

Christian Reconstruction

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CRITICAL MASS

Part IV: Gone Fishing

by Gary North

Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes (John21:3-8).

Simon Peter's goal wasn't to keep dry. If it had been, he could have stayed at home. His goal was to catch fish. "I go a fishing," he said. Here is the heart of this incident. It is relevant only for those who are ready to get wet. It is not relevant for those who want to "cocoon" in familiar but dry surroundings.

The fishermen initially caught no fish. Nevertheless, they stayed at their nets all through the night. They did not quit. When daybreak came, Jesus told them to cast their nets on the other side of the ship. They did not know that it was Jesus, but they obeyed anyway. They could have scuffed, but instead they obeyed. They pulled in a huge catch.

Why did Jesus make them work all night? To see how long they would stay on the job. To see if they would obey good advice after they had labored long and hard without visible results. He did not make them wait for their reward in order to persuade them to become carpenters.

They were in familiar waters. They had no special knowledge of where the fish might be. They went fishing as a group of fishermen who possessed only conventional tools. At first they caught nothing: abnormally poor results. Then they caught a huge catch: abnormally good results. What about on average? On average, it did not matter. With Jesus on the shore directing them, nothing was average.

Christendom vs. Pluralism

Where are we fishing today? In a very large body of water, filled with fish. But the water has a peculiar character to it. It is no longer culturally Christian. A century ago, it was, but not today.

Those of us who are committed to the ideal of Christendom face a peculiar problem. We face a problem analogous to Paul's in his missionary journeys. City by city, he faced either the paganism of the Greco-Roman world

or the Judaism of the local synagogue he visited. We also deal in this world with pagans most of the time and theologically basket-case Christians the rest of the time. The modern Protestant world has abandoned the ideal of Christendom. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy still officially maintain the ideal, but neither church acts as though its members really believe it. Liberalism has undermined the Roman Catholics, while seemingly endless persecution and mysticism have undermined the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

We live in an increasingly pagan culture. But unlike the pagan culture that Paul faced, the West's culture was officially Christian as recently as a century ago. So, the few people who still call themselves Christians in the West are at least vaguely familiar with a particular Christian tradition. Those who do not call themselves Christians live in a culture that still has a few remnants of the original faith: celebrating Christmas, for example. So, Christianity for the people we encounter is a kind of quaint holdover of the old days, preserved for memory's sake. Santa Claus or Saint Nick has more cultural influence at Christmas than Jesus does. Even among those few Protestant evangelical who still profess saving faith in Jesus, Santa has almost equal authority. This means that Christianity is not a new message in their eyes; it is an antiquated message. To be antiquated these days is to be an object of ridicule or pity.

So, people in the West know enough about what Christianity was, and how it lost the cultural battle to humanism, so that the message or-gospel seems irrelevant to them. Unlike the Greeks of Paul's day, they do not stone the messenger; they simply take no notice of him. Until a crisis comes that threatens the survival of Western humanism, there is little likelihood that this situation will change. People who are physically content yet bored with life – and people who are willing to watch today's television programming are desperately bored – are unlikely to respond to a message of God's eternal judgment and the need for personal repentance.

Evangelical live as theological schizophrenics, having adopted political pluralism as their religion. They live content in a fusion of two rival worlds: mostly pagan and slightly Christian. They watch re-runs of "Ozzie and Harriet," "Father Knows Best," and "Happy Days," and they imagine that if the world of the mid-1950's could somehow be resurrected, the result would be a reasonable substitute for the millennium. Meanwhile, they send their children to Sunday school once a week and to the pagan public school five days a week. They, too, reject the ideal of Christendom.

So, we face a two-fold task: (1) challenging pagans with a message of total repentance, total commitment, and permanent sacrifice – something worth giving up watching

Sunday afternoon professional football (for millions, an incomprehensible degree of personal sacrifice) – without (2) scaring off the halfway committed (at best) Christians who constitute the vast majority of the church's membership today. We are dealing with pagans who abort their children and Christians who don't personally believe in abortion, but. . . .

Fishing Where the Fish Are

The person who sets out to catch fish has to ask himself this crucial question: Where is the best place for me to drop my line into the water? In a quiet, secluded place where nobody goes or in a well-known spot where the fish are numerous, but so are the fishermen? He asks himself: Do I know a special place where the fish are which no other fisherman knows about? There are lots of places where there are no fisherman, but most of them are either too difficult to get to or they have few fish.

