

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. VI., No. 1

©Institute for Christian Economics, 1982

Jan./Feb. 1982

1984, NOT 1948

by Gary North

What's wrong with our churches today? A lot. But if anything is wrong with the evangelical, officially conservative churches, it is this: the members think that the way to restore Christian culture is to return to 1948. At the very latest, to 1956. That would be as close to "heaven on earth" as any church member could dare to hope for.

Because of the partial isolation of most of our churches from the grim reality of culture in the 1980's, they are reacting against the evils of 1968. They want to see a return of patriotism. They want dirty language off the prime-time T.V. shows. They want television starlets to put on some underwear. They dream of the day that Ozzie and Harriet will be the parent figures of America. (Trivia question: What did Ozzie do for a living?) The CBN commercial stations rerun "Father Knows Best" in the afternoon, or similar sitcom fare. Christian parents see these bland, thoughtless series as a kind of novocaine for their children's minds, or even their own minds. It takes them out of the 1980's.

In the Bible Belt, the culture is still suffering from a mixture of three decades of rebellion. The 1950's-style rebellion is almost cute: hot cars, cruising down main street, cigarettes behind the gym. These are the sorts of things that Fonzie does, and everyone loves Fonzie. The kid who was the black sheep in 1957, the kid your parents wouldn't have wanted you to goof off with, is a folk hero of the 1970's and 1980's—a throwback to "the good old days," when sin was essentially harmless. The trouble is, it was that "harmless" sin that served as a cultural wedge for the late 1960's. The same is true of the music. Buddy Holly was cute; the early Beattles were a bit strange looking, but cute. Nothing since 1965 has been cute.

Also present in the Bible Belt is the rebellion of the 1960's, such as pot smoking, illicit sex, loose language (I mean loose—incoherent—not just foul). Premartial sex, while frowned upon in Christian circles, is no longer a cause for mental breakdowns among parents. It is not exactly accepted, but it is not universally condemned, either. Incredibly, members of churches are not universally opposed to abortion. Thus, we come to the sins of the 1970's, such as having your daughter, "who made a mistake," kill her unborn child. In this case, the parents are as deeply involved in the sin as the children.

In the regions that see their rebellion on T. V., all nicely sanitized by the censors and the sponsors, Christian people can go about their business as if it were still 1962, as if our military defenses were still supreme, as if the Federal deficits were still in the \$8 billion range, as if the public schools weren't in the process of academic collapse, as if their pensions were "as sound as a dollar," and the dollar were "as good as gold." They think they can insulate themselves from the economic crises of New York City and the moral crises of southern California. Their culture's

walls still seem to be standing. If they can just get the local 7-11 store's manager to sell the soft-core pornography from a stack behind the counter, everything will be just fine.

The walls are in a state of disrepair. The universal culture of rock music, with its sado-masochistic lyrics, its call to homosexual experimentation, and all the rest of the filth, is available to any child able to reach up to the counter with \$7.98, plus tax. For an inexpensive paperback book on the whole incredible subject of the lyrics of modern hard-rock music, send \$3.95 to ACTS Ministries, 124 Apache Trail, Granbury, TX 76046.

The public schools are the established churches of the religion of secular humanism, yet millions of Baptists in the South think of these schools as "our schools," and nothing short of a 2-and-10 football season can get them up in arms. If someone were to write a book on the South's approach to education, it might be called, *Pigskins, Sheepskins, and Lambs to the Slaughter*.

Shorting Out

The cultural insulation of the Christian world has worn through all along the line. When this happens to an electrical wire, it leads to power failures and fires. The same thing is true of cultures.

The evangelical world can no longer persist in the illusion that the American Republic is still operational as it was in the days of our Founding Fathers. It has gone the way of all flesh. The faithful are at ease in Zion. God has sent them fatness, and put leanness into their souls (Ps.106:15).

The pastors of America are stuck. If they wish to model their ministries along the lines of the Old Testament prophets, all the fat, comfortable sleepers will stir, rub their ears, and grow angry. "Why are you preaching all this doom and gloom stuff? We get enough of that on T.V. We get that at the office all day long. We don't come to church to get more of the same. We come for relief," They treat the church as if it were a giant glass of Alka Seltzer. Relief is just a swallow away.

Want to shrink a ministry to the point of invisibility? Just start preaching specific sermons on specific sins that are dear to the hearts of the faithful. Just start teaching a view of Christian responsibility that goes beyond heart, hearth, and sanctuary. Recently, a relatively "concerned" evangelical church in Texas had the opportunity of bringing members out to hear some information on abortion and the possibility of setting up an abortion hot-line, to try to get women from killing their children. Almost no members of this good-sized church showed up. "This sort of topic isn't spiritually uplifting," one member informed the pastor.

