

**THEONOMY**  
**AN INFORMED RESPONSE**

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# **THEONOMY**

## **AN INFORMED RESPONSE**

**Gary North**  
Editor

**Institute for Christian Economics**  
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This book is dedicated to

**MOISES SILVA**

the lone author in the  
Westminster Seminary  
symposium who was wise  
enough not to write on the  
assigned topic.



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Protestant epistemology as a whole may be said to have certain characteristics that distinguish it from Roman Catholic epistemology. These characteristics can all be gathered about the two heads that we have mentioned from time to time, namely, the complete self-consciousness of God and the consequent analogical reasoning on the part of man.

That Protestantism has taken the self-consciousness of God more seriously than Scholasticism has, can be learned from the fact that Protestantism made the Bible central in its thinking. The Protestant doctrine of the Bible is that it is to be the absolute standard of faith and practice for men. All thought is true if it corresponds to the principles contained in the Word of God. The Christian consciousness is not something that stands next to the Bible with a sort of equal authority, but is something that must constantly be tested by the Bible as its absolute standard. In the Bible, Christ speaks with absolute authority to man.

This Protestant doctrine of the Bible does away with the dualism of Scholastic epistemology. It is no longer possible for man to have true knowledge about anything apart from the Bible. And especially is it impossible to have any true knowledge about God apart from the Bible.

In harmony with this doctrine of the Bible, is the Protestant conception of sin. Sin has, according to Protestantism, vitiated the whole of the human personality, his intellect as well as his will. It is for this reason that man must rely on the Scriptures altogether for the true interpretation of all reality. Thus, the fact of redemption is made to count for much more in the case of Protestants than in the case of the Scholastics. All thought must be made captive to the obedience of Christ.

Cornelius Van Til (1932)\*

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\*Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, Vol. I of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Den Dulk Foundation, [1932] 1969), p. 65.

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation (Matt. 12:43-45).*

One of the wonderful things about biblical hermeneutics is that we do not need 32 or more primary rules of interpretation in our minds before we begin to interpret the meaning of a passage. Let me prove my point.

First, this passage is about demonic possession. Second, it is not about literal swept houses. Third, it is about something wider than the individual: "this wicked generation." Are we agreed? (See? Who says that theonomists and non-theonomists cannot agree on anything?)

We need to go beyond the obvious. This passage is really about the myth of self-salvation: salvation by works. The Israelites of Jesus' day believed that they were free of demonic spirits as individuals. They therefore concluded that their society was permanently free of the moral and cultural effects of demonic spirits. They were wrong. They were only temporarily free of demonic spirits. The degree of their demonic possession would escalate rapidly in that generation, Jesus warned them.

I think it is reasonably safe to say that what had protected the people of Israel from being oppressed by demonic spirits was their judicial status as God's covenant people. Historically, after their return from Babylon, they did not again worship the older Canaanite gods. They turned to other forms of rebellion, especially theological: what became known after the fall of Jerusalem as Talmudic reasoning, i.e., a false hermeneutic based on the principle of salvation by obedience to man's laws. Nevertheless, they did not openly worship demons. Thus, the demons had wandered away. But they would soon return, Jesus warned – not one by one, but eight by eight. Demons that had long dwelt outside the judicial boundaries of the Promised Land would soon return in force.

What has this got to do with a book on theonomy? A great deal. Cornelius Van Til warned us, as no Christian philosopher ever had before him, of the great danger of employing a false hermeneutic to defend the faith. He warned against the myth of neutrality. There can be no neutral facts. Like the swept house in Jesus' metaphor, the assumption of neutrality is a trap. Unless Jesus Christ has swept the house and has installed a lock and burglar alarm system, the original demon and his seven companions will return. We cannot sweep the culture clean by means of our own autonomous brooms. They are not neutral. There is no "tabula rasa" – no cleanly swept intellect with which we begin our lives by interpreting the world around us on a covenantally neutral basis. We learn either as covenant-keepers (e.g., Jacob) or covenant-breakers (e.g., Esau). We need special grace: a clean sweep and a dead-bolt lock and burglar alarm.

Theonomists have been coming before the public ever since 1973 with a covenantal broom (Van Til's apologetic) and a dead-bolt lock and burglar alarm system (biblical law). We have warned any Christian or non-Christian who would listen that (1) there can be no neutrality and (2) the so-called Christian West's apparent status as a covenant-keeping society is as mythical as Israel's was in Jesus' day. The demons will return.

Actually, they started returning in force after 1964, as I indicated in my books, *None Dare Call It Witchcraft* (1976) and its update, *Unholy Spirits* (1986). The rise of occultism in the West has been spectacular since 1965. It has accompanied the advent of a far more consistent humanism than existed before President Kennedy was killed. The can-do technocratic liberalism of the New Deal era did not survive the rise of radical relativism, occultism, the counter-culture, and New Age theology. It did not survive the Vietnam War.

It is remarkable that the modern humanist is more ready to acknowledge the mythical status of the neutrality doctrine than Christians are. The educated humanist may know a little about what quantum physics did to the Newtonian worldview after 1924. He knows, if only second hand, something about the sociology of knowledge. He may have read Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), a book dealing with the history of post-Newtonian natural science, which became a kind of epistemological Bible for younger humanistic social scientists after 1965. In contrast, the Christian apologist is still a wide-eyed tourist in the epistemological equivalent of Walt Disney World's *Newtonland*, where all rational men know that two plus two equals four, and numerical relationships govern the external world for no apparent reason.

And just like Disney World, everything is swept clean daily.

### **Westminster Seminary in 1963**

I entered Westminster Theological Seminary in the fall of 1963, about ten weeks before the assassination of President Kennedy. I was a hyper-dispensationalist who believed in predestination. So, why did I choose Westminster? For two reasons. First, because it had the reputation of eloquently defending the inerrancy of Scripture. Second, because it had the reputation of being the most academically rigorous Bible-believing theological seminary in the English-speaking world. In short, it was Westminster's ability to deal with texts: the Bible's and

those scholars' who commented on the Bible. A Westminster faculty member in those days would not challenge an opponent until he had mastered the relevant biblical texts and also his opponent's texts. Westminster's faculty members were *masters of the texts*. That was the primary asset of Westminster Seminary.

This tradition of textual mastery was a legacy of the seminary's founder, J. Gresham Machen. We can see it in his two masterpieces, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* and *The Origin of Paul's Religion*. This tradition had been upheld by Robert Dick Wilson, who died the year after he joined the faculty, and by O. T. Allis, even though his *Five Books of Moses* was published after he retired from teaching. We can see it in everything that Edward J. Young ever wrote, especially his three volumes on Isaiah. John Murray's commentary on Romans is another example. So are Ned B. Stonehouse's commentary on Luke and his biography of Machen, even though Stonehouse died a year before I arrived. With respect to a detailed challenge to a theological opponent, consider the comprehensive mastery of Barth's works that is displayed by Van Til in *Christianity and Barthianism*. These men were serious scholars. One thing more: after 1936, all but Allis were Orthodox Presbyterian Church members.

I challenge the reader: pick up any of these works, read in them for five or ten pages, and then pick up *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. Compare the footnotes. In chapter after chapter of *Theonomy*, there is not a single reference to even one primary source document from the theonomists, beginning with Robert Knudsen's Chapter 1, which has no footnotes at all. What is conspicuous throughout is the absence of detailed discussions of the Bible texts cited by theonomists and the absence of any sustained interaction with the one hundred volumes of books and almost one thousand newsletters written by the theonomists.

The decline of commitment to the mastery of texts by today's Westminster faculty is the most disheartening aspect of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. By 1990, the faculty had squandered a precious legacy. They will not restore it easily. This places a



dark cloud over the Protestant world. For three centuries, Protestants have relied on the Presbyterians to defend the integrity of the Bible from the higher critics. They have also expected the Presbyterians (with a little help from the Lutherans) to defend the (non-predestinarian) "fundamentals of the faith." The Presbyterians, in turn, long relied on Princeton Seminary; and then, after 1929, on Westminster. But there is no one at Westminster today with the skills or reputation of Young, Stonehouse, Murray, or Van Til, nor is there likely to be if things do not change drastically. Yet Westminster's academic leadership in the orthodox Protestant world has not been challenged by another seminary. Westminster Seminary is still the most academically competent Protestant seminary in the English-speaking world. This fact is a grim testimony to the historically incomparable deterioration of orthodox Protestant seminary scholarship since Van Til's retirement in 1972.

### **A Universal Deterioration**

Americans complain that the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores of high school seniors have fallen, year by year, since 1963. This slow but steady erosion of academic performance has been matched, step by step, by the decline of America's Bible-affirming colleges and seminaries. There is simply no academic leadership remaining in any single Bible-believing institution of higher learning. Bible-believing Protestants have no university, meaning a Ph.D.-granting institution (excluding Bob Jones University's self-anointed effort). We also cannot point to any Christian college or seminary and say: "Here is the last bastion. Here we can find the whole counsel of God taught with confidence, rigor, and full documentation, in every department without exception."

*There is no longer a last bastion.* The mainline institutions of Christian higher learning have all gone soft theologically; most have gone liberal. Nothing saved them: not tax-exemption, not accreditation by humanists, not computerized mailing lists, not

full-color quarterly alumni magazines, not any of the rest of the modern academy's scientific techniques of donor-squeezing. One by one, they abandoned the doctrine of the six-day creation (if they ever accepted it); they never decided what they believed about abortion; they lusted after federal low-interest loans; and they assigned secular textbooks in the classroom. They de-emphasized theology and substituted psychology. They filled their faculties with people holding Ph.D.'s from secular universities. One by one, these institutions drifted away from orthodoxy. Today, the creeds of the Reformation have neither judicial authority nor intellectual influence on any Christian college campus. Westminster Seminary was always on the right wing of this spectrum, but the whole spectrum moved leftward.

But if there is no last bastion, what is the Bible-believing Christian to do? Where should he send his children to college? Where should ministerial candidates attend seminary? Where should the churches train their theologians of the next generation? It is not yet a case of the blind leading the blind, but the degree of theological myopia now approaches the level of the functionally disabled.

Dickens wrote in the first paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." This is the case today with the remnant of Bible-believing Christians. We are facing the worst spiritual crisis in the history of Protestantism. We may also be facing the greatest spiritual opportunity. The liberals have spent their inheritance on wine, women (sometimes even young men), and song. They are out of moral capital. They are also running low on financial capital. Theological liberalism is a spent force, but the liberals have also spent the conservatives' money on this phaeton ride. They have depleted the modern church's institutional inheritance as surely as they have depleted its moral and spiritual inheritance.

What went on in the churches was mirrored in politics. The humanistic conservative political movement in the United States is bankrupt. I know; I'm part of it. Anti-Communism is finished

– thankfully, by way of the collapse of the Soviet Union's economy. The libertarian movement has gone the way of all flesh, which is exactly what its doctrine of the unfettered individual had always defended, judicially if not morally: the voluntary addictions of drugs, sexual promiscuity, and sexual perversion. (My favorite example is the libertarian intellectual leader who brought his new boyfriend home to live with him and his wife, and was stunned when the boyfriend subsequently ran off with the wife.) A few hard-core moral hold-outs remain – people such as Murray Rothbard and Lew Rockwell – but they are not taken seriously by the handful of still-coherent libertarian troops and the sugar daddies with significant wads of cash.

*The West's moral capital is almost gone.* Meanwhile, its financial capital rests overwhelmingly on escalating debt and fractional reserve banking. The rhetoric of the New World Order has now moved from the confines of obscure socialist study groups and closed meetings of world financiers into the political mainstream. Covenant-breakers are growing more consistent, more arrogant, and more ruthless.

### **The Blackout Tactic Has Failed**

In the midst of this obvious breakdown of moral standards and the escalating threat of political tower-building, the faculty of Westminster Seminary used its precious resource of time to write *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. That tells me something. It tells me that the leading academic Reformed seminary in the English-speaking world feels intellectually threatened – not by the world of secular humanism, which the Westminster faculty has refused to interact with in any significant way ever since Machen's death in 1937, but by the one tiny movement within the modern church that proposes a comprehensive, explicitly biblical alternative to secular humanism: the theonomists.

*Theonomy: An Informed Response* is the third stage of an academic and polemical exercise. This exercise now appears to be over. The ICE has responded with three volumes that refute,

line by line, Westminster Seminary's one volume of essays critical of theonomy. Unless Westminster's faculty wants to launch another round of exchanges, this case is closed.

I have a sense of satisfaction in bringing this publishing project to an end, yet I also have a sense of dissatisfaction. Let me explain why. The Presbyterians for over four centuries have provided the Protestant world with its most rigorous academic leadership. Furthermore, the Protestant church of the United States in the twentieth century has been the dominant missions-funding church on earth. Yet the evangelical Protestant church in the United States today is in shambles. On the outer fringes of this shambles is what little remains of Calvinism, which is primarily Presbyterian. This gives me little comfort.

With our three volumes in reply, we have demonstrated at least three things: we respond fast, we respond thoroughly, and we respond rhetorically. Any ideological movement that cannot accomplish this three-fold polemical task is not going to survive. I offer as evidence the pamphlet wars of the Reformation and then the English Revolution, 1640-60. Any ideological movement that cannot write extensively, and then deploy this three-fold strategy when attacked, will fail to offset the standard three-part defensive strategy of all establishment organizations: the blackout, the lockout, and the sneer.

I honestly believe that the theonomists have accomplished one other major task in our (my) agenda: we have proven in these three volumes that we own the theological goods. We have Van Til's Bible-affirming presuppositional apologetic, which the Westminster faculty as a unit has long since abandoned. We have biblical law, which the faculty never accepted. We have postmillennialism, which only a few of Westminster's faculty members ever espoused: Machen, Murray (toward the end: see his exposition of Romans 11), and Shepherd. None of them developed the position in detail, either in print or verbal exposition. The faculty officially defends the 1788 Westminster

Confession of Faith, but it is taught only in an elective course (as is Calvin's *Institutes*). Theonomy offers more.

We have had two other things going for us. First, we have had the willingness to go into print and state our case as forcefully as possible – in my case, as blatantly as possible. (Some critics would say *arrogantly*.) Second, we have had publishing capital – Hays Craig's, 1959-73, mine and ICE's, 1981-present – so that we were able to ram our way through the bolted gates of two theological establishments, Reformed and Scofieldian.

The theonomists went on the offensive and stayed on the offensive ("the perseverance of the saints"). This was something the Reformed theological establishment never counted on. (Neither did the dispensationalists.) No one within the Reformed theological camp had done anything like this in over three centuries. The establishment – and here I include the secular media – cannot grasp just how much impact that fewer than a dozen men with word processors can have. (In the case of Rushdoony, not even a word processor, which did not exist when he wrote his major works. He uses only an ink well, a steel-tip pen with no ink bladder or cartridge, and a World War I-era typewriter to type in block quotations.)

### **A Strategy of Victory**

What does it take, institutionally speaking, for orthodox Christianity to challenge effectively any entrenched establishment except Islam (which takes a very different strategy)? The experience of the theonomists provides a preliminary answer. It takes a growing sense of malaise and uncertainty among one's opponents, accompanied by an intellectual flabbiness that inevitably results from years of uncontested authority. It takes this pair of unusually scarce personal resources: dedication and leadership – at every level of the new movement. It takes leaders and writers with a vision of victory and a taste for public confrontation. It also takes a biblically consistent paradigm, access to libraries, and the ability to read carefully and then

apply what you have read to (1) the weak links of rival ideological positions and (2) the crises of the real world.

Our opponents have co-operated magnificently by providing us with an amazingly complete package of weak links and escalating crises. This is typical of the conditions that exist just prior to what Thomas Kuhn has called a paradigm shift.

What it does not initially take is a lot of followers and access to the conventional media and to institutions of higher learning. It does not take what Lenin called *the transmission belt*. This is what the establishment cannot understand, for these are the necessary features of their long-term program for maintaining cultural control. Every establishment forgets how it displaced the previous establishment. It progressively takes on the characteristics of all previous establishments. It elevates money over vision, power over righteousness, form over substance, tradition over innovation, tenure over competition, certification over performance. Whenever it does, it becomes ripe for replacement. Humanism's establishment is ripe – nigh unto rotten.

Our major problem now is not what our theological opponents may say in print, let alone murmur in private. (From this point on, I suspect that inside the Reformed camp, it will be mostly the latter. When they write, we respond. Only masochists choose to endure inevitable pain when there is little legitimate hope of any future pleasure to offset it.) Our main problem is that we cannot be sure just how widespread and how long the looming external cultural crises will be. Theonomists are a remnant on the fringes of a remnant. Remnants have a tendency to wind up in Babylon as captives for a couple of generations, sharing this experience with the establishment masters who brought the wrath of God on everyone's head. In such a situation, it does very little good to remind former establishment members of Oliver Hardy's refrain to Stan Laurel: "Well, this is another fine mess you've gotten us into."

On the other hand, when it is at last time to return to the Promised Land, it will do no harm to remind the establish-

ment's former followers of just who it was who set the policies that led everyone into Babylon. And if you have a large pile of dusty old books and newsletters proving that your side gave the establishment and its court prophets a lot of opposition before the captivity began, it also may help.

I am not suggesting that the Westminster faculty is nothing but an assembly of court prophets. I *am* suggesting that they have failed repeatedly since 1973 to identify publicly who the court prophets are, and then challenge them root and branch.

It boils down to this: if you can't figure out that abortion is murder, the court prophets have little to fear from you. Neither does the court that employs them.

### Conclusion

The theonomists have ruffled many feathers since 1973. Ruffling targeted feathers has been a self-conscious tactic on my part. But I have a good precedent: the Protestant Reformation. I also have a more recent precedent: the career of Cornelius Van Til. He challenged everyone to become consistent with the Bible's assertion of its absolute authority. This authority began with creation, Van Til said; it continues through history; it will conclude historically at the final judgment. John Murray's concept of sanctification paralleled Van Til's concept of biblical authority: definitive, progressive, and final.

What has astounded theonomists is that those who are the institutional heirs of Van Til have abandoned the most important aspects of his legacy. Natural law theory has steadily seeped back into the thinking of the Westminster faculty, especially those members who promote political pluralism as the Christian ideal. They have not maintained Van Til's forthright break with the philosophy of autonomous man. In my book, *Westminster's Confession*, I identify the pluralists as the Gordon-Conwell faction. It is worth noting that the institutional and theological link between Westminster Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has been Meredith G. Kline.

The pluralists have justified this implicit break with Van Til by substituting Kline's theory of intrusionist ethics for Calvin's view of the covenant. Kline has justified his dispensational approach to the Mosaic covenant by arguing that Van Til's view of common grace leads to a uniquely New Testament concept of a *common ethical and legal order* which somehow unites covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers without violating the pre-suppositions of either group. In other words, Kline has used the worst aspect of Van Til's thought, his view of common grace,<sup>1</sup> to undermine the most important aspect of Van Til's legacy: his rejection of all common-ground philosophy and ethics. Accompanying this sleight-of-hand operation has been Kline's view of Genesis 1, which substitutes the so-called framework hypothesis<sup>2</sup> for a six-day succession of creation events. It was this thesis that Edward J. Young challenged in his book, *Studies in Genesis 1* (1964), politely using Nic. H. Ridderbos as a substitute for his colleague Kline. John R. Muether and the other pluralist followers of Kline have applied Kline's hermeneutic to political philosophy. They are being completely faithful to their mentor's rejection of the ideal of Christendom.

The theonomists refuse to go along with these sleight-of-hand substitutions. We continue to defend Van Til's basic doctrines: the Creator/creature distinction, the absolute sovereignty of God, the Trinity as the ground of all secondary being and reasoning, the self-attesting authority of Scripture, the impossibility of neutrality, the illegitimacy of all natural law theory, and the sole legitimacy of analogical reasoning ("thinking God's thoughts after Him").

It is time for Westminster Seminary's faculty to reaffirm publicly a commitment to these doctrines. Then, member by member, department by department, they need to apply them.

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1. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

2. A literary framework supposedly governs the text of Genesis 1: day one parallels day four; day two parallels day five; day three parallels day six.



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

*The words of the wise are like goads [prods], and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh (Eccl. 12:12-13, NKJV).*

It is time to prod a few critics. It is time to nail down a few facts. It is time for another round of weariness.

It is not given to all men to be readers of books. Fewer still are readers of serious books. Fewer still are writers of serious books. Fewer still ought to be writers of serious books. The proof of this final statement is the book of collected essays by the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.<sup>1</sup>

I still cannot understand why they wrote it. What was their motivation? Theonomists had not attacked them directly. Bahnson did respond in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* in 1979 to Meredith G. Kline's attack on Bahnson in 1978, the lengthy review essay in which Kline described theonomy as "a delusive and grotesque perversion of the teaching of Scripture."<sup>2</sup> (And people say I am a loose canon with *my* rhetoric!) The editor of

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1. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, edited by William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990).

2. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 172.

the *Westminster Theological Journal*, W. Robert Godfrey, who was co-editor of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, had cut a sweetheart deal with Kline: Bahnsen would not be allowed to reply to Kline in the pages of the *Westminster Theological Journal*. But that classic example of institutionally incestuous, **hit-and-run** book reviewing did not sit well with the more academically inclined and morally rigorous members of the Westminster faculty. Besides, Kline is conspicuously absent from the pages of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. (Now that I think of it, Kline has been conspicuously absent from just about everything since about 1981.) So, the question remains: Why did they do it? Why did they decide to take the time and trouble – insufficient trouble, as it turned out – to produce their collection of embarrassingly inept essays?

How inept? The level of academic performance that is exhibited in the essays in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* ranges from shoddy to mediocre. Compared to what most of these men have written elsewhere, the essays in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* have the appearance of exercises produced over three or four Saturday afternoons, or perhaps during a spring break, not a multi-year, supposedly co-ordinated effort to refute a serious theological position. Their essays exude the easily identifiable odor of late-night graduate school term papers: way too much coffee, not enough research, and no prayer. Any reader who wants to evaluate the truth of my accusation need only read their original book, then read this critique or my book, *Westminster's Confession*,<sup>3</sup> and finally read anything else written by the same faculty members (except for John Muether). He will then ask himself: What happened? And this question: Why?

These are the two questions I have been asking myself ever since I first read their book. I still have no clear answers, only suspicions. Given the fact that the Westminster faculty had

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3. Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

previously produced only three symposia from the school's inception in 1929, beginning with *The Infallible Word* in 1946, why did they decide to write this one? I still find it revealing that not one of the other three symposia was devoted to a refutation of a particular theological movement. The faculty must be publicly scratching where the itching is most intense. But why is their itching so intense? Lurking here is the making of a doctoral dissertation in the sociology of knowledge.

### **Pandora's Box vs. the City on a Hill**

In the story of Pandora and her opening of the closed box, we learn that only one good thing came out of it: *hope*. The Westminster faculty must have had hope regarding their collective effort. This is hard to believe in retrospect, but they must have. They did not need to write their book. In writing it, they revealed themselves as theologically unprepared, individually and institutionally, to deal with the formidable theological issues they let loose. In responding to their book, the theologians keep pointing to the numerous theological issues that the Westminster faculty has left unresolved. These are not peripheral issues; they are *covenantal* issues. The Westminster faculty had been content for six decades to leave these issues unresolved, but in 1990 they chose to reveal in public the extent to which these issues have been left unresolved. Now they are being called to account in public. It still baffles me: Why did they do this? Why did they open the box? What did they hope to gain?

When Christian scholars reveal through public debate – when they actually are willing to debate, which is rare – that they do not accept another movement's position, they must be ready to offer a systematic biblical alternative to the rejected position. It is not sufficient to register a few theological warnings or a handful of claims, especially unsubstantiated claims. The more detailed and comprehensive the opposing position is, the more detailed and comprehensive the critics' position ought to be. They need to keep the rules of debate in mind.

First and foremost, the critics must carefully evaluate the theological rigor (and publishing capital) of their opponents. Luke 14:28-30 applies to theological confrontations: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply [it happen], after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." When you are a professor, you daily face classrooms containing their appropriate consignment of after-class critics. This is why there is a market for books like *Theonomy: An Informed Response*. (The better-informed critics will also have well-marked copies of *Westminster's Confession* in their personal libraries.)

Second, Calvinists have always prided themselves on possessing the most rigorous theology in Christendom, even when they (as is the case with the Westminster faculty) reject the very idea of Christendom. When a Calvinist goes into print against another Calvinist, it is necessary for him to have a unified world-and-life view that stands as a beacon to the world, a beacon that can reveal the other person's errors because of the beacon's elevation on a high hill and the intense brightness of its beam. What we find in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is fifteen fellows (I omit Moises Silva) carrying only flashlights and stumbling around aimlessly in the seminary's back yard, each one occasionally calling out, "Wait! I think I've just found another theonomic inconsistency!" (Silva was wise enough to sit in the swing on the back porch and shine his light only on Kline's confusion.) In the case of librarian John R. Muether, nobody bothered to tell him that he needed to put some batteries in his flashlight. Questions: Where is the unified world-and-life view of the Westminster faculty? Where is that developed alternative to theonomy? Where is the "better something" that they expect their students and readers to accept in place of theonomy's supposedly "inferior something"? Like Meredith G. Kline, it is conspicuously absent.

### The Sealed-Beam Issue of Covenantal Ethics and Sanctions

When you reject a particular doctrine, you need a better doctrine to put in its place. *Never attempt to beat something with nothing.* When you offer your substitute doctrine, you have an obligation to show that it is consistent with the overall system of thought or theology under which you formally operate. If a Calvinistic, Reformed theologian presents a view of ethics that he says is consistent with the Reformed faith (and is of course consistent with the Bible, he will hasten to tell you), he needs to prove that the view he is defending will not undermine either Reformed theology or its view of the authoritative Bible. He must show that his suggested doctrinal substitution will not unravel the system of theology that he claims to be defending. This was Westminster Seminary's challenge. *Theonomy: An Informed Response* is one-third of our response.

The theonomists appeared on the scene in 1973 with a revived and highly developed version of a long-neglected view of Christian covenantal ethics, namely, the ethical and judicial approach that had been applied in church, family, and state by the New England Puritans during the first generation in colonial America, 1630-60.<sup>4</sup> This theological system was (and is) self-consciously tied to a defense of the continuing authority of biblical law, including Mosaic civil law. This means that not only is the moral law of the Old Covenant still binding in New Testament times – the familiar Reformed conception of law – but also the Old Covenant's case laws and their appropriate civil sanctions.

This controversial theonomic conclusion is the primary focus of concern for the faculty of Westminster Seminary. They have systematically rejected the theonomists' fundamental judicial

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4. In 1973, Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* was published, and Bahnsen handed in his Th.M. thesis, "The Theonomic Responsibility of the Civil Magistrate." My book, *An Introduction to Christian Economics*, also appeared in 1973. So, for that matter, did the U.S. Supreme Court's legalization of abortion on demand, *Roe v. Wade*, another document that the Westminster faculty has long chosen to ignore.

presupposition: *sanctions in any institution should be consistent with the law; therefore, "the biblically specified punishment must fit the biblically specified crime."* It is not simply that the Westminster faculty has rejected the idea that God's revealed law identifies the crime. Rather, it is that they – or at least most of them (especially the Gordon-Conwell faction) – self-consciously reject the notion that the Bible also identifies the *appropriate civil sanctions* in the New Covenant era. This is the heart of the controversy between Westminster Seminary and the theologians. It is reflected most clearly in Dennis Johnson's essay in the Westminster symposium and the responses in this book by Gentry and Bahnsen. (It will be interesting to see how Dr. Johnson responds. The ICE publication fund awaits this challenge.)

Consider the statement that was inserted into the 1647 revision of the legal code of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: "*The execution of the law is the life of the law.*"<sup>5</sup> In short, "no sanctions – no law." Westminster's faculty agrees. They have chosen to kill the ideal of a resurrected Old Covenant legal order by denying the legitimacy of executing that law-order's specified civil sanctions. Another civil law-order should replace it; what, they refuse to say. They have become **ethical dualists**: one law-order for God's covenant people (church and family) and another law-order for civil government. *Operationally, with respect to its view of civil law, Westminster Seminary has become Lutheran.*<sup>6</sup> The faculty has not heeded Van Til's warning:

It is for these reasons that those who have sought to contrast the genius of Lutheranism with the genius of Calvinism have stated that Calvinism has emphasized the authority of Scripture

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5. This statement appears in "Book of the General Laws and Liberties Governing the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts [sic], 1647," in *The Foundations of Colonial America: A Documentary History*, edited by W. Keith Kavenaugh, 3 vols. (New York: Chelsea House, 1973), I, p. 297. The emphasis was in the original document.

6. On Luther's dualism, see Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Foundations of Luther's Social Views," *Essays in Medieval Life*, edited by John H. Mundy (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1955).

more than Lutheranism has. Lutheranism has been less insistent than Calvinism on the necessity of special revelation for every sphere of human knowledge, and for that reason too, Lutheranism has been less insistent on the concept of an absolute self-consciousness of God than Calvinism has.<sup>7</sup>

To accept the idea that civil law in New Testament times must be conformed to Old Testament laws and sanctions is to accept the ideal of Trinitarian theocracy: the rule of God in every realm of life, not excluding the civil realm.<sup>8</sup> This was the Puritans' position on law, or at least the pre-1660 Puritans, before King Charles II was restored to the throne. This was the theology of the dominant Reformed factions during the English Revolution of 1640-60. This was the position of at least some of those Reformed theologians who attended the Westminster Assembly (1643-47), which had been called by Cromwell's Parliament to advise the national civil government – a fact admitted by Sinclair Ferguson's essay in the Westminster symposium. But this Puritan view of the civil covenant is not the position of Westminster Seminary.

Westminster's faculty chose to reject this position publicly. They reject theonomy's hermeneutic, namely, that each of God's revealed Old Covenant case laws is still in force, *having been resurrected with Christ* unless a New Testament revelation or principle has annulled it. The faculty has adopted the Napoleonic Code's standard of justice when dealing with any Old Covenant case law: "Guilty until proven innocent." The theonomists, in contrast, take English common law as their guide to the Old Covenant's case laws: "Innocent until proven guilty." This is the heart of the dispute over hermeneutics.<sup>9</sup>

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7. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Den Dulk Foundation, [1932] 1969), p. 71.

8. Note: theocracy is also an inescapable concept. It is never a question of theocracy vs. no theocracy. It is a question of *whose* theocracy: God's, Satan's, or self-proclaimed autonomous man's. A god must rule. Some god's law must be sovereign.

9. In the 1970's, Westminster's theological problem was Herman Dooyeweerd;

The Westminster faculty has chosen to reject a theology which insists that there is ethical cause and effect *in history* because God brings positive and negative sanctions *in history* in terms of His covenant law.<sup>10</sup> In short, they have rejected the doctrine of the covenant in general, but especially in the civil realm. They are willing to give lip service to an undefined covenant – I stress the word *undefined*<sup>11</sup> – as it applies to ecclesiastical affairs. Yet we are still waiting to see them present a detailed treatment of the church covenant's stipulations and appropriate sanctions: Who gets placed under which sanctions, why, and after how many years of appeals? They are willing, with great fear and trepidation, to assert the existence of a family covenant that is explicitly Christian. (Where is the Westminster faculty's published treatment of the key problems of divorce: Who gets the children, who gets the assets, who gets to remarry . . . and how soon?) But when it comes to the civil covenant, they have put a big sign on the seminary's front lawn: "No Restrictive Covenant." That is to say, "No Restrictive *Christian* Covenant." There is always some restrictive civil covenant.

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today, it's hermeneutics.

10. The reader needs to understand that the theonomists' view of God's corporate sanctions in history is tied to our view of the sacraments. (I am not necessarily speaking here regarding Rushdoony's view of the sacraments, which is at best problematical.) Theonomists reject any view of the sacraments that says that they are mere memorials or symbols. We believe the sacraments have judicial content (God's law) and that appropriate sanctions are attached to them. We believe that God is present *judicially* with His people in a unique way in the sacraments, meaning that He is with them *historically*. For example, the Lord's Supper is more than a meal or the symbol of a meal. God brings sanctions in history against those who participate unlawfully in the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:27-32). The burden of theological proof rests on those who deny that God brings predictable sanctions in history (Deut. 28).

11. The place to have presented a unified, agreed-upon definition of the covenant, and hence covenant theology, was in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. That the Westminster Seminary faculty once again chose to remain silent on this crucial point, despite my pointed exposing of Calvinists' theological nakedness in this regard (in my Publisher's Preface to Ray Sutton's *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 1987), is indicative of the faculty's underlying problem. They are not agreed on what the biblical covenant is. They remain silent. Yet they are Calvinists: covenant theologians.



### Christendom vs. Anti-Christendom

Here is their problem. *Covenants are inescapable concepts*, as Van Til would say. It is never a question of "covenant vs. no covenant." It is always a question of *whose* covenant. If a Christian says that there is no legitimate Christian civil covenant in New Testament times, he is necessarily saying that *Christendom* is not a biblically valid goal in history. Christendom is a civilization – the kingdom of God in history – that is governed in every area, every nook and cranny, by God: a society whose lawfully anointed rulers govern in terms of God's revealed law. In this view, God is not in retirement or on vacation; He is a King who has delegated to His officers the authority to exercise command. There are three covenantal institutions: church, state, and family. To deny that God's covenant law applies to civil government in New Testament times is necessarily to abandon the ideal of Christendom. Westminster Seminary has done this. So have all Christians who defend political pluralism.<sup>12</sup>

The problem is, God's covenantal enemies understand what modern Christian theologians fail to see, namely, that *there are three legs supporting civilization's stool*: church, state, and family. Modern humanism has identified its church and priesthood: the public school system. It has identified its state: centralized power. Finally, it has identified its family: two adults (frequently of different genders) living together by law. The humanists see that these three institutions must be governed by a comprehensive, consistent legal order. They understand what the Westminster faculty has long chosen to ignore specifically and deny implicitly: *civilization is a package deal*. A civilization is not built on the basis of smorgasbord religion: "a little of this, a little of that," and all on the basis of personal taste. *A civilization is a system of integrated covenants*. Westminster's faculty is not interested in building a Christian civilization because its members

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12. The standard rhetorical ploy of those Calvinistic pluralists who deny the ideal of Christendom is to substitute the supposedly pejorative word, "Constantinianism."

are unwilling to defend the idea of a biblically covenanted civil government. They have allowed the humanists to provide this leg. Give humanists this leg, and they'll break your arm.

I ask the faculty: On what judicial, covenantal basis can Christian political pluralists mount a successful defense against covenant-breakers' rival civilizations? How do they expect to be able to defend institutionally the covenantal sovereignty of the Christian church and the Christian family when they deny the legitimacy of the Christian state? They refuse to address this obvious problem – the problem that theonomists have been dealing with in print for almost two decades. The faculty wrote *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* without once dealing with this problem. They seem to think that they can save themselves (and all the rest of us) from the self-conscious, well-financed (with Christians' tax money) onslaught of covenant-breaking civilization. How? By negotiating a temporary cease-fire with the humanists: *publicly abandoning Christ's judicial claims in history as King of kings*. They seem to think that this temporary cease-fire is the equivalent of a permanent peace treaty that is governed by a team of neutral referees. But there are no neutral referees. There are therefore no permanent treaties – dare I say the word? *covenants* – between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. The intellectual defense of this conclusion was Van Til's legacy to Westminster: his rejection of natural law theory. This legacy has been abandoned by the present faculty.

### Conclusion

The covenantal issues that have been raised by the theonomists are not merely technical issues of biblical exegesis. They are issues of life and death, as *Roe v. Wade* makes clear. These issues cannot successfully be bottled up in a seminary classroom and treated as if they were academic exercises for graduate students. Yet the Westminster Seminary faculty attempted to do just this. They dealt with theonomy as if the theonomists were a group of fairly bright graduate students who are in need of

further specialized work in hermeneutics and church history. Worse; they assumed that if they could handle a few of the technical arguments in Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, their work of refutation would be complete. Yet even their discussion of Bahnsen's apologetic for theonomy was amateurish, as Bahnsen demonstrates here and in *No Other Standard*.<sup>13</sup>

Readers who are looking forward to fiery polemics will be disappointed by most of this book. The chapters in *Theonomy: An Informed Response* are polite . . . even mine.<sup>14</sup> I committed my traditional polemical offenses in *Westminster's Confession*; here, the style is subdued and scholarly. I always say: when meeting a market, provide products for many tastes. Several of the essays are exegetically detailed and intellectually devastating to their targets. How devastating? I predict that as you read Dr. Bahnsen's essay on Dennis Johnson and Dr. Gentry's two essays on Dennis Johnson, you will probably think to yourself, "Boy, am I thankful I'm not Dennis Johnson!" (From this general category of readers I am excluding, of course, Dennis Johnson.)

I strongly encourage you to buy and read *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* and then compare both the theological and intellectual quality of its essays with the essays in this book. This will enable you assess the degree of competence of the disputants in defending the Scriptures. I do not mean primarily the intellectual competence of the rival disputants; I mean the competence of the rival systems of interpretation. This, ultimately, is the only question worth asking and answering of rival theologians and religious movements: *What interpretive approach to the Bible best defends the principle of preaching and implementing the whole counsel of God?* Everything else is peripheral.

I have no idea how the Westminster faculty will be able to respond to our three volumes without self-consciously and

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13. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

14. Note: I said the *chapters*; I make no promises regarding either my Conclusion or Gary DeMar's appendix, "The Sorry State of Christian Scholarship."

publicly abandoning what little remains on campus of Princetonian or Dutch Calvinism's world-and-life view and Van Til's apologetic legacy. Frankly, I do not think they will respond in print. But if they remain publicly silent, as if the Institute for Christian Economics had not published three volumes of detailed responses to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, then their brighter students and the seminary's more theologically astute donors will know what the faculty's strategy was: **hit and run**. If that was their strategy – Kline's strategy in 1978 – it has now backfired: the victims survived and are now pressing charges.

Why they went into print with *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is beyond me. They are now into the theonomic tar baby up to their elbows. It will be interesting to see how they attempt to get free. The theonomists will be watching. So will the seminary's theologically competent students.

I will say one more thing regarding Westminster's strategy. The faculty did not in their wildest dreams imagine, when they began working on their book, that Ray Sutton, the victim of an astoundingly misleading and intellectually incompetent attack by Timothy Keller, would become president of Philadelphia Theological Seminary exactly one year after *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* appeared in print. I argued in *Westminster's Confession* that the Westminster faculty for over a quarter of a century treated theonomists as if we were so far out on the theological fringe that we were hardly worth considering. Some chapters in their book almost casually dismiss theonomy. Such an unprovoked attack looks idiotic when one of the victims then assumes the presidency of a Reformed seminary that is more than a century old – half a century older than Westminster.

(I wonder if Dallas Theological Seminary will publish a symposium on theonomy. Maybe they can title it, *Oil, the Middle East, the Antichrist, and Theonomy*. They can follow that one with another: *The Middle East, Oil, Theonomy, and the Antichrist*. And then: *The Antichrist, Theonomy, and Middle Eastern Oil*. This can go on for years. Don't take my word for it; ask John Walvoord.)

## **PART I**

# **CALVINISM AND THEONOMY**

Accordingly, when we come to the law itself as given on Sinai, we must still remember that it was not the comprehensive expression of the will of God. *The ten commandments are only a principle summary of the expressed will of God to man.* . . . Now, since this is the substance of the whole law, since the whole law can be summed up in the commandment of perfect love and obedience to God, it can and must be preached through all ages as the source of the knowledge of sin. Again it must be preached as such, not in the sense as though our knowledge of sin cannot be brought about otherwise than by the detailed preaching of the ten commandments. The law must always be regarded as the *summary* of the expressed will of God. Hence, this summary must always be interpreted in the light of the fullest revelation of the will of God that we have in the New Testament. . . .

In the second place, as the whole expressed will of God must be preached in order to bring men to a consciousness of sin, so also this same whole will of God, of which the decalogue is only a summary, must be preached as a rule of life by which men may regulate their life of gratitude. And since the decalogue is a convenient summary of the whole expressed will of God, it can most profitably be used as a basis of preaching on the ethical standard of the Christian life. Particular mention should be made of this fact since many orthodox ministers seem to think that when they go back to the law, they go back to something with which the Christian has nothing to do. Christ said that he came to establish the law. He himself said what had been said before, that if a man should really live up to its demands, he should certainly inherit eternal life. Hence, he himself came to bring nothing higher, and could bring no higher standard.

Cornelius Van Til (1958)\*

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\*Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, Vol. III of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1958] 1980), p. 146.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO PART I

*Modern secular man has found himself to be without a standard. . . . This problem is one of particular pertinence to me, inasmuch as this problem was one which plagued my thinking in my undergraduate days. It was not a lack of Christian background, nor a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, but a lack of theology and theological direction that made me helpless in the face of the contemporary scene. In the course of my thinking, it was the book of Job that gave direction to my theology. The book of Job made me a Calvinist. The book of Job made clear to me by what standard we must understand the whole of life.*

R. J. Rushdoony (1959)<sup>1</sup>

In this section, Gary DeMar provides an autobiographical account of his conversion to theonomy. He is responding to John R. Muether's essay in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, "The Theonomic Attraction." Muether purports to show why people become theonomists.

Muether's self-appointed task was doomed. There are far too many people with very different backgrounds who are now becoming theonomists. The best that a careful investigator can expect to achieve is to identify which aspects of theonomy appeal to people from one church tradition. There is no single

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1. R. J. Rushdoony, *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Tyler, Texas: Thoburn Press, [1959] 1983), p. 189.

road to belief in theonomy. If there were, I would be in the middle of it, directing traffic and collecting tolls. Critics such as Muether should recognize by now that I know something about direct-mail advertising. If there were a formula for becoming a theonomist, I would be in the mails with it. I have detected no pattern in the many conversions to theonomy. There are many individual roads to the law of God, although most of them tend to be dirt or gravel roads today. The two main paved highways lead Calvinists and charismatics into Christian Reconstruction. The Calvinists come as a result of Calvinism's unique theological heritage: judicial theology. Charismatics are likely to come by way of postmillennial eschatology (David Chilton's *Paradise Restored*) and social activism. If we ever get a highway into (and therefore out of) Baptist country, theonomy will become a serious organizational threat to the pietist-humanist alliance.<sup>2</sup>

In investigating the so-called theonomic attraction, let us begin with the co-founders of the Christian Reconstruction movement: R. J. Rushdoony and Gary North.

### R. J. Rushdoony

Theonomy as a theory began with Rushdoony's conversion to Calvinism. His father had been a Presbyterian pastor to various Armenian churches. He was an Arminian. An Arminian Armenian. His son switched allegiance from Jacobus Arminius to John Calvin. From Calvin's doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God over time and eternity, Rushdoony moved to the philosophy of Cornelius Van Til: *the absolute sovereignty of God in all thought*. This means the absolute sovereignty of the Bible in all thought. But if this is true for the intellect, Van Til taught, it must be equally true of ethics. Rebellion is not merely intellectual; it is covenantal, involving the whole man. Therefore, rebellion must involve all of man's institutions.

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2. Gary North, *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion vs. Power Religion* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pp. 2-5.



This led Rushdoony to the question of ethics, including social ethics – dangerous territory for Christian scholars, filled with ruthless savages who hold Ph.D. degrees from accredited universities. Van Til's technical developments in apologetics led Rushdoony to the idea of Christian Reconstruction. Rushdoony concluded that if the individual can be regenerated – *from covenant-breaking to covenant-keeping* – then so can all human institutions. Van Til had to admit this possibility in principle, but his amillennial eschatology denied its progressive attainment in history. Rushdoony's postmillennialism figuratively forced Van Til's hypothetical idea of comprehensive covenant-keeping out of the tenured safety of the seminary classroom and into the streets. Rushdoony began working on *The Institutes of Biblical Law* in the late 1960's, in the midst of a world-wide social upheaval: the counter-culture. Rushdoony was offering an explicitly biblical counter-counter-culture in a crisis period.

Van Til was not a theonomist. He was a philosopher – by training, calling, emotional preference, and self-imposed intellectual boundaries. Rushdoony pioneered the theonomic position. What was the necessary connection between the two men? The connection was judicial. Van Til destroyed all claims of autonomy in any area of life. God's Word, said Van Til, provides man with the *only* theoretically possible standard. All natural law theory, he said, is a covenant-breaking myth unless based squarely on the doctrine of man as a fallen creature who is in need of redemption and written revelation. But if this is true, then all legal systems that are not derived directly from the Bible have to be wrong. By dynamiting the dikes of natural law theory, Van Til had left Christianity without any intellectually valid alternative except the Bible. Van Til's was a career based on demolition. Rushdoony saw that this exclusively negative critique was necessary but insufficient. *There are no judicial vacuums; there is no judicial neutrality.* Something has to take the place of the collapsed edifice of natural law theory, not just in philosophy but also in social theory. This means theonomy.

Rushdoony saw what Van Til was unwilling to admit, in public or in private: if Van Til is correct in his assertion that only the Bible is an authoritative standard in history, then we have to turn to the Bible in our quest as Christians for an alternative to humanist social and legal theory. This means not only that Christian philosophy must be reconstructed; all of man's institutions need to be reconstructed. Van Til was unwilling to recommend this broadly conceived application of his narrowly circumscribed technical task, and he was suspicious of both Rushdoony and me in our attempt to apply biblical law in social theory. But he kept quiet in public about his suspicions.

Rushdoony recognized early that Van Til's apologetic revolution was new wine in very old wineskins, but he was not ready until 1973 to offer a published alternative. From the publication of *By What Standard?* in 1959 until the publication of *The Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973, he did not provide readers with a detailed application of what he knew in theory is mandatory: a reconstruction in social theory based on biblical law. He began his lectures on biblical law in 1968; they were not available to the reading public until 1973.

### Gary North

I was converted to predestinarianism by a dispensational Bible teacher, Jack Arnold (Th.D., Dallas Seminary), who taught a Bible class at the University Bible Church in Westwood, California, home town of UCLA, in the early 1960's. The church's pastor, Milo F. Jamison, in 1934 had been the first pastor to be thrown out of the Presbyterian Church USA for orthodoxy. He had refused to participate in the newly formed off-campus religious ministry at UCLA. His presbytery insisted that Jamison bring his popular Bible study's 200 students into the ecumenical organization. He refused. The Presbytery then erased his name from the Presbytery's roles without a public hearing or even a closed-door discussion with him. He was soon in contact with J. Gresham Machen, and he joined in 1936

what would later be re-named the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He ran for moderator of the General Assembly in 1937 as the fundamentalist candidate, lost, and joined Carl McIntire in an exodus. (So did two-year Westminster seminarian Frances Schaeffer.) McIntire then created the Bible Presbyterian Church. By 1960, Jamison was a dispensational independent. He had long since ceased preaching either Calvinism or predestination, although he still believed in predestination.

Dr. Arnold's tenure as a Bible teacher was brief: his message split the church's college-age group. I had attended only two of his lectures, but I had become persuaded of the position by the spring of 1962. I corresponded with Rushdoony at that time, since I had read *Intellectual Schizophrenia* (1961), in which he referred to the free-market Austrian economist, Ludwig von Mises. I had become an intellectual disciple of Mises. I wrote to Rushdoony about his interest in Mises. That summer, I attended two summer institutes: a week of evening lectures by Mises, and two weeks of morning lectures by Rushdoony. These lectures became *This Independent Republic* in 1964. In the fall of 1962, he sent me a copy of Van Til's syllabus on *Apologetics*, which I read. I immediately accepted Van Til's presuppositional position. Mises also was an *apriorist*, so Van Til's deductive approach to reasoning was no threat to my thinking. Nevertheless, I was a predestinarian, not a Calvinist. I was a hyper-dispensationalist of the Stamm-Baker-O'Hair variety.

I had decided in the spring of 1960 at the age of 18 that the Bible provides the foundation for economics. Officially, I was an antinomian, as all dispensationalists are. But psychologically, I had become a theonomist, at least with respect to economics. This is why Van Til's apologetics appealed to me. I could see in 1962 that his defense of the absolute sovereignty of God serves as the biblical basis for reconstructing economic theory. So, I became a Vantillian before I became a Calvinist. I did not move to covenant theology until the second semester of my year of seminary in 1964. It was John Murray's lectures on Romans 11

that triggered this shift. A year later, I read Meredith G. Kline's essays in the *Westminster Theological Journal* on covenant oath signs, and they made me a paedobaptist.

In the second semester, I also audited John Murray's weekly one-hour course in sanctification. These lectures transformed my thinking about law and ethics. His discussion of the three-fold aspect of sanctification – definitive, progressive, and final – revolutionized my thinking as much as Van Til had. This outline is the biblical basis of the idea of progress in history, though Murray never made this application, and I did not yet recognize it. Without this doctrine of imputed sanctification, all applied economics is irrational, as I argue in my discussion of imputation and value theory in my economic commentary on Genesis, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (1982).

There is no doubt in my mind how the idea of theonomy came to Rushdoony: his study of the book of Job and Van Til's writings. That is what he says did it, and I believe him. Theonomy as a social theory came to me as a result of my Arminian understanding in 1960 that economics needs to be restructured by the Bible. I believe today that I would have been unable to begin this specific work of reconstruction had I not been introduced to Van Til's apologetics and John Murray's concept of imputed sanctification. They were both Calvinists.

### Judicial Theology

Why is Calvinism so significant? Because it is so intensely judicial. Calvinism brings sinners to the foot of the cross by its defense of the doctrine of the holiness of God, meaning *the God of permanent law and permanent sanctions*. I will say it here, and I will keep on saying it: *strip Calvinism of its judicial character, and it ceases to be Calvinism*. This is why theonomy came out of Calvinism by way of Van Til's reconstruction of apologetics.

Van Til was a revolutionary. He abandoned every trace of Greek philosophy in the intellectual heritage of Christianity. But in doing this, he also stripped away the fig leaf of Roman

legal theory. This was a revolutionary intellectual act. Theonomists are Vantillians. We have openly broken with rationalistic Calvinism. But this gives no competitive edge, and no rhetorical advantage, to those Vantillians who claim to be defenders of Van Til's monumental revolution in apologetics, yet who still think there is hope in natural law theory. Westminster Seminary's William Barker stands before us in a drooping fig leaf to announce: "If it is indeed not our King's intention for the civil authority to enforce the first great commandment, then among the five alternatives that Bahnsen offers as possible standards for civil law, natural revelation as indeed 'a sin-obscurated edition of the same law of God' 'suppressed in unrighteousness by the sinner' is that to which we must appeal. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Natural revelation to the natural man cannot serve as a basis for an explicitly Christian social theory, but its futility is doubly pronounced in the case of someone who comes to us in the name of Van Til.

In the summer of 1963 and again in 1964, I studied directly under Rushdoony. I lived in his home. He had me do a great deal of reading. By 1965, I was ready to begin serious work in re-thinking the foundations of economics. I began to write. He was able to get an essay of mine printed as a pamphlet: *Inflation: The Economics of Addition*. We both began to think through the implications of biblical law, but both of us were writing negative critiques, not positive biblical alternatives. Writing exclusively negative critiques does not suffice, as Van Til's career indicates. I recognized clearly in the late 1960's the truth of that old political slogan: "You can't beat something with nothing." It is not enough to attack the epistemological bankruptcy of Marx or Freud or progressive education, as Rushdoony and I did. Christians also must provide a Bible-based alternative in every field. This means theonomy.

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3. Barker, "Theonomy, Pluralism, and the Bible," in William S. Barker and Robert W. Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990), p. 240.

The groundwork had been done by Van Til. He had cleared the field of epistemological alternatives. It was time to lay the foundation of the building. This foundation is judicial. There was no choice in the matter; it had to be done. Once a Christian becomes a Vantillian, he is stripped naked judicially. His membership card in the Neutrality Club is taken away. His voter registration card in the City of Man is revoked. "Into Van Tillianism we come naked." What still astounds me is that so many his followers depart from this life in the same condition. This is what *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is all about: a defense of judicial nakedness as a Calvinistic way of life. At best, it is an experiment in fig leaf judicial theology. But as fig leaves are wont to do, this defense keeps slipping.

Fig leaf judicial theology can no longer suffice for Calvinists. Other theological traditions can limp along with their fig leaves, but Calvinists are exposed first. Why? Because Calvinism is the archetypal representative model of judicial theology. Calvin's development of the doctrine of the imputation of both sin and redemption stands as the clearest statement in history of judicial theology. Take away this from Calvinism, and the doctrine of predestination can become impersonalism or fatalism. (This, by the way, was one of Van Til's objections to Martin Luther's predestinarianism.) A Calvinist who downplays judicial theology is undermining the essence of the Calvinist system he officially proclaims. Calvinism is inherently judicial.

### Conclusion

Gary DeMar began to understand much of this in his three years as a student at Reformed Theological Seminary in the late 1970's. He arrived as an anti-theonomist; he left as a committed theonomist. He shows why in his three essays. Greg Bahnsen forced DeMar's hand, and he also forced the hands of other students. These students became theonomists. The RTS faculty did not. They could not tolerate Bahnsen's presence. In DeMar's delightful analogy, Bahnsen was delivering a plane with

wings to a faculty filled with men who had a great fear of flying. Therefore, with respect to Reformed Theological Seminary, it can truly be said of their policy in 1979: "We had to fire Bahnsen, and could not hire Shepherd."

DeMar explores the question of how and why a Calvinist comes to theonomy. He is not dealing with the more complex question of how and why Arminians have also professed their commitment to theonomy as a social ideal. DeMar is responding to RTS librarian John Muether's essay in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, an essay which DeMar finds deficient. What DeMar makes clear is that the questions that led him to theonomic answers had all been asked in his seminary classes. The books that he was assigned professed complete confidence in the existence of an explicitly Calvinist worldview, but none of them ever got around to spelling out exactly what this worldview is. When DeMar encountered theonomy, he saw that its methodology is to apply the Bible to real-world problems, which is what the other Calvinist worldview authors had said is mandatory, but which none of them had attempted in public. Thus, he concludes, *theonomy is applied Calvinism*.

If he is correct about theonomy as an extension of the judicial principles of Calvinism, then the intriguing issue is not, contrary to Mr. Muether, "the theonomic attraction." Rather, it is "the *non*-theonomic attraction." First, why do so many Calvinists remain committed to a world-rejecting pietism, a kind of Anabaptism for predestinarians? Second, why do most of the remaining Calvinists adopt the language of world-and-life relevance, but then steadfastly refuse to develop explicitly biblical social principles, let alone apply them to real-world situations?

DeMar does not raise the question of the non-theonomic attraction. I do in *Westminster's Confession*. My answer: it rests on a fear of added personal responsibility. From him to whom much has been given, much is expected (Luke 12:47-48). For this reason, most Christians, especially seminary professors, prefer to reject God's gift of biblical relevance.

# 1

## THEONOMY AS AN EXTENSION OF CALVINISM'S JUDICIAL THEOLOGY

Gary DeMar

Dean C. Curry, in a review of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, writes that John Muether's "The Theonomic Attraction" is a "first-rate analysis of why theonomy is thriving."<sup>1</sup> I beg to differ. Curry's praise for Muether's evaluation of the "theonomic mind-set"<sup>2</sup> tells me that Curry has done little if any reading of Reconstructionist works. The same can be said regarding Mr. Muether, as his footnotes clearly reveal.

This is typical. I have encountered very few critics of theonomy who have addressed the arguments actually put forth by theonomy's advocates. *The critics refuse to read the published works.* How do I know? Because their charges – which are legion – are so off the mark.<sup>3</sup> Some of the charges border on the bizarre.

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1. *First Things* (June/July 1991), p. 54. The editor is Fr. Richard John Neuhaus.

2. John Muether, "The Theonomic Attraction," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990), p. 246.

3. Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 5, and Gary North and Gary DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 81-179.



Just the other day, I read a letter written to the editor of a Columbus, Georgia, newspaper that accused theonomists of advocating the death penalty for anyone "who commits an act, or even thinks a thought, that opposes the organization's tenets."<sup>4</sup> It won't be too long before we read that Reconstructionists claim they can read minds. (After reading John Muether's article, I've concluded that he seems to think he can.)

