

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## Queer Christianity

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*Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, Gary North. Tyler, Texas: Geneva Press, 1981 (first edition). 264 + ix, indexes, bibliography, \$4.95.

Dr. North dedicates this book to television preacher James Robison "who has already begun an important program for victory." What that program is and what victory Robison is seeking, North does not say.

He does say that he wrote *Unconditional Surrender* in two weeks in July 1980, and had it edited within another two weeks by James Jordan, also a Reconstructionist (Recon) author. The book was to function as an introductory volume to what the Theonomists/Reconstructionists are saying. North toyed with the idea of calling it *Sheer Christianity*, echoing C. S. Lewis.

Because the book is designed as a primer, it consists of nine chapters divided into three sections: the chapters on God, Man, and Law appear under "Foundations"; the chapters on Family, Church, State, and Economy appear under "Institutions"; and the final two chapters on The Kingdom of God and A Strategy for Dominion appear under "Expectations."

Like other Recon books, this one is not worthless, but it contains such serious errors that its value is vitiated. Perhaps the errors could have been avoided if North had taken more than two weeks to write it.

After all, a postmillennialist should not be in a hurry. He, of all people, should realize that haste makes waste.

I have discussed some of the errors of other Recon books in my earlier reviews; let me mention a few that appear in *Unconditional Surrender*.

### God

First, there is the matter of the Trinity. Like Cornelius Van Til, North teaches that the Trinity is both three persons and one person. He writes: "We are not dealing with one uniform, isolated being; we are dealing with Persons who constitute a Person... 'Let us,' God said; and They did. But They did it as one Person – one Person, yet more than one Person, in full communion" (18).

In discussing the Trinity, Van Til wrote: "It is sometimes asserted that we can prove to men that we are not asserting anything that they ought to consider irrational, inasmuch as we say that God is one in essence and three in person. We therefore claim that we have not asserted unity and trinity of exactly the same thing. Yet this is not the whole truth of the matter. We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person... we must therefore hold that God's being presents an absolute numerical identity. And even within the ontological Trinity we must maintain that God is numerically one. He is one person" (see Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 220-229; and

John W. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*, 1986).

This contradiction, which Van Til calls the "whole truth," is certainly not taught in Scripture. If it were, we would know that the Bible is not the Word of God. Yet the Recons, because they are disciples of Van Til, do not hesitate to ascribe contradictions to the Bible. Ironically, in so doing, they are in agreement with the atheists, who say the same thing; the atheists realize, with diabolic wisdom, that to destroy Christianity it is necessary to destroy the Bible. That is best done by showing that it contains mistakes. Both atheists and Van Tilians say that the Bible is contradictory. The atheists say that any contradictory book isn't worthy of belief, and the Recons and Van Tilians say that precisely *because* the Bible is contradictory it is worthy of belief. The atheists are, of course, right, and the Recons are talking nonsense. If any document asserts contradictions, we know that at least half the contradiction is false. And if it is false, it cannot be the Word of God. A book divided against itself cannot stand. Odd how some atheists understand Christianity better than some Christians.

North repeats another phrase from his teacher Van Til on the next page, and I quote: "They [the three persons] are, in the words of one Christian philosopher, mutually self-exhaustive. That means that each of them knows all things; that each of them is totally open to the others; that they share the same goals, exercise the same power, honor each other equally. They are equals, but they are not identical, for they are distinguishable. Christians usually say that they believe in one God in three Persons, but language is insufficient here" (19).

Language is not a barrier to expression, but the indispensable means of it. Those who say "words cannot express" simply don't know the words. They should humbly admit that it is not language, but their ignorance that is the problem. A good workman, I was told as a child, does not blame his tools. But further than that, if the persons of the Trinity are "mutually self-exhaustive," then they cannot be distinguished from each other. It is precisely because the three persons are not mutually self-exhaustive that they are distinguishable. If the

same set of propositions were to define all three persons, there would indeed not be three persons, but one person. For further discussion on this point, I refer the reader to Gordon Clark's book on *The Trinity*.

## *Man*

On the doctrine of man, North denies that the moral and rational nature of man is God's image. He writes: "We are not told that the essence of the image of God is seen in man's moral nature. We are not told that the image of God is seen in man's ability to think. Neither are we told that the fundamental fact of the image of God in man is his ability to speak." Rather, "the essence of the image of God in man is dominion" (24). Here North betrays his preference for the Old Testament (wrongly understood) rather than the New. In the New Testament we are taught precisely the things that North denies.

