

Christian Reconstruction

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THE APPLESEED PRINCIPLE

The first memory I have of the story of Johnny Appleseed is of the Walt Disney cartoon about him, with Dennis Day singing the role. I was about seven years old when I saw it. I did not actually remember Dennis Day's singing; my children now own a videotape of the cartoon. That reminded me.

Think of the technological revolution that has taken place since I saw that cartoon 40 years ago: a home videotape machine, a color television set, and a broadcast satellite 23,600 miles above the earth in stationary orbit. (By the way, I have literally cut the cords on both machines; these technological marvels became too addictive.) Think also of the technological wonder of that cartoon compared with the flickering black and white Disney cartoons of the early 1930's, about a decade and a half before he made Johnny Appleseed. Johnny supposedly scattered his appleseeds as he wandered through the land. Walt Disney in fact scattered a lot more than appleseeds.

Back in the 1920's, Disney was in a barracks with another recruit. The other man's name was Ray Kroc. Disney hit it big earlier, but Kroc changed the world far more. He developed the pioneer franchise business: McDonald's. With that franchise, he changed the way modern business works, as well as the eating habits of a nation, and maybe the world. (They have to station polite teenage guards at the door of the McDonald's in Budapest, to let people in a few at a time, so long are the lines.) Kroc's biographer records Kroc's memory of Disney in *It* a superb account of entrepreneurship. Disney would sit on his bunk sketching pictures of animals. There, in one army barracks, were two of the greatest visionaries of the modern world, two entrepreneurs who left their world a better place than when they arrived.

This is the Appleseed principle.

John Chapman

There really was a Johnny Appleseed. His name was John Chapman. Mott Media has published a delightful work of imaginative fiction and fact about his life in its Sowers Series for young readers. He was born in Massachusetts just before the outbreak of the American Revolution, in 1774. By age 18, he began a lifetime of intermittent wandering and intermittent orchard farming, living as a travelling evangelist, farmer, field hand, and planter of apple trees. He moved west, decade by decade. He died in Indiana in 1845.

Not much is known about him. He really did wear a cooking pot on his head as his hat. But we remember him as a legend, a man who moved west with the nation. He is remembered more for his drifting than for the plots of land that he turned into productive orchards.

His fame would be much less if he were remembered

for what he really was, a farmer and a land speculator, like so many other American pioneers. He would merely be one among hundreds of thousands of others. What we remember is the legend of his seed-sowing, not his patient caretaking. We see him as the Disney cartoon portrays him: the man who scattered seeds as he wandered through the new land. We forget the hard work that a successful orchard requires.

Americans have a streak of romanticism in them – not the Valentine's day sort of romanticism, but the romanticism of independent man the wanderer, the pioneer, the dreamer of dreams. We dream of the "open road," and fantasize about a life spent as motorized nomads driving across the country in a brand-new Corvette sports car ("Route 66") or on a motorcycle ("Then Came Bronson").

Yet we know that we would make poor nomads. There is still too much of the Puritan work ethic in us. So we remember the trees that somehow sprouted automatically from the seeds that an earlier supposed nomad scattered. Johnny Appleseed left the world a better place, we know. We pretend that he was a nomad rather than a pilgrim, a drifter rather than a man with a vision of heaven.

The Longing for Significance

In the February 3, 1989 issue of an essay appears by Daniel Taylor, "The Fear of Insignificance." As he says, he does not fear not "being somebody," nor does he fear the meaninglessness of life. As a Christian, he shouldn't fear such things, although those who are not in Christ certainly should. He asks instead: "Will it matter, once I am gone, that I was ever here?" He does not dream of statues erected to his memory, but he wants to be able to tally up his life at the end of his days and be able rightfully to say: "My life was worth living. Things are at least slightly better in the world because I was here."