Any attempt to understand the "mind-set" of those committed to a theological position like theonomy and Christian Reconstruction is futile without first doing extensive research. Discovering the reasons why living people believe something requires at least a few interviews. Muether conducted no interviews. How much first-hand research did he complete? Muether quotes from only *one* book written by a theonomist, George Grant's *The Changing of the Guard*, and that in a footnote. (If we are to believe Timothy J. Keller, George Grant is not a theonomist.<sup>5</sup> This means that not one Keller-sanctioned theonomic book is cited by Muether.) He does quote from six newsletters, hardly a representative sample when one considers that about a thousand newsletters have been published since R. J. Rushdoony wrote his first *Chalcedon Report* in October of 1965.

On the basis of Muether's meager research and "sociological" analysis, we are to believe that he has uncovered what attracts people to theonomy and Christian Reconstruction. He doesn't even come close. The theonomic attraction for Calvinists is simple to figure out if you read the works of theonomists. Talking to a few theonomists might also help. Serious scholars should put forth the extra effort it takes to get the story right. If they refuse to do this, then theonomists really have no moral obligation to regard them as serious.

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4. Sanjay Lal, "Fanaticism Still a Threat," *The Ledger-Enquirer* of Columbus, Georgia (August 18, 1991), p. E-4.

5. Timothy J. Keller, "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 294. See Ray R. Sutton's essay, Chapter 9, below.

### Calvinism and the Reformed Tradition

There is a very direct thinking process that leads someone who views Calvinism to be the most consistent expression of Christianity to adopt the distinctives of theonomy. *Theonomy is Calvinism's judicial theology applied*. The reader should keep in mind that theonomy is a methodology, a way of understanding God's law. Theonomy is not simply a body of texts woodenly applied to a modern context. Theonomy is the application of Reformed theology to the sphere of ethics. Greg Bahnsen made this crystal clear in the preface to the first edition of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. He repeats it for us in the second edition:

[T]he present study leaves a great deal to be explored and discussed in Christian ethics as well as extensive room for disagreement in the area of exegeting, understanding, and applying God's law in specific situations. Two people can submit to the exhaustive theonomic principle in Christian ethics while disagreeing on a particular moral question (e.g., whether a certain biblical command is ceremonial or moral, whether lying is ever condoned by God, etc.) Thus agreement with the thesis of this book is not contingent upon agreement in every particular moral issue or specific interpretation of a scriptural text.<sup>6</sup>

In principle, theonomy states that all of God's Word is "profitable" and applicable, equipping the man of God "for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16). Disagreements over how a passage applies is not an indictment against theonomy. Theonomists want to know, *contra* its critics, what *exegetical* reasons are used for rejecting contemporary application of God's law. A person who dips into the Mosaic legislation and makes a contemporary application is in some sense a theonomist, even though his application might differ from what other theonomists have written. It's the *fact* of application and not so much the *how* of

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6. Second edition, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, (1977) 1984, p. xxx. Reprinted in 1991.

application that is the essence of theonomy. By way of analogy, two U.S. constitutional theorists who agree on the doctrine of original intent,<sup>7</sup> but who disagree on application, are still constitutionalist theorists who believe in original intent.

As those who study the arguments for theonomic ethics soon learn, far from being "a new kid on the block," as Muetter intimates it is, theonomic ethics has always been a part of Reformed theology.<sup>8</sup> It's a *Reformed theology* attraction that has led many Calvinists like myself to embrace the distinctives of theonomy. The belief that the Bible in its *particulars* can and should be applied to every area of life is a major theological distinctive that sets Reformed theology apart from all other orthodox Trinitarian traditions. Furthermore, a growing number of non-Reformed Christians have adopted much of the ethical system outlined by theonomists because of its "biblicist hermeneutic."<sup>9</sup> Contrary to Muetter's views, John Monsma, an early advocate of world-and-life view Calvinism, stated that

Calvinism is nothing but Biblicism. If a government acts in accordance with the Bible, it will always be doing the right thing. If it transgresses the bounds that the Bible has placed around it, it becomes tyrannical. The New England governments, taken on the whole, were so exemplary because they were – not theocra-

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7. Meaning the original intent of the Framers in 1787.

8. Meredith G. Kline, a Calvinistic critic of Christian Reconstruction, is honest enough to state that theonomic ethics "is in fact a revival of certain teachings contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith – at least in the Confession's original formulations." Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 41:1 (Fall 1978), p. 174.

As Greg Bahnsen points out, there was no amendment to "the declaration about the law of God or its use in catechisms (i.e., the strictly theonomic elements of the Confessional Standards)." Revision was made to "a subsection of the chapter on the civil magistrate, aiming to reinforce disestablishment and the rejection of Erastianism (see *Theonomy*, pp. 527-37, 541-43)." Bahnsen, "M.G. Kline on Theonomic Politics: An Evaluation of His Reply," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VII (Winter 1979-80), p. 201.

9. In a faculty discussion at RTS on July 17, 1978, Greg Bahnsen had to answer the charge of being a "biblicist hermeneutic" several times. Biblicist? Too biblical?

cies,<sup>10</sup> but *Biblical* governments. The men of which these governments were composed recognized the Author of governments and of governmental authority, and they at least *tried*, tried hard, to govern in accordance with the faith of their souls, and to serve only those ends which the Bible placed before them.<sup>11</sup>

According to Monsma, the New England Puritans did not believe in *popular sovereignty*, "as it has been anti-theistically proclaimed at Paris in 1789," nor in *state-sovereignty*, "as it has of late been developed by the historico-pantheistic school of Germany." Rather, they believed in *divine sovereignty*. At the end of the New England Puritan document, "An Abstract of the Lawes of New England," published in London, in 1641, a summary of their dependency on God and His written revelation as the standard for all of life, these words, taken from Isaiah 33:22, are affixed:

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; He will save us.

Monsma states that this was "the favorite text of the regular New England 'politician'! Such 'politicians' the people honored and respected!"<sup>12</sup> If theonomists are guilty of "biblicism," then we are in good company.

### A Reformed Methodology

My attraction to Christian Reconstruction in general and theonomic ethics in particular came by way of a Reformed/

10. Numerous definitions are given for "theocracy." Monsma seems to equate theocracy with some form of *ecclesiocracy* where the church as an institution rules over the State. Reconstructionists use theocracy to mean the rule of God over all of life and the use of His written revelation as the standard for the governance of all of life. A Reconstructionist would use theocracy as a synonym for *biblical* government.

11. John Clover Monsma, *What Calvinism Has Done for America* (Chicago, Illinois: Rand McNally & Co., 1919), p. 141.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42.

Calvinistic methodology, a procedure for doing theology that I first learned while a member of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and later as a student at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. The sovereignty of God over all of life became the operating principle for "doing" theology.

This principle of divine sovereignty, when applied to the *Bible*, demands an absolute subservience to all of its prescripts, not only in the sphere of the church, but in all walks of life. God is the absolute Sovereign of all of life; therefore His Word should be the controlling factor in every sphere of life's activity.<sup>13</sup>

The Calvinism I was introduced to was more than the "five points." Calvinism is not simply a synonym for predestination. Calvinism, as I was taught, was a world-and-life view. In its broader aspect, said Monsma, Calvinism "has a strictly *scientific* meaning. It is a well-defined system of ideas, – of ideas concerning God and man, concerning the moral, social, and political life of the world. It is an organic structure, complete in itself."<sup>14</sup> In becoming a Calvinist, I was assured that I would find this "well-defined system of ideas" in the Bible.

As seminary students, we were heirs of Calvin's Geneva, the Puritans, and the Hodges of Old Princeton. The Bible is the standard. All things are to be evaluated in terms of Scripture. There is to be no compromising. This was the legacy I had

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13. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3. Beattie wrote: "Hence, the Calvinistic system is seen to commend itself to thoughtful minds as the sound philosophy of nature and providence, and as the true interpretation of the Scriptures and of religious experience. This system has a philosophic completeness, a scriptural soundness, and an experimental accuracy which afford it strong logical confirmation, and give it secure rational stability. It may be safely said that no other system can justify so fully this high claim, for even those who profess no sympathy with the Calvinistic system have never yet been able to present a better one for our acceptance." Francis R. Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standards: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Richmond, Virginia: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1896), p. 5.

been given. Students a century before had embraced a similar view of life. At the Induction Service in 1877 of A. A. Hodge as Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Seminary, Dr. W. M. Paxton concluded his charge with these words:

The name of this Seminary is known in all the world. Its chief distinction is its Biblical teaching. The ground of its faith is the Bible. Its only question is: "What has God said?" Its only proof is God's word. Its professors have never reached the point of thinking that they knew more than the Bible. This Seminary has always taught that there are but two questions to be considered: (1) Is this the Word of God? and (2) What does it mean? This ascertained there is nothing left but to believe and adore.<sup>15</sup>

Here is the real "theonomic attraction" within Calvinist circles. *Theonomy is the judicial extension of Reformed theology*. A stalwart of the Reformed faith, A. A. Hodge, made the case that "the kingdom of God on earth is not confined to the mere ecclesiastical sphere, but aims at absolute universality, and extends its supreme reign over every department of human life."<sup>16</sup> The implication of such a methodology was obvious to Hodge: "It follows that it is the duty of every loyal subject to endeavour to bring all human society, social and political, as well as ecclesiastical, into obedience to its law of righteousness."<sup>17</sup> This is no longer obvious to his successors.

Could A. A. Hodge get a teaching job today in any of the Reformed seminaries? Not if the same criteria were applied to his views as are applied to contemporary theonomists. What was Hodge saying that was different from what theonomists say today? If you are a seminary student or a member of a church

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15. Quoted in A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, [1869] 1978), p. x.

16. A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: Lectures on Doctrine* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, [1890] 1990), p. 283.

17. *Ibid.*

where theonomy is scorned, read to the critics the following quotation from Hodge. Of course, don't tell them the source of the quotation until you get their response:

It is our duty, as far as lies in our power, immediately to organize human society and all its institutions and organs upon a distinctively Christian basis. Indifference or impartiality here between the law of the kingdom and the law of the world, or of its prince, the devil, is utter treason to the King of Righteousness. The Bible, the great statute-book of the kingdom, explicitly lays down principles which, when candidly applied, will regulate the action of every human being in all relations. There can be no compromise. The King said, with regard to all descriptions of moral agents in all spheres of activity, "He that is not with me is against me." If the national life in general is organized upon non-Christian principles, the churches which are embraced within the universal assimilating power of that nation will not long be able to preserve their integrity.<sup>18</sup>

Hodge called the Bible the "great statute-book of the kingdom." In effect, he was a "biblicist" who believed the Bible should be used as a textbook on social theory. But Muether tells us that using the Bible as a textbook is the essence of fundamentalism, not of Reformed theology.<sup>19</sup> Muether's battle is now with A. A. Hodge. It is a mismatched fight.

### **The Lure of Pluralism**

What replacements for the firm foundation of a *biblical* worldview are being offered by today's Calvinist theologians as the essence of Reformed theology? Appeals are being made to natural law, general revelation, and common grace as seemingly full, independent, and reliable standards of ethical inquiry. The Bible appears to have become only one ethical standard among

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18. *Ibid.*, pp. 283-84.

19. Muether, "The Theonomic Attraction," p. 283.

many, part of a “smorgasbord ethic.” *Pluralism* is the new catch phrase of those within and without the Christian community. Of course, the term means different things to different people. This is its danger. Groothuis writes:

Pluralism refers to a diversity of religions, worldviews, and ideologies existing at one time in the same society. We are socially heterogeneous. One religion or philosophy doesn’t command and control our culture. Instead, many viewpoints exist. We have Buddhists and Baptists, Christian Reformed and Christian Scientist – all on the same block, or at least in the same city. This can have a levelling effect on religious faith.<sup>20</sup>

With the levelling of religion, we are seeing the levelling of morality. All lifestyles are permitted in the name of diversity and pluralism. In nearly every case, Christians are the losers. Pluralism is the bait for Christians to throw caution to the wind as we are called on to “trust” secular and religious advocates of pluralism. Christians are encouraged to set aside only a few of the distinct doctrines of the faith, those that are inherently “religious.” Once these are discarded, the friendly pluralists tell us, Christians are then free to speak.

The call for Christians to adopt pluralism is just another way of diluting the truth. Pluralism becomes a club to pound flat the theological bumps that make Christianity unique among all the religions of the world. And what is the fruit of the “new and improved” pluralist worldview? Harold O. J. Brown writes:

As soon as the words “Our pluralistic society will not permit . . .” are uttered, Nativity scenes are dismantled, Christmas vacation becomes Winter Holiday, and a moment of silence in public schools is no longer merely a vain illusion but a prohibited sin against pluralism. But say “Our pluralistic society requires . . .” and homosexual activists receive affirmative action support

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20. Douglas Groothuis, “The Smorgasbord Mentality,” *Eternity* (May 1985), p. 32.



for job demands, parents need not be notified of a minor daughter's intention to abort their grandchild, and Rotary Clubs and saunas are *gleichgeschaltet* into unisex. Whether or not one endorses pluralism seems to be a litmus test for whether one is *persona grata* in the modern world.<sup>21</sup>

Christian pluralists have abandoned the very doctrines that can make a fundamental difference in this world: the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the uniqueness of God's written revelation.

Is pluralism biblically defensible? Should the Christian in principle back off, giving equal opportunity to other competing minority or majority positions in the name of pluralism, when those positions advocate unbiblical and anti-Christian lifestyles? Do we allow abortion for competing systems when its advocates claim the "pluralist" model in defense of their position? Should the State allow "homosexual" marriages? Should the Mormons be permitted to practice polygamy, which the Mormon hierarchy has never publicly renounced as a religious ideal?<sup>22</sup> Should Satanists be permitted to worship according to the "dictates of their own conscience"?

The Bible teaches pluralism, but a pluralism of *institutions* under God's single comprehensive law system.<sup>23</sup> Scripture

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21. Harold O. J. Brown, "Pluralism in Miniature," *Chronicles* (May 1988), p. 13. R. C. Sproul's discussion of pluralism is helpful. See his *Lifeviews: Understanding the Ideas that Shape Society Today* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), pp. 119-27.

22. The Supreme Court declared that polygamy was out of accord with the basic tenets of Christianity: "It is contrary to the spirit of Christianity and the civilization which Christianity has produced in the Western world." *Late Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints v. United States*, 136 U.S. 1 (1890). A year earlier the Court declared that "Bigamy and polygamy are crimes by the laws of all civilized and Christian countries. . . . To call their advocacy a tenet of religion is to offend the common sense of mankind." *Davis v. Beason*, 133 U.S. 333, 341-42 (1890). Cited in John Eidsmoe, *The Christian Legal Advisor* (Milford, Michigan: Mott Media, 1984), p. 150. Pluralism's operating doctrine has now opened the door for the ACLU to abolish restrictions on the marriage vow. Under ACLU pluralism, polygamy ought to be allowed. And why not?

23. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for Government* (Ft. Worth,

does *not* teach a pluralism of law structures, or a pluralism of competing moralities that have equal standing. Ethical or moral pluralism (as distinguished from *institutional* pluralism) is always either polytheistic or humanistic.<sup>24</sup> All of life is under God's law because God judges all of life in terms of His law.<sup>25</sup>

Does this mean that Christians are granted special favors? Not at all. A distinction must be made between a prejudice in favor of Christians and a prejudice in favor of the Christian religion.<sup>26</sup> Christians and non-Christians are equal before the civil law, but all legal orders are not equal before God. "The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you" (Ex. 12:49; also Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:16). A Christian who commits a crime should be treated in the same way as a non-Christian who commits a crime – defined by God.

There is no ethical neutrality in life. All laws must rest on some moral (religious) foundation. That moral foundation is either Christianity or some other religion, whether humanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or an amalgamation of the "best" of all these systems. But the "best" of these systems can never

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Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), chapter 2 and *God and Government*, 3 vols. (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990).

24. DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations*, ch. 3.

25. *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

26. The New York *Spectator* of August 23, 1831 relates the following: "The Court of Common Pleas of Chester County (New York) a few days since rejected a witness who declared his disbelief in the existence of God. The presiding judge remarked, that he had not before been aware that there was a man living who did not believe in the existence of God; that this belief constituted the sanction of all testimony in a court of justice; and that he knew of no cause in a Christian country where a witness had been permitted to testify without such belief." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, [1834, 1840] 1960), 2:306.

Until 1876 North Carolina's constitution required the following:

That no person who shall deny the being of God, or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the divine authority of the Old or New Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State, shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this State.

include what is truly best about Christianity because what is best about Christianity is unique to Christianity.

Unique views are not tolerated under pluralism. It seems to me that pluralism is fundamentally prejudiced *against* Christianity. This is a radical departure from our nation's historical roots.

Can a nation that maintains no established church and regards religious pluralism as both socially inescapable and ethically desirable confidently look to religion to generate and nurture its fundamental moral values? When the founders spoke of the nurturing function of religion, they thought primarily of Christianity – Protestant Christianity – indeed, for some of them Protestant Christianity with a distinctly Calvinist flavor. In the second half of the twentieth century most of the public, as well as most commentators, have regarded the religious basis of American social values as including virtually all forms of not only Christianity but also the entire Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>27</sup>

With increased immigration of religious traditions from Eastern and Asian countries and the acceptance of these traditions on equal par with Christianity, Christianity no longer shapes the moral content of American democratic ideals. What standard will be used by the pluralists to determine what of each of these traditions should be incorporated in the American ethical mosaic? Pluralism by definition rules out the unique revelation of the Bible.

Even non-Christians recognize the pitfalls of pluralism. Sociologist Robert Bellah has "sought escape from the problems created by religious pluralism by turning to Rousseau's idea of a civil religion. Advocates of civil religion claim that broad and vaguely stated religious concepts can, without acknowledging any particular religious faith, give a kind of transcendent rein-

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27. A. James Reichley, "Religion and American Democracy," *The World & I* (January 1991), pp. 556-57.

forcement to values that are deemed useful to society.”<sup>28</sup> But who ultimately speaks for these values? Adolf Hitler used civil religion as a way of maintaining civic loyalty. Hitler’s message in the early years of his Reich government was based on what has been described as “moral culture.” The focus of civil religion is not the individual but the social whole. “Civil religion really places the welfare of the state at the heart of human values, and is therefore easily manipulatable by those holding political power.”<sup>29</sup> Christian advocates of pluralism are living off the older Christian consensus which, as Francis Schaeffer has pointed out, cannot last long “when one removes the Bible in which God has spoken propositionally. . . .”<sup>30</sup> Reichley writes:

The truth is that democratic values, at least historically, have rested largely on a Judeo-Christian foundation. Once a system of social values has been created, it may acquire a life of its own, to some degree enriched through contact with other sources. But if the Judeo-Christian roots were destroyed, the superstructure of democratic values would probably not persist for long. If this is true, the political system is to some extent dependent on a religious tradition, or traditions, to which not all Americans can be expected to belong.<sup>31</sup>

There is no doubt that pluralists of all types, secular as well as religious, espouse some of the *general* ideals of a Christian worldview. There is a great deal of talk about “individual rights” and “justice.” But what do these terms mean in their *particular* applications? Individual rights for some will mean the “right” of a mother to kill her pre-born baby. Homosexual

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28. *Ibid.*, p. 557.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 558.

30. Francis A. Schaeffer, *Back to Freedom and Dignity* (1972) in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 5 vols. (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1982), 1:379.

31. Reichley, “Religion and American Democracy,” p. 558.

"rights" groups want full and unrestricted freedom to practice their "alternative lifestyle." How does the doctrine of pluralism answer these requests for legal and civil legitimacy?

Pluralism was not set forth as an option while I was a student at RTS *until* theonomy came along and attempted to put wings on the Reformed-Calvinist "plane." It was a commitment to Reformed theology that led me to embrace the principles of Christian Reconstruction and theonomic ethics.

Students at RTS were always told that the Calvinist biblical world-and-life-view plane would fly. Rarely, however, did we ever see a modern Calvinist plane with wings or engines. We never saw the plane actually fly. This was a frustrating experience. When the distinctives of theonomy actually put the plane in the air, the control tower would call us back for modifications to the fuselage. Yes, the plane was in the air, but we were told that it was unstable with the theonomic wings. We were told that the wings had been tried before but met with little success. And so the Calvinist plane sits on the tarmac with no place to go.

### **No Credible Alternative**

What happened at RTS that led me to become a theonomist? Why was there such a negative reaction by numerous professors, the administration, board members, and pastors to the "theonomic attraction" that many of us saw as simply the working out of Reformed distinctives that we were taught in the classroom?

I really couldn't understand what the fuss was all about. The plane was flying. Isn't this what we were being told should happen when the Bible was applied to every area of life? We were even able to shoot down the dispensational air force with a consistent barrage of biblical fire power. The humanist air force did not have a chance, once we forced the secularists to be consistent with their man-centered, naturalistic presuppositions. When we shut off their fuel supply (which they were

stealing from the Christian fuel depot) and retrieved our stolen wings, they knew that they could no longer get their planes in the air.<sup>32</sup>

Maybe the critics didn't like the theonomic plane's ultimate destination. Fair enough. But those of us who were interested in the debate were waiting for an alternative plane to take off with a better (biblical) flight plan. None was ever forthcoming. Debate was silenced, and the pilot was dismissed.<sup>33</sup>

What really sold me on studying the issue of theonomy was how weak the critics' arguments were in their attempts to ground the theonomic plane. In our classes related to covenant theology, classic *Reformed* (continuity) arguments were used against dispensationalism. When theonomy became an issue, students found that *dispensational* (discontinuity) arguments, the same arguments that were refuted in the classes related to covenant theology, were being used in an attempt to answer and discredit theonomy. Schizophrenia reigned in the mind of any thinking student.

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32. The humanist, in order to keep his plane aloft, must borrow from the worldview presupposed in the Bible. The humanist plane loses altitude and eventually crashes when he assumes he can dump the fuel he stole from the pump marked "Biblical Presuppositions."

33. Others have observed the lack of a systematic working out of social theory by those who are best described as "critics of contemporary culture." James Skillen points out that while Chuck Colson "offers keen insights into contemporary public life," he stops "short of proposing anything systematic." While "he lauds the statesmanship of William Wilberforce, the early nineteenth-century English evangelical who led the movement to abolish the slave trade," Colson "draws too few conclusions from the study to suggest what a just political order and noble statesmanship should look like." James W. Skillen, *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 65.

## SOME WINGS FOR MODERN CALVINISM'S PLANE

*Gary DeMar*

As a student at Reformed Theological Seminary, I was taught that certain cultural applications flowed from a consistent application of Calvinism. Calvinism is synonymous with a comprehensive biblical world-and-life view. Simply put, I was told that the Bible applies to every area of life. To be a Calvinist is to make biblical application to issues beyond soul-saving.

All the literature we read on Calvinism had at least some reference for the application of Calvinism's world-and-life view in history. No one ever questioned this theological framework until some of us actually began to apply worldview Calvinism to particular social themes. This is what we were taught to do, from our first reading of Abraham Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* to Francis Schaeffer's *How Should We Then Live?* I contend that theonomy logically follows from worldview Calvinism. Take away Calvinism's worldview, and Calvinism's plane won't fly.

### ***Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism***

Those students who were interested in cultural Calvinism were directed to Kuyper's 1898 *Lectures on Calvinism*. It was

here that we were told we would find a fully developed, comprehensive, *biblical* world-and-life view. Kuyper's brand of Calvinism has been described as the "only modern exception" to the tendency of Christians either to abandon social action in favor of piety or to abandon piety in favor of social action.<sup>1</sup>

The "Kuyperian" tradition "was at once pious and socially influential."<sup>2</sup> "As Abraham Kuyper said, there is not one inch of creation of which Christ doesn't say 'Mine.'"<sup>3</sup> In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper discussed politics, science, and art – a rather odd mix, but it was more than the familiar five points of Calvinism. (Economics and law were strangely absent.)

Reading Kuyper was like reading a repair manual that was all diagnosis and little if any instruction on how to fix the problem. Here's a sample:

That in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which the Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God.<sup>4</sup>

Everything that has been created was, in its creation, furnished by God with an unchangeable law of its existence. And because God has fully ordained such laws and ordinances for all life, therefore the Calvinist demands that all life be consecrated to His service in strict obedience. A religion confined to the closet, the cell, or the church, therefore, Calvin abhors.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *Understanding Cults and New Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 126.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Douglas Groothuis, "Revolutionizing our Worldview," *Reformed Journal* (November 1982), p. 23.

4. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1931] 1970), p. iii.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 53.



This is marvelous biblical world-and-life view rhetoric, but there is almost no appeal to the Bible in *Lectures*. Broad principles are set forth, but a specific *biblical* worldview is lacking. As one soon learns after reading Kuyper, there is little that is distinctly biblical in his cultural position. Kuyper, along with Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), is best known for the concept of *sphere sovereignty* and what is now being described as principled pluralism. Writes pluralist Gary Scott Smith:

This position rests upon several major tenets. God built basic structures or institutions into the world, each having separate authority and responsibilities. He established state, school, society, workplace, church, marriage, and family to carry out various roles in the world, and He commands human beings to serve as officeholders in these various spheres of life.<sup>6</sup>

What standard are these officeholders to use in the governance of these various spheres? This is the essence of the debate. Reconstructionists agree with the principled pluralists' Kuyperian expression of world-and-life-view Calvinism that Christians should be involved. The disagreement is over *how* we should be involved and what *standard* we should use in our establishment of a developed social theory.

### *Principled Pluralism*

A contemporary application of the Kuyperian worldview can be found in the writings of numerous "principled pluralists." These Christian advocates of the Kuyperian model argue that "a biblical view of civil government must rest . . . upon general principles taught throughout Scripture."<sup>7</sup> The emphasis is on "general principles" and not "isolated prooftexts." From these

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6. Gary Scott Smith, "Introduction to Principled Pluralism," *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), p. 75.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

"divine norms," the people will "experience peace, justice, and righteousness in their fullness."<sup>8</sup>

But exactly how should the Christian define *justice* and *righteousness*? Is it just and right to tax the citizenry in order to fulfill the general demands of justice and righteousness, say, in caring for the poor and educating the people through an educational system controlled by the state because it is financed by the state? Liberals and conservatives espouse justice and righteousness. Whose definition is correct? Whose solution should Christians follow if the pluralist is correct when he maintains that the Bible cannot be appealed to for specifics, since the "tares" must be tolerated until the time of the "final harvest"? *By what standard* are Christians required by God to decide these issues?

Where does the Christian pluralist go for his *specific* norms? They are few and far between in the pluralist's world. For example, in Gordon J. Spykman's defense of principled pluralism, there is little appeal to the Bible, even under the heading "Biblical Foundations." He mentions *general norms*, but there is no worked-out judicial system.

Our view of society should not be derived from isolated passages scattered throughout the Bible. Such a piecemeal approach assumes that the Bible is a collection of timeless truths with built-in, ready-made applications for every situation. Rather, the Scriptures present principles and directives that hold for life as a whole in every age. We must therefore rely on the comprehensive meaning of the biblical message. Though couched in ancient *forms*, the Scriptures carry with them universal *norms* that should direct the lives of Christians and shape societies they live in.<sup>9</sup>

This is doubletalk. Let's rephrase the first sentence in this quotation: "Our view of *the Trinity* should not be derived from isolated passages scattered throughout the Bible." How about

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8. *Ibid.*

9. Gordon J. Spykman, "The Principled Pluralist Position," *ibid.*, p. 80.

our view of the deity of Christ, the resurrection from the dead, and justification by faith alone? Could the same be said for "the family" and "the church"? It was an isolated passage in Romans that brought on the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Luther's cry was that "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). Are the doctrines of justification and sanctification different from the doctrines of law and the civil magistrate? The Westminster divines did not think so. Biblical passages are cited throughout the Shorter and Larger Catechisms.

Spykman tells us that when "the Reformers spoke of *sola Scriptura*, they did not mean that Scripture is God's only revelation. God also reveals His will in creation and providence. In fact, the creational word remains His fundamental and abiding revelation." Then why did God give us the Bible? Adam and Eve, prior to the fall, were given special revelation regarding the maintenance of the created order. Spykman continues: "God gave the Scripture to correct and reinforce His original revelation upon our minds, redirecting our attention to its meaning, refocusing the intent and purpose of creation. God's message is always the same, but it comes in different modes. Its author does not contradict Himself. *Though revelation comes in various forms, its norms are constant. The word holds, even when men do not discern or obey it.*"<sup>10</sup>

Like theonomists, Spykman agrees that general and special revelation present the *same* message. If this is true, then we should expect to find the same laws in the creation order as we find in the Bible. For example, not only should we find prohibitions regarding what a society should do with men practicing sodomy, but we should also be able to find the same sanctions. Since both general and specific norms are found in the Bible, general and specific norms can be found in creation. They are one and the same! If the Bible was given "to correct and reinforce" God's "original revelation," *then why not begin with the*

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10. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83. Emphasis added.

*Bible*, since the “original revelation” is itself in need of reconstruction? Christian pluralists refuse to begin here. Why? My guess is that the Bible is just a bit too clear and specific.

God has directed his people to seek his law, not through their own study of the creation, but through his written word. To be sure, nature does reveal some of God’s ordinances (Rom. 1:25, 32; 2:14f.). But Scripture never suggests that nature contains a richer or fuller revelation than the written word. On the contrary: In Romans 3:1-2, the Jews, because of their acquaintance with Scripture, are said to have a tremendous advantage over the Gentiles who (according to the preceding chapters) had only general revelation. Scripture, says the Apostle Paul, is sufficient “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work” [2 Tim. 3:17]. Adding to God’s word is as much an act of human presumption as subtracting from it (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18).<sup>11</sup>

Because of its lack of a *specific* and *absolute* biblical ethic outside the confines of ecclesiastical courts, Kuyper’s sphere sovereignty has been taken to its logical conclusion in his native Amsterdam, the pornography and drug capital of Europe. In time, the distinctive Christian witness was so diluted by competing worldviews that little remained of Kuyper’s influence. In Amsterdam, prostitutes parade their “wares” in shop windows for eager “clients.” Of course, this is not what Kuyper intended, but it is the logical outworking of his common-grace system: no biblical civil law. Again, his system was a plane with no wings.

### Henry Van Til’s *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*

The first place I turned after Kuyper was to Henry Van Til’s *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*. Van Til, in his discussion of Augustine, wrote:

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11. John Frame, *The Amsterdam Philosophy: A Preliminary Critique* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Harmony Press, n.d.), p. 31.

Augustine believed that peace with God precedes peace in the home, in society, and in the state. The earthly state too must be converted, transformed into a Christian state by the permeation of the kingdom of God within her, since true righteousness can only be under the rule of Christ.

Not only in the realm of ethics and politics must conversion take place . . . [but also] for knowledge and science. Apart from Christ, man's wisdom is but folly, because it begins with faith in itself and proclaims man's autonomy. The redeemed man, on the other hand, begins with faith and reason in subjection to the laws placed in this universe by God: he learns to think God's thoughts after him. All of science, fine art and technology, conventions of dress and rank, coinage, measures and the like, all of these are at the service of the redeemed man to transform them for the service of his God.<sup>12</sup>

Van Til believed, along with Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper,<sup>13</sup> and Klaas Schilder – Christian scholars whose predestinarian views are expounded in *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* – that the building of a Christian culture is a Christian imperative. The Reconstructionists agree. Van Til castigated the Barthians for their repudiation of a Christian culture. "For them," he wrote, "there is no single form of social, political, economic order that is more in the spirit of the Gospel than another."<sup>14</sup>

Reconstructionists today are hearing a similar refrain from both Reformed and dispensational theonomic critics. If there is no specifically *biblical* blueprint, we are left with a pluralistic blueprint (William S. Barker), no blueprint (John Muether), or a postponed blueprint (dispensationalism). When we read that "religious pluralism within a society is our Lord's intention for

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12. Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), p. 87.

13. Kuyper's emphasis on common grace as "the foundation of culture" leads one of his critics to write "that Kuyper can never really get special grace into the picture." Van Til, *Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, pp. 118, 119.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

this time in history and hence is biblical,"<sup>15</sup> one gets suspicious. First, what *biblical* justification does Barker offer? How do we *know* that it is "our Lord's intention"? Are we to assume that whatever is, is right? Could the Lord's intention change at some other "time in history"?

Second, what does this view mean for economics, law, politics, and education? Does toleration for non-Christian religious groups mean that we should also tolerate their law systems? If we tolerate the religion of Islam, must we tolerate their view of economics and civil law? Babylonian law called for the "amputation of the right hand of the physician whose patient died during surgery."<sup>16</sup> Should this law be placed on the same platter with biblical law? If not, why not?

Someone assessing the merits of theonomy should want to know how theonomy and the views of its critics compare with the Bible, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the views of the Reformers, and books like Van Til's *Calvinistic Concept of Culture*. There seems to be no room for ethical pluralism for Henry Van Til. My seminary training never hinted at pluralism. Nothing I read in Henry Van Til led me to embrace pluralism. In rejecting Barth's repudiation of a specifically Christian culture, he assured us that the

Calvinist maintains that the Word of God has final and absolute authority, and is clear and sufficient in all matters of faith and conduct. It constitutes the final reference point for man's thinking, willing, acting, loving, and hating, for his culture as well as his cultus. . . . [F]or all practical purposes, the church throughout history has accepted the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the Word of the living God. Calvinism, also in its

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15. William S. Barker, "Theonomy, Pluralism, and the Bible," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 229.

16. *Laws of Hammurabi*, 218. Quoted in Gary R. Williams, "The Purpose of Penology in the Mosaic Law and Today," *Living Ethically in the 90s*, ed. J. Kerby Anderson (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1990), p. 127.

cultural aspects, proposes to continue in this historic perspective, not willing to accept the church or the religious consciousness, or any other substitute in place of the Word.<sup>17</sup>

This is the historic position of the church, Van Til asserted. This is what I was taught in seminary. This is the view that my professors defended. But there was one problem. Even after finishing Van Til's book, I noticed a glaring deficiency: There were few specifics and even fewer references to the Bible as to how it actually applies to culture. Van Til, however, was a few steps beyond Kuyper, but the plane still had no wings. It was not going to fly.

### **H. Henry Meeter's *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism***

I next turned to H. Henry Meeter's *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*. This work looked promising even though its focus was on politics. The first edition (1939) of Meeter's work was described as "Volume I." A subsequent volume never appeared. Again, the Bible was emphasized as the standard for both Christian and non-Christian.

The Calvinist insists that the principles of God's Word are valid not only for himself but all citizens. Since God is to be owned as Sovereign by everyone, whether he so wishes or not, so also the Bible should be the determining rule for all. But especially for himself the Christian, according to the Calvinist, must in politics live by these principles.<sup>18</sup>

Since God is the Sovereign of all His creatures, He must be recognized as the lawmaker for all mankind. How does one determine what that rule is? Meeter told us that the Bible

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17. Van Til, *Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, p. 157.

18. H. Henry Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, 5th rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, [1939] 1956), pp. 99-100. A 6th edition appeared in 1990 with three chapters added by Paul A. Marshall.

should be the determining rule for all, not just for Christians and not just for settling ecclesiastical disputes. So far, so good. Meeter then moved on to answer the question as to whether the state is to be Christian.

On the negative side, he made it clear that the state is still a legitimate sphere of government even though its laws are not based on the Bible. Of course, this is not the issue in theonomy. Is the state obligated, when confronted with the truth of Scripture, to implement those laws which are specifically civil in application?

On the affirmative side, Meeter wrote: "Whenever a State is permeated with a Christian spirit and applies Christian principles in the administration of civil affairs, it is called 'Christian.' If that be what is meant by a Christian state, then all States should be Christian, according to the conscience of the Calvinist, even though many states are not Christian. If God is the one great Sovereign of the universe, it is a self-evident fact that His Word should be law to the ends of the earth."<sup>19</sup>

Meeter had moved from "Christian principles" to "His Word should be law." The goal, then, is God's *Word* as the "law." Meeter continues:

If God is Ruler, no man may ever insist that religion be a merely private matter and be divorced from any sphere of society, political or otherwise. God must rule everywhere! The State must bow to His ordinances just as well as the Church or any private individual. The Calvinist, whose fundamental principle maintains that God shall be Sovereign in all domains of life, is very insistent on having God recognized in the political realm also.<sup>20</sup>

In what way is the state to "bow to His ordinances"? Where are these ordinances found? "For matters which relate to its

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19. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.



own domain as State, it is bound to the Word of God as the Church or the individual." For Meeter, a "State is Christian" when it uses "God's Word as its guide."<sup>21</sup>

Meeter left the inquiring theonomist with additional questions: "If the Bible, then, is the ultimate criterion by which the State must be guided in determining which laws it must administer, the question arises, with how much of the Bible must the State concern itself?"<sup>22</sup> He told us that "Civil law relates to outward conduct."<sup>23</sup> The inquiring theonomist is looking for specifics, a methodology to determine which laws do apply to the civil sphere. What "outward conduct" should the State regulate? Sodomy and adultery are certainly "outward conduct." (This is the legal issue of "victimless crimes.")

Like Kuyper and Henry Van Til before him, Meeter, who asserts that the Bible "is the ultimate criterion by which the State must be guided in determining which laws it must administer" never set forth a biblical methodology. In fact, he never quoted one passage of Scripture to defend his position, although there are vague references to biblical ideals! Reading Meeter was like reading an unfinished novel. The plane still had no wings.

### **The Calvinistic Action Committee's *God-Centered Living***

I next moved to a symposium produced by the Calvinistic Action Committee: *God-Centered Living*. *God-Centered Living* began with this noble goal: "This book seeks to be of help to those who desire to know what the will of God is for the practical guidance of their lives in the complex relations and situations of our modern day." The Committee encouraged the reader with its intent not simply to "theorize," describing its method as "a call to action" based on the "clarification and

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21. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

application of basic Christian principles. There will be no solution for our pressing modern social problems without recourse to the verities of the Word of God."<sup>24</sup>

Finally, I thought, a plane with wings! This volume was more comprehensive than those mentioned above, touching on the task of the church for the solution of modern problems, Calvinism and the missionary enterprise, evangelization of America, education, art, recreation and amusements, political action, economics, business, social problems, and international relations.

### *The Need for a Biblical Worldview*

Calvinism was set off from Christianity in general precisely because of its advocacy of a comprehensive *biblical* worldview. Quoting Francis R. Beattie, Calvinism was described as "the richest systematic expression of revealed truth yet made, . . . the richest product of Protestantism."<sup>25</sup> What does this greater consistency imply? "It means greater Biblical consistency, being more genuinely and more deeply and more richly true to the teaching of the Word of God."<sup>26</sup> Quoting Warfield:

He who believes in God without reserve, and is determined that God shall be God to him in all intellectual, moral, spiritual, throughout all his individual, social, religious relations – is, by the force of that strictest of all logic which presides over the outworking of principles into thought and life, by the very necessity of the case, a Calvinist.<sup>27</sup>

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24. Calvinistic Action Committee, *God-Centered Living or Calvinism in Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1951), p. 5.

25. Francis R. Beattie, *Calvinism and Modern Thought* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1901), pp. 13, 14. Quoted by Clarence Bouma, "The Relevance of Calvinism for Today," *God-Centered Living*, p. 14.

26. Bouma, "The Relevance of Calvinism for Today," *God-Centered Living*, p. 14.

27. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 354-55. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 15.

Similar to the appeals by Kuyper, Henry R. Van Til, and Meeter, the authors of the symposium believed that the comprehensive nature of the applicability of the Bible was unique to Calvinism. This included the applicability of God's law. "In Reformed church worship the law is an integral part of the sacred program. Many Fundamentalist fellow-Christians seem to know the law in only one relation, viz., that of sin and redemption. . . . The Heidelberg Catechism<sup>28</sup> recognizes the significance of the law both as a teacher of sin and as a norm for the Christian's life of gratitude, and it gives an exposition of that law precisely in the latter context."<sup>29</sup>

The Presbyterian dispensationalist, Donald Grey Barnhouse, had no such high view of the law. He considered it to be a "tragic hour when the Reformation churches wrote the Ten Commandments into their creeds and catechisms and sought to bring Gentile believers into bondage to Jewish law, which was never intended either for the Gentile nations or for the church."<sup>30</sup> In following the debate over Christian Reconstruction, a number of Reformed brethren seem to be more comfortable with the dispensationalism of Barnhouse than the high view of the law of the Reformed confessions and catechisms. It is time for Calvinists to abandon dispensationalism.

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28. On the Forty-First Sabbath, question 108 of the Heidelberg is read:

*Ques. 108. What doth the seventh command teach us?*

*Ans.* That all uncleanness is accursed of God, and that, therefore, we must, with all our hearts, detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock, or in single life.

Under the "Explanation and Proof" various texts are added, including Leviticus 20:10: "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."

29. Bouma, "The Relevance of Calvinism for Today," *God-Centered Living*, p. 20.

30. Quoted in S. Lewis Johnson, "The Paralysis of Legalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 120 (April/June 1963), p. 109.

There was no such depreciation in the writings of the Calvinistic Action Committee. The comprehensive biblical worldview of Calvinism includes an "ethical task." Bouma wrote:

This calls for a Christian witness in every realm of life. A witness in the home, in the church, in the school, in the state, and in every other social sphere. Calvinists have always been deeply aware of an ethical task. To them gospel preaching and social reform are not mutually exclusive, whatever Fundamentalists on the one hand and Modernists on the other, may have made of them. To live for the glory of God in every relationship of life, to be a soldier for the King, to battle for the Lord, to crown Christ King in every legitimate realm of human endeavor – this belongs to the very essence of being a true, full-orbed Christian, and it is the Calvinist – the true Calvinist, not his caricature – who stands committed to this task. It is to the exposition of this ethical task for our day that this book would strive to make a contribution.<sup>31</sup>

So, then, to be a full-orbed Calvinist is to demonstrate the ethical demands of soteriology. The Calvinist preacher must preach the law of God in clear tones from the pulpit. Where fundamentalism and modernism have failed, Calvinism must not fail. With the devaluing of God's law among fundamentalists, evangelicals, and some in the Reformed camp we can expect a reevaluation of a supposed worthy substitute. "There has been a tendency among evangelicals to give too much credit to the redeemed conscience, as though the conscience itself contained the standard of righteousness. It has been forgotten that the conscience needs to be guided by the inflexible standard of God's law. . . . Failure to preach the law of God has left the Christian without a clear sense of direction in his Christian life. For many this has permitted a too easy conscience with respect to the need of Christianizing his life and influence."<sup>32</sup>

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31. Bouma, "The Relevance of Calvinism for Today," *God-Centered Living*, p. 20.

32. Peter Van Tuinen, "The Task of the Church for the Solution of Modern

*The Need for a Biblical Ethical Standard*

Where is this "inflexible standard" to be found? Is it a "New-Testament-only" ethic? "From Moses and the prophets to Christ and the epistles, the law is expounded in such a way as to require that the Christian influence society for righteousness and the glory of God. The Christian witness is a life whose thinking and action has been brought into conformity with the will of God, as well as an oral declaration of the way of salvation in Christ."<sup>33</sup>

Notice the indictment on those who "give too much credit to the redeemed conscience." Some "inflexible standard" is necessary to keep even the *redeemed* conscience in check. This would also include the redeemed conscience's ability to discern ethical requirements in general revelation. And what about those who give too much credit to the *unredeemed* conscience? This is the latest trend in ethical pluralism. Supposedly "'the law written on our hearts' (Romans 2:15)<sup>34</sup>. . . is the law by which all candid people know that murder is wrong, for example. It is the law by which our consciences, if they are not too cauterized by sin, judge us."<sup>35</sup> There are "candid" abortionists who daily support the murder of innocent preborn babies. There are "candid" sodomites who practice "degrading passions, . . . men with men committing indecent acts. . ." (Rom. 1:27).

Of course, theonomy has little quarrel with those who maintain that general revelation convicts the unregenerate of sin. This, however, is not the issue in the debate over theonomy. What should the convicted sinner *do* once he recognizes that he has transgressed "the ordinance of God" (Rom. 1:32)? This is

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Problems," *God-Centered Living*, pp. 43-44.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

34. While it might not seem to make that much difference to some, Romans 2:15 actually says, "in that they show the *work* of the Law written in *their* hearts."

35. Thomas C. Atwood, "Through a Glass Darkly: Is the Christian Right Overconfident It Knows God's Will?," *Policy Review* (Fall 1990), p. 49.

the theonomic question. The theonomists have asked, ever since Rushdoony's first book was published: By what standard?

Does the Bible have a *clear* standard of ethical behavior that should be followed by sinners everywhere? Why the need to go to general revelation if the Bible already gives an answer? When you lead someone to Christ, do you point him to general revelation or special revelation? What book did you use for daily devotions this morning? What law have you adopted for the governance of your family? What principles should govern your mind as you enter the voting booth?

Westminster Seminary graduate Kenneth A. Myers has gone so far as to argue that "there is a biblical mandate for *not* attempting to solve all cultural problems with deductions from Scripture."<sup>36</sup> What about *some* cultural problems? The theonomist asks: Wouldn't it be legitimate to exhaust the Bible of all that it says about answers to "cultural problems" before we lay aside Scripture for the less clear statements of general revelation? He deserves a forthright answer.

My guess is that advocates of a general revelation ethic are viewing general revelation through the corrective lens of special revelation. For them general revelation is clear only because special revelation is clear. This was the point of *God-Centered Living*.

For the Calvinist law is not a matter of convenience, or of protection primarily. It is the expression of the will of God; it is based upon eternal principles of right and justice as revealed in the Scriptures, for example, in the Ten Commandments. From them man learns that theft, murder, and immorality are sins. To be sure, not all points of law and justice are directly covered in the Bible. However, the principles which govern them can readily be distilled from these eternal principles of right and justice which are expressed there. Again, government is divinely insti-

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36. Quoted in *ibid.*

tuted, and obedience to its ordinances, if they be in accord with these eternal principles, is the duty of the Christian.<sup>37</sup>

It is one thing to talk about the ethical requirements easily distilled from general revelation, but theonomists are still waiting for someone to demonstrate that this can actually be done. Theonomists often catch general revelation advocates borrowing from the theonomist's garden, similar to the way humanists borrow from the Christian's garden. But as our nation moves steadily from an ethic that most Americans recognize as being Bible-based, any ethic based on general revelation will dissipate as quickly as a morning fog vanishes at the appearing of a blazing sun.

Robert Bork, in the Preface to Herbert Schlossberg's *Idols for Destruction*, recognizes the "borrowed capital" principle.

Some few years ago friends whose judgment I greatly respect argued that religion constitutes the only reliable basis for morality and that when religion loses its hold on a society, standards of morality will gradually crumble. I objected that there were many moral people who are not at all religious; my friends replied that such people are living on the moral capital left by generations that believed there is a God and that He makes demands on us. The prospect, they said, was that the remaining moral capital would dwindle and our society become less moral. The course of society and culture has been as they predicted, which certainly does not prove their point but does provide evidence for it.<sup>38</sup>

General revelation operates only when it is constantly checked and balanced by special revelation.

Does the Mosaic law, beyond the general requirements of the Ten Commandments, play a role in the Calvinist's ethical

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37. Heyns, "Calvinism and Social Problems," *God-Centered Living*, p. 236.

38. Robert H. Bork, "Preface" in Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, [1983] 1990), p. xvi.

worldview? While there is no explicit defense of theonomic ethics in *God-Centered Living*, there is nothing that would preclude the reader from viewing the Mosaic legislation as a viable and necessary standard for modern-day civil instruction. Civil governments can derive their role as guardians of public health "from the sanitary regulations given the Israelites."<sup>39</sup>

*God-Centered Living* almost produced a plane with wings. But like Kuyper, Henry Van Til, and Meeter, the symposium was little more than versions of Howard Hughes' "Spruce Goose": a few seconds of flight and then back to the hangar. There was a great deal of discussion about applying the Bible to every area of life, but only a few glimpses as to how this might be done. The Christian community would soon put their faith in a pilot named Francis A. Schaeffer.

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39. Heyns, "Calvinism and Social Problems," *God-Centered Living*, p. 242.



## FEAR OF FLYING: CLIPPING THEONOMY'S WINGS

*Gary DeMar*

There is no doubt that Francis A. Schaeffer broadened the appeal of the reformed faith with his popular writing style and activist worldview. Schaeffer's popularity was extensive enough that he was recognized by the secular media as the "Guru of Fundamentalism."<sup>1</sup> Schaeffer filled the intellectual gap that resided in much of fundamentalism. In a sense, he carried on the tradition of his early mentor, J. Gresham Machen.

Prior to 1968, little was known of Francis Schaeffer. He had isolated himself from American evangelicalism by ministering to the roaming discards of society who were trekking through Europe hoping to find answers to life's most perplexing problems. The publication of *The God Who Is There* and *Escape from Reason* introduced him to an American evangelicalism in crisis. Schaeffer had an impact where many Christian scholars had made only a few inroads to the hearts and minds of a disenfranchised and impotent Christendom. What did Schaeffer do that was different? Certainly Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy*

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1. Kenneth L. Woodward, "The Guru of Fundamentalism," *Newsweek* (Nov. 1, 1982), p. 88.

*Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*<sup>2</sup> made an impact. It was, however, more of a statement than a system of belief with worked-out implications. Schaeffer worked at integration. His desire was to be more than just a critic of culture. This is why he asked the ethical question, "How should we then live?"

### Schaeffer's View of Christian Philosophy

First, Schaeffer began at the presuppositional level. Although no credit is given to Cornelius Van Til, the Vantillian method is evident in the first chapter of Schaeffer's first published book. In *The God Who Is There*, Schaeffer introduced his readers to the importance of presuppositions in rectifying the shift from antithesis to relativism in modern thought.

It was indeed unfortunate that our Christian "thinkers," in the time before the shift took place and the chasm was fixed, did not teach and preach with a clear grasp of presuppositions. Had they done this, they would not have been taken by surprise, and they could have helped young people to face their difficulties. The really foolish thing is that even now, years after the shift is complete, many Christians still do not know what is happening. And this is because they are still not being taught the importance of thinking in terms of presuppositions, especially concerning the truth.<sup>3</sup>

Second, with the fuselage of a cryptic Calvinism on the runway, Schaeffer began to design wings to get the long overdue plane off the ground and to its destination: Comprehensive lordship. In the 1981 preface to *A Christian Manifesto*, Schaeffer explained his methodology. He began with "the Lordship of Christ over all of life – philosophy, theology and the church, art, music, literature, films, and culture in general. The books

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2. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947, p. 14.

3. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (1968) in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 5 vols. (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1982), 1:7.

that followed dealt with and extended areas of Christ's total Lordship in all of life. . . ."<sup>4</sup> In this, Schaeffer worked in the shadow of Kuiper.

Third, late in his career, Schaeffer saw extended implications to the worldview he put in motion in his early works. He expanded the areas over which He believed Jesus is Lord with the publication of *How Should We Then Live, Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, and *A Christian Manifesto*. "That led to the demand of the next logical step: What is the Christian's relationship to government, law, and civil disobedience?"<sup>5</sup>

It was here that Schaeffer saw where his initial flight plan was about to take him: Christian Reconstruction. A reading of *A Christian Manifesto* alerts the reader that Schaeffer moved from being a critic of culture, his main contribution to worldview Calvinism, to advocating civil disobedience. The missing link was Reconstruction. To advocate civil disobedience was an admission that no constructive alternative to the humanistic system existed except the one advocated by Christian Reconstructionists. Schaeffer wanted his readers to understand that he in no way wanted what Reconstructionists were offering.<sup>6</sup> His earlier works influenced many future Reconstructionists because of his insistence that the whole Bible was applicable to the whole of life, the law of God included.

### Schaeffer's View of God's Law

While he refused to discuss the *particulars* of the law of God as the "base" for authority, he knew something had to be done to confront a bold humanistic law system. Schaeffer turned to Samuel Rutherford's doctrine of Christian resistance while ignoring Rutherford's *biblical* approach to the application of the

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4. Schaeffer, "Preface" (1981), *A Christian Manifesto* (1981), *Complete Works*, V:417.

5. *Ibid.*

6. See Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 165-220.

whole law to contemporary society, including, but not limited to, the civil magistrate.<sup>7</sup> The appeal to Rutherford came early in Schaeffer's writing.

Schaeffer rightly decried a *de facto* sociological law – “law based only on what the majority of society thinks is in its best interests at a given moment” – but offered no worked-out worldview to counter and replace it. He wrote about a “Christian consensus” and how that consensus is found in the Bible, but he did not inform us of its biblical content as it relates to a comprehensive biblical worldview in the *particulars*.<sup>8</sup>

There are times, however, when Schaeffer closely resembled a Reconstructionist. This is best demonstrated in his repeated references to Paul Robert's painting *Justice Instructing the Judges*.

Down in the foreground of the large mural the artist depicts many sorts of litigation – the wife against the husband, the architect against the builder, and so on. How are the judges going to judge between them? This is the way we judge in a Reformation country, says Paul Robert. He has portrayed Justice pointing with her sword to a book upon which are the words, “The Law of God.” For Reformation man there was a basis for law. Modern man has not only thrown away Christian theology; he has

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7. Richard Flinn, “Samuel Rutherford and Puritan Political Theory,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Symposium on Puritanism and Law, ed. Gary North (Winter 1978-79), pp. 49-74.

8. Schaeffer was more comfortable with historical and logical argumentation than with biblical exposition. Consider how he argues against abortion:

Schaeffer claims to base his arguments against abortion on both logical and moral grounds, but it is interesting that he accentuates the logical side. *In fact, he never appeals specifically to Scripture to buttress his position.* The major logical argument employed involves the impossibility of saying when a developing fetus becomes viable (able to live outside the womb), for smaller and smaller premature infants are being saved. Since the eventual possibilities for viability are staggering, “The logical approach is to go back to the sperm and the egg.” Dennis P. Hollinger, “Schaeffer on Ethics,” *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer*, edited by Ronald W. Ruegsegger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Academie, 1986), p. 250. Emphasis added.

thrown away the possibility of what our forefathers had as a basis for morality and law.<sup>9</sup>

This emphasis on the law continued to play a part in Schaeffer's worldview theology. "In Reformation countries," Schaeffer wrote, "the Old Testament civil law has been the basis of our civil law." Of course, he quickly reminded his readers that "we are not a theocracy,<sup>10</sup> it is true; nevertheless, when Reformation Christianity provided the consensus, men naturally looked back to the civil law that God gave Israel, not to carry it out in every detail, but to see it as a pattern and a base."<sup>11</sup> (It is interesting that Schaeffer sounded like a theonomist when he was dealing with the biblical text.) Schaeffer saw the book of Joshua as "a link between the Pentateuch (the writings of Moses) and the rest of Scripture. It is crucial for understanding the unity the Pentateuch has with all that follows it, *including the New Testament*."<sup>12</sup> The following quotations show that Schaeffer was a child of the Reformation and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

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9. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (1968) in *Complete Works*, I:261-62.

10. Many people are confused over what theocracy actually means. "To the modern ear the word 'theocracy' has distinctly pejorative overtones, suggesting the rule of some oppressive priestly caste, 'government of a state by immediate Divine guidance or by officials regarded as divinely guided,' to quote a standard definition. Yet, unlike certain other systems known in antiquity, 'the "Theocracy" was not a government by priests, as opposed to kings; it was a government by God Himself, as opposed to the government by priests or kings' (Dean Arthur Stanley, *A History of the Jewish Church*, 1862). The U.S. jurist and statesman Oscar Straus, a close associate of President Theodore Roosevelt, also stressed this point in his study of American culture's indebtedness to the Hebraic concept: 'The very fact that . . . with the single exception of Eli, no priest was ever elected to the magistracy during the entire period of the Commonwealth, decidedly negatives any such interpretation' (*The Origin of the Republican Form of Government in the United States of America*, 1887)." Gabriel Sivan, *The Bible and Civilization* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1973), p. 145.

11. Schaeffer, *Joshua in the Flow of Biblical History* (1975) in *Complete Works*, II:298.

12. *Ibid.*, II:153. Emphasis added.

