

Gary North, Apostle of Bible-Based Economics, Dies at 80

A prolific economic historian, he sought to infiltrate the conservative Christian and libertarian mainstream but never got too far from the fringe.

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Gary North, an economic historian who found a wide audience in America's far right and libertarian movements with his call for a Bible-based economic agenda under a harsh Christian theocracy, died on Feb. 24 in Dallas, Ga. He was 80.

His death, from complications of prostate cancer, was announced on his [website](#).

For fully 55 years, Mr. North wrote, edited or published some 50 books and churned out countless articles — all the while exasperating more mainstream conservative, libertarian and free-market politicians and policymakers with his relentless, if quixotic, embrace of old-time religion under the umbrella of Christian Reconstructionism.

In "Introduction to Christian Economics" (1973), he wrote, for instance, that in his envisioned society no form of government welfare payments "will escape the ethical limits" of the Apostle Paul's dictum in II Thessalonians that "if any would not work, neither should he eat."

His economic agenda opposed inflation, high taxes and big government and favored a return to the gold standard because, he said, "God would prefer gold to paper money."

In 1981, Mr. North wrote that "Christians must begin to organize politically within the present party structure and they must begin to infiltrate the existing institutional order."

But the impact of his stealth strategy on changing minds or public policy well beyond the right-wing fringe was debatable.

"His economic views resonated with conservative Christians dissatisfied with the economic direction of the United States in the Carter era," said Prof. Michael J. McVicar, who teaches religion at Florida State University and is the author of a book about the Christian Reconstruction movement.

He added, in an email, that Mr. North's writings and popular lectures in the late 1970s, with Jimmy Carter in the White House, "helped create opportunities for Christian Reconstructionists

to play a key intellectual role in the development of the Religious Right, the political coalition that many scholars and pundits credit with reshaping the Republican Party in the 1980s.”

Mr. North urged anti-abortion protesters to mount aggressive confrontations at clinics. He went so far as to propose a Christian theocracy calling for death by stoning for abortion, adultery and male homosexuality, arguing that that was what scripture prescribed.

In an article titled “Invitation to a Stoning” in the libertarian magazine Reason in 1998, Walter Olson wrote that one effect of Mr. North’s extreme views was to “allow everyone else to feel moderate.”

He added, “Almost any anti-abortion stance seems nuanced when compared with Gary North’s advocacy of public execution not just for women who undergo abortions but for those who advised them to do so.”

Asked to assess Mr. North’s legacy, David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, a respected libertarian research group that is generally conservative on economic solutions and more liberal on social issues, said, “I’ve never read North and haven’t paid much attention to him.”

But many others did, according to Mr. North’s website, which boasts, “No website for any evangelical news magazine, news site, theological seminary, church denomination, or publisher was even close” to his in popularity.

Over some 1,000 pages, Mr. North’s 1996 book argued that the Presbyterian Church had been taken over by theological liberals.

Mr. North was a meticulous researcher. In 1996, he published “Crossed Fingers,” a 1,000-page account of how theological liberals influenced the Presbyterian Church during the early 20th century. (The first 300 pages alone included 900 footnotes.) In 2012, fulfilling a mission he began in 1973, he completed a 31-volume economic commentary on the Bible.

While some of Mr. North’s strong views could be put down to matters of opinion or preference, his many critics said others were weakly held or downright wrong. His prediction, for instance, that a computer catastrophe at midnight on Dec. 31, 1999, popularly known as Y2K, would set the stage for the birth of a liberating Christian theocracy — “Y2K is our deliverance,” he declared — proved unfounded.

Gary Kilgore North was born on Feb. 11, 1942, in Los Angeles to Samuel W. North Jr., an F.B.I. agent, and Peggy North, a homemaker. Raised in Southern California, he and his parents became evangelical Christians when he was in high school.

As a student at the University of California, Riverside, in the early 1960s, he was smitten with the Calvinist philosopher R. J. Rushdoony, who wrote “Intellectual Schizophrenia: Culture, Crisis, and Education” and for whom Mr. North worked as a summer intern.

He wrote his dissertation on “The Concept of Property in Puritan New England” and earned his doctorate in economic history at Riverside in 1972.

That same year, he married Mr. Rushdoony’s daughter Sharon, who survives him along with their children, Darcy and Scott North and Lori McDurmon; and eight grandchildren.

Mr. North and Mr. Rushdoony became instrumental in founding the Christian Reconstructionist movement.

“Beginning in the 1970s, North extended Rushdoony’s theological ideas by synthesizing them with libertarian, free-market economic theories,” said Professor McVicar, the author of “Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism” (2015).

Mr. North also began publishing a series of newsletters and was hired as a research assistant by one of his subscribers, Representative Ron Paul, a Texas Republican and later a presidential candidate, with

Mr. North offered his own online curriculum, too. In the late 1980s, he became financially independent when he sold, for \$1 million each, two cell tower licenses that he had won in a federal lottery.

He founded GaryNorth.com in 2005; since then, it has posted an estimated 23,000 articles. On that site and others, he advised casual readers and paid subscribers on subjects ranging from personal finance — how to relieve oneself of burdensome debt and when to invest in gold (his website lists the daily price) — to personal health: Citing personal experience, he said, for example, that eating berries from saw palmetto shrubs helps relieve prostate problems.

Mr. North was single-minded and left little room for ambiguity. “Words summarize the American philosophy of life: Live and let live,” he once said, adding: “Eight words summarize American foreign policy: We’re better than you: Do it our way.”

Most of his commentaries invoked a biblical precedent, though, and if they didn’t always conjure up a wrathful God (the “starting point for all economic analysis,” he wrote, lies in accepting that “God cursed the earth”) they often suggested that it would be wise to watch out for some other antagonist.

After he completed his economic commentary on the Gospel of Luke, for example, he recommended that his subscribers not only read it but also download it to their hard drives — just in case, he said, he were to “drop dead and the site is taken down for any reason.”