

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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Backward, Christian Soldiers?*

by Gary North

What would you do if a topless bar-adult theater complex opened across the street from your church or Christian school? If your community were hit with a wave of pornographic materials, which institution should take the lead in campaigning against it? A hundred years ago, the answer would have been instantaneous, the local church. Yet when confronted with just this question by members of one southern California conservative church, the pastor replied that the church should do nothing officially. "We can't get involved in social action projects," he said.

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matt. 5:13). Christians have been losing their cultural savor for well over two centuries, and with increasing speed since the end of the Civil War. How could this have happened?

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christians invented the university, one of the great engines of social advancement and cultural enrichment ever conceived. Now they build backwater Bible colleges that send the students to the local secular college or university for the "neutral" academic subjects — like Freudian psychology, Keynesian economics and evolutionary anthropology. Christian professors have no alternatives today.

Challenging a Whole Culture

The Reformation saw the advent of modern printing, and the bulk of that printing was Christian, and by no means limited to gushy devotional tracts. Luther was challenging the whole fabric of Western culture; Calvin was rebuilding his city of Geneva (at the desperate request of the local town leaders); John Knox was winning Scotland to the gospel, using the sword as well as the pen. This literature still survives, even in secular college classrooms; it changed our world. The King James Bible established a standard of excellence in the English language that has never been superseded. Try to find a modern Christian example of literature that has had this kind of impact!

In 1974, I sent the manuscript of *Foundations of Christian Scholarship* to a Christian publishing firm in Britain. The book's essays challenge the established secular presuppositions of many academic disciplines: economics, sociology, psychology, education, philosophy, political science and even mathematics.

The writers all had advanced degrees, and most held the Ph.D. The letter of preliminary rejection explained that

the publishing organization "has been generally very wary about involving itself in this field. There is no one of any real competence to get involved in these matters of economics, sociology, etc. [presumably, he means nobody associated with his publishing firm] and it would be sticking our neck out with no one able to answer the charges that might be made. We see the first concern to address ourselves to the prevailing piety in worship, prayer and preaching. . . ."

The Prophets' Legacy

What has become of the legacy of the Hebrew prophets, who called a rebellious people — including priests and kings — to repentance and reform? What has become of the whole counsel of God? Why do Christians feel incompetent "to answer the charges that might be made?"

How many times have Bible teachers told their listeners that "the Bible has answers for all of life's problems?" This is true, of course, and what we know as Western Civilization was built upon this truth. Yet the moment Christians seek to find answers to the many problems of life that lie outside the narrow confines of the institutional church, they feel impotent and unqualified to speak.

Christians feel themselves helpless in the face of the complexity of life and the massed intellectual troops of modern secularism. A friend of mine, whose training was in natural science and who was once employed as an analyst of "war games" in a scientific think-tank, commented over a decade ago: "It's ironic. Christians look at science and see a roaring lion, when it's really a mouse in the corner, shivering."

Like ten of the twelve spies sent out by Moses to report on the military capacities of the various Canaanitic cultures, our reports are filled with dismay. Yet Rahab was to tell the spies of the next generation that "as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11).

Lord in the earth beneath: here is the battle cry of faithful Christians in every generation. Not Lord in the heaven above, but impotent on earth, but Lord of heaven and earth. The misinterpretation of Christ's words — that His kingdom is not of this world — should finally be given the burial it deserves. He was asserting to Pilate that His source of authority, of human sovereignty, of lordship was not an earthly source, but a heavenly source. His words are clear: "if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews:

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but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 8:36). Not from hence: He was speaking of the source of His authority, not the place of His legitimate reign.

But how many retreatist sermons have been preached concerning the solely spiritual, exclusively internal realm of Christ's kingdom, as a supposedly accurate explanation of this famous biblical text? I shudder to think of the number: like the sands of the sea shore.

Christian Scholarship

Why should Christians be afraid to challenge the secular culture of today? Has there ever been a culture less sure of its own beliefs, less confident of its own powers, more confused concerning its own destiny? The newspapers, the entertainment media and the universities can speak of little else but defeat and alienation. When a rare piece of positive drama appears, it usually deals with some historical figure, like Patton or Cromwell. The Christians have hardly heard of Cromwell, the great Puritan leader and revolutionary general. Secularists like the author Antonia Fraser or the producers of "Cromwell" have had to remind modern Christians of their own heritage, so forgetful have orthodox believers become. We let the secularists do even our spiritual work for us, so debilitating have the effects of emotional, pietistic withdrawal been.

Why should critiques of modern secularism been left to neo-orthodox scholars like the theologian Langdon Gilkey, whose book, *Maker of Heaven and Earth* (at least in the first six chapters), is perhaps the best book available on the implications of the doctrine of God's creation — something Gilkey does not even believe in its historic form? Why was it left to him to remind Christians that without the sure foundation of the belief in the creation, modern science could never have arisen? He, not the local pastor, has announced: "The optimism and buoyancy of Western culture is more an effect of the idea of the good creation than its cause."

With the fading belief in the creation, we have seen the coming of major intellectual crises in science and the arts. Who has informed modern Christians that without permanent standards of law and truth, no progress or development is possible, and that with the coming of relativism we have seen the death of the idea of optimistic progress? Why can't it be some internationally known evangelist rather than a secularist like Gunther Stent, professor of biology at the University of California, Berkeley? His book, setting forth this idea, *The Coming of the Golden Age: A View of the End of Progress*, was published for the American Museum of Natural History. Why must the secularists do our work?

When we think of Christian scholarship, what do we

have in mind? A seminary? But seminaries limit their efforts to instruction in the biblical languages, evangelism, church history, or practical theology — counselling, church budgets, visitation. Apart from the Wycliff translation program, there is hardly a single explicitly Christian endeavor that has impressed the secular world with its competence. We are second rate, or third rate, and we know it. Why? I contend that it is directly related to our stubborn unwillingness to consider the whole counsel of God. A book like R. J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* should have been written two centuries ago; a culture should have flowered because of it. Instead, we let the secularists do our work for us. We do not trust our own competence.

Christians believe today that they can safely retreat into a zone of social impotence and therefore social irresponsibility, just as they have done for a century. But with the acids of relativism and nihilism eroding the foundations of secularism — the faith which has supported the Western world since at least 1900 — the social buffers are disappearing. Drugs, pornography, lawlessness, economic disruption, witchcraft, random murders and all the rest of secularism's new children no longer respect the doors of the churches the way they used to. Like Joab, contemporary Christians are discovering that the horns of the altar no longer protect them from destruction (I Kings 2:28-34). They can no longer be "rice Christians," the beneficiaries of endless fruits of a once-Christian culture.

Conclusion

Christianity can reconstruct the culture; nothing else can. Secularism is at the end of the road spiritually; nothing is left to hold society together except brute force. God calls His people to leave the onions of Egypt behind them. There are no more safety zones in the combat of faith; as in the "demilitarized zone" of Vietnam. The battle rages. We can no longer whine, like Moses: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I — the LORD? . . . And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses . . ." (Ex. 4:11-12, 14a).

Moses finally had to do what he was told. He took up the challenge God had set before him. He would have saved himself a lot of agony had he responded initially. If it was true for Moses, before the revelation of Jesus Christ, to whom all power has been given (Matt. 28:18), it should be far more true of His New Testament people. The enemy is at the gates.