- “The commands of God were carried through Moses to the people in a written, propositional form. We are watching here the Scripture growing before our eyes” (II:165).
- “There is continuity of written objective authority all the way from the Pentateuch through the New Testament” (II:181).
- “God had given the people of Israel commandments which were a representation of His character, which is the eternal law of the universe” (II:247).
- “The moral law is the expression of God’s character, and we are not to set it aside when we become Christians. Our obedience to it will make a difference in what happens to us both in this present life and in the believers’ judgment in the future. So much of Jesus’ teaching emphasizes the importance of keeping the law of God!” (II:252).
- “So the command to the Church is the same as the command to God’s people in the Old Testament – proportional giving. Giving to God proportionately is not optional. God specifically commands it” (II:293).
- “On Mount Sinai God gave the moral law. ‘God spoke all these words . . .’ and then came the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). Immediately after this the civil law was given. As the race became a nation they needed a civil law; so God gave them one. The civil law for the Jews was based as much on the command of God as was the moral law” (II:294).
- “Here was real justice – a universal civil code that pertained equally to the citizen and the stranger. This justice was not rooted in the notion of a superior people, but in the character of God; therefore, it pertained to all men” (II:297).
- “Moses told how to distinguish between an intentional murder and an unwitting murder” (II:298).

● “Unlike modern man, the people of the Old Testament and of Christian communities after the Reformation did not view civil law as basically sociological. To them, it was not founded primarily on a social contract. Civil law was related to society, but not only to society. It was ultimately related to the existence and character of God. This is important. Law which comes from God can provide something fixed. Today’s sociological law is relativistic” (II:298-99).

● “The *moral* law is rooted in the fact of the existence and character of God. It has validity because God is there. ‘And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me’ (Ex. 20:1-3). The *civil* law is also based upon the reality of God’s existence; so it, too, has an absolute base. Reformation law was like this – one can think of Samuel Rutherford’s *Lex Rex* – and so was in total contrast to the post-Christian, sociological law which is developing in the Western world” (II:299).

● “Justice [in Paul Robert’s *Justice Instructing the Judges*] points to a book on which Robert has carefully lettered the phrase, *The Law of God*. This is tremendous! There was a foundation for civil law, fixed in the existence and character of God and His revelation of that character to men” (II:299).

● “On Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim . . . a choice was set before the people: ‘Obey the propositional moral absolutes of God, and you’ll receive blessing within the covenant. If you don’t, the blessing will come an end’ ” (II:314).

Schaeffer continued this theme in *How Should We Then Live?* “Paul Robert understood what the Reformation was all about in the area of law. It is the Bible which gives a base to law.”<sup>13</sup> In *A Christian Manifesto*, Schaeffer maintained that justice is based

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13. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* in *Complete Works*, V:136.

on "God's written Law, back through the New Testament to Moses' written Law; and the content and authority of that written Law is rooted back to Him who is the final reality. Thus, neither church nor state were equal to, let alone above, that Law. The base for law is not divided, and no one has the right to place anything, including king, state or church, above the content of God's Law."<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, Schaeffer left behind an unfinished legacy. He knew where the answer was, but he was unable, within the confines of his own methodology and his premillennial eschatology, to see it through. It is a shame that Schaeffer will best be remembered for his advocacy of Christian resistance and not Christian Reconstruction.

### A Common Theme

From Kuyper to Schaeffer, the same themes were stressed: (1) God is sovereign over all of life; (2) the Bible applies to every facet of society; (3) God's law is the standard for righteousness and justice for men and nations; and (4) nowhere do we find a worked out system to learn how the implications of the reformed worldview are worked out in the particulars except in the writings of Christian Reconstructionist authors.

If you have followed this odyssey from Kuyper to Schaeffer, you can see how easily it is to adopt the distinctives of Christian Reconstruction. Schaeffer, like those who proceeded him, understood where worldview Calvinism leads. He chose to skip over Reconstruction and head straight for civil disobedience. But there is no hope for a culture if resistance is its only option for change. What happens if the resisters win? What then? How should we then live? Schaeffer never told us *in the details*.

The problem remained: Who would put wings on Calvinism's world-and-life view airplane?

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14. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto in Complete Works*, V:430.



### **A Plane With Wings**

The odyssey did not stop with Schaeffer. Schaeffer asked the question of how should we then live; it was left to others in the Reformed tradition to answer it.

#### *A Pair of Calvinists*

Gary North came to the RTS campus in 1978 to address the topic of economics in an informal debate with Richard Mouw of Calvin Seminary. (He is now at Fuller Seminary.) The differences could not have been more striking. Dr. North stayed with the Bible. One thing I do remember about Dr. Mouw's address is that he said that when he gets to heaven, he will finally have time to read the works of Karl Marx. Sounds like hell to me.

One of Dr. North's messages had a singular impact on me. North was demonstrating the reformed methodology as it related to economics. His text was Isaiah 1:21-23, and the topic was "A Biblical Critique of Inflation." Keep in mind that this was the era of dollar inflation and double-digit interest rates. The economy was in "stagflation." This double economic whammy was affecting the economy with not much hope for a solution. Gold and silver prices were rising because of inflation fears. We were warned by Dr. North of what would happen if God's laws were rejected. Sure enough, the "predictions" came to pass. By 1980, silver was selling for \$50.00 per ounce while gold was selling for more than \$800.00 per ounce. Interest rates were nearing 20%. Does the Bible have anything to say about any of this? Dr. North said it does. Little was said by the faculty.

The passage in Isaiah 1 is an application of the case laws regarding just weights and measures (Lev. 19:36; Prov. 11:1; 16:11). The people and rulers alike resembled the debased silver that was being passed off as pure and the diluted wine that was being sold as uncut. Of course, under such economic conditions the poorest members of society, orphans and widows (v. 23), suffer the most. In just a few verses was found a specific

application to a contemporary issue. Here was worldview Calvinism with wings! Why wasn't this being discussed in the classroom?

It is a sign of the social and cultural impotence of contemporary Christianity that commentators interpret this verse in a so-called "spiritual" fashion. It is supposed to refer only to the souls of individual citizens. Passages such as Psalms 119:119 or Ezekiel 22:18-19 can be cited as "proof" of this thesis. The problem with this interpretation is that the prophets used known social and economic deviations in order to point out to the people their spiritual sins, a device used by Christ in many of the parables. They went from the concrete sin of the defrauder to the ethical deviation of the citizenry. If the legitimacy of the prophetic charge against the economic practice in question is denied, the impact of the critique of men's souls is thereby undercut. Verse 22 appears between concrete criticisms of specific political and social deviations, yet commentators are afraid to take verse 22 as referring to equally concrete sins. This is not the way to exegete the Bible.<sup>15</sup>

America and the world were in a crisis mode in the late 1970's. The church was nearly silent when it came to offering specific remedies to avert the crisis. There was no clear message coming from the church. The only group that really took the Bible seriously enough to make valuable social commentary were Reconstructionists like North, Rushdoony, and Bahnsen.

During his presentation, Dr. Mouw quoted a hymn that his mother had loved, he said: "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold." Dr. North referred this in his subsequent lecture. He said that as far as he was concerned, "I'd rather have Jesus *and* silver and gold." This pretty much summarized the split between the two men.

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15. Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 4.

*A Pair of Baptists*

A Baptist president who taught Sunday school was at that time sitting in the White House. There was no sure word coming from him. The Bible was a closed book when it came to evaluating (honest weights and measures again) the rightness or wrongness of certain public policies. In the name of impotent Christianity Jimmy Carter had endorsed the pro-abortion and pro-homosexual communities with, "It's not proper for Christians to impose their morality on others." What he was actually saying was, "The Bible does not apply, except in the narrow confines of the sanctuary and the Sunday school classroom." As seminary students we were told that the Bible *does* apply, but no one was showing how it could be done. For Christians, the Carter presidency was a disaster. Jeffrey St. John, a non-Christian libertarian columnist, wrote these prophetic words prior to the November election in 1976:

A Carter victory in 1976 would usher in an administration led by various liberal-to-left activist groups who have long pleaded for vast government powers over the private sector of industry and over middle-class Americans. In short, Carter appears to be leading a coalition of political and economic radicals who would go far beyond the massive expansion of the powers of the federal government Franklin Roosevelt instituted in 1933.<sup>16</sup>

The fundamentalist Christian community that had voted for Carter in 1976 felt it had been sucker-punched, again. Then entered Jerry Falwell. He was mad *at* hell, and he wasn't going to take it anymore. He became a political activist, a new role.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Jeffrey St. John, *Jimmy Carter's Betrayal of the South* (Ottawa, Illinois: Green Hill, 1976), p. 3. Quoted in Gary North, "Intellectual Schizophrenia," *Christianity and Civilization* 1, edited by James B. Jordan (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School, 1982), p. 7.

17. See Falwell's "Ministers and Marchers" (1965). Quoted in James A. Speer, *New Christian Politics* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984), pp. 19-20.

Near the end of Carter's presidency, Rev. Falwell cranked up the Moral Majority. In the beginning, his message was guided by what the Bible had to say. In an "I Love America" rally, Falwell counseled the crowd to use "theological considerations" in their choice of candidates: "If a man stands by this book [holding up a Bible], vote for him. If he doesn't, don't."<sup>18</sup> Falwell could not defend this position in terms of the generally accepted doctrine of religious pluralism and his own separatist Baptist background. In time, however, the message of the Moral Majority became dross.

- Moral Majority is a political organization and is not based on theological considerations.<sup>19</sup>
- The battle against humanism . . . is not theological; it is moral.<sup>20</sup>

The switch came for Falwell in 1980 when he "renounced his earlier vows to Christianize America."<sup>21</sup> "Theological considerations" were out, while traditional values were ushered in. Falwell admitted that "we count among us Fundamentalists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and *persons of no particular religious convictions at all who believe in the moral principles we espouse*."<sup>22</sup> This is fine for war-time strategy, but it will

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18. *Time* (October 1, 1979), p. 62.

19. Jerry Falwell, "Moral Majority Opposes Christian Republic," *Moral Majority Report* I:13 (October 15, 1980), p. 4.

20. Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1980), p. 187.

21. Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman, *Holy Terror: The Fundamentalist War on America's Freedoms in Religion, Politics and Our Private Lives* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982), p. 168.

22. Jerry Falwell, "Moral Majority: A Response to Attack on Basic Values of Millions of Americans," *Conservative Digest* 7:1 (January, 1981), p. 28. Quoted in Robert E. Webber, *The Moral Majority: Right or Wrong?* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1981), p. 39. Emphasis added by Webber.

not work after the war is over and a culture has to be rebuilt.<sup>23</sup> Fundamentalism has never developed such an agenda. With a moral rather than a biblical common denominator, the Moral Majority sounded like every other advocate touting the virtues of "morality." And these non-religious moral advocates were seen as less strident, and there was no need to repent and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Former Secretary of Education William Bennett, later to become our nation's "Drug Czar," called "for a new approach to moral education, one that gives kids a grounding in what Bennett describes as 'those values all Americans share.'"<sup>24</sup> If there is still a consensus morality, one has to ask where this consensus originated. Within America the obvious answer is biblical Christianity as shaped by the Puritans. With theological considerations gone, the Moral Majority was no longer unique. Robert E. Webber makes this observation: "Thus, what the Moral Majority espouses is a morality based on civil religion, not on the unique revelation of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ."<sup>25</sup>

### **Hath God Said? If So, Where?**

Christian Reconstructionist writers revived the older expression of world-and-life-view Calvinism and added the particulars of the Genevan and Puritan models. The revival of this particular expression of world-and-life-view Calvinism has not set well with the critics. As long as Reformed churches were preaching the general tenets of Calvinism, all was well. The historian R. H. Tawney noted in 1925: "No church has ever experienced

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23. "Solomon made use even of the Sidonians when building the temple of the Lord, but he did not give them membership on his building committee." Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), p. 317.

24. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (November 28, 1986), p. 49A.

25. Webber, *Moral Majority*, p. 39.

any great difficulty in preaching righteousness in general"; it is "righteousness in particular" that disturbs the churches.<sup>26</sup>

A good number of Reconstructionist critics are uncomfortable with Gary North's approach to Isaiah 1 because he points out that the passage describes "righteousness in particular" in areas beyond the heart, hearth, and sanctuary. Even when the Bible clearly sets forth a specific command, they seem to be more comfortable with scientific inquiry, forgetting that Van Til wrote that "Christianity claims to furnish the presuppositions without which a true scientific procedure is unintelligible."<sup>27</sup> They are like children who have to touch the pretty blue flame to determine if it will really burn flesh. Their father's word isn't good enough. Is God's Word good enough? Or should the Christian find validation for the truths of Scripture in terms of a "common ground" approach? The common ground approach assumes the neutrality of facts and the interpreter of the facts. Here is an example:

Why, for example, should the United States return to the gold standard?<sup>28</sup> Because careful and prudent economic analysis suggests it will produce a healthier economy? No, [the reconstructionists tell us] because Deuteronomy 25:15 says that you shall have just weights and measures.<sup>29</sup>

Would Muether argue this way for the truth of the divinity of Christ, the reality of the resurrection, or the inspiration of

26. R. H. Tawney, "Introduction," Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usury* (London: Frank Cass, [1925] 1969), p. 114. Quoted in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics*, p. 3.

27. Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (Syllabus, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1959), p. 24.

28. For an appraisal of the gold standard, and how Muether misrepresented North's position, see Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 283-86.

29. John R. Muether, "The Theonomic Attraction," *Theonomy: A Reformed Perspective*, eds. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990), p. 255.

Scripture? Are we to turn to "prudent analysis" to prove that Christianity is true over against all other religions? Whatever happened to the "self-authentication" of Scripture, both in its general and particular pronouncements? Is this all that's left of Cornelius Van Til's legacy? With Muether's approach we are left with only a "rational probability."<sup>30</sup>

So, why send your children to a Christian school if all we need is "careful and prudent economic analysis"? Why read the Bible for anything more than "spiritual" guidance? Muether claims that the Bible is not needed for economics. In fact, he takes a swipe at "contemporary evangelicalism" in general for its "biblicist hermeneutic that depreciates the role of general revelation and insists on using the Bible as though it were a textbook for all of life."<sup>31</sup> Does he mean general revelation as a scientific investigation of God's created order so that man learns to be a better scientist, agronomist, and medical practitioner by study and experimentation?

### *General Revelation*

Henry Van Til wrote that "Man does not need special revelation for acquiring the arts of agriculture or of war, the techniques of science and art; these things are learned from nature through the inspiration of the Spirit."<sup>32</sup> No one is disputing the use of general revelation in this way. But even this type of investigation has numerous ethical implications. For example, knowledge of what works in the field of medicine still leaves doctors and legislators with, for example, decisions relating to abortion and euthanasia. An abortionist can be an expert in the way he performs an abortion. He has honed this "skill" through scientific study of the created order (general revelation). But is

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30. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 335.

31. Muether, "The Reformed Attraction," p. 254.

32. Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), p. 162.

it right and just to use this knowledge in the destruction of pre-born babies?

Dr. Jack Kevorkian has designed a "suicide machine" that is efficient, effective, and painless, three criteria to consider in the practice of modern medicine.<sup>33</sup> But is it right and just? This is the real issue. Procedures that were designed as part of the healing craft are now being used to destroy life. There is no doubt that abortionists and the new suicide "doctors" are skilled practitioners of their respective crafts.

The study of general revelation might lead some medical practitioners to conclude that since animals often abandon and kill their young, therefore *homo sapiens* are little different if they do the same. A more highly evolved species like man can do it more efficiently.

The modern-day evolutionary hypothesis rests on a study of creation. Modern scientists have made a thorough study of the created order (certainly not their designation) and have concluded that man has evolved from some type of primordial chaos. This conflicts with the Bible's clear statement that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Such a conclusion has numerous ethical implications.<sup>34</sup>

It is this *independent* study of what we call "general revelation" that leads to anti-Christian conclusions. The Christian views general revelation "through the medium of a heart regenerated by the Holy Spirit. . . . The Christian looks at all that he receives through general revelation, in the light of the Scripture. It is only through the Scripture that he can see the true relationship between God and creation, and that he can see in creation its unity and purpose." On the other hand, "the knowledge which the natural man receives from general revelation comes to him through the subjective medium of an unregener-

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33. Jack Kevorkian, *Prescription: Medicine: The Goodness of Planned Death* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991).

34. Henry M. Morris, *The Long War Against God: The History and Impact of the Creation/Evolution Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990).



ated, depraved heart.”<sup>35</sup> General revelation without the guidance of special revelation can lead to disastrous results.

A classic example of the claim that knowledge of God and His will is gained from general revelation is found in the ideology of Nazi Germany. Hitler's National Socialist propagandists appealed to the revelation of God in reason, conscience, and the orders of Creation as justification for the Nazi state theology or cultural religion. Biblical revelation in Old and New Testaments was regarded by the Third Reich as a “Jewish swindle” and thus was set aside in favor of the Nazi natural theology. The Göttingen theologians Friedrich Gogarten and Emanuel Hirsch, by postulating the primacy of conscience and the flow of history as the chief modalities of revelation, provided theoretical justification for the Nazi ideology, which later wreaked havoc in Europe and beyond. A majority within the state church (known as the “German Christians”) unwittingly or otherwise embraced the new national religion, founded not on the Word of God but on the divine will allegedly embedded in the natural order. Emerging from this fatal exchange came a semi-Christian natural religion (some would say a new paganism) in which the church became a servile instrument of Nazi policy.<sup>36</sup>

The debate is not over how much one side depreciates the use of general revelation. Rather, the issue is over *what ethical standard will be used to evaluate the conclusions formulated from a study of general revelation*. General revelation takes on a life of its own as a nation steadily depreciates God's inscripturated Word as the revelational norm for all issues relating to faith (redemption) and practice (ethics). This situation results in using contemporary ideologies to build an interpretive framework so that general revelation can become specific. This means that general

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35. William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 71.

36. Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1982), p. 15.

revelation will be interpreted in different ways depending on what ideology is in vogue. A prevailing atheistic regime will interpret general revelation one way, while a New Age humanist will put another slant on it. In each case, the church's prophetic ministry is depreciated.

It is amazing to read critics of theonomy who maintain that general revelation is depreciated by theonomists. As an independent ethical system, yes.<sup>37</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith clearly states that the "whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" (I,vi).

Of course, there are a number of things that are not "expressly set down in Scripture," but these too "are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, *according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed*" (I,vi). But "just weights and measures" is "expressly set down in Scripture" as Muether admits (Deut. 25:15). Then how can he square his view with the Confession *and* the Bible? He can't, and he doesn't. This would bother me if I were assessing the legitimacy of the theonomic position in terms of what the critics say about it.

Are we to argue the pro-life/anti-abortion position in the same way? Anti-Reconstructionist Meredith G. Kline<sup>38</sup> and dispensationalist H. Wayne House<sup>39</sup> turn to precise exegetical

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37. The insights of unbelievers "are accurate because their presuppositions concerning the proper 'givens' of economic analysis are in fact the same 'givens' set forth by the Scriptures. They are correct, as Van Til says about secular philosophers, only insofar as they operate in terms of borrowed premises. But these men are to be preferred in their explanations of how an economy functions to those economists who borrow even fewer of the Bible's premises." North, *Introduction to Christian Economics*, p. xi.

38. Meredith G. Kline, "Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 1977), pp. 193-201.

39. H. Wayne House, "Marriage or Premature Birth: Additional Thoughts on

arguments found in the "Mosaic"<sup>40</sup> legislation to defend the pro-life/anti-abortion position. Nearly everyone does. John Frame, a contributor to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, remarks that "On Kline's exegesis, the statute provides a death penalty for the destruction of an unborn child, though with the possibility of redemption. He concludes that *this statute serves as a model for modern society*."<sup>41</sup> Kline, however, maintains that he can make an appeal to the Mosaic legislation, as a non-Reconstructionist, because it's a form of murder covered under the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9:6). But this is still an appeal to the Bible! Isn't this also a "biblicist hermeneutic"? Kline must find *specific* guidelines to flesh out the *general* guidelines. Muether seems to be out of step, not only with Reconstructionists and "contemporary evangelicalism," but with his own non-Reconstructionist colleagues.

### *Who Is a Theonomist?*

In simple terms a theonomist is someone who believes that the Bible applies in some way to issues beyond personal salvation. Do you believe that the Bible has some very direct instructions on how a pre-born baby ought to be treated and that civil government has a role in prohibiting abortion (Ex. 21:22-25)? If you do, then you are a Reconstructionist *in some degree*. Do you believe that the Bible is a blueprint for prison reform (Ex. 22:1-9; Eph. 4:28)? If you do, then you are a Reconstructionist *in some degree*. Read, for example, what Chuck Colson, president of Prison Fellowship, writes about prison reform.

Recently I addressed the Texas legislature. . . . I told them that the only answer to the crime problem is to take nonviolent

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Exodus 21:22-25," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41:1 (Fall 1978), 108-23.

40. Moses had very little to do with what is usually described as "Mosaic Law." As the New Testament tells us, "The law was given *through* Moses. . ." (John 1:17).

41. John M. Frame, "The One, The Many, and Theonomy," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 96.

criminals out of our prisons and make them pay back their victims with restitution. This is how we can solve the prison crowding problem.

The amazing thing was that afterwards they came up to me one after another and said things like, "That's a tremendous idea. Why hasn't anyone thought of that?" I had the privilege of saying to them, "Read Exodus 22. It is only what God said to Moses on Mount Sinai thousands of years ago."<sup>42</sup>

This is the essence of Christian Reconstruction. The Bible's laws, including, but not limited to, the case laws of the Old Testament, are applicable today, and, in Colson's words, are "the *only* answer to today's crime problem." Notice that there is no appeal to "general revelation" or "natural law." Of course, a Reconstructionist would say that these laws are an answer for our crime problem and much more, including, but not limited to economics, education, law, politics, business, ecology, journalism, and medicine.

Colson's assessment of the applicability of Mosaic legislation outside the covenant community compares favorably with how the Old Testament applies the law. The law is a model to the *nations* outside Israel's exclusive covenant community (Deut. 4:5-8). This same law has a civil application in that it is to be spoken before kings (Psa. 119:46; Mark 6:14-29). Light comes to nations that embrace God's law (Isa. 51:4).<sup>43</sup> The entire earth is said to be guilty for it has transgressed the law (Isa.

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42. Charles Colson, "The Kingdom of God and Human Kingdoms," *Transforming Our World: A Call to Action*, edited by James M. Boice (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1988), pp. 154-55.

43. The law's three functions operate within a civil context: The first use of the law involves the negative function of convicting the magistrate of his autonomy and the recognition that he is a minister under God's authority, rendering him inexcusable before God, and driving him to seek grace (Jonah 3:4-10; Romans 13:1). The second use of the law would direct the magistrate to use the law as a way of ordering civil justice (Jonah 3:8; Romans 13:4). The third use involves promoting the law, as Calvin writes, "among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns," for without a consensus the magistrate cannot rule effectively.

24:5). Before entering the promised land, Israel is warned that it will suffer the same judgment of the Canaanites who were indicted for breaking God's law (Lev. 18:24-27; Deut. 12:29-31). All the wicked are condemned for their transgression of the law (Psa. 119:118-119; Rom. 3:19).

What standard did God use to judge these nations? The prophets brought an indictment against the slave trade (Amos 1:6; cp. Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7), witchcraft (Nah. 3:4; cp. Ex. 22:18), loan pledge abuse (Hab. 2:6; cp. Ex. 22:25-27; Deut. 24:6), and other biblical-specific prohibitions.

### Conclusion

In the 1970's there was not much to read on the topic of theonomy. *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* and *The Institutes of Biblical Law* were the two main sources espousing the distinctives of theonomic ethics. But now, with nearly 100 published books and a thousand newsletters, the critics are in something of a dilemma. If people were not willing to read 1,200 pages fifteen years ago, what do we think will happen when these same people are confronted with "tens of thousands of pages"?<sup>44</sup> Some brave soul might attempt the task and work through the material. But the vast majority will believe the assessments of critics passed down second-hand and then third-hand. This is unfortunate.

My guess is that numerous Reformed Christians, who have not studied the issue, will assume that theonomy has been answered by *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* without ever reading it or the many published Reconstructionist works. They will think: "It is a large book" – by non-Reconstructionist standards – "with footnotes, so it must have done the job." When the topic comes up for discussion, critics of Reconstruction will point to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* and declare, "Theon-

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44. Tremper Longman III, "God's Law and Mosaic Punishments Today," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 41, note 1.

omy's been answered." A similar scenario is operating with the dispensational critics of Christian Reconstruction: *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?*<sup>45</sup> This tome has become the *deus ex machina* for dispensational non-readers.

If you think I am exaggerating, then consider this. An article appeared in a well-known dispensational magazine purporting to be the first in a series of articles that would evaluate Christian Reconstruction. The article was heavily footnoted, but you had to write to the publisher if you wanted a copy of the notes. Always the inquisitive one, I of course dutifully requested a copy. All the footnotes were from *Dominion Theology*. The entire article was based on the research of one book. No original research had been done. Then I learned, in correspondence with the author, that he had been assigned the task of writing on Christian Reconstruction with reference only to *Dominion Theology*.

Until a person works through the published works of the major Reconstructionist authors, he should not speak out on the subject. I fully expect that all of our critics will do this in the future. They will back up their criticisms with citations from the primary sources of Christian Reconstruction. Furthermore, they will not exaggerate their claims. They will address their criticisms to what Reconstructionists have said or written. I am quite confident about this development.

You understand, of course, that I am a postmillennialist.

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45. H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988).

## **PART II**

# **COVENANTAL SANCTIONS**

The individual believer has a comprehensive task. His is the task of exterminating evil from the whole universe. He must begin this program in himself. As a king reinstated it is his first battle to fight sin within his own heart. This will remain his first battle till his dying day. This does not mean, however, that he must not also seek to destroy evil in his fellow Christians and in his fellow men while he is engaged in destroying evil within himself. If he had to wait till he was perfect himself to seek to destroy evil within the hearts and lives of others, he would have to wait till after this life, when there will be no more evil to be destroyed. It is true that we all live in glass houses and therefore should never assume a proud attitude. It is true that we all sin again and again and that it will be necessary for us to warn our brother of his sin at one time while it will be necessary for the brother to warn us of our sin at another time. But all this does not absolve us from the sacred duty as Christians to warn one another of our sins.

We must go one step further. It is our duty not only to seek to destroy evil in ourselves and in our fellow Christians, but it is our further duty to seek to destroy evil in all our fellow men. It may be, humanly speaking, hopeless in some instances that we should succeed in bringing them to Christ. This does not absolve us, however, from seeking to restrain their sins to some extent for this life. We must be active first of all in the field of special grace, but we also have a task to perform with respect to the destruction of evil in the field of common grace.

Cornelius Van Til (1958)\*

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\*Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, Vol. III of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1958] 1980), pp. 86-87.



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO PART II

*For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For **he is the minister of God** to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for **he is the minister of God**, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for **they are God's ministers**, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour (Rom. 13:1-7; emphasis added).*

*Christ has not given the sword but the keys to those who are charged with authority in his name.*

Edmund P. Clowney (1961)<sup>1</sup>

Vern Poythress has titled his book on biblical law, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*. I think *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* would have been more accurately titled, *The Shadow of*

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1. Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 81.

*Clowney in the Pluralism of Westminster.* On the key question of the keys and the sword – ecclesiastical sanctions and civil sanctions – which is the central issue dividing theonomy's confession from Westminster's confession, Clowney's assertion underlies most of the faculty's contributions. His authority on the question of authority is authoritative for Westminster.<sup>2</sup>

### The Coherence of Covenant Theology

There are five points in the biblical covenant model: the absolute sovereignty of God (transcendence), the representative nature of God's authority (hierarchy), the revealed law of God (ethics), the sanctions of God (oath), and the progress of God's kingdom in history (succession).<sup>3</sup> Westminster Seminary's faculty defends the sovereignty of God; Westminster is a Calvinist institution. The theonomists have no debate with them on this point. (To the degree that the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is revealed in God's Genesis 1 account of a literal six-day creation, the theonomists do have a debate with the faculty of Westminster, for the theonomists are six-day creationists. Westminster has never taken an official position on six-day creationism, but Kline's "framework hypothesis" is opposed to it, and Muether's essay openly ridicules it. The editors let this pass.)<sup>4</sup>

In the four other areas of covenant theology, we oppose the world-and-life view of those members of the faculty who deny: (1) the ministerial authority of the civil magistrate (Rom. 13:1-7); (2) the authority of biblical law over any concept of natural law; (3) the legitimacy of biblically specified civil sanctions in defense of God's law; and (4) postmillennialism. This means a majority of the contributors to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

2. Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 1; pp. 138-46.

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

4. John R. Muether, "The Theonomic Attraction," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 254.

The debate over God's law is intense, but it is not merely a debate over the meaning and applicability of God's Mosaic laws in New Covenant history: the issue of ethics (point three of the biblical covenant model). It is equally a debate over the legitimate enforcement of these laws (point four). The authors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* again and again reject the theonomists' assertion that the specified civil sanctions of God's Old Covenant law are still authoritative in the New Covenant era, unless specifically annulled, case by case, in the New Testament. This seminary's position is defended by Dennis Johnson, whose essay is dealt with here by Bahnsen and Gentry. The essence of this position is that Jesus is High Priest *in history* (church sanctions), but not King of kings *in history* (no civil sanctions). His ascension secured the former office, but not the latter.

### The Question of Civil Hierarchy

The judicial issue involves more than the content of God's Bible-revealed law and the legitimacy of its biblically revealed sanctions. The judicial issue that underlies the question of civil sanctions in the New Covenant era is this: the legitimacy of the civil magistrate in bearing the sword in the name of Jesus Christ (point two). Edmund Clowney in 1961 made it clear that any such assertion by the state or in the name of the state is illegitimate. Jesus Christ supposedly transferred only the *keys* – the authority of the church to excommunicate its members – to “those who are charged with authority in his name.” No other officers (including heads of families) are identified by Clowney as lawful bearers of Christ's covenantal authority in time and on earth. He reiterated this theology – a theology of a unitary (i.e., Unitarian) civil covenant – in a 1979 essay on the kingdom of God and politics in the *Westminster Theological Journal*.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Edmund P. Clowney, “The Politics of the Kingdom,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (1979). For a critique of his views, see North, *Westminster's Confession*, pp. 138-46.

The issue is therefore hierarchy. Specifically, it is civil hierarchy. Here is the question: Does the civil magistrate represent Jesus Christ as an anointed agent of the kingdom of God in history? If the civil government can never legitimately become the bearer of the sword in the name of the Trinitarian God of the Bible, then civil government cannot properly be regarded as a covenantal institution, i.e., an institution created by a biblically legitimate *self-maledictory oath* under the Trinitarian God of the Bible. Civil government supposedly cannot possess covenantal status in history equal to church government and (maybe) family government. This was self-consciously and openly Clowney's opinion during his tenure as president of Westminster Seminary. The majority of the contributors to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* agree with Clowney regarding civil government.

#### *Anabaptism for Predestinarians*

By relegating the sword to non-covenantal status, Clowney necessarily became a defender of the political philosophy of Anabaptist Roger Williams, who articulated his civil pluralism in the 1640's after he had fled forty miles south of Boston, out of the jurisdiction of the theocratic republic of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Clowney's view of the sword is the traditional Anabaptist view of civil authority, or at least the view of the post-1535 (Münster), non-revolutionary Anabaptist tradition. It can also be described as the Lutheran view. This position is known as *dualism*: one law (revealed in the Bible by the Holy Spirit) for Christians in family and church, and another law (revealed in nature to neutral reason) for all men in the civil realm. This was never the Calvinist view in those historical instances when Calvinists were in a position to lay down the law: in Calvin's Geneva, Knox's Scotland, Cromwell's England, and Winthrop's Boston. Clowney's view has become Westminster Seminary's view. Civil Anabaptism has triumphed in Calvinist circles.

If the state in the New Covenant era is not legitimately bound by an explicit oath under the Trinitarian God of the

Bible, then there are (at most) only two lawful institutional covenants: church and family. Such a condition would render illegitimate Calvinism's original ideal of Christendom. *If the third leg of Christendom's institutional stool is removed, Christendom becomes impossible.* This is the explicit assertion of all political pluralists. The issue, then, is *theocracy*: God's covenantal rule in the three covenantal institutions. The pluralists argue that the third covenantal institution of the Old Covenant has lost its covenantal status under the New Covenant. They need to demonstrate this exegetically. This is what Dennis Johnson attempts to do, which is why his essay is the most important one in the Westminster volume. He defends explicitly what the others merely assume.

If civil government is not under God as a covenantal institution, and therefore not under Bible-specified boundaries of authority, then the state possesses the monopoly of violence – the sword – as an agency of compulsory salvation, a dispenser of positive sanctions that are financed by compulsory taxation. The view of the state as an agency with the authority to coerce some of those under its jurisdiction, so that the state's officers can dispense benefits to those under their jurisdiction (or outside it: foreign aid), is the view promoted by Timothy Keller in the name of Edmund Clowney.<sup>6</sup> The theonomists' point is this: there is no biblical warrant for transferring such monopolistic authority and actual power as the sword necessarily involves – the right to impose violence – to any institution that is not publicly under the direct sanctions of God. To impose physical sanctions lawfully, an institution of compulsion must be under God's sanctions, i.e., it must be an *oath-bound* institution.

The issue is authority: *under* God's authority and *over* men. The issue is therefore also civil sanctions: imposed in the name of God. If the state refuses to act as a mediating covenantal

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6. Keller, "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. On Clowney's connection, see *ibid.*, p. 283n. For my response, see North, *Westminster's Confession*, pp. 270-80.

agent, imposing God's negative sanctions in lieu of God's using domestic covenant-breakers or covenant-breaking nations to impose His negative sanctions, then the state is either abdicating its lawful authority or, more likely, acting as the agent of another covenant: Satan's. This is the two-fold issue – judicial representation and judicial sanctions – that the contributors to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* chose to ignore.

Here is the theonomists' assertion: *the character of the sanctions necessarily reflects the nature of the authority*. If the sanctions are not explicitly biblical, then the authority is in need of reform. That is to say, the authority needs to be reconstructed in terms of biblical law, which includes specified sanctions. This was the Puritan ideal in 1640-60: reforming society (not just the church) in terms of the whole Bible. The rejection of this ideal in England led to the acceptance in the name of Christianity of political pluralism and the higher criticism of the Bible.<sup>7</sup> Westminster Seminary has openly accepted the first of these two concessions. The question is: How long can it resist the second?

The Calvinist social ideal is the ideal of Christendom. It is necessarily theocratic. The political pluralist rejects this ideal. He necessarily rejects Christendom when he rejects theocracy. This is what the debate over theonomy is all about.<sup>8</sup> The faculty of Westminster Seminary has now publicly rejected the ideal of Christendom in the name (somehow) of John Calvin. The theonomists continue to defend it. Westminster Seminary has joined the Lutherans, the Anabaptists, and the dispensationalists on the question of Christendom. If he were alive today, would Calvin regard Westminster's confession as a legitimate extension of his theology? We do not need to speculate. Calvin expressed his views clearly. The Westminster faculty doesn't.

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7. On this second point, see the monumental historical study by Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible in the Modern World* (London: S.P.C.K., [1980] 1984).

8. Gary DeMar, *The Debate over Christian Reconstruction* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988).

### Conclusion

In this section, Bahnsen replies, first, to the entire Westminster faculty with respect to the issue of political pluralism – the broader theological issue – and second, to Dennis Johnson's essay on the question of civil sanctions in the New Covenant era. Gentry also presents a pair of point-by-point responses to Johnson. His first essay is more than a response to Johnson, however; it is a refutation of the idea of the state as a non-covenantal agency in the New Testament era. Gentry makes it very clear: covenant-breakers cannot escape God's judgment in history. The question is: *Who should administer God's judgments in history against those who violate His covenant law?* Should it be a covenant-keeping civil magistrate, or a covenant-breaking civil magistrate, or some covenant-breaking military invader? Or will God bring His sanctions directly, as He did against Ananias and Saphira? The eschatological issue then becomes relevant: Will there be a restoration of biblical civil justice after God's judgments in history are imposed? That is, are Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:4-6; 32; and 65:17-25 still covenantally operative today? If not, why not? (Gentry deals with eschatology in Part III.)

In 1973, Bahnsen's Th.M. thesis asserted continuity between the Old Covenant civil magistrate's authority and the New Covenant civil magistrate's authority. His thesis committee accepted it and awarded him the degree. This has been one bone of contention between Bahnsen and certain members of the faculty (as well as certain members of the Board) ever since. The faculty waited 17 years to respond to Bahnsen in print, but respond they did. In this, they became Clowney's representative mouthpieces, whether they admit this or not – and several do.

By asserting a discontinuity between the authority of the civil magistrate in the Old Covenant and the authority of the civil magistrate in the New Covenant, Dennis Johnson (who was a theonomist until just before Westminster hired him)<sup>9</sup> and his

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9. Cf. Dennis Johnson, "Evolution and Modern Literature," *Journal of Christian*

colleagues have defended the ideal of a law-order other than the Bible's which is *legitimately* enforced by civil magistrates who do not affirm the biblical covenant. Whatever civil oath men and magistrates take, the faculty insists, must not be to the Trinitarian God of the covenant. Also, magistrates must enforce this rival law-order by sanctions other than those specified by the Bible. In short, as the New Covenant era unfolds, *covenant-breakers must progressively put covenant-keepers under their feet*. The footstool imagery of Psalm 110 and I Corinthians 15:24-28 is reversed. In Westminster Seminary's theological framework, it is Satan who, through his human covenantal agents, exercises dominion progressively as history moves toward its completion. This perspective on the future is completely consistent with the amillennial eschatology of the Westminster faculty.

As you read this section, keep in mind Gentry's concluding remarks to Chapter 7: "As with so many who assail the theonomic option, we are left wondering *what is the nature of justice?* What is the standard by which we may judge civil law? May we even seek civil justice in the present age, since it is only at the coming of King Jesus that we may ever expect a perfect disclosure of it? It is a tragedy of much contra-theonomic argumentation that even if the arguments were valid, the Christian would be left without *any* biblically rooted civil directives regarding civil justice" (p. 192).

This, in a nutshell, is what the debate has been about ever since Presbyterian & Reformed published Rushdoony's *By What Standard?* in 1959, over three decades ago. Theonomists keep asking: *What is the judicial character and content of civil justice?* It would be both useful and revealing if our published critics would respond directly *and in detail* to this question someday. They need to remember this rule: "You can't beat something specific with nothing in particular."

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*Reconstruction*, I (Summer 1974). He spoke there of "the application of Christ's victory in the life of the people of God and at his return in glory" (p. 156).



## WESTMINSTER SEMINARY ON PLURALISM

*Greg L. Bahnsen*

### *A Generation That Knew Not Machen*

The founder of Westminster Seminary, J. Gresham Machen, maintained definite political convictions and pursued a visible involvement in social affairs based upon his theological understanding of the nature of Christianity, the believer's role in the world, and the authority of God's law. An enlightening as well as encouraging revelation of Dr. Machen's viewpoint is afforded in a collection of essays which are as relevant today as they were over fifty years ago: *Education, Christianity, and the State*.<sup>1</sup>

The essays display Machen's belief that in the nature of the case Christianity must undertake to transform all of human culture and that only the Christian ethic, based on the majesty of God's law, could arrest the decline of Western civilization. The essays show us Machen's insistence on a limited role for the state defined by the Christian scriptures, his conviction that society must be founded upon the law of God, and Machen's

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1. J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State*, edited by John W. Robbins (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1987).

confidence to take his distinctively Christian, socio-political position even before the Congress of the United States.

Machen's perspective and involvement provide a dismaying contrast to the overall thrust of a recent volume of essays on theonomic ethics and politics by the present faculty of Westminster Seminary.<sup>2</sup> Quite contrary to the spirit of Machen, the book gives distressing indications of a move away from a transformational socio-political posture among the Westminster writers – a move toward socio-political ambiguity and uncertainty, a shift toward political pluralism, and a tendency to decry any Christian involvement in politics which might even hint at triumphalism. In this essay we will consider and respond to the Westminster volume regarding the issues of political pluralism and triumphalism. Before doing so, however, let us pause to hear the voice of Westminster from many years ago.

In looking about him at Western civilization, Dr. Machen longed for a rediscovery of the law of God:

At the present time, the existence of law is being denied. Men no longer believe that there is such a thing as a law of God; and naturally they do not believe that there is such a thing as sin. Thoughtful men, who are not Christians, are aware of the problem that this stupendous change in human thinking presents to the modern world. Now that men no longer believe that there is a law of God, now that men no longer believe in obligatory morality, now that the moral law has been abandoned, what is to be put in its place, in order that an ordinarily decent human life may be preserved upon the earth? It cannot be said that the answers proposed for that question are as satisfactory as the way in which the question itself is put. It is impossible to keep back the raging seas of human passion with the flimsy mud embankments of an appeal either to self interest, or to what Walter

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2. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, edited by William S. Barker & W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990).

Lippmann calls "disinterestedness." Those raging seas can only be checked by the solid masonry of the law of God.

Men are wondering today what is wrong with the world. They are conscious of the fact that they are standing over some terrible abyss. Awful ebullitions rise from that abyss. We have lost altogether the sense of security of our Western civilization. Men are wondering what is wrong.

It is perfectly clear what is wrong. The law of God has been torn up, as though it were a scrap of paper, and the inevitable result is appearing with ever greater clearness. When will the law be re-discovered?<sup>3</sup>

Machen championed the view that society must recognize and be founded upon the directions of God's law:

Surely the only truly patriotic thing to teach the child is that there is one majestic moral law to which our own country and all the countries of the world are subject. . . . There will have to be recourse again, despite the props afforded by the materialistic paternalism of the modern State, to the stern, solid masonry of the law of God. An authority which is man-made can never secure the reverence of man; society can endure only if it is founded upon the rock of God's commands.<sup>4</sup>

Machen encouraged his listeners to make the world subject to God, to seek the total transformation of all areas of life according to the teaching of the Christian scriptures:

Instead of obliterating the distinction between the Kingdom and the world, or on the other hand withdrawing from the world into a sort of modernized intellectual monasticism, let us go forth joyfully, enthusiastically to make the world subject to God. . . .

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3. "The Importance of Christian Scholarship" (1932), *Education*, pp. 41-42.

4. "Reforming the Government Schools" (1925), *ibid.*, pp. 62, 63.

The field of Christianity is the world. The Christian cannot be satisfied so long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of all connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but also all of human thought. The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any branch of earnest human endeavor. . . . The Kingdom must be advanced not merely extensively, but also intensively. The Church must seek to conquer not merely every man for Christ, but also the whole of man. . . .

We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root. . . . What is today a matter of academic speculation begins tomorrow to move armies and pull down empires. . . . The Church has no right to be so absorbed in helping the individual that she forgets the world. . . .

Is it not far easier to be an earnest Christian if you confine your attention to the Bible and do not risk being led astray by the thought of the world? We answer, of course it is *easier*. . . . just as it is easier to be a good soldier in comfortable winter quarters than it is on the field of battle. You save your own soul – but the Lord's enemies remain in possession of the field.<sup>5</sup>

Machen proceeded to call this the “task of transforming” all human thought “until it becomes subservient to the gospel.” Machen did not exclude political thinking and policies from such subservience. He could not be satisfied as long as *any* human activity was opposed to Christianity. The Lord's enemies must not remain in possession of the field, but rather the whole world and the whole man must be made subject to God speaking in His Word. There can be no neutrality anywhere: “He that is not with us is against us. Modern culture is a mighty

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5. “Christianity and Culture” (1913), *ibid.*, pp. 49-50, 51, 52.

force. It is either subservient to the gospel or else it is the deadliest enemy of the gospel.”<sup>6</sup> Machen found the moral standard which governed all men in all areas of life in the law of God: “It is perfectly true that the law of God is over all. There is not one law of God for the Christian and another law of God for the non-Christian.”<sup>7</sup>

It was only natural, therefore, that Machen pointedly applied with confidence his Christian understanding of the state to the culture in which he lived. He opposed with all his heart, not only the notion of a religiously neutral state (pluralism), but the notion of a large and intrusive state:

The Christian school is important for the maintenance of American liberty.

We are witnessing in our day a world-wide attack upon the fundamental principles of civil and religious freedom. In some countries, such as Italy, the attack has been blatant and unashamed; Mussolini despises democracy and does not mind saying so. A similar despotism now prevails in Germany; and in Russia freedom is being crushed out by what is perhaps the most complete and systematic tyranny that the world has ever seen.

But exactly the same tendency that is manifested in extreme form in those countries, is also being manifested, more slowly but none the less surely, in America. It has been given an enormous impetus first by the war and now by the economic depression; but aside from these external stimuli it had its roots in a fundamental deterioration of the American people. . . .

The result of this decadence in the American people is seen in the rapid growth of a centralized bureaucracy which is the thing against which the Constitution of the United States was most clearly intended to guard.

And where was this tyrannical violation of civil freedom and decadence-caused growth of central government most obvious

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6. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

7. “The Necessity of the Christian School” (1934), *ibid.*, p. 77.

to Machen? "The technique of tyranny has been enormously improved in our day. . . . A monopolistic system of education controlled by the State is far more efficient in crushing our liberty than the cruder weapons of fire and sword. Against this monopoly of education by the State the Christian school brings a salutary protest."<sup>8</sup>

Machen also found the wretched intrusion of the state into areas not authorized by God displayed in the "child-labor amendment," "over-regulated cities," the system of National Parks, federal police surveillance and fingerprinting, managed currency (unbacked dollars), as well as the advocacy of a Federal Department of Education (calling this a "vicious proposal"). Machen declared that "if liberty is not maintained with regard to education, there is no use trying to maintain it in any other sphere. If you give the bureaucrats the children, you might as well give them everything else."<sup>9</sup> Machen insisted upon certain basic rights of individuals and families which must never be trampled under foot for any supposed advantage or in any emergency (e.g., property, privacy, speech). He insisted upon judicial restraint, states' rights (versus federal intrusion), and a free market.<sup>10</sup>

Machen openly opposed socialist conceptions of the state and explicitly taught that "the Christian idea, which is also the truly American idea, [is] that the State exists for the repression of evil-doers and the protection of individual liberty."<sup>11</sup> According to him, the civil government is "not intended to produce blessedness or happiness but intended to prevent blessedness or happiness from being interfered with by wicked men."<sup>12</sup> And Machen would have the state find its standards for dealing with wicked men in the law of God.

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8. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67, 68.

9. "Shall We Have a Federal Department of Education?" (1926), *ibid.*, p. 98.

10. "The Christian School the Hope of America" (1934), *ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

What do we find in this present-day America, in which the achievements of centuries are so rapidly being lost and in which that liberty which our fathers won at such cost is being thrown away recklessly by one mad generation? I think the really significant thing that we find is that America has turned away from God. In the political and social discussions of the day, God's law has ceased to be regarded as a factor that deserves to be reckoned with at all. . . .

A nation that tramples thus upon the law of God, that tramples upon the basic principles of integrity, is headed for destruction unless it repents in time. . . . The real reason why young men fall into crime is that the law of God is so generally disobeyed. . . . The real evil is the ruthless disregard of the law of God [by both individuals and states].<sup>13</sup>

As we can see, Machen was not vague and tentative in his political ethic based upon the word and law of God. He thundered against "soul-killing collectivism," against "the modern paternalistic State," against the ideal of being "under government tutelage from the cradle to the grave,"<sup>14</sup> against the state disregarding enforcement of the law of God, and against the "evil" of government schools. So confident was he that he took his testimony right into the highest reaches of civil government, speaking before House and Senate committees of the United States Congress.<sup>15</sup>

If we were to judge from the recently published book by the faculty of Westminster Seminary, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, we would say that the spirit of Machen with respect to socio-political ethics has largely departed. Confident application of the law of God to the state is no longer enthusiastically endorsed or pursued. No one speaks with the stature of Machen (understandably enough), but no one seems to speak for the

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13. *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 140, 141.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 133-35. Machen wrote: "From this dreary goose-step there will be no escape."

15. "Proposed Department of Education" (1926), *ibid.*, pp. 99-123.

outlook and attitude of Machen any more either. The faculty now displays a pervasive political agnosticism, a leaning toward a religiously pluralist notion of the state, and an over-reactionary fear of "triumphalist" Christian involvement in socio-political affairs. To these aspects of the Westminster volume let us turn an analytical eye and concerned heart. The initial question that needs an answer is this:

### **Can Pluralism Be Defended Biblically?**

The discrepancy between the distinctive political outlook of Machen and the tendency of the present faculty at Westminster Seminary presented itself to me quite vividly at a Consultation on Christ and Civil Government (the third such consultation) held at Geneva College in 1989. To this gathering I had presented a paper applying the theonomic view of the civil government to such matters as governmental prejudice for Christian socio-political standards, the proper functions and limits of the state, abortion, Operation Rescue, and government schools. The person chosen to respond to my paper from the pluralist school of thought was Dr. Will Barker, one of the editors of the (then forthcoming) Westminster book, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. It was startling enough that a Westminster professor would advocate political pluralism, but Barker also promoted the notion – so repugnant to Machen – that political rulers have a proper concern for "the general welfare" of their people, by which Barker meant that it is legitimate for the state to supply certain economic and educational needs of its citizens! The horrible irony is this: on Barker's pluralist conception of the state, the state may not *preserve* the true religion (by enforcing the first table of the law), but it may compel Christians (through taxation) to pay for the support of humanism and the *undermining* of the Christian message promoted by the government schools!



In the Westminster volume which he edited, Barker undertakes to present a *biblical* defense of political pluralism,<sup>16</sup> and this makes his work especially worthy of analytical scrutiny. Much of what Barker advocates in his paper is set forth as though it conflicts with a theonomic understanding of the civil magistrate, when in fact there are large areas of agreement which Barker overlooked, apparently due to misconceptions about theonomic ethics.

Barker says "If we are indeed zealous for the application of God's law in society, our first question must be, what is our King's intention?" He answers: "his intention is for the civil authority to apply God's law in the area of human relations in which God has ordained him to serve." Given Barker's conception of how this application would take place, it is inappropriate for the state to propagate God's saving truth or promote personal faith. "Civil authority" should not be used "to enforce the true religion" or "enforce the true faith and worship," for instance by "destroying" other religions than Christianity. The state may not "in any way coerce belief or worship," nor is it responsible "to exterminate false religion." We must, rather, "protect the liberty of conscience and belief of unbelievers under a Christian government." "It is not Caesar's to enforce the true religion." Accordingly, there ought not to be an "established church." We should "oppose the requirement of prayer or acts of worship in the public schools." The true religion ought not to be supported by taxation, and taxes ought to be paid even when the government follows a blasphemous religion. Victory for King Jesus "comes not through civil governments, but through his witnesses."<sup>17</sup>

Theonomists agree heartily with beliefs such as these, and I have promoted such viewpoints zealously in my public lectures *because* I believe that they are required by a proper reading of

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16. "Theonomy, Pluralism, and the Bible," *Theonomy*, ch. 10.

17. Barker, pp. 230, 232, 233, 236, 237, 238, 239, 241, 242.

*God's law.* Theonomists defend a biblically conceived religious toleration within the state which, just like our Reformed heritage, protects liberty of conscience for all religious perspectives and protects the practice of all denominational distinctives within the circle of Christian profession.<sup>18</sup>

It seems that Barker mistakenly expected theonomists to disagree with such views of religious liberty in the state because of his own misreading of the theonomic position. For instance, he incorrectly asserts that theonomic ethics recognizes no greater and no different distinction between church and state today than existed in Old Testament Israel.<sup>19</sup> Barker also incorrectly alleges that theonomic ethics holds that civil authorities are obligated to carry out and apply the whole law of God, all of its commandments<sup>20</sup> – an exaggeration which is patently repudiated in my writings.<sup>21</sup> Because of their advocacy of God's law as the standard (and limit) of political ethics, theonomists have a deserved reputation for advocating a *small* area of legitimate civil government. (Gary North has said that he believes that this is a major cause of the pluralists' opposition to theonomy: the law of God places too many restrictions on the state to suit them.)

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18. To belabor an obvious point, *nobody* actually advocates a completely open religious toleration without some limits (despite popular rhetoric): for example, liberty to practice human torture and sacrifice in subservience to Satan. The real question is where and how we morally ought to draw the line. Theonomists believe that this – like all other moral questions – must be answered according to biblical instruction.

19. Barker, pp. 229, 231, 232. This is quite contrary to what I explicitly say in *By This Standard* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pp. 288, 289, 330.

20. Barker, pp. 238, 239.

21. In particular this is evident in my position paper for the first consultation on Christ and civil government, found in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, edited by Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), pp. 21-53.

### No Enforcement of the First Table of the Law?

The general point of Barker's argument is that the civil magistrate should be prejudiced toward Christian values only with respect to matters pertaining to the *second* table of the law, all the while protecting the *religious* liberty of non-Christians; the state should approach these matters only through natural revelation. Barker says that according to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, the civil magistrate today is not expected nor permitted to enforce the first great commandment (viz., loving God), that is the first table of the law (viz., our duty toward God). Barker thinks that Jesus taught this view in His answer regarding the coin and taxation (Matt. 2:15-22).

As interesting as the discussion of Christ's answer to His critics is, Barker's line of reasoning really does not demonstrate what he set out to show. In this passage Jesus taught that it is indeed lawful for political subjects to give tribute-money to Caesar (cf. v. 17). To infer from that premise that it is, then, unlawful for Caesar himself to give tribute to God (enforcing the civil aspects of the first table of God's law) is an enormous *non-sequitur*.

Barker attempts to squeeze that conclusion out of Jesus' answer by pointing to the distinction which Jesus draws between the things belonging to Caesar and the things belonging to God. However that distinction in itself was nothing new – certainly not a new divine revelation of a truth which was unknown or inoperative in the Old Testament (e.g., Jehoshaphat's distinction between "Jehovah's matters" and "the king's matters," 2 Chron. 19:11) – and everyone is aware that in the Old Testament, where that distinction was taken into account, *the king was indeed obligated* to show tribute to God by enforcing the civil provisions of the first table of God's law. Consequently, Christ's reminder of that distinction cannot *in itself* have the *logical* force of revoking such an obligation. Barker's reasoning does not deduce anything from the text, but rather reads it into the text from outside.

To make his thesis plausible, Barker would also need to offer a convincing explanation of why in the Old Testament era Gentile, *non*-theocratic magistrates were held accountable to the first table of the law (or first great commandment in its civil applications), but they are no longer required to do so in the New Testament. After all, the king of Babylon was indicted (even by the dead kings over the other nations) for daring to rule in such a way that he was guilty of idolatry and despising his duty toward Jehovah (Isaiah 14). Darius decreed that throughout his empire all men "must fear and reverence the God of Daniel, for He is the living God and endures forever" (Dan. 6:25-26). Why would non-theocratic kings *today* be under any *less* a responsibility than the Old Testament kings of Babylon and Persia?

We find the *New Testament* also holding unbelieving civil magistrates responsible to honor and act in terms of the first table of the decalogue. When Herod arrogantly acted in defiance of the first commandment, permitting and receiving the crowd's acclamation of himself as divine, God clearly displayed His own holy jealousy and displeasure by striking Herod dead of worms on the spot (Acts 12:21-23). Likewise Paul condemned the civil ruler known as "the man of sin" because he dares to conduct his office in violation of the first table of decalogue, "setting himself forth as God" (2 Thes. 2:4). When Barker argues that civil magistrates ought to honor the second table of the law, but not the first table today, the distinction which his thesis advocates simply does not comport with the text of Scripture.

There are other difficulties in Barker's reasoning as well. For instance, the thesis that today's civil magistrates ought not to enforce the first great commandment really proves far too much since it would imply that the civil magistrate should not enforce *any* of God's commandments. Why is this? Because in terms of biblical teaching (reflected in numerous Reformed works of theology) part of my duty *toward God* (thus part of

what it means to love God) includes obedience to those laws regulating relations with *other men*; that is, the second great commandment is built into the first great commandment. Scripture persuasively declares that loving God *entails* loving my fellow man (e.g., 1 John 3:17; 4:8, 19; James 3:9-10). Hence the line of reasoning in Barker's essay implicitly rules out the magistrate enforcing laws which pertain to showing love to our fellow men (by protecting them from theft, rape, slander, abortion, sexual deviance, etc.) *as well as* to God Himself.

### **Can Pluralism Be Rescued from Secularizing or Deifying the State?**

It would seem that Barker's approach could be rescued at this point only by resorting to some version of the sacred/secular distinction – for instance, by holding that the “secular” applications of loving-God-by-loving-my-fellow-man are to be followed by the civil magistrate, but not the “sacred” applications of loving-God-by-loving-my-fellow-man. We should all be well aware of the conceptual and theological quicksand Barker would be stepping into if he moved in that direction. To avoid it, he should instead move in the direction of the theonomic position which delineates the kind of love (toward God and/or man) which the magistrate *should* and *should not* enforce by the objective, written revelation of God's law.

