

BIBLICAL ECONOMICS *TODAY*

ol. III, No. 2

© Institute for Christian Economics, 1980

April/May 1980

HUMANISM'S CHAPLAINS

By Gary North

The most important question of human knowledge is this one: "By what standard?" Is there some sort of universal reason which provides all mankind throughout all ages with a sufficient basis for making judgments? Or is the very idea of intellectual neutrality a snare and a delusion?

Historically, Christians and secularists have taken both sides. In their attempts to devise a universally valid intellectual defense of the faith, Christian apologists have appealed to "natural law" or "the law of non-contradiction," or some other common ground methodology. They have hoped that logic might bring rebellious men face to face with the claims of Christ. As Cornelius Van Til has demonstrated in numerous books, this appeal rests on the assumption of human autonomy, that is, the universally valid logic of human minds. It is an invalid presupposition. The only common ground is the sense of God's image in all men.

Secularists, especially prior to the mid-1960's, also appealed to "natural law" or "technocratic, non-ideological, pragmatic wisdom," in order to convince men of the universal validity of one or another program of social reconstruction. However, since the mid-1960's, this appeal increasingly has fallen on deaf ears; Marxists, revolutionaries of all brands, and systematic relativists have rejected the whole idea of a hypothetical universal logic. (Marx always rejected the idea.)

If there is no neutrality in human thought, then there is certainly no neutrality in any society's law structure. Laws are written to prohibit certain actions. These laws rest on the presupposition that certain acts are inherently wrong, according to a particular moral and religious order. There can be no law apart from a moral and religious law-order, and this law-order cannot possibly be neutral.

Social Reconstruction

If men are to work out the implications of their religious faiths, then they will attempt to reconstruct the external institutions of society in terms of a particular law-order. Only a totally internalized religion can legitimately neglect the tasks of external renewal. Yet it is very difficult to imagine how such a totally internalized religion might operate. How can we speak of ethics—human action within the framework of moral law—apart from external effects on other people and the creation? Even a pole-sitting ascetic is making a statement about his relationship with the world, and he has to have someone supply him with food, water, and clothing, not to mention volunteer

"bedpan" services. He is absorbing the scarce economic resources of the creation in his attempt to demonstrate his supposed withdrawal from the affairs of mankind. He is making a statement about the proper way to live in this world, which implies a moral obligation on others either to imitate him or to acknowledge the legitimacy of his activities (inactivities).

This is why it is impossible, or at least extraordinarily difficult, to imagine an ethical system which has no vision of social reconstruction, no blueprint for society at large. Yet it is popular today within Christian circles to make grandiose pronouncements concerning the immorality of grandiose pronouncements regarding society. "No creed but the Bible, no law but love," we are told—a rigorous creed, to be sure—and from this presupposition, men have created systematic ethical systems justifying retreat. The pilgrim motif replaces the Christian soldier motif. The social irrelevance of modern Christianity is defended on principle, as if social irrelevance were an ethical goal to be pursued in a disciplined fashion.

Nevertheless, when we examine the calls for social neutrality, we find that in all known cases, the program of social neutrality eventually winds up baptizing some humanistic program of social order. The Christian is told to make his peace with one or another non-Christian social order. The Christian is told to refrain from actively opposing, and then replacing, the prevailing social order. Christians are in the world (a geographical identification), but not of the world (a spiritual identification). The question is: Should Christians attempt to subdue the world in an attempt to make it conform more closely to God's guidelines for external institutions? More to the point: Are there biblical guidelines for social institutions? If not, have we not asserted a fundamentally demonic universe, wherein neither we nor the devil may be judged for our actions, since we have violated no godly standards?

In short, isn't the argument for neutrality—neutrality in any sphere of human thought or life—an argument for autonomy? Isn't it an assertion of some universal "King's X," an ever-growing area of human action (or inaction), in which God may not legitimately bring judgment, precisely because He has no standards of action that apply? Isn't the idea of social neutrality a defense of the idea that man and Satan can live beyond good and evil?

Reconstruction

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is one of the most respected

preachers in England. His books have been published and widely read in the United States as well. He was trained as a physician, but he left medical practice to become a minister. He has become an important advocate of Christian surrender to the world, and because of his prominence, we should examine his blueprint for "Christian inaction," or to be more precise, his blueprint for humanistic reformism.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones spelled out the details of his thinking in an essay, "The French Revolution and After," published in Britain in the book, *The Christian and the State in Revolutionary Times* (Westminster Conference, 1975). His essay makes the following points: 1) Christians must not support the status quo; 2) Christians must work for reform; 3) all explicitly Christian reforms will fail; 4) political conservatism is anti-Christian; 5) free market economics must be rejected. These same five points can be found in the exposition of seemingly endless proclamations made by respectable, educated, and frequently quoted Christian leaders, especially those in the neo-evangelical camp, the Toronto (neo-Dooyeweerdian) camp, and the "re-printing neo-Puritan" camp. This is the reigning ideology in the Grand Rapids-Toronto-Wheaton-Edinburgh-London-Amsterdam circuit. (Dooyeweerdians may call for Christian reform, but being amillennialists, they deny its possibility.)

