

BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

Vol. XII, No. 6

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Oct./Nov., 1990

SOME UNDISCUSSED COSTS OF WORLD REVIVAL

by Gary North

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply [it happen], after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish (Luke 14:28-29).

In 1902, Lenin wrote a book with a question for its title: *What Is to Be Done?* Forty years earlier, that same title had been chosen by the radical Cherneshevsky for a novel that he began writing upon his imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress. His book had become a favorite of Lenin's revolutionary older brother, who later was lawfully executed by the Czarist authorities. It then became a favorite of Lenin's. But Lenin did not write a novel; he wrote a revolutionary manifesto. This was to become the most important of his works. It was subtitled, *Burning Questions of Our Movement*. Things burned for Lenin. His newspaper was called *The Spark (Iskra)*. As James Billington says, there was fire in the minds of men.

In 1976, Francis Schaeffer also wrote a book with a question for a title: *How Should We Then Live?* This is the burning question of our movement: Christianity. This burning is different from the radical's burning: ours is fire initiated by the Spirit of God, man's only alternative to the consuming fire of final judgment (Rev. 20:14-15).

Schaeffer did not answer his own question. The book does not even attempt to do so; it is merely a brief popular history of Western culture. It surveys the rise of authoritarianism, tells us that we must speak out against it, warns us that we may well be executed for doing so, and offers no alternative political program. He suggested no specific, concrete, Bible-based, comprehensive ethical system. Lenin, in contrast, did answer his question, but these answers are now exposed to all mankind as failures, legacies of the Communist God that has clearly failed. In 1989, this gigantic failure became universally acknowledged, even by Lenin's heirs.

So, what is to be done by all those who call themselves Christians?

A Loss of Authority

In the *Washington Times* (July 25, 1990), columnist Georgie Anne Geyer warns of a new threat to America, a national criminal gang structure that will soon rival the Mafia. Some 100,000 youths in Los Angeles County have already joined 900 of these violent criminal gangs. These gangs command unqualified loyalty from their members. They have become substitute families. Capt. Raymond Gott of the L. A. Sheriff's Department says, "One of my concerns, particularly in high-gang areas, is that parents totally abdicate parental responsibility, and they've given it to anyone who will pick it up." The problem, Geyer speculates, is a breakdown of authority.

But the core of this problem seems to me to be simple in analysis and difficult in execution: We have become a society that refuses to socialize or acculturate its young because we have degraded all authority, and these far-out gangs symbolize the failure in stark terms that should warn us of larger reverberations.

How can Christians successfully bring the gospel to gang members and thereby undermine the gangs? In part, this is an organizational and tactical question, but more fundamentally, it is theoretical and strategic. It must be answered, and answered correctly, very soon.

First and foremost, what message should we bring? It must include an appeal to the misdirected sense of loyalty that these gangs call forth from their members. The church of Jesus Christ must be presented as a valid institutional option, one with a better authority structure than the gangs can offer. **We can't beat something with nothing.** Yet the institutional church today neither calls for such loyalty nor expects it. Churches do not honor each other's excommunications, nor do they expect their own excommunications to carry weight, either on earth or in eternity. They have little sense of authority, so they cannot compete with organizations that do possess this sense, whether gangs, cults, or secret societies.

There is a scene in the movie "Becket" where Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, is confronted by some of the king's officers, who have been sent by the king to arrest him. Becket draws a circle around himself and announces, "The man who crosses this line will have his soul condemned to hell." Not one of them dares to cross. Today, the Archbishop of Canterbury probably does not believe in hell. Even if he does, he surely does not believe that he has the lawful authority to draw a line in the dirt and condemn those who cross it to eternal judgment. But he does possess this authority, if his words are subsequently backed up by the other officers in the church: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). There are few Becketts in the West. The kings command, and their lieutenants enforce these commands.