What is a pastor to do? Preach the truth and clear the pews of slumberers. But mortgages being what they are—churches are in debt, contrary to Remans 13:8—and pastoral

employment opportunities being what they are, it is naive to expect this sort of preaching. In a typical church, the big-money donors have usually made their fortunes in terms of today's economic and political system. They do not want to rock the boat. They also want their pastor to refrain from rocking too hard.

But what if Deuteronomy is true? What if it applies? What if this nation is under a covenant, and the terms of breaking this covenant are those spelled out in Deuteronomy 28:15-68? What then? Judgment.

Now is the time for faithful Christians to start preaching for repentance, or judgment which leads to repentance. It appears that we are unlikely to wake up the slumbering faithful in the pews apart from judgment. So we should preach for judgment. Not judgment unto destruction, but judgment unto restoration, the kind of judgment preached by the prophets.

The culture is about to short out. God will not be mocked. We must be ready with lamps filled with oil, or to make the analogy more modern, generators filled with diesel, with 10,000 gallons buried safely nearby.

"Diesel"

One of the most important strategies of the I.C. E. is to make available books and newsletters dealing with the specific sins of today's culture against God and His law. Not many people take these warnings seriously. They did not take the prophets' warnings seriously, either. But when judgment came, and Zion ceased to be at ease, people then started examining their hearts and God's law to see what had happened to them. The I.C. E. is laying down a foundation of critical materials, as well as construction materials, so that after the signs of a crisis are obvious to the public at large, there will be a few thousand Christians who say to themselves first, and then to those around them, "I knew this was coming. I was warned. I was told of social, economic, and political alternatives. The law of God teaches that these sorts of crises are inevitable. If we want to reconstruct society, we need biblical alternatives to secular humanism. This time, we have to take God's word seriously."

We need diesel fuel for our generators. The publications of the I.C. E. serve as back-up supplies of diesel fuel. There is little likelihood that our perspective will be taken seriously until this culture works out its damnation without any fear or trembling. What these publications are designed to do is to sit on shelves in 3-holed notebooks, gathering dust. Most recipients probably ignore these materials today. We are investing long-term when we send them out. We want people to wake up on the far side of some disaster, reach up to the dusty shelf, and start rereading our materials. They will build then on foundations laid down today.

In a major crisis, every crackpot in the world will be parading in the streets (or the mails), telling anyone who will listen that "I told you this was coming! You had better listen to me." I will be among the crackpots, too, for I also warned you. But more important, I warned you because I took seriously the word of God, whereas the secular crackpots have ignored the explicit teachings of the Bible as thoroughly as the humanists in

Washington have ignored them. That's what long-term social critics have to do: criticize. But to be effective in the long run, the critics must be criticizing in terms of a framework. They must be criticizing in terms of a reliable standard. That is what most other critics are not doing today.

So stock up on diesel. You may think you have no need of such information. But keep it around for a few years. It may surprise you in the future.

The Rude Awakening

The rude awakening is coming. It always does. Men cannot go to sleep at the wheel indefinitely. There will be an accident. Or more accurately, there will be a nasty result. You cannot expect a civilization to sleep at the wheel forever, with the engine running at top speed, and not crash. Such crashes are hardly accidents.

When the awakening comes, there will be a frantic search for solutions—immediate, bread-and-butter solutions—and then scapegoats, and finally answers to existing problems. Woe to the man or movement that is discerned to be a scapegoat. What happened to the business community in the 1930's can happen to any group that is riding high in the days immediately preceding the crisis. What happened in Britain to the government of Neville Chamberlain in September of 1939 is only too typical.

Christians are not riding high today. It is not our time yet. Others are riding high all over the world. They will ride no higher than the economy. They will ride no higher than their ability to "deliver the goods." Socialism, regulation, and inflation do not deliver the goods. They deliver only the "bads." The public will catch on only after a crisis, but the public will catch on.

This is why we need a remnant. We need a school of the prophets. We need men and women who know, in advance, that a crisis is coming. They also need to know why the crisis is coming, so that once it hits, they will be able with confidence to explain in retrospect why it came, and why certain concrete steps must be taken to see to it that such a crisis does not come again.

It is insufficient to stand on a streetcorner with a big sign that reads, "The End Is Near." This familiar figure of the cartoonists is all around us: in every church that preaches the imminent return of Christ, in every humanist study group that teaches that nuclear war will end all life on earth, and in every government planning bureau that operates in terms of an economic philosophy which says that deflation will destroy civilization as we have known it. The end of the humanists' world may well be near. I believe it is. However, this is not the same thing as saying that the end of the world is near, unless we say that humanism is the highest and final stage of human history, or the worst and final stage of human history. Neither position is true. What we should say is that humanism is Satan's most effective imitation of Christian culture—a perverse mirror image—but that it contains the seeds of its own destruction. As it becomes more consistent with its own presuppositions, it will disintegrate.

We must be ready to pick up the pieces after the disintegration. We must be ready to show others how to do it. That is what the early church did for the collapsing Roman Empire. We must be ready to do it again.