

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

© Institute for Christian Economics, 1978

Vol. 1, No. 6

Nov. /Dec., 1976

Academic Compromise

By Gary North

There is little doubt that over the last eight centuries, the certified, self-regulated, self-policed academic community has not been at the forefront of intellectual innovation. The college or university is by nature oriented toward the status quo. Men are screened over a period of many years, first as students and then as non-tenured instructors. Their superiors keep them under their watchful sovereignty, since it is the threat of early dismissal which is the basis of tenured faculty power. Without this, the whole academic community would cease to function. Bureaucracies require authority.

The result, predictably, is skilled mediocrity – and sometimes not so skilled. Men are forced to conform their styles to the existing gray sludge verbiage of the dissertation, the journal article, and the narrow monograph. The lifeless prose of scholarship is supposed to represent detached neutrality, the once-reigning myth of higher education. The end result of this approach is boring, biased writing. Journals that are read by nobody, monographs that are immediately forgotten, textbooks that are always a decade out of date, seminars that no one attends, papers read to unresponsive or groggy audiences: this is the world of modern scholarship.

Certain questions are considered legitimate in any given academic guild at any given point in history. Certain approaches to the solution of these circumscribed questions are also considered the only ones acceptable. The guild polices itself rather well. The ways in which guilds enforce their world-and-life views are cataloged effectively in Thomas Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1970). Kuhn concludes from a study of the history of physical science that the major intellectual breakthroughs are all too often made by young innovators who are not well established within the guild and by skilled amateurs who are self-taught and completely outside the guild. Guild members are seldom convinced by these scientific breakthroughs; they simply grow old and retire, or die, while the younger men establish the new "paradigm." Then a new series of questions and answers becomes the reigning orthodoxy, waiting for yet another innovator to revamp the operating presuppositions.

Kuhn's analysis became a new paradigm for numerous academic disciplines during the late 1960's. Historians, political scientists, education professors, sociologists, and even a handful of natural scientists adopted Kuhn's open relativism. The idea of "objective science" was effectively removed from the classroom in those years of academic and

campus turmoil. The confident technocratic neutralism of the Kennedy years disappeared, especially among the untenured younger professors. Kuhn's book itself launched a cross-disciplinary scientific revolution.

Compromised Christian Scholarship

The trouble with Christian institutions of higher learning is that the faculty members are usually less self-confident than those in the high paying secular institutions. Their educational backgrounds are usually based on time spent in less prestigious universities. They have little time for serious study, since their teaching loads are heavy. In short, Christian colleges are regarded as backwater academic institutions by the academic community, on those rare occasions when the academic community pays any regard to Christian academic institutions. This leads to a kind of academic inferiority complex.

To counter this lack of prestige, college administrators put enormous emphasis on the attainment of a Ph. D by every faculty member. They chase after certification the way that politicians chase after swing-vote blocs. Good teaching, on any campus, cannot easily be measured, and all bureaucratic certification by higher boards must be based on measurable quantities, such as the number of Ph.D's teaching in each department. Bureaucratization means quantification. There is no escape. Certification means bureaucratization. Christian college administrators want certification. After all, their secular administrative peers measure their success as administrators by the success of Christian colleges in matching the criteria of performance set forth by secular humanists, and these criteria are bureaucratic. They see their task as one of meeting the formal requirements — supposedly strictly neutral and "merely" methodological — of secular humanistic education, while maintaining enough of the substance of Christianity to justify their appeals to Christian donors, parents, and students. They want their schools to be in the humanistic world of education, but not of it. They want their colleges to be "in the mainstream," but "swimming against the humanistic tide." The result is institutional schizophrenia.

