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A BOOTSTRAP CURRICULUM

(Part 1)

by Gary North

The ICE and American Vision are about to begin a joint program: a training ministry for college students. In this issue and the next of *Biblical Economics Today*, I will spell out in detail exactly why this program is necessary today, and why it was not possible as recently as five years ago.

The reader needs to understand that Christian Reconstruction or *theonomy* did not become a systematic position until 1973. Prior to that, R. J. Rushdoony and I had devoted our writing efforts to refutations of various aspects of humanism. Not until *The Institutes of Biblical Law* and *An Introduction to Christian Economics* appeared in 1973 was a positive, explicitly biblical alternative to the myth of neutrality made available to readers. It was one thing to criticize the myth of neutrality, as Van Til had done; it was something else to provide an alternative.

The Myth of Neutrality

The Christian Reconstructionist begins with the presupposition that all human thought must be brought under the authority of the Bible. There can be no acceptance of the doctrine of neutrality in education. The Christian Reconstructionist therefore understands that the priesthood of higher education, middle education, and lower education must cease to be regarded as a priesthood except in the sense of the priesthood of all believers.

For the entire period of modern higher education in the West, the myth of neutrality has undermined the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, the authority of the Bible, and the **absolute necessity** of revelation in the development of Christian culture. Step by step, century by century, the doctrine of the myth of neutrality has replaced the doctrine of the necessity of written revelation through the Bible as the foundation of knowledge and wisdom. We find today that virtually all of higher education rests on the assumption of the myth of neutrality. This myth is not merely equal to the doctrine of the necessity of revelation; it is superior to it in the thinking of those who staff the institutions of higher education.

The myth of neutrality is the legal foundation and also the philosophical foundation for modern state-supported education, and the myth of neutrality is a lie. There can be no religious neutrality in a world that was created by the God of the Bible. The theological problem from the very beginning of the public school movement has been that those who have funded education – taxpayers – have enthusiastically adopted this lie. The price of believing this lie seemed right: zero-tuition education. That price, too, has been an illusion except for those who really cashed in on the **subsidy** by going to state schools far longer than the average student does. Christians have allowed their children to be taught by individuals who had adopted some

version of the Greek concept of neutral reason and natural law. The universities have **always** had as the basis of their curriculum the **Greek** doctrine of the myth of neutrality.

There is no religious neutrality, the Christian Reconstructionist asserts. Only the Christian Reconstructionist really believes this, for he rejects natural law theory and replaces it with *theonomy*. If the myth of neutrality is a lie, then there can be no equality – the outcome of neutrality – between Greek wisdom and biblical religion; one must triumph over the other. In other words, there is **no neutrality** between the myth of **neutrality** and the **doctrine** of biblical **authority**. There is no **halfway** house between the **two** positions. But it is only in the last generation that a handful of people, namely the Christian **Reconstructionists**, have made this principle the foundational principle of their theological system. This is why Christian Reconstruction has been such an affront to both humanism and fundamentalism. This is why Christian **Reconstruction** is an affront to both Eastern Orthodoxy and to the Roman Catholic Church. This is why Christian **Reconstructionism** is a total break with the entire history of higher education since the twelfth century.

Christian Reconstruction is an extension of what the Puritans understood in principle but were unable to implement organizationally in terms of their proposed alternative curriculum. They never did have a comprehensible curriculum to replace the curriculum of Oxford and Cambridge, and therefore they fell under the curse of those who would attempt to beat something with nothing. They **could** not do it. But what of today?

The Task at Hand

Christian **Reconstructionists** today face an **overwhelming** problem. The task is the comprehensive reconstruction of all of life, including education. Christian Reconstruction promotes bottom-up social transformation, not topdown. Therefore, we have understood from the beginning that the most important educational **challenge** must begin with the earliest **levels** of education. The founders of Christian Reconstruction have always been strongly in favor of the Christian day school movement and are generally supportive of the home school movement. Both of these movements are based on the presupposition that the family is responsible for education, not the church and not the state.