Unfortunately, though, that option is not available to Barker since he contends that it is *natural revelation* that should be the standard for civil laws. But this conviction is freighted with self-contradiction and/or a conspicuous theological lapse regarding natural and special revelation. This is evident when we remember that natural revelation *includes* the moral obligations contained in the *first* table of the decalogue (our duty toward God), just as much as it contains those of the second table. Paul taught that natural revelation condemned the pagan world for failing to glorify God properly and for idolatrously worshipping and serving the creature instead (Rom. 1:21, 23, 25). It would

seem that, by exempting the civil magistrate from the civil demands of the first table of the law and obliging him to follow natural revelation instead, Barker has contradicted himself.

The fact is that *all* of the Mosaic laws (in their moral demands, in distinction from their redemptive provisions) are reflected in general revelation; to put it another way, the moral obligations communicated through both means of divine communication are *identical* (Rom. 1:18-21, 25, 32; 2:14-15; 3:9, 19-20, 23). Scripture never suggests that God has *two sets* of ethical standards or two moral codes, the one (for Gentiles) being an abridgement of the other (for Jews). Rather, He has one set of commandments which are communicated to men in *two ways*: through Scripture and through nature (Ps. 19, cf. vv. 2-3 with 8-9). Accordingly, the Gentile nations (and rulers) are repeatedly condemned in Scripture for transgressing the moral standards which we find revealed in the law of Moses – and not simply the summary commands of the decalogue, but their case-law applications and details as well (e.g., Mk. 6:18).<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Barker's preference for natural revelation *over* special revelation in civil matters involves a faulty conception of

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22. Numerous examples come to mind (as if they were really necessary to substantiate the fact that Jehovah's moral demands are not culturally relative):

Gen. 19:5-9, 15; 2 Peter 2:6, 8-9 with Lev. 18:22; 20:13.

Lev. 18:6-28.

Amos 1:6 with Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7.

Amos 1:13 with Ex. 21:22-23; Deut. 21:23.

Nahum 3:4 with Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:21; 20:6, 27.

Hab. 2:18-19 with Ex. 20:4-6; Lev. 19:4; 26:1; Deut. 4:16; 27:15.

Hab. 2:6 with Ex. 22:25-27; Deut. 24:6, 10-13.

The Old Testament prophets applied the very same standards of political ethics to pagan nations (Hab. 2:12) as they did to Israel (Mic. 3:10), and their prophetic condemnations for disobedience to God were applied to pagan cultures as a whole, *including* the sins of Gentile kings and princes (e.g., Isa. 14:4-20; 19:1, 13-14, 22; 30:33). By contrast, Ezra the scribe praised God for inspiring the pagan Emperor to establish magistrates beyond Israel who would punish criminals according to the law of God (Ezra 7:25-26). Barker simply ignores this biblical evidence against his theories, without a word of response.

natural revelation. It also assumes a mistaken view of the relation between natural and special revelation, overlooking the need for special revelation to *interpret and correct* our perception and understanding of natural revelation. The last thing we need in politics is the possibility of a Hitlerian perception of nature or "nature's laws" which cannot be checked by Scripture!

Finally, there is a conspicuous inconsistency inherent in Barker's modified pluralism. The position that there should be no special political dependence or preference shown to the distinctives of any one religion proves to be logically impossible. Barker illustrates this when his paper addresses the problem of explaining how the state, on a pluralist basis, can be *prevented* from *deifying* itself (e.g., going the direction of Hitler). His answer is that the state should "recognize" its subordinate place in relation to "the things of God" – and that state officials should "bring a Christian understanding" to their tasks.<sup>23</sup> But Barker cannot have his cake and eat it too! There are legal positivists, naturalists, secularists, and atheists who would not for a moment tolerate Barker's *Christian understanding* (or dogma) that "the things of God" limit the prerogatives of the state ("the things of Caesar"). They are not about to have such a "Christian understanding" intrude into the governing of the secular state. If Barker *calls for* bringing the Christian conception of a "higher law" to bear upon the state (to keep it from deifying itself), he *cannot* with logical consistency *also* argue that the state should *not* operate on any distinctively Christian understanding of its duties, limits or prerogatives over against the convictions of naturalists, positivists, etc. You see, honest pluralism logically precludes any distinctively Christian conception of the state.

Barker's interpretation and application of the taxation pericope in Matthew 22 does not, then, provide any good reason or

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23. Barker, pp. 240, 241.

biblical basis for us to depart from the theonomic view that the civil magistrate ought to be prejudiced in favor of Christianity in the exercise of his public office by enforcing the relevant portions of God's law. The words of Jesus prior to His ascension in Matthew 22 should not be pitted against the divine pledge of Psalm 2 that, following upon the exaltation of God's Son, all the kings and judges of the earth would be required to serve Jehovah with reverence and kiss the Son.

### **Transformationalism, Triumphalism, and Theonomy**

Theonomists have a heartfelt desire to pursue the goal of persuading the kings and judges of the earth to submit to God's Son and to serve Jehovah by obeying His revealed law; they wish to see politics *transformed* by the gospel just like every other area of life. A number of authors who contributed to the Westminster book, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* have seen in this – unfairly, I think – the danger of *triumphalism* in theology.

Whether they are postmillennialists or not, theonomists of all eschatological convictions would confess that the ultimate social state “wherein righteousness dwells” lies beyond the present age of history – and even beyond the mixed state of the millennium – in the consummated “new heavens and earth” (2 Pet. 2:13; cf. Rev. 21:1-22:5). Theonomists are not deceived about the continuing effects of sin and unbelief in the world prior to Christ's return. They do not promote the idea of a perfect world or society, even under the present Spiritual power of the gospel.<sup>24</sup> Christ's present kingdom is the world, in which there shall always be a mixture of wheat and tares (Matt. 13:36-43). The “sons of the evil One” and all “things causing iniquity” will not be removed until “the end of the world.” Until that time, our aim is to let the light of Jesus Christ and His Word dispel

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24. John Muether's concern over the possibility that we might seek “the premature consummation of the kingdom of God in this world” is unwarranted, inflammatory rhetoric: “The Theonomic Attraction,” *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 257.



as much as possible the darkness of our rebellious world, preaching the good news of salvation and persuading men to submit to the commandments of the Lord. Indeed, it is precisely a "lawful use" of God's law to let its standard restrain and punish the criminal activities of men in society (1 Tim. 1:8-10), while we all await the return of the Lord from heaven in flaming fire upon all who practice lawlessness (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 14-15).

In the mean time, Christ does not expect His followers to prefer more darkness to less, but to reform their societies as much as possible in anticipation of the world which is coming. It seems that this theonomic attitude should be endorsed by adherents of each of the millennial views, not simply postmillennialists. The *moral* requirement to seek a civil government which honors the just requirements of God is not diminished in the slightest even if the postmillennial confidence that this kind of government will one day prevail in the world proves unwarranted by Scripture.

In particular I feel that the article by Dr. Richard Gaffin in the Westminster volume<sup>25</sup> unfairly portrays the theonomic position as forgetting the theology of the cross and – in "triumphalist" notes of progress or victory – obscures or removes the constitutive dimension of suffering from the present triumph of the church. Is there anything at all in the tenets of theonomic ethics which would require it to obscure the suffering of the individual believer or the church in this age? The answer is quite simply no. The question is not whether the people of God shall suffer in this age (even when the ruling powers are more favorable to a biblical perspective). The questions are rather these: (1) according to the Bible, do our inevitable sufferings issue in *greater or lesser* manifestation of Christ's saving rule on earth, breaking the power of sin, and (2) should our inevitable sufferings as obedient followers of the Messiah deter us from

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25. "Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism," *ibid.*, ch. 9, pp. 210-18 (esp. 216-17).

*striving* to persuade men and societies to submit to His rule (and rules)? Scripture teaches us that our laboring is not in vain and that tribulation is not incompatible with greater manifestation of Christ's saving dominion. Scripture teaches us that persecution and hardship are no obstacles to the Great Commission that we teach the nations to obey all that Christ has commanded. I do not see how any legitimate charge of "triumphalism" can be laid at our feet for believing these *biblical* truths.

Actually, the threat of triumphalism in many forms seems to be *the unifying concern* of the recent book by the Westminster faculty. The editors offer this commentary: "Even to some sympathetic observers of theonomy the most troubling aspect of the movement, beside its application of the penal sanctions of the Old Testament judicial law, is the triumphalist tone of much of its rhetoric" (p. 193). The title of section 4 in the book is "Theonomy and Triumphalist Dangers," but the whole book is permeated with this theme. Dennis Johnson counsels the acceptance of "political powerlessness" (p. 191). The spirit of it all is captured by Bruce Waltke's plea: "May the church boast in its weakness, not in its might!" (p. 85). Of course, one must be careful not to run to the opposite extreme from triumphalism and seek a kind of spiritual and social *masochism* for the church! Where personal "boasting" is the issue, let us stick to our weaknesses. Where honoring the Lordship of our Savior is at stake, let us pray for the exercise of His might.

We should not deny that triumphalist dangers are very real. The church has sometimes experienced the threat of a triumphalist attitude in eschatology which leads some to ignore or downplay the suffering which is part of the Christian's experience and the church's history on earth. There is the threat of a triumphalist attitude in hermeneutics that leads one into thinking the interpretation and application of the Old Testament law is a simple and obvious affair, or that presumes to have all the

answers and a completely unproblematic scheme of thought.<sup>26</sup> There is the threat of a triumphalist attitude in personal relations which makes one unteachable and harsh and dogmatic. There is the threat of a triumphalist attitude in ethics which elevates concerns about social justice and politics to a higher place in our priorities than it properly has. There is the threat of a triumphalist attitude which seeks power and dominion over our fellow men, whether as teachers of Scripture or rulers of the state. Triumphalism in all these manifestations is a miserable failure in the life of any believer, whether a theonomist or a theonomic critic. It is failure to recognize the sovereignty of God, the mystery and grace of His kingdom, and the biblical exhortations to humility in following the Messiah. For that reason, the various concerns of the Westminster faculty over triumphalist dangers are well-taken.

Nevertheless, there is an anomaly about these cautions issued by the Westminster faculty. Ever since its inception during the modernist controversy, Westminster Seminary has communicated a sense of theological confidence in the teaching of God's inspired Word. There was no hesitation about triumphalism or being dogmatic when the faculty wrote in defense of Scriptural credentials against liberal detractors (*God's Infallible Word*, 1946). There was no hesitation about triumphalism or being dogmatic when the faculty wrote in defense of theological integrity against neo-orthodox detractors from the confession of faith (*Scripture and Confession*, 1973). When I was a student at the seminary we were taught caution and humility before the Word of God, but also to be bold in believing in the accessibility of its message, the necessity of applying it to all of life, and confidence in its declarations. I had professors who did not hesitate to teach and defend positions on *the most mysterious matters for*

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26. The essays by John Frame ("The One, The Many, and Theonomy") and Vern Poythress ("Effects of Interpretive Frameworks on the Application of Old Testament Law") particularly and wisely warn against this.

*human understanding* – matters pertaining to God's triune nature and sovereignty, the incarnation and hypostatic union, miracles, the wonder of regeneration, and the terror of everlasting damnation. These and other complicated, incomprehensible topics make the questions of socio-political ethics pale into simplicity by contrast. Yet Westminster professors did not keep back from declaring their views about them and presuming to go to Scripture for their support. That is what mystifies me when I now read their recent book on theonomic ethics. The mentality has certainly been reversed. Now, when it comes to socio-political use of God's Word, everything is just "too difficult."

### **Dogmatism and Agnosticism**

The book by the Westminster faculty often issues cautions about being "dogmatic" regarding the application of the Mosaic law to our modern socio-political situation. Vern Poythress concludes his article with a warning against "inordinately dogmatic" claims, having earlier claimed that faithful understanding of the application of the law requires "understanding the whole warp and woof of God's revelation" (pp. 117, 123)! He warns against "overconfidence" in our hermeneutical framework. John Frame declares that "we do not have the final solution to the relation between the testaments, and we are unlikely to find one that is utterly without difficulty" (p. 99). The editors are not pleased with the way in which theonomy is "broadcast in dogmatic tones" (p. 10). Dennis Johnson comments without approval on the "confident and straightforward" answer offered by theonomy, saying by contrast that Christians with political responsibilities can only hope for "reflections of his [God's] justice" in the minimal direction given for political governors in the relevant New Testament Word (pp. 172, 191). Clair Davis cautions theonomists against portraying the impression that their own perspectives are "the only correct ones" in the church. He reminds them of "political ambiguity" in this world (pp. 394, 395).

These exhortations should be taken to heart by theonomists. We must not assume the unteachable arrogance of the Jews (Rom. 2:17-20). Nothing can be taken for granted. We must check and recheck our answers, needing more experience in the Word of righteousness (Heb. 5:13-14). Unbending dogmatism is inappropriate. Yes, that all needs to be said and put into practice.

Yet there is *also* reason to worry that Christians (especially in our day) can be so averse to any biblical confidence and theological "dogmatism" that they will unduly hesitate to proclaim God's Word with power and conviction – with specificity and application (not just broad generalities). There is the danger that the Evil One will so intimidate us before the task of reading God's law and putting it into practice (or exploit our lingering rebellion against the commandments of God) that we will hide behind the "complexities" and present "political uncertainties" so that the task is never seriously engaged or begun – even more that it is never boldly brought to bear as the result of responsible, sanctified study.

The Evil One would love to silence the guardians of God's good news (including its moral standards). If we have a morally sick society, it would be Satan's desire to hamper the doctor from ever arriving with the needed medicine! Or if we cannot be stopped altogether, at least he might hamper us from applying the full dosage, keeping the effects of the healing Word of God confined to our private hearts and delimited church zones.

### Conclusion

My earnest admonition back to my brothers on the Westminster faculty (and everywhere) is that we not portray the task God has given us as *overly* difficult and virtually impossible to do. My admonition is against a kind of *functional agnosticism* that easily becomes the theologian's (and seminarian's) self-inflicted paralysis. Nobody who knows me and the nature of my work will mistake me for endorsing gullibility, naivete, and lack of

diligent study; God's people need to be roused to hard and responsible work in their thinking and in their use of the Bible. Nevertheless, it is so subtle and easy for us to pass on the impression to God's people that the Bible's message is too distant and difficult for them to apprehend and use.

We can forget that those who first received this Word – and were expected to understand and obey it in all aspects of their thinking and living – did not have (or apparently need) the vast sophistications of our modern scholarship (even printing presses). Praise God for intellectual advances! But we must not curse God's people by taking our scholarly apparatus and advanced insights and presenting them as formidable *walls*, rather than *tools* of more efficient *access*.

Christian scholars and especially those in seminaries can be so discouraging to the vital obedience of God's people, who are cowed into feeling "nobody knows for sure, even about what God clearly said."<sup>27</sup> When I look, for instance, at how ornate and complicated certain anti-theonomic "typologies" and redemptive-historical "arguments" are – especially at how subtle are their alleged insights or how technical one's knowledge of particular words (and word-studies) would need to be – I do not simply engage in analysis or detailed rebuttal. I also wonder whether, even if they were true, such expositions could possibly have crossed the minds or been understood by the original recipients of the Word being interpreted! Could they really have been expected to work through such a *maze* of creative connections or convoluted logic to reach a correct reading of the text and proper application of it? I really doubt it. And about that time I remember the Apostle John's thought-provoking words: "And as for you, the Anointing which you received from Him abides in you, so that you need not that anyone

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27. I do not need to be reminded that some portions of Scripture are harder to understand than others – even for an apostle like Peter (2 Pet. 3:16).

teach you; His Anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true. . . ." (1 John 2:27).

We do not want to portray the error of a dogmatic spirit in such an extreme light that people jump back into the arms of agnosticism, do we? We do not want to suggest that the task of teaching the nations everything that Christ has commanded needs to be placed on long-time hold until sufficient scholarship has been applied extensively and persuasively. We do not wish to suggest that the great commission is really *too great* to carry out. We do not want to intimidate God's people in their willingness to go out and apply those commandments (responsibly, of course) to their personal lives and cultures. So let's not *overstate* our case about its difficulty.

Finally, let me observe that it can hardly be a well-reasoned criticism of theonomic ethics that some "potentially dangerous ideas" could arise from encouraging the state to follow the holy laws of God in Scripture. We live in a fallen world where adherents of any and *every* political philosophy (including attempted biblical ones) will err in carrying out their ideals. That being the case, it only makes sense to err on the side of the angels, starting with the best (indeed, infallible) ideals available to men – the revealed laws of God! Just imagine what "potentially [nay, actually] dangerous ideas" have stemmed from *not* following God's law, but rather the human speculations found in Rousseau, Marx, Mill, Buckley, Galbraith, and many others! The world is a dangerous place – *too dangerous* for human authorities (or their theoreticians) *not* to be restrained and regulated by the justice of God's laws.

I believe that Dr. Machen would have concurred.

## WESTMINSTER SEMINARY ON PENOLOGY

*Greg L. Bahnsen*

The faculty of Westminster Seminary in the fall of 1990 entered the public dialogue over the use of God's law today by publishing sixteen essays under the title of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.<sup>1</sup> Of all the issues raised there, perhaps the most pointed and pertinent is whether Old Testament civil sanctions for criminal behavior continue to carry moral authority today. This question unearths the roots, consistency and soundness of one's theological convictions regarding Old and New Covenants, the place and function of the state, the nature of divine justice, and the validity of the Mosaic law – as well as the cogency of one's hermeneutical and logical reasoning. It is also the case that the issue of Old Testament civil penology, especially capital punishment, is the theonomic issue which is most liable to generate controversy in the lax, late twentieth century – even among those who profess to follow the Bible in their socio-political ethic.

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1. William S. Barker & W. Robert Godfrey, editors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990).



Accordingly, we will here explore the two essays in the Westminster volume which deal directly with the issue of penology: "God's Law and Mosaic Punishments Today" by Tremper Longman III,<sup>2</sup> and "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Mosaic Penal Sanctions" by Dennis E. Johnson.<sup>3</sup> The two authors approach the question in somewhat different ways and arrive at significantly different attitudes. The general attitude of Longman, anyway, seems much more positive and open than that of Johnson to the Mosaic system of civil punishments (when properly interpreted) – which sufficiently warns us against thinking there is anything like "the Westminster position" on the Old Testament penal sanctions.

### Flexibility Within the Law

In his article Longman points to the fact of cultural and redemptive-historical differences between Old Testament Israel and modern America. These are matters which theologians freely grant. Longman also examines the flexibility which was inherent within the Old Testament itself regarding the penal sanctions. This is his main point. However, this insight does not constitute a critique or even a mild conflict with the theonomic position at all. As long as we are dealing with a flexibility revealed *within* the law itself, we are dealing with the *interpretation* of the law and not the question of its *continuing validity*.

Longman shows that there was definitely some degree of flexibility and judicial discretion taught within the Old Testament law itself regarding some civil penalties – e.g., the choice between death or a ransom in the case of an ox that gores a second time (Ex. 21:28-32), the absence of a preestablished number of lashes to be imposed, apart from a maximum limit (Deut. 25:1-3). If they interpret the law accurately, theologians would teach the very same things in such cases.

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2. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, pp. 41-54.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 8, pp. 171-92.

Longman suggests that perhaps the *ius talionis* was “not mandating in every case” the penalty of death, but rather teaching the maximum penalty permitted (p. 52). I am open to that possibility in some (but not all) cases where the Mosaic law mentions the death penalty, provided it is supported with sound reasoning and competent exegesis. That has yet to be done, though.

For instance, Longman offers the opinion that Numbers 35:31-32 implies “that ransoms were a possibility for many other crimes” except murder (p. 53). The assumed premise, that only in the case of premeditated murder was the death penalty absolutely required (no ransom or substitute penalty being allowed), is not biblically accurate. “You shall not allow a sorceress to live” (Ex. 22:18) specifically forbids any punishment short of death. The next verse, “whosoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death” (22:19), uses an idiomatic Hebrew expression which communicates the *certainty* of that which was required – “dying he shall die” = “shall surely die.”

Moreover, not only is Longman’s premise false, his argumentation is fallacious. He does not show that the prohibition of taking a substitute (ransom) in the case of murder is *exceptional*, rather than the *model* for how other capital crimes should be treated in general. There are indicators in the Old Testament, after all, that the penalties prescribed by God were not supposed to be commuted. God ordered judges: “Your eye shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deut. 19:21; cf. 25:21). The book of Hebrews teaches us that those who broke relevant parts of the Mosaic law “died without compassion” upon the word of two or three witnesses (Heb. 10:28). So then, I would only say that much more argumentation and reflection is required than what Longman has offered his readers.

### **Overlap of Opinion**

What Longman has written in his article is not much of a critique of the theonomic position, but on the whole a virtual agreement with it, at least in basics. He, too, wants civic life guided by divine revelation, not autonomy and arbitrariness. He, too, thinks that "the time is ripe" for a change from the prison system to the Old Testament requirement of restitution. He writes that "the most significant contribution of theonomists, however, is simply their pointing to the Bible as crucial to the whole issue of just punishments. . . . There is deep wisdom and necessary guidance to be found in the principles of law and punishment contained in the Old Testament. . . . We can be grateful to theonomy for forcing the church to take these issues seriously" (pp. 41, 54).

Longman might believe that his differences with theonomic penology are bigger than they really are because he entertains certain misperceptions of the theonomic outlook. For instance, he repeatedly says that theonomists are loathe to admit any kind of "subjectivity" whatsoever in the process of using God's law in the punishment of criminals (pp. 42, 49, 50, 51).<sup>4</sup> He thinks theonomists are unwilling to consider "the mentally deficient" or "minors" as ineligible for having the death penalty applied to them (p. 44).<sup>5</sup> But these things are just not so.

Longman seems to think that theonomists feel the application of the Old Testament penal sanctions today is an easy and simple matter, not difficult at all – just a matter of looking up answers in a book, as it were (pp. 45, 48, 49, 50, 52). Those who know me and my teaching know better; I have never

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4. Sometimes Longman over-describes what theonomists allegedly fear as "sinful subjectivity." But of course nobody – Longman included – would welcome "sinful" subjectivity into anything the Christian does! Moreover, I certainly do *not* believe, as Longman portrays my view, that any "human subjectivity" amounts to "autonomy"!

5. For years I have taught such exceptions in carefully defined cases: e.g., incompetence due to organic brain disorders; holding parents liable for behavior which should have been governed in their young children.

considered this an uncomplicated and simple matter.<sup>6</sup> Far from being “unwilling to admit” the difficulty (as Longman paints me), I quite freely do so. What disturbs me, of course, are those who insist it is an *impossible* task to perform – or something we ought not even *try* to do. If theonomic publications sometimes give the impression that the application of the penal code is simple and clear-cut, I trust that this literary shortcoming does not, however, invalidate our arguments for the *need* to apply the law of God to the pressing issues of crime and punishment in our day. If we do not apply this, what better standard can be offered?

### A Sound Basis for Disagreement?

For the most part, then, Longman’s basic perspective is not far from that of theonomic ethics. Where he does turn to disagree with theonomic penology in a more focused or limited area, readers will certainly recognize that his argumentation becomes very weak. In fact, sometimes Longman disagrees with the theonomic view without any argumentation or proof at all.<sup>7</sup> At other times his thinking rests upon frivolous considerations – such as that theonomic penology would, *mirabile dictu*, require “a new Mishnah” (p. 50)! Can’t we just hear early church heretics “refuting” the doctrine of the Trinity by pointing to the dreadful eventuality that this doctrine will require systematic theologies which are three-volumes long!

Sometimes Longman pursues *non sequiturs* – as when he draws the conclusion that Christian legal judgments should be

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6. This is recognized by Longman’s co-author, Vern Poythress, in another article appearing in the same book: “Effects of Interpretive Frameworks on the Application of Old Testament Law” (chapter 5).

7. For example, he simply dismisses as “unsuccessful” with a wave of his hand (stroke of his pen) the detailed and exegetically based theonomic argument against the idea that Jesus departed from the Old Testament view of divorce and revoked the civil penalty for adultery (p. 53). There is no demonstration even attempted by Longman.

“guided by the principles of Scripture rather than by the explicit statements of the Old Testament” because the explicit statements sometimes involve flexibility or difficulty in interpretation (pp. 50-51). Such considerations provide no support whatsoever for *turning away* from the “explicit statements” of Scripture and *substituting* more “general” principles! (Besides, are not “general principles” *also* flexible and difficult to interpret?) The fact is that Jesus did not permit us the option of dismissing the explicit statements of Scripture – not even a jot or a tittle of the least commandment in the law (when properly interpreted of course, Matt. 5:17-19).

There are only two other, very brief theological arguments (both on p. 48) which Longman introduces into the dialogue over the penal sanctions, and they fare no better than the others, really. Longman suggests that the penal sanctions for violating God’s law regarding divine-human relations were dependent upon God’s special, holy presence in the midst of Israel. I have already thoroughly analyzed and rebutted this kind of argument elsewhere in response to Meredith Kline,<sup>8</sup> but Longman fails to interact with that discussion so as to rescue his line of reasoning. Indeed, the weaknesses in the argument from Israel’s special holiness are also exposed by two of Longman’s own co-authors in the Westminster book.<sup>9</sup> Longman does not explain why the penal sanctions regarding other kinds of sins (e.g., kidnapping, rape, even theft) are not *likewise* relativized by God’s special presence in the land of Israel, to whom He revealed His law. Longman leaves unexplained why not all sins in Israel called for capital punishment, given the same holy presence of God which allegedly required the death penalty for blasphemy, idolatry, etc. Longman does not account for the biblical declarations that the laws given Israel carried a univer-

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8. Greg L. Bahnsen, “M. G. Kline on Theonomic Politics: An Evaluation of His Reply,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VII (Winter 1979-80), pp. 195-221.

9. See John Frame, “The One, the Many, and Theonomy,” pp. 92-97, as well as Vern Poythress, “Effects of Interpretive Frameworks,” *passim*.

sal moral character, binding even on the Gentiles (e.g., Deut. 4:5-8). Longman simply leaves too many things unexplained.

In his second line of theological argumentation against theonomic penology, Longman teaches that the penal sanctions against such things as blasphemy and idolatry have now passed from Israel as a nation to the church of Christ – and moreover, that these penalties have now been changed from capital punishment to excommunication. Longman does not explain why *all* of the civil penalties of Old Testament Israel have not likewise been transferred to the New Testament church. Nor has he explained how any such penalties can really be said to be transferred, when in fact they have been completely *changed* (from physical death to spiritual excommunication). Nor has he offered any *exegetical basis* for these incautious theological overstatements in the first place. Arbitrariness and inconsistency are the two fatal flaws for any theologian.

At this point we can turn to the essay by Dr. Johnson, for in it he makes an effort to expand upon and substantiate this last line of argumentation from Longman which we have just considered.

### **The Burden of Proof**

In his article aiming to criticize the theonomic view of the Mosaic penal sanctions, Johnson realizes from the outset that he cannot hope to make his case unless he can dispose of the burden of proof which rests upon those who depart from the Old Testament law's guidance. He immediately turns to a discussion subtitled "Continuity, Discontinuity, and Burden of Proof" (pp. 172-75). This is good. Johnson, whose intelligence is indisputable, very alertly and self-consciously knows what is at stake in the debate; he addresses it right up front. Nonetheless, his discussion does not establish what he would have hoped.

Having noted that both theonomists and their critics acknowledge *both* elements of continuity and elements of disconti-

nunity between the Old Testament law and the New Covenant situation, Johnson says that there yet remains a difference between theonomists and non-theonomists: they have "differing assumptions about where the *burden of proof* lies in questions concerning the applicability of Old Testament law." The unavoidable fact is that the New Testament does not explicitly mention or comment on each Old Testament law: so, "to put it another way, theonomists and their critics interpret the *silences* of the New Testament differently." One presumes continuity, while the other presumes discontinuity. At this point Johnson's discussion, which has been as clear as water, becomes muddled.

Quite clearly, one logically logically have it both ways: assuming both continuity and discontinuity. And quite clearly, in the face of New Testament silence, one cannot refrain from using one operating, hermeneutical presumption or the other. These are objective, non-negotiable facts. Johnson's first mistake, then, is to propose that we can skip the issue of which side bears the burden of proof and simply not accept either hermeneutical presumption. He writes, "such generalized appeals to 'burden of proof' or interpretations of the New Testament's silences do not help us. . . ." However, the option of not using one or the other is not available, and we simply fool ourselves if we pretend that we have adopted it.

Johnson's second mistake is his confusing the (antecedent) operating hermeneutical rule with the (subsequent) results of specific interpretation. He says that the two general approaches to interpretation (presumed continuity, presumed discontinuity) ". . . do not help us understand the *precise character of the continuity and discontinuity* in God's revelation." Precisely! They are only rules of operation, not preconceived conclusions. Arguing that, therefore, we do not need such rules would be like complaining that because the rules of baseball do not "really help us" know anything precise about which team will win the World Series, we don't really need those baseball rules anyway!

Johnson's third mistake is in thinking that what he himself proposes to the reader is neutral on the choice between operating assumptions. He concludes: ". . . we must rest our convictions on the statements, not the silences, of the New Testament." Notice very well: the *statements*, not the *silences*. That is simply to say, where the New Testament is "silent" about an Old Testament precept, we may not assume its applicability. If the New Testament does not "state" the precise nature of some precept's continuity, then we may not conclude for its continuity. Johnson expects *New Testament restatement* (or *reinterpretation* anyway), or else silence implies *discontinuity*. Johnson's proposal is thus definitely a choice of one operating presumption (or way to handle New Testament silences) over the other – and it is, sadly, not the covenantal one.<sup>10</sup>

Now then, we must add that the choice between the hermeneutical presumption of continuity and that of discontinuity is not an abstract theological dispute which we may settle "outside of" Scripture or in terms of our "accustomed way of reading" Scripture. It is not a question, moreover, on which Scripture itself is silent. The disappointing thing about Johnson's discussion of "the burden of proof" is that he does not address the *exegetically based answer* which is readily available in the teaching of the Bible about how we should see the coming of Christ affecting the general operating question of continuity or discontinuity with the Old Testament law (Matt. 5:17-19). Where the Lord of the covenant Himself answers that question – and it was precisely that issue which He was raising (or suspected to be found among His audience) – biblical theologians are *not free*

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10. Johnson disguises this fact from himself by thinking that he is simply talking about "the character" of the continuity or discontinuity between the Testaments (pp. 175, 190) – when in actuality he has adopted a hermeneutical rule *about* continuity or discontinuity (in cases of New Testament silence). I would happily acknowledge that Dr. Johnson's veiled endorsement of the basic dispensational principle of interpretation is quite out of character with his quite commendable, health-giving and covenantal treatment of Scripture most everywhere else in his work.



to overlook the answer or adopt another one. Indeed, Jesus specifically warned those who are *teachers* that they come under His displeasure if they tell those who hear them that they may set aside *even* the *least* commandment of the Old Testament law (Matt. 5:19).

There is no exegetical stalemate or standoff here, as though non-theonomists can adduce equally strong, universal and pointed statements from Jesus (or the apostles) that every single jot and tittle – indeed even *the greatest commandment* – have been *revoked* by the advent of the Messiah and the establishment of the New Covenant. Whatever statements we find about the setting aside of the law (or particular commandments) will have to be integrated into the broader and absolutistic dictum of the Messiah Himself. Christ speaking in the Scriptures does not permit silence to revoke the law.

Notice the logic of Johnson's essay: "The question whether the penal sanctions should also instruct the state as it is charged to administer justice to persons within and without God's covenant is not explicitly addressed in the New Testament." To this *absolute silence* he adds another, *relative* silence – the fact that the New Testament less often addresses the responsibilities of political rulers (and "more often and more explicitly" those of political subjects). And *into* these silences he reads his intended conclusion, namely: "The New Testament's minimal direction to governmental officials does not support the view that the Mosaic penalties should be enforced. . ." (p. 191). If for Johnson New Testament silence (or minimal direction) "does not support" the continuing validity of the law's penalties, then his controlling hermeneutical presumption is that Old Testament precepts are discontinued unless readmitted by the Lord of the covenant – *directly contrary* to the teaching of the Lord of the covenant. At its core, Johnson's argument against theonomy is a disappointing and fallacious argument from silence.

Another note. Is Johnson really willing to be theologically *consistent* with his pattern of reasoning here? Does he sincerely

adopt the logic he sets before his readers, since he uses it elsewhere in his theological convictions? What theological conclusion does Johnson draw from the fact that infant baptism “is not explicitly addressed in the New Testament”? What does he theologially conclude from the fact that the regulative principle of worship “is not explicitly addressed in the New Testament”? Or that a specific sabbath-keeping requirement “is not explicitly addressed in the New Testament”? What theological conclusion does he draw from the fact that the prohibition of searching into the secret things of God “is not explicitly addressed in the New Testament”? or that a prohibition of bestiality “is not explicitly addressed in the New Testament”? We could continue on and on with such questions. We can also be relatively certain that Johnson (and many Reformed critics of theonomy) would *not* treat the preceding issues in the way that he has treated the question of the Mosaic penal sanctions. The appeal to silence as a tool of abrogation is *selective* and *arbitrary*. And for that reason alone it is theologically illicit.

### **The Penal Sanctions as Enforcing Holiness**

According to Johnson, the Old Testament penal sanctions served the purpose of drawing a line between God’s covenanted people and the unholy world, purging the covenant community of God-insulting and unholy sinners; and this is why those penal sanctions are applicable today *solely* to the church – in the *form* of excommunication. Johnson’s reasoning here leaves us wondering right from the outset about a lot of things:

1. Were Gentile crimes not *also* (in some way) insulting to the holiness of God?
2. Why were only *selected* forms of sin in Israel insulting to the holiness of God so as to require cutting off?

3. Why is the holiness of God *less* protected on earth after the intensification of God's presence on earth with the Incarnation, rather than more strictly or universally protected?
4. Why does one form of Old Testament "cutting off" (religious ostracizing) come over into the church today but another form of "cutting off" (execution) is abrogated?
5. How can anyone holding this view logically avoid cultural relativism in the matter of civil penology?

Johnson's line of reasoning is fairly popular today. But it all looks so arbitrary upon analysis. Let us explore key steps in his thinking.

Johnson begins on a sound enough note, observing that it is sometimes legitimate and necessary to interpret an Old Testament commandment as analogous to other commandments or types of laws (p. 176).<sup>11</sup> He then claims that "certain penal sanctions belong to categories of laws that set Israel apart from all the non-covenantal nations as a holy people, with God's temple in their midst" – which "entailed heightened responsibility to stay separate from *all* that would render a worshiper unfit to enter God's presence" (emphasis his). Three words in this statement particularly expose the erroneous nature of the reasoning employed: "certain" (indicating some, not all), "entailed" (indicating theological or conceptual necessity), and "all" (indicating universality).

Now then, what does the Bible *include* in "all that would render a worshiper unfit to enter God's presence"? In Psalm 15 David asks who may dwell in Jehovah's holy hill (v. 1), and his answer excludes (by implication) anyone who takes up a re-

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11. He chooses a good example in likening the prohibition of mixed seeds and fibers, which he reasonably treats as analogous to the prohibition of mixing clean and unclean meats. Laws of this kind pedagogically symbolized the separation ("holiness") of God's people from the world. This was what I taught in 1977 in *Theonomy*, p. 209.

proach against a neighbor, slanders, breaks promises, or lends money upon interest (vv. 3-5). In Psalm 24 David again asks who may ascend into the hill of Jehovah and stand in His holy place (v. 3) – however his concern here (which indirectly saps Johnson’s argumentation of strength) is for the holiness of God which is appropriate to *the entire world* due to God’s tabernacle on earth (vv. 3, 7-10): “The earth is Jehovah’s and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein” (v. 1). We learn that anybody on earth who has sworn deceitfully (v. 4) is rendered unfit to enter God’s presence (typified at the tabernacle).

If we ask what the Bible *includes* in “all” that would render someone unfit for God’s presence, and we think more broadly and theologically now, the answer would be *any sin of any sort at any time or place at all*. Dr. Johnson knows this. “God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). “The evil man shall not sojourn with” Jehovah (Ps. 5:4). His “eyes are too pure to look on evil” (Hab. 1:23). Therefore all who are under the curse of sin will one day be ordered “Depart from Me into the eternal fire” (Matt. 25:41) – “shut out from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:8-9). “Nothing impure will ever enter” the eternal city of God – “nor will anyone who does what is deceitful” (Rev. 21:27; cf. Psalms 15 and 24!).

Johnson has said that “certain” of Israel’s penal sanctions expressed a heightened responsibility to separate from *all* that rendered a person unfit for God’s presence. From what we have seen in Scripture, this would mean that the penal sanctions in Israel should have been enforced against *every* single kind of sin in whatever degree – including promise-breaking, slander, ungracious lending, etc. But that simply is contrary to historical and revealed fact, in which case Johnson’s explanation for the Mosaic penal code is misleading and refuted (*modus tollens*). It has proven to be arbitrary or inconsistent. It should have been the case (on Johnson’s hypothesis) that *all* sins called for the sanction of “cutting off” in Old Covenant Israel.

We should also remember that Johnson claimed the Mosaic kind of penal sanction was *necessitated* ("entailed") by the high privilege enjoyed by Israel as the covenant people of God. Johnson rightly identifies the church as the covenant people of God today. But *at this point* Johnson proceeds to contradict his own reasoning and now *denies* the necessity of that entailment – claiming that the high privilege of being the covenanted people of God no longer necessitates the penalties prescribed by Moses! (The death penalty has been put aside.) This is arbitrary and inconsistent.

Moreover, according to biblical teaching, the people of God under the New Covenant have an even greater privilege and even greater responsibility than those under the Old. The "entailed" penal sanction should then be at least, if not *more*, demanding today than it was previously.<sup>12</sup> Johnson does not explain the inconsistency in his pattern of reasoning.

Nor does he explain away the discrepancy in his claim that the "cutting off" which only the covenant community may use has passed from Old Testament Israel to the New Testament church. This is a conspicuous equivocation since the *Old Testament* cutting off is taken by Johnson to be something involving "physical force" imposed "to maintain the community's purity and integrity" – and yet the *New Testament* cutting off is taken by Johnson to be a declaration of excommunication (without physical force). The church does not carry out the *same* penal sanction as Old Testament Israel at all; it is certainly not the same in substance, on Johnson's hypothesis, but only perhaps in aim. Accordingly, when Johnson's overall theory claims that the Old Testament penal sanction has now passed over to the

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12. Those who tend to base their reasoning in creative, typological argumentation must be careful just here not to respond thoughtlessly: "Well, of course, the New Covenant sanction is more demanding because it involves eternal cutting off from God." Such an answer would relieve their logical problem at the heavy theological expense of denying that people in the Old Testament faced that same eternal judgment for their sins.

church, Johnson's own particular statements contradict that part of his overall theory (by equivocation).

There are other problems with Johnson's attempt to argue his case about the Old Testament civil penalties from analogy with the category of "sins which require cutting off" – not the least of which would be that "cutting off" does not itself appear to have denoted (even if sometimes including) a *civil* or even humanly-inflicted penalty in the first place, if we do a careful, exegetical study of the expression in Scripture.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly Johnson would lose altogether any *basis* for arguing by way of analogy from the penalty of "cutting off" to *other* kinds of civil penalties in the Mosaic code.

Johnson's proposed line of argument against the theonomic view of the Old Testament penal sanctions is thus without a reliable exegetical foundation and is internally flawed with inconsistency and arbitrariness. These systemic weaknesses, added to our original five questions, cause the argument to crumble when any weight is placed upon it.

### Appeal to 1 Corinthians 5

In his essay Johnson later observes Paul's use of the expulsion language found in some Old Testament penal passages, "Put away the wicked from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:13). Johnson notes that here excommunication is the *ecclesiastical* expression of that objective. But is this in any way contrary to what one would *expect* based upon a *theonomic* perspective on

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13. See Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 125, 241-42, 285-86. The punishment of cutting off was threatened against some sins which, by their nature, were secret and thus difficult to prosecute. God Himself is sometimes said to be the executor of the punishment, not some human agent. In at least one case cutting off is set in contrast to judicial punishment. Wenham argues that cutting off does not generally mean excommunication from the covenant community because that treatment is reserved for "uncleanness," rather than criminality. Cutting off referred to "a threat of direct punishment by God, usually in the form of premature death."

ethics, though? Not at all; it rather is exactly what the position would entail. The church – the covenant community – is unquestionably supposed to seek to remove wickedness from its midst (as the law requires), and the manner in which that is accomplished within the church is excommunication. Those observations tell us nothing of Paul's views (positively or negatively) about whether, or the way in which, the *civil state* should seek the objective of putting away evil from its midst. Johnson recognizes that it does “not necessarily” follow from this passage that excommunication has replaced the Old Testament civil sanction (p. 181), and he is correct.<sup>14</sup>

His further comment that the Old Covenant community had a political order with “authority to purge the community” through the use of capital punishment is not relevant to any argument against theonomic ethics, and even if it were, it would prove *far too much* for Johnson – namely, that *none* of the penal sanctions prescribed in the Mosaic law may be applied by modern states, since they are not the governing body of God's covenant community in the New Covenant.

Johnson's comment is *without relevance* because the Bible does *not* teach (as theonomic critics hastily surmise) that *only* in the covenant nation could it be said that civil magistrates purge the nation by rooting out the wicked one (through death or banishment). Isaiah the prophet declared explicitly that “The earth also is *defiled* [polluted] under the inhabitants thereof,” and the

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14. Johnson says that Paul's ending of his discussion with the use of the expulsion formula is “noteworthy” (and it is), but one suspects Johnson is hinting at more than note-worthiness. He somehow thinks that this evidence – if not “necessarily” proving it – inductively strengthens his view that excommunication “replaces” the Mosaic penal sanction. But it would do nothing of the kind (except offer question-begging “inductive support”) because Paul would just as readily have used this formula (indeed did) on *theonomic presuppositions*. What Paul does not say anything about here is either the “replacement” of penalties or “civil” sanctions in a more godly state – precisely the issue over which theonomists and their critics argue. The “evidence” found in 1 Corinthians 5 is simply not relevant to choosing between the competing views, and thus Johnson would clearly be arguing from silence, if he tried to rest anything on this text.

unambiguous specific cause of this defilement is “because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes” – nay, more, they have even “broken the everlasting covenant” (Isa. 24:5). When the inhabitants of Gentile nations have broken God’s statutes, even though they do not enjoy a redemptive covenant with God, they are still – on the authority of God speaking in His interpretive word – considered to be covenant-breakers who defile the earth. Do Gentile civil magistrates have divine authorization to remove such defilement through the penal sanctions of capital punishment or banishment? We are shown explicitly that they do in Ezra 7:26, where Ezra reports (and praises God) that the Persian king, Artaxerxes, decreed for “all the people beyond the river” (v. 25): “Whoever will not do the law of your God . . . let judgment be executed upon him with all diligence, whether it be unto death or banishment. . . .” It was not solely in Israel, the Bible being witness, that such penal sanctions were authorized by God to be applied to violators of His law (and polluters of the earth).

Therefore Johnson cannot show that *only* the church is to root out evil ones today, *nor* that in the Old Testament *only* Israel’s political rulers were engaged in rooting out defilement. Accordingly, he has absolutely *no basis upon which* to reason that Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 5 implies that what was solely the work of the civil magistrate in the covenant-nation of Israel has now become solely the work of the new covenant church.

### **The Appeal to Hebrews 2 and 10**

The announced platform for Dr. Johnson’s covenant-context argument against the modern state using the Mosaic penal sanctions is the book of Hebrews, particularly the allusion to the Mosaic penalties in chapters 2 and 10 (pp. 182-90). His introductory remarks about the book as a whole and the thrust of its message are uncontroversial. When he begins to focus his argument, however, there is a crucial equivocation and exegetical mistake at the first major step into his reasoning. He claims,



based on Hebrews 7:11, that the Jews were given the law “*on the basis of the Levitical priesthood*”; the priesthood of Aaron “is the very foundation of the law given through Moses to Israel” (pp. 184, 185).

An equivocation trips up Johnson’s thinking here. “The law” has been taken in one sense (the one intended by the author of Hebrews) as the *Mosaic administration* of the Old Covenant order, but in Johnson’s argument against theonomy “the law” is taken in a different sense (viz. the *moral stipulations* revealed by Moses).

The exegetical problem is that Johnson has chosen to take the Greek word *epi* (Heb. 7:11) in the sense of “upon the legal basis of.” While *epi* may take the sense of “upon the basis,” as in Hebrews 10:28, it is there used in the dative case; any importation of the specific sense of *legal* basis comes from the context (not the semantics of construction). In no instance of which I am aware in Hebrews does *epi* with the *genitive* (as we find in the Heb. 7:11) take the sense of “upon the basis.” For example, God has not spoken to us “on the [legal] basis of these last days” (Heb. 1:2), and God does not write His law “upon the [legal] basis of their hearts” (8:10)! The author of Hebrews did not believe that the moral stipulations of Moses were legally predicated upon the Aaronic priesthood – or even that the Mosaic administration of the covenant was legally grounded upon that priesthood (*whatever* legal grounding could mean in that statement). In Hebrews 7:11 he says, rather, that the law was given “in association with” (or even “at the time of”) the giving of the Aaronic priesthood; they coincided.

Once we correct the erroneous interpretation given to the preposition in Hebrews 7:11 by Johnson’s argument, it is evident that the question he poses in terms of it – “how sweeping is this change of law?” (v. 12) – is not the open door to the possibility of widescale change that he anticipates. The change of law is a change *regarding* precisely that priesthood which was instituted in association with it. The author of Hebrews himself

explicitly tells us that the change of law about which he speaks is the “the law of fleshly requirement” – that priests come from the tribe of Levi (Heb. 7:13-16).

When Johnson goes on to note, quite correctly, that there have also been changes in terms of sacrifices and cleansing available in the law, he attempts – without evidence – to tie them conceptually and/or logically to that particular “change of law” referred to in Hebrews 7:11. This alleged entailment is misleading since the “imperfection” of the Old Covenant sacrifices and cleansing is argued by the author of Hebrews on *other grounds* than the priestly prerequisite of coming from the Levitical tribe (e.g., Heb. 9:10-12; 10:1-2).

Johnson comes to the crux of his article by asking whether a change in the application of the Mosaic *penal sanctions* has “also” been introduced by the change in priesthood (pp. 185-86). It must be borne in mind that *nothing that has been said* up to this point is either logically or theologically relevant to answering that particular question. To ask whether the penal sanctions have “also” been changed is to ask, therefore, whether we have a textually grounded basis for believing such about them – as we “also” have such biblical warrant regarding the *other* changes (in priestly requirement, sacrifices, and cleansing efficacy). Johnson offers no textual proof (or anchor) for that opinion at all – not even one clear case that he then could use for an argument from analogy. Rather, his argument rests upon a misreading of the *a fortiori* logic of Hebrews 2:2 and 10:29 (pp. 186-89).

Johnson is entirely correct that these two passages in Hebrews prove (among other ways) how much more important and significant is the New Covenant order than the Old. The “greater the grace revealed in [God’s] words to his people, the greater their liability should they disregard his voice.” Precisely.<sup>15</sup> But then listen to the way in which Johnson, *without justi-*

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15. I said in *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler, Texas:

fication, narrows the premise of the *a fortiori* argument used by the author of Hebrews: "At issue is not divine justice in abstract as a model for political jurisprudence," but the Lord's expectation of a people with covenantal obligations (p. 187).<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, *that certainly is at stake*, if the author's argument is intended to be theologically and logically sound!

If in *any* of the ways God metes out punishment for transgression, He is arbitrary, harsh, lenient or *of changing attitude*, then one could indeed entertain the *possibility* that the threat of eternal condemnation for spurning so great a salvation offered in the gospel might be "escaped" (Heb. 2:3). *But* if universally valid and unchanging justice does *not characterize* even the capital crimes of the Old Covenant order, then the New Covenant (especially with its greater power or emphasis upon grace) could indeed enunciate threats which do not apply to everyone or apply for all time. Hell may be threatened, but God could change His mind (again!) about the absolute justice of His sanctions – just as He has done with the civil code (on Johnson's hypothesis).

After all, if God has not insisted upon the universal, unchanging justice of the lesser (civil penalties), how much more could we expect that He would relent upon the justice of the greater (eternal penalties)! This would be a perverse *reversal* of the very point made by the author of Hebrews. So Johnson is in error. The divine justice of *all* the penalties of the Mosaic order – civil, ecclesiastical, eschatological, or what have you – is precisely the premise upon which the author builds his argu-

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Institute for Christian Economics, 1985): "The New Covenant brings greater responsibility for *obedience*. With the giving of new light and new power in the New Covenant, the responsibility of men to obey the voice of God is increased. To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). . . . The revelation of the New Covenant is even more inescapable than that of the Old Covenant (Heb. 12:25), and to it we should give 'the more earnest heed' (Heb. 2:1-4)" (pp. 167-68).

16. Nobody is interested, of course, in any "justice in abstract" (pejorative wording). It is, however, vital (both ethically and existentially) that justice be "universal."

ment. Take it away, by suggesting that the civil penalties can be dismissed, and you simultaneously destroy the conclusion which the author builds upon that premise – from lesser (Mosaic) to greater (New Covenant).<sup>17</sup>

Johnson is obviously correct that civil governments today do not have the role of enforcing the elective, redemptive covenant of grace (p. 189). Theonomists have taught the same for years. The questions remain whether there are (non-redemptive) “covenantal” obligations resting upon the rulers of the earth, whether all punishable liturgical idolatry is a violation only of *redemptive* covenantal obligations, and whether *all* civil offenses can be somehow categorized as that kind of idolatry.<sup>18</sup> Johnson *does not even address* these necessary theological issues before jumping ahead to his conclusion. The entire earth and its inhabitants are not in elective redemptive covenant with God, and yet according to Isaiah 24:5, they break “the everlasting covenant” by violating God’s laws. All of the kings of the earth are under God’s wrath when they try to “break the bonds” with Jehovah, rather than serving Jehovah with fear and kissing His Son as King (Ps. 2:2-3, 6, 10-12). Consequently, we see that much, much more would have needed to be said and discussed

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17. Nothing more than this needs to be said about Hebrews 10:28 and Johnson’s treatment of it, at least in terms of the theonomic debate. On a subordinate point, though, I think it is entirely speculative to allege that the Old Testament allusion is *only* to the sin of apostasy. The “mouth of two or three witnesses” language is not restricted to Deuteronomy 17:6; see also Deuteronomy 19:15, which applies this prerequisite to “any sin.”

18. Johnson asserts without argument that “the justice of the Mosaic sanctions presupposed the offender’s privileged status and prior commitment as a member of the Lord’s covenant” (p. 189). But this is gratuitous and begs the entire question! Theonomists maintain that *the justice* of those sanctions does *not* presuppose privileged status, as though God has a double standard inside and outside of Israel. It is true that God revealed His universally just standards to those who enjoyed a privileged status with Him. But the Bible testifies that the standards which He revealed and entrusted to Israel were for the purpose of Israel becoming a conduit of them to the watching (and needful) world! Cf. Deut. 4:5-8; Ps. 119:46; Isa. 2:2-4; Micah 4:2-3.

by Johnson before he would begin to have constructed a successful argument for the conclusion which he wished to draw.

### A Final Fallacy

Before Johnson ends his essay, he exhorts his readers about Christian involvement in politics and engages in one last notorious fallacy: arguing from what *was* the case to what *should always be* the case.

Johnson makes note of the “politically powerless” situation of the early church and of the “minimal direction” given in the New Testament to political rulers (since believers would have had little opportunity to carry out such directions anyway) – stating that both of these things were part of God’s timing and providence. Johnson tells us “this situation is itself significant” (p. 191). Significant of what, though?

Johnson claims this situation reflects the sovereign and wise “design of his [God’s] Word, the standard for our faith and life” – remarkably shifting from the *written* word as our doctrinal and ethical standard, to the *metaphysical* word by which all events are providentially controlled. And then Johnson boldly commits the *naturalistic fallacy*, arguing from what is the case to what ought to be the case. He makes the “design of [God’s] Word” – meaning the providential design of God to reveal the New Testament to a politically powerless church – “the standard of our faith and life”!

Thus he concludes that the “New Testament’s minimal direction to governmental officials does not support the view that the Mosaic penalties should be enforced by a non-covenantal government structure. . . .” This kind of thinking is startling and disappointing. Upon reflection, Johnson would surely recognize that numerous counter-examples are available to reduce this kind of theological thinking to absurdity.<sup>19</sup> For

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19. Indeed, Johnson’s co-author, Clair Davis, offers just such a refutation in the same volume where Johnson’s essay appears. Dr. Davis writes: “. . . while this age is

instance: according to God's providential and wise design for history, the climax of redemptive revelation, "when the time had fully come," appeared when women were pervasively treated as social inferiors, no-counts, and chattel. The design of God's providential Word is the standard of our faith and life, says Johnson. *Therefore*, on Johnson's pattern of theological thinking, Christians *ought not* to work for a society in which woman are valued and treated more in accord with biblical moral standards. Women should accept the "powerlessness" in which the New Testament found them. That would be morally preposterous. Likewise, we may not accept the "politically powerless" situation of the New Testament church as a moral *deterrent* to our Christian challenge to transform all areas of life and thought, bringing them more and more into greater submission to the Lord of creation and redemption, our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

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characterized by powerful attempts to destroy the family, that has nothing to do with Christian responsibility." Davis, "A Challenge to Theonomy," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 391.

## CIVIL SANCTIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(*Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.*)

In this and the next chapter, we turn our attention to Dennis E. Johnson's thought-provoking article entitled: "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Mosaic Penal Sanctions." Two chapters are necessary here due to Johnson's approach, which is the only exegetically based treatment in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. In the first half of Johnson's article, he provides a rapid and broad survey of a number of passages that he deems detrimental to theonomic ethics. Although he does not devote much space to any of these, his cursory treatment is designed to leave the "impression" (p. 191) that theonomy is everywhere undermined by the New Testament. As I will show, each of his New Testament observations is mistaken.

In the second half of his article, having distracted the reader with his shotgun assault on theonomy, he turns to his major assault on theonomy: the specific argument from Hebrews. In Chapter 7, I will show that these arguments are as unfounded as his arguments in the preliminary section of his essay.

Theonomic ethics generally is criticized in a two-fold way: (1) by more broad-based, popularly oriented arguments and (2) by

narrowly-focused, scholarly presentations. My experience with resistance to theonomic ethics is that a superficial proof-texting is more likely to be convincing to non-theologians who are predisposed against theonomy. Hence, the potential utility of the first half of Johnson's article to the popular debate. Johnson, however, provides the best of both worlds in his article: the second portion of his analysis provides an exegetically based, seemingly focused theological treatment of theonomy for a more narrow audience of theologians. Hence, the potential significance of this portion of his article to the scholarly debate.

### **The Theoretical Issue Involved**

As we consider Johnson's arguments, we begin by noting the overriding *theoretical* issue involved in Reformed and evangelical discussion of socio-political matters. Though he never tells us how, Johnson himself notes and admits that: "Christians are bound to acknowledge the lordship of King Jesus in the political arena as in all other dimensions of life" (p. 172). Consequently, he recognizes the legitimacy of the Christian pursuit of "justice in the present age" (p. 192), *though he does not set forth any definition of "justice."*

As a Reformed Christian and an adherent to theonomic ethics, I heartily agree with these concerns – concerns which are tragically lacking in the dispensational discussion of the ethical issues. But the foundational premise of Christ's lordship over the political arena gives rise to a *practical* issue that has become a (the?) major focus of debate regarding the theonomic approach to civil justice: *criminal penology*.

