

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. VI, No. 4

© Institute for Christian Economics, 1982

July/August 1982

DEACONS AND VULTURES

by Gary North

...whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (Matt. 20:26-27).

Jesus set forth a new principle of leadership when He instructed His disciples to abandon power struggles. The transition from a prophetic ministry — healing the sick, miracles, revealing the word of God directly — to a priestly ministry is a necessary but difficult one to make. Those who follow in the footsteps of a "charismatic" leader will not possess his powers. Max Weber ["Mawx Vayber"], the great German social scientist, calls this transition "the routinization of charisma."

First comes the charismatic leader, Weber said. "... 'natural' leaders — in times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, political distress — have been neither officeholders nor incumbents of an 'occupation' in the present sense of the word, that is, men who have acquired expert knowledge and who serve for remuneration. The natural leaders in distress have been holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody."

These leaders establish followings, but their organizations are not structured. "In contrast to any kind of bureaucratic organization of offices, the charismatic structure knows nothing of a form or of an ordered procedure of appointment or dismissal. It knows no regulated 'career,' 'advancement,' 'salary,' or regulated and expert training of the holder of charisma or of his aids. It knows no agency of control or appeal, no local bailiwicks or exclusive functional jurisdictions; nor does it embrace permanent institutions like our bureaucratic 'department,' which are independent of persons and of purely personal charisma. Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint. The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His success determines whether he finds them. His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent." (Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills [eds.], *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* [New York: Oxford University Press, Galaxy Book, (1946) 1965], pp. 245-46.)

Jesus Christ was a charismatic figure. He had supernatural powers, was not part of an existing routinized priesthood or bureaucracy, was other-directed (because He knew His Father's will perfectly and performed it perfectly), yet inner-directed (for He was in spiritual communion with His Father). He had a mission and found followers. But He was a far-sighted charismatic leader. He saw the need for creating an organizational structure that would carry on His work. He

knew that it would have to include people of many gifts, some minimal.

Jesus set forth the fundamental principles of long-term organizational success. The mother of James and John (sons of Zebedee) came to Him and asked Him to place them at His right hand in the kingdom. "But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22). They replied that they were able, and Jesus said they would indeed do so — a promise of future hardships and persecution. But only the Father, He said, could appoint men to occupy the highest seats of authority beside Him. Jealousy then overcame the disciples. "And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren" (Matt. 20:24). At this point, Jesus told them the governing principle for His diaconal society: **service brings authority**. The leader must be a servant.

The Diaconal Society

This is what R. J. Rushdoony calls Christ's service-leadership authority structure. (*Law and Society*, vol. II of *Institutes of Biblical Law* [Vallecito, Calif.: Ross House Books, 1982], ch. 91.) Men will not rise to high office by means of back-stabbing, power plays, intrigue, blood relationship, or purchase with money. His church will be marked by servants. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." (Matt. 23:11-12). There is a true **hierarchy of service**.

Rushdoony contrasts the diaconal society with "a society of vultures, all men seeking to prey on other men. It leads to radical conflicts, disorders, and stresses . . . A vulture society will self-destruct; a diaconal society will prosper and flourish" (*ibid.*, p. 404). He sees modern humanist society as a vulture society, headed for a breakdown.

The two societies have radically different authority structures that match the differing goals. There is the **top-down** organization of the vulture society: "The state as lord, exercising dominion, claiming the power of eminent domain, and treating citizens as subjects, is pagan. It becomes a vulture state, not a diocese. The same is true of the church." Then there is the **bottom-up** society: "Unlike the vulture society, the diaconal society is not created from the top down, but from the bottom up. It appears wherever any believer ministers in Christ's name and in terms of His word: 'Freely ye have received, freely give' (Matt. 11:8). Its essence is communion in deed, not merely in rite. A society without communion will explode into violence. *The choice is between communion and revolution*" (*ibid.*, pp. 404-5).

The Incentive System

The humanists criticize Christians for seeking to impose their moral views on all people. They ignore the obvious: humanists are seeking to impose their immoral views on all people. The question is not "moral law vs. neutral law," but rather "whose morality determines the law-order?"