In this environment, compromise with humanistic standards is built into the system. It is assumed from the beginning that academic criteria of performance are wholly autonomous from any religious and philosophical founda-

tionsof knowledge. In short, the crisis of Christian education is found et the very heart of the educational enterprise. The Christian colleges recruit faculty members in terms of secular criteria of performance. They do not assume from the beginning that there are uniquely biblical standards of performance – methodological performance – that are superior to those established by secular humanists. They do not propose to teach secular humanists about the truth end falsity of any given approach to an academic discipline. They want to teach course work which is methodologically acceptable to secular humanists, yet provide a peculiar Christian twist to the content of the course. What you get, predictably, is twisted courses and teachers who are intellectually bent out of shape.

Whose Paradigms?

The brighter humanists of the late 1960's finally began to come to grips with the fall of guild-controlled "truth." They began to grasp the fact that all scholarship, from the methodological foundations to the most narrow content, is governed by biased, innately religious **presuppositions** concerning the nature of human thought, human perception, and the external universe. But this intellectual revolution has not yet touched the more mediocre secular universities, nor has it visibly affected the Christian colleges. The Christian colleges still refuse to pull out of the accreditation committees owned and operated by and for secular humanists. The administrators still sit close to the table of the humanists, begging for a few scraps to be thrown their way. Little do they know how impoverished the secularists are. It is as if St. Paul had feared to become a prophet until he had beenofficially certified by the Jerusalem synagogue.

From time to time, though, an amateur comes along and makes a major contribution, just as Kuhn's thesis predicts. He is someone who has no reason to want to be tenured by some department of Christian humanism. Perhaps the best example in recent years is Jay E. Adams, who has a Ph. D in speech, but whose contributions have been in the field of psychology, where he is self-taught. He did not feel it necessary to go through the humanistic gauntlet in some secular department of psychology. He felt free to abandon all the anti-Christian presuppositions of modern secular psychology. He has sold many books, conducted many seminars, and heiped many people, but only because he was unwilling to meet the secular standards of a department of psychology in any Christian college in America. He could not possibly meet their rigorous academic standards, thank God,

(And you have never heard of any of those who woulddeny Adams tenure in their third-rate imitations of second-rate humanistic colleges. Neither have thesecular psychologists in the prestige universities.) Warmed-over Freud, or prayerful behaviorism, will not bring men to repentance and healing. But that is what it takes to get tenured. Tenure is simply **baptized** mediocrity.

Another excellent example is the remarkable two-volume book by Donovan Courville, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*. Courville, a Ph.D in chemistry (whose work in his tenured field never made him noteworthy), started to examine the findings of modern archeology, especially in reference to the dating of the exodus. He hassinglehandedly reconstructed the dating of the ancient world, merely by taking the Bible at its word. His ingenious reconstruction cannot safely be ignored by any pastor or scholar who comments on the biblical events prior to Joshua. His book is still available, and an order blank is enclosed. Readera of this newsletter are being offered a 15% discount if they use the enclosed order blank. **Otherwise**, they will have to pay the full price of \$9.95 (P.O. Box 993, Loma Linda, CA 92354: Crest Challenge Books).

If we are to be successful in reconstructing the academic disciplines of our day, we will have to follow Kuhn's implied advice: forget the existing guilds and do the best work possible outside the locked ceils of the tenured **professoriates**. We will have to rethink the presuppositions of the experts, since they are guided by the paradigms of secular humanism. We will have to do it without the help of tenured Christian faculty members, and probably with their open hostility. We have no choice. Tenured guild members are seldom converted to a new paradigm. Fortunately, they eventually retire, leaving the field open to those who have come up with a more fruitful approach. The compromisers are finished.

We have time. They don't. We can do without tenure. They can't. Never having been accredited, we cannot be frightened into silence by the threat of having ouraccreditation withdrawn by the humanistic accreditation boards. They are continually terrorized by this prospect. The future is on the side of those who remain intellectually faithful to the Bible. The dust will soon settle over their unread, unreadable, and unmemorable books, journals, and monographs. The secularists who dominate the world of scholarship can afford to ignore third-rate Christian imitations of their work, and the laymen who are the backbone of the modem churches cannot afford not to ignore them. They will be ignored and must be ignored. We will die of malnutrition if we beg for scraps from thetables of secular humanism.