

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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THE FATHERS IN THE WILDERNESS

by Gary North

Your carcasses shall fall in the wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun (Num. 14:29-30).

These words of God were a threat and a promise. To those who had just attempted to stone Joshua and Caleb because of the latter's optimistic report and their call to arms (14:10), these words of God sealed their earthly fate. They would die in the wilderness that they despised and feared to die in (14:3). The reality of their worst fear would eventually overtake them, God vowed. To Caleb and Joshua, however, these words were a guarantee. They and their families would enjoy the fruits of victory, precisely because they both believed in the possibility of claiming those fruits.

At the same time, the doom of the older generation spelled 40 years of frustrating wandering for Joshua and Caleb. These two had been ready to fight the enemy. Instead, they would not gain the opportunity to confront the Canaanites for another generation. They would suffer the frustration of having known that victory had been in their grasp, but that their fathers' generation had not perceived the opportunity. They would be tempted to look back over their shoulders at a forfeited opportunity, and curse the dust of the ground where they would walk for 40 extra years.

They did not yield to the temptation. They persevered. They trudged through the wilderness alongside the cowardly generation that had failed to take advantage of God's promise of victory. They waited patiently for the day that every last one of them would go into the grave, thereby "clearing the decks" for the next generation's conquest. They would wait 40 years in order to take command of the new army that God was raising up during the wilderness years.

Anti-Revolutionary Restraint

Adam and Eve refused to wait to exercise judgment. They refused to wait for God to place His robes of authority around them. Instead, they pronounced judgment against God and in favor of the serpent. They acted against the word of God, as if the negative promise of God's judgment were not true.

Israel fell again in the wilderness. The people discounted the promise of God—in this case, a positive promise of victory, the equivalent of the promised tree of life in the garden. But the negative promise of judgment always is the reverse side of the covenant's coin. The judgment of God fell on them once again. They would not enter the promised garden. They would die in the wilderness.

It is basic to godly rule that men not grab for power prior to their ability to rule, nor shirk power when they are ready to rule. Joshua and Caleb had to wait. They had to do what Adam and Eve refused to do. They had to put up with the rule of those very same leaders who had not sided with them in their call to offensive action against the Canaanites. God had promised them success, but that promise had a long timetable.

They had to become models for the next generation. It was clear who would lead that generation to victory. God had said clearly that only two men of that generation would go into the land. There could be no doubt concerning the ultimate leaders of the next generation. Yet neither Joshua nor Caleb attempted to speed up God's timetable by advancing prematurely to positions of authority. They remained covenantally subordinate to the incompetent leaders of the doomed generation. Like David under Saul, the two refused to grab for the reins of power. Their restraint was the standard. The younger men were to follow their lead. By younger, I mean all those who were under age 60 (20 + 40) at the time of Israel's crossing through the Jordan River.

God did not ask that younger generation to remain obedient for the sake of "pie in the sky by and by." He asked them to remain patient so as to avoid the fate of their elders—and of Adam and Eve. He asked them to remain patient for the sake of a guaranteed victory, in time and on earth. They would eat of the gardens they had not planted, drink of the fruit of the vines they had not cultivated, and live in the houses they had not built. The price of these rewards was patience and obedience to known, doomed, cursed incompetents. If they could remain faithful to incompetents for 40 years, they might also remain faithful to competents later on. The transfer of authority would come after a generation of waiting.

Fundamentalism's Vacuum

With the death of William Jennings Bryan in 1925, a few days after the end of the ill-fated Scopes' trial, the heart of fundamentalism went out of the movement. The humiliation of the creationist cause had been magnified by the fact that fundamentalism's most eloquent spokesman had compromised so much (he was not a 24-hour-day six-day creationist, and said so on the witness stand), and had lost so overwhelmingly. Scopes was convicted and fined a token amount, but even this was reversed on a technicality at the appeals level. In the press, the fundamentalists were pilloried. They did not recover for two generations.

With Bryan's death, the mantle of fundamentalist leadership fell on J. Gresham [GRESHAM] Machen [MAYCHEN], Bryan's fellow Presbyterian, a man who always claimed to be orthodox rather than fundamentalist. He was opposed to Pro-

hibition (as a nineteenth-century economic liberal), and refused to criticize smoking or dancing. He was also a mild postmillennialist and strongly opposed to premillennial dispensationalism. But there were no articulate fundamentalists to lead the fight against theological modernism, so Machen took over the anti-modernist leadership by default. His battle to save the Northern Presbyterian Church from the modernists was lost from 1926-36, as was the battle to save the Northern Baptists from those same modernist forces (immersed).

