

BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

Vol. VIII, No. 2

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Feb./Mar., 1985

THE SABBATH MILLENNIUM

by Gary North

It has become apparent to thoughtful Christians that a major transformation has taken place in the thinking of a growing minority of Bible-believing Christians. This transformation I would summarize with the phrase, **from Rapture to dominion**. The older fundamentalism, which was centered on Bible prophecies of Christ's imminent return and the necessity of short-term, high pay-off, and minimal-commitment evangelism schemes, is suffering from a kind of schizophrenia. For the first time in over a century, the older fundamentalism has begun to focus on the idea of dominion, which necessarily requires a far greater commitment. But in order to produce this commitment in Christians, it takes time and a new kind of teaching. This, in turn, extends the time necessary for training and motivating new (or even old) converts to Christianity. Finally, this has forced a growing number of fundamentalist leaders to **lengthen the time span which Christ has allotted to His church to achieve its tasks**.

This shift in the time perspective of Bible-believing Christians is the most important event of the twentieth century. This is a strong statement, but there is no more important **practical** aspect of a man's world view than his view of time. Once he has made up his mind about the "big four"—God, man, law, and knowledge—the question of time becomes paramount. No matter what it is that we are trying to accomplish, we must ask ourselves two questions:

1. What is it going to cost?
2. How long will it take?

Time and Cost

There is always a trade-off between time and cost. It costs money (meaning assets) to take extra time. There is always a positive rate of interest. Present goods are always worth more than those same goods are worth in the future (assuming unchanging tastes and unchanging technology). So we demand more future goods if we are being asked to give up the use of present goods. Therefore, the longer we are asked to wait for the return of our invested capital, the larger the payment we demand.

On the other hand, it is always more costly (apart from interest) to produce a capital-intensive product in a short period of time than a longer period. To produce it rapidly, we "cut corners." We do not take the extra time to check everything out, or we have to build it with less expensive inputs. Since it is desirable to get something delivered to us earlier than later, we have to pay extra for the privilege: either more money or a less perfect product.

Therefore, we are forced to count true costs. We balance the cost of borrowed capital (the time-preference factor, or interest) with the reduced cost of slower production. The

quicker we get it, the better. We save money on interest, but pay extra for fast delivery.

A familiar example is the universally hated term paper. Every student could use another week to finish it. He might find the one crucial article or book that will make his paper the best in the class. He always has just one more job to do before he sits down and writes the final draft (which is usually the first draft). He wants to delay the pain, too. He wants more time.

His professor, on the other hand, wants it handed in on time. He does not want to have to grade a set of papers that trickle in. Besides, allowing some students to hand in their papers late penalizes those who hand them in on time. So most professors set deadlines, and they place penalties on late papers. Even if the papers need more work, they must still be handed in on time to avoid the penalty. So the student faces the trade-off: more time, but a higher penalty vs. less time, but no penalty. Sometimes it may appear wise to hand a paper in late. (What is true of students is equally true of newsletter writers. I want these words on my tombstone: "O deadline, where is thy sting?")

What we describe in relation to term papers applies to everything else. We are mortals. We have a finite amount of time remaining to us. Our work must be **paced**. We must count the cost, but this includes counting the time. If we have very little time, then we will have high costs. We will have to sacrifice more to achieve our goals. Even in heaven, time will still be a problem. In the Book of Revelation we read: "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (6:9b-10). Only after the resurrection will time become no burden, because the curse will be lifted, though time will still be a cost of production. (Heaven is temporary and also imperfect: the separation of soul from body is still part of the curse.)

The Jubilee Year

When we think of the requirements for world-wide dominion, we expand our horizons: geographically, institutionally, educationally, sociologically, temporally, etc. The devil asked Jesus to bow down to him, and he promised to give Him the whole world. Jesus refused. Does this mean that Jesus thereby transferred permanent title to the whole world to the devil? No! But for over a century, fundamentalists have believed, implicitly, that this was exactly what Jesus did. Therefore, Christians, as subordinates to Jesus, supposedly are not required **all by themselves** to reconquer the lost territory for Jesus. But how did we "lose" it in the first

place? Adam, as God's subordinate, gave up title to the world by himself, meaning autonomously, or "on his own." That was why Satan could make the offer to Jesus to return the world to Him, but on his own wicked terms.