Here is the message from Dr. Lloyd-Jones. He admits that we must have a total world-and-life perspective. "The Christian is not only to be concerned about personal salvation. It is his duty to have a complete view of life as taught in the Scriptures" (p. 101). This is a common theme of most educated Christian leaders: the need for a biblical perspective. It is this statement which is expected to serve as a sort of cleric's collar for "truly progressive" Christians—a means of distinguishing oneself from modern fundamentalism, whose advocates have not generally bothered themselves with questions of philosophy. Whether you're in Grand Rapids or Wheaton, London or Toronto, Christian academics will tell you of the need for a distinctly Christian perspective. This makes sense; the kicker is found in their **universal unwillingness to use revealed biblical law as the blueprint** for constructing a Christian alternative. This is absolutely crucial, since **without a concrete biblical blueprint, there is nothing left except some humanist blueprint**. In short, talk concerning a Christian world-and-life view is incredibly cheap; the test is this: What are the **sources and standards** for constructing a biblical alternative?

Second, Dr. Lloyd-Jones is adamant in opposing three important errors: 1) the status quo; 2) explicitly Christian political reform; 3) other-worldliness (pp. 103-05). The only trouble is, he never says how you can avoid all three simultaneously. The worst evil is the status quo, since "historically it has been the greatest danger" (p. 102). He minces no words: "For some strange reason one of the greatest temptations to a man who becomes a Christian is to become respectable. When he becomes a Christian he also tends to make money; and if he makes money, he wants to keep that money, and resents the suggestion that he should share that money with others by means of taxation etc. Looking at history it seems to me that one of the greatest dangers confronting the Christian is to become a political conservative, and an opponent of legitimate reform, and the legitimate rights of people" (p. 103).

Here we have it: the evils of political conservatism. He recognizes that there is a tendency for Christians to make

money. Sadly, he refuses to speculate concerning the reasons for this tendency to exist (and exist it does: Deut. 8, 28). But men who make money don't appreciate being forced by State bureaucrats to contribute money to the care and maintenance of statist power, i.e., welfare programs used for the purchase of votes by politicians, what Rushdoony has called the politics of guilt and pity. This, the good doctor argues, is an evil attitude on the part of Christians. They don't like to share their wealth with the State. The State, by implication, has a perfect right to the wealth of hard-working, thrifty, risk-taking Christians who have prospered financially. This is called "the legitimate rights of people." It is also called Keynesianism, interventionism, statism, the "new economics," political liberalism, the New Deal, the welfare State, the corporate State, and in the 1930's was known as fascism. It is theft with a ballot box instead of a gun. It is the Christian liberal's rewriting of the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote." It is the economics of most voters in Grand Rapids, Toronto, Wheaton, Edinburgh, London, and especially Amsterdam.

He recognizes that Anglo-Saxon Protestant Nonconformists—those opposed to an established State church—have traditionally been political reformists. These people were defenders of 19th-century political liberalism: political equality, but with economic freedom. He also recognizes that those defending the idea of the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28) tend to be political reformers, as do the Marxist "liberation" theologians. In his interview in *Christianity Today* (Feb. 8, 1980), he made clear his attitude toward the cultural mandate concept. Carl F. H. Henry asked him (from the perspective of neo-evangelicalism): "Would you agree that even if we might have only 24 hours or 48 hours, to withhold a witness in the political or any other arena is to withdraw prematurely from the social responsibility of the Christian and to distrust the providence of God? Might he not do something even in the last few hours that he had not done before? The closer we get to the end time, isn't it that much more important to address public conscience? Must we not press the claims of Christ in all the areas of society and remind people, whether they receive Christ or not, of the criteria by which the returning King will judge men and nations?" This is an excellent question, whether asked by a neo-evangelical, a neo-Dooyeweerdian, or a Chalcedon promoter. Dr. Lloyd-Jones' answer was quite explicit:

No; I'm afraid I don't agree. It seems to me that our Lord's own emphasis is quite different, even opposed to this. Take Luke 17 where we read, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives . . . until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came . . ." You can't reform the world. That's why I disagree entirely with the "social and cultural mandate" teaching and its appeal to Genesis 1:28. It seems to me to forget completely the Fall. You can't Christianize the world. The end time is going to be like the time of the Flood. The condition of the modern world proves that what we must preach more than ever is "Escape from the wrath to come!" The situation is critical. I believe the Christian people—but not the Church—should get involved in politics and in social affairs. The kingdom task of the church is to save men from the wrath to come by bringing them to Christ. This is what I believe and emphasize.

