

# Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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## MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS!

by Gary North

"The church shouldn't get involved in [ ]."

Here is one of the most familiar complaints of our day, aimed primarily against the theological-political liberals in the pulpit. Those who listen to such preaching mutter this phrase under their breath, or else ignore the whole thing, since it is obvious that the millions and millions of parishoners who attend the weekly sessions of "political salvation by direct action" presented by liberal Establishment pastors do not get involved in the projects recommended to them. The vocal complaints come from the more conservative churches, the members of which want a theological justification for staying as inactive as their fellow attendees in the Establishment denominations. (People who spend their lives in liberal Establishment churches seldom search for theological justifications of anything, including apathy, since theology carries so little weight in such churches.)

The debate over whether the church should get involved in this or that, or how it ought to get involved, has been going on for about 2,000 years. The Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 was called to explore this very question. The question has many facets. First, if the church can get involved in affairs not strictly ecclesiastical, wouldn't the pastors have to become experts in too many different fields? Second, does the Bible really present criteria for settling arguments in these other fields? Third, can these other fields (the State, for example) claim jurisdiction over the church? After all, if the church can tell the State what it should do, why can't the State take steps to control the church as a means of self-defense? In any case, won't the State do just exactly that? Fourth, will new discoveries in the various fields threaten the integrity of the church's message? If the church places a heavenly seal of approval on one interpretation, won't new discoveries eventually force churchmen to reverse their former judgment? Fifth, isn't such preaching a violation of sphere sovereignty? Won't we wind up with a tyrannical church that tries to control everything? Sixth, as a practical matter, won't such meddling force some members to leave the local church for a rival one (which either takes the opposite position or says nothing at all)? In some cases, former members may leave the churches altogether. If a man's financial contributions are going to support a rival philosophy of life in an important area of a man's life,

won't he quit? Won't this lead directly to a breakdown of churches along lines of "secular concern"?

All of these questions are quite valid, and the inability of the institutional churches to deal completely successfully with them over 2,000 years has led many concerned Christians to abandon the idea of the church speaking out on matters outside strictly ecclesiastical-institutional concerns.

At the same time, however, these same Christians have found themselves in the real world with a most intriguing doctrine, namely, that the Bible is the Word of God, a God who in turn is the Creator and sustainer of the whole universe. A corollary to this doctrine of revelation is the oft-cited phrase, "The Bible has the answer to all your problems." The trouble is, a lot of people's problems have to do with the affairs of life outside the narrow concerns of ecclesiastical polity. Does the Bible have answers or not? Must we abandon the idea of a comprehensive revelation of a Creator God? Must we affirm the position that although God created the universe, He has voluntarily limited His revelation of Himself to a very narrow segment of human life? Must we affirm, therefore, the doctrine that sin and ethical rebellion are narrowly ecclesiastical acts, since there are no criteria for obedience in those areas outside the narrowly ecclesiastical? After all, if our knowledge of our sin comes through our knowledge of our transgression of God's laws of life (Romans 7:7-25), and we affirm that God's law does not provide specific criteria for godly action in many areas of life, then how are we to be made aware of our specific transgressions? Are we saying that the regenerate man will not be in any way distinguished in his handling of life's problems from the actions and conclusions of the unregenerate man?

### Reversing the Questions

Let us return to the six questions raised by those who would challenge the right of the church to speak out on secular issues – "secular issues" being defined by those who resent such preaching as those areas in which the church does not have a right to speak out.

