

TENTMAKERS

Financial Counsel for Pastors, Deacons, and Seminarians

SCHOLARLY INDEPENDENT SHEPHERDS

by Gary North

I visited a community of Orthodox Jews in 1984. Several of them subscribe to my financial newsletter, *Remnant Review*. They have put some of my advice into practice. One thing that I have always recommended is the creation of a geographical community of like-minded people. Instead of buying a farm and turning it into a Christian commune, Christians should decide on a general area to move to, and then, family by family, they should buy homes near each other. That way, people progress at their own speed, and they also retain private ownership of their property.

This Jewish community is doing just that. They have targeted about three or four blocks in west Los Angeles which are within walking distance of their synagogue on the beach in the Santa Monica area. Beachfront property is astronomically expensive, but within a "sabbath-day's walk," middle class people can still buy property. The community's members keep an eye open for any "For Sale" signs in the neighborhood. When someone moves out, a Jew moves in. You can almost hear the wail of distress among the gentiles: "Well, here comes the neighborhood!"

These Jews don't wear the Hasidic clothes or ear curls. They look like everybody else. But they aren't like everybody else. As far as I can see, they aren't like anybody else. They have developed principles of local organization that are unique. Protestants should imitate several of their techniques, but the cost would be high. I do not expect anyone to do it. It takes too much discipline.

Pastoral Leadership

The first differentiating principle is the principle of pastoral independence. The leader of the community has had rabbinical training. I am not sure that he has been ordained, or even what ordination might mean in these circles. What I am sure of is that his leadership is based on his detailed mastery of a large body of rabbinic materials—and when it comes to details, there is no literature more detailed than rabbinic literature. He spends many hours of study each week in contemplation and exposition. These people have answers for everything. They pay attention to details.

You would imagine that a man who has been asked by his congregation to spend so much of his time in study would be well paid for his time. He isn't. He runs an independent profit-seeking business. He is financially independent. If they should give him the boot, he would go right on studying and right on trying to make money from his business.

He is a sailor. I gather that he would be of professional standing if there were professional sailboaters. He is a scholar, an entrepreneur, and an athlete. Through a combination of gifts and self-discipline, he has gained his place of eminence among his peers.

Each One Teach One

His peers are also remarkable. They are in various businesses and callings. One is a best-selling author in his late 'thirties, who produces serious works (such as a study of the most important presidential advisors in U.S. history) as well as popular social commentary and popular film commentary. Another member (predictably) is in the diamond business, which Jews, and especially orthodox Jews, have dominated for a century. I have the impression that most of the others are in white collar occupations, but there are no doubt exceptions.

These are busy men, I was impressed with their program of intellectual self-development. In fact, it is without doubt the most impressive program I have ever heard of which is actually in operation outside an academic community. Each man is paired with two others. One of his peers is superior to him in his understanding of the rabbinic literature; the other is inferior. They spend an hour a week with each of the other two. They ask questions in one session and answer questions in the second.

What they have created is a sort of transmission belt educational system. The knowledge that one man has is transmitted downward to those below him, and transmitted rather rapidly. This imposes on him the responsibility and personal incentive to advance farther. There is always someone nipping at his heels. Conceivably, his pupil might overtake him. Similarly, the person farther down knows that he is the recipient of information within a chain of knowledge. The division of intellectual labor is working within the community to elevate all its members in their comprehension of the fundamental documents of their faith. The recipient knows that he will soon be called upon to transfer what he has learned to someone else, and in teaching people learns more rapidly.

A third hour must be spent in private study. Thus, each man allocates three evenings a week to study, in addition to any community meetings that take place.

The laymen's model is the intensive training that the rabbinical leadership goes through. Within the orthodox community, each leader is supposedly able to trace his teacher's teacher, and that teacher's teacher, all the way back to Moses. Theirs is an oral tradition as well as written. In the same way that Anglicans are supposed to be able to trace their ordination back to Jesus, the orthodox Jewish leadership is supposed to be able to trace their training back an additional 1500 years. In short, their ordination is their training. This training continues throughout the rabbis' lives. Their master teachers continue to train them, and they continue to train their subordinates. The focus is on lifelong learning. It is a life of what appears to me to be intense intellectual discipline.

The Spillover Effect

This community is unquestionably literate. Its emphasis on the life of the mind is characteristic of no other religious laymen that I am aware of. Certain specialized Christian monastic communities devote their time to scholarship, but these are specialized communities, not laymen's organizations. Orthodox Jews take learning seriously.

This attitude spills over into their callings. They are readers by religious conviction, so their addiction to the printed word manifests itself in their businesses. They have a competitive advantage.