Jesus Christ set forth a program for social reconstruction: service to man brings power. It is a reliable governing principle for all organizations. But service to man must be **under God's law**. If we seek to advance the lawful needs and desires of our fellow man, we will steadily rise to the top. Any organization that does not honor this principle will find itself on the bottom, eventually.

Service is more than a slogan to put on a plaque on the wall. It must be rewarded. The **incentive system** of the organization must be constructed to **reward faithful service**. This is true of the civil government, the church, the school, and the profit-seeking business. In a diaconal society, **he who serves best prospers most**.

The free market rewards those future-predicting entrepreneurs who accurately forecast future consumer demand, and then go out and buy up producer goods to meet that future demand. By delivering to the consumers what they want at prices they can afford, entrepreneurs reap profits. Profit is a residual that is left over after all other costs have been paid for. He who fails to forecast consumer demand, or who pays too much for producer goods, is wasteful. He is using up scarce economic resources. He will earn losses, and he will be forced out of production if he does not learn how to conserve resources. The entrepreneur does well by doing good. He is an agent of the consumers who is involved in a ceaseless quest for ways to meet consumer demand. The **richer** he wishes to become, the **better servant** he must become.

Being a servant (slave) is hard work. People get tired of it. So businessmen get together and pressure politicians to pass laws that protect them from other, more efficient producers. These newer entrants into the market are serving consumers too well. Consumers are responding with their money to offers being made by these overly enthusiastic servants. The State is called in to restrict competition. **This is the political economy of the vulture society.** It is the top-down imposition of force that keeps true servants of the society from performing. **So powerful is the service principle in a free market economy that it must be actively suppressed by its opponents.**

The same is true in churches. Someone will come up with a new idea or new program, but he finds that the hierarchy is instinctively hostile unless some way can be found for the pastor or the elders to supervise every detail. There is no decentralization. Eventually, the innovative person gets tired

of hearing "no!" from the hierarchy. He stops coming up with innovative ideas. Or he leaves. One by one, the church drives out the creative men — younger men, unordained men, retired men who have not attended seminary. **Show me a ministry where innovative men leave, and the leaders refuse to delegate authority to those with new programs for service, and I'll show you a vulture organization, whatever its leaders say or its creed asserts.** Slogans are not the issue. **What is the system of incentives?**

The elders of Israel in Christ's day would not accept His service. He healed men on the sabbath day, and He was criticized. He preached a Gospel of healing, and they threw stones at Him. The entrenched ecclesiastical and political vultures did not welcome this challenge to their authority. They recognized the nature of the challenge: **the diaconal society's organizational principle is the eternal rival of the top-down hierarchy of self-aggrandizement.**

Revolution from the Bottom Up

The Marxists claim to represent the people in their revolutionary struggle against oppression. But look at the Soviet Union's society. It is a top-down hierarchy. The system of incentives does not reward those who serve the people; it rewards those who serve the Party hierarchy. Look at the age of the Kremlin's leadership. These men cannot be removed by the actions of the people, unlike the aged leaders of Japanese industries (which can go broke). **Any social experiment which requires a permanent, monolithic, highly disciplined hierarchical organization to sustain it will not survive.** It will always fall to the bottom-up service organization. That was why Christ defeated Caesar after three centuries of religious warfare.

Paul's outline of the church as a functioning body (I Cor. 12) is our model. The eye should not resent feet; it should seek to see more clearly. The feet must not envy the eye; they must seek to walk more surely. **Mutual support** is the goal. That is how a church, or any other historic movement, rises to the top and stays there. When bureaucrats refuse to find a place of service for creative "charismatics," and when "charismatics" will not tolerate the slower processes of bureaucracies and official channels, then that organization (or society) is doomed. It will succumb to challenges from newer, innovative organizations that understand the service principle and adhere to it.

Christian reconstruction is a service project, a bottom-up replacement of the vulture organizations of the day. By better service to men and God, the faith goes forward to victory. We do not need a violent revolution, or a single hierarchical organization to enforce our will. What we need is an **elite of service**, not an elite of political power.