Regarding a system of penology that is just, Johnson comments: "[W]e cannot simply avoid this question. Therefore we must consider *how* the Word of the Lord, which structured the social life of his people before Christ's coming, should guide our response to Jesus' lordship in our redemptive-historical and socio-political setting" (p. 172). His article sets out to examine



the New Testament use of Mosaic penal laws, as do a number of other contributors to the Westminster book.<sup>1</sup>

Other contributors to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (hereinafter: *TRC*) applaud the theonomic concern to develop a Bible-based social theory. For instance, Tremper Longman III states: "Perhaps the most significant contribution of theonomists, however, is simply their pointing to the Bible as crucial to the whole issue of just punishments. . . . We can be grateful to theonomy for forcing the church to take these issues seriously" (p. 54). Bruce Waltke writes: "We also celebrate the theonomists' efforts to give concrete expressions to the confession that Christ is Lord of all and their high regard for the written Word" (p. 79). Johnson himself early penetrates to the heart of the theonomic concern in this particular area (which, contrary to a popular perception, is *not* the only concern of theonomic ethics): "on the very issue of penology the theonomists believe that other Christians have disregarded God's law and capitulated to the modern secular ideal of toleration" (p. 171). He is correct, and we make this judgment on a firm New Testament basis. For instance, a New Testament justification of the theonomic concern for a biblical, as opposed to a secular, penology may be found in Romans 12:17-13:10 – an obvious passage that has been ignored by critics of theonomy for many years.

### The Minister of Civil Justice

In Romans, the flow of Paul's argument and the correspondence of terms employed vitally connects chapters 12 and 13 as Paul speaks to the problem of evil in society: "Repay no one evil [*kakon*] for evil [*kakou*]" (Rom. 12:17). He urges them: "Be-

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1. Besides ch. 8, see especially ch. 2 "God's Law and Mosaic Punishments Today" and pp. 75-79, 89, 117-23, 141-47, 310-12, 322-49. McCartney writes: "The theonomic controversy swirls around two practical questions, that of whether the state should enforce true religion (as the original Westminster Confession stated) and that of the applicability of the Torah's prescribed negative sanctions (punishments)." Dan G. McCartney, "The New Testament Use of the Pentateuch," *TRC*, p. 146.

loved, do not avenge [*ekdikountes*] yourselves, but rather give place to wrath [*orge*]" (Rom. 12:19a). Why does he command this? "For it is written, 'Vengeance [*ekdikesis*] is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Thus, he urges the Christian not to take the law into his own hands: "Be not overcome of evil [*kakon*]" (Rom. 12:21).<sup>2</sup> He then engages a discussion of the *God-ordained role of the civil magistrate as God's avenger*.

In Romans 13, the matter of the civil magistrate is approached prescriptively, rather than descriptively.<sup>3</sup> As such, he has been "ordained of God" (Rom. 13:2), so that "he does not bear the sword in vain. He is, in fact, *God's minister*, an avenger [*ekdikos*] to execute wrath [*orgen*] on him who practices evil [*kakon*]" (Rom. 13:4). Clearly, then, the *magistrate* is to *avenge the wrath of God against those who practice evil* (Rom. 13:4, 6).

As he continues, Paul makes express reference to the Law of God, citing four of the Ten Commandments (Rom. 13:9a) and a summary case law from Leviticus 19:18 (Rom. 13:9b). Finally, he concludes the thought regarding personal vengeance, which he began in Romans 12:17-19: "Love does no harm [*kakon*, "evil"] to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10). This involves appropriate social conduct that is incumbent upon all men, especially Christians – conduct that avoids "carousing and drunkenness" and "sexual promiscuity and sensuality" (Rom. 13:13).

His reference to God's Law<sup>4</sup> in this context is important.

2. Which, with the whole context as I am presenting it, is compatible with Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:38ff and is very much contrary to Waltke's remarkable statement in *TRC*: "Bahnsen will not concede the obvious point that in Matthew 5:38-42 Christ abrogates the principle of immediate justice; Christ will bring justice in the *parousia*" (p. 82)! Shall we await the Lord's Return before we seek criminal justice?

3. How could Paul be *describing* Roman imperial authority as an avenger of God's wrath, when Christ had earlier warned against the idolatrous assertions of Rome (Matt. 22:15-21) and was shortly thereafter illegally crucified by Rome (John 19:4, 6, 16)? See William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew (NTC)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), pp. 802-4. See also Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: The Dating of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 16.

4. Earlier he deemed this Law "established" (Rom. 3:31) and called it "holy, just,

Ultimately, God's eternal vengeance is according to His holy Law (cf. Rom. 2:3, 5-6, 12-15), which is encoded in the Mosaic Law.<sup>5</sup> But proximately and mediatorially, God's temporal "minister," the civil magistrate, must mete out the "just reward" (Heb. 2:2; cf. Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8) to those for whom the penalties of the Law were designed: evil-doers. Paul specifies this even more particularly in 1 Timothy 1:9-10: "The Law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine."<sup>6</sup> And all of this was "according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust" (1 Tim. 1:11) – not according to a *passé* example.

### The Problem Specified

The theonomic position is that God's Law is the standard for justice in all areas of life, including criminal penology (provided careful exegesis is engaged to properly assess each penal sanction). This surely could be deduced from the Romans 12-13 passage. But, of course, the point has been made – shall we say, "exhaustively" – in Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. Yet many remain unpersuaded. Johnson wrote his article to expose

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and good" (Rom. 7:12).

5. The Law of Moses is identified time and time again as the Law of Jehovah: e.g., Deut. 30:10; Josh. 24:26; 2 Kgs. 10:31; 17:13; 21:8; 1 Chron. 22:12; 2 Chron. 6:16; 31:21; Ezra 7:6, 12, 14, 21; Neh. 8:8, 18; 9:3; 10:28, 29; Ps. 78:1; 81:4; 89:30; 119:34, 77, 92, 97, 109, 174; Isa. 1:10; Jer. 6:19; 9:13; 16:11; 26:4; 31:33; 44:10; 22:26; Dan. 6:5; Hos. 4:6; 8:1.

6. A case may be made for Paul's generally following the order of the Ten Commandments, H. D. M. Spence, "I and II Timothy" in Charles John Ellicott, ed., *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 8 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. n.d.), 7:180. At the very least it may be said that "the apostle now gives a summary of the law of the Ten Commandments." William Hendriksen, *I and II Timothy and Titus: New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), p. 67.

what he regards as the error of the theonomic penological argument. He employed a New Testament analysis of the question, particularly focusing on the Epistle to the Hebrews.

As is generally urged, the basic "problem" with the theonomic position is that it fails to account for a fundamental discontinuity between the old and new covenants, a discontinuity brought about by the redemptive labor of Jesus Christ in establishing the New Covenant. Johnson notes that "What separates the two groups [i.e., theonomists and non-theonomists] seems to be largely a difference in approach to the continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New, between the old covenant order of promise and the new covenant order of fulfillment inaugurated in the Christ's death and resurrection" (p. 172). Of course, as a Reformed theologian, Johnson is sympathetic to the continuity of the covenants, as against the radical discontinuity in dispensationalism.<sup>7</sup>

Yet no evangelical holds to either a total continuity (e.g., urging an Ebionite maintenance of the ceremonial system) or a total discontinuity (e.g., urging a Marcionite theory of canon). "So the difference between theonomists and nontheonomists is not that one group sees nothing but continuity between the Mosaic order and the New Covenant, while the other sees nothing but discontinuity. *Both* groups acknowledge *both* continuity and discontinuity" (p. 173).

Then what is the problem with theonomic ethics? Johnson suggests: "And yet, there is a difference. It is a difference in

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7. "Reformed covenant theologians acknowledge an even greater degree of continuity" (p. 173). Cf. Moises Silva's statement in *TRC*: "The Reformed tradition, in contrast, has been concerned to minimize the antithetical elements, to assert the coherence of God's gracious provisions in both dispensations, and to stress the continuing validity of God's law for the Christian" (p. 154). See the admission by dispensationalist John S. Feinberg: "The more one moves in the continuity direction, the more covenantal he becomes; and the more he moves in the discontinuity direction, the more dispensational he becomes." Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1988), p. xii.

predisposition, and it shows itself in differing assumptions about where the *burden of proof* lies in questions concerning the applicability of Old Testament law. In general, theonomy argues that the burden of proof rests on any contention that a particular Mosaic stipulation does *not* apply now as it did for Israel" (pp. 173-74). That is, the debate is over "the precise character of the continuity" between the Old and New Testaments (p. 175).

### The Approach Taken

Johnson notes that the theonomic argument involves the notion that "the burden of proof rests on any contention that a particular Mosaic stipulation does *not* apply now as it did for Israel" (p. 174). That is, "Theonomy's approach views the New Testament silences as tacit *reaffirmations* of the Mosaic case law. . . . Moreover, general New Testament statements about God's justice or God's law can be assumed to include the specifics of the penal sanctions announced in the judicial laws" (p. 174).

Johnson disagrees with the theonomic viewpoint, arguing that "the burden of proof rests on all views" because "arguments from silence are notoriously subjective" (p. 175). Therefore, his general approach to the issue is in accordance with the following principle: "ultimately the New Testament must be our guide in determining how the various categories of commandments in the law of Moses function as God's authoritative Word to the postresurrection church" (p. 190). Therefore, "we will need to exegete carefully any New Testament passage in which a particular judicial law may be quoted, alluded to, or commented on" (p. 175).

His particular approach to the issue is: "Only a few specific references to the Mosaic penal sanctions are found in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> Below I will argue that among the most significant

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8. His survey covers the following: Matt. 5:21ff; 15:4 (Mark 7:10); Luke 19:8; John 7:53ff; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Heb. 2:2; 10:28 – and doubtfully Rom. 1:32 and Acts

of these are the passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews that compare and contrast the Mosaic penalties to the judgment awaiting those who repudiate the new covenant inaugurated by Christ" (pp. 177-78). When he finally arrives at his goal, he writes: "We come, then, to two sections in the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:1-4; 10:26-31) that refer explicitly to the penal sanctions of the Mosaic law, and at the same time place these sanctions in the context of a broad theological analysis of the relationship of the law to the new covenant order established with the sacrifice of Christ" (p. 182).

Before we engage his particular argument, we should note that his general statements cited above are somewhat misleading. For instance, how is it that so much controversy has circled around Bahnsen's exposition of Matthew 5:17-20, which argues for the maintenance of the Law "in exhaustive detail," when, according to Johnson, the basic theonomic argument is deemed an "argument from silence"? One of Bahnsen's chapters is even entitled "New Testament Substantiation of the Thesis," which surveys the New Testament evidence. May it be stated that Bahnsen's 600-page argument is one from "silence"? Furthermore, has not even Bahnsen himself noted that "arguing from silence is a notorious logical fallacy"?<sup>9</sup>

And too, we must remember that the burden-of-proof argument is not an argument from *silence* at all. As a matter of historical fact, God did rather noisily (Exo. 19:16, 19; 20:18-19; Heb. 12:19) give a Law and included it in the canon of Scripture. By the very nature of the case, there can only be a *divine* repealing of that Law in Scripture (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Psal. 119:160; Prov. 30:5-6; Isa. 51:6; Matt. 4:4; John 10:35; 2 Tim.

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25:11. Strangely, in *TRC* Dan McCartney's article – the poorest article in the book – states: "So far as I can determine, there are in the New Testament only two citations that make reference to civil aspects of the Law" (p. 145)! He lists two that are not found in Johnson's list: Matt. 19 and 2 Cor. 13:1!

9. Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 103.

3:16-17). But instead of repealing it, the New Testament *confirms* it (Matt. 5:17; Luke 16:17; Rom. 3:31; 1 Cor. 7:19; 9:21; 1 John 2:3-4; 5:3). This is because the Law is not contrary to the promise of God (Gal. 3:21a). In other words, *the argument that urges discontinuity in Scripture requires proof; not that which urges continuity* (cf. John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). This is what the entire book of Hebrews is about: a presentation of the case for the *discontinuance* of the ceremonial levitical ministry, i.e., "the old covenant *atonement* structures" (p. 184).

In fact, even in the New Covenant era, it is the Law of God that is written on the heart (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:8-10; 10:16). Thus, in the New Testament itself, Law obedience expresses the Golden Rule of social conduct (Matt. 7:12), defines the conduct of love (Matt. 22:40; Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:14; Jms. 2:8), promotes spirituality (Rom. 7:14; 8:3-4; Heb. 8:10), and evidences holiness, justice, and goodness (Rom. 2:13; 7:12, 16; 1 Tim. 1:8; Heb. 2:2). The Law convicts of sin (Matt. 19:16-24; John 7:19; Acts 7:53; Rom. 7:7; Jms. 2:9-11; 1 John 3:4) and restrains the sinner (1 Tim. 1:8-10), because it is the standard of God's Judgment (Rom. 2:13-15; cf. Matt. 7:23; 13:41; Jms. 2:10-12). Consequently, he who is not subject to the Law of God in the New Covenant era is at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7). Thus, the Law may randomly be cited by the apostles as confirmation of their message, as it so often is, as Dan McCartney even admits (pp. 129-52).

And what shall we say to the following statement? "The variety of ways in which the New Testament applies Old Testament laws (e.g., 1Co 5:6-8; 9:9-10) should caution us against presuming a particular understanding of continuity or discontinuity as our starting point" (p. 175). Why? Why should such caution be urged, when a specific God-ordained law is *applied* in a deeper and fuller way? How can *expanded application* undermine *original jurisdiction*? How can greater depth of meaning rule out the obvious surface meaning? Does the ocean have no surface because it has great depth? As we shall see below, Jesus

applies prohibitions of murder and adultery to hatred and lust. But does this mean that murder and adultery in their original, physical sense are no longer condemned?

In the remainder of this chapter, I will retrace Johnson's survey of the New Testament references to Mosaic penal sanctions. This will not only expose debilitating weaknesses in Johnson's treatment, but will cast light on a proper exegesis of these important passages. I bear in mind Johnson's worthy maxim: "We will need to exegete carefully any New Testament passage in which a particular judicial law may be quoted, alluded to, or commented on" (p. 175). In the next chapter, I will turn my attention to his primary argument from Hebrews.

### **Worst-Case Scenarios Based on Capital Sanctions**

Before I actually engage his New Testament survey, I must say a word or two regarding one of Johnson's assertions that I believe to be in error regarding the death penalty laws. This is important, for all too often, antipathy to theonomic ethics is engendered through worst-case-scenario analyses.<sup>10</sup> These scenarios are usually generated through a misguided treatment of the capital offenses in God's Law.

Johnson suggests the possibility that the Lord's warning in Exodus 22:22-24 threatens civil proceedings: "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." Johnson comments: "It seems likely that this curse envisions the Lord's use of a human intermediary in executing his wrath, but it is not clear whether this human instrument is to be the regu-

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10. The classic illustrations of this are H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1988) and Hal Lindsey *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1989).



lar judicial system of Israel or a chastising invasion by a Gentile nation" (pp. 177-78).

Not clear? How can there be any doubt on this matter? Did not the prophets warn Israel about *national destruction* in response to Israel's abuse of the widows and fatherless (Isa. 1:17-25; 10:1-6; Zech. 7:9-14)? God *providentially* judges the abusers of the widows and orphans (Job 22:9-13; Psalms 68:5-6; 94:3-11; 146:9); there are no civil penalties associated with such economic sins.<sup>11</sup> Language speaking of making widows of wives and orphans of children is not that of capital punishment, but of *providential judgment* (Jer. 18:2; Psalm 109:9, 12).<sup>12</sup> Also, the language involving slaying by the sword is common parlance for providential judgment, not capital punishment by the state.<sup>13</sup>

This is an important objection to Johnson. His understanding of Exodus 22:22-24 is not only erroneous on the very surface, but confusing in two additional respects. In the first place, it portrays the theonomic civil ethic in such a way as to suggest it threatens a blood-bath upon our covetous society. Such a misinterpretation further stirs up the worst-case-scenario waters. Second, it goes directly contrary to the limited-government views of Christian Reconstructionism.<sup>14</sup> Johnson's interpretation would be more applicable to liberation theology's socialistic state.

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11. "[T]here is no civil sanction attached to this moral obligation." Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), p. 686. For a discussion of this matter, see pp. 679ff.

12. Keil and Delitzsch comment on Exo. 22:24: "'Killing with the sword' points to wars, in which men and fathers of families perish, and their wives and children are made widows and orphans." C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., trans. by James Martin, in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1975 [n.d.]), 2:142.

13. Exo. 5:3; Lev. 26:6, 25; Num. 14:3; Deut. 28:22; 32:25; Isa. 1:20; 27:1; 34:5; Jer. 5:17; 9:16; 11:22; 12:12; Eze. 5:2ff; 26:8ff; Amos 4:10; 7:11f; 9:1ff; Nah. 3:15.

14. Gary North promotes a taxation system that extracts no more than 10 percent of national income by all levels of civil government combined. The state is to be shrunk, he insists.

### Introduction to the New Testament Evidence

Let us now turn to consider Johnson's "brief survey of the other New Testament references to the penalties of the Law of Moses" (p. 178). Despite the initial appeal of Johnson's argument, it is flawed at every stage of its development.

#### 1. The Sermon on the Mount

Johnson's treatment of Matthew 5:21ff, while recognizing its reference to capital sanctions (contrary to McCartney's oversight: p. 145), is seriously defective:

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus cites the law's requirement that murderers be brought to judgment; then he asserts that not only murder but also unjustified anger brings liability to judgment, and anger expressed verbally brings *eternal condemnation* (Mt 5:21; Lev 24:17). Jesus cites the law's 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' principle, only to tighten further its restriction on vindictive retaliation (Mt 5:38; cf. Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Dt 19:21). Thus, on the one hand, Jesus announces a more severe penalty than the Mosaic law: under Moses, murder was grounds for the judgment of execution; but for Jesus' disciples a cross word or taunt becomes grounds for *eternal destruction*. Yet, on the other hand, Jesus restricts his disciples' right to inflict on others the penalties provided in the Torah. Are Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount *intended to function* as a guide to new covenant jurisprudence in the political sphere? Learning from Jesus that the insult is a far more serious offense than any of us would have imagined, should Christians urge their government to make it a capital crime? If so, are we then forbidden by Jesus' word in Matthew 5:38 [*sic*] from pressing charges against the perpetrators of this and other misdeeds? The implied argument from lesser sin/punishment to greater confirms that the law reveals God's justice; but Jesus' treatment of the penal sanctions poses difficulties for us if we assume that biblical statements about God's justice in interpersonal relations are always intended to define the role of civil government as 'God's agent of wrath' (Ro 13:4) (p. 178).

*The Justness of Capital Sanctions*

In the first place, we should notice that Jesus' appeal to the Mosaic Law regarding capital punishment for murder in Matthew 5 is such that it *assumes both the death penalty's justness and its validity*. The Matthaen reference to capital punishment is important in the debate over penal sanctions for at least two reasons:

(1) Contrary to the expectations of such writers as McCartney,<sup>15</sup> Christ does not appeal back to Genesis 9:6 for a justification of capital punishment for murder. Neither does Jesus here urge the repeal of this capital sanction (which would bring Him into contradiction with Himself in Matt. 5:17-19). He no more repeals the capital sanction for literal murder with His statement in Matthew 5:21-22, than He repeals the divine prohibition against physical adultery in verses 27 and 28. Both remain binding as standing law from God.

(2) We must note that Christ appeals to this function of God's Law in the very context in which He makes reference to its integrity for the era of "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). This is significant because of the whole question of continuity/discontinuity between the major redemptive eras (cf. Matt. 11:12-13; John 1:17). Yet in no way do His words express a repeal of the sanction for murder. This is despite His speaking in terms of the very fulfillment era He ushered in by His incarnation and suffering.

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15. "The only sanction applicable is death, which is administered by God himself. Perhaps the Noahaic covenant (Ge 9:1-17; cf. esp. vv. 9-10) applies to the world at large. . . . This means that the only sanction required of all civil government by God's covenant with all mankind is the death penalty for murder." McCartney, *TRC*, p. 147. By one stroke of the pen McCartney has bid good riddance to the *moral obligation* of government to punish theft, rape, kidnapping, etc. In fact, he has removed the civil government from *all* moral obligation to public sanctions, except in the one case of murder!

*Reaffirming the Old Covenant's Sanctions*

Second, Johnson writes: "Scholars debate whether Jesus intends to contrast *the new, heightened ethics of his kingdom* with the written law contained in the Scripture. . ." (p. 178n). But was Jesus, in fact, bringing a *new* species of judgment to bear upon men? Can we assume that in the Old Testament God was *not* enraged with the sin of anger? Were not men in the Old Testament era condemned to eternal death for such sin? Is eternal condemnation a wholly New Testament reality?

*Christ was not establishing a new measure of judgment.* He was sweeping away the scribal accretions to God's holy Law. When Christ scathingly remarked that the Pharisees' Law-keeping must be surpassed (Matt. 5:20), He was not bringing *ex post facto* charges against the Pharisees: "The righteousness which he proclaimed was not a novelty. It was in thorough harmony with that enunciated in the Old Testament; that is, in 'the law and the prophets' (cf. Luke 16:16)."<sup>16</sup> Contrary to the scribal distortions, the Old Testament clearly forbade unjust anger.<sup>17</sup> As Calvin put it: "In attaching God's Law only to the outward duties, they trained their disciples in hypocrisy like monkeys."<sup>18</sup>

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16. Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 288. Christ's complaint against the scribes and Pharisees constantly brought out their distortions of God's will. See for example: Matt. 15:3, 6; 16:6, 11-12; 23:28. The Talmud said: "To be against the words of the scribes is more punishable than to be against the word of the Bible." See A. T. Robertson, *The Pharisees and Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), p. 130

17. See: Lev. 19:18; Prov. 14:17; 22:24; 25:23; Eccl. 7:9; Job 5:2; Jon. 4:4. "Also at this present time not only the outward deed of murder but also the inner disposition of hatred that could lead to it are punishable in God's sight (5:21, 22). . . . The principles here enunciated are applicable always and to all. . . . We are shown that this righteousness is in full accord with the moral principles enunciated in the Old Testament (5:17-19), but is not in accord with the current and traditional (rabbinical) *interpretation and application* of God's holy law (verses 20-48). It exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day as well as that of the ancient Jewish interpreters." Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp. 260-62.

18. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, in David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, eds., *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 182. He notes that in Matthew 5 "He restores the Law

The written Law is the standard; that which is in question is the rabbinic interpretation ("You have heard it *said*") versus Christ's correct interpretation ("But *I say*," cf. Matt. 7:28-29).<sup>19</sup> The later Mishna refers to rabbis Hillel and Shammai as the "fathers of antiquity,"<sup>20</sup> much in the way Jesus here refers to rabbinic predecessors.

### *Evil Attitudes and Civil Sanctions*

Third, in an attempted *reductio ad absurdum*, Johnson comments: "Learning from Jesus that the insult is a far more serious offense than any of us would have imagined, should Christians urge their government to make it a capital crime?" (p. 178). This misses the whole point of Jesus' instruction. The Pharisees tolerated vindictive anger by focusing *only* on the express penal sanction of the Law against murder. But the prohibition against murder also involves the *heart attitude* that leads to it (cf. Mark 7:21; Jms. 4:1), says Jesus. Yet nowhere in

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to its purity, by ridding it of their degraded comments." "Christ in fact had not the least intention of making any change or innovation in the precepts of the Law. God there appointed once and for all a rule of life, which He will never repent of. But with the Law overlaid with extraneous commentaries, and distorted out of its proper intention, Christ champions it from out of the hold of all these excrescences, and demonstrates its true purpose, from which the Jews had departed." "Christ is not to be made into a new Law-giver, adding anything to the everlasting righteousness of His Father, but is to be given the attention of a faithful Interpreter, teaching us the nature of the Law, its object, and its scope." (*Ibid.*, pp. 182, 183, 184).

19. "Also, what was proclaimed at Sinai is not set aside but is given its deeply spiritual interpretation by Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 5:17)." Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 261. "Thus far [to v. 20] the Saviour had been speaking of the law and of its precepts, as they were in themselves, without any reference to the form under which his hearers were familiar with them, and on which their views of the divine law must be founded. This peculiar form had been imparted to the law by the traditional accretions and the superstitious practice of the Pharisees. . . . They were ostensibly the strictest moralists, and much of the intolerable burden under which the people groaned, arose from their unauthorized additions to the law which their followers confounded with the law itself." J. A. Alexander, *The Gospel According to Matthew Explained* (Lynchburg, Virginia: James Family, rep. [1861]), p. 134.

20. Mishna, Eduyoth I:4. See also B. Pick, *The Talmud, What It Is* (New York: Schocken, [1887]), p. 23. Cited in Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 296n.

the Old Testament Law is anger subjected to capital punishment. And Jesus does not here urge capital punishment for anger, but eternal judgment for the unrepented sin.

Neither may we "assume that biblical statements about God's justice in interpersonal relations are always intended to define the role of civil government as 'God's agent of wrath' (Ro 13:4)" (p. 178). God's Law does not make anger a civil *crime*, though it does designate it a spiritual *sin*.<sup>21</sup> This attempted *reductio ad absurdum* is pressed further by Johnson: "If so, are we then forbidden by Jesus' word in Matthew 5:38 from pressing charges against the perpetrators of this and other misdeeds?" (p. 178).<sup>22</sup>

Is Johnson unaware of Old Testament statements similar to Jesus'? These words of Jesus no more forbid the civil punishments of God's Law than do similar statements in the *Old Testament*. There we read: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:18). "Do not say, 'I will recompense evil'; wait for the LORD, and He will save you" (Prov. 20:22). "Do not say, 'I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work' " (Prov. 24:29). Did these Old Testament era commands undercut the other divine commands regarding civil redress?

Johnson's approach to Jesus' statement is quite superficial. It fails to realize that Jesus can be dealing with specific situations (e.g., personal vindictiveness justified by appeal to civil penal-

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21. As Johnson well knows: "Not all of the sins in Paul's preceding list (vv. 29-31) were in fact punished by physical execution under the Mosaic laws, in part because many of the sins Paul mentions (greed, envy, arrogance, insensitivity, and lack of compassion) are actions of the 'heart' rather than the 'hand.'" Johnson, p. 180. See also: Barker, "Theonomy, Pluralism, and the Bible," *TRC*, p. 231.

22. Waltke makes a rather dangerous statement regarding this passage: "Bahnsen will not concede the obvious point that in Matthew 5:38-42 Christ abrogates the principle of immediate justice; Christ will bring justice in the *parousia*" (Waltke, *TRC*, p. 82). This abrogates the principle of *all* temporal justice, including that specified in Romans 13:3-4!

ties), while passing over other *applications* (e.g., the more obvious infractions of civil law). There are numerous examples of this practice. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus encourages good works before men to glorify God, but in Matthew 6:1, He discourages them. In Matthew 7:1, He warns against judging others, but in Matthew 7:6, He urges His disciples not to cast their pearls before *swine* (a judgment call if ever there was one!). In Matthew 5:39ff Jesus is employing hyperbole, rather than setting down universally abiding commands. For instance, notice that He forbids oaths (Matt. 5:34), yet He himself takes one (Matt. 26:64), as does Paul (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:8). He urges turning the other cheek when slapped (Matt. 5:39), yet He rebukes one who slaps Him (John 18:23).

## **2. Other Gospel References**

The second class of texts Johnson points to as referring to penal sanctions are those found elsewhere regarding Jesus' ministry. He summarizes these briefly in two paragraphs, introducing them with what seems to be a theonomic admission: "Other accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry reaffirm the appropriateness of the penal sanctions as expressions of God's disfavor toward sin" (p. 179). He cites Matthew 15:4, wherein Jesus mentions the capital law for the rebellious child (Exo. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). He refers also to Zaccheus' determination to offer fourfold restitution (cf. Exo. 22:1) to those whom he defrauded (Luke 19:8), which action is put in an approbative light by the gospel writers.

Johnson is correct when he states that the appropriateness of these penal sanctions is reaffirmed as expressions of God's disfavor toward sin. These are also cited with the apparent assumption of their continuing validity, i.e. as civil sanctions.

He then turns to the familiar pericope of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). He doubts its textual authenticity, but says that "if the text is an authentic part of God's Word, it gives us no clear guidance on the question of the continuing

significance of the Mosaic penalties." The reason for this conclusion is that "Jesus' response . . . is ambiguous. Would Jesus be repealing the death penalty as the sanction against adultery? Or (since no executioners will be perfectly sinless) for any and all crimes? Or would he simply be requiring that the witnesses, who must cast the first stone, be innocent of the sin with which they are accusing the woman – endorsing the law's penalty" (p. 179).

### *Three Options*

The alleged ambiguity is really not so ambiguous. Consider the three options Johnson sets before the reader as his attempt at demonstrating Christ's ambiguity. I assume that he does not really accept the possibility of the second option, that Jesus is repealing the death penalty for all crimes. What then would become of Genesis 9:6; Acts 25:11; and Romans 13:3-4? Jesus' statement (if taken in this sense) would really do away with *all* punishment for *all* crimes. For on this argument, how shall we allow anyone who is not "perfectly sinless" to punish *any* infraction?

The first option has standing against it the fact that He says *absolutely nothing* contrary to the capital sanction proposed. Nor does He instruct the accusers *not* to punish the woman. They allegedly caught her "in the very act" (John 8:4b), but where is the man? With His word of instruction given, her accusers turn and leave. Jesus then asks, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" How does this repeal the sanction for court-proven adultery, which requires credible witnesses?

The third option seems the most likely, especially in light of the Lord's endorsement of God's Law elsewhere (e.g., Matt. 5:17).<sup>23</sup> In fact, as is universally agreed, the Pharisees distorted

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23. "The laws of Moses, therefore, very properly made adultery a capital crime; nor does our Saviour, in the incident of the woman taken in adultery, repeal that



and abused the Law. Jesus' one sentence response required of them two important procedures necessary for capital sanctions: (1) The accusers must be innocent of the crime (Deut. 19:15a) and (2) the witnesses themselves must begin the execution (Deut. 17:17). Despite Johnson, this would seem to be "clear guidance" on the implementation of capital sanctions: Jesus requires the divinely mandated, court-proven, protective procedures of the Law be maintained.

### 3. Romans 1:32

As we continue with Johnson's survey, we note his reference to one of two passages that "have sometimes been thought to contain appeals to the penal sanctions of the Old Testament" (pp. 179-80). His first reference is to Romans 1:32, which reads: "and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." He comments:

In Romans 1:32 Paul climaxes a catalog of sins with the comment: "They know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death. . . ." The expression "deserve death" (*axios thanatou*) may be an allusion to Deuteronomy 21:22; some of the sins listed by Paul (homosexuality, murder, disobedience to parents, and sometimes slander) in the preceding context carried the penalty of death under the Mosaic Law. . . . It seems more likely, however, that Paul's reference is to a punishment *more severe* than physical death, a punishment *beyond the power of human government* to inflict. Not all of the sins in Paul's preceding list (vv. 29-31) were in fact punished by physical execution under the Mosaic laws, in part because many of the sins Paul mentions (greed, envy, arrogance, insensitivity, and lack of compassion) are actions of the 'heart' rather than the 'hand.' . . . Moreover, although Paul began this section speaking of the

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statute, or disallow its justice." Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1972 [1878]), p. 407.

present revelation of the wrath of God (Ro 1:18), he is making the transition to the final revelation of God's wrath (2:5-6); and it is this ultimate display of divine wrath in eternal condemnation that is the most natural referent of the phrase 'deserve death' in this context (see 6:23).

Although this would not be a leading theonomic proof-text, it is not so easily discounted as Johnson seems to think. Let us consider the passage and Johnson's comments briefly.

First, the expression "deserve death" (*axios thanatou*), as Johnson admits, "may be an allusion to Deuteronomy 21:22." He expresses a reservation, though, in his footnote: "In the Hebrew Scriptures (*mispat mawet*) and the Septuagint (*krima thanatou*) the expression is '[receiving a] judgment of death.' Thus our New Testament passages do not contain a direct verbal echo of Deuteronomy 21:22" (p. 180). Yet it is interesting that Franz Delitzsch's *Hebrew New Testament* employs the two Hebrew terms found in Deuteronomy 21:22 in his rendering of Romans 1:32. At the particular point in question, Delitzsch has *ben mispat* rather than *mispat mawet*. But *mispat* does occur earlier: "They know the ordinance (*mispat*) of God that . . . they are worthy of death (*ben mispat*)."<sup>24</sup> Thus, as Delitzsch's Hebrew rendering of Romans 1:32 evidences, the verbal echo is there in the verse as a whole.

Second, the Greek word *dikaïoma*, which Paul employs in the phrase "although they know the ordinance of God," is properly translated: "regulation, requirement, commandment, statute." The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* calls such a rendering "the most common" sense of the word in the New Testament, as do Arndt-Gingrich, Abbott-Smith, and Thayer.<sup>25</sup> It is

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24. Franz Delitzsch *Hebrew New Testament* (Berlin: 1931), p. 273.

25. Gottlob Schrenk, "dikaïoma," in G. Kittel, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:221. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 197. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Lexicon of*

the very word mentioned by Paul just a few verses later as a stipulation from God's Law: "Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements (*dikaïoma*) of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?" (Rom. 2:26). It occurs again in Romans 8:4: "... that the righteous requirement (*dikaïoma*) of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4). In fact, it is frequently used of the specific requirements of God's Law (Luke 1:6; Heb. 9:1; extra-biblical: Barnabas 4:11; 1 Clement 2:8; 35:7).

Thus, *TDNT* observes that in Romans 1:32, "the reference is to the knowledge of God's statutes or ordinances which obtains among men."<sup>26</sup> Sanday agrees when he notes that *dikaïoma* probably indicates "a declaration that a thing is *dikaion*," as "that which the Law lays down as right" Rom. viii. 4; hence 'an ordinance' (Luke i.6; Rom. ii.26; Heb. ix.1,10)."<sup>27</sup> As such, its referent would be *God's Law in its prohibitions* and its declaration that certain actions are "worthy of death," i.e. deserving capital punishment.

This conclusion is not solely based on verbal echoes or lexical probabilities. The context of the Pauline argument in Romans is also helpful. Paul brings God's judgments to bear upon sinful man in Romans 1-3:

(1) Romans 1:18 speaks of the "wrath of God" (*orge theou*) in His providential judgments ("from heaven"), which is reprobative in giving sinners over to their sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

(2) Romans 1:32 points to the "ordinance of God" (*dikaïoma tou theou*), which is mediatorial in bringing God's justice through concrete civil sanctions, in that civil magistrates sit as "gods" (Rom.

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*the New Testament* (3ed: Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1937), p. 117. J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book, 1889), p. 151.

26. *TDNT*, 2:221.

27. W. Sanday, *The Epistle to the Romans* in Ellicott, *Commentary*, p. 48.

13:3-4; Deut. 1:17; Gen. 9:6; cf. John 5:34; Psa. 82:1,6; Exo. 21:6 [Heb.]; 22:8-9, 28 [Heb.]).

(3) Romans 2:5-6 reaches beyond the temporal order to the ultimate "righteous judgment of God" (*dikaiokrisias tou theou*), which brings eternal sanctions to bear.

The *mediatorial justice* established by "ordinance," then, is exercised through the *magistrate* in declaring certain crimes "worthy of death." Certainly there may be a break-down in the criminal justice system, so that men may "not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32b). Nevertheless, Paul warns, the eternal justice exercised at the end of history will certainly and infallibly be a "revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:5b-6). In the meantime, "the whole world" is presently under God's Law requirements (Rom. 3:19). His Law is "established" (Rom. 3:31) and is "holy, just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). Because of sin, its presence "works wrath" among evil-doers (Rom. 4:15; 12:19-13:10; cf. 1 Tim. 1:8-10), who are not "subject to the Law" (Rom. 8:7-8), though the righteous should walk in the Law's requirements (Rom. 8:3-4).

Third, I believe that Johnson may be missing the referent of the capital sanction. He looks at the "such things" in the statement "those who practice such things are worthy of death" individualistically, rather than distributively. He is correct in noting that *some* sins in the Pauline catalog are not crimes, and therefore certainly not capital crimes. Paul's main focus here is on *idolatry*. It is *because of the idolatry* that God reprobates these men (Rom. 1:23-24; also note the specific reference to idolatry in the discussion of God's Law in 2:17-23). Also, it is common in Scripture to associate *wide-ranging immorality* as a concomitant

of idolatrous worship (cf. Lev. 18; Deut. 12:29-13:18; 18:9-14; Rom. 1:20ff).<sup>28</sup>

Surely the idea impressed upon the readers is not that some idolaters are merely "whisperers" (Rom. 1:29). These sins are found clumped in idolatrous communities. And as a complex of moral behavior involving specific capital crimes (e.g., homosexual conduct, murder, etc.), these multiple sins/crimes merit capital sanctions. These people are "filled [Gk. perfect passive participle] with all unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:29) and are justly subject to capital sanctions, as they "know" (Rom. 1:32; cf. 2:14-16).

Romans 1:32 is helpful to the theonomic argument.

#### 4. Acts 25:11

Acts 25:11 reads: "For if I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar." Johnson's comments on this verse are:

Is Paul here making a direct appeal to the Mosaic judicial laws as defining crimes that cause one to be 'deserving of death'? Certainly Paul does claim not to have violated the law of the Jews (v. 8), but it is pressing his words further than the context will allow to argue that Paul expects the pagan Festus to understand the complexities of the Torah . . . well enough to find Paul's appeal intelligible and persuasive. On this point it is most natural to suppose that Paul is appealing to Roman law (pp. 180-81).

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28. "Religion and morality in the great scale hang together, and morality in the long run is determined by religion." James Denney, "Romans" in W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), 2:594. Paul "saw that idolatry and licence went together." William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 49. "Idolatry is the source of immorality," F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Tyndale) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 82.

Johnson has seriously erred here. There are numerous and compelling indications that the *Mosaic* sanctions are in Paul's mind as he utters the words of Acts 25:11.

First, though Paul himself is in Caesarea, this portion of his series of trials was initially engaged before the *Sanhedrim* and Festus *by Jews in Jerusalem* (Acts 25:1-2). These accusers demanded that Paul be brought to Jerusalem for trial (v. 3). Thus, its historical circumstances were pre-eminently in terms of Jewish legal concerns.

Second, according to J. A. Alexander's comments on Acts 25:7, "the nature of these charges may be gathered from the former accusation [Acts 24:5-6] and the abstract of Paul's answer in the next verse."<sup>29</sup> The "former accusation" is found in Acts 24:5-6, where the charges before Felix read: "For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law." Indisputably these are *Jewish* charges that, in the Sanhedrim view, demand redress "according to *our law*."

The "abstract of Paul's answer" is found in verse 8: "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all." The first two foundational points of defense relate to "the law of the Jews" and the charge regarding temple desecration. And then he adds for good measure that he has not even offended Caesar's law.

Third, because of this, Festus asked Paul: "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?" (Acts 25:9). *The case is close to being remanded back to the Sanhedrim, where matters of Jewish law would be dealt with.*

Fourth, an earlier charge in this series of legal woes for Paul directly relates his worthiness of death to the Jewish law: "I

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29. J. A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles Explained* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, n.d.), 2:384.

found out that he was accused concerning questions of *their law*, but had nothing charged against him worthy of death [*axion thanatou*] or chains" (Acts 23:29). The same terminology is used by Paul in his protestation against the charges against him: "For if I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death [*axion thanatou*], I do not object to dying" (Acts 25:11a).

It is important to notice that Paul considers the case already to have been tried and concluded in Jerusalem before the Sanhedrim: ". . . but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar" (Acts 25:11b). That is, "if such is the result of the investigation just concluded, then *I do not refuse*. . . ."<sup>30</sup> "These things" charged to Paul are clearly spelled out in Acts 23:28-29: "And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. I found out that he was accused *concerning questions of their law*, but had nothing charged against him worthy of death or chains." And later in Acts 24:13 and 20, he confirms that the trial by the council (*sunhedrion*) could not establish his guilt: "Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. . . . Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council." Because of the concluded proceedings Paul can say to Festus: "To the Jews I have done no wrong, *as you very well know*."

Fifth, Festus writes King Agrippa regarding Paul, pointing to the Jewish charges that failed to prove him guilty of a capital offense, as they themselves argued: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the *whole assembly of the Jews* petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, *crying out that he was not fit to live any longer*" (Acts 25:24). His entire trial before the Jewish and Roman authorities reminds us of Christ's trials, wherein the Jews accused Jesus with religious charges in seeking His death: "We

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30. Alexander, *Acts*, 2:388.

have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God" (John 19:7).

Interestingly, in light of Johnson's complaint against the theonomic reference to this passage,<sup>31</sup> Festus admits that the Jews "had some questions against him about their own religion and about one, Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters" (Acts 25:20). In fact, Paul is delighted to appear before Agrippa "especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews" (Acts 26:3). He is ready to re-defend himself against "all the things of which I am accused by the Jews" (Acts 26:2).

Acts 25:11 is relevant to the theonomic argument.

### 5. 1 Corinthians 5

Johnson's observations on the excommunication of the sexual offender in 1 Corinthians 5, like those on the gospel references beyond Matthew 5, offer absolutely no harm to the theonomic civil ethic.

Does this excommunication replace the Mosaic penalty of death for adultery? Not necessarily, since it could be argued that Paul is instructing the *church* regarding what it should do, without addressing the question whether a *further* penalty should be imposed by the civil government. But it is noteworthy that Paul seals this discussion with a formula quoted from the Mosaic penal sanctions: 'Expel the wicked man from among you' (v. 13; see Dt 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7). His wording follows that of the Septuagint so closely that his intent to appeal to this Old Testament formula is

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31. Of Acts 25:11: "it is pressing [Paul's] words further than the context will allow to argue that Paul expects the pagan Festus to understand the complexities of the Torah . . . well enough to find Paul's appeal intelligible and persuasive. On this point it is most natural to suppose that Paul is appealing to Roman law." Johnson, p. 181.



unmistakable. In the Deuteronomy contexts this formula, whenever it appears, refers to the execution of those committing deeds 'worthy of death'. . . . The old covenant community was granted a governmental-political structure that 'bore the sword' and had the authority to purge the community through the physical execution of offenders. Paul applies the *same terminology* to the new covenant community's judging/purging act of *excommunication*. . . (p. 181)

Johnson is quite correct that Paul's instruction has to do with the church "without addressing the question whether a *further* penalty should be imposed by the civil government."<sup>32</sup> And the adaptation of the Mosaic capital sanction phraseology in an ecclesiastical setting is most appropriate, due to the continuing validity of God's Law. If the Law required capital punishment for certain sexual criminal sins, then surely the Church would be under obligation to bring its greatest discipline to bear upon the offender, were that crime still deemed of a serious (capital) nature. How does the fact that the church uses its most severe penalty for an action specified as criminal in God's Law undermine the continuing obligation of the state *also* to punish the crime?

But what was this man's sin? Paul laments: "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles; that *a man has his father's wife!*" (1 Cor. 5:1). Here as in verse 13 Paul goes to God's Law for his wording. "St. Paul used the Hebrew phrase instead of the ordinary Greek word for 'step-mother,' as it was in this phraseology that such a union was

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32. See: Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, p. 114n. Calvin notes here: "Chrysostom compares the strictness of the Law with the clemency of the Gospel, because Paul was content that the crime be dealt with by excommunication, whereas the Law demanded the death penalty for it; but there is no justification for that view. For here, Paul is not speaking to judges armed with the sword, but to a company unarmed, allowed to use only brotherly reproof." John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. by John W. Fraser, in *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 116

forbidden by the Law of Moses."<sup>33</sup> The "father's wife" phraseology "is the term of Lev. xviii.8."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, Paul calls the marriage of a man to his father's wife "fornication." Bruce notes in this connection that "*porneia* means 'fornication' and is here used, in a sense occasionally attested for '*erwah* in rabbinical Hebrew and *zenut* in the Zadokite Document, of cohabitation within forbidden degrees. . . . This was forbidden by the Torah (Lev. 18:8; Dt. 22:30; 27:20). The prohibition, with the others accompanying it, was taken over into the Church. . . . Paul does not stop to show reason why the levitical regulations in this matter should continue to be observed. . . ."<sup>35</sup> As Hodge notes here: "We have here therefore a clear recognition of the perpetual obligation of the Levitical law concerning marriage."<sup>36</sup> Dabney writes: "We hold that this law, although found in the Hebrew code, has not passed away; because neither ceremonial nor typical. . . . We argue also, presumptively, that if this law is a dead one then the Scriptures contain nowhere a distinct legislation against this great crime of incest. . . . In the New Testament, we find the same law enforced by the Apostle Paul. I Cor. v:1." "Every Christian Church and every commonwealth has acted on the belief, that this Levitical law fixes, for all subsequent time, the degrees within which marriage is lawful."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, without the *Mosaic stipulations* defining the particular sin in question, how would the church at Corinth know that it was a sin – and a serious one at that? Since the "Old Testament

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33. T. Teignmouth Shore, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in Charles John Ellicott, ed., *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 7:301.

34. G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians" in Nicoll, *Englishman's Greek Testament*, 2:807.

35. F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians* (NCB) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 53-54.

36. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1969 [1857]), p. 81.

37. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, pp. 412, 413.

formula" of expulsion is applied in the New Testament to a social sin that is defined as such in the Old Testament, there is the clear expression of *the continuity of God's Law in the New Covenant era*. The New Testament Christians were under obligation to this Mosaic regulation under the threat of the church's greatest censure.

### **Conclusion**

The rationale for Johnson's treatment as investigated above is explained in his statement that: "Ultimately the New Testament must be our guide in determining how the various categories of commandments in the Law of Moses function as God's authoritative Word to the postresurrection church" (p. 190). We have weighed in the balance Johnson's first stage of argument against the theonomic view of the Mosaic penal sanctions, and have found it wanting. The New Testament does not disengage the Mosaic penal sanctions. In fact, it assumes and applies them.

There are serious objections to his presentation that undermine his conclusions. But this is only the first, preparatory stage of his case. As the title of his chapter indicates, his primary argument will be made in his treatment of the Mosaic penal sanctions as referenced in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We will turn our attention to that matter in the next chapter.

## CHURCH SANCTIONS IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

*Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.*

The editors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* write that Johnson shows "that in the Epistle to the Hebrews the sanctions are cited to maintain the purity of the covenant community (rather than the state)" (p. 125). We must examine in detail his major supporting evidence for this argument.

As he continues his analysis of the New Testament usage of the Mosaic penal sanctions, he contends that methodologically "among the most significant of these are the passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews that compare and contrast the Mosaic penalties to the judgment awaiting those who repudiate the new covenant inaugurated by Christ" (p. 178). He presents what he considers *the* telling argument against the theonomic ethic, which is that the theonomic employment of

the Mosaic penal sanctions overlooks the redemptive-historical place assigned to them by the Epistle to the Hebrews. The punishments of the Mosaic Law belong clearly to the old order, and thus they point ahead to the higher privilege and the resultant higher accountability of the new covenant order established in

Jesus. Although these penalties are not precisely labeled 'types' in Hebrews, the epistle nevertheless leads us to see that they are fulfilled and heightened in the sanctions of church discipline that point to the ultimate horror of separation from God and affliction under his jealous wrath (Heb 10:27, 30-31). The justice of these sanctions is specifically qualified by the covenant bond that has been violated, the relationship between the offender and the Lord, which has been severed irreparably (pp. 189-90).

The two foci of Johnson's argument from Hebrews are Hebrews 2:2 and 10:28, which "sum up the impression gleaned from other, less explicit New Testament passages: the Mosaic penal sanctions belonged in the context of the discipline and purity of the covenant community" (p. 191).<sup>1</sup>

Let us analyze the crucial features of his reasoning. Ultimately, his case rests on three essential foundations: (1) the theme of Hebrews, (2) the employment of *a fortiori* arguments relative to the penal sanctions, and (3) the environmental covenantalism of the penal sanctions.

### The Thematic Flow of Hebrews

According to Johnson, the Hebrews 2 and 10 passages mentioned above "are part of an overarching structure" that contrasts the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. In fact, as he sees it, "we are prepared by the prologue to view all of history in terms of a contrast between the past . . . and 'these last days'" (p. 182). Consequently, the argument in Hebrews "ad-

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1. This statement is weakened by two problems: (1) Our previous study shows that the other New Testament references do *not* allow an "impression gleaned" that is contra-theonomic. (2) Even on his own analysis, not all of the previously considered New Testament references have to do with "the discipline and purity of the covenant community." For instance, how does Zaccheus' four-fold restitution demonstrate that the penal sanctions enforce covenantal discipline in the sense which Johnson means? Not even Johnson draws a church discipline parallel from this reference (p. 179). The *exact function* of the Mosaic sanction is maintained by Zaccheus' action; there is no "heightened" (Johnson) New Covenant application of that law.

vances in four phases," each making direct references to features of the Mosaic Law. These four phases illustrate the superiority of Jesus to the angels (1:1-2:18), Moses (3:1-4:13), the Aaronic priesthood (4:14-7:28), and "the covenant – centered in the sanctuary and the sacrificial system – that the law inaugurated" (8:1-12:29) (pp. 182-83).

I certainly agree that there is a contrast being established in Hebrews, a contrast that begins immediately to be framed in the opening verses. And surely we can trace the flow through the phases he mentions. But does this cripple the theonomic argument? Does Johnson properly assess the exact nature and consequence of the contrast?

### *Covenant Limitations?*

As Johnson himself notes in his conclusion, "it is clear that the author to the Hebrews is not answering the question of how to set up a Christian political system." Then he makes the overbroad observation: "The author of Hebrews presents the penalties of the Mosaic Law as covenant sanctions, visited justly on those who violate covenant with the Lord" (p. 190). This sweeping assertion generates an erroneous impression regarding the evidence in Hebrews, thereby undermining his analysis. The statement is overly broad in that in the Hebrews presentation, penal sanctions are only mentioned *twice*, and only in *one* of those instances (Heb. 10:28) is a *particular sanction* cited. In addition, the particular sanction mentioned is in regard to one particular sin (or, perhaps, one class of sin): apostasy from God, which *could* theoretically be delimited to the covenant community and have no bearing on other criminal sanctions.

Johnson is fully aware of this, clearly stating that "the author is not thinking of *every violation* of the Mosaic Law when he speaks of one 'who rejected the law of Moses.' Violation of the *fundamental demand of loyalty* to the Sovereign is the focus of the penalty in view in Hebrews 10:28-29" (p. 187). Yet, when making reference to Calvin's comments on this passage, he states:

"It is possible that Calvin is deliberately leaving out of account the many other offenses for which, according to the Mosaic Law, death was the requisite penalty." Still further, "it could be that, though referring explicitly only to Deuteronomy 17, Calvin is thinking of *all* the sins for which the Mosaic Law mandated capital punishment as *various forms of the law against apostasy* – expressions of covenantal infidelity at its most fundamental level" (p. 187). Despite Johnson's admission of the (apparently) narrow focus of the one penal sanction mentioned, and despite the fact he has to read an assumption into Calvin's comments in order to broaden their scope, he asserts: "This conclusion illustrates the difficulty of using the Mosaic penal sanctions as a pattern for modern jurisprudence" (p. 189).

Elsewhere, he refers broadly to "the Mosaic penal sanctions" (pp. 177, 178, 189, 191), "the Mosaic Law" in general (p. 183), "the penalties of the Mosaic Law" (p. 190), and "the penal sanctions" (p. 192). On the basis of one apostasy law, how can it be broadly argued that *the* penalties of the Mosaic Law – all of them? – are only visited upon covenant citizens, thereby rendering them useless to theonomic jurisprudence in society at large?<sup>2</sup> Are there not a number of *other* civil sanctions that are unrelated to apostasy (from the covenant community) that are not even capital sanctions? What about the retribution for theft, which Johnson himself mentions (p. 179)? Does not Johnson himself cite several *capital* sanctions, which involve other crimes that have no necessary bearing on covenantal identity, crimes such as murder, homosexual activity, rape, adultery, and so forth (p. 177n, 179, 181)?

At best, his argument would only support the notion that the *apostasy* law is rendered inoperative by the New Covenant, since it is the only one specifically mentioned. Thus, his statement

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2. I will not even consider the covenantal nature of governments like the United States. See Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Plurality* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), Part 3.

should be: "The author of Hebrews presents the Mosaic *penalty for apostasy* as a covenant sanction, visited justly on those who violate covenant with the Lord." But I will later show that Hebrews will not even allow that limited point.

### *The Stages of Hebrews*

And what of the four-staged structure of the author of Hebrews? A careful analysis of the four stages cited by Johnson will show that they are (1) contrasting *mediatorial agency* (involving covenantal *form*), and (2) even then focus only on a contrast of the mediatorial agency in regard to one's *approach to or relationship with God* (involving covenantal membership). This four-phased argument in Hebrews in no way undermines the continuance of God's moral law or His civil sanctions for criminal deeds.

The theme of Hebrews is *the superiority of Christ over all mediatorial agencies associated with the Old Covenant administration*. The author of Hebrews argues that to spurn Christ in deference to angels, Moses, Aaron, and the Old Covenant sacrificial system is to risk eternal damnation. To exalt *any* Old Covenant mediatorial authority over Christ is not only eternally dangerous but theologically absurd, for only Christ has been "appointed heir of all things." Only through Christ has "God made the world." Only Christ is the "brightness of His glory and the express image of His person." Only Christ "upholds all things by the word of His power." Only Christ "purged our sins." Only Christ "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:2b-3).<sup>3</sup> Neither angels, nor Moses, nor Aaron did such. The angels are but "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14). Moses is *in* the house of God, Christ is *over* it (Heb. 3:2-6). Priests were ministers in the "earthly sanctuary"; Christ is "in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Heb. 8:1-4; 9:1, 11).

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3. The anarthrous appellation in verse 2 points out the *charakter* (Gk.) of Christ as the Son, as in 3:6; 5:8; 7:8; 7:28.



Nor does the sacrificial system effect the redemption that this glorious Mediator of the New Covenant did (Heb. 10:1-9). The earthly sanctuary offered the blood of bulls and goats as symbolic of redemption; the theanthropic Christ (Heb. 1:8) offers His own blood as effective of redemption (Heb. 9:11-15).

In fact, the emphasis on the *contrast* of mediatorial agency is exhibited in the opening verses: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers *by* the prophets has in these last days spoken to us *by* His Son" (Heb. 1:1,2a). It is not the *substance* of the moral obligations that is in contrast here, but the *agency* of their mediation, for in both cases it is *God* Who speaks:

"of old" – "God having spoken" – "*by the prophets*"  
 "in these last days" – "He spoke" – "*by a Son*"

God's speaking in the Old Covenant was mediated through the prophets; in the New Testament it is immediate in the Son, who is "the brightness of His glory and the express image (*charakter*) of His person (*hupostaseos autou*)" (Heb. 1:3).

Regarding the angels of Hebrews 1:4-14, we should note that they are often mediatorially associated with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai: ". . . the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward" (Heb. 2:2).<sup>4</sup> But Hebrews argues that "on this account" (*dia touto*, i.e., the superiority of Christ over the angels), "we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard." By this, the writer is speaking of the gospel of "great salvation" which "at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him" (Heb. 2:3).

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4. Deut. 33:2 (LXX); Psa. 68:17; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19. See also Jubilees 1:27; Josephus, *Antiquities* 15:5:3; Philo, *De Somniis* 1:143.

Alford notes that the "therefore" of Hebrews 2:1 ties together the discussion of Christ's superiority over angels: "because Christ, the *Mediator* of the New Covenant, is far above all the angels, who were *mediators* of the former covenant."<sup>5</sup> As Hughes notes, the *word spoken by angels* in verse 2 "is precisely matched by" the *word spoken by the Lord* in verse 3: "In both places *laletheis* and *laleisthai* are 'divine passives,' with the implication that it is God who spoke on both occasions."<sup>6</sup> The fact of *mediation* is clearly in view in that the "word" of God is "through" (*dia*) angels and "through" (*dia*) the Lord.<sup>7</sup> Thus, "the idea conveyed by the preposition in both cases is that of *mediation*, a concept of considerable importance in this epistle."<sup>8</sup>

A further element "which is another mark of the close correspondence in mental and linguistic structure" is the paralleling of "steadfast" (*bebaios*, v.2) and "confirmed" (*ebebaiothe*, v. 3). The contrast of the *mediation* of God's covenant mercies is surely in view.<sup>9</sup> "The 'greatness' of the salvation is traceable to the greatness of Him who mediates it (i.4), of the method employed (ii.10), of the results, *many* sons being brought to glory (ii.10)."<sup>10</sup>

Of course, through the fundamental ministry of the greater Mediator, there was brought about a *conclusive finality* to covenant redemption. But it is covenant *redemption* that is so important to his argument (Heb. 9:15), *not moral instruction regarding*

5. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Longmans, Green, 1894), 4:25 (in exposition). Emphasis mine.

6. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 77n.

7. In Heb. 1:1,2 it was "by [en] the prophets" and "by [en] Son." In Hebrews 7:11 we learn of the mediatorial nature of the Levitical priesthood: "if perfection were through [*dia*] the Levitical priesthood."

8. Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 80.

9. See such passages as the following for a demonstration of the direct approach to God, which is secured by the New Covenant because of the divine Mediator: Heb. 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 7:19, 25-26; 8:1-2; 9:24; 10:19-22; 12:22-24.

10. Marcus Dods, in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *Englishman's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), 4:259.

social or civil righteousness. We must recognize that moral obligations guiding social conduct are distinguishable from ceremonial responsibilities typifying redemption.<sup>11</sup>

As Johnson himself puts it: "The implicit conviction that 'drives' the argument is that the old covenant *atonement structures* were finally dependent on the atoning death of Christ" (p. 184). He is correct – and this observation undercuts his overall argument! The *finality* of this "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3a) is the major feature of the superiority of Christ in His mediatorial work. Redemptive finality forms a strain of thought that is traceable from the beginning of Hebrews and throughout.

The finality of redemption is evidenced early in the epistle: ". . . when He *had* by Himself purged our sins [He] *sat* down [aorist indicative] at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3b). That this is the theme of Hebrews is evident from Hebrews 8:1: "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1; cf. Heb. 10:12; 12:2).

The *redemptive concern* of the Hebrews argument is evidenced again in Hebrews 1: "Are [the angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will *inherit salvation*?" (Heb. 1:14). Moffatt comments that this is a "skillful transition to the deeper theme of the next passage [2:1ff], viz. the relation of the Son to this *soteria*."<sup>12</sup> The writer demonstrates Christ's eternal glory as accomplishing salvation, despite His glory's being veiled during His earthly humility. He became flesh in order

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11. Johnson says: "Now, it is obvious that the Epistle to the Hebrews approaches the Mosaic Law from the perspective of its sanctuary and sacrificial system. . . . [F]or they symbolized the *goal* of the covenant (communion with God) and they provided the *means* to that goal through the covering of sinful impurity. . . . We are not surprised, then, to find that much of Hebrews' discussion of the new covenant replacing the old focuses on the sacrificial-ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law." Johnson, "Hebrews and Penal Sanctions," pp. 183-84.

12. James Moffatt, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ICC) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), p. 16.

"to make *reconciliation* for the sins of the people" (cf. Heb. 2:14-18). "And every priest *stands* ministering daily and *offering repeatedly* the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (Heb. 10:11), whereas Christ effected redemption and sat down.

Actually Hebrews 1:1-4 is one long sentence. Moffatt's comments on this sentence are to the point: "In short, since the object of the divine revelation (*lalein*) is fellowship between God and man, it must culminate in One who can deal with sin, as no prophet or succession of prophets could do; the line of revelation *en prophetai* has its climax *en huio*, in a Son whose redeeming sacrifice was the real and effective manifestation of God's mind for communion."<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, *the author of Hebrews is dealing with the effecting of redemption, not moral or civil directives*. Christ did not fulfill the penology of God's Law, or else there would be no ultimate moral basis or directive for civil penology at all. Furthermore, if redemptive sacrifice removed the threat of civil penalty, why did not offering a sacrifice remove the civil penalty under the Mosaic administration (Num. 35:31-32; Deut. 19:21)?

### *The Danger in View*

We read in Hebrews of a "better covenant" (i.e., covenantal administration), not a "better law" (Heb. 7:22; 8:6; cf. Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8). In fact, the moral obligations of the Law are never questioned, and their continuance in the New Covenant era is expected (Heb. 8:10; 10:16),<sup>14</sup> as we will show more fully below. It is *Christ the Mediator as the Living Way to acceptance with God* that is held forth to these Jewish Christians (Heb. 10:9-12:29). These Hebrews must learn that acceptance with God cannot come by returning to the "the commandments in ordi-

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13. Moffatt, *Hebrews*, p. 1.

14. The New Covenant reference to "My laws" cited in these two verses must mean God's laws, as revealed through Moses. As I noted in the last chapter (see footnote 5) the Law of Moses is constantly identified as the Law of God.

nances" (Eph. 2:14-15), i.e., the "weak and beggarly elements" of ceremonialism (Gal. 4:9-10), which are but "shadows" (Heb. 9:9; 10:1; Col. 2:17).<sup>15</sup> Because of their temptation to return to the temporal tutelage of ceremonial law (cf. Gal. 3:23-4:10), his Jewish readers need the very "elementary principles of the oracles of God" taught to them again (Heb. 5:12).

There seems to be an important historical reason for the structure and content of Hebrews – a reason that should not be overlooked in analyzing its purpose. *Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians, who were being drawn back into Judaism and the Old Covenantal system.*

The evidence suggests that these Jewish Christians were feeling the attraction of *the Jews of the Qumranian sect* (although this particular narrowing of focus is not essential to our analysis). There is a strong correspondence between the doctrines dealt with in Hebrews and those held among the contemporary Jewish sect in Qumran. Among these several correspondences are a strong emphasis, for example, on angels,<sup>16</sup> Melchizedek,<sup>17</sup> the Aaronic priesthood (to be purified in the future),<sup>18</sup> and so forth. Whether the readers were actually former Qumranian Jews<sup>19</sup> or Jewish Christians under temptation to depart

15. See even the Old Testament realization in Psa. 51:6-17; Isa. 1:10ff; Hos. 6:6. See also Eph. 2:15 and note the contextual references to circumcision and the dividing wall.

16. 1QM 9:15-16; 12:1-9; 13:9-13; 17:6-8; 1QS 11:7-8; 1 QH 3:21-22. See William Sanford LaSor, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 83, 185.

17. 11QMelch. See J. A. Fitzmeyer, "Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967) 25-41. J. Danielou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1958), pp. 111ff.

18. LaSor, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 182.

19. Yigael Yadin, "The Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews," Ch. Rabin and Yigael Yadin, eds., *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Scripta Hierosolymitana)* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1958), 4:39. D. Flusser, "The Dead Sea Sect and the Pre-Pauline Christianity" in *ibid.*, pp. 36ff. C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Gabalda, 1952), 1:226ff. F. M. Braun, *Revue Biblique* lxi (1955), p. 37. Danielou, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 111ff. H. Kosmala, *Hebraer-Essener-Christen* (Leiden: Brill, 1959).

from Christianity via Qumranian doctrine<sup>20</sup> is not certain. But in either case, the structure of Hebrews suggests the contrast of *two approaches to God for salvation*: through the eternal, living Christ; or through the temporal ceremonial system of the Mosaic administration (via a "purified" Judaism).

### *Hebrews 7:11-12*

A major reason Johnson misconstrues the flow of Hebrews, deeming it contra-theonomic, is due to his interpretation of Hebrews 7:11-12. That passage reads:

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.

Johnson comments on this passage: "Now, the introduction of this new principle of priestly appointment when the new priest (Jesus) undertakes his office *demands a change in the law*. This is so because *on the basis of* the Levitical priesthood the people were given the law (Heb 7:11). . . . [T]he priesthood of Aaron and his sons is the very foundation of the law given through Moses to Israel" (p. 184).

First, we should note that his analysis of Hebrews 7:11 ("on the basis of the Levitical priesthood") is open to a counter interpretation. Johnson argues that the Law as such is founded upon the Levitical priesthood by translating *epi* as "on the basis of." He suggests that "the priesthood of Aaron and his sons is

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20. Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 77; William Sanford LaSor, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), ch. 14. J. W. Bowman, *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter* (London: Tyndale, 1962), pp. 13-16. F. F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews (NICNT)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. xxix. Bruce points out the emphasis on various washings as evidence (Heb. 6:2ff; 9:19ff).

the very foundation of the law given through Moses to Israel." And in a footnote he states that *nomotheteo* in Hebrews 7:12 means "to give law, establish legally" (p. 185). This argument attempts to establish the entirety of the Mosaic Law upon the temporal priestly system, which, when removed, would eliminate the foundation of the entire Law.

But his interpretive argument is at best only a possibility. In light of all the other pro-theonomic arguments, it is highly unlikely. Interestingly, the Greek verb *nomotheteo* occurs only twice in the New Testament, in Hebrews 7:11 and 8:6. Although it does carry the meaning of "ordain, establish, enact," it also has another meaning: "to order a matter by law, to settle legally."<sup>21</sup> In fact, two major New Testament lexicons even distinguish these two uses in Hebrews.<sup>22</sup> For Hebrews 7:11, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* opts for the idea of "to order a matter by law, to settle legally."<sup>23</sup>

The meaning of *nomotheteo* in Hebrews 7:11 is that it was on the basis of the Levitical priesthood that the people had the Law *authoritatively explained to them*, i.e., when matters of dispute arose. Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown's *Commentary* suggests Malachi 2:7 is behind this statement.<sup>24</sup> Malachi 2:7 reads: "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 2:7). This idea is supported elsewhere in the Old Testament, as well (Lev. 10:8-11; Num. 27:21; Deut. 17:8-11; Neh. 8:7).

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21. W. Gutbrod, "nomos" in G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:1090.

22. *Ibid.* See also: W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 544. Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book, 1889), p. 427.

23. *TDNT*, 4:1090.

24. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments* (Hartford: S. S. Scranton, n.d.), 2:457.

In addition, we should note that in Hebrews 7:12, the writer of Hebrews is dealing with the ceremonial *Levitical system*. It is the temporally-conditioned ceremonial form of the Law that is under scrutiny, *not* the moral or civil ethics of the Law (cf. below; cf. Rom. 3:31; 7:12). This is evident from the immediate context which contrasts Christ's Melchizedekan priesthood with the Aaronic priesthood and then notes: ". . . if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood. . ." (Heb. 7:11).<sup>25</sup> It also is seen to be so on the basis of the explanatory *gar* ("for") in the following verse: "*For* He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar" (Heb. 7:13). Lenski comments: "What law is referred to is evident; it is not the whole Mosaic law, but the laws pertaining to this priesthood, *gar* being added in the confirmatory sense of 'indeed.' "<sup>26</sup> That is, according to the argument of the writer of Hebrews, perfection was never attainable through the Levitical system (cf. Heb. 10:1).<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi.

After all, it is only one aspect of the Law, the "preceding commandment" (*proagoures entoles* [sg.], Heb. 7:18) regarding "the Levitical priesthood" (Heb. 7:11), that is in view.<sup>28</sup> It is in

25. This seems clearly directed to the Qumran doctrine that expected a purification and re-establishment of the Aaronic system. See the Qumranian *Manual of Discipline for the Future Congregation of Israel*.

26. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938), p. 224. Westminster divine William Gouge comments: "By law, is here in special meant the ceremonial law, which was most proper to that priesthood, and which was most especially abrogated by Christ's priesthood." William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews: Exegetical and Expository* (Grand Rapids: Kregal, 1980 [1655]), p. 501.

27. The writer of Hebrews makes a strong case for the weakness of the priests themselves in Heb. 5:3; 7:18, 24, 27-28; 8:1.

28. "The former commandment refers in particular to the legislation whereby the levitical priesthood and its succession were regulated (vv. 11ff above.) "Our author's primary concern, however, is with that part of the law ('a former commandment') which prescribed and controlled the sacrificial system." Hughes, *Hebrews*, pp. 264, 265. "It must be borne in mind through out that by the 'commandment' is meant the ordinance which created the Levitical priesthood, not the Law in general." W. F. Moulton,



view because of its inherent weakness due to its temporal design (Heb. 7:18b-19). In fact, the Old Covenant administration containing that commandment regarding the priestly system already anticipated its succession in the Old Testament (Psa. 110:1-4). And "this is the main point [*kephalaion de epi*] of the things we are saying: We [Christians] have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1), contrary to the succession of Levitical priests.

### *Ceremonial Concerns Throughout*

As Bruce notes of Hebrews: "In this epistle, moreover, the law is not a principle set in opposition to the grace manifested in Christ's saving work, but rather an anticipatory sketch of that saving work. Here we find a concern with the sacrificial cultus rather than with the 'tradition of the elders,' with the ritual law as a means of access to God rather than with the moral law as a way of life."<sup>29</sup> "The author of Hebrews is concerned more with the ceremonial law. . . ."<sup>30</sup>

Many interpreters follow this line of thought. *TDNT* notes: "The fact that in content the orientation of *nomos* is to the law which orders the priestly ministry is based on the main interest of the epistle. In [Hebrews] the Law is viewed from a standpoint essentially different from that of, e.g., either Jesus or Paul. For them the Law is the will of God which requires and regulates human action. In [Hebrews], however, the Law is seen from the standpoint that it gives the OT priesthood its basis, dignity and force. . . . [T]he true theme of [Hebrews] is not the relation of Law and Gospel, but the relation of the

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"The Epistle to the Hebrews," in Charles John Ellicott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. n.d.), 8:309.

29. Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp. 28-29.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

priestly ministry of the OT to the priestly ministry of Jesus."<sup>31</sup> Or as Windisch puts it: Hebrews views the law "not as a prescription for the behavior of the individual, but as the sum of sacrificial regulations for the ancient cultic community."<sup>32</sup>

The "fault" (Heb. 8:7) in the Old Covenant was not in the civil and moral standards (Heb. 2:2; 8:10; 10:16; cf. Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8), but in the *temporary nature* of the *administrative priesthood* (along with its concomitant ceremonial features), which could not finally settle the sin question. "A new order of priesthood presupposes a new disposition of law. The introduction of a new and different order of priesthood necessitates the setting aside of the law *insofar as its prescriptions for the regulation of the old priesthood and its ministry are concerned*, and the provision of a new law by which the new system is governed."<sup>33</sup> "The 'change in the law' is seen in this, that, with the establishment of the order of Melchizedek, the numerous precepts of the law respecting the function of the levitical priesthood have been abrogated and have fallen into desuetude, and. . . have been replaced by the new principle or 'law' of faith."<sup>34</sup>

Calvin comments: "The Law contains both the rule for good living and the free covenant of life, and there run through it many outstanding passages which instruct us in the faith and in the fear of God. None of this has been abolished in Christ, but only that part which was involved in the old priesthood."<sup>35</sup>

Purdy comments on Hebrews 7:11: "What could this mean? That the whole law was set aside? Then why is the argument

31. TDNT, 4:1078.

32. H. Windisch, *Der Hebraerbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1931), p. 66.

33. Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 256 (emphasis mine).

34. *Ibid.*, p. 257. See the antipathy of the Jews to this in Acts 6:14; 8:3; 21:28; Phil. 3:5ff. "He turns to explain the priesthood of Christ, the true, pure understanding of which abolishes all the ceremonies of the Law." John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, trans. by William B. Johnston, in David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, eds., *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 3.

35. Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 96.

based on the priesthood of Melchizedek, relying as it had to on Gen. 14:17-20? . . . It was the old priesthood that was doomed, and whatever law it required."<sup>36</sup>

Lenski comments that Hebrews 7:12 "necessarily changes also any 'law' (no article!) supporting the Aaronitic priesthood. . . . [T]he actual change was a complete termination of the Aaronitic priesthood."<sup>37</sup>

Kistemaker comments: "God himself imposed his law on the Israelites. As lawgiver he stood above the commandments and ordinances he had enacted. Thus at the proper time he could supplant a particular law – the one pertaining to the Levitical priesthood – and institute a new order."<sup>38</sup> The particular matter of the priesthood before us is given in Hebrews 7:16: "who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life." The issue is over "priestly lineage" as per the "fleshly commandment" (*entoles sarkines*).<sup>39</sup>

Vincent comments: The "forgoing commandment" probably is summed up in verse 16.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the rhetorical statement regarding priestly mediation: "if perfection were through (*dia*) the Levitical priesthood" (Heb. 7:11a).

John Brown translates Hebrews 7:11: " 'For the people were subjected to a law in reference to that priesthood' " and then notes: ". . . everything with respect to that priesthood was settled by divine positive appointment."<sup>41</sup> He points out what seems to me to be obvious: "The law he is speaking of throughout the whole of this paragraph, is the law of the priesthood to

36. Alexander C. Purdy, "Hebrews," in George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1955), 11:667.

37. Lenski, *Hebrews*, p. 225.

38. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New Testament Commentary) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 199.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

40. Marvin R. Vincent, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1985 [1887]), 4:462.

41. John Brown, *Exposition of Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961), p. 338.

which the Israelitish people have been subjected. . . . Jesus Christ's being a Priest, is a clear proof that the Mosaic law about the priesthood is abrogated."<sup>42</sup>

### *Sanctions and Israel*

Johnson agrees that the "change in law" has its *focus* in the Levitical priesthood. But he attempts to extend the context of the "change in law" to include "the relation of the Mosaic *penal sanctions* to the priesthood and sanctuary, the heart of the covenant" (pp. 185-86). This argument, in his view, ultimately dismantles the theonomic position, for "the author of Hebrews presents the penalties of the Mosaic Law as covenant sanctions, visited justly on those who violate covenant with the Lord" (p. 190). Elsewhere he writes: ". . . the justice of the Mosaic sanctions [not just apostasy-type sanctions -KLG] presupposed the offender's privileged status and prior commitment as a member of the Lord's covenant" (p. 189). "The specific statements of Hebrews 2:2 and 10:28 sum up the impression gleaned from other, less explicit New Testament passages: the Mosaic penal sanctions belonged in the context of the discipline and purity of the covenant community" (p. 191).

Besides committing such informal logical fallacies as *fallacy of accident* (Johnson confuses *expanded application* with *original jurisdiction*) and *hasty generalization* (he judges *all* sanctions on the basis of *apostasy* sanctions),<sup>43</sup> there are some additional, imposing problems confronting his presentation.

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42. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

43. This seems to involve him in argumentative self-contradiction. In one place he argues "as part of this system, certain laws can be *grouped together into categories*, since together they reinforce *particular aspects* of God's lordship over Israel" and "*certain* penal sanctions belong to *categories of laws that set Israel apart* from all the noncovenantal nations as a holy people" (p. 176, emphasis mine). But his fundamental argument regarding the removal of the Mosaic penal sanctions is based on the alleged repeal of the *apostasy* law (Heb. 10:28), which seems to overlook its potentially distinct categorization.

Johnson sees all Mosaic penal sanctions as designed only for "the discipline and purity of the covenant community," i.e. they are intended directly for Israel in the Old Testament and indirectly for the Church in the New Testament. Yet the Old Testament itself sets forth the Law as a model to the *nations* beyond Israel (Deut. 4:5ff) that must be spoken before kings (Psa. 119:46; cf. 2:9ff). It is a "light" to the whole world (Isa. 51:4), despite the fact the entire earth has transgressed it (Isa. 24:5). Were not the Canaanites judged for its breach (Lev. 18:24-27; Deut. 12:29-31)?<sup>44</sup> By it are not all the wicked condemned (Psa. 119:118-119; Rom. 3:19)?

On Johnson's view one is left to wonder how God could judge the nations around Israel on their moral and civil failures, *but never ceremonial* failures, in the Old Testament.<sup>45</sup> Or how the Ten Commandments could be obliged upon pagans, since the Commandments begin with a distinct reference to Israel's redemption from pagan bondage (Exo. 20:1-3; Deut. 5:6-7). Are the Ten Commandments, then, expressly for the covenant community?

Isaiah 24:5, referred to above, reads: "The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." Westminster Seminary's Old Testament scholar, the late E. J. Young, explained this passage in such a way as to illustrate the obligation of *non-covenant pagans* to God's Law:

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44. Craigie writes that the words of Deuteronomy 12:29-31 "not only function as a warning to the Israelites, but they also present the religious justification for the expulsion and extermination of the Canaanites. They were not to be dealt with harshly simply at the Lord's whim, nor out of sheer political necessity, but because their life style, as reflected in their religion, had become repugnant to God, the creator of all men. . . ." Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 219-20.

45. The prophets judged pagan nations for slave trade (Amos 1:6; cf. Exo. 21:16; Deut. 24:7), witchcraft (Nah. 3:4; cf. Exo. 22:18; Lev. 19:21), loan pledge abuse (Hab. 2:6; cf. Exo. 22:25-27; Deut. 24:6ff), and so forth.

The Law was not specifically revealed to the Gentiles as it was to the Jews at Sinai. Nevertheless, according to Paul, the Gentiles do by natural instinct those things which are prescribed by the Law . . . and this fact shows that the work of the Law is written on their own hearts. In transgressing those things prescribed in the Law, however, it may be said that the Gentiles were actually transgressing the Law itself. Here, the plural is used to show that the Gentiles had transgressed divine commands and ordinances, and also that their sins were many and varied. We may say that the Gentiles transgressed specific items of the Law, a thought which the plural form of the noun would also support.<sup>46</sup>

This portion of Johnson's argument based on the theme of Hebrews is woefully lacking. The theonomic ethic is not undermined by the evidence he presents.

### **The *A Fortiori* Argument in Hebrews**

In Johnson's view, the sustained *a fortiori* argument in Hebrews is telling against the theonomic ethic. "Throughout the epistle the superiority of the new order to the old is reinforced by the repeated use of the word 'better' (thirteen times in Hebrews) and by a series of *a fortiori* ('how much more') arguments that reason from the *value* of the Mosaic order to the *greater value* of the order established by Jesus (2:2-3; 9:13-14; 10:28-29; 12:25)" (p. 183).

As we have already seen, though, this does *not* have a bearing on the question of *moral and civil* issues. The specific concern in Hebrews is with the "so great salvation" that these Hebrew Christians are in danger of apostatizing from. The Levitical system in particular is given the most consideration in his argument (Heb. 5-10) because Christ is the *telos* of the sacrificial system. The mediation by a human priesthood and through ceremonial actions has passed away, being fulfilled in Christ.

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46. E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 2:156-57.

We may now personally and directly "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

### *Hebrews 2:2*

Let us consider some specifics of Johnson's presentation in this regard:

Hebrews 2:2 affirms the justice of the Mosaic penal sanctions, as a basis for the *a fortiori* argument that neglect of the great eschatological Word of God, the word of salvation spoken through the Lord himself, will justly bring even more severe punishment than that meted out to Old Testament violators of the law. 'Every trespass of unwillingness to hear received a just reward' (literal trans.). For God, then, to prescribe the penalties of the Mosaic Law for those members of Israel who disregarded his covenant word, given through angels, was unquestionably a display of his justice (p. 186).

We must keep in mind that an *a fortiori* argument from the lesser (capital punishment) to the greater (eternal condemnation) *in itself* does not remove the lesser. Johnson knows this: "The implied argument from lesser sin/punishment to greater confirms that the law reveals God's justice" (p. 178). Here is the key question: Does the greater divine judgment for rejecting the works of Jesus remove the lesser divine judgment for rejecting the words of the prophets (Matt. 11:24)? The theonomist answers *no*. In another place, Jesus makes an *a fortiori* reference to the fact that civil magistrates are called "gods" in the Old Testament, so how much more the Messiah in the New Testament (John 10:34-36). Does the appearance of the Messiah invalidate the authority of civil magistrates? Certainly not. In fact, *a fortiori* arguments *depend* upon the validity of the lesser argument in order to establish the greater. If the lesser is invalid, how can the greater be urged?

The significance of Hebrews 2:2 for the theonomic argument is its declaration of the *justness of the penal sanctions of God's Law*: "For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward." In fact, the Law, involving as it did just penal sanctions, "proved unalterable" (*egeneto bebaios*). This form of statement parallels Paul's statement regarding "the promise" (*einai bebaian*, Rom. 4:16).

Also, it is evident that the writer of Hebrews *assumes* the continuity of the Mosaic judicial sanctions. In the references to the priestly and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic administration, the writer forthrightly declares the disposal through fulfillment of those laws.<sup>47</sup> But in Hebrews 2:2, the assumption which is clearly laid down is this: If God's Law requires temporal penal sanctions as "a just reward" for infractions of God's civil law, *how much more*, then, will there be eternal sanctions for even neglect of the spiritual salvation offered by the Lord (Heb. 2:3) to those "who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14)?

There is a foundational necessity for the *temporal* punishments of God's Law as evidence of the *even more fearsome* eternal punishments. Civil punishments certainly pale in comparison to eternal judgment, but they do occur – and they are "just." If the Mosaic penalties *are* alterable and have, in fact, just been altered, how would the Hebrews argument stand? If the "lesser" has been changed, is not the "greater" open to the possibility of change later?

Neither may it be argued, as some do (and as Johnson implies), that the Mosaic penal sanctions were "heightened" punishments due to Israel's covenant status (p. 176). Here Johnson contradicts himself again: In one place he says Jesus is said to "contrast the new, heightened ethics of his kingdom with the written law" (p. 178n), whereas elsewhere Israel under the Law has a "high privilege [that] entailed heightened responsibility"

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47. See Heb. 7:11-12, 18-19, 26-8:6; 9:8-12, 23-26; 10:1-14, 19-22.



(p. 176). Who has the "heightened" ethical standing: Israel or the Church?

Hebrews 2:2 mentions nothing of its intensification or elevated status. It specifically declares that the Law's penal sanctions (capital and otherwise) did *not go beyond* the requirements of strict justice. "Every transgression and disobedience" punished under God's Law fully met with what could be described as a "just reward." The transgressions received a condign penalty, for as Johnson well notes, *endikos* indicates that which is "based on what is right . . . deserved" (p. 186n). In fact, "these penalties were just, not arbitrary explosions of vengeance, their very justice being a vindication of the law."<sup>48</sup> Then why should we assume that such just penalties as these have been abrogated?

#### *Hebrews 10:28*

Hebrew 10:28 reads: "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." It seems certain that *the apostasy law*, particularly as found in Deuteronomy 17, is in view here, for three reasons: (1) The immediate context of Hebrews regarding absolute apostasy would suggest such (Heb. 10:26-31). (2) The illustrative action regarding "the Law of Moses" is a wholesale rejection (*athetesis*, "disregard, annul")<sup>49</sup> of the Law, not a breach of one point (Heb. 10:28a). (3) The reference to the two or three witnesses (Heb. 10:28) is virtually lifted from Deuteronomy 17:6. Of course, there is the parallel law in Deuteronomy 13, which also readily comes to mind.

For our present purpose, the integrity of the Law and its continuance – despite its employment in an *a fortiori* argument

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48. Purdy, "Hebrews," *Interpreter's Bible*, 11:667.

49. "The verb *athetein* . . . describes not only the violation of an ordinance or authority in details, but the denial of the validity of the ordinance or the authority altogether." See Gal. 3:15; 1 Tim. 5:12; Jude 8; John 12:48. B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews with Greek Text* (London: Macmillan, 1928), p. 331.

– seems to be underscored by the use of the present tense: “Anyone who has rejected Moses’s law [i.e., as per Deut. 13 and 17] *dies*.” *Dies* here is *apothneskei*, which is a present indicative verb and of which Vincent writes: “Lit. *dieth*. According to the ordinance as it *now* stands in the law.”<sup>50</sup> Westcott notes of this verb: “The Law is valid and effective.”<sup>51</sup> The clear impression here is that the writer considers the Law still binding (even if not capable of enforcement under Rome).

It is interesting that there appears to be a contrast between verb tenses involved here in verses 28 and 29. The *present* dying under capital punishment pales in comparison to the *future* eternal punishment: “Any one who did set at nought a law of Moses, apart from mercies, by two or three witnesses, *doth die* [present], of how much sorer punishment *shall he be counted worthy* [future] who the Son of God did trample on” (Heb. 10:28-29).<sup>52</sup> The contrasting verb tenses are drawn close together in apparent emphasis on the comparison of *present* temporal judgment with *future* eternal judgment. This underscores the present validity of the Mosaic penal sanctions.<sup>53</sup>

I will deal further with this reference in the next section.

### Covenantal Penalty in Hebrews

#### *Penal Sanctions and Church Discipline*

As Johnson sees it, the penal sanctions in God’s Law are more or less typological of the discipline of the Church. As I noted previously, he says of the theonomic approach to penal sanctions, that it

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50. Vincent, *Word Studies*, 4:504.

51. Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 332.

52. Robert Young, *Young’s Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* (3rd ed.: Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d. [1898]), 2:154.

53. One of the Westminster divines, William Gouge has commented on this Hebrews verse: “This justifieth the practice of magistrates in like cases.” Gouge, *Hebrews*, p. 729.

overlooks the redemptive-historical place assigned to them by the Epistle to the Hebrews. The punishments of the Mosaic Law belong clearly to the old order, and thus they point ahead to the higher privilege and the resultant higher accountability of the new covenant order established in Jesus. Although these penalties are not precisely labeled 'types' in Hebrews, the epistle nevertheless leads us to see that they are fulfilled and heightened in the sanctions of church discipline that point to the ultimate horror of separation from God and affliction under his jealous wrath (Heb 10:27, 30-31). The justice of these sanctions is specifically qualified by the covenant bond that has been violated, the relationship between the offender and the Lord, which has been severed irreparably (pp. 189-90).

Johnson's argument leaves the undeniable (though probably unintended) impression that the Old Testament saints knew nothing of God's eternal sanctions. But those who died in sin in the Old Testament had to face eternal punishment (Psa. 49:14; Isa. 66:24; Dan. 12:2). So, how could the *Mosaic sanctions* serve as types of God's eternal sanctions (which threat met the Old Testament saint, as well) and be applied in the Old Testament era, but *not* in the New Testament? The psychological element in the *a fortiori* contrast is between the natural tendency of man as a sinner to shrink back from the more immediately visible temporal judgment (capital sanctions) than the distant eternal judgment (eternal judgment). Yet just as surely as the Law condemns criminal conduct, Judgment Day will deal even more sorely with spiritual rebellion.

In addition, the threat of excommunication existed in the Old Testament – even on Johnson's own analysis: "In addition [to commonly recognized capital offenses], those found guilty of certain acts must be 'cut off from their people.' In some instances this may possibly entail banishment, 'shunning,' or excommunication from the congregation of Israel" (p. 177n). *Excommunication and capital punishment existed side-by-side in the Old Testament.* The theonomist asks: Why not also in the New Testa-

ment? This is not a radical question. After all, most evangelicals affirm future eternal sanctions as well as capital punishment for murder. Still further, may we on the basis of Johnson's argument throw out the requirement of witnesses (Heb. 10:28) for excommunicatory sanctions?

It is true, of course, that the author of Hebrews draws these penal sanctions into a discussion of the ultimate repercussions of spiritual apostasy from the Christian faith. But his *a fortiori* argument does not dismantle the *civil utility* of the penal sanctions. We have examples of this fact in other New Testament passages. In Matthew 5, Jesus applied the prohibition against murder to the root cause of murder, which is hatred. And though He references the fact of the capital sanction against murder, His urging the deepest spiritual meaning of the Law does not render its capital punishment inoperative. In Hebrews 10, the writer applies the prohibition against idolatrous apostasy to its root effect, unbelief. And though he references the fact of the capital sanction against idolatrous apostasy, His urging the deepest spiritual meaning of the Law does not render its capital punishment inoperative (see discussion below for the nature of the apostasy in view). That is, there may be temporal capital sanctions against physical acts administered by the civil magistrate, while *at the same time* there exists the threat of eternal judgmental sanctions against related spiritual acts, administered by the Lord of glory.

Just because the Church is only given the "keys of the kingdom," whereby she punishes by excommunication, this does not mean that the State may not have an obligation to wield its sword against the same excommunicable act. After all, if a church today has a member who murders someone, may not the church excommunicate him *and* the State capitally punish him? The two types of sanction are distinct, to be sure, but they are not mutually exclusive.

*Penal Sanctions and Apostasy*

But how does the theonomic ethic understand the capital sanctions regarding apostasy, as recorded in Deuteronomy 13 and 17:2-7? Do we call for *civil* governmental enforcement of all excommunication decrees by capital punishment? These are important questions. Let us set forth some critical observations regarding the application of these laws "when properly interpreted."<sup>54</sup>

First, it should be noted at the outset that the framing of the law in Deuteronomy 13 has in view *solicitation and seduction to idolatry* (Deut. 13:2, 6, 13). It does not have in mind personal unbelief or even personal rejection of faith in Jehovah God. Those who mistakenly assume that this law would inevitably draw the State sword into church discipline for unbelief are mistaken. In point of fact, unbelief in Israel was *not* punishable by death. For one to refuse to be circumcised (an expression of unbelief, cf. Lev. 26:41; Deut. 30:6; Jer. 9:25-26; Eze. 44:7) meant that he was "cut off" from the religious community (Gen. 17:14). He was excluded from the worship in Israel (Exo. 12:48; Eze. 44:7, 9); he was not capitally punished.

Second, in Deuteronomy 13, we have what in essence is the framing of a law against *treason*. This is evident on the basis of the following three-staged consideration: (1) By the very nature of the case, the *god* of a society is that society's source of law.<sup>55</sup> It has been thus in the fallen world since the temptation of Eve to be as "God" by "knowing" (determining, legislating) good and evil (Gen. 3:5). Hence, the pagan tendency for political rulers to be deified, as illustrated in the Babylonian king (Isa. 14:4, 13-14) and the Roman emperor (Matt. 22:15-22;<sup>56</sup> 2

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54. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (2nd ed.: Nutley, NJ: Craig, 1984), p. xvi.

55. See R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn, 1971).

56. For helpful insights see: Will S. Barker, *TRC*, pp. 234ff.

Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:4ff). Hegel clothed this pagan conception in modern dress: "The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth."<sup>57</sup> To seek another god, therefore, is to turn from the Law of the present God, Jehovah, which Law was the constitutional basis of the nation of Israel.

(2) The context preceding Deuteronomy 13 speaks of the gods of the nations around Israel. It speaks of *nations serving their gods*: "When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, '*How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise*'" (Deut. 12:29-30). This leads me to note that:

(3) The Deuteronomic law is developed in such a way as to indicate the *ultimate outcome* of such apostasy. It is wholesale, treasonous rebellion against the lawful authority and integrity of the nation: "If you hear someone in one of your *cities*, which the LORD your God gives you to dwell in, saying, 'Certain corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their *city*, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods," gods whom you have not known' " (Deut. 13:12-13). As Craigie puts it: "In its implications, the crime would be equivalent to treason or espionage in time of war."<sup>58</sup> Thus, in a certain respect such a law was a right to "self-defense" for the nation, as was the right to wage defensive warfare.

Third, any perception of idolatry as a quietistic unbelief is wholly mistaken. The very nature of idolatry involved the ancient worshiper in a number of capital crimes.<sup>59</sup> *Thus, the punishment for idolatry is a punishment for those particular crimes.* As

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57. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1901), p. 87.

58. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 222.

59. In fact, it is only in modern times that worship and faith could be separated from life and practice.

Mayes notes, Deuteronomy 12:29-32 is the "general introduction" to chapter 13.<sup>60</sup> This "general introduction" clearly speaks of certain "abominable acts" of idol worshippers:

When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, '*How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.*' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for *every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.* (Deut. 12:30-31)

Idolatry involved wide-scale criminal conduct and was a dangerous cancer.<sup>61</sup> The Canaanites were not thrust out of the land for unbelief, but for wholesale moral and criminal perversion.<sup>62</sup> That idolatry was a real danger is evident in the days of Israel's apostasy, when abominable acts were committed (2 Kgs. 16:3; 21:6; 23:10). All nations served idols in those days (2 Kgs. 17:29). Israel fell right in with them and with their grossly immoral crimes (2 Kgs. 17:7ff, 17-19), thus corrupting and subverting the moral fiber of their culture by legalizing child sacrifice, bestiality, homosexual conduct, cult prostitution, and the like.

Thus, as we have seen, the apostasy laws of God's Laws are not laws against mere unbelief or against misguided worship. Those laws were designed to protect *the legal integrity of the nation* (criminalizing such actions as treason, conspiracy, seditious revolt, and espionage) and to bring *judgment against wicked*

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60. A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy (New Century Bible)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 230.

61. See Lev. 18:21-30; Rom. 1:21-32. 1 Cor. 10:20 shows the connection with Satan worship.

62. Lev. 18:3, 24ff; 20:23; Deut. 9:5; 18:9-12.

*idolatry* (criminalizing such actions as cultural subversion and public mayhem).<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

In the final analysis, we let Johnson undermine his own case: "At issue is not divine justice in the abstract as a model of political jurisprudence, but the Lord's just expectation in view of his people's covenantal obligations to him" (p. 187). That being the case, how can Hebrews undermine the theonomic view of penal sanctions? By the same parity of reasoning, since children are commanded to be obedient to their parents in Paul's epistle to the *covenant community* at Ephesus, may we legitimately argue that children of parents *outside the covenant* are not to be obedient to their parents? This *reductio* could be applied across the board to *all* features of the Ten Commandments, since they, too, are given to the covenant community of Israel.

In Johnson's conclusion, he notes that the New Testament "calls us, even as we pursue evangelism and justice in the present age, to look ahead to the only perfect disclosure of the kingdom's righteousness, at the coming of the King, Jesus Christ" (p. 192). As with so many who assail the theonomic option, we are left wondering *what is the nature of justice?* What is the standard by which we may judge civil law? May we even seek civil justice in the present age, since it is only at the coming of King Jesus that we may ever expect a perfect disclosure of it? It is a tragedy of much contra-theonomic argumentation that even if the arguments were valid, the Christian would be left without *any* biblically rooted civil directives regarding civil justice.

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63. The false prophet in Deuteronomy 13:5 is not just a foolish mouther of error, but is a focus point for agitating the masses to rebellion. The prophets of Israel "demanded that same obedience to their words as was due to the Law of God." E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 34. The false prophets would tend to mirror the cultural function of the true prophets, and were, thus, dangerous as conspirators.



**PART III**

**THE CHURCH**

Further, there is in the periods of development of the immediate ethical ideals a sort of fitness for every stage. There is a far greater externalism in the earlier stages of revelation than there is in its later stages. That the prophets have a more internalistic ethics than was given to the Israelites at an earlier stage is often used as evidence of the evolutionary development of Old Testament ethics. Yet it does not prove anything of the sort. It is simply what we should expect. On the other hand it is not true that there is no internalism in the earlier stages at all. We have already quoted Deuteronomy 6 to show that the Israelite was to love God with all his heart and with all his mind. It is a matter of degree. Then too it is evident that in the course of redemptive revelation the later stages present a much faster development than the earlier. In the first stages it seems as though there is very little development. Then suddenly rapid strides of advance are made. The final reason for this is ultimately in the free disposition of God. Yet we can see in it certain laws of progress. We can see a process something akin to the accumulation of snow on a rolling snowball. The capacity for taking in more snow increases greatly as the actual quantity increases. So also it is but natural to expect that once the facts of the life and death of Christ have taken place the church will make rapid strides in its capacity for catching hold of the ultimate ideal and making every immediate ideal subordinate to it.

Cornelius Van Til (1958)\*

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\*Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, Vol. III of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1958] 1980), pp. 93-94.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO PART III

*And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:19).*

What are the keys? Are they judicial? Are they based on a self-maledictory oath before the Trinitarian God of the Bible? Do they involve lawful judicial authority? Does the church alone possess these keys? Does God back up His church's excommunications in eternity? Are excommunicated people – people who do not have lawful access to the Lord's Supper – really going to hell? Most theonomists answer *yes* to all these questions. This brings us to the doctrine of the church.

We have already discussed the doctrine of the state. It began with this question: What is the sword? Is the sword, like the keys, an oath-bound covenantal authority? If so, then the state is required to be Trinitarian. If not, then there has been a fundamental break covenantally with the Old Covenant order. If there has been such a break, there must be judicial standards other than the Bible's that apply lawfully to all people who live in this, the New Covenant era. *What are these standards?* That is what Van Til asked. Following Van Til, that is what Rushdoony asked. That is what the theonomists have asked. And that is what our pietistic, antinomian brethren from a wide range of

theological traditions have steadfastly refused to answer, decade after decade. Like Roger Williams, they wind up defending some version of natural law theory and the civil authority of general revelation over the Bible. To put it in the quaint language of the Calvinist seminary, they relegate biblical law to an aspect of the "historical-redemptive economy," meaning the Mosaic economy, which was supposedly buried with, but not resurrected with, Jesus Christ. That is, they treat biblical civil law as if it were *God's law, emeritus*.

This view of the authority of God's civil law automatically transfers to covenant-breakers the authority to name the standards of civil government and then enforce them by means of whatever sanctions they can get covenant-breaking voters to accept. And then, lo and behold, the Christians say, "We, too!" (Yes, even when the pagans start murdering pre-born infants.)

The issue is very simple: "If the state refuses to protect God's church from those who would attack it, then no other agency is empowered to." Next: "If the state is not Christian, it is non-Christian." But as Van Til kept saying, to be non-Christian is necessarily to be *anti-Christian*. There are only two categories, he insisted: covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. But his spiritual heirs at Westminster Seminary no longer accept such a harsh judicial distinction. Van Til was wrong, they tell us today. There has to be a third category: *covenant-neutral*. If there isn't, then the theonomists are correct. Let it never be!

With the publication of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, Westminster Seminary has publicly abandoned Van Til's legacy. The amazing thing is, they refuse to say so clearly. This self-conscious lack of clarity may have confused Westminster's donors, at least temporarily; it should not confuse anyone else.

### **What Westminster's Challenge to Theonomy Is All About**

As we have seen in Gentry's essays on Dennis Johnson, the heart, mind, and soul of Westminster Seminary's critique of theonomy is the faculty's concentration on Jesus Christ's office

as High Priest. This exclusively ecclesiastical focus has obscured His continuing office of King of kings in history. His resurrection and ascension for some reason supposedly have annulled His status as a King with sanctions in New Covenant history. Today, He is supposedly a King without any need for intermediary, oath-bound civil sanctions. He imposes only random sanctions today, we are assured; He does not impose predictable negative sanctions, as He did under the Old Covenant. So, there is no reason for anointed civil magistrates to take a self-maledictory oath to Him. They no longer serve as His intermediaries, imposing the negative sanctions of civil government so that God does not impose His own negative sanctions directly.

Once freed from explicitly biblical covenantal restraints, the state can then impose positive sanctions as an agency of covenantally neutral healing. This may not be the opinion of all the Westminster faculty, but it was surely the opinion of Edmund Clowney, and it is openly the opinion of his disciples, most notably Timothy Keller.<sup>1</sup>

Westminster's faculty members have accentuated the negative covenantal sanction of excommunication and the positive covenantal sanction of spiritual healing, but they have either downplayed or denied the legitimacy of the negative covenantal sanction of the sword. *They have publicly stripped Jesus Christ of His kingdom in church history.* This is necessarily what all amillennial and all premillennial schemes do, and members of the faculty are all amillennialists. Jesus is seen by them as King only on the day of final judgment: "King of dead kings, and Lord of dead lords." This theological position is expressed most forthrightly in Dennis Johnson's essay, but it is the underlying judicial presupposition of every essay in the book except the essays by Frame and Poythress. (Frame and Poythress believe that Jesus is kind of a King in history and sort of a Lord, from a

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1. Timothy J. Keller, "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, ch. 12.

certain point of view, all things considered, generally speaking, but we need to be *very* careful in how we express this publicly.)

My accusation will be denied by the faculty – vigorously and incoherently. (How incoherently? See pages 205-6 of Gaffin’s essay in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, on what he calls the “staticism of eschatological dynamism,” for evidence.) Any time an amillennialist begins to discuss the nature of the victory of Christ in New Testament history, he becomes incoherent. In contrast, the premillennialists, who hold an identical view of the actual effects of the work of the church in history, are much more forthright. In their view, the church loses until Jesus returns bodily to establish His kingdom. Until that time, they insist, we should expect no more success than an amillennialist expects (well, a little more: larger churches, certainly, plus higher Nielson ratings on charismatic satellite T.V. networks).

### **The Ideal of Christendom**

Because the theonomists have discussed the kingdom in its broadest sense, as a civilization (Christendom), they have drawn the slings and arrows of pietists generally and the Westminster faculty specifically. The theonomists are dismissed as people whose concern is primarily politics. Why are informed readers willing to consider such an argument? Because readers are all products of the humanist-certified school system, which indoctrinates its victims with this creedal formula: *politics is pluralist, religion is ecclesiastical, and history is neutral*. This view expresses the same view of the kingdom that pietism does: Jesus as King of dead kings, and Lord of dead lords. It presents Christendom as the enemy worldview. Thus, any attempt to bring the civil covenant under the law of God, as manifested publicly by the imposition of explicitly biblical penal sanctions by the civil magistrate, is seen as a form of “Constantinianism,” and therefore inherently tyrannical. (Question: Was God tyrannical in Old Covenant Israel? The critics of theonomy never answer this question directly, but when pressed, they answer *yes*, God *was*

basically tyrannical, which is why I argue that Marcionism has outlived Marxism as a system of historical interpretation.)

God sends covenant-breakers to hell. He resurrects these people only to put them into an even worse condition for eternity. He torments them (i.e., *tortures* them) forever. But when a theonomist suggests that God's covenantal agent, the civil magistrate, can lawfully execute a convicted criminal in God's name, thereby transferring the criminal into God's heavenly court, the theonomist is identified as theologically deviant.

God provides an *earnest* (down payment) in history to both covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. The good get richer, and the bad get poorer, long term. The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. This is the covenantal argument of the postmillennialist. The righteous will inherit the earth in history.

Another way that God extends His earnest in history is by having the civil magistrate lawfully execute those who commit certain crimes. A crime is defined biblically as a sin that the civil magistrate is empowered by God to punish. The civil magistrate does not make people good; he merely imposes penalties on evil acts that can be proven in court to have taken place. I ask three questions. Under whose covenantal authority? By what judicial standard? In terms of what covenantal oath?

The Westminster faculty steadfastly refuses to answer these three questions. They fudge. In doing so, they systematically ignore the implications in history of the inescapable covenantal status of the family. They are willing to do this because they are determined to deny the covenantal status of the state.

### The Question of the Church

What is the proper response of the church of Jesus Christ to the issue of theonomy? Is it a heresy, as several dispensational authors of paperback books have said? Is it outside of the Reformed theological heritage, as former pro-abortionist, former dispensationalist, and former Westminster Theological Seminary professor Bruce Waltke has argued in *Theonomy: A Re-*

*formed Critique?* Is it a threat to the peace of the church, either because of the issues it raises or the tactics of its adherents? (If so, can a similar legitimate criticism be made against Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox?)

This raises a fundamental theological question: *What is the future of the church?* If the church has a limited role in history, then its responsibilities are minimal. If its responsibilities are minimal, then it needs to reduce the level of confrontation with the world. This is the belief of most critics of theonomy.

If the level of confrontation between the church and the world is reduced, what happens to the level of confrontation within the church? Some might argue that it will also be reduced. I disagree. The level of conflict within the church will increase. If the world is inevitably going to hell in a handbasket, then church members will spend their lives tearing up the peace of the church over such matters as the proper color of the carpet. Another fertile ground for church splits is the choir. The debates that went on inside the Russian Orthodox Church from 1900 to 1917 had little to do with the looming threat of revolution or the rise of Bolshevism.<sup>2</sup> After 1917, the Russian Orthodox Church was under continual siege. Its leaders ceased debating over trivialities. They were too busy avoiding martyrdom – Stalin killed 80,000 priests – to worry about trivialities.

If we want God to leave us in peace to do His work, we had better not confine our ecclesiastical debates to trivialities. This means that Christians need to know what the church's God-assigned task is in history.

### Eschatology

This leads us to the question of eschatology: What is the church expected by God to accomplish before the return of Jesus Christ, either to rapture His saints to heaven for a thou-

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2. Ellen Myers, "Uncertain Trumpet: The Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Religious Thought, 1900-1917," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, XI (1985).



sand years (or perhaps for only seven years, followed by a return to earth for a millennium of head-bashing for Jesus)<sup>3</sup> or to bring the final judgment?

The faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary has been predominantly amillennial from its inception. The old Princetonian tradition of postmillennialism was not transferred to Westminster in 1929. Richard Gaffin's essay in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* spells out some of the implications of Calvinism's amillennial heritage, a relatively recent theological import from the Netherlands.

Kenneth L. Gentry's reply to Gaffin's essay on eschatology is a reminder of my continual refrain: "You can't beat something with nothing." The "nothing" that Gaffin has offered is a critique of postmillennialism that is not supported by the biblical texts he presents as evidence against postmillennialism. One by one, Gentry responds to these supposed proof texts against postmillennialism. Gentry concludes that Gaffin is also hampered by his unwillingness to present a positive exegetical case for amillennialism. Had Gaffin referred to some body of exegetically based theological opinion that has stated this case, especially as it relates to a theory of church history, Gentry's accusation would be groundless. But Gaffin does not refer to such a body of opinion. There is a very good reason for this – one of the embarrassing secrets of amillennialism: there is no such body of opinion. It has all been assumed to exist by amillennialism's promoters, but it does not exist. It never has.

Here is the heart of the debate over the nature of New Covenant church history. It underlies Gaffin's essay and Gentry's. It is a debate over what separates the two – and *only* two – bodily comings of Christ. The first coming inaugurated His kingdom; the second coming will close His kingdom's manifestation in history by ending history.

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3. Dave Hunt, *Beyond Seduction: A Return to Biblical Christianity* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1987), p. 250.

*The Nature of New Covenant History*

The amillennialist wants to merge Christ's two comings into a cosmically unified event. The postmillennialist agrees that the two comings are cosmically unified – the inauguration and historical completion of Jesus Christ's New World Order – but he wants to link these two events by the process of historical transformation, which he sees as equally cosmic. Like the amillennialist, the postmillennialist insists on seeing the first coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh as discontinuous and covenantally definitive. Like the amillennialist, the postmillennialist also sees the second coming of Christ in the flesh as final: the consummation of history. The postmillennialist joins the amillennialist in a common rejection of premillennialism's doctrine of a series of pre-consummation discontinuities: additional bodily comings of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> But the postmillennialist sees the work of Christ in His church in history as progressive. He views this progressive work of transformation as cosmically (eschatologically) significant. He views the *continuity of the church's growth and its social transformation of culture* as eschatological. The amillennialist does not, as Gaffin's essay reveals.

History for the amillennialist links *chronologically* the two comings of Jesus Christ in the flesh, but it does not link them *eschatologically*. History in the amillennial system does not possess the degree of transformational power regarding cultural development which the Mosaic economy possessed. The amillennialist speaks of the "redemptive-historical process," but he limits the social and cultural aspects of this process to the Old Covenant. In short, in the amillennial framework, history is not transformed by the gospel of salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit; only individuals are. If this sounds like pietistic fundamentalism – "Save souls, not society!" – that is because

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4. Historic premillennialism teaches that Jesus will come again bodily to inaugurate His earthly kingdom reign. Dispensational premillennialism teaches that prior to this appearance, Jesus will come bodily (secretly) to rapture His church to heaven.

amillennialism and premillennialism share a common pietism. Their view of *church history* is the same, so their view of *salvation* – the healing power of the gospel – is the same.

### Transformation

With respect to transformation, there are two models that are presented in the name of Christianity. The first is postmillennialism's model: the transformation of the world through the widespread transformation of individuals. In short, a *comprehensive gospel* will bring *comprehensive salvation* in history to a world in *comprehensive sin*. This will be accomplished through the church's empowering by the Holy Spirit. Its motto: "Sin is no more comprehensive than the gospel, and much less powerful as time goes on."

The other model is fundamentalism's: the transforming power of the gospel is limited to individual hearts. At most, the gospel can transform families and churches. It cannot transform society. Its social reform model is the skid-row mission: sober up a few bums and send them to McDonald's to work. Perhaps a few of them will even become assistant managers before they die or Jesus returns to rapture the church, whichever comes first (presumably the latter).

Amillennialism is very close to fundamentalism's model, except that the amillennialist thinks that the return of Christ is indeterminate, so the ex-bum may even have time to make it to manager, unless the persecution of Christians begins (which, Van Til always said, is inevitable).

Getting bums off skid row is a worthy goal. The question is: How many bums can the church hope to get off and keep off skid row? Another question is: Can we expect the bums to escape their present economic and social condition if the church and society place no legal conditions on the aid that they receive? *Is biblical charity conditional?* Ray Sutton examines Timothy Keller's essay on charity and shows why Keller's model

is antinomian. If put into practice, it would lead to the bankruptcy of the church. It is based on guilt rather than law.

The provision of charity is a positive sanction by the church. This is what distinguishes it covenantally from the state, biblically: the church, unlike the state, is an agency of positive sanctions. So is the family. The state, with its monopoly of violence, is not. By making the state into an agency for administering positive sanctions, the statist transforms the state into a pseudo-family,<sup>5</sup> and in some cases, into a pseudo-church. The state then becomes messianic.

### Preaching

The church, not the family or the state, is the central institution in history. It alone carries into the world beyond the final judgment (Rev. 21, 22). Neither the family nor the state can claim this degree of centrality. Any discussion of Christian reconstruction must begin with the church. Any attempt to deflect the primary responsibility for Christian reconstruction to any other institution is doomed to failure, for no other institution is empowered by God to withstand such pressure and responsibility. Clanism-patriarchalism results from making the family (or the private school) the central covenantal institution. Statism is the result of the attempt to make the state the central institution: Marxism, socialism, fascism, or Keynesianism. Neither familism nor statism is biblical.

The institutional church has three aspects: the preaching of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments (positive sanctions), and the defense of the sacraments against unauthorized participants (negative sanctions). Calvinism has always stressed preaching, although it has formally admitted the other marks of the church. (Weekly preaching is universal in Calvinist churches; weekly communion isn't.) So, I focus on preaching.

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5. Gary North, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986), ch. 5.

*Hermeneutics*

If theonomy had no principle of biblical interpretation – no hermeneutic – then it could offer no guide for preaching. The essay by Vern Poythress in the Westminster symposium accuses theonomists of not having offered a hermeneutic that is both theonomic and at the same time uniquely capable of being applied to real-world situations. He argues that other hermeneutics are equally valid, especially Meredith G. Kline's.

If true, this would be a serious accusation. More than this: it would be fatal to theonomy's claim of universal transformation. So, the issue of hermeneutics is vital for the theonomic movement. Theonomy's principles of biblical interpretation must be made clear enough to enable pastors to use them. If this cannot be done, then the preaching of the churches cannot be transformed by theonomy or lead to transformed lives and institutions. This is why the lack of a uniquely theonomic hermeneutic would be fatal for theonomy. Unless the church preaches by means of such a hermeneutic, theonomy will remain a curiosity of scholars. It will not lead to social redemption.

Poythress is a victim of an affliction called *multi-perspectivalism*. It leaves the expositor with too many potential paths to the Bible's truth. This truth remains ever elusive, for with too many paths leading into it, there are too many paths leading out of it. There can be no uniquely biblical guide to specific personal or social actions if there are many paths to truth.

Poythress wants a blueprint so cluttered with options that no building could ever be constructed by using it, and certainly no building taller than a single story. To assert the existence of many covenantal blueprints is to assert the non-existence of any uniquely biblical covenantal blueprint. This is his way of denying the concept of biblical covenantal blueprints. By opening the hermeneutical door to everyone, he closes the door to the ideal of Christendom. This is a more polite, seemingly less humanism-compromised way of denying the legitimacy of Christendom than the approach taken by the Calvinistic "prin-

ciplend pluralists," but the effect is the same. Being lost in the shadows is just as debilitating as being tenured by humanists.

Poythress challenges the theonomists to present their principles of biblical interpretation. He specifies a test case: Leviticus 19:19. I respond to this challenge in my essay.

John Maphet responds to a wider challenge: the assertion that theonomy divides churches. He shows that the critics in the churches have not read theonomy's literature. This, I need to add, puts them in the same condition as all the other published critics. We had expected a better challenge from Westminster.

### Conclusion

Theonomy is theocentric. It is therefore ecclesiocentric. The church is the central institution in society. It is therefore the central institution for the reconstruction of society along biblical lines. By training pastors, a seminary today has a huge responsibility. If a seminary degree were universally required for the pastorate – providentially, this is not the case – the seminary would shape the future as no other educational institution could. A seminary's error is still very dangerous to the church. This is why *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* warranted three volumes of responses from theonomists.

## WHOSE VICTORY IN HISTORY?

*Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.*

It is quite evident that Westminster Seminary's published critique of Christian Reconstructionism is systematically operating from a two-fold agenda. The aspect of the agenda receiving the most focused concentration in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is the denial of God's objective divine sanctions in history. This resistance to the contemporary, historical application of God's Law (including its criminal sanctions) to all of life and culture, is evident throughout the work.