Jesus, as the second Adam, refused this offer, not because the world is never to be redeemed (bought back), but because He intended to redeem it on His terms, not Satan's. **Christ redeemed the world (bought it back) at Calvary.** Christ holds title to the whole earth (Matt. 28:18). He has transferred the **leasehold rights** to His subordinates, the members of His church. **This is the fulfillment of the Jubilee Year**, which He announced in the early stages of His public ministry, when He taught at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19). Note: this announcement took place shortly after His encounter with Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13).

What will His people do with their lease? Allow the devil and his subordinates to maintain control of the property? Obviously, the devil no longer has the leasehold. He lost it at Calvary. **Since Calvary, the devil has been an illegal squatter.** But Christ expects us to imitate Him. We, too, must **redeem the land**. We must buy it back, through preaching the gospel and through productive service in every area of life. In short, we are told, we must **redeem the time** (Eph. 5:16).

Counting the Cost

Once we see just how much world there is to redeem, we must make estimations of the cost. **Counting the cost** is basic to faithfulness to God (Luke 14:28-30). To do this, we must estimate the resources available to us now, the potential for growth in our capital over time, and the amount of time available to us as individuals **and to our replacements**. In short, we must deal with the phenomenon of **compound growth**.

If we have very little time, then we must look for the fast pay-off. We must put our money in high-risk ventures, usually highly indebted ventures. We must look for **leverage**. This is the way of the world, especially the twentieth century. Use other people's money. Take on the debt obligation, and then use the money to produce huge gains. What happens to those who follow this path? Most lose, a few win, but the skill of winning seldom gets passed on to one's successors. The empire built on debt by one generation is lost by the next. Leveraged growth is Satan's scheme. It is designed specifically by a being who is short of time. It is the strategy he recommends to his followers. Long-term growth is not his way, for he knows that his is a short-term program.

When Christians adopt the time perspective of Satan, they inevitably begin to adopt Satan's short-term methods. They build big, debt-burdened churches and institutions. They launch high-visibility, expensive, but necessarily short-term campaigns. They do not make use of the principle of long-term compound growth; at best, they look for short-term compound growth, meaning one or two generations. They launch programs that make ridiculous promises, such as "win the world for Christ in a generation." One generation (or less) later, the founders are dead, exhausted, or disillusioned, and the humanists step in and pick up the remaining institutional and financial pieces. A classic example was the student "world missionary movement" of the 1900-1920 era. It went liberal so fast that it could barely spend the funds raised by draining evangelical pockets. Even more devastating to orthodoxy, it was out of that well-intentioned but juvenile movement that many of the leaders of the next generation of really hard-core theological liberals was recruited.

Two questions must be asked: How much will it cost, and how much time do we have? We can pay very high prices to redeem the world if we have enough time. If we have very little time, then we must be satisfied with only redeeming bits and pieces of our leasehold, leaving the bulk for Satan's fol-

lowers to use (misuse) until God comes in person to reclaim it. Such a short-term mentality was basic to Adam in his rebellion. He wanted instant illumination, instant wisdom, instant powers of judgment, so that he could become as God and possess **instant dominion**. But God still forced him out into the world to fulfill the terms of the dominion covenant. He did not escape mankind's long-term dominion tasks just because he rebelled. He only made the work harder, longer, and less profitable. **Adam broke the sure method of dominion, namely, compound growth.** He unleashed the phenomenon of set-backs which would henceforth interfere with God's world of linear development. He introduced **negative feedback**. He introduced the element of judgment unto destruction for covenant-breakers, and judgment unto restoration for backsliding covenant-keepers. He and his heirs have learned about judgment the hard way. They have also learned about compound growth the hard way.

Exponential Growth

We have seen the remarkable phenomenon of compound growth as no generation has in recorded history. When the compounding process reaches that critical upward path and turns sharply upward, exponential growth appears. It began in Europe in the late eighteenth century, in every area: population, industrial production, but most important of all, **knowledge**. As this process has accelerated, we have seen miracles—mass produced, price competitive miracles. The hand-held calculator is my favorite example, but the desktop computer is more spectacular. Soon the lap computer will be the most conspicuous miracle. And every expert will tell you today, **this is just the beginning**. We will get knowledge, and get it more abundantly. Now we must ask the question: Will we get **wisdom**?