The church, not taking itself very seriously, is not taken seriously by anyone else. The West's churches suffer from a distinct disadvantage. Behind the Iron Curtain, churches are beginning to recognize the power they possess to affect history. This realization has not yet penetrated the Western churches. Evangelism therefore suffers. If this self-imposed cultural and judicial impotence of the churches continues, their members are going to suffer persecution. The "equal time for Satan" rhetoric of the political pluralists is rapidly becoming "no time for Jesus" in every public institution. Meanwhile, every institution is steadily being redefined by the messianic State either as inherently public or

else under no other jurisdiction than the State. There is no neutrality.

The Tactical Problems

God calls us to evangelize the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20). This is a worthy goal. Where should we begin? Consider the Los Angeles basin. How could it be done, assuming the Spirit were to move in a mighty way?

We haven't the slightest idea. By "we," I mean the churches. We simply haven't thought about the problem. I have. I also think about how we could bring Harlem to Christ. I ask: How? I get no conventional answers. But I keep thinking about it.

I do not know what will work. I do know what cannot possibly work: the local church on the corner. There is no local church on the corner. There are very few churches per square mile. Want to buy a church property in Harlem large enough to fit the 5,000 or so people who live on each square block? Want to buy all four corners, remodel them, and fit 1,250 people into each one? On every block? And then go on to the Bronx?

Want to buy sufficient land in the Los Angeles basin so that 10 million worshipers can come to church each Sunday morning at 11 a.m.? Want to finance the construction of a sufficient number of churches with 30-year mortgages? In today's financial setting? Through which savings & loans? Want to direct the flow of traffic until they all get built?

I am not yet asking the question: Which denominations could best meet the demand of 8 million new converts? I am asking the far simpler question: What physical structures could accommodate them? How should the church answer this "simple" question?

First, a strictly economic question: Is there any building on God's earth less economically efficient than a church building? Designed to seat a few hundred people once or twice a week, the congregation pays for land and buildings that sit unused or underused for about 163 out of 168 hours a week. Want to calculate the costs of this strategy? You need to estimate the income that the churches forfeit. Take the market value of the land and buildings. Multiply this figure by about 8% (.08). This tells you the yearly income the property would bring if it was sold, with the money then invested in the lowest-risk, lowest-return income-producing assets. Then divide this figure by about 260 hours - the hours of full use by the congregation each year. I contend that no other comparably sized building in town is as expensive to occupy on a cost per hour basis.

Try to find sufficient empty space to build 40,000 such churches - 8 million new converts divided by 200 attendees per week. Try to get the funds to build them.

Next, where will you get 40,000 new pastors? Or 160,000 new deacons?

So far, we are only talking about Los Angeles. Now, for the big question: How could we handle the conversion of, say, 5 billion people worldwide, give or take a hundred million?

What I am saying is that the modern church cannot possibly accommodate a mass revival in its present top-heavy structure. It has no way to park the new converts, seat them, teach them, counsel them, console them, or even shake hands with them once a week.

How could we mobilize them? How could we give them specific answers to Schaeffer's question: How should we then live?

How did the early Jerusalem church accommodate 3,000 new converts in one day? We are not told. What we know is that these converts did not attend Sunday school at the local YMCA. The ecclesiastical leaders did not go to seminary. Nobody loaned them money to buy a building.

Here we are, almost 2,000 years later, and we have

given no more thought to the question of mass revival than they did. But they didn't know it was coming. Supposedly, we do.

What is to be done?

The Prophesied Revival

For well over a decade, I have heard major church and parachurch leaders predicting that there will soon be a great worldwide revival. So, where are their recommended plans to accommodate this revival? Nobody has one. Leaders make these glowing prophecies with all the confidence that they predict the imminent Rapture. Yet they don't restructure their lives, debts, and retirement investment portfolio in terms of an imminent Rapture. Why not? **Because they don't really believe in an imminent Rapture.**

If you believe that something is going to take place, you plan for it. You take steps to finance your plan. If you do not plan for it and begin to execute the plan, you simply do not believe it. It is just one option among many, and not one very high on your list of probabilities.