But there is a second feature of the book, which is vitally related to this concept and which flows as a major undercurrent through many of its chapters. That strong and deadly undertow is the book's antipathy to postmillennialism's confident expectation of the culture-wide victory of Christianity in history.

The tragedy of such a dual agenda should be evident. *When historical pessimism is coupled with a studied resistance to historical divine sanctions, the effective result is a denial of Christian culture.* Christian Reconstructionists have vigorously argued this as their distinctive contribution to Christian social theory.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See especially the recent works in this area: Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990) and Kenneth L.

The issues of *time* and *civilization* are important to a full-orbed Christian faith and a fundamentally biblical world-and-life view. Regarding time, the postmillennial eschatology provides the duration, direction, and expectation necessary to the building of Christian civilization. Regarding civilization, the theonomic ethic provides the foundation, framework, and substance essential for such. Unfortunately, the critique before us by Westminster Seminary seems committed to the *failure* of Christianity as a pervasive, distinctive, culture-wide influence, due to a resistance to a proper understanding of time and civilization as viewed from a biblical perspective. One of the analysts in the book, John Muether, even complains rather surprisingly: "Theonomy . . . insists on using the Bible as though it were a textbook for all life" (p. 254).

This sad situation is evidenced in a recent review of my *Before Jerusalem Fell* by Rev. Stuart R. Jones, a 1974 graduate of Westminster Seminary. In his exposing of what he feels are weaknesses in my work, particularly the application of many of the prophecies of Revelation to the A.D. 67-70 Jewish War,<sup>2</sup> Jones triumphantly asserts: "This weakens the argument for preterism . . . and leaves room for pessimism!"<sup>3</sup> Reconstructionists firmly hold an expectation of the historical, earthly victory of the kingdom of Christ in the transformation (reconstruction) of civilization. Amillennialists, instead, prefer to "leave room for pessimism."<sup>4</sup>

In the work before us, Gaffin even writes: "No success of the Gospel, however great, will bring the church into a position of

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Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Calling in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

2. Gaffin also resists such preterism, though with *no* exegetical argumentation, cf. pp. 205, 217, 217n, 218, 221.

3. Stuart R. Jones, "Review of *Before Jerusalem Fell*," *New Horizons* 12:2 (January, 1991) 23.

4. See chapter 12, entitled "Pessimism and the Great Commission," in my *The Greatness of the Great Commission*. See also North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 4: "Pessimillennialism."



earthly prosperity and dominion such that the wilderness with its persecutions and temptations will be eliminated or even marginalized" (p. 223). This helps explain the endorsement of pluralism in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.<sup>5</sup> In essence, pluralism is the best for which history's losers may hope.<sup>6</sup>

This leads me now to consider the only purely eschatological chapter in the book before us, Richard B. Gaffin's "Theonomy and Eschatology." After struggling for a definition of postmillennialism (pp. 197-202), Gaffin provides the reader with four theological reservations he has regarding the "triumphalism" inherent in postmillennialism. Due to space limitations, I will consider only his two major reservations.<sup>7</sup> One he calls his "primary reservation" (p. 202); the other his "most substantial reservation" (p. 210). Despite Gaffin's well-deserved reputation as a careful reformed theologian and his argument's *prima facie* plausibility, I believe a studied analysis of his presentation will expose debilitating argumentative flaws within it.

### De-eschatologization

Gaffin's "primary reservation" to Reconstructionist postmillennialism is that it " 'de-eschatologizes' the present (and past) existence of the church," so that postmillennialists inadvertently "devalue Christian life and experience in the present (and the past). . . ." (p. 202). This, he argues, is because postmillennialism "effectively compromises and, in part, even denies" the "kingship of the ascended Christ" (p. 202).

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5. See: Will S. Barker's chapter 10, entitled: "Theonomy, Pluralism, and the Bible" in *TRC*.

6. See: Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989) and North, *Millennialism*.

7. I will deal with the alleged problem of watchfulness-and-imminence in my *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, forthcoming). Also in that work, Gaffin's fourth issue (the wilderness theme) will be shown to be improperly employed, by a positive setting forth of the prophetic expectation of Scripture.

How is this surprising charge so? He explains:

Nothing is more distinctive to the postmil vision than its expectation of promised 'victory' for the church, a future 'golden age,' before Christ's return. . . . [This] millennial 'gold'/'victory' (1) is expected before Christ's return and (2) up to the present time in the church's history, apart from occasional anticipations, has remained entirely in the future. . . .

Here, then, is where a problem . . . begins to emerge. Emphasis on the golden era as being entirely future leaves the unmistakable impression that the church's present (and past) is something other than golden and that so far in its history the church has been less than victorious (pp. 202-3).

Gaffin then goes on to argue that the New Testament "will not tolerate such" a postmillennial construction of history in that "the *eschatological* kingship of Christ begins already at his first coming culminating in his resurrection and ascension. . . . This is a key eschatological pronouncement (announcing the fulfillment in Christ in terms of Psalm 8:6 and 110:1)" (p. 203). With this last statement, I could not agree more heartily; but my agreement is with Gaffin's *words*, not his *connotation*.

### *Psalm 110 in the Debate*

It is interesting that Psalm 110:1 is mentioned by him, for this is precisely where we learn in succinct language of the expectation of historical victory: "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Reconstructionist postmillennialists affirm that the sessional kingship of Christ began at His First Advent and that the exercise of that kingship is coextensive with the entire era,<sup>8</sup> as Gaffin well knows (pp. 206-7). And since begun, Christ's sovereign rule will continue

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8. Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 175-92.

"until" all of his enemies become his footstool. This is such a significant truth for biblical theology that Psalm 110:1 is the Old Testament reference that is quoted most often in the New Testament. Gaffin rightly points out that Christ is currently the absolute sovereign and has been since His ascension (p. 203). But he sees the "until" of Psalm 110:1 as pointing to Christ's Second Advent, when He defeats death when He *closes* history: ". . . that decisive, quantum transition is plainly associated with events concomitant with his personal bodily return . . . and not with some prior, intermediate point or set of developments leading to his return" (p. 203). Is he correct in this view?

The word "until" in Psalm 110:1 is the Hebrew word: *ʾd*. According to Brown, Driver, and Briggs this word marks "not an absolute close, but an epoch, or turning-point, in the fut[ure]." <sup>9</sup> This lexical observation may be seen at work in Paul's important employment of Psalm 110:1 in chapter fifteen of 1 Corinthians. Paul's *major* point in 1 Corinthians 15, to be sure, has to do with "the end" of history (v. 24), when the *resurrection* occurs at Christ's Second Coming (v. 23). The resurrection is the ultimate and conclusive demonstration of Christ's victory *over death*. And as a matter of fact, this is the focus of Paul's attention (see vv. 12-23, 35-38).

Yet in the very context in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul alludes to both Psalm 110:1 (see v. 25) and Psalm 8:6 (see v. 27), he also clearly mentions Christ's present continuing reign as a *progressive, unfolding reality*: "For He must reign [present infinitive] *until He has put* all His enemies under His feet" (v. 25). His present reign, which is *from heaven* where He has all authority, seeks its *historical manifestation* through the *present* progressive abolishing of "all rule and all authority and power" (v. 24). Consequently, He will not come (v. 23) until "the end" (v. 24a), which will not occur until "*after*" (*hotan* with the aorist subjunc-

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9. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 725.

tive, v. 24) this has been accomplished. In other words, Paul interprets the "until" from the Hebrew of Psalm 110:1 by an effective aorist,<sup>10</sup> allowing its *progressive* import up to its successful completion in verses 24 and 25.

This fact is confirmed for us in 1 Corinthians 15:28, where we read of the *still future* expectation of the total subjugation of all His enemies: "And *after* [*hotan* with the aorist passive subjunctive means "after"<sup>11</sup>] all things shall be subdued unto him, then [*tote*] shall the Son also himself be subject [future indicative] unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." Of the aorist verb used here, A. T. Robertson notes: "It is prophecy, of course."<sup>12</sup> That is, the subduing that Paul had in mind was still in the future when he wrote. Gaffin's theological objection to postmillennialism, then, would appear *equally applicable to Paul!* Thus, on Gaffin's analysis, Paul would be "denying" the reality of Christ's *present* rule by expecting some *future* unfolding of victory in addition to what He had in the first century!

Furthermore, we should note that *even death itself has already been conquered* definitively and in principle by Christ in the first century (see 2 Tim. 1:10, cp. Acts 2:24; Rom. 6:9, 12-13; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:14). Gaffin recognizes this, for he writes: "believers are 'alive from the dead,' already resurrected" (p. 211). This is despite the fact that, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:26, the conquering of death awaits the historical end of history for its conclusive manifestation to the world. This understanding of Christ's victory over death – definitive in the

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10. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1960), 4:191. "The idea is that emphasis is laid on the end of the action as opposed to the beginning (ingressive)." A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (4th ed.; Nashville: Broadman, 1934), p. 835.

11. The subjugation in view is *not yet* as Paul writes. Hence, it is not the ascension-session's definitive subjugation in *principle*. Rather, it looks to the progressive subjugation in *history*.

12. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4:192.

past but also final in the future – is irreconcilable with Gaffin's theological method, as we shall see.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, the writer of Hebrews says of the Psalm 8:6 verse referenced by Gaffin (p. 203): "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. *But now we see not yet all things put under him*" (Heb. 2:8). The writer of Hebrews applies Psalm 8:6 to *man*, even though Paul applies it to *Christ*. Hebrews also teaches that all things have "not yet" been subjected by Christ in history through the instrumentality of man, *even though we know from Paul that "all has been subjected" by Christ* in principle since His ascension (Eph. 1:20-22). Is there an "effective compromise" (Gaffin's phrase) of the *present* reality of the subjugation of "all things" by Christ in the statement by the writer of Hebrews? Surely not!

### *The Principle of Gradualism*

Regarding sovereign rule: Jesus Christ currently possesses its reality, claims its title and authority, and actually exercises it in history. But He sovereignly directs His people *progressively* through time to seek the *historical manifestation*, the contemporary development and unfolding, of this glorious reality on earth and among its inhabitants. It is only the *last* enemy (death), whose defeat awaits the moment of His return; His other enemies fall before that glorious event.

The gradual, historical unfolding of the implications of the kingship of Christ *does not in any way deny the contemporary eschatological reality of its heavenly status and present reality*, as 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 and Hebrews 2:8 clearly show.<sup>14</sup> In fact, this

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13. By parity of reason we might ask Gaffin if the Lord's Prayer petition, "Thy kingdom come," denies the presence of the kingdom.

14. This is just as true as the fact that the present *definitive* sanctification of the believer (Heb. 10:10, 14, 29; cp. 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Jude 1) does not deny his ongoing *progressive* sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23; cp. Eph. 5:26; 1 Thess. 4:3,4; 2 Tim. 2:21; 1 Pet. 3:15).

heavenly position of Christ, when coupled with the prophetic promises of Scripture, *demands* just such a *progressive unfolding* in history. This is evident from the *gradualistic* kingdom imagery in Scripture that shows the kingdom growing from a stone to a mountain (Dan. 2:35ff), from a twig to a stately cedar (Eze. 17:22-24), from a trickle of water to a river (Eze. 47:1-9), from a mustard seed to a great plant (Matt. 13:31-32), from a little leaven to a totally leavened mass (Matt. 13:33), from a lone seed to a mature, fully fruited grain (Mark 4:26-29).<sup>15</sup>

Nor does the gradual, historical unfolding of the implications of the kingship of Christ in future cultural victory "devalue Christian life and experience in the present (and the past)" (p. 204). How does building on the foundation laid by Christ and built upon by the godly labors of our forefathers (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:6-15) in promotion of the mission set by Christ (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) and under His direction (Matt. 28:20), to the goal He has set (Matt. 28:18-19), *devalue* past Christian experience? Contrary to Gaffin, the gradual, developmental unfolding of the eschatological reality of Christ's kingdom (as per postmillennialism) *demands* a high estimation of the present and past labor of the Church. Was not the Church established as a foundation in the first century, yet expected to grow to a complete building (Eph. 2:19-22)? Though he dislikes the counter charge of *staticism* (p. 205), staticism is a genuine problem with his view, as he has presented it. Growth is not static. Neither is history.

### *The Problem of Equivocation*

Another problem with Gaffin's analysis is his bold overstatements asserting that postmillennialists throw "emphasis on the golden era as being entirely future" (p. 202) and that the victory "has remained entirely in the future" (p. 202). Such statements remain faulty even when qualified on the next page by

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15. See: Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, "The Gradualistic Principle of Biblical Gospel Victory," pp. 217-22.

the insertion of a parenthetical "almost," when he says postmillennialists "define 'golden'/'success'/'victory' (almost) exclusively in terms of the church's future (short of Christ's return)" (p. 203).

A part of Gaffin's error here is traceable to the inadvertent, though serious, logical fallacy of equivocation.<sup>16</sup> Let me explain.

Gaffin is attempting to rebut one aspect of the postmillennial notion of "victory." The postmillennial conception of victory is of a progressive *cultural* victory and expansive influence of Christianity in history. But when *this* progressive victory is attacked in his argument, he alleges postmillennialism's diminishing of the present (and past) completed *salvation* victory. The personal status of the believer and the corporate standing of the Church in salvation is indeed one of present victory – in principle. The evangelical postmillennialist does not deny this. The distinctive postmillennial view of Christianity's progressive victory, in time and on earth, into *all of human life and culture*, is postmillennialism's application of the doctrine of Christ's definitively completed salvation. This should be the point of dispute for Gaffin: the expansive application of the *outcome* of Christ's salvation victory. This is the dividing issue between the amillennialist and the postmillennialist.

Postmillennialists agree that "what the New Testament announces in Christ's first coming, especially his exaltation, is nothing less than the actual beginning of the end – the great, long-awaited work of God bringing history to an end and inaugurating the new and final order for the creation" (p. 209). Notice that Gaffin himself states that it is "the beginning of the end," and not the end itself. How can the postmillennial expect-

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16. "To commit the *fallacy of equivocation* is to allow a key word in an argument to shift its meaning in the course of the argument. Consider this example. . . . Only man is rational. No woman is a man. Therefore no woman is rational." S. Morris Engel, *With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 59.

tation of a progressively spreading cultural victory diminish the reality of past and present salvific victory (our eternal standing with God), except by the fallacy of equivocation regarding the term "victory" in view?

### *Continuity and Discontinuity*

Elsewhere Gaffin objects to postmillennialism that the "future must be in continuity with and an unfolding of the eschatological reality already present and operative in the church" (p. 205). But again there are problems with this assertion *as an objection to postmillennialism*.

In the first place, we must ask: How is the progressively unfolding victory of postmillennialism *discontinuous* with the "eschatological reality"? The postmillennialist holds that the cultural victory expected is the developmental *fruition* of the kingdom-seed confidently planted and carefully nurtured by Christ. Seeds grow. Slowly. Gaffin's objection would better be urged against premillennialism than postmillennialism.

Secondly, *on Gaffin's own view* the completed victory of Christ at the ascension will, nevertheless, allow the dramatic *eschatologically significant* occurrence of post-ascension events. He particularly mentions the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, even though it occurs forty years after the ascension (p. 204). Why will he not allow the progressive conquest of the world by the gospel through history as a developmental unfolding of the implications of Christ's past victory? He writes: "Certainly with the first, 'already' installment there is room for different stages or phases – marked off by epochal events like Jesus' baptism, his death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, and the fall of Jerusalem" (p. 204). If he can allow this *based on the Scriptural record*, why cannot we do the same with the future prospects of gradual conquests in history by Christianity, continuous with the present and also *based on the Scriptural record*? One problem with Gaffin's article is that he has not dealt with the *exegetical*



foundations of either postmillennialism or amillennialism! His objections are primarily theological, as opposed to exegetical.<sup>17</sup>

Gaffin argues that the New Testament's eschatological language and events should be understood primarily (approaching *exclusively*) as referring to discontinuous completions of the Old Covenant's legal order, rather than as future applications of the New Covenant's legal order. He understands that postmillennialism emphasizes the results of the New Covenant in history. As an amillennialist, he prefers to emphasize the *discontinuous* judicial break from Old Covenant history rather than the *continuous* cultural effects in church history of the comprehensive New Covenant judicial order, an order which is today uniquely empowered by the Holy Spirit in a way that the Old Covenant order was not. He writes that

the fall of Jerusalem is decisively misunderstood unless we recognize that – even for the apostolic church, when it was still future – its primary affinities are not toward the future but the *past*, toward the first coming, as it marks the end of the brief transitional period from the old to the new covenant. It is a fundamental misreading to see the eschatological discourses of Jesus (Mt 24, Mk 13, Lk 21) and the Book of Revelation as fulfilled almost exclusively or even largely in the events of A.D. 70, as if those events were of major eschatological importance.<sup>18</sup> The

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17. Notice Gary North's frequent complaint about just such a lack by amillennialists. North, *Millennialism*, pp. 114, 171, 173, 178, 183, 214. The silence in Gaffin's chapter in this area is deafening.

18. Is it really a "fundamental misreading" of the Olivet Discourse to interpret Jesus' material in the light of His own statement that "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt. 24:34)? Is it really a "fundamental misreading" of Revelation to interpret it in the light of the following statements? "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must *shortly come to pass*" (Rev. 1:1). "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for *the time is at hand*" (Rev. 1:3). "And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must *shortly* be done" (Rev. 22:6). "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for *the time is at hand*" (Rev. 22:10). Somehow

destruction of Jerusalem and the temple begins already on Good Friday, when God himself radically desecrates 'the holy city' (Mt 27:53) in its inner sanctum. . . . What happens in A.D. 70, despite the untold suffering and violence, is but the inevitable aftermath, nothing more than a secondary aftershock" (p. 205).

The postmillennialist holds that the prophesied conquest of the world, like the prophesied fall of Jerusalem, is due to the history-long "secondary aftershocks" of the first coming. That conquest is to be understood in terms of Christ's first coming and is traceable back to it (unlike premillennialism, especially the dispensational variety). *The cultural victory of postmillennialism flows directly from the redemptive victory of Christ at His first advent.*

Thirdly, even Gaffin can assert: ". . . what from the Old Testament angle is a unitary, telescoped focus of eschatological hope (*one* coming of the Messiah, *one* Day of the Lord) turns out in the differentiation of its actual fulfillment, in the New Testament, to have a *dual* focus (not three or more foci). In other words, there are *two* comings (or, more accurately, two episodes of the one coming) of the Christ" (p. 203). This raises an important exegetical question: If he can merge (include) the first coming in humiliation (concluding with its glorious ascension-exaltation) with the final, conclusive majestic coming, why cannot postmillennialists see this eschatological era in which we live as a continuing expansion of the implications of the first coming that will continue through to the end? If he can say "more accurately" that the two advents are "two episodes of the one coming," why cannot we legitimately include the prophesied expanding conquest of the world in that eschatological "coming" inaugurated at His first coming?

For the postmillennialist, the future – encompassing the time from Christ's exaltation until His Second Advent – is the gracious and sovereign historical unfolding of the present reality of

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these inspired statements derived from the text carry more weight with me than Gaffin's naked assertions.

the glorious supra-historical enthronement of Christ. Likewise, is it not true that the Christian has a glorious position in Christ, yet seeks to press on and grow and mature thereby? Does progressive sanctification devalue our positional sanctification?<sup>19</sup>

Gaffin's theological argument regarding "victory" is quite flawed and, consequently, incapable of overthrowing the *exegetically* founded argument for postmillennialism's cultural victory.

### Suffering

I move now to what Gaffin calls his "most substantial reservation" to postmillennialism (p. 210). His position may be found summarily stated: "Over the interadvental period *in its entirety*, from beginning to end, a *fundamental* aspect of the church's existence is (to be) 'suffering with Christ'; *nothing*, the New Testament teaches, *is more basic* to its identity than that" (p. 211, emphases mine). But let us consider some of his leading proofs for this bold observation. He specifically refers to three major passages: 2 Corinthians 4:7ff.; Philippians 3:10; and Romans 8:17ff. Of these, 2 Corinthians 4 and Philippians 3:10 are his favored passages in that they are "especially instructive" (p. 211).

#### 2 Corinthians 4:7ff.

Gaffin turns first to 2 Corinthians 4:7-11, which reads:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus'

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19. See Footnote 14 above.

sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

Gaffin comments here that "Paul . . . effectively distances himself from the (postmil-like) view that the (eschatological) life of (the risen and ascended) Jesus embodies a power/victory principle that progressively ameliorates and reduces the suffering of the church" (p. 212). He then informs us that "Paul intends to say, as long as believers are in 'the mortal body,' 'the life of Jesus' manifests itself *as* 'the dying of Jesus'; the latter describes the existence mode of the former. Until the resurrection of the body at his return Christ's resurrection-life finds expression in the church's sufferings. . . ; the locus of Christ's ascension-power is the suffering church" (p. 212).

In considering Gaffin's observations, the reader of Scripture must bear in mind, first, the thrust of Paul's entire argument, which throws some essential light on Paul's statements. Many commentators would agree with Philip E. Hughes that

the general situation which lay behind [2 Corinthians'] composition was as follows: certain false teachers, who claimed to be apostles, had infiltrated the ranks of the Corinthian church, and in promoting their own claims they had gone out of their way to discredit Paul and to call in question the genuineness of his apostleship. The letter, accordingly, was written largely with the purpose of refuting the accusations. . . . It is a defence by Paul of the integrity of his personal character and apostleship and an exposure of the intruders as imposters. . . . And so, with evident distaste for speaking about himself, Paul reminds the Corinthians that, as they well knew, in contrast to the pretended apostleship of these false teachers his apostleship was one of continuous suffering and self-abnegation. . . .<sup>20</sup>

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20. Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (*New International Commentary on the New Testament*) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. xvi, xix. Cp. W. C. G. Proctor in Francis Davidson, *The New Bible Commentary* (2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 969. Donald B. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (3rd ed;

F. F. Bruce, acknowledging a debt to Käsemann, notes that Paul had to defend "his apostolic *exousia*" against these false apostles.<sup>21</sup> Gaffin seems aware of this fact, for he admits that "strictly speaking, [Paul's statements] are autobiographical . . ." (p. 211).

In fact, the very section under our scrutiny is a portion of a major digression by Paul in his apostolic defense. This digression covers at least from 2 Corinthians 2:14 through 7:4, as a comparison of 2:13 (and what precedes it) with 7:5 (and what follows it) will evidence.<sup>22</sup> Kümmel sees Paul turning to his own defense as early as 2 Corinthians 1:12. In addition, he argues that the "apology for the apostolic office . . . extends from 2:14 to 7:4,"<sup>23</sup> covering, then, our passage in 2 Corinthians 4. In his outline, Bruce even entitles the section from 2:14 to 7:1: "The apostolic ministry."<sup>24</sup>

Thus, it is clear that on the basis of contextual exegesis, Paul's argument is tied to his apostolic defense and, therefore, deals with the *apostolate* primarily. Furthermore, Bruce even argues, as do others, that the earthen vessels are "the apostles themselves. They were expendable, but the *treasure* was of indestructible worth."<sup>25</sup> This is quite consistent with the surround-

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Downer's Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 437-39).

21. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* in Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black, eds., *The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 187. Of 2 Cor. 2:16-17 Hughes notes that "this consideration at once places Paul in a category totally different from that of those false apostles who had invaded his territory at Corinth. That 'the man' to whom he refers should primarily be understood of these unauthorized invaders is generally agreed." Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, p. 82.

22. *Ibid.*, p. xx. See also Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4:205.

23. Werner George Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, translated by Howard C. Kee (17th ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), p. 280.

24. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 175, 187. After the discourse on the New Covenant ministry (2 Cor. 3), Paul concludes: "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not" (2 Cor. 4:1).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 197. A few commentators who concur with this as the main point of Paul's statement include: John Calvin, J. H. Bernard (in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*), Marvin R. Vincent, Albert Barnes, E. H. Plummer (in *Ellicott's Commentary*), James L. Price (*Interpreter's*), F. W. Farrar, and Walter Grundmann (*TDNT*).

ing context. In verse five Paul specifically distinguishes between the apostles and the Corinthians: "For *we* preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves *your* servants for Jesus' sake." Bruce's comments are helpful: "the plural *we* throughout this chapter, unlike 'we all' in 3:18, means 'we apostles' (cf. 1 C. 4:9), and more especially denotes Paul himself."<sup>26</sup>

Paul's argument, then, is that he (and the true apostles) do not corrupt the word, as do false apostles (2 Cor. 4:2;<sup>27</sup> cp. 2:17; chs. 10-12). The true apostles, and particularly Paul among them, have received the light of God's revelation (v. 6), which is a treasure kept in lowly earthen vessels (the persecuted apostles, v. 7): "But we [i.e., apostles] have this treasure [i.e., the sure light of the knowledge of God, v. 6<sup>28</sup>] in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." Paul's idea here clearly points to his *own* seemingly precarious existence and his frequent and intense suffering. God has chosen to bear the glorious and inextinguishable light of the gospel into the world through the weak apostles: "*We* [i.e., the apostles, again, though surely with a special testimonial focus on Paul himself] are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we* are perplexed, but not in despair; *we* are persecuted, but not forsaken; *we* are cast down, but not destroyed" (vv. 8-9).

Hughes puts the matter of verse 7 clearly:

There could be no contrast more striking than that between the greatness of the divine glory and the frailty and unworthiness of the vessels in which it dwells and through which it is manifested to the world. Paul's calumniators had contemptuously described his bodily appearance as weak and his speech as of no account

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26. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 194.

27. Of 2 Cor. 4:2 Hughes notes: Paul "is contrasting himself with others whose behavior has been inconsistent with their claims to be ministers of Christ." Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, p. 122.

28. "*This treasure*. The divine light which is the guide and inspiration of the apostolic ministry." Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1878] 1985), 3:311.

(10:10; cp. 10:1, 11:6, 12:7), hoping thereby to discredit his authority. But it is one of the main purposes of this epistle to show that this immense discrepancy between the treasure and the vessel serves simply to attest that human weakness presents no barrier to the purposes of God, indeed, that God's power is made perfect in weakness (12:9), as the brilliance of a treasure is enhanced and magnified by a comparison with a common container in which it is placed.<sup>29</sup>

Though in Macedonia Paul suffered much affliction (2 Cor. 4:8-9, cp. 1:8), the life of the Corinthian believers was a confirmation of the fruitfulness of his particular suffering: "So then death worketh in *us* [i.e., in Paul himself], but life in *you*" (4:12). All of his sufferings are worth it, for they bring *multiplied* blessings to God's people and glory to God himself as the gospel has success (as the postmillennialist would hope). And this is all despite Paul's persecution: "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (v. 15). His daily dying for the cause of Christ renewed him within and brought him confidence regarding his own eternal blessings (vv. 16-18). Now certainly it is true by extension that all of us may grow by persecution and that we have an eternal hope, just as did Paul. But Paul's particular point has to do with his own apostolic vindication. His concern is relevant to the situation then present (although certainly applicable elsewhere, *when the conditions meet*).

It should be noted that 2 Corinthians 4 is not *prophecy* specifying the *future* expectation of the Church. Instead it is *testimony* revealing Paul's *present* situation, that we may (or may not) share in as similar situations arise.

Second, and this is extremely important: Gaffin's comments are far too sweeping in their assertions. He writes: "Over the interadvental period *in its entirety*, from beginning to end, a *fundamental* aspect of the church's existence is (to be) 'suffering

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29. Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, p. 135.

with Christ'; *nothing*, the New Testament teaches, *is more basic* to its identity than that" (p. 211, emphases mine). Is suffering (persecution?)<sup>30</sup> throughout the "entirety" of the interadvental period a "fundamental" aspect of the church's existence? Is there absolutely "nothing . . . more basic" in the New Testament? If we are not suffering (persecution?) are we a true church? Is Gaffin suffering? Gaffin's statements are inordinately applied in an attempt to win points for his pessimistic eschatological view. Surely they are overstatements.

Third, what of the specifically positive *prophetic* statements of the New Testament, which actually set before us our divinely ordained victory-oriented expectation for the future, rather than describing our hope amidst present trial when it arises (as it did so universally among our first century forefathers)? Does not 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 hold before us the prospect of the universal triumph of the gospel of Jesus Christ as He sovereignly reigns from the right hand of God?<sup>31</sup> Do not the statements of cosmic redemption set forth the confident expectation of a redeemed world (John 1:29; 3:17; 12:30-31; 47; 1 John 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:19)?<sup>32</sup> Do we not have the right to hope that the kingdom of God will dominate and permeate the entirety of human life and culture (Matt. 13:31-33)?<sup>33</sup> Are we not commanded to "make disciples of all the nations" under the absolute authority

30. If persecutorial suffering is not in Gaffin's mind here, then all other forms of suffering are irrelevant to the argument contra postmillennialism, as I will demonstrate below.

31. See: Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, pp. 214-17. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1864] 1969), pp. 326-36.

32. Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, pp. 203-10. B. B. Warfield, "Christ the Propitiation for the Sins of the World," in John E. Meeter, ed., *Selected Shorter Writings*, 2 vols. (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1915] 1970), 1:23.

33. Richard C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles and the Parables of Our Lord* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, rep. 1943), 2:109-123. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1883] 1971), 1:593 (in Bk. 3; ch. 23). J. A. Alexander, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1860] 1980), pp. 367-70.



of Christ, who is with us in the project until the end (Matt. 28:18-20)?<sup>34</sup> Does not the prospect of the redemptive New Heavens and New Earth, which began definitively in the first century, speak of an enormous transformation of human culture?<sup>35</sup>

*Philippians 3:10*

In Philippians 3:10, Gaffin's second major reference, Paul writes: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Of this verse Gaffin notes: "Paul is saying, the power of Christ's resurrection is realized in the sufferings of the believer; sharing in Christ's sufferings is the way the church manifests his resurrection-power. Again, as in 2 Corinthians 4:10-11, the locus of eschatological life is Christian suffering" (p. 213). But is Paul's reference to suffering here contrary to postmillennialism? Is Christ's resurrection-power *limited* to the upholding of believers in times of persecutorial suffering?

Let us notice, first, that Paul is writing from prison, where he is being held because of the fierce opposition of his enemies (Phil. 1:7, 13).<sup>36</sup> Paul apparently wrote Philippians in regard to "pessimism at Philippi because of persecution there and the bad news of Paul's imprisonment."<sup>37</sup> He specifically refers to his dire circumstances (1:12), which have led to severe deprivation (4:11-12) and could well issue forth in his death (1:21-23;

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34. Gentry, *Greatness of the Great Commission*.

35. See: Isa. 65:20ff; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15. See North, *Millennialism*, ch. 5. Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, [1954] 1981), ch. 13; J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1875] 1977), 2:452-56.

36. Paul was imprisoned many times, 2 Cor. 11:23 and suffered much affliction, 1 Cor. 15:32; 2 Cor. 1:8-11; 6:5.

37. Davidson, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 1031. Hendriksen suggests that this letter may even be in response to the Philippians' specifically expressed concern about Paul's condition. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Philippians* (*New Testament Commentary*) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), p. 19.

2:17). Consequently, he urges the Philippians to follow his example (3:17; 4:9) by conducting themselves in a worthy manner during his enforced absence (1:27) and in the face of their own opposition (1:29-30). They are being urged to holy steadfastness (4:1) in light of such grievous circumstances, a steadfastness made possible because of the grace that flows from Christ (2:1-16, 28-30; 4:19). His statements must be understood in terms of his present condition. As was the case in 2 Corinthians 4, so Davidson notes of Philippians 3, "verses 4-11 are a biographical passage."<sup>38</sup>

This leads us to note, second, in light of his frightful circumstances, Paul speaks of the sustaining power he has access to in such times: the power of the resurrected Lord (3:10). Again, this is Paul's personal testimony, which, of course, he holds before the Philippians (and us) by way of example and for their (and our) encouragement. This is *not* a *prophecy* of things to come or a declaration that this is *all* Christians may expect in history. Paul is simply saying that just as when he undergoes severe trial, he comes to know Christ's sustaining power more and more, so may all believers through whatever circumstances they may endure. Of course, in those particular days, the believing community would surely expect regular persecution.

Third, as (amillennialist) Hendriksen correctly notes of this passage:

One should be careful to avoid the conclusion that these experiences are all *literally* reflected in the life and death of believers. Failure to note this important point has given rise to errors in exegesis both here and in connection with verse 11. Thus, when the apostle yearns to become increasingly conformed to Christ's

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38. Davidson, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 1039. Notice especially v. 8. "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." Davidson comments that Paul's reference to "My Lord" is an impressive and unusual personal statement (*ibid.*).

death, this has been interpreted to mean that he longed for death by crucifixion or at least for death as a martyr. But why not allow the apostle himself to clarify the meaning? When with a believing heart the Christian appropriates the saving value of Christ's death, *he dies to sin*, for the guilt of his sin is removed, and its power over him is gradually reduced and at death completely annihilated by the work of the Holy Spirit. *Rejecting sin and selfishness* he throws himself into the work of being a means in God's hand to open men's eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (Rom. 6:4-11; Acts 26:18). It is in that sense that the believer experiences fellowship with Christ's sufferings and becomes conformed to his death.<sup>39</sup>

In a footnote on the above statement Hendriksen shows the proper view of the suffering involved. It is not necessarily the suffering of persecution – which is the issue involved in the postmillennial/amillennial debate. Paul is speaking more broadly of “entering into the fellowship of Christ's suffering and becoming conformed to his death by dying unto sin and selfishness and thus becoming, like Christ in his death, a blessing to others.”<sup>40</sup>

Regarding his seeking to attain unto the “out-resurrection of the dead” (3:11, Gk.), Paul evidences an “intense longing and striving to be raised completely above sin and selfishness.”<sup>41</sup> With such a statement, Paul is paralleling his thought in Romans 6:4-11, where he speaks of conformity to Christ through death to sin, and Romans 7:9-25, where he evidences a struggle for righteousness warring in his own members.

The postmillennial advance of the kingdom of Christ in history will gradually and effectively remove all external opposition to the gospel. Nevertheless, the individual Christian al-

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39. Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 169 (emphases mine).

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

ways remains a sinner saved by grace, who must struggle to grow in grace and die to sin. Throughout the millennial era, God's people on earth will remain in mortal, unresurrected bodies and will need the sustaining grace of Christ. This is the sort of thing Paul is discussing here in Philippians 3:10. Such death to sin and self is eminently helpful in enduring overt persecution, but it is not limited in its usefulness to the persecution environment.

### *Romans 8:17*

Romans 8:17 reads: ". . . if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Of this verse Gaffin comments: "This correlation of future glory and present suffering is a prominent concern in the section that follows. At least two points are worth noting about 'our sufferings' (v. 18): (1) their nature/breadth and (2) their terminus" (i.e., the resurrection) (p. 213). (Due to pressures of space limitations, I will only briefly respond to Gaffin's use of this passage.)

It is important to note that this passage is something of a conclusion to Romans 6-7. And Romans chapters 6 and 7 are dealing with the *internal* struggle of the Christian against indwelling sin! The postmillennialist does *not* teach that there is coming a day in which Christians will no longer have a sin nature. As Murray notes on this verse: "Christian suffering ought not to be conceived of too narrowly. In the passages so far considered, and elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., 2 Co 1:5-10; 1 Pe 4:12-19), suffering includes but is more than persecution and martyrdom."<sup>42</sup> Gaffin seems to be aware of this, although not of its disutility to his anti-postmillennial argument, where he writes: "suffering is everything that pertains to creaturely experience of this death-principle" (p. 214), and "suffering with Christ is the totality of existence 'in the mortal body'

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42. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:213.

and within 'this world in its present form [that] is passing away' (1Co 7:31), endured for his sake" (p. 214).

Despite his awareness of the broader principle at work and in apparent contradiction to it, Gaffin makes such statements as: "Any outlook that tends to remove or obscure the (constitutive) dimension of suffering for the Gospel from the present *triumph* of the church is an illusion. The misplaced expectation, before Christ's return, or a 'golden age' in which, in contrast to the present, *opposition to the church* will have been reduced to a minimum and suffering will have receded to the periphery for an (at last) 'victorious' Christendom – that misconception can only distort the church's understanding of its mission in the world" (pp. 217-18, last emphasis mine). *This* is the issue: the reduction of opposition to the Christian faith, i.e., to the Church. The issue is not the eradication of mortality (see next point) and innate sin.

The very next reference to suffering by Paul has to do with the decaying condition of the natural world (Rom. 8:19) and is not tied to persecutorial suffering from opposition to the Christian faith. Although postmillennialism teaches the advancement of age longevity (cf. Isa. 65:17-21), nevertheless death remains throughout the millennial era (Isa. 65:20; 1 Cor. 15:26). The sufferings of Romans 8 are not evidences against postmillennialism, which promises the removal of *persecutorial suffering for the faith*. The great advances of the postmillennial kingdom expansion, even at its most glorious height, will still not compare to the glory of the total liberty of the believer in the resurrection as he possesses a glorified, eternal body.<sup>43</sup>

Postmillennialism acknowledges the great discontinuity between history and the post-resurrection world. But theonomic postmillennialism also insists on ethical and judicial continuity between history and eternity – our *earnest* (Eph. 1:14).

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43. See discussion in Murray, *Romans* 1:300-2.

### Conclusion

Gaffin's article is not a persuasive argument against postmillennialism. He tends to equivocate on important theological terms; for example, he shifts from cultural victory in time to redemptive victory in eternity. He confuses the issues in debate; for example, earthly mortality is not equivalent to persecution for the faith. He overstates his case; for example, persecutorial suffering is not a *fundamental* aspect of the Church's identity. But ultimately his case lacks sufficient merit as an argument against postmillennialism because it is devoid of an exegetical argument for amillennialism. His theological paradigms may not stand in place of the exegetically founded postmillennial eschatology.

## WHOSE CONDITIONS FOR CHARITY?

*Ray R. Sutton*

While I was sitting in the church office one day, the phone rang. A man explained that he was in great need of help. I responded, "How can I help?" He said, "Pastor, I would like to come by and explain my situation." I told him how to get to the church. Within minutes, he was there.

He entered my office, sat down, and told me how he had gone from being an executive in a bank to living on the streets when the oil economy first slumped in Texas in the 1970's. He had a wife and a small child, he said. After about fifteen minutes he asked for some money. I gave him ten dollars.

Suddenly, he became angry and began cursing at me. He told me that he had a gun in his pocket and that he was going to kill me if I didn't give him more money. All I had on my person was twenty dollars, so I gave it to him. He insisted I had more and for a moment I feared for my life. But, as quickly as he had gone into a rage, he left the office. Over his shoulder he blurted out, "When I come back, you'd better have more money." In short, he was imposing certain conditions on me.

I called the police and reported what had happened. After the officer chastised me for being so naive and stupid, he explained that this man had been doing the same thing at a num-

ber of churches in town. The man was a drug addict feeding a huge habit, and he knew that he could get quick cash from unsuspecting preachers. The officer said to me in a stern tone, "DON'T EVER GIVE MONEY TO ANYONE WITHOUT FIRST QUALIFYING WHO HE OR SHE IS."

I was kind of stunned. I even took a little offense at what the policeman said to me. I answered back, "Officer, I believe that my Lord Jesus has commanded me to give to any who asks in need." And then the wise, old, veteran policeman said to me words that I have long since remembered, "Yeah, preacher, but giving a person what he wants is not always what he needs. Don't you think your Jesus would rather you to give a person what he *really* needs?"

His words cut me to the bone. I was speechless. I was forced to re-evaluate my interpretation of benevolence. I vowed to go back to the Scriptures to find fresh biblical solutions for ministering to the needy in today's world. I have found them in a number of places, especially in the insightful writings of George Grant.

Today, as well as being a seminary president, I am an Archdeacon in the Reformed Episcopal Church. An Archdeacon in the historic and ancient church is a presbyter with special appointment to train deacons – biblical ones, that is. In the Bible, a deacon can preach and also administer the sacraments (Acts 8), as well as conduct his primary mission of ministering to special needs ranging from feeding the poor to working with the handicapped. So, I train deacons in my local parish, as well as in my synod: the larger grouping of churches.

I believe that the office of deacon is the most neglected and most needed office in today's church, as well as in society. I am convinced that the church's primary means for changing the world is not only through the Word and the Sacrament but the *service* that goes before and after the means of grace. The story of the Good Samaritan is a dramatic case in point. Christ was



primarily a servant, helping people in need, and He has called the church to do the same.

### Misrepresenting Theonomy

I say all of this and candidly express my commitments to the ministry of mercy because I have been badly misrepresented in an essay by Dr. Timothy Keller, "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections." On the surface, he has implied that our theonomic theology leads to a neglect of the poor. Nothing could be further from the truth. If Dr. Keller had taken the time to talk to me or more thoroughly research his subject, he could have avoided his erroneous essay.

Theonomists do fundamentally believe that the state has no biblical warrant for being a welfare state, but this does not mean we do not have another, and I believe far superior, strategy for serving the needy of our society. We advocate that the benevolence ministries of the church and family minister mercy. But, we also insist that anyone involved in mercy ministry should take the advice of that old policeman advisor of mine. They should not give unless they are sure that they are meeting a real need, which means they must apply *conditions* in order to be truly loyal to Christ's commands about helping the needy.

Dr. Keller has reacted to these points. Before dealing with them, however, I must clear up the confusion sown by his consistent misrepresentation of the facts of the Reconstructionist position on poverty relief. Then, I will address the *real issue*.

Dr. Keller creates a false impression at the beginning of his article, namely, that Reconstructionists are not concerned for the poor. He falsely accuses them of reducing *all* the causes of poverty to personal sin. He does so by quoting out of context some general Reconstructionist comments. He carefully neglects the writings that specifically address the subject of poverty in a more complete and balanced fashion. Let us consider a few examples of his methodology.

### Chilton and North

Consider how he caricatures Reconstructionism by summarizing on the basis of two writers quoted out of context.

Chilton and North see the roots of modern poverty as cultural and personal disobedience to God's law. They remind us so often that wealth is God's benediction on faithfulness to his law that they appear to be saying poverty is simply the result of sloth and sin.<sup>1</sup>

He is careful to say, "appear" in his quotation, for which I am grateful. He then quotes North and Chilton in some places where they actually do speak of sinful causes of poverty. He does not, however, refer to comments by these individuals to indicate that they see other causes of poverty besides cultural and personal poverty.<sup>2</sup> The effect he is trying to create, however, is that Chilton and North are theologically callous toward the poor. This is completely false, as we shall see.

Another problem with Keller's assessment is that he has not selected Reconstructionist writings that are truly representative of Christian Reconstructionism's basic *paradigm* on poverty. Chilton's and North's comments are not designed to present the system as such. They speak mostly in the context of critiquing liberals who fail to address personal responsibility at all. For example, David Chilton wrote his famous *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (1981) in response to Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977). The nature of Chilton's effort was polemical, designed for a specific purpose.

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1. "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections," Timothy J. Keller, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, edited by Robert W. Godfrey and William S. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic Books, 1990), p. 263.

2. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators* (2nd ed.; Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1981), pp. 65-66. In this section, Chilton advocates the Old Testament laws of gleaning. He is in no sense failing to recognize legitimate cases of poverty that are due to the inability to work.

He was not attempting to write a position paper on poverty. If anything, he was presenting a primer on Christian economics, not poverty. It is highly unfair to draw such strong conclusions from an author when he is speaking in another context. Nevertheless, Chilton was attacking, among other issues, the humanistic state welfare approach advocated at that time by Ron Sider.

### *North and Grant*

What Keller does with North's comments is extremely misrepresentative. He quotes North from an introduction to a book, *In The Shadow of Plenty*, by George Grant, an author highly endorsed by Keller himself. Grant was a publicly avowed Christian Reconstructionist at the time that he wrote the books that Keller likes so much. He was the Reconstructionist writer of the 80's who best represented the Christian Reconstruction position on poverty. Yes, North makes very pointed comments about aspects of poverty. But Keller tries to make it sound as though North is against helping poor people. Then why did he publish Grant's book, as well as Grant's other book, *The Dispossessed: Homelessness in America* (1986)?

Dr. Keller does not tell you what North goes on to say in the same introduction. North writes about the *need for Christians to help the poor*. Consider the following statement from the same section written by North, which Keller conveniently neglects to cite:

We must put our hand to the plow and do the real labor of charity. We can not effect reconstruction by proxy. We must, as Grant so aptly points out "transform poverty into productivity." . . . We prove to the world that we *don't intend to let everyone starve*. We thereby build up institutional alternatives to state welfare programs. . . . Therefore, it is our job as Christians to preach a Word-and-deed Gospel. We must preach both with our mouths and our actions. We must regain dominion through more effective service, both to God *and the lost* [emphasis mine].

We must offer the poor both the bread of life and the bread of grain. We must offer them shelter from hell and shelter from the weather.<sup>3</sup>

It is truly amazing what context does! Does the man who said, "We prove to the world that we don't intend to let everyone starve," sound like the same person Keller quoted? Hardly, but I think that this is the straw man that Keller prefers.

Moreover, we need to ask the obvious question: "Why was North going to so much trouble to write the introduction if he was in so much disagreement with Grant?" Why doesn't Keller point this out? This is sheer deception, bringing us to perhaps the most misrepresentative aspect of Keller's article.

### George Grant

Dr. Keller denies George Grant's affiliation with the Reconstructionist movement in his "Addendum" at the end of his essay. I think it is obvious why Keller does this. He wants to be able to accuse Christian Reconstructionism of something that is simply not true. To accomplish this, he has to take George Grant away from Christian Reconstructionism.

Why is Keller wrong when he says that Grant is not a Reconstructionist in his writings? First, not only did Gary North write introductions to George's books, but he *edited, published, and financed much of George's work in the 80's*. Why was he publishing George Grant if he didn't agree with Grant's prescriptions for transforming poverty? I can tell you from experience, North never publishes someone with whom he does not agree, at least on the specific topic of the book or article.

Second, what George Grant believes at present is not the issue. Dr. Keller remarks that Grant is *presently* not a Reconstructionist.

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3. North, "Editor's Introduction," to George Grant, *In the Shadow of Plenty: The Biblical Blueprint for Welfare* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), pp. xv-xvi.

Despite his close association through the publishing houses, Grant is *not* a reconstructionist. Certainly, there are many definitions of that term, but by virtually any criterion he does not meet the requirements. Grant does not share the reconstructionists' approach to the application of the Old Testament law . . . He is not a thoroughgoing postmillennialist, nor does he partake of many other common reconstructionist perspectives.<sup>4</sup>

Keller refers to, but does not quote from, "personal correspondence" with George Grant to prove his claims. I have not seen any of these personal letters. For all I know, Dr. Keller has misrepresented his personal correspondence with Grant; it would certainly be consistent with how he operates: selective quotation. On the other hand, perhaps this is what George believes today. Even so, the point is not where my friend George is in his thinking *today*, but what he held *at the time of the writing of the major corpus of his writings*, during the period of the 80's.

#### *Grant in the 1980's*

What was George Grant's position on poverty in the 80's? Two themes appear. First, he was against *state welfare* because he thought that it had been an utter failure in its attempts to help the poor. It was part of the problem and not the solution, even creating a monstrous class of welfare state people. Consider this one statement of Grant's, so characteristic of a reconstructionist mind-set that pervades all of his writings on poverty:

The war on poverty actually halted in its tracks the ongoing improvement in the lot of America's poor. Writers as diverse as Charles Murray, George Gilder, Warren Brookes, Thomas Sowell, and Murray Rothbard have shown conclusively that instead

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4. Keller, *Theonomy*, p. 291.

of enabling the infirm and the elderly to lead full and productive lives, and instead of empowering the poor to control their lives and rise from poverty, the social welfare programs rendered them impotent, dependent, and helpless. The sheer numbers ought to be enough to convince anyone. After billions upon billions of dollars spent, after a monumental effort that mobilized the ablest minds and the finest machinery, there are more poor than ever before. There are more homeless than ever before. There are more hungry than ever before. Something went wrong.<sup>5</sup>

What went wrong? Grant consistently argued for the institutions of the church and the family to meet social needs. But it takes more than this to put Grant in the Reconstructionist camp in the period when he wrote his works on poverty.

#### *Grant on Old Testament Law*

A second major theme that appears in George Grant's works on poverty is his use of the whole Bible and especially the *Law of God from the Old Testament* to develop biblical guidelines for the social problems generated by poverty. He did not stop with the Old Testament; he began there. Take special note of his classic work on poverty, *Bringing in the Sheaves*, where he quotes David Chilton and then proceeds to apply Old Testament law.

How are the able poor to be put to work? As David Chilton has shown, in Scripture, "the primary source of regular charity to the poor is the practice of gleaning." Perhaps the best illustration of how gleaning works is the story of Ruth. It is a story of compelling beauty and romance, of faithfulness and intrigue, of tragedy and hope. . . . The good news was that God's Law made abundant and gracious provision for strangers (Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 24:17-18) as well as unskilled,

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5. George Grant, *Bringing in the Sheaves* (Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision Press, 1985), p. 45.

destitute workers (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 23:24-25; 24:19-22). These "gleaner laws" stipulated that farmers and landowners leave the edges of their fields unharvested and that overlooked sheaves remain uncollected. Any among the poor or the alien who were willing to follow behind the harvesters and gather that grain were welcome to it, thereby "earning" their own keep. Ruth took advantage of this just provision and was thus able to uphold her responsibility to Naomi. . . . According to R.J. Rushdoony, "This was indeed charity, but charity in which the recipient had to work, in that gleaning the fields was hard, backbreaking work."<sup>6</sup>

Grant applied Old Testament Law to the poverty question. This made him unique as an evangelical. Why didn't other evangelicals and Reformed people outside the theonomic camp come up with the *gleaning approach*? How could they, when they reject the continuing application of Old Testament civil law, which Keller also does? Interesting, isn't it, how we find that those who appear to be so much in favor of helping the poor abandon the most obvious Scriptural advice when they reject the application of the *entire* Bible?

In all fairness to George Grant, however, he did not end with the Old Testament. He was no legalist. He skillfully applied the Gospel and New Testament by calling for what he expressed as the need for *compassion*. He said:

The Samaritan in the story is a paragon of virtue. . . . But perhaps even more significant than his strict adherence to the Law was the *compassion* that the Samaritan demonstrated. He wasn't simply "going by the rules." His was not a dry, passionless obedience. He had "put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12). He "became a father to the poor, and searched out the case" of the

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6. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

stranger (Job 29:16). He loved his neighbor as himself (Mark 12:31), thus fulfilling the Law (Romans 13:10).<sup>7</sup>

Grant demonstrated his sensitivity to compassion in his writings as much as he did in his practice when his church operated a HELP ministry in Humble, Texas. Let us not forget, though, that he built this compassion on a concept of Old Testament Law as well as the Gospel. He never advocated a kind of lawless grace. Rather he showed the grace involved in true obedience to God.

Gary North recognized these commitments in Grant so much so that he financed many of Grant's writings. Consequently, whatever Dr. Keller likes so much in Grant should be comforting to him to know that Dr. North liked it even more, enough to put tens of thousands of dollars behind the publication of this vision.

### *A Co-Operative Venture*

In addition, it should be obvious to Dr. Keller that if he took time to study carefully the footnotes in theonomic writings, he would notice a *conversation* at work among the Reconstructionist writers and Grant. David Chilton and George Grant were extremely close in those years. Chilton spoke at Grant's church and strongly influenced him in a number of areas. It could even be said that Chilton had the initial Reconstructionist influence on George. That came out of Chilton's *Productive Christians*. Significant to the poverty issue, however, Chilton was sympathetic to Grant's work in the area of relief to the poor. I know, because Chilton was a member of my congregation at the time. We were all close, and we were all interacting about all of the Reconstructionist theology all of the time. This was no secret either. Just read the writings of North, Jordan, Chilton, Grant, and me as they develop over the last ten years, some-

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7. Grant, *In the Shadow of Plenty*, pp. 27-28.



thing which Keller and most of the critics failed to do in preparation for publishing *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

Critics of Christian Reconstructionism often resist the proof that many theonomists have been willing to refine and develop their position, as evidenced by the fact that the very critics refuse to read the flow of the corpus of material over a ten to twenty year period. If Dr. Keller and others at Westminster are going to lump us all together, then they are going to have to read all the material. If not, then they should only deal with the people whose writings they have read in total. Unless they do this, they will continue to caricature and misrepresent, and then be shown to have produced sloppy and even bigoted scholarship.

Thus, simply put, Keller makes his article read as though Reconstructionists don't care about the poor! Nothing could be further from the truth. All of us have been involved in practical kinds of poverty relief in a variety of ways in our own churches: everything ranging from homes for unwed mothers to street feedings. Dr. Keller presents the complete opposite by failing to grasp the context of Chilton's and North's writings, and by removing Grant's work from the Reconstructionist movement. If I were to take your money and then accuse you of not giving to the poor, who would really be uncharitable? Mr. Keller does virtually the same, only with theological concepts and commitments. He takes away, and then accuses them of lacking the very thing he has taken. This is most uncharitable.

### Sutton

When it comes to my own writings, Dr. Keller does the same. He neglects quoting from the full context of my paper on *The Theology of Poverty*, a paper published in 1985. He criticizes me for being overly reductionistic, charging that I fail to consider *all* of the causes of poverty. (What are *all* of the causes of poverty, Dr. Keller?) I know that Dr. Keller read this paper

because he quotes it later in his article. Listen to his accusation, however, against Christian Reconstructionism. He writes:

It is critical to recognize all of these causes [of poverty]. *None* of the reconstructionist writers seem to speak much of "calamity," the constant stream of factors in fallen nature (Romans 8:18ff.) that will bring poverty into our lives. (There are plenty of poor people who are neither sluggards nor oppressed.)<sup>8</sup>

Come now, Dr. Keller, are you asking your readers to believe that "none" of the Reconstructionist writers discuss other causes for poverty and particularly calamity? Dr. Keller knows better because he quotes from the very piece of mine that gives a wide range of explanations for poverty.

### *The Causes of Poverty*

In 1985, I identified three different reasons why people are poor: (1) those who are poor because of a special vow of poverty as in the case of the Nazirite, (2) those who are poor because they are being tested by God, such as Job, and (3) those who are poor as a "result of God's judgment or discipline. Two examples of the second cause of poverty are given, Ruth and the 'beggars' of the Bible."<sup>9</sup> I go on to point out that in both cases there was not necessarily culpability involved. Ruth, for example, had done nothing particularly wrong to find herself in need of begging. And of specific kinds of beggars, I say the following:

In the New Testament, we find several classic beggars. There is the blind beggar (John 9:8-9), Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), the beggar at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3:1-11), and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31; not to be confused with Lazarus of Bethany). So

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8. Keller, pp. 265-66.

9. Ray R. Sutton, "The Theology of Poverty," *The Geneva Papers* (March 1985), p. 2.

what about these beggars? In each case, the Bible speaks favorably. . . . We must take note that their plight is due to physical handicaps. They are not like the sluggard who can but won't work. . . . The laws of charity provided for them. Definitely the poor tithe should have been used on people who were forced to beg for an existence. Yet, they still continued to go hungry. Why? The fault lay with the religious and political leaders. They were not living by the Bible.<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, Dr. Keller does not quote me on these important points. Why, to hear him speak of me, one would think that I did not recognize any of these classifications of the poor! Dr. Keller has a problem: selective quotation. What he leaves out would destroy his case; this is why it gets left out.

*The Key Issue: Conditionality*

What bothers Dr. Keller in particular, however, is the concept of *conditionality* when it comes to helping the able-bodied poor. He misleads the reader in two ways regarding this principle. First, he implies that I am arguing for full obedience to the Law of God before helping someone. He says, "[Sutton believes that] we should have conditions – obedience to the law and the covenant – before we give any aid."<sup>11</sup> Instead, what I advocate is a limited conditionality to test the intent of the person asking for help. I suggest finding out if the person in need goes to church or is willing at least to attend. George Grant even has people pick up trash on the property. These are limited conditions. They are not asking for perfect obedience. But they are conditions.

Second, Keller speaks in his article as though the application of conditions is contrary to George Grant. As a matter of fact,

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10. *Ibid.*

11. Keller, *Theonomy*, p. 274.

Grant speaks of the same kind of conditionality in his book, *Bringing in the Sheaves*. He says,

Whereas humanitarian social policy keeps people helplessly dependent, Biblical charity seeks to remove them from that status and return them to productive capacity. Biblical charity seeks to put them back to work because Biblical charity should never be anything other than a prod to full restoration of the poor to their God-ordained calling. Paul makes it plain: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

A handout does not charity make!

