

CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION

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A NEW RENAISSANCE AND A NEW REFORMATION

by Gary North

C. S. Lewis makes the observation in *The Abolition Man* (1947) that occultism and humanism appeared in Western history at about the same time, during the Renaissance. They were two sides of the same revival of paganism. Thus, he argued, occultism and humanistic rationalism are not enemies in principle but rather cooperating philosophies that are united against Christianity and Christian civilization. This is the theme of his great masterpiece, the novel *That Hideous*

From 1964 onward, a new Renaissance took place—a recapitulation of the Renaissance's revival of occultism, mysticism, and the quest for power. To this witches brew was added revolutionism. It hit the academic world in September of 1964, when the student riots began at the University of California at Berkeley. That revolution shook the foundations of the older liberalism. It launched a series of "scientific revolutions" or "paradigm shifts" in every social science.¹

The new humanism and the new occultism of the late 1960's produced a new world view, which has in recent years begun to be called the New Age movement or New Age humanism.² Such phenomena as 'holistic healing,' Eastern mysticism, monistic philosophy (the world is one: pantheism), magic, astrology, and outright satanism began to multiply. It started as a campus phenomenon, and in many ways, this new Renaissance ended there, in the spring of 1970.

Six Years that Shook the World

The key events, in retrospect, were these: the assassination of President Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963; the arrival ten weeks later of the Beatles to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show; the two incidents (mostly mythical, as it later turned out) in the Gulf of Tonkin in July of 1964, and the Senate's resolution which allowed the President the right to escalate the war unilaterally; the Berkeley student protests (Free Speech Movement, FSM, led by Mario Savio) that began on September 15, the week before classes were to begin; the defeat of Goldwater by Johnson in November; the escalation of the war in Vietnam throughout early 1965; and the release of the Beatles' "Rubber Soul" album in 1965, which marked their transition from lighthearted boys singing "I want to hold your hand" to musical innovators and, as it turned out, musical revolutionaries. The counterculture had arrived. So had occultism.

We also should note the short-lived attempt of California designer Rudi Gernreich to introduce topless fashions in the summer of 1964. The "topless bar" fad began. Miniskirts ap-

peared. The counter-culture in fashion had arrived.

In racial matters, the Civil Rights Act was passed on July 3, 1964, just in time for the 4th of July holiday; thirteen days later, a race riot began in Harlem, New York, and thirteen months later, the Watts riot, which the beginning of the serious urban riots that were to continue for three more years.

Also in 1965: the beginning of the great dollar inflation.

The half-decade of chaos ended almost as rapidly as it appeared. In the second week of August, 1969, Charles Manson's crew of occult, drug-blurred followers murdered Sharon Tate and her friends, and the next night murdered the LaBiancas. Los Angeles was shocked. A week later the famous "Woodstock" rock festival in upstate New York marked the high water point of the counter-culture. It was peace and love everywhere, and drugs and fornication: "Woodstock Nation," radical Abbie Hoffman later dubbed it. It was a short-lived nation.

On December 1, the story hit the papers: a jailed follower of Charles Manson's "dune buggy army" had admitted that she and others in the Manson clan had committed the Tate and LaBianca murders. The case was virtually solved, announced the Los Angeles Chief of Police. Some of the gory details came out at the December 5 grand jury investigation, and were leaked to the press in time for the afternoon editions. More details came out in the months ahead. Charles Manson, who was the friend of rock stars (including, as it later was revealed, several of the Beach Boys, who had actually recorded one of his songs), turned out to be a vicious con artist who used drugs, mysticism, occultism, Beatles' lyrics, Hermann Hesse's pop classic in Eastern mysticism, *Siddhartha*,³ sexual debauchery, and other mind-altering techniques to create a dedicated little band of revolutionaries and murderers. The counterculture began to look fearful to millions.

The day after the grand jury hearings, December 6, the ill-fated Rolling Stones rock concert took place at the Altamont Speedway near San Francisco. During the concert, a Hell's Angel killed a man who had pulled a gun. It happened just after the Stones' began singing "Sympathy for the Devil." As Mick Jagger remarked moments before the killing, "We always have something funny happen when we start that number. . . ."

From Woodstock to Altamont: the hiatus lasted less than four months.

In early May of 1970, Richard Nixon gave a speech in which he admitted that the U.S. had begun an invasion of Cambodia. Student protests spread. A few days later, a protest at obscure Kent State University led to the shooting and deaths of several students by the Ohio National Guard. That

1. Gary North, "The Epistemological Crisis of American Universities," In North (ad.), *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallejo, California: Ross House, 1976).

2. Constance Cumbe, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: The New Age Movement and Our Coming Age of Barbarism* (Shreveport, Louisiana: Huntington House, 1983).

