

# Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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## REPRESENTATION AND AUTHORITY

by Gary North

Matthew 8 records that a centurion came to Jesus and asked Him to heal his servant. It says that "a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him" (v. 5). But Luke 7 says that Jews came to Jesus in the name of the centurion, and then the centurion's friends came to Him (vv. 3, 6). There is no evidence that the centurion ever actually spoke with Jesus. Is there a conflict here? Does the Bible contradict itself?

No. The centurion spoke with Jesus through representatives. Also, the centurion represented his sick servant in his request that Jesus heal him. The centurion understood the doctrine of representation. He even went so far as to say that Jesus did not have to enter his house in order for the servant to be healed (Luke 7:6b). Then he said, "But say the word, and my servant will be healed" (v. 7:7b). He understood Jesus' authority. He was implicitly testifying to Jesus' position as God's representative, for he compared Jesus' authority to his own position as a representative of Caesar:

"For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (Luke 7:8-9; New King James Version).

The Jews spoke to Jesus in the name of the centurion. His friends also spoke in his name. The centurion spoke to Jesus in the name of Caesar (above him) and in the name of his sick servant (below him). Understand, he was publicly subordinating himself to Jesus' authority, despite his official position as Caesar's lawful representative. This took great faith, as Jesus publicly affirmed to the crowd. The centurion recognized that Jesus spoke in the name of God the Father (above Him) and could therefore banish the power of sickness and death (below Him). Jesus **also** was a man under authority. The centurion recognized clearly that Jesus' covenantal subordination to God was the basis of His power over sickness and death, just as the centurion's covenantal subordination to Caesar was the basis of his power over his troops and servants.

We have come "face to face" (representationally through the printed word) to the doctrine of representation: **to speak in someone else's name before God, and to speak to men in God's name.** This is the structural basis of human authority in God's world of plural, hierarchical, institutional authorities.

### In the Name of . . .

The centurion spoke in the name of his servant. The servant was lying in bed, close to death. The servant could hardly speak for himself. It was this very incapacity that was

the basis of the centurion's need to make intercession for him. The centurion recognized that he himself had to speak to Jesus in the name of his servant.

The centurion also recognized that he was as impotent to gain healing for his servant as the servant was. In order for the servant to be healed, the centurion needed to locate someone who could speak authoritatively in God's name. He needed to locate someone who could speak for him and his servant before God the Healer, and who could also speak God's word of power in God's name. He came to Jesus, thereby acknowledging that Jesus possessed this unique office of God's representative who speaks absolutely authoritatively in God's name.

Thus, for the servant to be healed, the centurion had to go through several layers of representative kingdom government. He was the first layer: in between his servant and his friends. The friends came to Jesus. The Jews came to Jesus. Jesus already stood between the Jews and God. All this took place because the centurion stood between Caesar and Israel.

This multilayered system of authority is typical of all human relationships. All human relationships require representation. Jesus' representation of man before God is the basis of the substitutionary atonement. Without this, there could have been no history after Adam's judgment.

Intercession is the basis of God's providential administration in history. Jesus sits at God's right hand, making intercession for His people (Rom. 8:34). The Holy Spirit prays for God's people in the presence of God (Rom. 8:26-27). These prayers are heard by God because they are prayed according to God (Rom. 8:27).

These are not merely symbolic acts. They are historically significant. They affect the way that history unfolds. The servant was healed by the faith of the centurion in Jesus, who in turn validated this faith publicly by healing the servant. These are hierarchical, representational acts.

### A Nation at War

When a national leader selects a general during a war, he acts in the name of the people. The general acts in the name of the leader. The soldiers who serve under the general act in the general's name. These are real events, not merely symbolic. Battles are won and lost in terms of decisions made by generals and their subordinates. Nations win or lose in terms of these decisions.

The citizens of a nation at war are represented by the national leader. His representative decisions have historical effects in the lives of the citizens. Whether they voted for him or not, whether they believe that he has the capacity to lead or not, they are represented by him. They have little choice in the matter, once he is legally sealed by oath in his civil office.

Children who live in a nation at war have no say in who leads them. They live or die or go into captivity in terms of decisions made in their name by those in authority over them.

Everyone always lives under someone else's authority. Someone else always represents them and a portion of their interests in the courts of power. There is no escape from the principle of representation.