Karl Barth thought the image of God was sex. Mormons think it is man's body. The Protestant position is precisely what North denies: the rationality and morality of man. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* summarizes the Bible's teaching on the point with these words: "After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endowed with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, after his own image..." (4, 2).

North goes on to say, on page 49, for example, that Adam lost his "legitimate dominion." Well, if dominion is the image of God, and Adam lost it, then Adam stopped being the image of God. But if men today – all men – are still the images of God, then it is their rationality, their ability to think and to be sinners (animals are not sinful because they are not rational; they do not have reasonable souls) that is the image.

North also seems confused about justification. After declaring that "Justification is a judicial act," he goes on to say that God "imputes" Christ's righteousness to his people (47). So far, so good. But on the next page we are told "it is Christ's righteousness in us which enables God to declare

our acts righteous." That sounds like the doctrine of justification according to Roman Catholicism. It makes one wonder whether North recognizes the difference between "impute" and "impart." It is not Christ's righteousness *in* us that is the ground for our justification, but Christ's righteousness wholly *outside* of us.

North advocates "progressive justification" (48, 50). How this comports with the notion of justification as a judicial act is a good question. I think the *Confession* is far more accurate: "Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them... not for anything wrought in them, or done by them...." No righteousness in us, either ours or Christ's, is the basis for declaring us or our acts righteous.

### *Required Baptism*

Turning to matters political, Dr. North writes this paragraph: "Because circumcision was administered to households and even whole societies, baptism should also be administered to households. (We no longer have kings who represent a whole nation covenantally, so national baptism today would not apply. If, however, a majority of voters covenanted themselves with God, and agreed to conform the nation's laws to God's laws, citizens who intended to remain citizens could legitimately be required to be baptized, since their leaders had agreed to submit the civil government to God" (117).

It is this sort of Recon thinking, so reminiscent of Romanism, that has drawn the attention of many. Some serious questions are in order: If baptism may be required of citizens by voting (and Dr. North knows quite well that it is usually minorities who win elections; he even says that the "leaders" make the decision), why not the Lord's Supper? Is that any less a sacrament than baptism? And if the Lord's Supper, why not regular church attendance and membership, including tithing? In fact, North seems to recognize and agree with these implications of his view in *Political Polytheism*.

Of course, this position raises a host of problems that effectively ended the Puritan experiment in New England. But to put the matter in more modern

terms: If political rights are going to depend on valid church membership, the civil rulers, the state, must decide what a valid church and membership are. If the government were to simply accept at face value any claim to be a church or to be a church member, the requirement would become meaningless. All the arguments that North has mustered against state involvement in education, for example, apply *a fortiori* to state involvement with the church. He does not seem to grasp the point that church and state are two different societies with overlapping memberships, and to make membership in one dependent upon membership in the other is both unscriptural and productive of totalitarianism.

In the Reconstructed society, the state must decide which churches qualify as Christian. Baptist? Presbyterian? Methodist? Charismatic? Roman Catholic? Greek Orthodox? Seventh Day Adventist? Seventh Day Baptist? Mormon? My list of denominations in the U.S. runs to about 2,000 names. Then there are tens of thousands of independent churches. And those are only the churches in the U.S. In order to remain an *American* citizen would one be compelled to be a member of an *American* church? Will the state maintain a list of approved churches? Will churches have to register with the state so that their members can vote?

All of these problems, of course, arise from the necessity of deciding who administers Christian baptism. Once we are past that hurdle there are more. Which churches qualify for administering the Lord's Supper? How about Mass? Or is Mass idolatry as the Reformers said? North says on page 76 that idolatry is punishable by death. In a Reconstructed state will members of the Roman Catholic Church vote or die? How about Mormons?

How about tithing? Will churches be required to prove that a member is tithing? Will those who want to vote be required to send their 1040s to the local priest to be forwarded to Washington (or Tyler)? ("Elder" is certainly the wrong word at this point, since we have long ago left behind anything resembling a Christian church.)

Furthermore, why just two sacraments? The largest professedly Christian denomination in the world (900 million members) has seven sacraments. What if the voters (or the "leaders") "covenant" that three, four, or 26 sacraments should be required for political rights to be recognized? Where, if any place, does Dr. North draw the line in this church-state that he advocates?

