

BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

Vol. XXI, No. 1

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December/January 1999

HEAR, FEAR, AND TESTIFY

by Gary North

Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children (Deut. 4:9-10).

The theocentric basis of this law is the fear of God. As covenantal agents of God, fathers were required to teach their sons and grandsons the law of God. The family's hierarchy was to extend Israel's national covenant into the future. This was not a seed law in the sense of a tribal law. It was an affirmation of the covenant in the life of Israel. It is a universal law that is to govern covenant-keeping fathers throughout history. Only when God is no longer to be feared does this law cease in history, "that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth."

Moses spoke these words to people who could remember the giving of the law. Through their parents' oath of allegiance to God, they had participated in the sealing of the covenant at Sinai-Horeb (Ex. 19), immediately prior to God's giving of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). Moses warned them not to forget, and to tell what they had seen to their children and grandchildren.

The threat to Israel was a break in this verbal inheritance. There was a risk that their memories of this covenantal event might depart from Israel. But how? Through a failure to tell this story. The focus of this warning was not primarily individual; it was corporate. Old people remember the events of their youth even when they forget their own names. The memory spoken of here was corporate memory, i.e., the transmission of the story. If this story should ever depart out of the nation's corporate heart, it would no longer define Israel. It would no longer motivate them to fear God and obey Him.

The transmission of Israel's inheritance rested on the telling of this story. Here, Passover was not the focus; the giving of the law was. Passover was to remind them of the great deliverance from Egypt, which Moses called the iron furnace (Deut. 4:20). But the story of the giving of the law was equally important. It was not just that God had delivered them out of bondage; it was that He had also delivered to them His law. The events surrounding the covenantal meeting between

God and Israel at Mt. Horeb had to be repeated to the next generation. They had heard God (v. 12). They were not eye-witnesses to God; they were earwitnesses to God. They were required to pass on this story just as they had received it: verbally.

Hearing Is Believing

Modern man has a phrase, "Seeing is believing." The technology of photography launched a new era. Men could at last record faithful images of what they had seen. This elevated the eye to a position of authority that it had enjoyed only in trials, where witnesses had to confirm the event. Now the photograph replaced one of the witnesses. But this legal authority as a witness is about to depart unless modern computer technology is reversed. The technology of digital imaging is going to make possible the altering of photographic images to such an extent that seeing will no longer be believing. For example, the immensely popular 1994 movie, *Forrest Gump*, brought to the screen mixed images of old newsreels and a modern actor. Several of these mixed images looked real. Similar image mixing had already been used by television advertisers.

The rise of modern science is generally explained in terms of the rise of experimentation. Only whatever can be measured is said to be scientifically valid. The repeatability of an experiment is the source of its validity: other scientists can see the same results. But the description of these experiments is always conveyed verbally. Words must accompany the images and mathematical formulas in order for others to understand the procedures and repeat them. Never has seeing been believing except for the individual who saw. To transmit a description of what he saw to others requires more than images. It requires words. **The images confirm the words.** Images do not speak for themselves. Facts do not stand alone. Facts are never brute facts; they are always interpreted facts.

This does not mean that seeing is irrelevant. I think of the scene in a Marx brothers movie where Groucho is discovered in the arms of some young woman. "What are you going to believe," he asks the intruder, "me or your own eyes?" Eyes are a valid source of information, but there is always an interaction between sight and interpretation. The persuasive power of belief and habit is usually greater than the power of sight. The Israelites saw the Red Sea open before them; then they crossed over dry land; then they saw the water close over the Pharaoh's army. Still, they soon ceased to believe that this unified event was in any way relevant for their new trials. Seeing was believing, but what

Israel believed was highly restricted through their lack of faith. Seeing lasts only for a moment; then memory takes over – memory filtered by faith.

Hearing is repetitive. For those who did not see, as well as for those who saw but never learned the lesson, hearing is the dominant mode of communication. Reading involves sight, but prior to the advent of photography, reading was mainly hearing through the eyes.

Hearing and Obeying

There is a strong ethical element in the Hebrew verb “to hear.” The word for “hear” in Hebrew is the same as the word for “obey”: *shawmah*. “As soon as they **hear** of me, they shall **obey** me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me” (Ps. 18:44; emphasis added). “Now therefore, if ye will **obey** my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine” (Ex. 19:5; emphasis added). “And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be **obedient**” (Ex. 24:7; emphasis added). When God speaks, men should obey. When those in authority speak of God, the listeners should obey. This is why telling the story of the giving of the law was mandatory in Israel. The story was intended to persuade men to fear God, hear God’s law, and obey what they heard.

