

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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TUGBOATS, LIFEBOATS, AND BATTLESHIPS

by Gary North

I am in a unique position. I edit an investment newsletter, *Remnant Review*, which deals with economic investing in a time of increasing chaos. I also edit several Christian newsletters and publish several others through the I.C.E. I only know of one other individual who edits both an investment newsletter and a Christian current-events report, Jim McKeever.

With two sets of readers (though with considerable overlap), I face different sorts of criticisms. Some readers of the investment newsletter appreciate the economic advice, but they would rather I steered clear of all traces of religion. At the same time, there are readers of the I.C.E. material who are curious about the relationship between theology and economics, but they don't want to read about mass inflation, the coming economic conflagration, and the importance of buying dehydrated food. They are not happy with what I call relevance, which they think is a form of materialism. God is supposed to take care of all His people, so they are therefore free to spend all of their time preaching the gospel of Christ.

For years, a few readers of *Remnant Review* have complained about my emphasis on the importance of "survival" products, or as I prefer to call them, self-sufficiency investments. Every year I receive a few letters complaining about my "retreatist" program, and calling me to "stand up and fight" in the city. They equate "taking a stand" with standing up in the middle of a crossfire. They don't want to leave the city, with its comforts and conveniences, so they are disturbed by someone who encourages them to cut their ties with urban America and get into a smaller town.

There are also those on any newsletter mailing list who are devoting their lives, hopes, and even a part of their fortunes to a particular cause. Now, I'm a great believer in the division of labor. I think people in every walk of life should grab hold of some cause or program and devote time and money to it. However, the enthusiasm necessary to sustain a man's long-term commitment to such a program has a tendency to make him a one-issue voter. He sees that issue as the issue in life, one which must be fought and even died for. He cannot understand why someone else seems to be saying, "Cool off, buddy, there are other things in life."

But there are other things in life. The crisis faced by the West in the latter years of the twentieth century is not a **monocausal** crisis. There are many causes, many problems, and many possible solutions. One reason why we see the crisis as essentially one thing is that we don't have time to master all the intricacies of today's crisis. There are **intricacies**. There are a series of crises. Just because someone else doesn't share your sense of emergency doesn't mean he is wrong or you are. All it means is that there are several emergencies brewing today.

Retreat

This is a word which evokes knee-jerk reactions in the **hard-money** camp, as well as in the conservative movement in general. The activists resent the retreaters because they see the capital devoted by the retreaters as essentially wasted. "If the ship goes down, we all drown," they argue. A retreat is seen as a sort of neutralizer. He is calling people to come away from the fight and to head for the hills.

On the other hand, the retreaters see the movement people (whatever the movement happens to be) as naive. They see them as people who have not come to the realization that the war is lost, that the end is near, and that in order to survive, people have to get out of the way of the steamroller (whichever of the numerous steamrollers happens to be in view).

The same sort of division is present in religious circles. One congregation may vote to secede from a drifting denomination, and those other congregations that are trying to reverse the drift before it's too late resent the retreaters. The loss of a vote seems to count for so much when you're in a minority. Study the history of the rise of theological liberalism in any given denomination, and you will find pastors and congregations leaving at different times, since people don't always agree on the precise timing for abandoning the sinking ship. When you're still on board, bailing out water frantically, you probably resent the departure of those who have given up the ship.

Which brings me to this issue's analogy: boats. You may have noticed that any well-prepared ship carries lifeboats with it. In fact, it's a matter of International law that cruise ships have at least one drill for all passengers within 48 hours of boarding. Everyone grabs his life preserver and heads for his assigned deck. Roll is taken to see to it that everyone participates. This is a testimony to a grim fact: the best of ships sometimes sink. Captains may choose to go down with their ships, but nobody else does.

While you're on board, you don't pay much attention to lifeboats. They are taken for granted. But crews are continually checking them out, making sure they are ready for use in an emergency. Nobody on board resents the extra man-hours devoted by cruise lines to keep the boats in good repair. We all know about the *Titanic*. However, nobody appreciates 15 fake alarms.

The same can be said for social lifeboats. When the crisis hits, those who have done nothing to prepare themselves are only happy to crowd on board someone else's lifeboat. But churches, political orders, and economies are not cruise ships. The problem with a social catastrophe is that the civil government—the cruise line—has chosen to ignore the icebergs and is sailing full steam ahead. Anyone who calls attention to the

icebergs is ridiculed. The ship is still afloat, isn't it? And even after it starts to sink, the captain may try to prevent panic a little longer by denying the impending catastrophe. He tries to buy a little more time. What if he's wrong? What if the liner really is beyond the point of no escape?

Lifeboats

You see the lifeboat. You see the iceberg. You compute the estimated speed of the ship, compare it to the location of the iceberg, and then conclude that a collision is inevitable. What do you do? Do you sound the alarm? What if you do, and the ship misses the first iceberg? And then you spot another. What then?