The reality of fishing is this: there are no unique lures that stay unique for long, unless they fail to attract fish that bite. There are no unique fishing holes that stay unknown for long, once someone starts pulling in the fish. So, the average fisherman who wants to fish where the fish are must content himself with an average catch unless he is willing to get up very early and stay very late. The differentiating factor in the size of his catch will be his dedication to the task.

Where are the fish? For the Christian who brings the simple gospel to pagans, almost all of them are at his place of employment and his service club. I suspect that 60% of them are in one place or the other. If he works alone and is not a member of a service club (as is the case with me), he will not be an effective one-on-one evangelist. I compensate by being a writer, but few people have this opportunity. So, he had better join a **service** club if he wants to go fishing for men, one that has no self-maledictory oath involved, and no secret ceremonies and initiations.

Where are the fish? For the Christian Reconstructionist, in a local congregation filled with "Happy Days" Christians. Or in the local Christian youth group. Or in some parachurch organization of dedicated people who are either without churches or are not overly concerned about the distinctive of their churches.

Who is the best target for our message? We never know. The old goal of the parachurch campus ministries – recruiting the popular athlete or the cheerleader – has produced so little relevant fruit over the last forty years that I cannot understand why any organization still uses this strategy. Far better to recruit a budding student newspaper reporter. The main target is not the existing leadership of any organization but **potential** future leaders. The existing leaders are inescapably representatives of the existing power structure. They would pay a high price in shifting their visible commitment. Their self-interest is working against us in such cases.

What we want is the person with a willingness to serve sacrificially, no matter what his present position, no matter what leadership abilities he shows. The crucial issue for exercising leadership is dedication. When it comes to gaining leadership, the key covenantal doctrines are hierarchy (the willingness to obey constituted authority), ethics (the willingness to obey God's law), and succession (the perse-

verance of the saints). He who outlasts his competition wins the prize. We are running a marathon, not a sprint.

The Beet Location to **Begin**

We begin in the church, for the church is the bride of Christ. It is the central institution in Christian society. This means that the Christian Reconstructionist must be a **member** of a church. It also means that he should select this church on the basis of two things: (1) its faithfulness to the Bible (preaching, sacraments, and discipline) and (2) the number of available fish. If there are two local churches of equal theological rigor (meaning not too bad), then join the church with the largest number of people who you think will respond to your word-and-deed recruiting.

Our appropriate goal in most churches is to raise up a cadre of dedicated Christian leaders. This is easiest to accomplish with young people: 16 to 25 years old. The more idealism we can promote in the name of our beliefs, the more recruits we will pick off from the church's youth. A person who wants to train dedicated future leaders needs to be able to present a compelling vision of service and sacrifice. The Communists learned this early: if they wanted the greatest level of dedication, they had to present the largest task. Writes ex-Communist organizer Douglas Hyde:

The Communists' appeal to idealism is direct and audacious. They say that if you make little demands on people, you will get a mean little response which is all you deserve, but, if you make big demands on them, you will get an heroic response. (*Dedication and Leadership*, 1966, p. 18.)

Suggestions: Open your home to the youth meetings of the local church. Spend time with the youth. Take them on field trips. Get parents to finance a teenage child's attendance at one of David Noble's two-week summer training programs at Summit **Ministries** (Manitou Springs, CO).

Conclusion

The primary strategy is to train up the youth of the local church. The tactic is to volunteer to serve. Over time, this will have the greatest payoff for the kingdom of God in history. No one gets upset at someone who appears to be helping young people. The fact that these young people are adopting a world-transforming idealism based on the whole Bible will be less likely to upset their elders, so long as this idealism is clothed in student projects involving service to others coupled with an anti-humanist worldview. No worldview is better able to accomplish this than Christian Reconstruction.

The Christian Reconstructionist who selects membership in a local church solely on the basis of what it preaches is making a mistake. A very important goal for choosing a church is service: the Reconstructionist's service to the church and his subsequent recruits' service thereafter.

If your local church has been shrinking for years, and you cannot gain support for a program to reverse this attrition process, then move on to another church, even if it is less rigorous theologically. Don't waste your time fishing in an evaporating pond when the fish are biting in a nearby lake.