

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. V, No. 5

September/October 1981

THE LONG, LONG HAUL

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One of the strange anomalies of modern social and political life is the sharp contrast between what conservatives believe and what they actually do, and an analogous contrast between what revolutionaries say they believe and what they actually do. Both sides are inconsistent, and these inconsistencies go a long way to explain why the radicals have been so successful, and the conservatives have not.

Consider the radicals' view of reality. Following Marx, they believe that the institutions of modern life are corrupt. The corrupt environment of mankind is what lies at the root of injustice in social affairs. By reconstructing man's environment, they believe, they can produce a fundamental alteration in the nature of man. All radicals share some version of **environmental determinism**.

Marx, however, went farther than this. He argued that social and political institutions are so corrupt that a revolution is needed to remove the influence of the ruling class. "Revolutions are the locomotives of history," he wrote. The history of man has been the history of class struggles, he declared in the early section of the *Communist Manifesto*. Revolution cannot be avoided. (He made two totally inconsistent and pragmatic exceptions: England and Russia.) Marx held to a religion of revolution. Historical change that is significant must be **discontinuous**. Significant social, economic, religious, and political change must be rapid, all-encompassing, and class-directed. Slow, organic change is not significant; only discontinuous breaks in the continuity of history are socially important in the processes of history.

This same philosophy was basic to the radicals of the French Revolution. It was against such a view of life that Edmund Burke wrote his classic book, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which he wrote in 1790, the year following the opening shots of the French Revolution. His argument ran as follows. All meaningful social change is cumulative, the product of organic development. Society is an organic whole, with slow, steady development of its constituent parts. No revolutionary regime can maintain personal, local, and traditional relationships within a society. Any attempt to upset these relationships by force will lead to a rupture of society. Only terror, oppression, and the centralization of the State can impose a revolutionary break on society, apart from war. He predicted the terror of the French Revolution several years before it was visible to the West.

Burke's essay became the touchstone of nineteenth-century conservative social philosophy. A commitment to tradition, organic change, and steady progress was the conservatives' alternative to bloody revolution. Only organic change, Burke maintained, protects human freedom from the grasping reach of the revolutionary State. Only the intermediary institutions — family, church, guild, etc. — can protect a man from the growing

power of the State. When all men are defined strictly as citizens — when all men are told that the only membership worth having is their membership in the State — the State will become tyrannical. There is no salvation, personal or collective, by politics. This was Burke's conservative philosophy.

Rival Programs

If you were to read Marx and Burke, you might imagine that Marx's intellectual heirs would have given up the fight long ago. Where is the promised proletarian revolution? Marx wrote to Engels in 1858 that he feared that the revolution might come before he had time to finish his book, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which was published in 1859. Not only did the proletarian revolution not come in 1858, we are still waiting for its arrival.

Do the Communists still propagandize? More than ever. Do they still map out long-range strategies for victory? They do. Are the Soviets devoting huge budgets to military spending, in order to outpace the West's military machine? They are. Why do they do it? Shouldn't revolutionaries abhor the long-term, steady, seemingly relentless task of building a revolution? Shouldn't they forget the whole thing and go home? Isn't it futile to devote a lifetime, or several generations, to the task of producing one overnight transformation of society through revolution? In short, why is it that the Communists are so dedicated to the discipline of continuity, when their faith rests on an ultimate discontinuity?

On the other hand, what about the conservatives, which includes most of the evangelical churches? What is their program geared to? Generally, the conservatives hope and pray for a miracle, usually a political miracle, and since miracles are in short supply these days, a national political miracle. This means electing a President of the United States. It is somewhat different in parliamentary systems, since the Prime Minister holds his office because his party has a majority in the parliament. He is there because numerous local elections have put representatives of his party into office. But in the United States, the President may be (and often has been) a lone figure. The House and Senate can be controlled by a rival political party. So the main office can be captured by one campaign: a campaign whose resources have been devoted to electing one man to office, and not necessarily his party. (The Presidential campaign of 1972 was the archetype of such an election, when Nixon siphoned off millions of dollars of Republican Party funds to assure his re-election, thereby depleting the funds remaining for House and Senate campaigns.)

So the conservatives, who believe in continuity, pray for discontinuous events: Presidential or parliamentary victories every few years. In between, they return to their normal pursuits: family life, business, education, etc. The humanistic liberals believe in

salvation by politics, and they devote large quantities of their time, money, and energy to this end. The conservatives specifically do not affirm a faith in salvation by politics, so they tend to be less devoted to the cause of politics. This has produced the anomaly: liberals working for years to achieve a smashing political victory across the boards, and conservatives working sporadically, hoping for an occasional figurehead victory. The liberals staff the bureaucracies and the appointed positions, even when a conservative wins the top office. The liberals have the experience and the dedication to politics; they have the expertise to gain the offices' staff positions. Conservatives lack the trained, dedicated troops to carry through on an occasional political victory, from grass roots to staff positions at the top.

When conservatives gain a victory, they go home. They think they have done their duty for the year, or even for the next four years. They turn away from politics, not having a great deal of faith in politics. The liberals never stop pushing, subverting, or infiltrating. They never go home. Conservatives, because they often have the support of the mass of actual voters on many issues, are capable of electing men through the use of sophisticated direct-mail techniques, but their victory ends the night the polls are closed and the ballots are counted. They can elect men, but they have not demonstrated any ability to lead. They have not followed through. Their ability is limited to the day of the election, not the crucially important ability of staffing the positions and carrying through a legislative program.

