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Isaiah 61:4

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TRANSMISSION BELT RELIGION

by Gary North

Two decades ago, I came across a remarkable mimeographed manuscript, "The Fabian Transmission Belt." The author was a member of a tightly disciplined religious order and the daughter of a prominent U.S. Senator. She had access to an enormous file of materials relating to the development and transmission of Fabian socialist ideas. She named the major figures on both sides of the Atlantic who had set up communicating organizations that were dedicated to creating a new world order, and showed how they had succeeded in capturing the media.

The manuscript was suppressed by her ecclesiastical superiors. She was ordered to destroy all copies still in her possession. Fortunately, several copies had been sent to other scholars. One of them found its way into the hands of Rose Martin, who used it as a guide in writing her shorter and far more readable account, *The Fabian Freeway* (Western Islands, 1966). The book is still in print.

The title of that manuscript has stuck in my mind for many years. It expresses a unique concept of ideological development. The conservative American sociologist Robert Nisbet once remarked that "ideas don't produce ideas the way that butterflies produce butterflies." Igor Shafarevich, the Russian dissident who is now in the U.S., has also remarked on the odd development pattern of socialist organizations and ideas: "At the moment of their inception, socialist movements often strike one by their helplessness, their isolation from reality, their naively adventuristic character and their comin 'Golgolian' features (as Berdayev put it). One gets the impression that these hopeless failures haven't a chance of success, and that in fact they do everything in their power to compromise the ideas they are proclaiming. However, they are merely biding their time. At some point, almost unexpectedly, these ideas find a broad popular reception, and become the forces that determine the course of history, while the leaders of these movements come to rule the destiny of nations." (*The Socialist Phenomenon*, Harper & Row, 1982, p. 129.)

Ideas require organizations to carry them abroad. The best historical account of the transmission of the idea of revolutionary socialism is James Billington's *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (Basic Books, 1981). He shows, by painstaking and exhausting research, where the ideas came from, who devoted their lives to transmitting them, and what kinds of organizations were built in terms of them.

The Pyramid Society

From the days of the Tower of Babel, the symbol of the pyramid has fascinated men. The religion of humanism sees man's task as originally creative: to establish his own world order, through power, across the earth. Men attempt to build a social order in terms of man's omniscience. To accomplish

this, the rulers must claim access to exhaustive knowledge (data) and comprehensive economic theory (plan). They believe that through a massive centralization of control, an elite corps of planners can synchronize and direct the affairs of all mankind. It is this imitation of the sovereignty of God over creation which leads men to create socialist commonwealths.

Those who are convinced that the construction of a pyramid society is a moral imperative and a serious possibility adopt a distinct concept of ideological progress. They see the advance of civilization as the product of a combination of education, motivation, and concentration of power. But to achieve their goals, they believe that it is necessary to guarantee the spread of their ideas through their control over the various media.

This view was stated clearly by Lester Frank Ward, the first President of the American Sociological Association. He was also the man who first articulated the position of planned evolutionism. In his classic (and neglected) book, *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), Ward discussed the problem of controlling men's opinions. "The attempt to change opinions by direct efforts has frequently been made. No one will now deny that coercion applied to this end is a signal failure. . . . There is one way, however, in which force may and does secure, not a change of existing opinion, but the acceptance of certain approved beliefs; but this, so far from weakening the position here taken, affords a capital defense of it. The forcible suppression of the utterance or publication in any form of unwelcome opinions is equivalent to withholding from all undetermined minds the evidence upon which such views rest; and, since opinions are rigidly the products of the data previously furnished the mind, such opinions cannot exist, because no data for them have ever been received. . . . It is simply that true views may as easily be created by this *method of exclusion* as false ones. . . . The more or less arbitrary exclusion of error, i.e., of false data, is to a great degree justifiable. . . . This, however, is the essence of what is here meant by education, which may be regarded as a systematic process for the manufacture of correct opinions. As such, it is of course highly inventive in its character, and the same must be said of all modes of producing desired beliefs by the method of exclusion' (vol. II, pp. 547-48).

This, put more bluntly, is *thought control*. Ward saw the public schools as the most efficient agents of thought control by statist planners. But as he said, this method of exclusion is not limited to educational institutions. All the media are useful in "producing desired beliefs by the method of exclusion."

Those who believe in central planning have a tendency to believe also in the **central planning of ideas**. After all, ideas are an aspect of the economy. They can even be thought of as economic assets, and therefore the property of "society,"

meaning the State. Thus, to allow the **free flow of ideas** through a competitive market is as dangerous as allowing the **free flow of capital and profits** through a competitive market.

Because 19th-century liberal economics (the free market) also involved a concept of liberal education (free speech), 20th-century collectivists face a major problem: their advocacy of free speech is inconsistent with their rejection of the free market. Thus, they attempt to conceal their suppression of ideas, even from themselves. They create monopolies of the public airwaves through the FCC, and then fill the airwaves with collectivist propaganda disguised as entertainment. They use these protected monopolies to buy up book publishing firms and other outlets of ideas. They see to it that the best colleges, the largest denominations, and the judges are in accord with their views. (Gary North, "Capturing the Robes," *Christian Reconstruction*, vol. VI, No. 5; Sept./Oct., 1982).

