

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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CRITICAL MASS

Part III: The City on a Hill

by Gary North

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid (Matt. 5:14).

Lights are meant to be seen. Light makes life easier. Light makes the working day longer. The darkness that inhibits us is dispelled by the power of the light. We can work, play, or just enjoy our surroundings at any hour of the day. The darkness does not direct our pattern of existence.

The twentieth century has been the century of inexpensive light. When Thomas Edison invented the electric light bulb, he changed the world. He gave every urban resident a good reason to sign up with the local power company. The light bulb created the modern power industry. After the light bulb came all the other electrical appliances. Because of their massive installed base of customers, power companies can get prices of electricity so low that there is no reason for urban dwellers not to have a level of comfort undreamed of a century ago. Think of Texas without air conditioning. As Texas author J. Frank Dobie said in the 1930's when he first learned of air conditioning: "Texas will be ruined. Yankees will be able to live here."

Electric light did not merely chase away the darkness of the night. It changed the face of civilization. So does the light of the gospel. It is not simply that the gospel of Jesus Christ chases away the darkness of false religion; it transforms civilization. It reconstructs fallen man, and it reconstructs fallen civilization. Any view of the light of the gospel that does not include the comprehensive transforming power of God and His revealed Word is half a gospel. It is the theological equivalent of a single light bulb burning from the center of "a ceiling in a large house devoid of music, air conditioning, refrigerators, washing machines, and all the other tools of dominion. Yet millions of Christians prefer such a dim gospel.

The Brightness of God's Law

Modern antinomian theology regards the law of God as the profound darkness to be dispelled by the gospel. Its creed is simple: "No creed but Christ; no law but love." But what we have found again and again is that the preachers who profess this simple creed keep getting caught in bed with the choir director's daughter – or worse, with the choir director's son. (Remember the honeymooners in the mid-1970's, both graduates of Billy James Hargis' American Christian University? "I have a confession to make," the young bride said tearfully. "I have had carnal relations with Rev. Hargis." Her husband had an identical confession for her. I wonder who was more surprised.)

The law of God places boundaries around men and institutions. Like the glass that makes possible the vacuum in which the bulb's filament burns brightly, the law of God makes possible the light of the gospel. The gospel of salva-

tion apart from the law of God is as impractical as a light bulb without the glees. Yet fundamentalist Christians today are taught to memorize Ephesians 2:8-9 without any reference to Ephesians 2:10. They know by heart: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." They have never even noticed the next verse: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." They have been taught half a gospel.

The Christian Reconstructionist comes to the modern Church and reminds its members of the existence of verse 10. All well and good. But there is a distinct problem if, in reminding the Church about verse 10, the one doing the reminding is not visibly practicing it. Faith without works is dead, James wrote (James 2:20, 26). He who ignores this fact, James said, is a vain person (James 2:20). Good doctrine is not enough: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). We do well to believe in true doctrine; we just do not do well enough.

Christian Reconstructionism is struggling against one of the most powerful forces in modern Christianity: men's desire to escape personal and institutional responsibility. In his search for positive sanctions favoring irresponsibility, the modern pietist finds comfort in the doctrines of antinomianism. By abandoning the narrow biblical road of obedience to God and service to man, he abandons lawful authority. All authority necessarily involves law. All authority involves the enforcement of standards. Without law, there can be no authority. Without authority, there can be no leadership. The modern antinomian Christian has voluntarily subordinated himself to those who will enforce the law over him. The problem is, that law is not God's law.

Words and Deeds

In the struggle against unsound theology, the Christian Reconstructionist has a two-fold assignment: word-and-deed evangelism. This two-fold evangelism is to be aimed at both unbelievers and believers. The unbeliever must be persuaded to embrace Christ as both Lord and Savior; the believer must be persuaded to embrace Christ as Lord, so that Christ can in fact be a Savior. We are supposed to evangelize with the Bible's message of comprehensive redemption.

Most Christians do not hold our views of the Bible and its message to the Church. We need to explain our views carefully, and also show that these views are consistent with the way we live. This means that we must show by

our lives that we are involved in the life of the local church. We are to avoid doing anything that is not consistent with this. It is not sufficient for us to ~~talk~~ walk a good line. It is necessary to ~~walk~~ the line. By our fruits shall they know us.

If we believe that all institutions are to be reconstructed, then we dare not leave out the local church. We must begin with the local church. So, what we need is a strategy of reconstruction within the focal church. We must work hard to achieve the positive critical mass phenomenon. If we can contribute to the growth of the local church, then we become assets to that church. Thus, our primary initial institutional goal is church growth.