Nevertheless, even at the lowest educational level, there have been problems in developing an **alternative** curriculum that is self-consciously biblical. The use, for example, of the old **McGuffey** readers in Christian education testifies to the fact that no clean break has been made by modern Christian education with the myth of neutrality. Other **elementary** school **curriculum** materials that are **popu-**

lar with Christians are equally corrupted by elements of humanism. This is not to say that we must never use such materials, but it is to say that when we have the opportunity to replace them with something that self-consciously Christian, we have a moral obligation to do so. Until such time as there is a self-conscious attempt on the part of Christians to reconstruct every aspect of the lowest curriculum materials to conform to biblical revelation, the work of Christian Reconstruction in education will remain deeply compromised.

The next stage beyond the simplest kind of educational materials is the high school curriculum. Here again, if we look at the curriculum materials, especially in the humanities, we find horrendous theological compromises, not only with humanism but also with various forms of heretical Christian movements in church history. There has been no self-conscious attempt on the part of Christian Reconstructionists or Calvinists in general to reconstruct high school curriculum materials to make them conform rigorously to biblical principles of social theory.

One reason for this is that there has been no self-conscious attempt to develop Christian social theory in terms of biblical revelation. The development of an explicitly Bible-based social theory has been the exclusive province of the Christian Reconstruction movement since 1973 (and ignored prior to 1973). We have not had a sufficient division of labor thus far to achieve this kind of comprehensive reconstruction of all the academic disciplines of social theory in general. This is what must be done in the future, but it has not been done yet.

Outlines of what needs to be done have been presented, but only the barest filling-in of these outlines has been attempted. This is why a new generation needs to be trained over the next thirty years: to begin filling in the gaps that now lie in the task of reconstructing all the academic disciplines to conform with biblical presuppositions.

No one who accepts the doctrine of the myth of neutrality is academically capable of doing this, yet virtually all the Ph.D.-holding professors who call themselves Christians who are teaching today have adopted some degree of the myth of neutrality. They have been formally certified by those who proclaim the myth of neutrality, and deeply resent the intrusion of Christian Reconstructionists in calling attention to the fact that they are morally and intellectually compromised by adopting the principle of the myth of neutrality, better known in modern circles today as the doctrine of natural law. Natural law theory from the very beginning was an attempt of the scholastic theologians to incorporate Greek learning and biblical revelation. This was always a doomed effort. It has hampered the development of Christian civilization ever since.

An Academically Compromised Church

The reason why we face a civilization that is committed to anti-Christian categories is that the church has abandoned to its enemies the training of its own leaders. I will deal with this at greater length in the next issue of *Biblical Economics Today*. Conservative Presbyterians today require for ordination into what they call "the teaching ministry" that the candidate be a graduate of a state accredited or humanist accredited college or university before he can attend seminary. The church then requires at least three semesters of seminary before ordination can take place.

The only thing that has offset this defection to the professorate on the part of all American churches is the fact that fundamentalist churches have generally not required that its ministers attend such institutions. The first and second Great Awakenings saw the replacement of Calvinism by Arminianism (especially Methodism), and the replacement of hierarchical churches by either independent Baptist churches

or other forms of independent Protestantism. These institutions have not generally required that their ministers become ordained by first attending a college or university. This unwillingness on the part of fundamentalist, Arminian churches to bend the knee before the Baal of higher education has been a blessing to American Christianity.

This is not to say that the myth of neutrality has not been basic to these independent churches. They have adopted the American civil religion, better known as political pluralism, and undergirding this civil religion is the doctrine of the myth of political neutrality and the myth of religious neutrality. But the reality is, these churches refused to run their leaders through the gauntlet of self-conscious humanist education, and therefore the corruption of higher education did not spread to these churches to the extent that it has spread to the mainline denominations that did require such formal certification of all its ordained ministers.

