

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. II, No. 2

© Institute for Christian Economics, 1978

March/April 1978

A Program of Christian Publishing

The first chapter of John refers to the second person of the Trinity as the Word. The revelation of God in the Bible is called the word. Heaven and earth shall pass away, Christ said, but His words will never pass away (Mt. 24:35). Christianity is the religion of the word. If we do not make our stand where we have an advantage historically, then we have thrown away our heritage.

One of the reasons why the Reformation was successful was the existence of the printing press. The spread of translations of the Bible, along with tracts written in the national languages, made it impossible for the traditional religious authorities to contain the flood of reform. Inexpensively produced writings created a new incentive for literacy, and the English Puritans were at the forefront of the literacy movement. W. K. Jordan, in his important book, *Philanthropy in England, 1480-1660* (1959), makes it clear how much the Puritan merchants of London contributed to the formation of all sorts of charitable institutions, but especially common schools. Never before in recorded history, Jordan concludes, had such a wave of charitable giving taken place. The broadening of the market for books made cost reductions possible, and this in turn stimulated the growth of literacy. Underlying this progressive, circular relationship was the idea that God communicates in words to His people. Men were determined to gain access to the words of God.

The university was the creation of Western Christianity, although without exception the rival traditions of Greek and Roman rationalism compromised these universities within a few decades, or less. Without a commitment to the idea of learning, of passing down a growing body of knowledge to the next generation, the expansion of Christianity throughout Europe would not have been likely. The monks of Ireland in the early middle ages ("Dark Ages," so-called) kept alive the traditions of literacy, and they were also evangelists of major importance. The link between the written word and Christian evangelism, not to mention culture, has been with us from the beginning of European history.

The Retreat from Learning

The defection of Christians from the world of scholarship has been a continuing one in Europe since the French

Revolution, an event itself made possible by two centuries of secularized publishing and pamphleteering by Enlightenment rationalists. In the United States, the defection came after the Civil War, with the defeat of the South and its long tradition of Christian letters. The New England rationalists and irrationalists (Transcendentalists), in league with the revivalists of the midwest, had combined to produce the abolitionist movement. Their victory led rapidly in the North to the social gospel movement of reform through legislation, while in the South, the "old Whig" tradition of Southern learning failed to regain its ante-bellum position of respect and leadership. Southern fundamentalism-populism, which had no strong tradition of education comparable to the Calvinistic Presbyterians and traditional Episcopalians, took over the thinking of the new breed of political leaders in the South, especially after 1890. Thus, the North increasingly turned to secularism for its intellectual sustenance, while the South turned to pietism and emotionalism that had few roots in the heritage of Christian scholarship. The tradition of a layman like General A. P. Hill, the South's calvary officer, who had written a well-received, orthodox life of Christ in the late 1850's, steadily disappeared.

The Christians defaulted. There was Princeton Theological Seminary, of course, but one school is hardly sufficient to direct a national revival of learning, especially not a seminary. Reconstruction brought public education to the South, and public education brought Darwinism to the North. Christians turned inward, looking to their churches for what little educational guidance they wanted. The leadership in academic and educational affairs was transferred to professional bureaucracies whose commitment to so-called neutral scholarship was guaranteed to help create a secular culture.

Today, there is virtually no organized market for orthodox Christian books of an academic nature. The pietistic tradition does not concern itself with the rigors of scholarly research. Yet the seemingly insatiable thirst of Christian parents for children who are university graduates has led them to send their children to apostate institutions of higher learning. Their sons and daughters are ill-equipped to handle the confrontations between Christian presuppositions and humanist learning, and so they defect from the faith,

or become intellectually schizophrenic, or just fail to respond to the information being presented to them. The first two alternatives are disastrous, and the last one indicates a terrible waste of tuition and time.

What Can Be Done?