We face a more baffling problem. There aren't enough lifeboats on this particular cruise ship. There is no way everyone can assemble his own lifeboat. Everyone can't get out of the cities. Everyone can't become a subsistence farmer. Everyone can't move. So what should you do? Tell nobody about the iceberg, just because not everyone can get on board? Should everyone go down on the *Titanic* just because there aren't enough lifeboats for everyone? Should none of the available lifeboats be used? There are some lifeboats available. Should you speak up?

I think you should. I think you should point to the icebergs, the speed of the ship, and the direction it's headed. Tell people if you think the collision is inevitable. Get those who are willing to listen to head for their cabins, gather up a few belongings, grab a life preserver, and get to their lifeboat before the rush.

A lifeboat, by the way, is not a permanent vessel. It's a temporary vessel. You get into one when the main liner is sinking and the alternative is drowning. You don't plan to spend the rest of your life on it. It's a way to extend your life until a more productive alternative comes along.

Now, these days we have those in the "survivalist" camp who think the end of civilization is coming, and that no alternative to a lifetime in a lifeboat is likely to come along. They think we should build such expensive lifeboats that we can float forever in them. But how many lifeboats will escape squalls, typhoons, and the normal crises for small vessels, if these lifeboats are on the ocean forever? Who could survive psychologically in a permanent lifeboat? Very few.

However, the fact that lifeboats aren't efficient permanent vessels is no argument against lifeboats in general.

Tugboats

When a cruise ship comes into port, it has to have a tugboat. Without a tugboat, the cruise ship will plow into the pier. Without tugboats, huge ships cannot be steered into tight spaces.

Societies are like this. They need tugboats. They are so big that no single tugboat will do. However, you can have too many tugboats. When too many tugboats are pulling against each other, the ship still rams into the pier, or sits immobile in the port.

We need to construct efficient tugboats. We need to do everything possible to become the vessels that direct the ship of state into port. We need to build tugboats in every area of life, to gain every possible position of social leverage. We have to become the only reliable tugboat captains in the port. We have to see where the present tugboat commanders are pulling the ship. Increasingly, they are pulling it over the falls. We're already well into the rapids,

There comes a time, however, when a dedicated tugboat commander sees where the ship is headed. He is going to have his boat squashed between the ship and the pier. There is no way he can move the ship back on course. The ship's prow is heading straight for his little tug. What does the sensible tugboat captain do? Tell his crew to sit tight, wave their arms, and shout? Or does he tell them to abandon ship. "Into the life rafts, boys, she's going to ram us!"

Or if the ship is halfway down the rapids, obviously out of control, and you hear the sound of the falls getting louder, what is your wisest course of action? Cut the rope that's attached to the ship and head for the shore? Or try to pull the ship to safety, with seven other tugs pulling in different directions?

I'd cut the rope and save myself, the crew, and the tugboat. Even if it's too late to avoid the rapids, we might avoid the falls. And even if we don't avoid the falls, we know where the ship is going. Who needs to be tied to it? Sound the alarm to the ship, but when the captain ignores you, cut the rope.

Battleships

When you're in your lifeboat, you should be headed for your tugboat. You had better hope that you get picked up by a battleship. Today, we need battleships.

The trouble is, nobody is building battleships these days. All the old ones are in mothballs, rusting in ports around the nation. Nobody uses them anymore.

We Christians need to get our old battleships out of mothballs. We need to start training younger men to handle the guns. We need to stock up on some ammo. The Christians have forgotten how to fight. They've forgotten what it means to be in battle. They think it's good enough to be third-class passengers on some cruise ship, and when a few of their number get up to second class, it's cause for rejoicing. Second class might mean an earned Ph.D. from some state university, or being elected congressman from some rural district, or winning third place in the NCAA basketball championship playoffs (small schools division). But they have forgotten that cruise ships stop sailing during world wars. The parties are over in wartime. No more "bon voyage" streamers when the torpedoes are launched. Cruise ships become cargo ships, or troop transport ships, in wartime.

Solzhenitsyn has sounded the alarm. We are at war. We may not recognize it yet. We may be halfway into our 'round-the-world cruise. It doesn't matter. The enemy submarines have been launched. The planes are in the air. The war is on. (As I have warned in my booklet, *The Threat of Nuclear War*, a real war may be imminent, which is what Solzhenitsyn has been saying for years: \$2 per copy; Remnant Review, P.O. Box 39800, Phoenix, AZ 85069).

I suppose it has always been this way. People popping champagne corks on a cruise ship don't worry about tidal waves, hurricanes, and torpedoes. They just sing and dance. Even those in steerage hope for the best. They hope the ship's captain knows what he's doing.

He doesn't.

That's why I'm recommending lifeboat drills. And if you think you're a tugboat captain, sound the alarm and then cut the rope. And if you're a retired battleship commander, get out the steel wool, the gray paint, and the ammo: you're about to be called back into service.