## *Covenanting*

But there is an even more fundamental problem here: the notion of covenanting itself. North writes of a majority of voters (and "leaders") covenanting with God. That presumes that men can initiate covenants with God. Consider that presumption for a moment. Isn't it God, the sovereign, who makes covenants with his subjects? Are not covenants, in the proper sense, imposed from the top down? Isn't the notion that men make covenants with God getting everything upside down?

Subjects do not and cannot initiate covenants with kings. Covenants, as suzerainty treaties, are always imposed from the top down. It is sheer impudence for us to think otherwise. Israel had a covenant with God only because God imposed it. The people of Israel did not get together and make a covenant. It was beyond their poor power to do so. To presume that the people (or their "leaders") have the power of initiating covenants is to attribute sovereignty to the people (or their leaders), not God.

No nation except Israel ever had a covenant with God; no nation ever will. God's New Covenant is made with his people, not with a geo-political institution. Ironically, it is a standard Reformed criticism of dispensationalists that they multiply covenants. I venture to guess that no one multiplies covenants more than the Reformed, some of whom seem to think that covenants can be made willy-nilly by any Christian (or Christian group) at any time for any (moral) purpose. Of course, men can make promises to God, but many, if not most, of those promises are wrongheaded. Perhaps promising to require citizens to be baptized church members is one of them.

## *Dominion Confusion*

North suffers from the usual Recon confusion between the great commission (*Matthew* 28) and the cultural mandate (*Genesis* 1). He identifies the two on pages 177 and 218. The differences between the two commands may be summarized by saying that the persons to whom they are addressed are different (*Genesis*: all men, man *qua* man; *Matthew*: Christians), the content of the commands themselves is different (*Genesis*: subdue; *Matthew*: teach), and the objects (*Genesis*: non-human creation; *Matthew*: men) of the commands are different. How anyone could become confused on this point is a mystery. And, generally speaking, unbelievers, from *Genesis* 4 on, seem to have been better at subduing the Earth than Christians.

North tells us that "Law is man's tool of dominion: over himself, his fellow men, and the creation" (57). He quite clearly advocates dominion over one's fellow men, contrary to what Christ himself said about dominion theology: "You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you" (*Matthew* 20:25-26). North also teaches that "law" works for everyone: "The power of God's law in producing external prosperity is not dependent upon the spiritual condition of the adherents.... So long as they [rebels] adhere to the externals, they receive external blessings" (66). If government can force an external obedience to God's laws, the people will prosper, despite their unbelief.

## *Christianity*

On page 233, Dr. North asks, What is Christianity? He offers this historical answer: "Christianity is a lot of things historically. But it has generally been a religion of this world – a religion based on conquest, to one extent or another, a religion of exploration and dominion." Perhaps no phrase is repeated more often in this book than "in time and on Earth" as the focus of North's attention. In this he echoes the liberation theologians.

But to say, as North does, that Christianity "has generally been a religion of this world" is to

misunderstand Christianity completely: The author of *Hebrews* tells us that "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the Earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a Heavenly country" (*Hebrews* 11:13-16). See also *2 Corinthians* 4:18.

More emphatically, Christianity is not "a religion based on conquest." Perhaps Islam is, but not Christianity. Conquest and dominion over men are not the marks of Christianity, but of its perversions, among them Roman Catholicism. In addition to Christ's condemnation of dominion theology, which I quoted earlier, Peter commands that elders are not to be "lords" over those entrusted to them, but examples (*1 Peter* 5:3). It is precisely because Christianity has been falsely associated with conquest and dominion that it is extremely difficult in some circles to get a fair hearing for Christianity.

## *Hebrews*

Finally, on a matter of less importance to his argument but revelatory of his method, North says that Paul wrote *Hebrews*: "We think it was Paul who wrote *Hebrews*; no one can be sure today" (72). Actually, we can be sure that Paul did not write *Hebrews*; He says in *2 Thessalonians* 3:17 that he signs every letter he writes; *Hebrews* is a letter (*Hebrews* 13:22, 25); *Hebrews* is not so signed; therefore, Paul did not write *Hebrews*.

Gary North is a talented writer, but he has deviated from Scripture on many important points.