

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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GUERRILLA TACTICS: THE EARLY PHASE

by Gary North

Christian Reconstruction since about 1986 has begun to receive attention from the media. Fundamentalist groups are increasingly hostile, and they are willing to publish an occasional article or pamphlet against us. Very few of these groups are well known; neither are the critics, with two exceptions. Dave Hunt and Hal Lindsey, acting as lone wolves, have attacked us, but this has only happened recently. Both men have built careers on marketing paperback sensationalism, and they regard us as good targets. Given the minimal impact of *The Road to Holocaust* and *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, it appears that these attempts have failed to gain much support.

The fact that they launched their attacks has given new confidence to other critics. These unknown critics are playing a "me, too" game. They feel confident in attacking us, using the poor research of Hunt and Lindsey to make their case. They have not read our literature, but then again, only a few of our critics ever have.

This is going as planned: my plan, not the critics' plan. I have done my best for a decade to provoke these attacks. I will explain why later in this report. I have described this rhetorical side of my strategy in my Foreword to Bahnsen and Gentry's *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology*. It is part of a larger overall strategy. I can now go public with it, since it is too late for my critics to do anything about it. In fact, if they try, they will only aid me.

My strategy has always conflicted with R. J. Rushdoony's. He is committed to a kind of grand silence in the face of published criticism. His is the Dwight Eisenhower strategy. It is an acceptable strategy for a non-ideological candidate in a non-ideological era. Before it works, however, the candidate has to be perceived as having had a major success in a popular but non-ideological crusade. This is why successful generals have been elected President so often. (Since our generals are today faceless, unknown bureaucrats, this is no longer true.)

In contrast, I am self-consciously ideological. My strategy is the Margaret Thatcher strategy: to state my case in highly provocative terms, hoping to flush out my targets. First, the bird dog; then the shotgun. It took a million dollars and fifty books or more to do this, but one by one, they respond in print. Then I write or assign a book that responds to the targeted critics, or perhaps two books. Then the critics have to reply, and if they do, I write or publish another. This will go on until they quit. I then announce my total victory, and wait for the next target. I am the tar baby of modern evangelicalism. Hit me once, and you're stuck.

Westminster's Concession

It took seventeen years for Westminster Theological Seminary's faculty to respond to Rushdoony's *Institutes for Biblical Law* (1973) and fourteen to Bahnsen's *Theonomy*

in *Christian Ethics* (1977), and an astonishingly feeble response it is: *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. They are in fact responding to my strategy: I goaded them about their amillennialism and antinomianism until they responded in frustration, the same way House and Ice finally responded in *Dominion Theology*. Now it's our turn.

It took them four years to write it; it will take us four months to get out two volumes of answers. I got them to say what I wanted them to say about their pessimillennialism and their lack of any cultural alternative. (Maybe we will have to wait another seventeen years for a rebuttal.) Their students will now be able to compare and contrast. My strategy worked; in sixty years, this is the first time that Westminster's faculty has acted as a team to respond in print to any rival movement. They never published a joint effort against neo-orthodoxy, dispensationalism, liberation theology, or any other contemporary theological trend. But they responded to us. Sort of. With the exception of Bahnsen's two books, there are very few references anywhere in their 400 pages to the writings of the Reconstructionists, including our journals and books, and none to our newsletters. The book is not so much a critique as a wail.

Let me tell you why I have done what I have. Let me also tell you the limits of this strategy.

Confrontation: Guerrilla Attack

The leaders of a new movement have one major advantage: it has no existing reputation or program to defend. It has no constituency to please. It can launch attacks on its enemies as a means of gaining public attention to its program. This publicity is normally very important for a new organization. Any response from an existing organization lends support to the new organization's claim that it is relevant. But you have to be squeaky clean ethically to make this strategy work. You had better not be doing it for money.

This strategy also helps the new organization to attract people who are willing to be confrontational. These personality types tend to be dedicated, at least until they lose interest and join some other cause. They are "true believers."

To have only a negative program is suicidal. It takes time, but such negative organizations eventually disappear. Their targets change over time, or even disappear, so a negative campaign is always doomed. The American conservative movement is now learning this painful lesson: anti-Communism is not sufficient. There has to be a positive alternative. This is the only basis of long-term organizational growth.

The new organization has to combine a negative campaign against an existing paradigm or organization with at least an outline of a workable alternative. It has to have the appearance of being workable; otherwise, it will attract only self-destructive crazies. These people are failures in life;

they are attracted to groups that propose a program of destruction. They thrive on sensationalism. They are defenders of lost causes. It is not possible to build an organization with crazies, unless it is some kind of hate group that eventually turns to violence against the established order.

Confrontation: The Establishment Responds

In the early phase of any movement, very few people pay attention to it. This was as true of Jesus' ministry as any. He had a few tradesmen and a tax collector in his "inner circle." The authorities took notice only when He began doing miracles. In any case, He had no influence in China or South America. It was a local ministry with only local impact.