The realm of ideas is important if we are to recapture and reform the secular culture of our age. We can do without footnotes and research techniques and still maintain our existence as a separate people, but we will remain a permanent remnant, content to feast upon the cultural scraps left to us by a dominant secular society. Only today's secular culture has fewer and fewer scraps to offer. We are living in an era of increasing pessimism and despair. Secularism today is in a position like that of a character in an old Hollywood western, who declares: "I'd give you a piece of my mind if I thought I could spare it." Modern secularism cannot spare much. We, like the Hebrew remnant in the days of the prophets, are trapped in the same culture with the rebellious; our external circumstances are inescapably tied to the drift of the age. We will not all drown if the secular ship goes down, but we will have to tread water or swim to shore, and most Christians are out of shape.

The lifeboat, to continue the analogy, is the printed word. To some extent, it is also the spoken word, best represented by the cassette tape. We desperately need to develop a decentralized system of book and tape production. Local churches have to become concerned enough to fund the publication of new or classic books. They have to start linking their activities to other similarly dedicated churches and publishing organizations.

The development of the remarkable Cameron Belt Press has made possible the production of low-cost books, both paperbacks and hardbacks. One company using this press, BookCrafters, located in Fredericksburg, Virginia, can print, bind, and package a hardback book of over 300 pages for under \$1 per book if a run of 5,000 is ordered. Paperbacks are even cheaper. The whole process takes less than a month, from the placement of the order until delivery. The firm also stores the books at a modest fee. If churches could ferret out many out-of-print titles, especially those which are over 70 years old and whose copyright protection has lapsed, we could begin to hit the markets with low-cost, decently printed books dealing with important themes, both biblically and culturally. If a dozen churches could get together, each one agreeing to reprint one volume of some old set, such as McClintock & Stong (eds.), *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (1870's), the buying public could gain access to important information, yet no single church would be risking too much money. Maybe only one such project would

be produced per church each decade, but that would be a great benefit compared to nothing.

I would strongly suggest that pastors and church leaders communicate with other people with similar interests and begin to draw up prospective lists of books suitable for reprinting. They should consult *Books in Print* to find out which titles are still available, and which are being sold at astronomical prices by limited edition reprint companies. Conferences of pastors and laymen could serve as clearing houses for new ideas on publications. Denominational and associational newsletters could be used to suggest potential reprints, or announce the publication of new books, as well as serve as book-locating services. There is no reason why a special session of a Christian conference couldn't be devoted to a discussion of recent publishing successes and potential projects. Perhaps several churches could co-sponsor the republication of a particular title. A whole body of formerly unavailable books and journals could be published over the next 20 years. New manuscripts might even be attempted.

It will take great care to select the proper books. For the average layman, anything over 200 pages, or written in small type, or deeply theological, is not going to appeal. But there is no doubt that works of the past century were set in readable type in many instances, making it possible to republish a lot of books without bearing the \$7 to \$12 per page typesetting fees that most professional typesetters charge. Still, even the cost of typesetting is not all that great if a church could plug its 5,000 copies into a distribution network responsive to the type of books in question. It will take advertising, communication, and a concerted effort on the part of organizational leaders to co-ordinate the necessarily decentralized efforts of local churches. It will take time. We have to begin somewhere.

If Christian leaders could draw up lists of potential books for publication or reprinting, and get agreement with others as to the possible sales potential of the various titles, they could publish a list of proposed titles, with local churches contacting the director of the committee and signing up to produce a particular title. If the committee could hire a book cover artist to co-ordinate the series, with churches able to foot the initial bill, either the co-ordinating committee (or book distribution firm) could have it printed, or else it could assign the job to a local church. Title by title, the proposed list could be checked off, with perhaps a dozen new titles a year being produced. This is the way things get done. It will take an initial subsidy, but spread over dozens of churches, the costs can be minimized. The place to start is with the regional and national conferences sponsored by churches with similar concerns.

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Christian Reconstruction is published every other month by the Institute for Christian Economics, a non-profit, tax-exempt educational organization. It is mailed free of charge to those who ask to be put on the mailing list. Subscriptions: 713 W. Cornwallis Rd., Durham, NC. Donations are fully tax deductible. Checks should be made out to Institute for Christian Economics.