3. Ed Sanders, *The Family: The Story of Charles Manson's Dune Buggy Attack Battalion* (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 106.

event, almost singlehandedly, ended student protests in the world. Students vowed to be back in force the following semester, but when they returned, the campuses everywhere became astoundingly quiet, and have remained so for 15 years. There was one more peace and happiness rock concert, on the Isle of Wight in the English Channel, in August of 1970. Then it was all over.

The economic recession that began in the stock market in the summer of 1969 stretched into 1970 and then into 1971. The days of easy jobs for college graduates ended. Even more important for the campus, the 1964 prediction by New York University's president Allan Carter came true: that in 1969, the boom in college hiring would end. It did. From the spring of 1969 until the present (and far into the foreseeable future), newly graduated Ph.D.'s in almost every field have not been able to get full-time college teaching jobs, let alone tenured positions. This ended the visible radicalism of the professors, overnight. It has never returned.

But the changes wrought philosophically and morally by the counterculture are still with us. The New Age movement has become respectable and bureaucratized. The psychedelic baby did not exactly eat the cybernetic monster; it just grew up and bought an IBM PC. The hippies got haircuts, but a significant proportion of them have not abandoned their world view. The Weathermen went underground, but they still await a favorable time to begin terrorist attacks. LSD was out by 1970, but cocaine is in. Cocaine has become the preferred drug of stockbrokers everywhere.

In entertainment and popular literature, magic and witchcraft have fused with fantasy and science fiction to give us a whole new range of occult options: Dungeons and Dragons, wizardry, Conan the Barbarian, and an endless number of Saturday morning cartoon shows for children displaying the wonders of the occult. "Ghostbusters" was the biggest money-making movie in 1964. The Rolling Stones, their facial lines becoming middle-aged wrinkles, are still able to draw huge audiences all over the world. Jumping Jack Flash is still jumping. The beat goes on.

Old Faith, New Faith

There have been significant changes since 1970. The Soviets have caught up with the West and have surpassed us in terms of armaments. Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag* has at last brought reality in the thinking of the West's intellectuals concerning Soviet civilization. The U.S. economy has been through the inflation-recession wringer several times, and the rapidly escalating government and private debt load threatens the Western economies everywhere. The New Deal welfare programs are geriatric and shuffling with the aged gait of the octogenarian. The Great Society's war on poverty is now known to have poverty.⁴

The self-confidence of the liberals is gone. The self-confidence of the economists has gone with it. France's

Jean François Revel's remarkable book,

(Doubleday, 1984), is an epitaph on modern democracy's inability to defend itself against dedicated, relentless Communist totalitarianism, and it has won rave reviews from Democrats everywhere. We are at the end of an era.

Simultaneously, the rise of the New Christian Right since 1979 has astounded political commentators. A major shift in the thinking of evangelical is in progress. Older evangelical intellectuals are now faced with what they regard as a dismaying choice: to line up with the practical prescriptions of the theocratic conservatives in the Christian Reconstruction movement, or to side with the socialistic liberation theologians, who are presently visibly pacifists but who threaten to become revolutionaries (as their spiritual forebears, the Anabaptists did, 1525-35). Either the new Puritans or the new Anabaptists! Either David Chilton or Ronald Sider. Either pro-legalized life or pro-legalized abortion. "Relevance, thy name is risk."

The flagship of middle-aged Christian scholarship's fleet, the battleship has been hit by several torpedoes, and is taking on water fast. The a destroyer, has also sustained several direct hits. The a cruiser, is in dry dock. This is a time that tries the souls of vaguely committed and risk-averse Christian scholars, meaning about 95% of them.

Younger charismatic and most of the independent Christian schools are headed toward biblical law and away from the social and political policies of inaction that have been common in traditional, pietistic dispensational circles since 1925. The key word in this shift of perspective is "dominion." The secondary word is "resist." Resist what? Secular humanism and its legal arm, the Federal government. In contrast, Billy Graham, Wheaton College, Calvin College, *Christianity Today*, neo-evangelicalism, and the evangelical and Reformed seminaries seem to be headed toward liberation theology (an exception: Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Philadelphia). Old-line dispensational seminaries are desperately trying to stay out of the fight, and in doing so, they are becoming increasingly irrelevant. This split is affecting numerous old-line conservative denominations and parachurch organizations.

The liberals are losing, and so are the pietists. Their sense of despair is showing. In April, 1985, the pietistic, dispensational *Moody Monthly* ran an attack on Christian Reconstruction written by a liberation theologian (who had published a similar diatribe in old-line liberal magazine

exactly two years earlier). The message: the Reconstructionists are analogous to Christian supporters of the Nazis because they believe that politics should be Christian. Antinomianism makes strange bedfellows (and even stranger historiography). If this is the best that Reconstructionism's opponents can come up with, the intellectual battle is very nearly over.

The New Reformation is now setting the theological agenda. The counter-reformation is almost completely impotent intellectually to do anything about it.

4. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).