The Christian Reconstructionist looks at the educational situation today and says that everything must be changed from bottom to top. Christian Reconstructionists have been optimistic about the long-term effects of Christian education at the lower levels, not simply because we believe that families are before God required to educate their children, but because we understand that any successful long-term revolution must begin at the lowest level and work up to the highest level. We understand that until we have a fully developed curriculum at all levels of education, it is utopian and counter-productive to imagine that we can overcome humanist civilization. We can get into all kinds of political battles, but none of this will amount to anything unless the de-funding of all education by the state takes place. The long-term goal of every political battle must be the total abolition of all state money in the field of education.

The trouble is, most Christians today have made their compromise with the state, not on the basis that there is no other way to get their children educated, but on the assumption that the modern education is not really a threat to the child's moral and intellectual standards – none worth paying extra money to defend against, anyway. By the time the child goes off to college, the parent has washed his hands of the whole thing. "There's nothing I can do about it now," he concludes. The symbol of this transfer of sovereignty is the dorm key. From that day forth, others will set the only rules that count institutionally – rules with sanctions attached.

This compromise usually begins very early. It begins at least at the high school level, when the parent says, "The local public high school is not really as bad as we read about in other cities." Apparently, his academic standard is whatever is going on in some high school in Harlem or South Central Los Angeles, and if what is going on locally is not so bad as what is going on in some inner-city high school, then there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the local high school. While it is understandable that the Christian parent is forced into this sort of intellectual self-justification when the child enters college, since there is no university or college anywhere in the world that has a self-conscious Christian curriculum at its foundation, it is not a legitimate when there is any other alternative available to the parent, including home schooling, that would enable him to keep his child out of the public high school. So, the child is sent into the humanist gauntlet at a very young age, and is expected by the pastor and the parents to emerge relatively unscathed from that gauntlet. This is naive.

A New Curriculum Is Needed

What we need today is a reconstruction of social theory and physical theory. We need a biblical curriculum in every field at the college level. We need a college that

will train students in this world view, and we need to have teachers that **believe** in this curriculum, and are capable of imparting it to students. But because of the accreditation problem, those teachers who have gone not through the gauntlet of higher education are not accredited, and therefore the college that employs very many of them cannot be accredited.

It costs tens of millions and really hundreds of millions of dollars to set up a college today, and the faculty is already so completely tainted by the myth of neutrality that there is no way you can staff a college today with a faculty of fifty certified professors who honestly believe that the Bible is absolutely sovereign in their respective academic disciplines. We do not have fifty people in the world today academically certified who **could** be brought to a college to set up this kind of training. That is how far behind we are. We are trying to overcome eight centuries of compromise and defection in one generation. This cannot be achieved in our day.

The higher a student goes in education, the fewer the materials available to him that even pretend to be **Christian**. There are no graduate-level textbooks in any field **except theology**. There are very few college-level textbooks. There are a few high school textbooks, but demand for them is so low and the costs of production so high that they are usually a decade or more out of date. The few high school social studies textbooks that are available are so filled with humanism – generally this is right-wing humanism – that the student has no idea of how the Bible relates to whatever he is reading.

The Christian student who enters college is usually a graduate of a public high school. He has never read anything that self-consciously seeks to apply the Bible to an academic subject. The less typical college freshman is a graduate of a Christian high school. He is vaguely **conservative** unless he has entered the rebellion stage, which his college professors in Western Civilization and sociology will trigger by the second semester, if at all possible. Anyway, that was the case in my day; these days, perhaps the English department is worse. The point is, the typical Christian college student is unaware of a biblical alternative to academic humanism. It is the task of Christian Reconstruction today to present this alternative in an effective way. Not many students will respond because not many students are interested in academics.

A New Agenda Is Mandatory

Christian Reconstructionists should not continue to produce only materials that are suitable primarily for upper-division college students or even graduate school students. We have to begin to produce materials that are suitable for college students. But writing them and publishing them is not sufficient; we have to get them into the hands and minds of students. We must begin **actively** to recruit and train the next generation.

