

# Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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## MARKET DECENTRALIZATION AND COVENANTAL ORGANIZATION

by Gary North

*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ  
(1 Cor. 11:1).*

The individual Christian has a model: Paul. He had a model: Jesus Christ. But this does not solve the institutional problem: What is the biblical model within each of these categories: Church, State, and family?

For almost two millennia, Christians have argued concerning the proper model of the institutional church. They argued with equal intensity, though less frequently, over the proper model of civil government. Finally, they have remained remarkably silent regarding the biblical model of the family, despite the fact that various Christian societies have, at different times, adopted two remarkably different versions of the family: patriarchal and nuclear.

Modern free market capitalism has forced societies to restructure their operating models of these three covenantal institutions. If capitalism is not biblical, then we must reject the modern models. If we refuse to reject these modern institutional models as being **the** biblical models, then we need to answer this question: How did it come about that a nonbiblical economic institutional arrangement, free market capitalism, pressured society to adopt what are supposedly biblical covenantal models?

### The Nuclear Family

Let us begin with the least controversial model in today's world, the nuclear family. While vestiges of the patriarchal family remain in the West, the near-universal absence of parent-arranged marriages testifies to how few vestiges remain. Within a single generation, immigrant groups in the West have abandoned a millennium or more of supposedly fixed marital traditions. The poverty of non-capitalist cultures kept patriarchs in control of the family for almost 6,000 years. Sons and daughters-in-law dwelt under the roof of the father. They ate at his table and took his orders. This arrangement broke God's commandment in Eden: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Sons did not leave.

There are Christian social commentators — "social philosophers" is too laudatory a phrase — who do not believe that free market capitalism is the Bible's prescribed economy. They fail to recognize what is under their noses, namely, that the economic growth which alone is possible by free market capitalism has made possible the re-establishment of the original requirement for marriage: separate households for fathers and adult sons. If fathers dwell with sons, it should be only because they are feeble, i.e., defenseless. They are to dwell as servants rather than as masters of the household. It is in Marxist countries, not capitalist countries, that housing is so scarce that married

sons live as servants in their fathers' tiny apartments.

Thus, we have a biblical model to work with: the nuclear family. Today, few who can afford to live in the separate household of the Western nuclear family choose to dwell in their father's houses. To live under one roof is to live in dire straits, either as a son who cannot afford to escape or as a father who cannot safely live alone. It is a system of enforced childhood, either for married sons or aged fathers.

Capitalist society, with its commitment to decentralization, has allowed mankind to move toward the standards of Eden.

### The Constitutional Republic

There was no king in ancient Israel. There was instead a system of law courts. Jethro instructed Moses:

Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said (Ex. 18:19-24).

God instructed Samuel:

But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them (1 Sam. 8:6-9).

"Today," in the words of the late deposed Egyptian "King" Farouk, "there are but five kings left in the world:

the King of England, and the kings of spades, diamonds, hearts, and clubs." What was politically inconceivable in 1914 was reality in 1918: the kings had departed. World War I, the armed intra-family dispute of Queen Victoria's three grandsons, destroyed kingship in the West for the first time since King Saul. That war, whose outbreak was made nearly inescapable by the logistics of troop movements on capitalism's railroads, became a holocaust by capitalism's mass-produced weaponry.

In England, King George V really did not have the authority to initiate the great war unilaterally. His kingship was a shadow of what had been continental Europe's standard prior to the French Revolution. From the death of Henry VIII, the power of the English throne had suffered irreversible decline. What England had pointed to, and the American colonies had demonstrated, became the political reality of the modern world: men can live without the rule of hereditary kings. A king may reign today; he does not rule.

The civil model is clear: constitutional republicanism. Structurally, the twentieth century has returned to something closer to the civil standard recommended by Jethro than the standard demanded by Israel in the days of Saul. Bureaucracy has replaced kingship.

If men return once again to faith in the unhampered free market as the primary means of production and distribution, society will then be able to replace bureaucracy with the appeals court system recommended by Jethro. At least there was a working model in the covenantal past that has become a political possibility in the present.

Capitalist society, with its commitment to decentralization, has enabled us to move toward the standards of Sinai.

### **Ecclesiocracy**

Ancient Israel had the Tabernacle and then the Temple. It had a synagogue system, but the Old Testament is silent regarding its outline, either architecturally or institutionally.

The early gentile church had no Temple or anything like it. It had, in effect, only something like the synagogue system, and little is said about it in the New Testament. What is clear is that there is no single geographical place of sacrifice in the New Covenant order.

Congregations in the early church met in homes or in hidden places during periods of religious persecution. So does the church today in anti-Christian tyrannies. But when, in the fourth century, the church was first recognized as a legal entity, and then as the sole religion of the State, the churches began to take over pagan temples. The ideal of the Temple re-surfaced. The common place of worship in the cities was a large public building with perhaps additional buildings in the outlying areas. So it remains today.

By replacing the official pagan cult of the ancient city, the church became the heir of both the real estate and the institutional functions of the earlier cults. The church attained a political function that it has lost only in modern industrial society. The ecclesiocratic principle of "no

bishop – no king" was accepted in every era of pre-modern European history, except in Switzerland and in Cromwell's brief Commonwealth. The short-lived French Revolution also accepted the traditional principle, though in a negative form: "no king – no bishop"; the Jacobins killed the bishops after they decapitated the king. But only in the twentieth century have most Western men decided that the principle is an anachronism.

The question is, however: Is today's radical separation between church government and civil government valid biblically? Do we have a working biblical model? It is these two questions that Christian Reconstructionists inevitably must grapple with.

A third question is this: Is the free market order inherently anti-theocratic? If so, why?

### **Real Estate Prices and the Local Church**

Try to start a church in southern California or New York City. Try to buy the real estate, with or without a mortgage.

Then think about church planting in Tokyo.

A radical change has been taking place since the Industrial Revolution: the urbanization of the modern world. Capitalism made agriculture sufficiently productive to allow people to move to the city. But there are limits to this centralization. Where will the sons of the urban middle class live in the next generation, or in two generations from now? Not next door to their parents' home, bought when it was still considered risky to devote more than 25% of one's income to housing. As roads wear out (as they did after the fall of Rome), as urban pollution increases, as traffic jams of the "free" roadways become intolerable to many, as the lifestyle of the urban dwellers becomes anathema to all but the very rich and the very poor, and as technology moves society back toward decentralized production, this centralization will change.

Until then, the urban church building will remain the most expensive, under-used extravagance of modern life. The preference of modern Christians for 11 a.m. Sunday morning services is a luxury that will not remain an economic option on the day God's great revival begins. There will simply be no place to seat the new converts.

The question then will be: Where will church services be held? The other question is: When?

This inescapable architectural and organizational crisis can be deferred for only so long as the revival is merely talked about, either confidently prophesied or confidently denied. The day it begins, the modern church will have to rethink everything.

Church planners had better take the free market seriously. The market has forced the restructuring of the family and the State. It has begun to restructure the urban church. The question is: Will the market's decentralization decentralize the church, the city, or both? The question is: When?

The final question is: Will the churches be ready when the monumental ecclesiastical crisis of mass revival at last appears?