The main function of politics, culture, and all these things is to restrain evil. They can never do an ultimately positive work. Surely the history of the world demonstrates that. You can never Christianize the world.

This tends to be the answer of modern fundamentalism: escape from the wrath to come, forget about Christian reconstruction. But what does he expect Christian people to do? Of course, it is not normally the task of the institutional church to get into the political arena. But that isn't the question. What about Christian men and women in voluntary political or other organizations? What can they expect to accomplish? Hardly anything, says the good doctor. They are in a losing battle. As he wrote in his 1975 essay:

We are now back to the New Testament position; we are like New Testament Christians. The world can never be reformed. Never! That is absolutely certain. A Christian State is impossible. All the experiments have failed. They had to fail. They must fail. The Apocalypse alone can cure the world's ills. Man even at his best, even as a Christian, can never do so. You can never make people Christian by Acts of Parliament. You can never christianize society. It is folly to attempt to do so. I would even suggest that it is heresy to do so (p. 108).

Here is his constant theme: men are sinful; the world is fallen; therefore, perfection is impossible. As he told Carl Henry, the cultural mandate was given to Adam before the Fall; we live as in the days of Noah. What he conveniently neglects—and he could not conceivably be ignorant of the passage—is that God gave the same cultural mandate to Noah, after the Flood (Gen. 9:1-7). It should be obvious why Dr. Lloyd-Jones conveniently neglects this passage: **it spells the doom of his entire misinterpretation of the Bible.** We cannot escape the moral burden of the cultural mandate—what I have called the dominion covenant—just because of man's ethical rebellion. We are the sons of Noah.

Christian reconstruction is supposedly impossible. However, we can work as Christians for reform. He calls statist wealth-redistribution "legitimate reform." He then appeals to the tradition of Abraham Kuyper. I find his conclusions most illuminating, especially in regard to the similarities drawn by Lloyd-Jones between the political careers of the Netherlands' Kuyper and Britain's first Laborite Prime Minister, the socialist Lloyd-George:

Nevertheless, government and law and order are essential because man is in sin; and the Christian should be the best citizen in the country. But as all are sinful, reform is legitimate and desirable. The Christian must act as a citizen, and play his part in politics and other matters in order to get the best possible conditions. But we must always remember that politics is 'the art of the possible'; and so the Christian must remember as he begins that he can only get the possible. Because he is a Christian he must work for the best possible and be content with that which is less than fully Christian. That is what Abraham Kuyper seems to me to have done. I have recently read the life of Kuyper again and it is clear that his enactments as Prime Minister and head of the Government were

almost identical with the Radicalism of Lloyd-George. They were two very different men in many ways but their practical enactments were almost identical. The chief respect in which they differed was in their view of education (p. 108).

This is damning Kuyper with faint praise. Kuyper wanted government subsidies to Christian schools, while Lloyd-George wanted the destruction of all private education. Both men were caught up in the ideology of economic interventionism by the State, and this tradition still dominates the Toronto-Amsterdam-Grand Rapids Dutch tradition, as well as the British Protestant tradition. Yet there is almost nothing in the Old or New Testament to warrant such a view of the State, which is why these Christian defenders of the welfare State are unable to appeal to a body of biblical doctrine which might support their position.

So, we are told, individual action in support of the welfare State is valid, but reform in the name of Christianity is by definition impossible and therefore invalid, since politics is the art of the possible. He makes himself perfectly clear: we have no hope.

I now come to what, to me, in many ways is the most important matter of all. I suggest that this is the main conclusion at which the Conference should arrive. The Christian must never get excited about reform, or about political action. That raises for me a problem with respect to the men of the 17th century and other times. It is that they should have become so excited about these matters. I would argue that the Christian must of necessity have a profoundly pessimistic view of life in this world. Man is 'in sin' and therefore you will never have a perfect society. The coming of Christ alone is going to produce that. The Christian not only does not get excited, he never pins his hopes to acts of Parliament, or any reform or any improvement. He believes in improvement, but he never pins his hope in it, he never gets excited or over-enthusiastic; still less does he become fanatical or bigoted about these matters (p. 108).

