

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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CRITICAL MASS

Part II: Service as the Technique

by Gary North

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14-20).

In the previous issue of *Christian Reconstruction*, I outlined the problem of the critical mass in church membership. Churches face the marriage pool problem in sustaining their views over time. If they do not solve it, they eventually disappear. I argued that the Christian Reconstruction movement faces the same problem. In fact, the problem is far worse, since the Reconstruction movement has few churches or other institutional means of building committed families.

There are certain ways to overcome this. One is the familiar tactic of the annual conference, a tactic that small denominations also use. But an annual conference is not a sufficient substitute for systematic weekly worship. This means that the Reconstructionist finds that he is either unhappy with the worship service of his local congregation, or he is at least unhappy with the content of the preaching. He also suffers from the effects of theological isolation.

The Solution: Local Service

What is the solution to this problem? It seems to me that the only likely solution in the near future is for the person who has Reconstructionist beliefs to begin to apply those beliefs in a practical outworking of local service. As I said before, the great advantage that the city has is that it attracts such a large number of people that they are able to demonstrate their talents in very specialized forms of service. I think this is also the meaning of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. The Church as a whole throughout the world is to provide all of the services needed for the worship of God in the extension of Christian civilization (Christendom). A denomination should specialize in certain forms of these services, and such a denomination will attract people who happen to have these talents.

Within a congregation, the only means of gaining long-term influence is through service. If an individual defends what are regarded as peculiar ideas, he has to overcome the initial skepticism toward those ideas by becoming a well-known servant of others in the congregation or in the

community or both. Consistent service to the needy in the congregation is a way of overcoming ideological resistance. Paul understood this, and so did Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Those people who selflessly serve others around them tend to have good reputations. If it is clear that the ideas which they espouse are consistent with, and motivational for, the kind of service that is praised by all those around them, the ideologically peculiar individual in the congregation can overcome resistance toward his ideas.

What this means is that Christian Reconstruction, in order to be successful, has to develop a commitment to service, a detailed program for service, and motivated individuals who will dedicate themselves to the program. No one form of service is primary, but anything that relates to charity, self-improvement, education, or personal development will be most consistent with Reconstructionist ideals. This means that there has to be a dedicated attempt on the part of those who hold the Reconstructionist position to make a positive difference within their congregations and denominations.

This also means that now is almost certainly not the time to attempt to start Reconstructionist denominations. There is always a temptation to do this, just as there is a temptation for disgruntled residents of a small frontier town to set up an even smaller town nearby. People grow tired of being out of step with those around them. They get tired of being the odd man out. But the warning is all around them: small towns are dying, small denominations are dying, and small congregations are dying. They are being absorbed by the larger entities. The only way to overcome this inclusion effect is to adopt it as a strategy.

What is this strategy? Members of a small organization must look outward toward a world that is in need of the service that they can provide. The needs are out there, and Christians as a whole have the talents to meet those needs. For any small organization to be successful, it has to turn outward. If it focuses inwardly on the endless purification of its members, or the endless purification of its doctrine, it will wind up like the small town that is committed to preserving the old ways, only to find that its heirs have departed from the town and have moved to the big city. The old ways cannot be observed unless they can be sold, generation by generation, by individuals who are committed to the future and who are serving other individuals. A successful ideology must be an outward looking worldview, and it must be put into action. Any ideology that fails to do this cannot survive.

Dedication and Leadership

Douglas Hyde, in his remarkable book, *Dedication and*

Leadership (Notre Dame University Press, 1956), outlines the way in which the Communist Party in England in the 1940's extended its influence. The leaders always knew the party would be small. They also knew that it could have great influence if the members of the Party were dedicated, and through personal self-discipline and hard work could become prominent individuals in their own organizations: their trade unions, churches, schools, communities, or whatever. The Party's strategy was to train its members to become the most productive people in the circles in which they traveled. In doing this, they systematically gained influence way out of proportion to their numbers. These people gained leadership through dedication. (A similar strategy was adopted, though not self-consciously, by Puritan merchants in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They gave money to charities way out of proportion to their numbers.)