The Remnant

In contrast to the collectivists' concept of the transmission-belt society, with its direct control of the flow of information, stands the concept of the Remnant. The Remnant, God told Elijah, was an unorganized, invisible group of faithful followers of God, "all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (I Kings 19:18).

Elijah had thought that he was alone, the last of God's faithful. He was wrong. He had no knowledge of the existence of 7,000 other followers of God, yet he was a prophet who was supposed to understand such things. Ahab the king sought his life, and the queen controlled the priests and teachers of the nation, yet not only was Elijah still safe and sound, he had 7,000 others in the land who agreed with him.

Those who controlled the transmission belts of power and information were not omniscient. Obadiah, a spy in the very chambers of the king's household, had told Elijah, "there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee" (I Kings 18:10), but his network of informants and spies had not found the prophet. But the prophet found the king's "servant" (a spy for God), and this man brought the king to Elijah when Elijah was ready to meet him.

Albert Jay Nock, the libertarian writer, wrote a marvelous essay in 1937, "Isaiah's Job." Although he did not espouse a theology of providence, his description of the Remnant requires providence in order to make it believable. For those who understand that providence sustains history, Nock's description is fundamental: "... in any given society the Remnant are always so largely an unknown quantity. You do not know, and will never know, more than two things about them. You can be sure of those — dead sure, as our phrase is — but you will never be able to make even a respectable guess at anything else. You do not know, and will never know, who the Remnant are, nor where they are, nor how many of them there are, nor what they are doing or will do. Two things you know, and no more: first, that they exist; second, that they will find you. Except for these two certainties, working for the Remnant means working in impenetrable darkness; and this, I should say, is just the condition calculated most effectively to pique the interest of any prophet who is properly gifted with the imagination, insight, and intellectual curiosity necessary to a successful pursuit of his trade. ...

"The other certainty which the prophet of the Remnant may always have is that the Remnant will find him. He may rely on that with absolute assurance. They will find him without his

doing anything about it; in fact, if he tries to do anything about it, he is pretty sure to put them off. He does not need to advertise for them nor resort to any schemes of publicity to get their attention. If he is a preacher or a public speaker, for example, he may be quite indifferent to going on show at receptions, getting his picture printed in the newspapers, or furnishing autobiographical material for publication on the side of 'human interest.' If a writer, he need not make a point of attending any pink teas, autographing books at wholesale, nor entering into any specious freemasonry with reviewers.

"All this and much more of the same order lies in the regular and necessary routine laid down for the prophet of the masses. It is, and must be, part of the great general technique of getting the mass-man's ear — or as our vigorous and excellent publicist, Mr. H. L. Mencken, puts it, the technique of boob-bumping. The prophet of the Remnant is not bound to this technique. He may be quite sure that the Remnant will make their own way to him without any adventitious aids; and not only so, but if they find him employing such aids, as I said, it is ten to one that they will smell a rat in them and will sheer off.

"The certainty that the Remnant will find him, however, leaves the prophet as much in the dark as ever, as helpless as ever in the matter of putting any estimate of any kind upon the Remnant; for, as appears in the case of Elijah, he remains ignorant of who they are that have found him or where they are or how many. They do not write in and tell him about it, after the manner of those who admire the vedettes of Hollywood, nor yet do they seek him out and attach themselves to his person. They are not that kind. They take his message much as drivers take the directions on a roadside signboard — that is, with very little thought about the signboard, beyond being gratefully glad that it happened to be there, but with very serious thought about the directions."

Nock's evaluation should guide us in our tasks. We do not need lavish Hollywood productions, best-selling books, huge advertising campaigns, programs to "win back the public schools," or control of the major news media. Such control will come only **after** society has adopted the fundamentals of true faith, when men already believe in the Remnant's God.

What we need is a faithful conveying of the message, with the tools of communication that we already have and that we already understand. The collectivists think that the control of all media is essential to the success of their religion, which is one very good reason why their religion is a false religion. They see the **end** of faith — domination of one's ideas over a whole culture — as the **means** of faith. They proclaim the omniscience of the planning elite, while we proclaim the omniscience of God. We see dominion as the product of **bottom-up** permeation of the society, from the Remnant to the seats of power, while our opponents see dominion as the **top-down** permeation of central planning from the seats of power to the Remnant.

Conclusion

We cannot lose, any more than Elijah could lose. The Remnant is there. It is nearly invisible. It does its work. We need not waste our resources in a vain attempt to capture the transmission belts of power. God controls them; we don't. We need only to proclaim the truth and to organize our lives in terms of the truth we profess. When He is ready, God will raise us up, as heaven raises up a loaf. Permeation is more comprehensive than mere control over visible transmission belts.