in the flocks of other shepherds, either because the shepherds are more reliable or because the flocks are located in safer regions. For a secretly Christian official in the pagan Roman Empire, it was better to be far removed from Rome and the Emperor. Better to be on the fringes of power than in the corridors of power if the system is in alliance with Satan. Better to be in Colorado Springs than in San Francisco.

### Losers

The loser is the most common of all. He is either a bystander— not always innocent — or a follower who has poor judgment in selecting organizations to join and leaders to follow. Losers never catch on. They drift through life. They do not understand

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 Bay Colony legislated local tax funding for local schools, Christian educational reformers have had as their primary educational goal 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 vouchers 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 ever since.

When it comes to the quest for formal authority, start at the bottom. Move from bystander status to followership status. Like a civilian who joins the service and is sent to boot camp, so is the bystander who takes up the responsibility of followership. Master the skills of followership before you attempt to attempt to learn the skills of leadership. Learning followership is God's required way to learn leadership.

Too many prospective leaders want to skip from bystander status to leadership. The conservative 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, like 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 restaurants before they wait on tables. The result? Poorly run restaurants and many bankruptcies.

#### **Conclusion**

Christians are to exercise leadership in the world. The lowest sheep, Paul said, is a more reliable judge of disputes 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, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths" (Isa. 3:12). Although baptism has made judicial equals of men and 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.

In 1981, Richard Viguere wrote a premature book, *The New Right: Ready to Lead*. Let us not write similar books or entertain similar illusions in our day.

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