### Christians as Representatives

In Genesis 18, Abraham bargained with God to save the city of Sodom. It was not that Abraham loved Sodom. He had already spurned the gifts of Sodom, in order to avoid even a hint of being dependent on Sodom in any way (Gen. 14:23). He recognized hierarchy: he did not want to be under Sodom.

Yet Abraham was perfectly willing for faithful people to be above Sodom representationally. He asked God to spare the city for the sake of 50 people, then 45, and so on, down to ten people. For the sake of as few as ten righteous people, God was willing to spare a wicked city. He was willing to have their righteousness serve as a covering for the city. He would look at them as **Sodom's representatives**, and spare the whole population.

This same office is one which Christians must seek to attain in history. The world is in sin. In order for it to be healed, it needs more time for Christians to do their work. The kingdom of God is like leaven (Matt. 13:33), and leaven takes time to raise the dough. Thus, God looks at Christians as representatives of a world that is in need of more grace.

If Christians serve God diligently, praying for those around them, praying for magistrates above them, praying for peace, as Paul insisted that we must, then their culture may be granted a stay of execution. This is what it means to make intercession (II Tim. 2:1-2). It is an act of grace.

This places Christians above the humanist cultures of our day. To make intercession means that you place yourself in between God and His judgments in history. Those who are in authority over others are those who make intercession. Even though Christians pray for civil magistrates who are above them institutionally, they do so only as God's authorized kingdom representatives. In effect, they take dominion over a culture through prayer, for God grants them prayers that are made in the name of the covenant-breakers in society. Then makes it possible for Christians to inherit the accumulated wealth of covenant-keepers (Prov. 13:22).

This is the same as Abraham's praying on behalf of the sinners in Sodom, or the centurion's making a request of Jesus to heal his servant. There is no doubt that the person who prays on behalf of another is in a position of covenantal authority over that person, for God listens to the covenant-keeper who offers the prayer. This covenantal authority may not be visible institutionally, but it is surely real. God's public answers to such prayers are visible manifestations of his anointing of those who intercede.

Prayer is a major step in any program of external domin-

ion over a pagan civilization. Whether men pray for God's wrath or His blessings, they are praying that He **judge** the society. As God's agents who call down the judgment of God on society, Christians are those who are in ultimate authority in a society.

Because the doctrine of covenantal representation has been denied by so many traditional fundamentalist churches for so long, they no longer take seriously the psalms of cursing in the Bible, such as Psalm 83. They no longer believe that they act as lawful covenantal agents to whom God has assigned the task of bringing a covenant lawsuit to society, just as Jonah brought to Nineveh. They do not take the psalms seriously as contemporary tools of judgment in history. They see the language of God's judgment in history as either purely symbolic of the exclusively inner victory of Christians over sin, or no longer valid in New Testament times.

These churches do not require parents to bring their infants for baptism as their children's covenantal representatives, those who exercise judgment over them in terms of the family covenant. They do not regard the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a covenant-renewal ceremony. They therefore do not take seriously the church's lawful position as God's earthly representative which makes intercession before God for society. They do not take the institutional church seriously as an agency of historic judgment. The church's power is seen as exclusively internal to its members or exclusively symbolic. Church power is not **real**. Such an attitude is the result of a rejection of the covenant as God's means of bringing legal judgments in history.

They do not see intercessory prayer by Christians as a means of extending the kingdom of God in history and therefore the dominion of God, through His representative people. They do not believe that Christ can rule society in history through His people as authorized covenantal agents. They therefore either internalize away the kingdom of God in history, or else they make Christ's rule a literal, physical future event.

### Conclusion

Representation is covenantal. It is also institutional: church, state, and family. Those who make intercession before God are those who are chosen by God to extend His dominion across the earth. This extension of kingdom authority in history is representative. As surely as generals win battles for the head of state, and as surely as the national leader signs the peace treaty in the name of the people, so are Christians Christ's representatives in the kingdom of God on earth. This is why Christians are told to pray: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). This is intercessory prayer for the kingdom in history. Christians are asked to pray this prayer because God intends to answer it.

It is not surprising to learn that many dispensational churches refuse to pray this prayer. They take seriously the anti-covenantal theology of anti-representation.

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