

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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CRITICAL MASS

Part IX: Dedication Through Confession

by Gary North

But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed (Romans 10:8-11).

Studies in church growth indicate that sending out new converts is a vital factor in any systematic evangelism program. The new convert has made a definitive transition out of an old environment and into a new one. This process never ends until death, but generally speaking, the major transition takes place within the first year, and really within the first six months.

The new convert has not yet left the company of his existing circle of friends. Over time, he will transfer allegiance to a new circle of friends within the local church. As this transition takes place, he will steadily abandon the life style of those he is leaving behind. Their concerns will less and less be his concerns. Eventually, he will sever the ties.

In the transition phase, he has the greatest opportunity to share his story of what has happened in his life. His friends are more likely to be curious about this transformation in the early stages. He is still regarded as "one of them." Something odd has happened to someone like them. They may be curious about this. As he grows more distant from them, they will be less likely to respond to his testimony. After all, he has obviously left the group. He is someone else. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17). A covenantal break has taken place; a cultural and associational break will follow.

In the meantime, there is a unique opportunity.

An Immediate Assignment

In his book on Communist training techniques in the 1940's, *Dedication and Leadership* (1956), Douglas Hyde describes how the new Communist Party member was immediately told to sell copies of *The Daily Worker*, the official Communist newspaper. The Party knew that the new member knew very little about Communism. Nevertheless, he was sent out to sell the newspaper. Why?

First, it was a way to get him to face challenges. People would ridicule him. More important, they would ask questions about his beliefs, questions that he could not answer. This would provide an incentive for him to attend introductory evening classes in Communist theory.

Second, it was a way to show him that membership in the Communist Party was not passive. It involved taking

risks and suffering discouragement. A high degree of commitment was mandatory. Membership in the Communist Party was not like membership in the local flower arrangement club. It was not just another membership. It was to be a lifetime commitment.

Third, it was a way to gain new recruits. The newspaper was a recruiting tool.

Fourth, it was a way to help pay for the printing of the newspaper. Some money did come in from sales.

The same technique was adopted by the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) in the mid-1960's. Well-dressed black men stood outside supermarkets and hawked copies of *Muhammed Speaks*, the organization's newspaper. I remember one man, probably 6 feet three, who asked me as I walked toward the market, "Don't you want to help black people?" Years before, I had heard the challenge of the most eloquent guilt-manipulator I had ever heard, Malcolm X, both on local T.V. and at a speech he gave at UCLA. I had also read C. Eric Lincoln's book on the Black Muslims, so I knew what they believed: racism plus a garbled form of Islam. I therefore replied: "Not particularly." That ended the discussion. He quickly walked away to pitch other, more politically correct victims. I was probably the only white person he had met who actually sounded like the white devils we were all portrayed as being. It probably made his day. But he didn't get my money.

Selling *Muhammed Speaks* in shopping mall parking lots obviously was not geared to making converts of those who bought most of the copies, i.e., whites. Selling newspapers to guilt-manipulated whites also did not produce confrontations. Whites were buying the papers to avoid confrontation. So, this was basically a form of begging. The Nation of Islam wisely dropped the technique after a couple of years. It was counter-productive.

The Two Assets

Churches that are committed to growth recognize the unique asset that a new convert brings: enthusiasm. His life has been changed. He recognizes that he has been delivered. Like a person who has come out of a dark room into daylight, he has to squint his eyes in order to see. What he lacks in knowledge he makes up for in enthusiasm.

There is a tendency for these two aspects of the Christian faith to be in inverse proportion to each other psychologically. As he grows in knowledge, his enthusiasm wanes. This pattern must either be broken early or overcome temporarily until it locks the person in. The person who feels under pressure to master every detail of the new faith before he talks about it needs encouragement to speak first and ask questions afterwards. He needs to be shown

from the New Testament that new converts get into the testimony business right from the beginning.