What I am talking for, therefore, is a new program of **recruiting**. We need to develop an off-campus training program that is aimed at bright college students who are willing to commit themselves to the lifetime task of reconstructing a particular academic field or a particular profession. We must try to attract these students from the day they walk onto the college campus. We must give them academic guidance through the four years of college. We have to present them with materials that will enable them to get through the graduate school level with their faith and minds intact. This has not been done in the last two decades of the Christian Reconstruction movement, but now it must be done.

Clearly, we are not ready to produce a comprehensive curriculum at the **collegiate** level. We do not have enough

people to write the materials, nor do we have the millions of dollars that it will take to produce such a body of materials. Also, there would be very high demand for such materials at this point. We must first develop high school materials and very shortly thereafter develop the lower-division collegiate materials. But in doing this, we have to be certain that we are also extending the number of buyers of such materials. In other words, we must **first** create a **market**.

This can only be done by a systematic penetration of the Christian high schools of America. Obviously, we are still not ready for a direct assault on university education; we have yet to develop systematic Christian materials even at the elementary school level. This lack becomes visibly serious at the high school level, when the student is taken from very simple principles of memorization and grammar and moves to logic and then to rhetoric. It is here that the great division becomes visible between reason and revelation. It exists at the lower levels, but it is less visible there.

How can we overcome this? Not with printed materials – at least not initially. But if we do not have the printed materials, how can we do this? There is only one way: with teachers. This is why the ICE and American Vision have already launched summer seminars for training Christian high school teachers. We also need to train future Christian high school teachers. We need to give them the incentive to go into the high schools and begin to develop the necessary materials. In other words, we need to present the biblical principles of academic disciplines in the humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the professions. Then we need to motivate prospective teachers to do the work to translate these principles into high school classroom instruction materials.

Since 1981, ICE and American Vision have devoted resources to producing the books that were needed to set forth the basic theonomic paradigm. That task is completed. It was only a preliminary task. We now have enough books to say to a student: "Here is the basic worldview. Now you have to begin re-thinking your field in terms of this body of material. You must return to the high school classroom or grade school classroom as a teacher and think through what must be done to reconstruct lower education."

As with all other areas in the Christian Reconstruction field, this task has must be done on a very tight budget. Our resources are extremely limited – perhaps so that God will get all the credit retroactively. What we need to do now is concentrate these minimal resources on extending the division of intellectual labor. We have enough materials in print today to enable us to provide at least a preliminary foundation for the intellectual reconstruction of the social sciences. This is what we have to present to bright energetic students who are willing to pay the personal price of being on two tracks of education at the same time: secular humanism and biblical Christianity. We know that there will be very few of these students, but we have to start with them, for there is no other place where we can start.

We cannot sensibly expect to conquer academia, or even take over a Christian college, nor can we expect to infiltrate a secular university faculty. What we teach is illegal to be taught in a state-funded institution. It is not our job to take over anything that is not biblically legitimate in the first place. Public education is surely such an area, as surely as public brothels are. It is not our job to "clean up public education," any more than it is our job to "make state-funded brothels medically safe." It is not legitimate for taxpayer dollars to go into either of these institutions, but it will probably take generations to persuade the public of this with respect to education, unless a total economic collapse accelerates the public's economic awareness.

In any case, we cannot beat something with nothing. We cannot sensibly call for the end of taxpayer-financed

humanistic education until we are ready to provide parent-financed Christian education. The world is not ready for this, Christian Reconstruction is not ready for this, and so we have to operate in a difficult environment, but one which can be overcome at least in the lives of a small number of dedicated students. It is now time for Christian Reconstructionists to begin to identify these students, recruit them and train them.

Robes of Authority

In the West, the mark of a representative who possesses lawful authority in a covenantal institution is his wearing of robes. From the medieval period until today, priests in the church have worn robes, very often black. Similarly, judges in civil governments wear black robes. Black robes are worn in the modern world by only two other groups: church choirs and graduates of academic institutions. (White gowns are worn by physicians - another near-priestly guild - and laboratory scientists.)