First, if pastors must preach the whole counsel of God, how can they neglect secular issues, so-called? Are pastors

not neglecting the preaching of a comprehensive gospel of repentance when they narrow the scope of their challenge? Second, must we not affirm that the Bible does present criteria for godly action in areas of life outside the institutional church? (By the phrase, "the Bible," I have in mind the Bible—not Paul's prison epistles alone, or the passages referring only to something called "The Church—the Great Parenthesis," or those sections of the New Testament that are in red letters in red letter editions of the Bible, etc. ) Third, if the church does not claim the right to preach the standards of righteousness for the State, business, medicine, and other areas of life, then will not the very silence of the church aid the satanic plans of all rebels in these various other institutions? Will not the church become a tool of the State by its very silence, the thing too many churches became in Nazi Germany and have become behind the Iron Curtain? It is necessary only that the churches remain silent for evil to prosper. Are pastors to ignore their role as prophets? Are they to become court prophets, baptizing all schemes (or which is the same thing, baptizing none)? Fourth, are all new discoveries of various sciences not to be tested first by the Bible? If modern science is at bottom officially relativistic (as it is), isn't the silence of the churches an affirmation of the possible validity of every discovery made in terms of such relativism? Are Christians to acquiesce in the primary goal of modern evolutionary science, namely, chasing God out of His universe? Isn't the scientific silence of God the equivalent of a revelationless chased-out God? Fifth, isn't sphere sovereignty limited by the concrete revelation of God, through His written Bible? Isn't the idea of sphere sovereignty, apart from such concrete revelational guidelines, basically a return to Protestant Scholasticism – the idea of autonomous standards of performance, intellectually and operationally, for each sphere of life, ungoverned by specific revelational guidelines? Where you have the concept of sphere sovereignty that is sovereign from explicit standards of biblical law, you always find a quest for a new "common ground" between saved men and lost men – an intellectual common ground, rather than the only common ground that there is, namely, our common condition as rebellious creatures who face a comprehensive law of God. Sixth, if some members might leave a church which presents comprehensive preaching, what are we to conclude? That men do not like to be challenged to repent in the area of their most conspicuous rebellion? We knew that before. That is what repentance is all about. Even if some other church preaches messages soothing to the soul of one set of members, this need not be a disaster. Isn't the Protestant position one which affirms the rights of human conscience, the ecclesias-

tical autonomy of local congregations from a single hierarchical authority? Isn't competition good for the invisible churches, at least in some instances? Wasn't this what the battles of the Reformation were all about, institutionally speaking? Isn't the idea of voluntary church membership, in opposition to an established State church, what modern Protestants affirm daily? So why are we worried about the effects of comprehensive preaching on church membership? Are we worried about budgets and church debt, rather than the reclaiming of the whole world for Jesus Christ? (Oh, debt, here is thy sting!)

Creeds also divide Christians. Creeds also require periodic revision. Creeds are the basis for rival denominations and associations. Are we therefore to abandon creeds? (If the answer is "yes," then that, too, is a creed.)

### God's Business

"Mind your own business!" is the oldest, most popular cry of rebels that we can locate. It was Satan's challenge to God, and Adam's to God. It is the denial of God's revealed word. It is the assertion that God is trying to meddle in the things of His creation that are no concern – no lawful authority — of His. It is the cry of all antinomians everywhere. It is the cry of every person caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

The right of all Christians, not just pastors, to question the whole creation in terms of God's revelation is unquestioned. This questioning process is governed by God's law, too. It is to be orderly. It must be consistent. It is not to respect persons. But it is always valid. It was the "crime" of the prophets that they challenged kings and priests in terms of God's revelation.

What we have in this century is the triumph of the preaching of the sanctuary. This preaching sees reform starting, then ending, at the House of the Lord. It is the preaching of the mini-reformer. It is the sweeping of dust and filth into the streets, or under the rug, out of sight of the faithful during church services. It is based on the assumption, first, that only God sweeps filth from the streets, and second, that even if we have a great commission to sweep the streets, too, God has given us only flimsy brooms, and He really doesn't expect us to get the streets as spotless as He expects us to get the pews (which is where Christianity has attempted to hide itself in this century).

But if the streets are filthy, we face a problem. We can track a lot of filth into the sanctuary, but we can't track spotlessness into the streets. We need the brooms and shovels – the law and the prophets — that have been kept locked up in the church's storage room since about 1865.