It is this attitude of service, when combined with personal self-improvement and self-discipline, that is basic to the success of any new ideological movement. If the Christian Reconstructionist movement is unsuccessful in developing dedicated and self-disciplined people who are committed to a lifetime of service, then the Reconstructionist movement will not achieve very much. It will become little more than an historical curiosity that receives an occasional paragraph in obscure specialized histories of American Christianity in the second half of the twentieth century. We should hope to be more successful than this.

This means that we have to go beyond ideological rigor. It means that we have to extend our ideas into the realm of practical action. Intellectual rigor is not sufficient; dedicated service is also mandatory. This is why I think it is wise for individuals who can operate within a particular congregation or denomination to remain where they are in order to serve as many people as possible. Jesus said that by their fruits you shall know all people. The more people who can see the positive outworkings of the Reconstructionist position, the better off the Reconstructionist movement will be. It does not pay to become known as the Reconstructionist with the chip on his shoulder, or the Reconstructionist who divides organizations. Better to have our many critics gain this reputation.

There are problems with this strategy. One is a personal problem. The individual has to put up with preaching that is at best peripheral to his primary interests. He must also put up with a great deal of backbiting regarding his ideas. Institutionally, he may find himself involved in an unpleasant but continual fight to defend himself and his ideas. Some Reconstructionists will be thrown out of their churches because of their theological beliefs. This is a good way to leave any denomination or organization. If you are thrown out because you hold to the truth, the very action of throwing you out brings the organization under condemnation. When the Presbyterian Church, USA, defrocked J. Gresham Machen, in 1936, it brought itself under judgment. It never recovered spiritually or theologically from that decision.

Whenever an individual is able to work in a positive manner within a particular denomination, he should remain content inside that organization. If the religious beliefs of the organization are so consistently pursued that it becomes impossible for the individual to remain in that organization in good conscience, then he ought to leave.

When is it time to leave? When the church's confession has become heretical, or it starts ordaining those to the preaching ministry who are prohibited by the Bible from serving. This means women and homosexuals. But the fact is, not many evangelical churches today are sufficiently consistent or dedicated to theology that they will pursue the individual in order to drive him out of the denomination. This condition of theological blandness is to the advantage of the Reconstructionist today, if he adopts this program of converting critics through service.

If the idea of Reconstructionism is to reconstruct, the obvious institution that needs to be reconstructed first is the Church. The Church is the primary agency of reconstruction, and so its purification should be our target and goal in all that we do. That was what the Protestant Reformation was all about: institutional reform. The reconstruction of the Church is fundamental to our strategy. It is more important than the reconstruction of education, the reconstruction of politics, or the even the reconstruction of the family. The Church is the agency that must be reconstructed first, so that it can be the primary agency in the process of overall reconstruction in the society. To argue that anything is more important than the reconstruction of the Church is to adopt an activist Anabaptist view of society: a world in which politics or education is primary. (The passive Anabaptist tradition is ecclesiastical, but it denies the possibility for the reconstruction of society in history.)

Thus, what I recommend is that individuals who are committed to reconstructionist ideas remain where they are and serve as positive forces for good within the community in which they find themselves. Until an individual is thrown out by the organization, or until the organization becomes so self-consciously perverted that a man in good conscience cannot remain in it, he should stay right where he is. He should recruit from inside that organization, and the means for his recruiting should be his visible, positive service to members of the denomination and to the community in general.

This approach to Christian Reconstruction tends to be non-denominational. This is not because reconstructionist should regard the denominations as irrelevant (although the activist Anabaptist wing of the movement does think this way); it is because Reconstructionists should regard all the denominations as relevant. It is to the advantage of Reconstructionists with a vision of service to gain recruits to the movement from within their own congregations. This is a much better strategy than any attempt to create a separate reconstructionist denomination. The only legitimate reason to start a Reconstructionist denomination is if a number of local churches that are already Reconstructionist in persuasion are ready to get together to form a jurisdictional unit. What we have found, however, is that there is insufficient agreement on church polity at this stage to enable a successful creation of a denomination. It is my opinion that such will not be possible in the 1990's.

Conclusion

The goal is consistent public service. The goal is not purity of doctrine at the expense of service. **Doctrine should be purified in the outworking of service.** Christianity is applied theology, and this application should be both word and deed evangelism. It must be both theoretically rigorous and visibly practical in the eyes of those around us (Deut. 4:5-8).