

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. V II, No. 4

Institute for Christian Economics, 1983

July/August, 1983

DEFENSIVE BURN-OUT

by Gary North

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Gal. 6:9).

After years or even decades "in the trenches," people who have dedicated their time and money to a defensive cause tend to get burned out. In the mid-1950's, the woman who first introduced me to political conservatism was also teaching several other women the basics of research, meaning full-time monitoring of various left-wing political and conspiratorial organizations. She set up several study groups in southern California in this period. But by the late 1960's or early 1970's, she was no longer interested in politics. She had divorced her husband years before, and she was nonworking full time. She got tired of fighting. She gave her research files away in the late 1970's.

In the mid-1960's, I met two other women who had been trained by her. Both experienced the same phenomenon of burn-out by the end of the 1960's. They had monitored their chosen left-wing groups for years; they had filled files and boxes with reams of clippings (without a coherent index); they had dragged in children and friends to stuff envelopes with flyers and announcements, until children and friends became convinced that the whole effort was crazy. And then, predictably, they threw all the materials away. I have seen many other follow the same pattern; of course, in southern California, there were a lot of opportunities to meet such ladies. They were the proverbial "little old ladies in tennis shoes." But they weren't old when they started; they just got old.

Women seemed to be the primary victims of tennis shoe burn-out, probably because they had put more of their hopes and efforts into the conservative movement than their husbands had. Men have their jobs to worry about. They associate daily with other men who are not involved in conservative political action. Husbands are more likely to be on the fringes of the political fringe; their wives are more often right in the center of the extreme. Women see that their children are threatened by the public schools, or by "values clarification," or other planned conquests of the family. They see how much they have to lose. Their husbands do not have the same focused interests or fears. They can take the attitude that "I let my wife worry about saving the world," in the same way that millions of them say, "I let my wife take care of religious matters." The results in both cases are catastrophic: for wives, husbands, children, and the society at large.

Working Wives

There is no doubt that wives can set aside more time in the day for activities such as monitoring this or that group or activity of the enemy. Husbands are busy trying to earn a living. But husbands have the money. They may not write the checks each month, but they can say where the big blocks of disposable income will go. The wife may pay the bills, but husbands ultimately can determine which economic burdens will

be assumed by the family. Wives influence husbands, but husbands make the fundamental decisions. The wife is not going to write a check for \$1,000 to some organization, even if she devotes 20 hours a week to it 50 weeks a year. She makes her contribution to the cause by donating her time.

But time, like money, is not free of charge. She has to get the time to donate. So she starts cooking less frequently or less thoughtfully. She starts coming home several hours after the children have been out of school. She begins to squeeze the clock the way other women squeeze the wallet. Her day begins to resemble the schedule of working wives. The family suffers.

This brings up another important point. As economic pressures have mounted, and as young families have deferred having children, or have had smaller families in order to allow the wife "free time" to go back to work, the supply of dedicated volunteers has begun to dry up. One neglected explanation for the rise of statism in the West is that mothers are working, meaning working for money outside the home. They start paying taxes, so the State gets larger, and the time available for young women to do volunteer work is reduced drastically.

The nature of political conservatism has changed as a direct result of the changing employment patterns. Direct-mail appeals have increased. Families have more money to donate, but less time to donate. One reason for the rise of the "New Right," with its corps of dedicated, paid political professionals, is the phenomenon of working wives. The pool of amateur talent which once supplied the "tennis shoe ladies" is much smaller now. The gray haired volunteers are becoming white haired, and they are not being replaced.

Financing Alternatives

At the same time, the appearance of the Christian school movement has begun to compensate for the social losses associated with shifting patterns of employment. Instead of turning children over to the State to educate them, parents have begun to send them to independent private schools. Wives may have to go to work, but the State is deprived of its pool of future talent, namely, the brighter, more affluent, more dedicated, ideologically committed students. If a wife who would have been a newspaper-clipping study group member is forced to go to work instead, in order to finance her children's escape from the government schools, then the family is probably strengthened. Working wives who are using the money to pay their children's tuition are making better use of their time than those newspaper-clipping ladies did in southern California back in 1958.

The focus of the family's concern now shifts in a positive direction. Wives who might have wasted endless hours documenting the take-over of the public school curriculum by Communists or the United Nations' UNESCO, the way women did in 1958, now go to work in order to finance an alternative to the

tax-supported schools that were captured by humanism in the 1830's. It was not Communism or UNESCO that created the problem; it was the philosophy of humanism which dominated public schools from the beginning. (See R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education* [Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963].)

By creating and financing an alternative to statist education, families and their representatives, the churches, are today accomplishing far more than was ever accomplished by the conservative study groups of the 1950's. The burn-out phenomenon is far less likely to derail the efforts of today's Christians. Instead of spinning their wheels in an endless attempt to document the seemingly endless success of the enemy, Christian conservatives today can uproot the crucial statist institution through which the ideological enemy has captured the minds of the public.