Rushdoony commented very early on the relationship between the robe and formal covenantal authority in the West (*Messianic Character of American Education*, p. 10). He understood that the demand by medieval universities that their members be allowed to wear black robes was in fact an assertion of primary legal jurisdiction. The universities demanded legal sovereignty in their operations, autonomy from both church and state. "The world of the university was a priesthood and a brotherhood, a privileged realm. . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 11). The symbol of this privilege was the black robe.

The Western university successfully established its claim to legal autonomy. This meant that church authorities were restrained in their ability to enforce theological standards on professors in the universities. The doctrine of academic freedom goes back many centuries to the earliest universities: Paris, Cambridge, and Oxford. Oxford and Cambridge had their own representatives in Parliament. (Sir Isaac Newton on occasion served in an undistinguished fashion in Parliament.) One of the best examples of this autonomy was John Wycliffe. In the late fourteenth century, Wycliffe was under attack by ecclesiastical authorities because of his teachings. He taught against the doctrine of transubstantiation. He taught what might be called an early Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith. He was able to do this because he had been given sanctuary by Oxford. Church authorities could not enforce their will on him until very late in his career, when Oxford buckled to extreme pressure and removed him from his academic position. Martin Luther enjoyed similar protection a century and a half later.

Western intellectuals until World War I were a very tiny class, but they were increasingly powerful from the twelfth century onward. They staffed the clerical positions of both church and state, and apart from certification by universities it became increasingly difficult to be ordained into the higher levels of the priesthood. This academic certification and judicial bureaucratization steadily transformed European thought and culture. The universities were to a great

extent outside civil and ecclesiastical law, yet they provided both the staff and worldview of those who administered the law. The rise of the professional lawyer class was made possible by the rise of the teaching of law within the universities. (Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution*, Harvard University Press, 1963).

This development has posed a major problem for the church and for Christian civilization generally from the very beginning of the university system. Greek knowledge, especially the philosophy of Aristotle, was brought into the universities as early as the late eleventh century, when the universities first appeared. The rise and triumph of Scholasticism over the next two centuries made possible the secularization of formal education. The doctrine of the two modes of learning, reason and revelation, held in dialectical tension, was a product not only of Scholasticism but of formal education generally. This meant that a major division was placed between revelation and reason. Increasingly in academic circles, reason became enthroned as the primary means of knowledge, with revelation relegated to a secondary position. This culminated in the nineteenth century with the rise of atheism and secular humanism, especially in the major French universities (*écoles*), a worldview that has become triumphant in our day. The independence of the universities made possible the incorporation of pagan learning into the life of the West.

This autonomy led also to the spread of many kinds of heresy within the universities. There were two major institutional sources of heresy within the church in the later Middle Ages: the universities and the various monastic orders that were independent of local ecclesiastical authority. The Franciscan order is probably the best example of heresy and borderline heresy inside the late-medieval church. Many of these doctrines, sometimes referred to as Spiritualist doctrines, were incorporated into the curricula of the universities. (Friederich Heer, *The Medieval World*, Mentor, 1962, chaps. 9, 10). But the fundamental problem was authority: autonomy bred error.

The universities' threat to orthodoxy was recognized by the Puritans during the English Civil War, 1640-1660. Cromwell and his supporters understood that secular education, meaning education outside the church, was a counter-force to the Puritans' goal of the comprehensive restoration of Christianity in English civilization. They understood clearly that the curriculum of the colleges in both Cambridge and Oxford was shot through and through with humanism. But so powerful was the hold of these two universities on the judicial and social order of England that even Cromwell's political authoritarianism was incapable of reforming those two universities. The Puritans knew that this power had to be challenged and had to be replaced by a thoroughgoing Christian world-and-life view, but they did not have the authority, the power, or the alternative curriculum to ram through the changes that were needed. (John Morgan, *Godly Learning*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, Conclusion.) In distant Harvard College, no one even tried.

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