With his death on New Year's Day, 1937, a void appeared in the intellectual leadership of American fundamentalism. There were Missouri Synod Lutheran scholars and Christian Reformed (Dutch-American) scholars, but they had no following in the mainstream of American fundamentalism. From 1937 until the early 1960's, there was no one who stepped in to fill that void in leadership. The issues of depression, world war, the Cold War, economic recovery, and then the mindless television culture of the 1950's dominated the thinking of Americans. Fundamentalists had nothing uniquely biblical to say concerning these issues, and even if they had said something, no one was listening. At best, they were anti-Communist and anti-liberal, but they had no positive program to substitute. A muddled patriotism was no match for secular humanism's worldwide intellectual and political forces.

Think back to 1940, or even 1960. Where were the serious scientific books based on the six-day creation? From George McCready Price's ineffective efforts in the 1920's until Morris and Whitcomb published *The Genesis Flood* in 1961, what was there? *Genesis Flood* had to be published by tiny and unknown Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., since all the other Christian publishing houses to which the manuscript was sent insisted that the authors make at least a few friendly references to non-six-day creationist positions. They refused.

What about social theory? Prior to Rushdoony's *Foundations of Social Order* (1969), what was there? What about Christian economics? What about Christian politics? What about Christian legal theory? Biblical law? In short, until the 1960's, there was nothing but a vast wasteland—a wilderness—as far as serious Christian scholarship on questions relating to society was concerned. There was no leadership.

The Liberals' Vacuum

With the death of John Kennedy on November 22, 1963—also the day of death for Aldous Huxley and C. S. Lewis—the rhetoric of can-do liberalism was taken up by a crass Texan who knew how to wield power under the old rules, and who proceeded to involve the United States in two losing wars, the Vietnam war and the war on poverty. Can-do liberalism started twisting arms visibly, and by 1968, the humanistic forces of mindlessness, of revolution, and of drugged retreat reacted violently to what little was left of the humanist vision of Camelot. Lyndon Johnson was the invisible man at the Democrats' 1968 convention, and he remains invisible. Simultaneously, bureaucrats took over the management of the dreams of Camelot, as bureaucrats always do, and "the Great Society" became an economic and foreign policy nightmare.

Thus, by the early 1970's, the old liberalism was crumbling ideologically, and by the late 1970's, it was in full retreat institutionally. The rise of the neo-conservative movement

has routed the intellectual leaders of the old left, and the rise of the New Right's direct-mail politics and the New Christian Right's voter registration drives among fundamentalists has begun to rout the political leaders. The extent of Mondale's loss probably sealed the fate of the old left's Presidential hopes. Some new left vision, some new age vapor, or some crisis-solving blue collar patriotism seem to be the humanists' only political alternatives. They are in disarray. They control the reigns of power temporarily, but they are no longer being given a free ride by the conservatives.

The Era of Wilderness Wandering

With the rise of the Christian Reconstruction movement in the late 1960's, and the rise of the Protestant "renewal" movement of the same period, the vacuum of fundamentalism is being filled. On the other side, liberation theology and neo-Anabaptist communalism have arisen to fill the void of the older theological liberalism. Each side looks at its aging leaders and hopes for something better.

What is called for now is a period of rebuilding the foundations. An enormous educational program is called for. The Christian day school school movement and the Christian home school movement are the main long-term weapons in this educational counter-attack against humanism. Of secondary importance long-term, but of great importance short-term, are the new T.V. satellite Christian broadcasts and the advent of computerized mailing lists and newsletters.

The older leaders are ambivalent at best, hostile at worst. Some will go part of the way, others refuse. Some have adopted certain aspects of the Reconstructionist position; others have rejected all aspects. Most ecclesiastical and seminary leaders are either unaware of, or confused about, most of what has happened in the Christian world since 1979. Most are skeptical. Their institutions are being shaken by controversy, and the shaking has only just begun. They are unable to lead, for they long ago adopted a philosophy of compromise and non-involvement politically. Franky Schaeffer lambasts them weekly, and his father's last testament, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, announced the necessity of a break with the conservative (reactionary) leadership of the past.

What now? Patience. Study. Institutional push-ups. Several laps around the field. In short, hiking in the wilderness. We need a scraping off of top layers. But it is not the task of the younger men to scrape off the dead institutional layers. Their task is to scrape off their own ideological and theological layers. They must pioneer new avenues of both Christian service and Christian confrontation. They must develop their own agendas, and finance their own programs. They are to replace the stagnant fathers by superior performance over time. Their cry should be: "**Replacement, not revolution.**" It is the leavening process which should be their model, as it was in the firstfruits offering (Lev. 23:17).

Wandering in the wilderness prepared Joshua's generation for a successful confrontation with the Canaanites. A similar process ought to accomplish the same thing with this generation. Though the present theological and ecclesiastical leadership is compromised, just as Saul's leadership was, it is to be tolerated for a time. The testing process of wilderness wandering will purge away the dross of a syncretistic Christian-humanist heritage. Let us strive to become gold; God's judgment will remove the dross.

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