Did statist really worry about the study of groups of the 1950's? Were they really threatened by temporarily outraged mothers who paraded against sex education in the public schools? Did they experience any permanent defeats by such short-run flare-ups? Of course not. Time was on their side. When each crop of children was graduated, their formerly outraged mothers lost the incentive to continue the fight. Furthermore, the children had received their indoctrinations, and each succeeding crop of children had less conservative parents. The culmination of this was the student protest movement of the late 1960's.

Yet out of the jaws of victory the humanists are today snatching defeat. The rise of the Christian school movement is accomplishing what decades of shouting mothers could not accomplish: the creation of an educational environment hostile to humanism of all varieties. Instead of trying to "win back our public schools," parents have abandoned "our" public schools, which were never ours anyway — philosophically, financially, or theologically.

The products of humanistic colleges and universities are now the teachers in today's public schools. These teachers are so ill-prepared that they haven't the ability to pass on the standard public school curriculum of the 1950's, weak as it was. The standard high school civics textbook for senior high students has been rewritten, year by year, to make the language simpler. Today's senior high school textbooks, and even some college texts, are written for what would have been a ninth-grade level in 1958. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores dropped steadily from 1963 until 1982 — a two-decade disaster.

In contrast, the Christian schools are adopting more rigorous materials for students to use. The McGuffey Readers are used by many Christian schools, and they are quite sophisticated. One of my favorite examples in this regard is the one provided by Prof. Bertel Sparks of the Duke University Law School. Each year, he has his first year law students read a section from Blackstone's *Commentaries* on the law, a passage dealing with property. The students always find it difficult to analyze and explain. Then he tells them where he got this selection: from the 6th McGuffey reader.

The Christian school movement, for all its amateur status and lack of funding, and for all its inability to recognize just how much youngsters can accomplish by age nine, is beating the public schools. My children attend a Christian school which gives them New Testament Greek in kindergarten, adds Hebrew in the second grade, and adds German in third grade. My five-year-old son has no trouble reading the King James Bible. He started school at age four. My eight-year-old daughter gets phonics training in four languages. When these students graduate from high school, they will have skills that few of today's college graduates possess, let alone college graduates a decade from now.

The statist are now really frightened. They see what is happening, and they see what is coming. They are fighting desperately to stamp out the independent school movement. But as they increase bureaucratic pressures on the independent schools, some of the Christian school headmasters learn about the real nature of the enemy. So do pastors. The myth of neutrality is being exposed daily. Christians are learning how to fight. They now have institutional incentives for a fight.

In addition, the home school movement is growing, so that parents no longer need to face this dilemma: a poorly operated private school vs. a humanistic public school. They are starting their own home schools. Mothers quit working for money and start working as teachers. Attack these schools, and you attack the family directly. The State is making warriors out of parents.

Instead of spinning their wheels, as women did in 1958, husbands and wives are driving over their enemies. We can see the tire marks on the bureaucrats' chests. They are desperate. And as the State escalates the war against parents, the parents get tougher than ever before. They learn the techniques of resistance to bureaucratic tyranny.

Dross Burns Out

Burn-out is closely associated with flare-ups. Brief flare-ups did little to retard the advance of humanism. The futility of the conservative movement of the 1950's was demonstrated to everyone. Time after time, the bureaucratic inertia of the Left withstood the flare-ups of the Right. The Right was always trying to capture institutions that were innately statist. But now the conservatives are getting smarter. They are simply abandoning the institutions controlled by the Left. They are beginning to follow the words of Jesus: "Let the dead bury the dead."

One of the major mistakes of the conservative movement has been the production of endless exposes of this or that Left-wing organization. By focusing on the successes of their enemies, conservatives created an illusion of invincibility on the part of the opposition. Conservatives have erroneously believed that the public exposure of conspiratorial or special interest organizations would produce renewal and reconstruction. Not so. Mere exposure is little more than gossip — a kind of graffiti on the walls of the enemy's stronghold. In fact, endless exposes can become self-defeating: people are given a false vision of their own weakness in the face of a seemingly perfectly co-ordinated onslaught by the enemy. What is needed is a program for positive reconstruction and incentive to begin it. What is also needed, as Howard Phillips has titled his book, is a vision of victory.

Conclusion

Without fuel, any fire will eventually burn out. This is the plight of all primarily defensive causes, all "holding actions": they eventually run out of fuel. They run out of volunteers for a program that has been in retreat for generations. Men need to be involved in a program of dominion. They have to believe that their efforts will produce good fruit.

We fuel a fire with success. We fuel it with a cause to defend, but a world to conquer. The best defense, in other words, is a good offense. We fuel it with the prospects of victory. This is why the humanists are going to fail. They are the ones headed for burn-out financial, philosophical, and monetary. They have conquered the visible world, and their world is unraveling. They control national politics, but people have lost faith in national politics. They control a mountain of money, but it is paper money. Paper money burns fast and furiously; dross is consumed. Gold remains (1 Cor. 3:12).

We have the gold, philosophically speaking; let our opponents remain in the dross business. They collect the taxes, but tax-financed dross is still dross. Their burn-out is assured — not just beyond the grave, but in time and on earth.