

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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CRITICAL MASS Part V: Homiletic Gluttons by Gary North

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:23-25).

James made it clear: listening is not enough. This principle is absolutely fundamental to the Christian life. It is fundamental to everything. The obese person who spends all his spare time reading diet books while munching on cookies will stay obese. Diet books are designed to show a fat person what to do and motivate him to do it. If he does not do it, then reading diet books is worse than a waste of his time; it condemns him. He has been given knowledge, and he has refused to heed it. "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat" (Prov. 23:1-3). Thus, he is now worse off:

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47-48).

This applies to Christian Reconstruction more than to any other contemporary religious movement. Those who gravitate toward this position tend to be readers. Readers are always subject to the temptation to read just one more book before applying what they have read. Christian Reconstruction calls for the restructuring of every institution on earth—huge vision, few visible resources. "With such a large task ahead of me, maybe I need to read one more book," thinks the addict. Wrong.

Starvation in the Pulpit

Christians who read a great deal are subjected to an additional temptation: joining the futile quest for preaching that matches their libraries. Very few pastors read widely. Also, very few pastors read narrowly. So, the typical Christian Reconstructionist has more information about the application of biblical law to institutions than the average pastor does.

There are Reconstructionists who think that they are not being fed meat from the pulpit. This may well be true. But why should people who have read a dozen or more

books on Christian Reconstruction expect to be fed meat by a preacher who has not read a book in ten years?

Well, then, says the pew-sitter, I will seek out a great preacher. Question: Why should anyone expect to locate a really good preacher? After all, most pastors have attended seminary. There is no better way to destroy a man's ability to preach than to send him to seminary. The more Reformed the seminary, the truer this statement is. Seminarians are taught how to preach by having them preach to seminarians. Worse, they are taught to preach to seminary professors.

Anyone who expects to sit under great preaching should also expect to join a megachurch where personal contact with the preacher is rare. Or else he should expect to see the great (and presently undiscovered) preacher leave for greener pastures.

Great preaching is as rare a talent as great anything else, and it is distributed seemingly on a random basis with respect to theology. Great preachers are rarely great theologians. They may or may not be competent administrators. They may or may not be effective motivators. One thing is sure: they are never great reproducers of themselves. Anyone who expects a pastor like D. James Kennedy to produce a replacement with Kennedy's gifts is as naive as the person who expects his organist, Diane Bish, to produce another organist of comparable talent to replace her.

Protestantism's Centrality of Preaching

Because the Protestant church was born as a reaction to the theological corruption of the Catholic Church, which did not preach Paul's and Augustine's gospel message of salvation by grace through faith, the Protestants have always emphasized preaching. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Protestants have always built their churches around preaching. This has always been a mistake. The church has three marks: preaching, the sacraments, and discipline. None is supposed to take precedence institutionally. None is supposed to become "first among equals."

If a Protestant were to visit a church that had quarterly preaching, he would not return. Such a church would not survive. Yet most Protestants attend churches that serve the Lord's Supper quarterly. A few may celebrate this sacrament monthly. John Calvin never doubted that it is supposed to be served weekly; virtually none of his disciples believe this today. They take their stand with the magistrates of Geneva, who forbade Calvin and the other pastors to serve weekly communion. The Genevan magistrates well understood that weekly communion would elevate the church's sanctions, which are temporal and eternal, above

the civil government's exclusively temporal sanctions. They shut off this challenge to their authority by the threat of civil sanctions. It is difficult to understand why Calvin's spiritual heirs have sided with the magistrates. Perhaps it is because they fear the added responsibility that a church with sanctions more respected than the State's would place on them.

If today's evangelical churches were to elevate the celebration of the Lord's Supper to its status as **judicially equal** to the sermon, they would have to begin excommunicating sinners. Excommunication is the concomitant practice to communion.¹ This would mean added judicial responsibility for pastors and elders. Today, the State threatens churches that excommunicate public adulterers, as a church in Oklahoma discovered a few years ago. The humanist State fears the church's rival authority. The pastors and elders are almost equally fearful of their own authority. This is why Protestant pastors rarely preach on Matthew 16:19: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It scares them.

The result is the Protestant tradition of the centrality of preaching. This has placed a heavy responsibility on homiletical skills, while reducing it for judicial skills. The Protestant Church has therefore become a "voice-only" institution. This matches the desire of the "ears-only" church member described by James: "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

Achieving the Extraordinary

The success of the Church International is not built on great preaching, any more than the success of McDonald's International is built on great cooking. It is built on word-and-deed evangelism by its members: **ordinary people who are trained in simplified service programs that are carefully designed to produce extraordinary results.** The success of the system must never become dependent on the availability of extraordinary people, either in the pulpit or in the pews. There are too few extraordinary people.² Worse; the gospel is designed to alienate extraordinary people. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Cor. 1:27).

1. The practice of the Campbellite churches of combining weekly communion and open communion has had a predictable result: God's removal of the power of the sacraments from these churches.

2. Michael Gerber, *The E-Myth* (New York: Harper Business, 1986), pp. 59-61.

What is needed today are manuals on how to serve God in a wide variety of ways. Each manual has to break down the service system into easily remembered and easily mastered steps. The assigned task must be achievable through a series of simple steps. The old military rule is correct: **KISS** — Keep It Simple, Stupid.

Preaching should be structured to motivate people in the pews³ to take on one of these projects. The bulk of the work of a local church should fall on its membership, since only by a sharing of the burden can a church be expected to grow, especially after the founding preacher-pastor leaves. The unique division of labor that the Church offers must be implemented (1 Cor. 12).

Succession — point five of the biblical covenant model — is threatened ecclesiastically by great preaching. The lesson of Charles Haddon Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle is this: a congregation that rests on great preaching collapses when that preaching is removed.

Conclusion

Critical mass in one congregation can be attained by great preaching, but it cannot be sustained denominationally by great preaching. Chuck Smith of Calvary Church in Orange County, California, is not noted for his great preaching. He is noted for his comprehensive preaching: he goes through the whole Bible every five years. To listen to Smith is to wonder: How did this man build such a congregation, let alone a whole movement? What he has built institutionally probably will survive his death. The lesson of Chuck Smith's preaching confirms positively the negative lesson of Spurgeon's preaching: the light of the gospel is not long sustained by pyrotechnics.

The organizational secret of sustaining critical mass ecclesiastically is to train people from the beginning to build the local church from the bottom up. They must be taught from the beginning that the congregation will never become a megachurch. Instead, it must multiply. Critical mass is based on the willingness and ability of a portion of the membership of every local congregation to walk away from the existing preacher and start another congregation under a new preacher. In any case, preachers invariably die, take better offers, retire, or run off with the organist's daughter. **Institutional continuity must be provided by the judicial character of the sacraments, not the skills of a preacher.** The city on God's hill is not a lighthouse. It is a thousand points of light. And there are a thousand hills for "urban development." Let us get busy.

3. Actually, pews are an economic disaster. A pew cannot be removed from the sanctuary during the week. So, the sanctuary's square footage cannot be used as a day care, which generates income to support the church. Pews are too expensive a luxury in this post-Christian civilization. Folding chairs are mandatory. Pews should be removed and sold to the United Methodists.