Premise: If meaningful change comes to this nation and then the world (or vice versa), it must come through the institutional church, with its sacraments and discipline. The church is primary. The church, alone among human institutions, survives the final judgment. Change will not come primarily through Christian education, Christian publishing, or Christian television networks. The church will use all of these tools; they will not be allowed by God to use the church, unless He is bringing it under judgment. So, we do not need to be geniuses to conclude that one of four things must take place:

1. The revival will reshape the church unexpectedly and totally when it hits.
2. The church will prepare for it well in advance.
3. The church will prepare, but the revival will not come.
4. The church will not prepare, and the revival will not come.

The fourth possibility is the chilling one. For that failure, we will be held accountable.

I think it is time to begin thinking about the kinds of institutional changes that a worldwide revival would probably force upon the church. We should now begin to make plans for these preliminary changes, so that when it comes, we will not be caught flat-footed.

My bet: the church will be caught flat-footed.

Organizational Questions

Let me propose some questions. Say that God were to save 10 percent of the population in your community in the next twelve months. Then, during the following twelve months, another 10 percent get saved. If you are a rural pastor, no problem. If you are a Bible-believing New York City pastor - are there a dozen such pastors in New York City? - big, big problem.

I will tell you what you would do. You would go to two services per Sunday. Then three. Then four. Then you would crack up.

You would try to get new pastors to come and help. So would every other pastor in town. Where will you find them?

You will need to build a new church. Where will you get the money? Oh, yes, of course: every new convert, being debt-free, will automatically start tithing. Just like all your existing members. No problem.

What presently existing structure - physical - could accommodate such historically unprecedented church growth? Will we go to mega-churches? House churches? Mega-churches connected to house churches? Normal, 200-

member churches?

What institutional structure will we adopt? Will we train the new officers to meet the needs of new converts? Where? When? How? How fast?

Will we ordain overnight pastors? What happens then to doctrine? Where will these men get the years of experience needed to counsel people wisely about how they should live? Where will they learn how to manage church finances? (Where do they learn this today?)

What about Christian education? Can the churches be converted into day care centers during the week? **Profitable** day care centers? Or, can Christian day care centers be converted into churches on Sunday? Here is one way to make church real estate pay. But then someone will want to add a regular day school. Here is a terrific way to get into fights with zoning boards, boards of education, and existing congregation members who think **their** local public schools are all right.

What is to be done?

Satan Wins By God's Default

Maybe God does not intend to send a revival. Maybe we are dealing with a God who calls men to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28), and then gives them Western technology that enables them to meet this requirement. This brings 6 billion people into the world (still growing), 5.5 billion of whom (minimum) will spend eternity in hell and the lake of fire if no revival comes.

To win this cosmic war, Satan merely has to see to it that no revival comes. What specifically does he have to do? Nothing. He can win the souls of the vast majority of men by standing pat. People are born into his covenantal kingdom. They are lost by default because of Adam's rebellion. God therefore has to act positively in order to win the souls of men. Satan doesn't. He can win by remaining passive, just so long as God refuses to send the Holy Spirit to bring His irresistible grace in history. Satan wins by default.

So, here is the choice of agendas: a God who wins in history by sending grace by His Spirit, or a God who loses in history by standing pat. If nothing changes, the mere birth rate differentials between the saved and the lost will guarantee the triumph of Satan's kingdom in history. Add up the populations of China, India, and the Islamic world. Toss in most of Latin America. Toss in Europe. Don't forget New York City, Los Angeles County, and San Francisco. What do the numbers tell us? Christianity is losing.

Amillennialism teaches that this is what we must expect. Premillennialism teaches that Christ's earthly kingdom will be marked by the outward obedience of men. It does not teach that most people will be converted to saving faith in Christ. In fact, given the Arminian views of most premillennialists, they cannot possibly assert that the coming of an earthly kingdom will automatically lead to mass revival. Some, like Dave Hunt, say specifically that the hearts of most men will not be changed, and that in this sense, the millennial earthly reign of Christ should not be equated with the kingdom of God.

Then where are we? The souls are here. We cannot send them back. The question is: Are they going to perish eternally by the billions? Are we living in the most horrible period in man's history, when hell starts filling up in earnest? World population keeps growing. Will we live to see 10 billion people ready for eternal fire? Will we not see a great harvest?

What is to be done?