In other words, if victory does not come in politics as a result of one act of will, the conservatives aren't that interested in getting involved. Their faith is not in politics, so the extent of their vision is limited by a single electoral victory. They preach continuity, but they act in terms of discontinuity. The liberals and radicals preach discontinuity, and act in terms of continuity. The liberals have won.

The Logic of Continuity

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he hath sufficient to finish it?" (Luke 14:28). We have to face the reality of the costs. We believe in the continuity of work, yet we also believe that God intervenes in the lives and affairs of men. We believe in biblical law, but we also believe in miracles. However, **we** are responsible for implementing the law; God is responsible for the miracles.

The proper strategy for Christian reconstruction is long-term discipline in every area of responsible action. We dig in early and steadily expand our area of influence. Where a person's **heart** is, there he will adopt a philosophy of **continuity**. The farmer working his soil, the businessman developing a market, an inventor developing a working model: here are examples of continuity. Since Christians are called into God's service, they must adopt a program of continuity in their primary area of service.

The shortening of men's time horizons as a result of both premillennialism and amillennialism has contributed to **a decline in competence** among Christian workers and **an increase in reliance upon the miraculous**. If men do not believe that they have a lifetime to develop their skills and capital, let alone to pass down both skills and capital to later generations, they must become dependent upon God's miracles to advance their causes. **As men's time horizons shrink, their quest for "the big pay-off" increases**, since only through such a discontinuity can they expect to advance themselves significantly in a brief period of time. The man who has time can experience steady but slow increases in his capital — however he measures his assets. The man who does not have time cannot afford the luxury of continuity.

Rebellious men have always gambled. They have, in recent years, used extensive debt to gain "leverage," meaning a rapid profit stemming from high returns and other people's borrowed

money. They buy a \$50,000 home with \$5,000 down and a debt of \$45,000. Then, if housing prices rise, they sell it a few years later for, say, \$100,000 — a 10-to-one profit on the original investment of \$5,000. But they have remained personally liable for a debt of \$45,000 during this period — a form of bondage. After all, what if the value of the house fell? The debt would still be there, despite the drop in capital value of the asset. But the only way we can rapidly convert \$5,000 into \$50,000 is with debt. Men want fast pay-offs; they must adopt high-risk investing techniques, debt financing, and other near-gambling strategies in order to beat the limits of time. A long-term program of growth would accomplish the same thing, probably with less risk, but a person must be **future-oriented** to use debt-free, lower-risk strategies. He must also believe that time is on his side, because God is on his side as a result of his covenantal subordination to God.

Covenants and Time

To count the costs, you must be able to estimate time. Time is a significant factor in assessing true costs. Try to get a home built in half the time; it costs more money. The same is true of almost any investment. The shorter the pay-out period, the higher the risk involved. Short delivery time schedules cost more.

When men covenant with an eternal God, they must have some idea of what He expects them to accomplish in time and on earth. They must estimate the kind of time horizon God has in mind for His covenanted community, including the sons and daughters of today's faithful remnant. **The covenant stretches across generations**. This is what gives significance to **little triumphs**; they can accumulate over time to produce **extensive results**. The compounding effect requires time, but if you have enough time — and if your time horizon encompasses all the time you have — then you do not need large percentage increases each year in order to achieve your goals. A little each year goes a long way, if you have enough time.

The radicals have grasped this. Marx was convinced that there was a march of progress over time, that the proletarians would inevitably win, and therefore it is worth sacrificing a lifetime to produce the pamphlets and books that would strengthen the proletariat over its long-term struggles. Marx had a vision of history which stretched back to the hypothetical ancient communist agricultural communities. Time was important to him — he thought the timetable for revolution was much shorter than it was — but time was not a threat to him. He could settle for minor victories. So could Lenin. **Two steps forward and one step back** is a perfectly reasonable strategy, if you think you have time on your side.

The conservatives have adopted a philosophy of continuity in some areas of their lives — family, business, church growth, etc. — but not in political affairs. As they lose faith in time, their commitment to continuity will be reduced in whatever areas of ultimate concern that they have. Until they become convinced that time is on the side of righteousness, they will remain ineffective politicians, and they will become less effective in those areas of life that they are willing to sacrifice for over the long haul. Divorce and business bankruptcies will increase as men's time horizons decrease. Men will not "stick it out" for the long haul.

Victory is not to the swift, but to those who recognize that they are in a very long-distance Marathon race. Who will "go the distance"? Those who see that time is on their side, because they are covenantally subordinate to the God who controls time. They can have a valid faith in programs of continuity, leaving the miracles to God. Because they have time, and a strategy geared to time, they become less dependent on miracles and more dependent on biblical law. This is what Christian maturity is all about. It is what Christian reconstruction is all about. Most important, it is what victory is all about.

Christian Reconstruction is published six times a year, alternating with **Biblical Economics Today**. It is published by the Institute for Christian Economics, a non-profit, tax-exempt educational organization. It is mailed free of charge to residents of North America. **Subscriptions:** P.O. Box 6116, Tyler, TX 75711. Donations are fully tax deductible. Checks should be made out to **Institute for Christian Economics**.