Stories possess great authority when told by those in authority and confirmed by others in authority. The command to tell the story of the giving of the law was directed to parents and grandparents: people in authority. Children look up to their elders – literally when children are young. The awe associated with tall parents is analogous to the awe associated with God. The Israelites repeatedly expressed fear of the giants in the land; it was this that kept the exodus generation from the inheritance. They feared the children of Anak: “And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (Num. 13:33; cf. Num. 14:28). They saw other “men of great stature” (Num. 14:32).

Israel’s spies had seen giants. But seeing was not to be believing. Hearing was to be believing. Joshua said: “Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven, A people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak!” (Deut. 9:1–2). Not only were the Israelites to hear; they were to obey. It was time to claim the inheritance. But to do this, they had to trust what they heard, not what they saw.

Obedience and Inheritance

The basis of maintaining the covenant’s kingdom grant is obedience to the terms of the covenant. An inheritance can always be dissipated. It can shrink to a shadow of its former self when the faithful become a remnant. The captivity brought home this point. Israel forfeited the original inheritance during the exile. Most Israelites remained behind, content with life in Assyria-Babylon-Persia. Only a remnant returned to the land on a permanent basis. The others came only at Passover.

The problem with maintaining the compound growth of an original grant of capital is that growth can turn negative. This delays the conquest. The kingdom’s era of expansion is replaced by an era of contraction. The problem is, when you lose half of your capital, you must double it to get even. Large losses are difficult to overcome. Growth seems almost automatic during the growth phase. It is taken for granted. Yet

a 20 percent per annum increase becomes exponential in just a few years. Such rates of growth cannot be sustained. The expanding capital base runs up against the limits to growth. Those who pursue wealth-building as if such rates can be sustained for part of the economy without comparable rates of growth throughout the whole economy eventually reach environmental limits. The investor runs out of investments that enable him to reinvest his profits at 20 percent. The compounding process slows. To sustain such high rates of growth, men often adopt techniques of debt: leverage. The threat to debt is two-fold: 1) mass inflation, which destroys the currency unit; 2) economic contraction, which bankrupts the debtors.

Bastardy and Culture

Moses told his listeners to teach the next generation. They were also to teach their grandchildren. This would either constitute a double witness – parents and grandparents combined – or else it would overcome the defection of the children. The grandparent factor becomes a kind of covenantal insurance policy against a breakdown in the inheritance process.

This is why bastardy is such a threat to a society. When fathers are absent, mothers must sustain the legacy. They do not enjoy the benefits of the division of labor. This places heavy burdens on mothers and children. Mothers must earn money to support their children. They must also allocate time to teach them. The covenantal legacy is threatened by a break in continuity. Grandmothers may intervene at this point, caring for the children while mothers are at work. If the grandmothers fail in their task of transmitting the story of the covenant, the third generation is cut loose from the covenant. This is when the breakdown begins.

This has now taken place in the United States among the black population. In the early 1960’s, the rate of black illegitimacy was about 25 percent: high. By the 1990’s, it had reached the two-thirds level. In the inner cities, it was above 80 percent. The social breakdown in the black community that was predicted by Harvard professor Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965 has taken place. Crime has escalated; welfare dependency is becoming universal among unmarried mothers.

There has been a one-generation cultural echo: black to white. The rate of illegitimacy among whites was 22 percent in the early 1990’s – only slightly under the rate of black illegitimacy in the early 1960’s. By 1990, one quarter of children in the United States were growing up without fathers. Writes Nicholas Davidson: “This is the greatest social catastrophe facing our country. It is the root of the epidemics of crime and drugs, it is deeply implicated in the decline in educational attainment, and it is largely responsible for the persistence of widespread poverty despite generous government support for the needy.” Some 70 percent of all the juveniles in U.S. correctional facilities grew up without fathers in the household. There is no indication that this demographic process is decelerating; on the contrary, it is accelerating. Between 1983 and 1993, the birthrate for unwed mothers in the United States rose by 70 percent.

When the covenantal legacy is lost by three successive generations, it takes a religious revival to restore it. In my day, this will have to come from outside the secular entertainment media – music, television, and movies – and the secular schools, which combined eat up almost all of the daylight hours of every child. The government-funded school systems that are universal in the West in the twentieth century have divorced learning from the Bible. This has replaced the Christian covenantal inheritance for the vast majority of

residents in the West.