The Postmillennial Hope

I prefer to believe that in the coming millennium, the seventh since creation, God is going to send His Spirit. I

think this will happen fairly soon. If it doesn't, then Satan will be able to boast: "They obeyed your rule (Genesis 1:28), and therefore I will spend eternity with vastly more souls close by." The multiplication of mankind, minus the saving work of the Holy Spirit, means the overwhelming defeat of God's gospel in history.

I do not tell God what to do. I do make suggestions to Him from time to time. My number-one suggestion today is: "Don't sit on Your hands too much longer. Otherwise, people's faithfulness to the external terms of the dominion covenant—their multiplication—will become Satan's most successful jiu-jitsu operation against You in history."

I think the long-predicted but unexpected revival is imminent. Psychologically, I have to think this way; it's the only way I can see for God not to be defeated in history by the very success of the world's people in meeting the requirements of God's biological command. I do not choose to believe in the historic victory of Satan as a direct result of people's obedience to the external demographic requirement of God's law.

The Rapture could solve this, of course. Most dispensationalists think that this event is imminent. Fair enough, but then they should not babble on and on about the looming revival. **The imminent Rapture is the alternative to the imminent revival, not its means.** If Jesus is coming to set up an earthly kingdom, then the revival, if it actually occurs, will be a post-"Church Age" phenomenon; we who are on earth now will not be here to see it, promote it, or respond to it. We will be in heaven, or wherever it is that raptured church saints will be sent for cosmic rest and recreation.

Both institutionally and theologically, an appeal to the imminence of the Rapture is the removal from the church of any responsibility for preparing for a great revival. It cannot be prepared for; it is a post-Rapture event. If you wonder what I have most against premillennialism, this is it. By its very nature, it keeps Christians from thinking about and planning for the worldwide event that could overturn Satan's kingdom in the very period in which he expects to capture 6-10 billion souls.

I think history is coming to a head. I believe in the 6,000-year-old earth. I believe in a millennium of visible, worldwide covenantal blessings. I believe in the sabbath. I believe in the **sabbath millennium**. But these chronological and symbolic biblical references do not weigh heavily upon me. What weighs upon me is not prophecy; rather, it is the inescapable reality of today's worldwide population. **God will lose 6 to 10 billion souls over the next 75 years if the revival does not come.** Apart from revival, the only thing that could change these numbers is some sort of demographic catastrophe. This does nothing positive for the billions who are already here.

What is to be done?

The Traditional Consequences of Revival

North America has had two great revivals, the First Great Awakening (1735-55?) and the Second Great Awakening (1800-50?). There have been similar revivals elsewhere, notably the Welsh revival at the turn of this century. They had common features.

First, a downgrading of the theology. The "new light" preachers were rarely theologians; more often than not, they were untrained itinerant preachers who had no doctrine of the institutional church. If they had possessed a doctrine of the institutional church, they would not have been itinerant preachers.

Second, a downgrading of church discipline. The "new light" preachers emphasized the experiential moment, not the hard work of a lifetime of service. The churches to a great extent were uncooperative with these wandering outsiders, and they suffered the consequences: church splits,

attacks from "revived" saints, and the creation of lowest-common-denominator rival congregations.

Third, a wave a sexual debauchery. The rise of illegitimate births nine months after a local revival was noted by observers during both Great Awakenings, and modern historians have confirmed this statistical relationship.

Fourth, the subsequent falling away of many. The heat of the moment cooled. The converts left the churches. These people could not be called to repentance. This phenomenon led to what were called "the burned-over districts" by Charles Finney, who had personally burned over many of them.

Fifth, the rise of political liberalism and non-Christian social transformation. The First Great Awakening led to the American Revolution and then to the Unitarian-Masonic Federal Constitution, with its abolition of Christian oaths of office (Article VI, Section 3). The Second Great Awakening led to abolitionism as the primary focus of Christian political action and then to the Unitarian-led Civil War. American Christianity split in the decades after the War: a worldly social gospel paralleled by an escalating pietist-fundamentalist retreat from all social and political concerns. Common-ground (anti-creedal) religious experientialism leads to common-ground (neutral) ethics and common-ground (humanistic) politics.

