

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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How Relevant Is Christianity?

Consider the following questions.

First, if every U.S. Congressman and every U.S. Senator were converted to saving faith in Jesus Christ tomorrow", would it be possible to observe a change in their voting records the day after tomorrow? If a researcher were looking for such changes, which kinds of issues would he examine first to measure this hypothetical mass conversion? If no changes were perceived immediately, how long (if ever) would it take to see these "new men" vote differently?

Second, if every businessman sitting on the boards of every company listed on the New York Stock Exchange were converted tomorrow, would it be possible to see this reflected in the quarterly reports, earnings statements, or corporate policies by the end of the next quarter? What kinds of changes would we look for? How long would it take, beyond a quarter, to produce such changes if three months were insufficient?

Third, if every labor union executive were converted tomorrow, would it be possible to measure the change in perspective in their policy statements and organizing practices?

Fourth, if every professor in the nation's colleges and universities were converted tomorrow, would we perceive changes in the content of the courses they teach? How long would it take? What alterations could we legitimately expect? Would they immediately drop every textbook presently in use?

These questions should illustrate a whole series of theological and practical problems faced by contemporary Christians. A constant refrain heard among Christian groups is that "the Bible has answers to every problem." Yet it should be obvious that practically nobody is trying to find answers to modern social and intellectual problems in terms of biblical revelation. On the contrary, the majority of Christians spend countless hours wringing their hands and wailing about the awful mess the whole world is in, how nothing can be done to reverse the drift into chaos, and how our only hope is the immediate return of Jesus Christ to set up an earthly kingdom in terms of His omniscience and omnipotence—a world in which we as Christians, will not be burdened with the responsibility of making policy, but at most, enforcing policy, with Jesus' omnipotence backing up our enforcement. Modern Christians would prefer to be little more than local constables

in the risk-free kingdom of God on earth, walking the rounds, saying hello to the neighbors, and filing reports to the real authorities far up the chain of command.

Does the Bible Really Have Answers?

Is it sensible to claim that the Bible is relevant for every man's life, for every man's crisis, if we are unable to find specific answers, or strategies for problem solving, when we search the Scriptures? If the Bible is essentially a book dealing with the heart of man—"heart" narrowly defined—rather than the day-to-day affairs of every man's life, then what can possibly be meant by the phrase, "the Bible has answers for every problem"? If Christian principles are supposed to be applied by every Christian, since every Christian must work out his own salvation [the salvation that is his] with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12b), then the Bible should be the starting point and the final earthly court of appeal in the decision-making process. But is it? More accurately, do twentieth-century Christians treat it as such?

If we look at the way Christian politicians vote, it is unlikely that the Christians and non-Christians could be sorted out by means of a computer print-out of their voting records. It is unlikely that even their speeches on the floor of Congress would reveal their ultimate commitment. They may give a few speeches to the local YMCA or a Christian businessmen's organization, but there will be few specifics. The concept that the Bible provides basic principles that should govern the vote on, say, the farm program, or Social Security, or national defense policy is not shared by many people in the pews, and fewer still in the Seminary classrooms of America. Least of all is it shared by Christian legislators.

Businessmen may claim to be Christians, and presumably no Christian businessman is involved in operating prostitution rings or pornography publishing houses, but beyond these minimal (and obvious) entrepreneurial imitations, how could we successfully locate a Christian businessman in terms of his occupational standards, his company's decision-making activities, or the firm's economic goals? In fact, is there any agreement among those of us who would even begin the search for such recognizable standards, let alone the profit-seeking businessmen in our churches?

Would the labor union leader recognize the nature of

compulsory unionism and its economic effects? Could he stand up against his union's membership, any more than the Christian businessman could stand up against voting shareholders or the demands of the free market to make maximum profits? Could such men survive in the real world, meaning the policy-making world of personal leadership and full responsibility?