The process of long-term growth took place only in the Christian West, the home of theological orthodoxy. The Eastern Orthodox Church wasn't orthodox, and it stagnated, along with the societies that grew out of it. It substituted **mysticism for dominion**, and it reaped whirlwinds: the Mongols in the thirteenth century, the Turks in the fifteenth century, and the Communists in the twentieth. But as the West became progressively secularized, primarily through the influence of various "common ground" philosophies—the supposed "shared presuppositions" between Christians and satanists—the growth process itself became secularized. The Protestant ethic no doubt was the major factor in creating the spirit of capitalism, as Max Weber argued, but he was correct in the second half of his argument: the spirit of capitalism eventually broke away from its original Protestant roots. But Weber's other argument was incorrect: secularism has not become an autonomous force that can sustain continuing progress. This autonomy has cost secularism its ability to tap into the moral and spiritual capital base that alone can sustain long-term compounding. **Secularism has been spending its principal, not reinvesting the profits.**

The Rise of Pessimism

Pessimism is very popular these days. The origins of pessimism within humanism go back to the decades before World War I, when path-breaking social and psychological investigations were begun by a young generation of anti-positivists and anti-optimists: Weber, Durkheim, Pareto, Mosca, Croce, Sorel, Freud, and numerous others.¹

This pessimism was in sharp contrast to the naive and optimistic social gospel movement in the United States. The Christians, both liberal and conservative, were several decades out of step with the cutting edge of intellectual leadership, as has been the case for two centuries.

1. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Vintage, 1958).

In opposition to the social gospel's vision of a State-financed and State-directed millennium, the fundamentalists reacted. They became pessimistic concerning the future. As Rushdoony has said, the liberals believe in history but not in God, and the fundamentalists believe in God but not in history. The fundamentalists began their prophecy conferences in the 1870's, and this led to the creation of a new world view based on premillennial dispensationalism. They believed that the second coming of Christ was near. The world as we know it in its premillennial circumstances is doomed.

By the end of World War I, secularists were beginning to agree with the general social conclusion of the fundamentalists. A "doom and gloom" mentality began to appear, with Germany's Oswald Spengler sounding the trumpet of retreat in his defense of cyclical history, *The Decline of the West* (1918). It became one of the most popular fat, unreadable books of this century. It was followed by a wave of pessimistic literary sensations.

In theology, the advent of neo-orthodoxy in the 1920's, with its skepticism concerning external reforms, and Reinhold Niebuhr's pragmatic pessimism of the 1930's and 1940's, spelled the doom of the older liberal optimism, even as the liberals were capturing the major denominations. It took the 1970's for this pessimism to reach the theological liberals generally, but the "Me Decade" of the 1970's (Tom Wolfe's phrase) replaced "radical chic" (also Tom Wolfe's phrase) decade of the late 1960's. Meanwhile, Hal Lindsey's *Late, Great Planet Earth* became the capstone of the dispensationalist era, selling 20 million copies in 10 years, and also stamping the Me Decade with the Brief Housekeeping Seal of Approval. The pessimism of the new liberalism and the old fundamentalism have combined to produce despair and cultural impotence.

Despair and cultural impotence mark the end of historical eras, and the beginning of new ones.

The Coming Millennialism

As we approach the close of the twentieth century, and the coming of a new millennium, we can expect to see a growing apocalypticism, both Christian and humanistic. The year 2000 has been a focus of concern by humanists since at least the era of the French Revolution.² The year 2001 inaugurates the third millennium after Christ, and almost simultaneously, six-day creationists expect to see the seventh millennium (if the world is just about 6000 years old). These millennia can easily be correlated with the Bible's "third day-seventh day" symbolism of rest and resurrection. We are in a very real sense approaching a new Sinai, meaning a new sixth-day (millennium) covenant. If so, we can expect the millennial sabbath to follow.

What is the "third day-seventh day" symbolism? The best discussion of it that I have seen is in James Jordan's book, *The Law of the Covenant* (Institute for Christian Economics, 1984). I reprint the bulk of it here, since it must be understood before I discuss its millennial implications.