The Transfer of Authority

The two great revivals of the American past led to a transfer of cultural authority from orthodox Christians to Unitarians and then to humanists. The First Great Awakening broke the authority of the older Calvinistic holy commonwealths of New England. The Civil War broke the political authority of Arminian Christians. The parallel rise of the social gospel and pietism broke their cultural authority.

Why did this occur? Because the revivals promoted the **lowest common denominators**: theologically, ecclesiastically, judicially, and emotionally. There was no vision of a holy commonwealth in the preaching of the revivalists. Everything was focused on gaining a one-time profession of faith, by whatever means. The revival meetings were like medieval fairs: everyone came. The unconverted masses came mostly for excitement, secondarily for entertainment, and only belatedly for a religious conversion. The revivalists gave them what they wanted. The pastors couldn't and still remain faithful to God.

Later, there was an ecclesiastical transfer of authority. The waves of revival spread westward, just as the population had. The mainline denominations did not move fast enough, except for the Cumberland Presbyterians, who were not very Calvinistic and did not require advanced academic degrees for their pastors. The old saw goes like this: "The Baptist evangelists walked into the West, the Methodists rode on horseback, the Presbyterians went by covered wagon, and the Episcopalians waited for regularly scheduled train service." The more rigorous the academic requirements to serve as a pastor, the slower the comparative growth of the denomination during the revival. Presbyterians, New England Congregationalists, and Episcopalians, who had been the dominant influences as late as 1790, were dwarfed by the Baptists and Methodists during the next half century.

The pietism of these new churches was uniquely suited to the humanists' demand that Christians, as Christians, withdraw from public life over the next century and a half.

Except for one doomed crusade - Prohibition - nothing of a social or political nature motivated these groups after World War I. Only with the Supreme Court's legalization of abortion has a small minority of these groups, usually laymen and especially laywomen, begun to re-enter American political life. Only with the accelerating reduction of the lowest common denominator of American public morality have a few Christians begun to challenge the establishment humanist elite, which now has a huge majority of public school graduates, plus an army of functional illiterates, solidly behind it.

What we have seen in past revivals does not inspire optimism about future revivals. The revivalism of the past has been **antinomian** to the core. Without exception, the great revivals have accelerated the drift into secularism, by separating personal conversion from biblical law. This antinomianism has undermined church, family, and State. In short, **revivalism has never been covenantal**. It has always been individualistic. It has undermined the primary covenantal institution, the church, and from there it has undermined everything else. **Revivalism has invariably transferred authority away from the existing church order, yet always in the name of Christianity.**

So, what is to be done?

Conclusion

The churches are not prepared for the coming of mass revival: theologically, institutionally, financially, educationally, or morally. If we get a mass revival, new converts will inevitably ask: "How Should We Then Live?" If this new life in Christ is defined as "meet, eat, retreat, and hand out a gospel tract," the revival will leave one more egg on the face of God's church. If the revival does not definitively break the existing pessimillennialism, as well as from antinomianism, the church will be set back again for several generations. The whole world will become a gigantic burned-over district.

None of this is perceived by the churches, which are not ready for revival. Yet revival may come nonetheless. If it does, we will see the most remarkable example of "on the job training" since the early church gathered in Jerusalem to meet, eat, and wait for the Holy Spirit to put them to work. They were waiting to receive power (Acts 1:8); today's church is waiting for late-night reruns of "Ozzie and Harriet."

If revival comes, millions of new converts will ask: "Now what should we do?" What will pastors tell them? "Pray while you're plowing the fields"? Ours is not a frontier wilderness. The division of international labor is the most developed in mankind's history. Platitudes will not suffice. Yet platitudes are all that Bible-believing Christians have offered mankind for a century. Christians have rejected biblical law, so all they can do is baptize the prevailing humanism. But baptized humanism will not suffice next time; humanism is too clearly bankrupt.

What is to be done? Solomon told us three millennia ago: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13-14). Jesus told us two millennia ago: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). But the churches have not listened. They had better start listening soon.

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