Restoring the Testimony

When Christian parents send their children to secular public schools, they are inevitably telling their children that knowledge – useful knowledge – has nothing to do with the Bible. Yet the words of Moses convey the opposite viewpoint: the knowledge of God's revelation in the Bible is the foundation of all useful knowledge. The parents then have a major problem: to persuade their children of the moral consistency of the parents' outlook, which is pro-secular education and pro-Bible. They do this by appealing to the traditional argument of the two hermetically sealed compartments of revelation: biblical and natural. Somehow, the two are consistent, yet they are separate. This outlook affirms that the Bible does not instruct natural revelation. But because of the hierarchical structure of all knowledge – from God to man – this argument cannot be sustained. Either secular presuppositions regarding cause and effect in history replace the Bible's providential view of cause and effect, or else the Bible's cosmic personalism is substituted for the cosmically impersonal universe of humanism. We cannot begin our reasoning process from the presupposition of the autonomy of nature and human thought and then logically reach the conclusion that God is totally sovereign in history. We cannot reason consistently from the god of humanism – evolving nature as interpreted by autonomous man – and end with the God of the Bible.

The philosophical dualism of a majority of modern fundamentalists and evangelicals rests on their theory of knowledge: two sources of truth. This presupposition has led Christian philosophy into compromises with humanism from the days of the early defenders of the faith. It has culminated with the widespread support by Christians of the compulsory, tax-supported school. Christians send young children into an educational hierarchy in which the God of the Bible is either ignored or ridiculed. This has broken the covenant of the modern evangelical church. This substitution of covenants begins in kindergarten. It accelerates through graduate school. The American graduate school has been secular from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. The opinions of a majority of college-educated Protestant evangelicals are not significantly different from the opinions of college-educated non-Christians. This is not surprising, since the colleges require all of their faculty members to have earned graduate degrees from secular universities. The professorial drift on campus into liberal humanism is disguised by a cloak of verbiage about Christian relevance in a pluralistic world. Such relevance usually is said to be available by baptizing some discarded humanistic fad.

At the end of the twentieth century, writes David Wells, "It is only where assumptions in culture directly and obviously contradict articles of faith that most evangelicals become aroused and rise up to battle 'secular humanism'; aside from these specific matters, they tend to view culture as neutral and harmless. More than that, they often view culture as a partner amenable to being co-opted in the cause of celebrating Christian truth." [David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 11.] But it has not been secular humanism that has been co-opted; it has been modern evangelicalism. "Evangelicals now stand among those who are on easiest terms with the modern world, for they have lost their capacity for dissent. The recovery of dissent is what is most needed, and the path to its recovery is the reformation of the church." [*Ibid.*, p. 288.] Wells is speaking of upper-middle-class, well-educated men and women who are beneficiaries of humanist culture. He sub-

sumes under his label all the pietist-fundamentalist-charismatic church growth proponents who dismiss theology as irrelevant. But this categorization is misleading without extensive qualifications. Pietistic fundamentalists have generally resisted the inroads of modernism, and the six-day creationists still do in academic areas related to origins. Fundamentalists have defended Scofield's rejection of the Enlightenment ideal of inevitable progress, while rejecting both Darwinian liberalism and post-World War II evangelicalism. Bob Jones University surely has had no alliance with modernism. "We're reactionaries and proud of it!" has been the cry of millions of fundamentalists, especially prior to 1976, when some of them began to take tentative steps back into American political life, from which they had been absent as an identifiable voting bloc since 1925. Wells is also not speaking of the Christian home school movement or the new theocrats who have at most made a grudging temporary truce, not an alliance, with humanism's mandatory institutions. These people are dissenters, which is why evangelicals do not find them respectable. When parents take their children out of the public schools, they have joined the ranks of the dissenters, for the public schools have long served as America's only established church.

There has been an implicit, unspoken alliance between Christians and right-wing Enlightenment culture since at least 1700. In the name of Sir Isaac Newton, right-wing humanists have presented their case for universal principles of knowledge, law, and culture. But this implicit alliance was not self-consciously adopted in the name of an alliance; it was believed by the Christians to be inherently Christian. The fact that Newton hid his Unitarianism from his superiors at Cambridge in order to retain his teaching position only added to the confusion. After Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) destroyed the foundations of this Newtonian-Christian synthesis, American fundamentalists began to distance themselves from modernism. This self-conscious distancing escalated rapidly after the Scopes anti-evolution trial in 1925, and escalated again after the publication of *The Genesis Flood* in 1961. Newtonian mechanism still has its adherents in Christian scientific circles, for it is seen as the only alternative to both evolutionary Darwinian organicism and Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty. Nevertheless, there has been a major break with modernism in the realm of creationism. This break has dismayed the neo-evangelicals, who strive to make peace with modern science at the expense of the Bible. What Wells says about evangelicals applies to the American Scientific Affiliation, a group of Trinitarian scientists who reject the six-day creation. It does not apply well to the Creation Science movement.