Their children are in a private school. They grow up with books and are encouraged to read. When they hit college, they will be far advanced in terms of study habits. Their peers will be at a disadvantage. This academic head start is already true of non-religious secular Jews, who tend to dominate in academic settings far out of proportion to their numbers. (Name three prominent gentile economists: you have 20 seconds!) But the non-religious Jews do not have a theological compulsion to study; it is more of a cultural impulse. The orthodox Jews see the life of the mind as service to God—not a substitute for good works, but the foundation of good works.

Independence

The community's leader serves as a model. He works at his occupation, but he also devotes his life to mastery of a comprehensive religious literature. What can the layman say when he does not perform intellectually? He cannot make this excuse: "Well, the rabbi is paid for studying." Maybe he isn't paid, and in any case, he earns his keep in his private business. The layman cannot say, "I'm too tired when I get home from work." So is the rabbi. He studies anyway. When the leader is both an entrepreneur (or at least a wage-earner) and a scholar, he cuts off lame excuses from the congregation.

It is the financial independence of the leader which helps to solidify his leadership. It offers as a goal to others the possibility that they, too, might eventually become leaders. At the very least, it establishes as a community model the dual challenge of financial independence and intellectual productivity. Laymen are not asked to do anything that the leader is not himself doing. He is not doing less than his followers; in fact, he is doing it better.

Financial independence underwrites intellectual independence. I know this from my own experience. I do not have to answer to outside editors, or financially strapped Christian book publishers, or anyone else when it comes to the publication of my books. I do not even have to answer to readers, if I am willing to subsidize the publication of my books with profits earned from other activities. Without my success in building up my *Remnant Review* mailing list, I could not have built up the I.C.E. list. There is no doubt in my mind that my financial independence made possible the publication of *The Dominion Covenant*. I doubt that any conventional Christian publisher would have risked it.

From the day that literacy became a monopoly of the elite intellectuals, they served as bureaucrats to powerful men. Without patrons and employers, the intellectual is usually unable to produce an income. Thus, the court scholar has been with us from the beginning. Even the most famous Jewish historian of all time, Josephus, saw where his bread was buttered and defected to serve the Roman

court. The intellectual, bought and paid for, is a story as old as history, although there are few records to prove it directly, since the bought-and-paid-for intellectuals wrote most of the ancient records.

Over and over through the years, I have emphasized the importance of financial independence for successful ministries. I doubt that most rabbis are financially independent. Clearly, few pastors are. But those who are do possess an advantage over those who aren't. They are their own men, given the restraining factor of the market. If they are effective as entrepreneurs, they will be independent pastors.

This independence makes other bureaucrats nervous. Theological training is overwhelmingly bureaucratic training. Seminaries are designed, consciously or unconsciously, to mold graduates into compliant bureaucratic participants. A man who must tailor his sermons to a congregation in order to eat is not in the same position as a pastor who needs only to tailor his sermons to God in order to serve.

The security of an independent stream of income should be used to produce an independent ministry which encourages imitators within the congregation. The pastor should serve as a model. Better to listen to sermons that have taken three hours to write, when delivered by a man who has demonstrated competence in a free market competitive situation, than sermons that take twenty hours to write, when delivered by a man who is afraid of his congregation, especially the check-writers.

Congregational Security

A pastor who is dependent on his pastoral skills to put food on his table and tuition money for his children is more likely to respond to an offer to leave, if the other congregation ups the ante financially. The poorer the local church, the more vulnerable it is competitively. But if the pastor is building what he hopes will be a successful local business, the congregation knows that he will create geographical roots (unless he is making his money as a writer). He will hesitate to leave, even if a good offer—by ecclesiastical standards—should be made by a distant church. Thus, the independence of the pastor from the local church's finances can create a pastor who is more likely to devote a lifetime to building up a local church, precisely because he is simultaneously building up a local business. The local conflict of interest with respect to his time reduces the competitive pressure geographically.

Conclusion

It is difficult for young men to attempt to create a ministry and a business in their early years. They have no money, their wives have paid a heavy price already, and they face a difficult time in trying to get two fledgling operations going at the same time. But the pay-off a decade later is high, both financially and institutionally. The church will be stronger, since laymen will be more willing to take up the slack in the church if they know that the minister is occupied at a calling which helps to insure his long-term devotion to the local church. The laymen will be stronger because of the legitimate absence of the minister in certain situations. A financially independent pastor is an asset, not a liability, to the stronger, more competent members of a congregation. His absence gives them an opportunity to serve. His role model is advantageous in recruiting competent subordinates. It is high cost at the beginning but low cost at the end.