Third Day-Seventh Day Resurrection

"The process of covenant renewal with man dead in sins and trespasses must involve resurrection. . . . To be cleansed, therefore, is to undergo resurrection. This is the meaning of the cleansing rituals of Leviticus 11-15, and other places. The covenant can only be reestablished with resurrected men, so the people were to cleanse themselves before the third (sixth) day, when the covenant was to be made (Ex. 19:10-14). . . .

"And so, God drew near on the third day (after God's announcement to Moses on the fourth day), which was the sixth day of the week, to renew covenant with men. It was

not the New Covenant that God was renewing at Sinai, but the Old Adamic Covenant. It was the Old Covenant temporarily and provisionally reestablished in the sphere of temporary, provisional, ceremonial (New Covenant) resurrection. It was temporary; but just as the original Adamic Covenant had pointed forward to sabbath rest, so the renewed Adamic Covenant at Sinai pointed forward to the work of Christ and the Future New Sabbath Covenant to come.

"It was the third day, and the third month (19:1, 16). For the significance of this we need to look at Numbers 19:11-12. The man who is unclean from contact with a corpse is to be cleansed on the third day and again on the seventh day. This *double resurrection pattern* is found all through the Scriptures. For instance, in John 5:21-29, Jesus distinguishes a first resurrection, when those dead in sin will hear the voice of Christ and live (v. 25); and a second resurrection, when those in the grave will come forth to a physical resurrection (v. 29). The *first resurrection* comes in the *middle of history* to enable men to fulfill the duties of the old creation. The *second resurrection* comes at the *end of history* to usher men into the new creation.

"Jesus was raised on the third day, thereby inaugurating the New Covenant in the midst of the week of history. Christians live between the third and seventh days of history, Spiritually resurrected and in the New Covenant, but physically mortal and assigned to complete the tasks of the Old Adamic Covenant. The fact that the law was given at Sinai on the third day, and in the third month, was a provisional anticipation of the third-day resurrection yet to come in Christ.

"The third-day resurrection was only provisional under the Old Covenant, so it had to be repeated year after year. Thus, every year, the third day after Passover, there was a waving of the first fruits before the throne of God (Lev. 23:5, 7, 10, 11). This was a prophecy of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, which came three days after Passover. Jesus' third-day resurrection, however, was not provisional but definitive, and never to be repeated."³

The Prophesied "Thousand Years"

Consider the implications of Jordan's analysis. Sometime around the year 2000, there will be a *one-time-only* fusion of symbolic "days." The sixth "day" (millennium) comes to a close. *This symbolically closes the six days of fallen mankind's labor.* The sixth day was also the day on which God created man and delivered the dominion mandate to him. As Jordan points out, the sixth day was also the day of re-covenanting between God and man at Sinai. On that day, God's law was delivered to Israel.

Simultaneously with this closing of the sixth "day" will be the closing of the second "day" (millennium) since the death of Jesus Christ. On the third day, He was resurrected. On this day, true life—life beyond the grave—was manifested clearly to His people. On the evening of the day of resurrection He took communion with His disciples. In short, He spent two days in the grave, and then He visibly triumphed over death.

A "day" of rest, a "day" of resurrection life: this is what the seventh millennium appears to offer. Furthermore, beyond it lies the eighth "day," which points to the culmination of creation: **the new heavens and new earth.** The new creation was definitively established by Christ's "eighth-day" resurrection. The church's switch in the day of rest-worship from Seventhday to Firstday meant that Eighthday is the day of the new creation. In short, **the symbolism fits together.** After 2000 (or at the latest, 2070), it will never again fit together. This will become increasingly apparent as the year 2000 draws near.

2. Robert Nisbet, "The Year 2000 and All That," *Commentary* (June 1968).

3. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 27-23* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 56-58.