As for university instructors, how many of them would leave the state-supported university, with its legalized secularism, or drop the secularized textbooks for their own mimeographed materials? Would they be able to teach in secularized college settings without breaking the law? Would they even acknowledge that their own academic disciplines should be governed by Christian presuppositions? Would they see that in some cases, even the **content** of their science should be governed by biblical revelation? It is most unlikely. There are hardly a dozen explicitly Christian textbooks at any level in all fields. There is no market for them, few publishers for them, and no acceptance among those in the classroom who profess Christian faith.

What shall we say? That the Bible really doesn't have answers? Is it not rather that our leaders, including the Christians in positions of authority, have abandoned the idea of the relevance of Christian faith outside of mere soul-saving? Have they not in fact accepted a radical dualism, a radical neutralism, in the arenas of life? Have they not abdicated their responsibility to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling? Have they not tried to limit Christianity to the soul alone?

How narrow is the human soul? Do we think of the soul as simply some disembodied spirit that is floating around behind our eyes, waiting to receive its home in heaven? Is it completely disconnected from flesh? Are body and soul two radically different substances, just as the Greeks, gnostics, and mystics of both East and West have always maintained? But if body and soul are one, if heaven and hell are really temporary resting places, if the resurrection is to reunite body and soul for both the just and the lost, if Christians are headed for the new heavens and new earth (rather than the lake of fire), and if men are responsible for every word and deed that they perform, (1 Cor. 3), then how dare we regard the soul or heart as a disembodied spirit? How can we continue to view the heart as some sort of irresponsible vapor that is not responsible for the actions of the body? How can we continually narrow the sphere of Christianity's relevance as if salvation from the world did not require sanctification in the world? How can Christians continue to think of responsibility as somehow without standards? How can we work out our salvation with fear and trembling if we do not acknowledge the existence of eternal, revealed standards of righteousness—24-hour-a-day righteousness—that serve as ethical benchmarks for our daily activities?

The Concept of Personal Responsibility

The doctrine of creation implies many things, but at the very least, it teaches cosmic **personalism**. OURS is a universe of law, a universe of standards; God created it, and He said it was good. It reflects His handiwork, revealing His existence even to the rebellious (Rom. 11:8-23). We are responsible before God, but this responsibility is intensely historical. Christianity is the pre-eminent religion of history; it asserts the eternal implications of each man's life and actions (1 Cor. 3). Thus, Christianity is not ethereal. Responsibility is concrete. Men are responsible for their actions in time and on earth.

The work of the law is written in the heart of every man (Rom. 2:14-16). The law itself is written in the heart of every Christian (Heb. 8:8-10). This is why each man can be held responsible for his actions. He is responsible to God in terms of God's law. Therefore, it is the law which stands above us, both saved and lost, condemning some (Rom. 5) and serving as the foundation of prosperity for others (Deut. 8'). It is not abstract responsibility, but rather fully personal responsibility that we face: true persons (men) facing true persons (the Godhead) in terms of a law-order which reflects God's holiness and is in conformity to man's needs, since man is made in the image of God.

There are no gaps in God's law, for there are no gaps in our daily responsibility. We do not have safety zones of ethical neutrality that serve as a sort of "king's x" in a game of cosmic tag. The theology of "king's x" is demonic, it asserts, as Satan argued with Eve that God's law can be tested, that His omnipotence can be tested, that man stands in judgment over God's law-order, and that in the day that we ate of the tree of knowledge, maybe we didn't really die. Maybe God's law really was never comprehensive. Maybe we can live forever in a neutral world of our own creation, doing what pleases us in terms of man's relative standards.

In contrast to this stands the testimony of God through His word. He tells us that we are responsible, that we cannot remain Christians and ignore the requirements of applied Christianity. We are not disembodied spirits floating in a timeless world. We are real persons who live in a real world which has meaning in terms of the plan of God for history. Our faith is not irrelevant mysticism. It has implications for the way we live in our daily occupations. It has standards. Therefore, we must build in terms of His standards, or else we capitulate to Satan.

It is time to begin building.

Gary North