How is this achieved? By word-and-deed evangelism. First comes the word: sound doctrine. If it is good doctrine, it must involve both words and deeds. This is what James teaches. Because Reformed Christians have specialized in verbal doctrine, and have a handful of very tiny churches to prove it, they have written many works of academic scholarship. But they have never dealt successfully in an institutional sense with the Epistle of James. They have not developed a consistent theology that incorporates Paul's doctrine of justification with James' doctrine of justification. They have ignored the centrality of good works in living faith. Calvinists write commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans or the Corinthians; they do not write them on James. Their specialized verbal theology has too much trouble with the activism of James. Norman Shepherd got fired from Westminster Seminary in 1982 for even toying with the ideas found in the Epistle of James.

What Christian Reconstruction brings to the Lord's Table is a comprehensive verbal theology that integrates Romans and James. But this is not enough. We must also integrate this verbal theology into the life of every local congregation that will have us. This means that our presence within a local **congregation** should help it reach critical mass – not negative critical mass but positive.

Remember, a layman is not initially responsible for the doctrinal position of the local church. He is responsible for **his** share of the deeds, especially those deeds that are an outgrowth of biblical law. So, he **should** begin where he **has** been given unique responsibility. Sadly, some **Reconstructionists** have “grabbed at the robes” prematurely. They have attempted to straighten out the leaders before they have become indispensable to those leaders. This is really stupid; it is **also** very common.

The Right Foot of Fellowship

There are many stories of Christians who get booted out of a local congregation. There are many reasons why this happens. There should be only one reason: the leaders in the local congregation can no longer stand the presence of an effective worker for the kingdom. If the leaders boot out a Christian Reconstructionist because of the visibility of his good deeds rather than his words, then the victim can leave in good spirits, knowing that it was the outworking of his theology that created the disturbance, not his presentation of verbal theology.

Darkness hates light. Evil men love the darkness because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). When confronted with a Christian whose consistent deeds build up the local church, those who are determined to continue in their evil and . . . lity-fleeing ways may take judicial action. But the righteous person who is thrown out for nogoodreason can then move to another congregation, possibly taking

others with him – not because he verbally attacks the leaders who booted him but because other members follow light rather than darkness.

The strategic goal is to become indispensable. This places a high price on our opponents' exercise of the right foot of fellowship. When you are indispensable, you can get away with murder – or better yet, with righteousness. If our deeds are righteous, others will ask us how we came to do what ~~we~~ do. When we are asked, we can tell them. We can take them into the Bible and prove our case.

City vs. Lighthouse

A lighthouse has one high-intensity light. It is meant to keep ships far away. A city is, in the words of President Bush, a thousand points of light. These lights attract people who want to live in cities. This means most people on earth. The city on a hill is not to be a lighthouse. It is to be a decentralized, covenanted place where people of many talents can pursue their callings and jobs as representatives of God in history (point two of the biblical covenant model: hierarchical representation).

What does a lighthouse attract? Bugs. **Bright lights attract large bugs.** This has been a major problem with Christian Reconstruction for three decades. It has attracted some of the largest bugs in Christendom. Like the Fabian movement in its early decades, some very strange people have wandered in. They come, but most of them eventually drift away, generally after having disrupted some struggling local congregation.

The Church is the premier city in history. It is the place of both refuge and service. The Church is to be filled with many lights. No single light is bright enough to illuminate the whole Church. It needs many lights. Thus, the Christian Reconstructionist who can throw light into some dark and neglected corner of the local church has offered an important service. The person who wants to make a difference for the Church must find a unique area of service. A person's calling before God is that unique task which God has given him the ability to perform. A person's calling should be that job that is most important for the kingdom of God in which he would be very difficult to replace. The sooner a person identifies his calling (not necessarily his employment), the more he can accomplish by devoting capital (land, labor, and time) to the problem. The phenomenon of compounding takes over: slow growth for long periods of time. The tortoise beats the hare.

Conclusion

Volunteers are crucial to any nonprofit operation. This makes it possible for people of peculiar views to gain institutional acceptance. Out of acceptance comes leadership.

The goal is to move a local congregation toward positive critical mass. This means that the local church must attract and retain converts. It also means that the Christian Reconstructionist must attract and retain converts within the local church. The best way to attract converts from within the local membership is to attract converts from outside the membership. The person who brings in an outsider will probably retain the allegiance of that outsider when he becomes an insider.

Thus, the beet way to become a member of a Reconstructionist church is to persuade a non-Reconstructionist church to switch before it forces the Reconstructionist to switch. The best form of persuasion is service.