The idea that the six days of the week and six millennia are linked symbolically was common opinion in the very early church. Barnabas wrote concerning the sixth day of God's creation: "Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, 'He finished in six days.' This implieth that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years. And He Himself testifieth, saying, 'Behold, to-day will be as a thousand years.' Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished."⁴ It is not clear to me whether he believed that the final judgment would come 6,000 years after Christ's era, or that the whole period of fallen man's life on earth lasts a total of 6000 years. What is clear is that he believed that the 6000-year period is significant. Then comes the eighth day: "... when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead."⁵

More and more people will begin to listen to biblical teaching concerning death and resurrection, work and rest, six days and one day, decline and dominion, defeat and victory, Old Covenant and New Covenant, as we approach what I call the **sabbath millennium and millennial sabbath**. Christians need to be in a position to explain the nature of the transition to a final stages of the manifestation of Christ's new world order, which was established during His lifetime, and was made visible by the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.⁶ The old humanism has bet a great deal on the inauguration of a humanist millennium, the dream of a humanist New World Order. So has New Age humanism.⁷ When these dreams do not come true, and the dreams of fundamentalists concerning the imminent Rapture also do not come true, men will again begin to ask: "What must we do now?" Francis Schaeffer's title, *How Shall We Then Live?*, will be the religious question of the next two decades.

The millennium as such is not limited to a thousand years. The millennium as millennium began no later than the fall of Jerusalem—the end of the old order. (The interim transitional period was called "the last days."⁸) It could extend well into the "eighth day," or eighth millennium, which will begin sometime around the year 3001. But there could very easily be a **specific manifestation** of the millennium as well as a **general manifestation**. The specific manifestation would be precisely what Revelation 20 refers to, a thousand years in which Satan will be chained up and rendered civilizationally impotent. It would be most fitting if this full-blown restraining period would begin in precisely the period that

the humanists and occultists have looked to for centuries as the beginning of their millennial reign.

Conclusion

The paralysis of pessimism is steadily overcoming the enemies of Christian orthodoxy. The humanist world is "running out of gas." The optimism which once motivated eighteenth-century Scottish rationalists such as Adam Smith, and nineteenth-century evolutionists such as Herbert Spencer, and twentieth-century reformers in general, is now fading. At the same time, the old fundamentalism is passing through its adolescence stage into maturity. Its leaders are at long last talking about dominion. Simultaneously, they have stopped talking about the imminent return of Christ at the Rapture. This has taken place since 1976—a very recent phenomenon.

The pessimism of the later Roman Empire led to its destruction by the barbarians and its capture by the Christians. The pessimism of the later Middle Ages, especially after 1350, led to the Wycliffe movement and then to the Reformation. The pessimism of the Puritans after 1660 in both England and New England led to the triumph of syncretistic Arminianism and rationalism, which in New England turned into Unitarianism and Transcendentalism in the early nineteenth century.

Pessimism neither builds nor long sustains a civilization. At best, it can sustain a long-term monastic community of celibates or a short-term communal farm, both of which serve as retreats from collapsing civilization for a handful of "psychological exiles." Only Anabaptists can long tolerate communal farms; it is no longer clear that even Roman Catholics can tolerate monasteries. Social drop-outs can make communalism a way of life; no one else can. Social drop-outs by definition do not build a civilization. At best, they sometimes preserve the forgotten historical documents that may later serve as the literary and intellectual foundations of the next stage of civilization.

At this time of widespread pessimism concerning the future of man, Christians have an unparalleled opportunity to challenge, defeat, and replace the leadership of a declining civilization. To do so, they must first abandon at least the conclusions of the old fundamentalism, if not the presuppositions. This is now taking place. Like a snake shedding its skin, fundamentalist leaders are rapidly shedding their pietistic and retreatist heritage. Christians are rediscovering the true biblical doctrines of God, time, law, and knowledge.⁹ They are also rediscovering how to fight . . . and win. As this two-pronged process of integrating theory and practice continues, probably in the face of escalating persecution, the foundations of the sabbath millennium will be laid. It will not take long: under 20 years. This is why **time is getting short**—not for the Christians, but for their multitudinous opponents.

4. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, ch. XV, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1973 reprint) I, p. 146.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

6. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: An Eschatology of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Reconstruction Press, 1985).

7. Alberto Villoldo and Kenneth Dychtwald, *Millennium: Glimpses into the 21st Century* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1981).

8. Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, ch. 13.

9. Gary North and David Chilton, "Apologetics and Strategy," *Christianity and Civilization*, 3 (1983).

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