We must be pessimistic. Why, he doesn't say; we just ought to be. Then, given this pessimism, we have to face a pessimistic reality. We can never expect perfection; therefore, reform is impossible. We can work for it, but we should never get excited about it. Here is a counsel of despair, the psychology of defeat. Here also is verbal tomfoolery. What if I were to use this same line of reasoning against the legitimacy of the institutional church? First, we know we can never see a perfect church prior to Christ's second coming. Second, we should not get enthusiastic about church reform. Third, a Christian never puts his faith in church courts (or synods, or whatever), since the church can never be perfect. By equating "Christianity" with "perfection," Lloyd-Jones thereby emasculates applied Christianity. He negates institutional reform in the name of anti-perfectionism. The same syllogism, if applied to the institutional church, would destroy the institutional church, just as surely as it destroys the idea of a Christian social order. The premise (pessimism) is wrong, the goal (earthly perfection) is not what we have in mind, and the means (biblical law) is ignored.

Establishment Religion

What Lloyd-Jones wants is simple: the triumph of irrelevance. If he didn't want it, he wouldn't argue so vehemently for its inevitability, especially in the face of the biblical testimony favoring victory, in time and on earth—not perfection, but victory. (See J. M. Kik's *The Eschatology of Victory*, published by Craig Press; Box 13, Nutley, New Jersey, 07110.) I am reminded of C. S. Lewis' words: "In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful." (*The Abolition of Man* [New York: Macmillan, (1947), 1967], p. 35.)

What he calls for—and what the overwhelming majority of widely read, academically respectable Christians call for—is the defense of the status quo of the late twentieth century. The modern status quo, being Darwinian, or Marxist, or in some other way evolutionistic, is based on the idea of change, whether reformist or revolutionary. It wants more government, not less; more State welfare, not less; more coercively enforced economic equality, not less; more taxation of the productive, not less. The modern status quo is the status quo of constant change—government-enforced experimentation. This is the legacy of the French Revolution, which Lloyd-Jones is so worried about, yet he has adopted it, but without its original optimism. He wants an economy of tinkering bureaucrats, for that is what the welfare State invariably produces, and he wants a welfare State. Because the language of the modern status quo is the language of change, our modern academic, non-fundamentalist Christians can wrap themselves in the flag of progress and change, when that flag is, in fact, the flag of the status quo. They can ignore biblical reconstruction—indeed, they feel compelled to oppose biblical reconstruction—which would forever abolish the humanist welfare State, with its constant economic intervention. These men are defenders of the humanists' evolutionary State. They are the chaplains of humanism's bureaucracy. They are the transmission belt of Fabianism in the world of evangelical Christianity. Their job is to keep the silent Christian majority forever silent, or, where the majority is no longer Christian, to keep the Christian minority fearful, despondent, and impotent. They have done

their job very well. They have been supremely victorious in this century in promoting the psychology of perpetual Christian defeat. Chaplains for the status quo, they have paraded in the uniforms of "impossibility thinking"—the impossibility of Christian reconstruction in today's society of humanistic evolutionism.

What Lloyd-Jones really resents is the free market. He shares this resentment with others in the Grand Rapids-Toronto-Wheaton-Edinburgh-London-Amsterdam Axis. He reserves his worst epithet for the free market: Arminian. "Arminianism over-stresses liberty. It produced the laissez-faire view of economics, and it always introduces inequalities—some people becoming enormously wealthy, and others languishing in poverty and destitution" (p. 106). Get this: the free market introduces inequality. It apparently wasn't there before. This is not only poor logic, but it is inaccurate historically. As the voluminous researches of Prof. P. T. Bauer and other economists have demonstrated, the free market reduces economic inequality, and it also erodes the barriers—status quo, statist barriers—that tend to prevent upward and downward economic mobility.

What is so unique about Lloyd-Jones' resentment? Nothing. It is the standard, run-of-the-mill pap that has been stuffed into the heads of two generations of American college students, and three generations of British students. It is the same old Fabianism, the same old Keynesianism. It is the status quo. So, using the language of anti-status quo, Dr. Lloyd-Jones joins the ranks of the ordained chaplaincy of humanist conformity. He is a Conformist's conformist, and he has therefore been granted the right to use the language of progressive reformism—so long as it is not promoted in the name of Christianity, so long as it abandons any appeal to Old Testament law, and so long as it abandons hope.

Is it any wonder that leadership like this has produced generations of socially impotent Christians? Is it any wonder that humanism, in the form of the welfare State, has triumphed? In the realm of society, the salt has lost its savor. We have been afflicted with chaplains who have actively promoted savorless salt. The sheep need better shepherds; they need shepherds who are not front men for political humanism's wolves.

Biblical Economics Today is published six times a year, alternating with Christian Reconstruction. 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 25, Sterling, VA 22170. Checks should be made out to Institute for Christian Economics.