

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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Vol. IV, No. 1

January/February, 1980

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?

by Gary North

"What do you know?" is a standard greeting in America. "Well, what do you know about that?" is another familiar colloquial expression. The odd fact is that the person who repeats either of these phrases really doesn't expect you to know much at all. The standard refrain to "What do you know?" is "Not much."

Peter wrote, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you . . ." (1 Pet. 3:15). That is a very broad assignment. There are many people who might ask all sorts of questions concerning the reason of the hope that is in you. That hope is not some single-faceted matter. It is an all-encompassing faith that involves the whole created realm.

A few years ago, I spoke at a seminary in the South. I admonished the students to set this task before their eyes. They should maintain their commitment to studying the broad sweep of orthodox theology throughout their careers. At the same time, however, each of them should discipline himself to master at least one specialized field that might prove useful to the church as a whole at some future period. Both disciplines are needed for a balanced intellect: the general and the specific.

Such discipline is difficult. Only a handful of pastors ever achieve it. In fact, only a few scholars do. They tend to become specialists, even as the pastors tend to become generalists (if they try to become anything at all, intellectually). But the Christian world needs both the generalist and the specialist, and best of all, the person who is familiar with the difficulties and possibilities of both.

The generalist has the advantage of being able to fit the parts into a whole. That whole may be fuzzy around the edges, but at least it's an integrated whole. It provides a framework for dealing with numerous bits and pieces, although in order to fit them into a preconceived whole, the generalist is tempted to force the parts together, not taking sufficient care to see to it that the edges of each piece fit securely in the corresponding edges of the other pieces of the intellectual puzzle.

The specialist is barely concerned with the whole. He is too busy shaving the fine edges of his little piece of knowledge, making a work of art out of his special field. He tends to ignore relationships between parts, and he is less likely to exercise creative judgment in discovering important correlations between seemingly unrelated data.

We need finely crafted parts. At the same time, it's not the parts as parts that we are concerned with; we are concerned about the integrated, functioning whole. This is why experts in any field have an obligation to keep the broad picture in mind. That really is what we mean by the words "universe" and "uni-

versity": a coherent, integrated whole which gives structure and meaning to the parts. And Clark Kerr was quite correct when he described the modern university as a "multiversity," of which his own University of California was chief—an unintegrated body of wildly specialized academic moles, all burrowing deeply into their tunnels.

Generalists

It takes lots of reading to keep up with practically everything. Yet it is the widely read leader in any organization who can make some semblance of sense out of the daily operations of the structure. The generalist is like a juggler who must keep oranges, pins, and plates in the air, while giving the appearance of total control.

A program of successful tactical maneuvers is worthless unless it has a grand strategy. Winning the battles and not the war means very little. We must have dedicated men in every sphere of life who can exercise self-discipline to master a grand strategy for their particular areas of responsibility, and then mobilize the troops. The generalists are like military commanders, also called generals, who can provide leadership for the experts in the specialized fields. They must have a "feel" for the problems of the specialists, as well as a "feel" for the whole. Without the presence of a generalist, scholarship becomes fragmented. So do other forms of human organization.

The generalist must have the courage of his convictions. He is the one who takes the greatest risks. He always faces the criticism of other generals, but even more annoying, because of their inevitability, are the criticisms of the specialists who see a "non-professional" invading their jealously guarded domains. This does not prove that the generalist knows nothing about the field. The subtle nuances of the specialists' debates may have escaped the generalist, but he can always find a certified specialist who will back him up, if he looks hard enough. It is his lack of "fine-tuning," not his conclusions as such, that are likely to create opposition to the generalist among the tightly knit fraternity of specialists, where methodology, not content and conclusions, tends to reign supreme.

The generalist has to bear the risks of making numerous methodological gaffes in some specialist's field or another, but he knows that the risks must be taken if the war is to be won. Obviously, no general can know the exact conditions in a particular field as well as the captain who is there, but on the other hand, the captain needs the support of a commanding general if he is to be maintained in the field. Academic specialists, unlike captains,

seldom have any sense of dependence, or the sense of a true battle's being in progress. They do not acknowledge the need for a chain of command from a generalist with a commanding view of the battlefield.

Specialists

Specialists are like brick manufacturers who are content to produce endless bricks, completely oblivious to the needs or concerns of the architect and the contractor who will convert their bricks into a coherent structure. The bricks, not the structure, are the focus of concern for today's academic specialists. Some of them even deny the possibility of constructing any permanent building. Scholarship, in their eyes, is the production of increasing quantities of ever-more meticulously constructed bricks. It is the meticulous construction, even more than the brick itself, which is the motivation of these brick producers. Unless the brick has the characteristic marks of narrowly prescribed craftsmanship, the brick manufacturers' guild rejects it as being amateurish, irrespective of the usefulness of the brick in question. The result has become inescapably obvious: **chaos in the brickyard**. (One of the most insightful satires on this process within the scientific guild is a letter from Bernard K. Forscher of the Mayo Clinic to *Science* [18 Oct. 1963], p. 339: "Chaos in the Brickyard.")