But as time goes on, and the movement begins to expand its influence, it begins to cause trouble for existing institutions. It may receive some attention, almost as a mosquito receives attention. If it buzzes, someone may swat at it absent-mindedly. If it stops buzzing, the swatter assumes that he either killed it or scared it away. He promptly forgets about it. If it keeps buzzing, however, it will eventually receive more systematic attention.

An established institution cannot afford the resources to squash every conceivable critic. It would be deflected from its positive mission if it were to assign scarce economic resources to respond to all critics. Who knows which critics are worth the resources? Some of them may be, but the head of the organization cannot know which ones. So, the standard response is to ignore the critic until it becomes obvious that he is in a position to create public or internal resistance to the organization's policies. Then the organization has to respond. If it fails to respond, its silence will be regarded by some people (it is not predictable just who) as an implicit acceptance of the truth of the accusation. Eventually, the organization will respond. In the meantime, however, the guerrilla critics can seek to establish themselves in the shadow of the Establishment.

What kind of response is appropriate for the established institution? This depends on the nature of the criticism. It may be a lawsuit. It may be public relations handouts to the media. It may be a letter to donors. It may be an article in a scholarly journal. It may be a book. The organization's leader has to decide. In a sense, this is an entrepreneurial decision. It involves the allocation of resources to a project whose outcome cannot be known with certainty.

The key defensive entrepreneurial ability is to be able to identify early which critics will pose a threat, long-term. These should be dealt with early and devastatingly. But very seldom is this possible; the established institution does not have this entrepreneurial skill, nor does it have the will to "take out" the critic. What it does is fudge. It dithers. It mumbles. This is grist to the guerrilla's mill. "See; they can't fight! They have neither courage nor good sense. They don't have a case. They're sitting ducks."

If they are sitting ducks, then the existing institution really will fall. It may take decades, but it will fall. This happens to an entire culture very rarely, but it does happen.

Choosing Your Battlefield

At some point, the guerrillas have to start working at least part-time as an army. They build up conventional arsenals. They move from newsletters to books; from books to magazines; from magazines to radio and television. At each stage, there are changes that become necessary.

There is also a shift of support. The ranks become filled with more conventional people. Only tyrannies like the Communist Party can remain immune to this shift, but then they collapse. Guerrillas do not build civilizations. Castro is the model. Being a guerrilla is only the initial phase.

When the guerrillas become big enough targets, the attacks will come. They must be ready to meet the attacks, not simply as guerrillas, but also as conventional forces. To make the transition into a conventional force, the guerrillas must be in control of the attackers' responses during the transition period. When your opponent is skating on thin ice, persuade him to use a flame-thrower against you. As Saul Alinsky put it, "The action is the reaction." The successful guerrilla lures his opponent into a battlefield in which the guerrilla has the advantage. He must not allow his enemy to set the ground rules.

For fifteen years, this is what I have been trying to do. I initiate certain offensive attacks in order to produce predictable responses: either silence (which I can use) or specific public reactions (which I plan for in advance). At the same time, I avoid those kinds of confrontation in which I do not have the advantage. For instance, I refused to appear on Bill Moyers' television show exposing Christian Reconstruction in 1987. I never give eight-hour interviews to people so that they can electronically splice six minutes of my answers to their questions. I know when I do not have the advantage. I also recognize that if they don't have a "sound bite," TV documentaries are almost helpless in dealing with groups that are exclusively ideological, i.e., that deal only in ideas. Ideas bore TV viewers. They suffer from the MEGO syndrome: "My eyes glaze over." Again and again, Moyers' staff called my office, trying to lure me out. Very few people know when to say no to the media. They want "to tell their side of the story." So do I, but in my own way, on my terms. My refusal threw them for a loop. I destroyed what I suspect was their strategy: to pit the "nice" Reconstructionists against the "nasty, dangerous" Reconstructionists. They had no perceived crazies (Tylerites) on tape, so the program wound up mildly favorable to the Reconstructionists. It bored viewers. Nothing happened, so there were no follow-ups from other TV sharks. We won.

We Are Still Guerrillas

The Russian military strategy in this century has been to throw waves of men and equipment into the enemy's front lines, taking huge casualties, but wearing down their opponents. Then, when a break in the line takes place, they rush through, splitting their opponent's army in half. This is a suicidal strategy for a guerrilla force. It does not have sufficient men or equipment. This is where Christian Reconstruction still is.

What is our appropriate tactic? It is two-fold. First, at the visible level, a handful of writers maintain both offensive and defensive ideological tactics. Second, at the local level, the troops build up working programs that benefit the Church: private schools, unwed mothers' homes, help ministries, and similar charitable works. Confrontations should be limited to public efforts to change people's minds: not the dedicated opponent's mind, but the mind of those who have not yet decided. The goal is to undermine confidence in the opposition's policies and programs. This goal will work if our opponents' foundations are really weak. Given the quality of their published responses so far, they must be incredibly weak.

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