The restoration of Christian culture can come only from outside the existing educational system. The churches must abandon the lust for certification through secular college education, beginning with the removal of all requirements for candidates for the ministry to attend State-accredited colleges and seminaries. Parent-funded Christian education, beginning at the lowest level, must steadily replace the tax-funded system of State-accredited secular education. The graduate schools will be the last to fall. This means that curriculum materials must be written which are systematically in opposition to the presuppositions of modern secularism. The Bible must be placed above conventional curriculum materials.

The problem here is that the academic accreditation system was deliberately designed to keep out graduates of non-approved institutions. This keeps non-certified people from entering the professions. Academic accreditation has been the humanists' means of centralizing the curriculum of

all schools, not just tax-funded schools. This system was designed by a liberal Baptist minister, Frederick Gates, and sold to his employer, oil billionaire and liberal Baptist John D. Rockefeller, Sr., who in turn persuaded the U.S. Congress to authorize the incorporation of the General Education Board in 1903. "It would be difficult to overstate the value of the work the GEB did in the ensuing half century. Ironically, it seems largely forgotten today. . . . To understand the GEB, one must see it as an agency of change, one of such remarkable accomplishments that it is scarcely an exaggeration to refer to it as revolutionary." [John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson, *The Rockefeller Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), p. 70.] One of its major accomplishments was "reforming college administration and developing professional standards for graduate education throughout the United States. . . ." [*Ibid.*] Furthermore, "the work was done very quietly, with great circumspection and skill, for the good reason that, like any agent of change, the GEB was up against some form of established opposition in each of its successive missions. . . ." [*Ibid.*, p. 71.] By the time it was voluntarily shut down in 1960, the year John D., Jr. died, it had expended \$324 million on its many projects. Some \$208 million had gone into higher education. But setting standards for lower-level schools was also part of the plan. The GEB was the main factor behind the creation of the public school system in the American South, through the funding of one professorship in education in every major state university in the South, and through lobbying in every state capital. From a few hundred schools in 1900, the South's public school system grew to thousands in the 1920's.

For non-parochial school, non-immigrant group Protestants in the United States to break with this entrenched monopoly would have seemed impossible in 1960, but since that time, the Christian school movement has grown rapidly. The deterioration of the public schools has paralleled and accelerated the exodus of the Christians. These are self-reinforcing phenomena. Christian-fundamentalist curriculum materials are still highly influenced by traditional secular outlines, and none of them is at a truly high level academically – there is no market at today's prices for such an academically rigorous curriculum – but independent Christian schools represent an advance over what existed a generation earlier. A minority of Christian parents has begun to take seriously Moses' words regarding the necessity of teach-

ing their children the stories of the Bible. These stories, when coupled with the law of God, provide God's people with the means of conquest: the cultural compounding process. But so much covenantal capital was dissipated by Christians in the twentieth century that it will take centuries to reclaim lost ground unless a revival – very high compound growth – should begin and be sustained. But in the past, revivals have never been sustained.

The church must tell the story and show people how to apply it in New Covenant times. Parents must tell the story to their children. But the presumed judicial discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant has created a problem. Of what relevance to the kingdom inheritance is the giving of the law at Horeb, if there is no continuity between the Ten Commandments, the case laws of Exodus, and New Covenant historical sanctions? If there is no visible kingdom of God in history that is tied covenantally to God's revealed law, and if there is no predictability between corporate faith and corporate sanctions, then the story becomes little more than a testimony to personal moralism, if that. It loses its character as inheritance-preserving. This is the situation in the post-Puritan West. The assumption of judicial discontinuity has undermined the relevance of what had been a mandatory story.

Conclusion

Moses warned his listeners not to skip a generation. Parents were told to tell their children about the meeting between God and Israel at Mt. Horeb. God delivered the law to them at that time. Respect for the law was given added support by the testimony of parents and grandparents who had heard God speak in history.

This covenantal legacy was to be handed down verbally, generation by generation. This legacy would in turn undergird the legacy of land, which followed the giving of the law and the wilderness experience. Moses understood the threat of a break in Israel's covenantal inheritance, which above all was **an inheritance of law**. The authority of God's law was to be attested to by the testimony of the parents, who could trace back their unbroken testimony to the revelation of God at Mt. Horeb. When the children heard about God from their household elders, they were to fear God. They were to obey Him. The fear of God was to lead to the expansion of the inheritance, generation after generation.