What has overtaken science has also overtaken modern theology. The irrelevance of contemporary humanistic theology — dying Germans and imitation Germans digging up the burial mounds of other dead Germans — is matched only by the studied irrelevance of their orthodox counterparts, who are specializing in the realm of the internalized spirit. Footnotes heaped upon footnotes, signifying nothing — fully tenured nothing. To paraphrase the Rime of the Ancient Mariner: "Footnotes, footnotes everywhere, and not a thought to think."

Academic people have no monopoly on specialization. There are specialists in the church courts, who have devoted their lives to a mastery of *Robert's Rules of Order*. Pastors decided long ago in some denominations to imitate the halls of the politicians by putting *Robert's Rules of Order* into their denominational handbooks, thereby turning over the direction of their denominations to those who are master craftsmen of the ramrod, the delay, and the point of order. I am not exaggerating the role of the clergy in this massive sell-out to the bureaucrats. Gen. Henry M. Robert, a military engineer and acknowledged expert in designing defenses for ports, wrote his rule book in the late 1860's. He openly admitted that it was "based in its general principles upon the rules and practices of Congress, and adapted, in its details, to the use of ordinary societies." At least he grasped the fact of the abnormality of Congress (which I used to work for, by the way). "In 1876 he placed an order with a printer for four thousand copies of a first edition of 176 pages. He mailed a thousand review copies to business leaders and clergyman. About the same time, S. C. Griggs, a Chicago commercial publisher that had previously rejected the book, agreed to distribute and the edition was gone in a few months. To date more than two million copies have been sold. (*The Publish-It-Yourself Handbook* [Yonkers New York: Pushcart Press, 1973], p. 25.) He spotted the potential market for bureaucratic consumption: clergymen and businessmen. Both groups have proven able in substituting precisely controlled meetings in place of output. Today, of course, he would have first sent the review copies to university administrators.

Reconstruction

To overcome the inherent weaknesses of each group, we need a generation of disciplined generalists who have also mastered at least one specialized field. These men will know the problems of both fields. They will be available for service, whether the

"market" needs overall administration or specialized production.

A Christian who is serious about making an impact on his own area of personal influence and responsibility should be prepared to give an account of his specialty whenever those around him need advice. He should have a good reputation with those who are "laboring in the brick pits," as well as with the designers and builders of edifices. When a problem arises which requires careful, detailed answers, there should be one man in the camp of the orthodox who has done his homework and who can provide specific answers — answers that are the product of a systematic perspective.

Pastors should be in communication with others of similar commitment. They should integrate their specialized efforts into a coherent plan of action. The various assignments should be farmed out, by voluntary choice, well in advance. Each participant should know his own strengths and weaknesses, and he should choose his field of lifetime diligence with care. Then he should labor to become the most skilled worker in this field, but always as a representative of any army, not as a lone wolf. He should share his ideas with his colleagues. He should try to find out what they are doing in their areas of specialization. When he finds himself in a bind, or facing some sort of dead-end, he should be able to call upon a whole team of specialists to get answers. They should be brickmakers who understand how to build, how to contribute to the overall structure.

This is why I think pastors should produce newsletters. Mimeograph machines are cheap. You can buy them at auctions for under a hundred dollars. Men should hone their mental skills and continue to do research, or at least systematic reading, in a particular field. Then they should trade letters with others of like mind. If a mimeograph machine is not used, then audio tapes can be. There should be at least one well-prepared specialist in the ranks who can be called upon to produce a position paper, or whatever, with only a brief notice. We are an army. We should train ourselves as a well-drilled army is trained.

The Laziness Factor

There are pastors who complain about the difficulty — even impossibility — of comprehending a book like Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973). Yet eighth graders at the Fairfax Christian School have been assigned this "impossibly difficult" book. They also read Rushdoony's *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, [1968] 1978), another book which some pastors have regarded as being too complicated. Is it possible that today's eighth graders are better equipped intellectually than pastors? (I shall remain discreetly silent about my opinion.)

Men who are too busy to read are too busy to lead. Pastors who have too many things to do besides reading things more profound than *Christianity Today* will face congregations that are unprepared to solve their own problems. Pastors who think they are too busy to read much are very likely too busy because they don't read much.

That's why a dedicated, self-disciplined group of literate, thoughtful pastors will be in a position to recapture their denominations by the end of the century. Either the establishment leadership will be replaced, or else their denominations will be replaced. Irrelevance is too dangerous institutionally in the face of today's crises. The ecclesiastical establishments do not read, cannot write, and have not thought for a generation. They are ripe for the picking. The era of universal theological "know-nothingism" is coming to a close.

If the pastors will not discipline themselves for this battle, then laymen must. Responsibility is a function of knowledge, not ecclesiastical ordination.