

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

by Gary North

About once every two years, I receive a letter from the head of the business and economics department at one or another Christian college. This has been going on for about ten years, possibly twelve. I usually keep these letters in my files. I would like to offer you a fictitious composite version of one of these letters, for it is very important that readers understand just what is going on in the academic world. I assure you, I am not exaggerating in this composite. I will do my best to reproduce the spirit of each inquiry faithfully.

Dear Dr. North:

I have followed your writings for several years, and I know that you must have wide contacts within the Christian academic world. Therefore, I'm writing you this letter.

Our school, Marginal Christian College, is an established institution of 850 students, predominantly of the United Brothers in Christ Church. It was founded in 1859 and has long enjoyed the reputation of maintaining high standards of Christian liberal arts education.

Recently, an opening in the business department became available, and we are seeking to fill the position with a high-quality instructor, which is why I'm writing you. However, because of our high standards, anybody just won't do. We are looking for a unique person to fill the slot.

First, he must have an earned Ph.D. Over 40% of our faculty members have the Ph. D, and we are striving to upgrade our faculty all the time. It would help if he has a Ph. D in economics, though a Ph. D in accounting or business would be acceptable. Since our school is too small to offer strictly an economics major, he would teach in the business and economics department.

Second, we want a person who believes in the infallibility of the Bible. We also require that he sign an oath that he neither smokes nor drinks, on campus or off, since the United Brothers in Christ Church has always maintained a strict position of biblical separation.

Third, we would like a man who is an effective lecturer to civic organizations, since we know there will be great interest in his work in our local business community. We need a man who is a strong defender of the American free enterprise system to take its case to the community.

It would help, of course, if he were willing to join one of the three United Brothers churches in our little community of Hog Jowls, so that he can participate in the life of the community. About 60% of the people in Hog Jowls, not counting the student body, belong to the United Brothers. Hog Jowls, as you may know, is a thriving little community of 7,900 people, only an hour and a half from the tri-state city of Durden, which has numerous

cultural attractions. (I'm enclosing a brochure put out by the Durden Chamber of Commerce in order to familiarize you with the area.)

He will be required to teach our "introduction to economics" course, two sections of "introduction to business," and two upper division classes in marketing and advertising, plus one course in macroeconomics the second semester. Next year he will be able to teach a course in the history of economic thought, which is required for graduation.

We are unable to offer a tenured position, and his contract is subject to renewal each year. But we think a really top-flight man will receive tenure here, once he teaches the full five years normally required to attain tenure.

Summer school teaching is available each year, though our two tenured men normally fill these positions. Our senior man, Mr. Samson, is scheduled to retire at the end of the 1983/84 term, so the new man will have a good shot at this extra assignment, which pays \$1,800.

Naturally, the position demands that he be available for student counseling at least three hours a day, and we would expect him to serve as advisor for two of our student associations, Future Profit-Seekers of America, and Delta Upsilon Delta, the national scholastic fraternity of middle-level management majors.

Besides offering a fine health care plan and full retirement benefits, the salary range will be in the \$16,000-\$17,000 range.

Rental units are presently somewhat scarce in Hog Jowls, although co-op apartments have been opened in the nearby town of Lurch, about a 20-minute drive away.

Please let me know if you know of any young men available to fill this position. It's late in the spring term, and we would like to get things wrapped up for the next semester.

Faithfully yours,

J. Sterling Smeed
Chairman, Social Sciences

So I sit down and start thinking. Who would want this post? I know of about ten men in the U.S.A. who have earned Ph. D's in economics and who say they believe in the Bible and the free market. Of these ten, seven have tenured positions in some state university and are earning at least \$23,000 of the taxpayers' money each year, teaching nine units a term, and teaching in summer seminar programs on their own. Marginal College has about as much hope of attracting one of these guys as its football team has of going to the Rose Bowl.

One or two of the fellows are recent graduates, but they live half way across the country, their wives like the city, and their

children are in Christian schools, which are not available, sad to say, in Hog Jowls. They will find work locally right where they are. If nothing else, they can become market research specialists for some nearby conglomerate at \$19,500 a year starting salary, with possibilities of advancement within two years to the \$27,000 range. Marginal College pays \$27,000 only to four people: two senior professors, the president, and the football coach.

Then there is the fact that with 850 students (975 in 1967), the school is in financial trouble. Chigger State University is operating about an hour away, and 75% of Marginal's student body is recruited in-state. Most residents will go to the cheaper state school. Yes, even sons and daughters of United Brothers parents. If you're going to get a humanistic education anyway, they conclude, you might as well pay cheap socialist tuitions. Besides, the school has fraternities and sororities, long banned at Marginal College.