Theologically rigorous churches have a tendency to reinforce this psychological pattern of initial hesitation. They immediately put new converts into catechism classes. Sometimes they do this even before baptism, as if mastery of a lengthy confession of faith were biblically required for church membership. These churches persuade the new convert that everything must be crystal clear before it should be publicly confessed. Such churches have a tendency to remain small.

A Question of Sanctification

The first thing that a new convert needs is baptism. This places him publicly under the covenant. Submission to (but not submersion in) baptism is the judicially binding form of confession. The theology of this ritual is simple: no confession, no salvation. This is all the new convert needs to know in order to be baptized.

The second thing that a new convert needs is an introduction to the terms of God's covenant. He needs to know what God says he is not allowed to do. Then he needs to know what God expects him to do. He is expected to begin extending both his knowledge of God's ethical requirements and his obedience to them.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was (James 1:22-24).

His progressive adherence to the terms of God's covenant is the outward sign of his inward spiritual condition. This is the biblical doctrine of sanctification.

The biblical doctrine of sanctification is three-fold: definitive, progressive, and final. Through the grace of redemption, a person receives Christ's moral perfection at his conversion. He then is expected to extend what he has received ethically throughout his lifetime. He receives final perfection after his physical death. If he waited until he was perfect before he confessed what he received by grace, he would die before he could speak.

Definitive sanctification is what empowers a person to speak of the grace of God. He speaks as a child, but he will not always speak as a child. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I Cor. 13:11). The time will come when his Christian confession will match his physical age. But to learn to speak as an adult, a person must first speak as a child. His speech is more than sufficient for those who are outside God's special grace.

Still, a challenge from some self-conscious covenant-breaker should provide the incentive for the new convert to improve his speech. First, he needs the grammar of faith. This is what the simple public confessions of faith impart: the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. Second, he can advance his theological understanding: the more detailed confessions and catechisms. Third, he should advance in his rhetorical ability: the application of these theological principles to the individ-

ual conditions of his listeners. But this comes only through continual practice.

A Training Program in Public Speaking

When we hear the words "public speaking," we think of people lecturing in front of an audience of more than one. **But the most important audience for the new convert is the audience of one.** The Church will remain stymied in its programs of evangelism if people in the pews expect church growth through preaching alone. As surely as generals do not win battles without troops in the field, so is the Church dependent on one-on-one confrontations.

Confrontation is the correct word. The gospel is at bottom the good news that God's covenant lawsuit can be resolved apart from the death of the covenant-breaker. The death of Jesus Christ serves as a substitute, but only for those who admit this before God and men. Men and women must be trained to present this covenant lawsuit as clearly and as relevantly as they can in one-on-one situations. This means that they must be trained to apply the specific terms of God's covenant to individual cases.

Theologically rigorous churches recruit new converts into classes in the denomination's confession rather than classes in making confession. They think that the theology of confession must precede the grammar of confession. They miss the opportunity of sending the new convert back immediately into his old environment on a fishing expedition. They forfeit the advantage that the new convert has for the first six months of his conversion. To use an analogy based on the techniques of Communism, they expect him to be fluent in *The Communist Manifesto* and conversant with *Das Kapital* before his gets back on the street to sell *The Daily Worker*.

Conclusion

A great advantage that churches with short confessions and weak theologies possess is that their leaders do not expect new converts to have much theological knowledge before they are sent out to recruit others from their old social environment. This is no more a recommendation of short confessions and weak theologies than it is an assertion that the Communist Party would have been far more successful if it had not had *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*.

My point is this: the Communists honored the outline of the doctrine of sanctification: definitive, progressive, and final. (Actually, there was no final sanctification for Communism, since the system was evolutionistic. That was its downfall: no final hope of individual perfection.) They also honored the progression of grammar, logic, rhetoric. They sent out people with poor grammar to speak to people with even worse grammar. As these spokesmen matured, they were expected to master logic and then rhetoric. But they started speaking with the grammar of faith, not the logic of faith. They treated children as children: suitable for recruiting children.

Churches today should do at least as well as the Communists did in the days when their faith was still vibrant. Churches possess what the Communists stole: the biblical theology of confession. They confess it, but they do not build in terms of it.

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