Taylor recognizes that the chief lures of bogus temporal immortality – fame, wealth, and power – are inevitably eroded by the acids of time. The temporal is not enough. He is correct: "Nothing is more important in contemplating the significance of one's life than taking a transcendent, eternal perspective." But what about immanence? What about this world? In what way is the transcendent linked to the historical? The Bible's answer is clear: **God's covenant with His people.**

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more, But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear

him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The LORD bath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word (Ps.103:10-20)

The Road to Heaven Passes Through Atlanta

There is a standard joke in the southern United States that when you die, whether you go to heaven or hell, your soul will have to make connections in Atlanta. That gigantic hub airport links the world of the Southeast. But the slogan is close to the mark: we do make connections to our eternal destiny by way of the temporal City of Man. But what is the nature of this connection?

The connection is **ethical**. The success or failure of our spiritual mission in history is judged in terms of **God's permanent covenant law** (Luke 12:47-48; 1 Cor. 3). The ethical terms of the biblical covenant are the bridge between time and eternity. There are two bridges: one to God's eternal kingdom and one to Satan's. God's law offers the signposts that enable us to determine which bridge we are traveling. God's the narrower of the two bridges in history (though not necessarily in every stage in history).

Life in the Fast Lane

It is standard Protestant doctrine that every Christian is a priest, and that in his lawful calling (occupation), every person ultimately serves God, either as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker. The concept of the calling is two-fold: God calls specific men to specific forms of service, and men respond either obediently or disobediently. They may or may not go where God calls them. If they obey this call, they do so either as covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. But it is God's specific call.

There are many lanes on God's kingdom highway in history. Some lanes move faster than others. Western Protestant societies pioneered the fast lane, and this rapid pace is basic to modern life. There is today world-wide pressure from the capitalist world on all cultures to get into the fast lane. The competitive world market is forcing this change. Producers' rapid responses to the ever-shifting demands of consumers in a free market is the foundation to corporate survival.

The fast pace of modern capitalism reflects God's warning about men's limited quantity of time. Jesus said: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Paul warned: "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:14-16). The point is, **time is running out**. We have limited amounts of it to make our mark. Time is the **world's only irreplaceable resource**. This view of time has always been basic to capitalism, which was itself the product of Protestant culture.

In contrast, Roman Catholic countries tend to be slower-paced. The agrarian Old South of the United States was also slow-paced compared with the North; its culture, while Protestant, was not Puritan. It could not compete with the Industrial North industrially, as the South learned during the

Civil War, and its culture has **steadily** been swallowed up by the North's, a fact lamented by twelve non-Christian southern "Agrarians" (literary figures) in the 1930's in a classic book, I'll There is no better example of this transformation than the city of Atlanta, the city that Sherman's army burned, which is today the boom city of the South.

Making Our Mark

To make a meaningful mark on a piece of paper, you need a pen or pencil, "lead" or ink, a vision, an alphabet, literacy, and time. As far as the eternal future is concerned, covenant-keepers make their marks in ink; covenant-breakers make their mark in pencil. The work of the covenant-keeper endures; the work of the covenant-breaker is erased. The covenant-breaker's mark endures in the lake of fire, but only with respect to him personally. He leaves behind nothing of enduring value except as the inheritance of covenant-keepers. "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor.15:28).

This is why **righteousness is cumulative while unrighteousness is not**. Righteousness produces continuity; unrighteousness does not. It is cut short in the midst of time.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not **bow down thyself to them**, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Ex.20:4-6).

The temporal reference of the text is **generations**: those who love God are giving blessings for thousands of generations, i.e., through eternity. This is the fifth point of the covenant: continuity or inheritance.

Conclusion

Johnny Appleseed left behind fruit-bearing trees, but more important, he left behind a legend. He left behind a view of history which says that the efforts of covenant-keepers are not in vain; their efforts endure and flourish. In contrast, the works of covenant-breakers, however mighty, however legendary, survive in the long run only as the inheritance of covenant-keepers. Thus, Christians can serve God faithfully, confident that their efforts, visible or not in history, are not in vain, and confident also that they are not insignificant persons in God's grand scheme of things, which is the only **scheme that counts**.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God bath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God bath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, bath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence (1 Cor. 12:6-29).