The prospective employee must read between the lines. The school only offers six upper division courses in economics, meaning that no full-fledged major in economics can graduate from the school. It's a business major, with a smattering of economics. Anyone really interested in economic theory will go to Chigger State. Those whose parents went to Marginal, or who really don't want to go to college anyway, will wind up in the business ed course at Marginal. Half the football team will be majoring in business. (The other half will major in physical education, with a minor in business.)

Here is some fellow who has spent ten years of his life or more struggling through the Keynesian swamps, going through the mental gymnastics of playing econometrics, and he comes forth with his earned Ph. D in economics. So now what does he face? The oblivion of teaching business in a backwater college that may go belly-up in four years anyway. His salary will never survive mass inflation. If he knows any economics at all, he knows this much.

But it's an opportunity to teach free market economics to Christian young people. So he considers it, if only for a moment. He inquires into the situation. The senior professor in business, Mr. Samson (M. A., University of Southern North Dakota at Grunge, 1946), is in charge of selecting the textbook in economics. He hasn't read an economics journal or seen the inside of a classroom other than his own in three decades, but he knows what's respectable, so he insists on using Samuelson's *Economics*. So much for free market economics.

The school's Bible department is staffed by two graduates of the denomination's seminary (which went Barthian back in 1847), with graduate degrees from Yale and Edinburgh Divinity Schools. Then there are two retired pastors (whose churches threw them out for incompetence) who teach pastoral theology. Anyone who tries to integrate the Bible with his own academic discipline had better not come out for a literal, "proof-texting" type of approach, or else there will be complaints, such as "Where did he get his degree in theology?" and "Let the Bible Department teach the Bible at Marginal." He will learn what happens when orthodox believers invade the academic turfs of those whose faith faded into the "Wholly Other" two decades ago.

Then there are the local businessmen. These men belong to the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, and Lions. All nice guys, all struggling along, and all deeply committed to increased tariff protection for textiles and automobiles. What they want is "fair competition." When our young defender of free markets and free trade starts teaching such heresies, word will get out.

Pretty soon, the college's President Frump will start getting challenged at weekly meetings of the Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, VFW, American Legion, and Odd Fellows (all of which, as a fund-raiser, he feels compelled to join, and besides, it's goor' clean fun): "What's this we hear about some young Commie economist that you've hired? Where do you get these guys, anyway?" So much for the free market. Pressure will soon be applied. The man's contract will not be renewed, and no explanation will be provided. And where do you apply after Marginal College has tossed you out after a stay of two terms? Sub-Marginal?

I remember one of these inquiries I received back in 1974. The college just had to have a man with an earned Ph. D, who believed in the Bible, who didn't smoke or drink, and who believed in the free enterprise system. I told the recruiter that no such person existed, but if he located one and hired him, I would pledge 1 % of my income for as long as he stayed on the faculty. A risk-free offer, certainly; I knew that school would never find him. Then I attended a conference of free market economists that summer. Sure enough, I ran into the guy who finally was hired. He was still working on his dissertation, he was divorced, he smoked and drank, he didn't believe in the Bible, but he did believe in the free market.

What is usual, however, is for the school to hire a near-Ph. D from a nearby state university, possibly part-time, and then permanently after he has his Ph.D. He knows little about theology, nothing about Christian reconstruction, and something about Keynesianism, which he believes in the same way that he believes in political liberalism, that is to say, blindly.

As one professor told me, after calling me to locate that elusive Christian economist, he couldn't lure the man I had first recommended, but did I have any more names? I gave him about five (all teaching at state universities, save one, who was 65 years old). And his final inquiry? You guessed it. "Now all of these merry have the Ph. D., correct?"

Correct.

Conclusion

Why do colleges do it? Why do they chase shadows, illusions, academic certification awarded by the academically certified? Why do they subject our young men to years of struggle learning lies—outright, God-denying, economy-wrecking, State-expanding lies—and then expect them to learn the truth in one summer after a decade or more of higher education? Do they think men can learn the truth in the summer before they start teaching undergraduates? It is as if Protestants required all their pastors to go through a decade of instruction at the Pontifical Institute. Why don't we have the guts to certify ourselves and reconstruct our own colleges (let alone the world)? Why don't we subsidize the brightest young men in each discipline, sending them to study individually with the best men in our camp, not Harvard's (or Paducah State's)? Why send them through the secular gauntlet? And why, oh why, do laymen subsidize the present system of humanist-certified, humanist-trained, humanist-corrupted Christian higher education? Until laymen stop writing the checks, there can be no reform.

Stop writing your checks until some reform is initiated. The first reform would be simple: the college should voluntarily pull out of the regional accrediting agency. But parents of students at the college might panic, right? And that is one reason why reconstruction will not begin in the halls of baptized ivy.