Every effort must be made to ensure that our helping really does help. A handout may meet an immediate need, but how does it contribute to the ultimate goal of setting the recipient aright? How does it prepare him for the job market? How does it equip him for the future? How well does it communicate the Law of God and the precepts of Biblical morality? The kind of evangelical myopia that envisions the Scriptural duty to the poor as a simple transfer of funds simply misses the boat. When the church mimics the government by promiscuously dispensing groceries and other goods and services, it hurts the poor more than it helps. Adherents of such short-sighted thinking only perpetuate the war against the poor.

The Good Samaritan faith goes to work putting the able poor to work. That's Biblical charity.<sup>12</sup>

Yes, and this is all that I argued for in my original essay on poverty. Notice the principle of conditionality implied in Grant's statements. He even refers to the same verse on which I would base my understanding of conditionality (II Thess. 3:10). Thus, it is once again very misleading to the reader for Keller to say that the emphasis on conditionality is unique to Reconstructionists.

He cannot have it both ways. If George Grant is *not* a Reconstructionist, when he clearly argues for a conditional approach

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12. Grant, *Bringing in the Sheaves*, pp. 78-79.

to benevolent distribution, he agrees with a major point of the Reconstructionist approach. If Grant *does* believe in conditionality, then he has made a major break with the liberal, unitarian, statist approach of such people as Dr. Keller, placing himself within the pale of the Reconstructionist movement. As I have already argued, this was indeed the case at the time of the major corpus of Grant's writings on the subject.

In summation, Dr. Keller distorted and falsified the Reconstructionist position on poverty and welfare. All of the leading writers of Reconstructionism of the 80s, of which I too was a part, above all else wanted to see developed a rival system of benevolence. We eagerly desired that the church and Christian families take this function away from the state. Mr. Keller never actually therefore communicated what I have just said. Instead, he tried to create the notion that the Reconstructionists are a group of people who are not concerned to help the poor.

As a matter of fact, the Reconstructionists are one group in the Reformed and Evangelical camp that has constructed an orthodox theological paradigm for social benevolence. They have attempted to build a plan of benevolent action on the basis of Scripture and the doctrine of the church and family. This is where Mr. Keller differs. He is representative of good intentions mixed with bad theology (assuming that good intentions can produce such a caricatured article as the one he wrote against theonomy. I do.) He professes to be Reformed, and at the same time he borrows from a humanistic, statist, unitarian model for social welfare. He defends himself by attempting to provide a Scriptural rationale for a state-subsidized welfare program, as well as a non-Calvinistic theological defense of unconditionality.

To see the Scriptural fallacies in Keller's thinking, I will spend the remainder of this essay on the biblical rationale of conditionality.

### Conditionality and Scripture

Dr. Keller objects to the way that I applied the concept of conditionality to the area of benevolences. He agrees that conditions should be applied *after* a person comes into the church, such as is the case with the "widow indeed" and the Pauline requirement of working before eating. What Dr. Keller objects to is the application of conditionality *before* a person is saved, because he thinks that this does not present a true picture of the Gospel. To elaborate, he says that the Reformed doctrine of salvation is unconditional first, proceeding to conditions after entering the faith. In other words, *justification is monergistic and sanctification is synergistic*.

I generally agree with his statement regarding the Reformed doctrine of salvation, but Dr. Keller is somewhat misleading about the "monergism of justification." To clarify my position, I originally spoke to the area of the *application* of benevolence. I made it clear that in application there should be conditions met. Although I used the analogy of the unconditional and conditional in reference to salvation, I was not saying that a person has to be saved to be helped, nor was I saying that a person has to be completely morally straight before the church administers benevolence to him. I suggested some practical qualifiers before helping people. But does the doctrine of salvation mean that *no conditions at all* should be met by the able person in need? In the final analysis, even Dr. Keller would place "some" conditions on people before helping them. He says: "Of course we should be on the lookout for fraud, and we must not give aid naively in such a way that it is immediately abused."<sup>13</sup>

On what basis does Dr. Keller make such a condition – one, by the way, with which I would not disagree? Given his statements, I am not sure, because he sounds as though he is so

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13. Keller, *Theonomy*, p. 277.

over-reacting to me that he proves the case for *naïve giving*, to use his expression.

*Visible Saints and Judicial Conditions*

Here is a breakdown in his articulation of the Reformed doctrine of salvation. Salvation is unmerited and unconditional because God sovereignly predestines, redeems, and applies the judicial redemption. But when God saves man, there is a *visible* demonstration of faith and repentance. These are acts that man does because God enables him (her).

Nevertheless, man can only live judicially by a *visible covenant*. The visible church can only live judicially by the visible. It cannot see into the decrees of God and somehow mysteriously know the elect apart from the visible covenant. For example, doesn't a person have to *believe* to be saved? Is this not a condition to baptism? Is not repentance a condition as well? Or should the church admit someone to baptism who has not repented?<sup>14</sup>

All I have attempted to argue is that qualifying the needy is the wise path in the work of benevolence. It is based on the premise of the visible manifestation of repentance. Again, I am not saying that a person has to be saved in order to be helped, but asking for a simple demonstration of willingness to work for the able needy is nothing short of good application of repentance.

Man makes a *show of good faith* if he possesses saving faith (the whole epistle of James). If an able-bodied person wants to be helped by the church, he also should be required to make a show of good faith with respect to his willingness to work for his supper. If he refuses, his motives are not right, and the church should apply its benevolence elsewhere. There are limits

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14. The issue of judicial representation is basic to the practice of infant baptism. The parents represent the child before the church. They repent in the child's name. The child of course can break this covenant later on.

on the local church's assets. Any view of unconditionality that destroys a modicum of discrimination or conditionality is not, as we shall see, actually unconditional. Such a view ends up taking from the widows and orphans to "unconditionally" feed those outside the church. The poor widows of the church, who are under its judicial conditions, necessarily lose whenever those outside the church but inside its benevolence are not said to be under its judicial conditions.

If God expects those on the inside of grace to live by conditions, as Keller freely admits, then why not also those on the outside of the church? This is saying that those without grace have fewer sanctions than those with grace, which doesn't sound like real grace at all! We shall discuss this further in a moment when we get to the real issue with Dr. Keller.

#### *What About the Good Samaritan?*

In a sense, Dr. Keller recognizes the need to be wise and not "give aid naively," as I have already noted. But in another sense, he attempts to deny this by pointing to the passages in the New Testament where apparently no discriminatory process was used. Here is another serious misrepresentation.

For example, Dr. Keller cites the Good Samaritan story as a case in point. But this passage is not talking about the able poor in the situation with the beaten man on the road to Jericho. He is unable, and as I have made it abundantly clear in this essay and all others on the subject of poverty, *no judicial conditions* should be placed on the unable poor. (This does not mean that in a world of scarcity there are no economic conditions.)

Dr. Keller also refers to those passages in the New Testament that command the believer to give to the needy. But the New Testament does not explain *how* and *what* should be given. When the text says, "Give to anyone who asks," it does not specify the gift. Could it not be a job or an opportunity to work in the case of the able poor?



Also, the process of determining who is genuinely needy is not developed in Scripture. These issues are left up to the church to sort out according to the application of other principles and biblical wisdom in general. Thus, Dr. Keller has misinterpreted the New Testament benevolence passages that he believes would exclude any concept of conditionality for the unbeliever.

### **An Agency of Compulsory Benevolence**

The real issue on conditionality for Dr. Keller concerns the agency of benevolence. He argues that the Bible endorses the state as an instrument of benevolence. He does not say that this is a pragmatic consideration. In no way does he say, as some of us have noted, that the church is simply not willing and able to take over all the benevolent needs of this society at this point in history, so the state will continue its program for as long as the national debt and the church's abdication allow. Rather, he argues as *a matter of principle* that the state should be involved in welfare.

This raises the issue of compulsion: the sword's lawful use in the healing of society. Is state compulsion lawfully used to benefit one group at the expense of another, except in requiring restitution payments from convicted criminals to their victims? Keller says that such compulsory wealth redistribution is not only lawful; it is actually required by the Bible. He cites the fourth verse of Romans 13, "It [the state] is a minister of God to you for good." He interprets the "for good" as including welfare and an entire host of state-financed programs. He appeals to some Calvinistic writers, such as Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper's natural law theory of politics contributed to the eventual secularization of the formerly Calvinist state in the Netherlands. I am not impressed, nor am I surprised, that Kuyper would support a statist interpretation of Romans 13:4.<sup>15</sup> Once "bap-

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15. See Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy*

tized" by Kuyper, the Netherlands became a humanist mecca – the classic example of the result of "common grace-natural law" theory. I will say this: if someone prefers a society such as the politically pluralistic Netherlands has become since 1945 – drugs, pornography, and legalized euthanasia – then he may find the Keller-Kuyper view of the state appealing.

*John Murray, Welfare Statist?*

Dr. Keller, however, misleadingly (here we go again) turns to a former professor of systematic theology at Westminster, John Murray, for support of a welfare state view of civil government. In the context of quoting other welfare state Calvinists, Keller says that "John Murray explains that 'good' cannot be confined to a mere absence of crime, but it is defined in I Timothy 2:2 as 'peaceful and quiet lives.'"<sup>16</sup>

Does this statement by Murray mean that Murray believed in a welfare state interpretation of Romans 13:4? Hardly. Consider Murray's complete statement:

He [the magistrate] is the minister of God for that which is good. And we may not tone down the import of the term "good" in this instance. Paul provides us with a virtual definition of the good we derive from the service of the civil authority when he requires that we pray for kings and all who are in authority "that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity" (I Tim. 2:2). The good the magistrate promotes is that which subserves the interests of *piety* [emphasis mine].<sup>17</sup>

The last sentence and the last word of this quote are important. The positive good of the magistrate serves the interest of

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(Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 126-29: "Kuyper's Legacy: The State as Healer."

16. Keller, *Theonomy*, p. 281.

17. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 152.

*piety*. That is to say, the civil magistrate is required by God to promote those external conditions that allow Christian worship. This has nothing to do with taxation and redistribution, especially the taxation of Christians for the support of covenant-breakers. Rather, if Murray's reference to the Pauline injunction to pray for peace is kept in mind, the professor obviously understood "good" in a *judicial* sense. The magistrate is a minister for good when he protects the people of God. He thereby creates an atmosphere in which the Gospel can freely spread. Once again, Dr. Keller has pulled a quote out of context to establish a welfare state point. Murray's point was in fact a theocratic one.

Murray was a Scottish Calvinist, not a Dutch Calvinist. The conflict between these two traditions at Westminster has not been sufficiently discussed in public by the faculty. This conflict was there from the beginning. Machen did not agree with Kuyper.<sup>18</sup> The nineteenth-century Dutch eschatological tradition has been dominant on campus ever since Murray's retirement and Norman Shepherd's dismissal. Keller is trying to make Murray speak with a Dutch accent. He never did.

### The Real Issue: Whose Conditions?

The real issue, therefore, concerns *whose* conditions regarding welfare to the poor, not whether or not there will be conditions. Conditionless charity is pure mythology, as even Keller has demonstrated in his own admission that "we must not give naively." (If this is not what he means, he has argued naively.) Conditionless charity is itself naive. It is fiction.

Dr. Keller's own misused example is the best proof. He tries to use the ancient patriarch of the Bible, Joseph in Egypt, as a legitimate example of where the state was involved in a welfare program. The point is, however, that Joseph's program was not

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18. North, *Westminster's Confession*, pp. 129-32.

based on a policy of unconditional welfare. Joseph rose to power by means of his solution to the famine problem of his day. What was his solution? He *gave* to his own family (a covenant-keeping condition), but he developed a program through Divine inspiration whereby he *sold* the Egyptians food (a covenant-breaking condition). He did not give away food to the people of Egypt, even though he had persuaded the Pharaoh to take it from them by force. He used their condition of near-starvation to get these pagan Gentiles to surrender the ownership of their livestock and their land. His program was not conditionless. He in essence *enslaved* the Egyptians to the powers that were, of which he was the chief. The Gentiles were legally enslaved to the Pharaoh, while Joseph's family was given the best of Egypt's land. This partially explains the later hatred of the Jews by the Egyptians. Yet Dr. Keller calls this a welfare system. Indeed it was: a *state* welfare system. Predictably, it led to enslavement.

### *Free Lunches vs. Freedom*

There is no such thing as a free lunch. Somebody pays because someone always absorbs the burden of the conditions.<sup>19</sup>

Let us assume for the sake of argument that Dr. Keller is correct: an unconditional, compulsory, benevolent program by the state is really sanctioned by the Bible. Does Dr. Keller believe that the state does not require any conditions for wealth distribution? There is always discrimination in one form or another, even though it may not be racial. *There is no neutrality.* The state has to impose conditions, because anyone who gives away anything, even if it means driving down a street and throwing food out of the back of a truck, has to decide upon what basis a particular street is chosen. He or his superiors must make several other decisions, the main one being the

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19. The obvious example is Jesus on the cross.

answer to the crucial question: *Who pays?* It is extremely naive to think that this benevolence will be given without expectations, i.e., *votes*.

What about the taxpayers who are paying for it? For the state to operate as a modern welfare state, it will have to tax more than the tithe of the church, as every model socialist society has demonstrated, including our own. The middle class will have to be robbed to pay for the poor and their Civil Service-protected handlers. Conditions are placed on someone. The history of the welfare state reveals that its mythological "unconditional benevolence" is far more conditional than judicially conditional Christianity is.

### *The Task of the Church*

This brings me to the possibility of unconditional church benevolence. Let's think this situation through. Someone always gets sanctioned or ends up with conditions being placed on him or her. If the church is giving away money in a non-discriminatory fashion, this means less money for the widows and the orphans in the church. It's a matter of simple mathematics.

Dr. Keller has created a system whereby *those who are under grace are negatively sanctioned more than those who are outside of grace*. What kind of message does this send to the members of the church? The elect are really not the elect because there is no preference given to them. Being in the church means being equal to an unbeliever. Worse, being in the church means being *less than an unbeliever* because at least the unbeliever gets the "unconditional" benevolence. It is presumably better to be outside of the church where the "gettin' is free." A widow or orphan is better off economically not being part of the church. What kind of message does Mr. Keller's system send to the world? In an attempt to communicate grace, he has destroyed a major incentive for coming under grace. The incentive is gone.

*Unconditionality is mythology* – as mythological as judicial neutrality. It is the grand illusion of Pelagian and Arminian Christianity. It is the huge hoax of neo-evangelical political liberalism: the politics of guilt and pity. The real issue for Dr. Keller is the imposition of both economic and judicial conditions by politicians and bureaucrats. I would rather be theologically honest about conditions and live under Christ's.

### Conclusion

On the afternoon of my completion of this article, the showcase of socialism's welfare state, Sweden, democratically decided to scrap its legendary system. Why? Said one Swedish representative: "Because the people are tired of being taxed *fifty per cent* of their income." Socialism has become economically obsolete. Sweden has begun to learn: *charity has conditions*.

Let the church turn again to the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospels for a saner, more biblical, and much more long-lasting theology of poverty – a view of Scripture where judicial conditions are real, but so is *Grace*! This is why biblical charity must discriminate between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. To do anything less is to deplete the resources of the righteous and transfer them to the unrighteous. But we know that the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just, not the other way around (Prov. 13:22b). Sweden has at long last begun to grasp this principle of biblical justice. If we support those who have become poor through their own immoral behavior, then we are subsidizing evil. God does not call us to support evil. Satan does, however; such charity expands his kingdom at the expense of God's. We should resist his temptation.

There can never be unconditional charity in a world of scarcity. To give charity to one person is to deny it to another. There can be no neutrality. The myth of neutrality undergirds the reality of the modern welfare state: compulsory wealth-redistribution. As followers of Christ, we must reject the myth of neutrality wherever we encounter it. This is Van Til's legacy.

## HERMENEUTICS AND LEVITICUS 19:19 – PASSING DR. POYTHRESS' TEST

*Gary North*

*Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed; neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woolen come upon thee (Lev. 19:19).*

When I wrote *Westminster's Confession*, I hammered on several themes. One of them was this: "You can't beat something with nothing." If a Christian refuses to accept the covenantal ideal of Christendom, then what does he offer in its place? In whose name? According to which biblical texts? The faculty at Westminster Theological Seminary clearly rejects the ideal of Christendom. They have attacked theonomy's assertion of the legitimacy of this ideal, but they have offered no alternative. Several members have accepted the legitimacy of natural law theory (whether Aquinas' version or Newton's is unclear). This breaks with Van Til's rejection of natural law theory (both Aquinas' version and Newton's).<sup>1</sup> The question then arises: Is theonomy

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1. Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

truly a positive alternative? Is there, in fact, a distinctly theonomic approach to Old Testament texts, especially the case laws? Or is theonomic biblical exegesis done, as the World War II song put it, on a wing and a prayer?

### Dr. Poythress' Challenge

In his essay in the symposium, Vern Sheridan Poythress, who is professor of New Testament, challenges the defenders of theonomy to deal with the hermeneutical (interpretational) problems of Leviticus 19:19. He knows that theonomists are defenders of free market economics and modern capitalism. How, then, can they escape the dilemma of Leviticus 19:19? He begins his analysis-criticism of theonomy with a consideration of this verse. He regards the exegetical problem of Leviticus 19:19 as exemplary of the theonomists' larger hermeneutical problem of distinguishing judicial continuity from discontinuity in the two testaments. He calls it "the test case."<sup>2</sup> In short, he has argued that we theonomists need to beat nothing – he offers no solutions to the hermeneutical problems he lists – with something. This I intend to do.

Poythress' challenge is legitimate. He does raise important issues regarding the principles of biblical interpretation as they apply to the case laws of the Old Covenant. The command not to mix seeds is an expression of God's will, he correctly observes. It is therefore relevant to us. He asks: Does this particular case law express a universal standard, or is it uniquely a law of a distinct kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6)? Was it part of Israel's laws of unclean foods? If it was part of Israel's priestly laws, how does it apply to the church as a royal priesthood (I Pet. 2:9)? The Old Covenant's food laws are abolished, he correctly observes. We are still not to mix good and evil. (This

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2. Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Effects of Interpretive Frameworks on the Application of Old Testament Law," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, edited by William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990), p. 110.



presumes that the separation of seeds and fabrics in Leviticus 19:19 has something to do with separating good and evil.) "How do we decide how Leviticus 19:19 applies to us?"<sup>3</sup> This is indeed the question. It is not just the theonomists' God-given assignment to answer it. It would have been helpful if Dr. Poythress had suggested his solution to it. He avoided this task.

Greg Bahnsen says that this law no longer applies.<sup>4</sup> He is correct on this point, but Poythress is not persuaded by Bahnsen's general explanation. Poythress cites Bahnsen: "We should presume that Old Testament standing laws continue to be morally binding in the New Testament, unless they are rescinded or modified by further revelation."<sup>5</sup> Poythress adds: "Strict, wooden application of this principle would appear to imply the continuation of Leviticus 19:19 in force."<sup>6</sup> He notes in a footnote that Rushdoony argues that Leviticus 19:19 still applies, thus making all hybrids immoral.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Poythress implies (correctly), those theonomists who reject Rushdoony's interpretation of Leviticus 19:19 need to produce specific evidence of a judicial discontinuity between the testaments that has annulled the literal application of this law.

Poythress says that this law might be regarded as part of the Old Covenant's food laws and hence abolished. The Old Covenant's laws of separation no longer apply, Bahnsen says.<sup>8</sup> Poythress asks: "But how do we tell in practice what counts as a 'separation' principle? How do we tell what elements in Mosaic statutes are shadows and in what way are they shadows? How

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

4. Poythress does not cite a source for this assertion.

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pp. 345-46.

6. Poythress, p. 106.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 106n. He cites R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 255. For a detailed critique of Rushdoony's argument, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: The Political Economy of Leviticus*, forthcoming, Appendix F.

8. Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, p. 346.

do we tell what is ceremonial and what is moral?"<sup>9</sup> We know that all the laws in Leviticus 19 are moral, he says. They functioned in some way to separate Israel from the nations around her. Second, it is easy to argue that "keeping the types of seed distinct is a principle of separation based on creation and therefore of permanent validity. Third, the immediate context of Leviticus does not provide decisive information about the permanence of this statute."<sup>10</sup> The more that Poythress looks at the specifics of this case law, the more its New Testament meaning seems to get lost in the Old Testament's shadows. This is true of almost every civil law in the Old Covenant that he examines in detail, as he repeatedly demonstrates in his book, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (1991).

How can we faithfully solve these exegetical problems? Dr. Poythress offers this exegetical imperative: "We are supposed to determine the classification of any statute by first understanding its primary function. Understanding its function reveals whether it primarily defines sin in a universally binding way or whether it primarily articulates the way of salvation in a way conditioned by the redemptive-historical context. We therefore determine in what respects it is permanently relevant to our redemptive-historical situation. The primary remaining difficulty is that it is not always easy to determine the primary function, particularly because several functions may sometimes be interwoven."<sup>11</sup>

What, then, were the primary functions of Leviticus 19:19 under the Mosaic economy? Can we discover an approach to solving this problem that can also be applied successfully and biblically to other problem passages? This is Dr. Poythress' test. Can a theonomist pass it?

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9. Poythress, p. 106.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

### A Question of Judicial Discontinuity

I agree with Poythress' statement regarding the exegetical imperative. It is therefore mandatory on me or on another defender of theonomy's hermeneutic to do what Poythress says must be done: (1) identify the primary function of an Old Covenant law; (2) discover whether it is universal in a redemptive (healing) sense or whether (3) it is conditioned by its redemptive-historical context (i.e., annulled by the New Covenant). In short: What did the law mean, how was it applied in ancient Israel, and how should it be applied today? This task is not always easy, but it is mandatory. If a person understands the basic principles of biblical interpretation – continuity and discontinuity – the task gets much easier.

One hermeneutical rule can help us make sense out of the continuities and discontinuities between the covenants: *a change in the sacraments accompanies a change in the priesthood*. Whenever there is a question of a change in judicial administration – a suspected covenantal discontinuity – we need to ask this question: Was the Old Testament law under discussion in some way connected to the sacraments? If so, we should expect to see its annulment or radical alteration – one might even say *alteration* – in the New Testament.

Let us ask another question: Is a change in the priesthood also accompanied by a change in the laws governing the family covenant? Jesus tightened the laws of divorce (Matt. 19:3-9). The church has denied the legality of polygamy. Did other changes in the family accompany this change in the priesthood? Specifically, have changes in inheritance taken place? Have these changes resulted in the annulment of the jubilee land laws of the Mosaic economy? Finally, has an annulment of the jubilee land laws annulled the laws of tribal separation?

At this point, I am suggesting a weakness in the Westminster Confession's tripartite division of biblical law: *moral, ceremonial, and judicial*. The moral law is said to be permanently binding (XIX:2). The ceremonial law is said to have been abrogated by

the New Covenant (XIX:3). The judicial law is said to have applied only to national Israel and not to the New Covenant era, except insofar as a law was (is) part of something called the "general equity" (XIX:4). This formulation assumes that the judicial law applied only to Israel's "body politic." But what of the family? It is a separate covenantal administration, bound by a lawful oath under God. Which civil laws in Israel protected the family? To what extent have these laws been annulled or modified (perhaps tightened) by the New Covenant? And why?

I am here suggesting the need for a restructuring of this traditional tripartite division into *civil*, *ecclesiastical*, and *familial*. In other words, the divisions should match the Bible's tripartite covenantal and institutional division. There are continuities (moral law) and discontinuities (redemptive-historical applications) in all three covenantal law-orders. It is the task of the interpreter to make these distinctions and interrelationships clear. The church has been avoiding this crucial task (exegetical and applicational) for over three centuries. The result has been the dominance of ethical dualism in Christian social theory: natural law theory coupled with pietism and/or mysticism.

### *Holiness and Separation*

It must be borne in mind that Leviticus is the Bible's book of holiness. Boundaries are basic to biblical holiness. So, it is wise to approach the passages in Leviticus that make little sense to the modern reader in expectation that many of these the issues can be clarified by discovering the underlying principle of holiness, which is a principle of separation.

Three areas of economic activity are mentioned in Leviticus 19:19: animal husbandry, agriculture, and textiles. Except for mining and metalworking, these were the three primary categories of economic goods in the ancient world. Leviticus 19:19 established rules for all three areas. That world is long gone. Beginning in the fifteenth century, and accelerating rapidly in the late eighteenth century, a series of improvements in all

three areas transformed the traditional economy of Europe. The modern capitalist system, with its emphasis on private ownership, the specialization of production, and the division of labor, steadily replaced the older medieval agricultural world of the common fields. Yet this comprehensive economic transformation was seemingly accompanied by the violation of at least the first two, and possibly all three, of the "separation" statutes of Leviticus 19:19.

This raises an important covenantal issue: the predictability of the external corporate blessings of God in history. A civilization-wide violation of these Levitical laws has produced (or at least has been accompanied by) an historically unprecedented increase in wealth. We must therefore conclude one of three things: (1) the laws of Leviticus 19:19 are no longer binding because of a change in covenantal administration; (2) the covenantal link between corporate obedience and corporate blessings no longer holds in New Testament times, although the laws of Leviticus 19:19 do hold; or (3) these laws and God's corporate sanctions are still in force; therefore, the modern world is headed for a horrendous covenantal judgment of God because of systematic violations of this particular Old Testament law. The first conclusion is the proper one. This chapter explains why.

### **The Industrial Revolution**

It was the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century that visibly transformed the traditional economy. This is not to say that industrialism somehow appeared overnight. It did not.<sup>12</sup> But to characterize England as the first industrial society would not have been accurate much before 1760. After 1800, it was an appropriate designation. There is no question that the economy of England in 1800 was a radically different kind of system than anything the Israelites would have understood.

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12. John U. Nef, *The Conquest of the Material World: Essays on the Coming of Industrialism* (New York: Meridian, 1964).

The industrial revolution in England was not initially industrial; it was initiated by a series of transformations in the traditional sectors of agriculture,<sup>13</sup> animal husbandry,<sup>14</sup> textiles,<sup>15</sup> and metallurgy.<sup>16</sup> Improvements in metallurgy were made possible by improved coal mining.<sup>17</sup> Commerce and industry accelerated as economic output increased.<sup>18</sup> The revolution in steam power that was a characteristic feature of the industrial revolution was made possible by the improvements in metallurgy and coal, and the steam engine in turn made mining less expensive by pumping water out of the mines.<sup>19</sup> Machines were also applied to textile production.<sup>20</sup> But the reality was this: the industrial revolution took place after 1760 in England and after 1800 elsewhere because of prior transformations in agriculture, animal husbandry, textiles, and to a lesser extent, metallurgy and mining.<sup>21</sup>

The changes that first became visible in Britain were not confined to that island empire. The fundamental change – a change in property rights – had taken place throughout Western Europe for several centuries preceding the industrial revolution. The growth of towns, the growth of markets, and the growth of commerce had begun in Western Europe at least by the eleventh century, and this growth continued. After the fifteenth century, civil government and defense became more

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13. Herbert Heaton, *Economic History of Europe* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1948), pp. 310-14, 407-13. Heaton was one of my professors late in his career.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 404-7, 413-16.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 314-16.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 316-17.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 317-19. In England, the wood supply began to shrink in the second half of the eighteenth century. The English had to rely more and more on coal, which they had in abundance. Brinley Thomas, "Toward an Energy Interpretation of the Industrial Revolution," *Atlantic Economic Journal*, VIII (March 1980).

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 319-28.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 494-97.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 489-93.

21. After 1750 in England, coal mining became significant.

and more the responsibility of the king and the nation rather than the local lord of the manor. Loyalties shifted accordingly, especially in the cities. Lampard writes: "The result was a new social division of labor in which property rights played a more decisive role than personal obligations in determining the division of the social product. Property rights as a claim on the material means of existence provided the institutional foundation, if not the psychological mainspring, for a commercial, acquisitive society."<sup>22</sup> This institutional transformation was not confined to Great Britain. Because of this, once England had shown the way, the industrial revolution spread within two generations throughout Northern and Western Europe, and also to North America. By 1830, it was a common Northern European phenomenon.

### *Population Growth*

The most statistically relevant aspect of the era of the industrial revolution in England was the growth of population. In the year 1700, there were about five and a half million people in England and Wales. By 1750, it was six and a half million. By 1801, it was about nine million, an unprecedented increase of 60 percent. By 1831, population had reached fourteen million. This was not due to an increase in the birth rate.<sup>23</sup> It was also not due to immigration. During the eighteenth century, as many as a million people left Great Britain for the colonies.<sup>24</sup> The cause of the increase in population, 1750-1800, was an unprecedented reduction in the death rate.

The question is: Was it the industrial revolution that produced this increase? This seems not to have been the case. A

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22. Eric E. Lampard, *The Industrial Revolution: Interpretations and Perspectives* (Washington, D.C.: Service Center for Teachers of History, American Historical Association, 1957), p. 12.

23. T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 4.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

growth of population was also taking place in other European nations and in North America – nations that had not yet experienced an industrial revolution.<sup>25</sup> This points to the possibility that the slow but steady increase in agricultural productivity outside of England had been more important in increasing population than England's industrial revolution was. Agricultural productivity did not rise in England after 1750. England became an importer of food, selling its industrial products abroad to pay for these imports.<sup>26</sup> This meant that other areas were producing agricultural surpluses.<sup>27</sup> Successful agricultural techniques discovered in one region were imitated throughout Western Europe. This leads us back to the problem of Leviticus 19:19 and the corporate blessings of God. If progress is a blessing, and innovation is at the heart of progress, is the Bible opposed to progress? Is it opposed to innovation?

### *Innovation*

The fundamental change in the West's traditional economy was the appearance of widespread innovation. As never before in man's history, innovation began to reshape economic production. Entrepreneurs gained access to capital, and this capital allowed them to test their visions of the future in the competitive marketplace. Either they met consumer demand more efficiently than their competitors, thereby gaining short-term profits until other producers imitated their techniques, or else they failed. The winners were the consumers, whose economic decisions steadily became sovereign in the economy. Rosenberg

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25. *Ibid.*, p. 6. Cf. Shepard B. Clough, *The Economic Development of Western Civilization* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 241-42.

26. Brinley Thomas, "Food Supply in the United Kingdom During the Industrial Revolution," in Joel Mokyr, ed., *The Economics of the Industrial Revolution* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 142.

27. A surplus does not necessarily mean abundance, and surely did not mean this in the eighteenth century. A surplus is merely an asset that its producer regards as less valuable to him than the item he receives in exchange.



and Birdzell have described the process as well as anyone has: "The immediate sources of Western growth were innovations in trade, technology, and organization, in combination with accumulation of more and more capital, labor, and applied natural resources. Innovation emerged as a significant factor in Western growth as early as the mid-fifteenth century, and from the mid-eighteenth century on has been pervasive and dominant. Innovation occurred in trading, production, products, services, institutions, and organizations. The main characteristics of innovation – uncertainty, search, exploration, financial risk, experiment, and discovery – have so permeated the West's expansion of trade and the West's development of natural resources as to make it virtually an additional factor of production."<sup>28</sup> Entrepreneurship was (is) the key to economic growth.

Innovation was the key to European economic growth and social change. Yet Leviticus 19:19 seems opposed to innovation, especially with respect to animal husbandry. There is to be no scientific interbreeding of animals, the law declares. The same restriction appears to hold true for the seeds of the field. If the key to Western prosperity has been economic and scientific innovation, then why did God establish laws for agriculture that restrict innovation in two major areas of modern agricultural output?<sup>29</sup> Are any of God's laws opposed to economic development? If so, which ones? And why?

### Leviticus 19:19 and Economic Development

The transformation of the first three sectors of the European economy involved what appear to be explicit violations of Leviticus 19:19. Men developed new strains of plants, new breeds within species, and new combinations of textiles.<sup>30</sup> Agricultural

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28. Nathan Rosenberg and L. E. Birdzell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 20.

29. The third law, prohibiting the wearing of mixed cloth, was a restriction on use, not on output as such.

30. As early as the fifteenth century, Europe was benefiting from fustian: various

productivity as a whole went through something like a revolution, 1600-1750. It accelerated vastly after 1800. By 1900, modern agriculture had become capital intensive and scientific. Hybrid seeds would soon become the foundation of this revolution in agricultural output. Gregor Mendel, a monk living in what became Czechoslovakia after World War I, discovered the laws of genetics in 1865 and published his findings in 1866, "Experiments With Plant Hybrids," in an obscure local journal. This article attracted no attention. It was rediscovered in 1900, and his discovery began to reshape the modern world – a transformation that is now accelerating through genetic engineering.

Animal breeding was the least important factor in this agricultural transformation.<sup>31</sup> Economic historian Peter Mathias comments: "The first main innovations were mainly in improving rotations and crops, seed-yields and strains in plants. Advances in animal breeding and the widespread substitution of the horse for the ox on the farm followed mainly in the wake of these improvements. This also was not accidental. The new animals demanded more efficient, better feeding. The old styles of unimproved stock remained a natural and appropriate response to poor pasture, waterlogged fields in the winter and scanty winter feed. Neither sheep nor draught-animals could serve a specialized function: the ox was eaten when it could no longer draw."<sup>32</sup> Scientific breeding is a recent phenomenon.

The question must be asked: If the modern world had remained faithful to Leviticus 19:19, would we have escaped the narrow economic boundaries of the pre-modern world? Would we still be facing famines, starvation, poverty, high infant mortality rates, and all the other curses of poverty in the world prior to 1800? The answer is obvious: *yes*. So, the question

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cloths that were a combination of linen and cotton. Heaton, *History*, pp. 215, 232-33.

31. Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1914* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), pp. 78-80.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

arises: Was Leviticus 19:19 itself an economic curse? Second, is it still in force? If it is, then isn't our high per capita wealth today – seemingly a great blessing from God – judicially illegitimate? If it is, how can a theonomist explain this anomaly?

More specifically, is the defender of free market capitalism forced into an untenable ideological position if he also defends the continuing authority of biblical law? Is the modern world's wealth an example of God's perverse blessing on antinomian Christianity and humanism, generation after generation? Or is the modern world's abandonment of Leviticus 19:19 legitimate? Is Leviticus 19:19 a case law that was annulled by the New Covenant? If it is, then is this fact itself theological justification for announcing the annulment of all Old Testament case laws?

### *The Enclosure Movement*

Before we pursue these topics, one development must be remembered: the enclosure movement. There is no doubt that the genetic specialization of herds and crops was made possible economically by the steady enclosure of the medieval common fields or commonly tilled soil. The enclosure movement began early in England, certainly by the thirteenth century.<sup>33</sup> It accelerated in the sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup> After 1760, Parliament authorized specific enclosure by private acts.<sup>35</sup> The steady partitioning of the common fields made possible the so-called agricultural revolution in England. (A revolution that takes well over a century is evolutionary by modern standards, though perhaps not by pre-modern standards.) Ashton writes: "Progress in agriculture was bound up with the creation of new units of administration in which the individual had more scope for experiment; and this meant the parcelling out and enclosure of the common fields, or the breaking up of the rough pasture

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33. W. E. Tate, *The Enclosure Movement* (New York: Walker, 1967), pp. 60-61.

34. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

and waste which had previously contributed little to the output of the village.”<sup>36</sup> What was required, in short, was the establishment of new boundaries.

These legal boundaries established the private ownership of, and therefore personal responsibility over, the crucial means of production in an agricultural society: specific units of land. The fruits of one’s capital and labor inputs could be more easily identified and claimed. This created economic incentives to improve the land and to introduce new crops, including the bleating crop known as sheep. Specialization of agricultural production and the resulting increase in output per unit of resource input increased both wealth and population in early modern England. This in turn led to the industrial revolution. My point is that the increasing precision of the legal claims of private owners of land, enforceable in civil courts, was the crucial change that made possible the agricultural revolution. The development of new crops and new breeds was the result, not the cause, of that crucial revolution. In short, the new boundaries – geographical but especially legal – led to greater dominion. It was the transformation of legal relationships that produced the transformation of the rural economy of England.

There was a perverse side of English inheritance: the eldest son inherited all of the family’s land (primogeniture). Furthermore, except in cases of bankruptcy, this land could not be sold (entail). The result was that younger sons were pushed into the clergy, the military, or government service. (Not business: there was a stigma attached to business.) In an economic sense, the younger sons were “sacrificed” for the sake of the family’s name: the survival of the property as a social force.

The only way for a landowner to get immediate access to additional money out of this system, such as the money for a daughter’s dowry, was to mortgage the property. Very long-term mortgages became universal by the early years of the

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36. Ashton, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 18.

industrial revolution, and this remained a fixture of the English aristocracy.<sup>37</sup> Large debt accompanied large landed estates.

### Case Laws and Underlying Principles

A single case law governing agriculture, animal husbandry, and textile production had to be taken very seriously under the Old Covenant. The expositor's presumption is that these three laws constitute a judicial unit. If they are a unit, there has to be some underlying judicial principle common to all three. All three prohibitions deal with mixing. The first question we need to ask is the crucial one: What was the covenantal meaning of these laws? The second question is: What was their economic effect?

I argue here that the fundamental judicial principle undergirding the passage is the requirement of separation. Two kinds of separation were involved. The first two clauses were agricultural applications of the mandatory *segregation of the tribes* inside Israel until a unique prophesied *seed* would appear in history: the messiah. We know who the seed is: Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "Now unto Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). The context of Paul's discussion is *inheritance*. Inheritance is by promise, he said (Gal. 3:18). The Mosaic law was given, Paul said, "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:18). Two-thirds of Leviticus 19:19 relates to the inheritance laws of national Israel, as we shall see. When the Levitical inheritance laws (Lev. 25) ended with the establishment of a new priesthood, so did the authority of Leviticus 19:19.

What was Paul attempting to prove? This: eternal life (the ultimate inheritance) is obtained by God's promise, not by God's law. God's law cannot impart life.<sup>38</sup> That is to say, the

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37. Mathias, *First Industrial Nation*, pp. 55-57.

38. Moises Silva, "Is the Law Against the Promises? The Significance of Galatians

means of eternal life is not obedience to God's revealed law. Paul was not, contrary to the argument of the Judaizers, attempting to set biblical law in opposition to the principle of inheritance by promise.<sup>39</sup> He was arguing that there is only one pathway to eternal life: by God's promise. It is this promise of *new life*, which is a *new inheritance*, that is central to Leviticus 19:19. Seed and inheritance are inescapably joined together.

The second form of separation is more familiar: covenantal separation. The final clause of Leviticus 19:19 deals with prohibited clothing. This prohibition related not to separation among the tribes of Israel – separation within a national covenant – but rather the separation of national Israel from other nations. This is the familiar application of the separation laws.

Because their frame of reference is not intuitively recognized, the first two clauses must occupy our initial attention. We must begin with an understanding of the ultimate boundary in ancient Israel: the covenantal boundary of blood.

### Boundary of Blood: Seed and Land

The preservation of Israel's unique covenantal status was required by biblical law. The physical manifestation of this separation was the sign of circumcision. A boundary of blood was imposed on the male organ of reproduction. It was a sign that covenantal life is not obtained by either physical birth or through one's heirs. As Rushdoony says, "Circumcision witnesses to the fact that man's hope is not in generation but in regeneration. . . ."<sup>40</sup> Unlike the ancient Greeks, who believed that a decent life after death could be obtained only through an un-

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3:21 for Covenant Continuity," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 158.

39. Meredith G. Kline argues that this was Paul's contention: *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 23. Moises Silva says that Kline is incorrect on this point. *Theonomy*, p. 160. In fact, Silva says, Kline's interpretation – the radical contrast between law and promise – is the same as the Judaizers' argument. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

40. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 43.

broken series of rites performed by one's heirs,<sup>41</sup> the Israelites knew that physical generation within the family unit had nothing to do with one's life after physical death. They had a doctrine of creation; the Greeks did not. This made a great difference, as Fustel remarked so long ago: ". . . if we reflect that the ancients had no idea of creation, we shall see that the mystery of generation was for them what the mystery of creation is for us. The generator appeared to them to be a divine being; and they adored their ancestor."<sup>42</sup> Ancestor worship is not the message of the Old Covenant. The theology of the Old Covenant is creationist: *the Creator-creature distinction*. The Creator placed the generator, Adam, under a covenant. Adam served as the judicial representative of all his heirs. The generator then broke the terms of the covenant. Mankind is therefore under a curse, both in history and eternity. To escape this curse, a man must re-covenant with God. The mark of this covenant in ancient Israel was circumcision.

The nation of Israel was separated from non-covenanted nations by geographical and covenantal boundaries. Furthermore, tribal and family units separated the covenant people within Israel. This *intra-national* separation was geographical, familial, and economic; it was not confessional. Israelites were not divided tribally because they had different ancestors, which was the case in ancient Greece. They were divided tribally because they would have different heirs. Only one tribe could bring forth the promised seed: Judah.

Family membership and rural land ownership in Israel were tied together by the laws of inheritance. A rural Israelite – and most Israelites were rural – was the heir of a specific plot of ground because of his family membership. There was no rural landed inheritance apart from family membership. Unlike

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41. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book I.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

ancient Greece, Mosaic law allowed a daughter to inherit the family's land if there was no son. But there was a condition: she had to marry within the tribal unit (Num. 36:8). The landed inheritance could not lawfully move from one tribe to another (Num. 36:9). The family's inheritance in rural Israel *was* the land. The land was tied legally to the seed: future, not past.

Land was tied to *name*. So important was this principle of inheritance that a brother who lived on the family's land with a married brother who died without children had to obey the levirate marriage law and procreate children through the brother's widow (Deut. 25:5-10). Their children would inherit the family's name (Deut. 25:6). To refuse to perform this requirement was to be disgraced publicly. The wife could challenge the brother publicly, announcing before the elders, "My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel. . ." (Deut. 25:7). Name, land, and seed were linked.

Tamar became a childless widow when Er, her evil husband, was killed by God (Gen. 38:7). Judah sent Onan, now his oldest son, to become her levir husband. Onan refused to procreate a child with her. He spilled his seed (*zarah*) on the ground, "lest that he should give his seed to his brother." This was not just an act of defiance against Tamar; it was a ritual act of defiance against God. God killed him for this ritual act (v. 10).

When Tamar bore twins to Judah, she named the second-born son *Zarah*. He was the child who had the scarlet thread around his wrist, who had almost been the firstborn (v. 30). He disappears after Genesis 46:12. He was not Judah's promised seed. His brother Pharez becomes the seed line of Judah, into which Ruth the Moabite married (Ruth 4:12). So, the covenant line of Judah led to the kingly line of David through Ruth, for Boaz performed the office of the levir when Naomi's nearest of kin refused for fear of losing his inheritance (Ruth 4:6). David is listed as the tenth generation after Pharez (Ruth 4:18-22), making David's generation the first generation of Judah's line that could become citizens according to the Mosaic law of bas-



tardy (Deut. 23:2), and therefore lawfully become judges, for Pharez had been a bastard son born illegally of Judah.<sup>43</sup>

The name Pharez comes from the Hebrew word for breach. God placed him as the head of the family line. Pharez was born abnormally, but he nevertheless inherited: sovereign grace.

### *Till Shiloh Come*

Jacob had promised Judah that his blood line would rule until the promised heir (Shiloh) should come (Gen. 49:10). Thus, the integrity of each of the seed lines in Israel – family by family, tribe by tribe – was maintained by the Mosaic law until this promise was fulfilled. The mandatory separation between the tribes was symbolized by the prohibition against mixing seeds. The prohibition applied to the mixing of seeds in one field. What was the meaning of *field*? The field was not the whole world under the Old Covenant; *the field was the Promised Land*. Thus, the husbandman or farmer had to create boundaries between his specialized breeds and between his crops.

The boundaries separating animals had to be there because of the normal sexual bonding that takes place among pairs within a species. So, too, was it normal for members of the same covenant confession to marry. Thus, Mosaic law established an artificial barrier between the tribes. This barrier was economic: *landed inheritance*. Tribal separation decentralized Israel's economy and politics. The Levites were scattered across the land, living in walled cities or in Levitical cities in which the jubilee land laws did not apply (Lev. 25:29-30, 32-34). Levites provided religious leadership, including judicial advice, for every tribe. But the Levites had no inheritance in the land, so they could not buy up rural landed property or gain it through intermarriage, thereby centralizing the economy. Neither could

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43. On the incomplete genealogy of the Davidic line, see Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 147-51.

the king, as the conflict between Ahab and Naboth indicates (I Kings 21). Within Israel, there was continuity of theological and judicial principles (Levitical), one tribe to another; there was discontinuity – separation – of plots of land, tribe to tribe. This land law ruled out dynastic marriages among tribal chieftains.

Thus, the prohibition against the interbreeding of animals and the mixing of seeds had to do with *keeping separate what is normally mixed*. The family fields in the land of Israel reflected the tribal boundaries within Israel. Such separation was abnormal, not normal. What is abnormal is the separation of breeds within a species. What is abnormal is separation of crops within a single field. *What is abnormal is the judicial and marital separation of a biblically covenanted people*. This abnormality was essential to the maintenance of the tribal structure in Israel. Inheritance in the land was by tribal separation, but only until Shiloh at last arrived. The internal boundaries would come down once Shiloh came. So would all other laws associated with these boundaries.

### *Inheritance: Generation vs. Adoption*

Another application of the seed laws was the prohibition of a eunuch's membership in the congregation (Deut. 23:1). The congregation had a civil function.<sup>44</sup> If a man was cut off in the stones, he was genetically cut off from the possibility of lawful inheritance in the land. He had no genetic future; he could therefore not be a citizen of Israel. This exclusionary rule even applied to victims of holy war. Not even the laws of adoption could overcome this ecclesiastical and civil law.

Under the New Covenant, the laws of adoption have annulled this Mosaic law. The obvious New Testament example of its annulment is the encounter of Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch. As soon as the eunuch professed faith in Jesus Christ, Philip baptized him (Acts 8:37-38). Covenantal inheritance in

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44. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 98. He cites the capital laws of Numbers 15:33ff., 27:2; and 35:12.

the New Testament is by public profession of faith, public baptism, and public obedience; it is not by genetics. Inheritance is by adoption, not by biological reproduction. This is a testimony to the fact that *covenantal faithfulness is more fundamental in history than biology*. It always has been, as God's adoption of Israel as a nation testified (Ezek. 16). But because of the *historic* importance of the prophesied seed of Israel, the seed laws predominated over the adoption laws in the Mosaic economy.

The advent of Jesus Christ restored adoption to visible primacy. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). *With the death of Jesus Christ and the annulment of the Old Covenant, the seed laws ceased*. They were not resurrected with Christ. There was no further need to separate seeds within Israel; the prophecy of the seed of blessing had been covenantally and historically fulfilled. So had the Levitical land laws (Lev. 25). *The Mosaic law's mandatory link between physical seed and land ceased for all time*. The family and tribal boundaries within the land, like the boundaries establishing the judicial holiness (separateness) of national Israel from the world, were covenantally annulled by the New Covenant. The new wine of the gospel broke the old wineskins of Israel's seed laws.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the letter to the Hebrews. It begins with an affirmation of Christ's inheritance: God the Father "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:2). His inheritance is expressly tied to His name: "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Heb. 1:4). Jesus is the high priest of an unchangeable priesthood (Heb. 7:24). His priesthood, because it is after the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:9-11). This has changed the Levitical laws: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). This includes the laws of tribal

separation. Jesus, as high priest, has transcended the Old Covenant's laws separating the tribes of Israel: "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (Heb. 7:14). If He transcended the tribal boundary laws, He transcended the land laws and seed laws, too. A new priesthood now inherits the earth.

### **Sacrifice: Seed vs. Land**

The connection between land and seed was very close in the ancient world, not only judicially but also ritually. When the Israelites came into the land of Canaan, they were told by God that they must not sacrifice their children to the gods of the land. They were not permitted to pass their children through any ritual fire. "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through [the fire] to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I [am] the LORD" (Lev. 18:21). Molech was the god of the Ammonites; it was identified as an abomination (I Kings 11:7). Notice that God called such a practice a profanation of His name (Lev. 20:3). The nation's name, the family's name, and God's name were all interlinked ritually.

Why would anyone have done such a thing? In a civilization such as ours, which was originally built on covenant theology rather than on magic, such a ritual act seems irrational. But sacrifices must be made in life. Men understand this principle, which is why they speak of sacrificing the present for the future. The ancient Canaanites sent their children through the ritual fires in order to identify the survivors as the family's heirs. Also, by placating Molech, they hoped to gain external blessings, which meant primarily agricultural blessings. *By literally sacrificing their children, they hoped for increased agricultural fertility.* We refer to Canaanitic religions as fertility cults.

The religion of Israel was in open conflict with fertility cult religion. God warned Israel against putting their hope in the land or the gods of the land. The seed laws of Leviticus 19:19 were an aspect of this prohibition. They restricted genetic ex-

perimentation in Israel. There would be no specialized breeding of animals; there would be no mixing of seeds in any field. Why not? For the sake of the inheritance, i.e., for the *promise*. The promise was more fundamental than any productivity gained by genetic experiments. Families were required to forfeit some degree of wealth for the sake of faithfulness to the promise. The preservation of each family's seed (i.e., *name*) was more important than increased agricultural output. *The religion of Israel was thus in complete opposition to the fertility cults of Canaan.* This opposition imposed economic costs. Sacrifice always does.

Leviticus 19:19's prohibition of genetic experimentation was an aspect of the preservation of the national covenant, which included the tribal boundaries. In the *sacrificial trade-off* between the *land's seed* (increased wealth from genetic experimentation) and the *promised seed* (which required the maintenance of tribal boundaries), the promised seed had priority. *We must interpret the seed laws as ritual laws.* Israel had to sacrifice some degree of wealth in order to honor ritually the principle of the promised seed. Far better this sacrifice than passing one's children through the fire: ritually honoring the family's land more than the family's seed. For Israel, the seed was primary, not land.

In one particular, there was still the sacrifice of a son. Levi served as the firstborn son in Israel (Num. 3:12). This means that the nation did not have to set apart (sanctify) their firstborn sons for service to God, family by family, at that first numbering of the nation, as would otherwise have been required (Ex. 13:2). The other tribes did not have to make a payment to Aaron and his sons except for the 273 firstborn in excess of the Levites' 22,000 members (Num. 3:39, 46-48). The tribe of Levi became a lawful substitute. God claimed the Levites as His special possession (Lev. 3:45). They could not inherit rural land in the Promised Land. They were disinherited because they were like dead men (sacrifices). They were judicially holy (set apart). A boundary was placed around them in the Levitical

cities, where the jubilee laws did not apply (Lev. 25:32-34). Levi was separated, until Shiloh came.

Leviticus 19:19 is part of the Old Covenant's laws governing the preservation of the family's seed (name) during a particular period of history. It was an aspect of the necessary preservation of genetic Israel. The preservation of the separate seeds of Israel's families was basic to the preservation of the nation's legal status as a set-apart, separated, *holy* covenantal entity. This principle of separation applied to domesticated animals, crops, and clothing.

### Animals

Let us begin with the law prohibiting the mixing of cattle. Did it refer to bovines only? The Hebrew word is transliterated *behemah*, the same word that we find transliterated as behemoth in Job 40:15. In every reference to cattle in Leviticus, this Hebrew word is used. Did this law apply only to cattle? What about other domesticated species? A case can be made both ways. Nevertheless, I believe that *cattle* in this case refers to all domesticated animals. The parallel prohibition against mixing crops was generic. Also, the Hebrew word *behemah* is used generically for all domesticated animals in the laws against bestiality (Lev. 18:23; 20:15). This prohibited activity was less likely to be performed with bovines than other, smaller beasts.

Another reason for translating *behemah* broadly as domestic animals in general is found in the law identifying the Levites as a special tribe, God's firstborn. In setting aside the Levites as a separate, holy tribe in the midst of a holy nation of priests, God also designated their animals as representatives of all the animals in Israel. At that first census of Israel, the people did not have to make a payment for the firstborn animals as part of the required sacrifice of the firstborn males (Num. 3:41, 45). The Hebrew root word for cattle in this verse is *behemah*. The payment to the temple in Numbers 3:49-51 does not mention a payment for the animals. This absence of payment indicates

that the "cattle" of the Levites represented all the domesticated animals, not just bovines, so no payment was owed.<sup>45</sup>

The case law governing the interbreeding of animals is analogous to the case law prohibiting owners from muzzling oxen as they worked the fields (Deut. 25:4). The prohibition against muzzling an ox while it treads out the corn applies in principle to paying appropriate wages to people (I Cor. 9:9-12) and honoring church officers (I Tim. 5:17-18). In these case laws, animals are representative of human beings. In short, *the animals of Leviticus 19:19 were representatives of the nation of Israel as a people*. Identifiable breeds were to be kept separate from each other, just as Israel's tribes were.

The plain teaching of the passage indicates that the breeds of animals that were common in the Promised Land at the time of the conquest were to be allowed to reproduce. The breeds had to be kept separate, however. There was to be no active breeding of new specialized breeds in order to produce animals that had different characteristics from the two original breeds. There was to be no man-directed genetic manipulation of animals in Mosaic Israel.

The Mosaic law prohibiting the interbreeding of animals was never part of the creation mandate. It was a temporary law that illustrated an eschatological principle: the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham regarding the world's deliverance through the seed. This event had not yet come to pass in Mosaic Israel. The Mosaic seed laws did not in any way reduce the authority of the promise to Abraham; they merely governed the administration of rural families' landed inheritance until that promised seed should come. The authority of God's promise established the authority of the promised seed. The seed *was* the promise in Old Covenant Israel. Christ fulfilled that promise. In doing so, He annulled the Levitical seed laws. These laws no longer had any eschatological purpose.

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45. This is an argument from silence: the absence of any recorded payment.

*The Separation of the Breeds*

The technical possibility of mixing breeds always exists. It will happen in nature without active interference from man. If animals are not kept separate, they will breed together. Thus, to preserve an existing breed genetically, a husbandman must take active steps to keep the breeds separated. He must either build fences or hire drovers to keep them apart. There is no indication that the civil government in ancient Israel possessed lawful authority to enforce this law, for it was a ritual law. The priests had to enforce it. But if the priests excommunicated the head of a family, he lost his citizenship, and his sons could lose their inheritance. To retain their legal status as heirs, adult sons had to break publicly with their father, presumably at the time of his excommunication, and promise to obey the law.<sup>46</sup> In short, inheritance required obedience to God, not the father.

A law prohibiting random intermixing of breeds really was superfluous. No profit-seeking owner would allow a pair of specialized breeds to intermix randomly. Such progeny would rarely command the same price or produce the same level of output as the progeny of the separate breeds. Even if a more productive offspring would occasionally be produced, this would do the owner no long-term economic good, for the owner was prohibited from interbreeding the resulting pairs. So, this law was really a prohibition against scientific breeding aimed at producing a new breed with unique characteristics. It meant that whatever common breed existed when they entered the land – “muts” – could mix freely with other similarly undistinguished animals. What if the free market began to register demand for a particular kind of animal? This demand would have applied to: (1) a breed that they had brought with them into the Promised Land, (2) a breed already within the land when they invaded, or (3) an imported breed from outside the

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46. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pp. 838-39.



land after they conquered it. These breeds would be our equivalent of registered animals.

The husbandman would have kept these animals separate from other existing breeds. Obviously, he would have an economic incentive to do this. To sell into a specialized market, his animals would have to be kept away from others not of the same type. So, this law commanded what the economy would have required anyway: separation. Thus, to the extent that this law had civil implications, *it would have applied only to owners who had begun programs of experimental breeding to produce a separate breed*. That would have been a biblically prohibited public action. The priests could then bring a covenant lawsuit.

The seed of each breed had to be separated. To obey this law as it applied to "non-muts," an Israelite would have had to construct a holding area or pen for each breed of animals. This means that a specific seed or seed line was associated with a specific place at any point in time. Owners could lawfully move their animals to new locations on their property, but there was always to be a permanent geographical boundary associated with each breed (seed), just as there were tribal boundaries. This boundary established a connection between *land* and *seed*. This connection was mandatory for both man and beast.

### Crops

The law stipulated, "thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed." This meant that a specific field had to be devoted to a specific crop at any given point in the growing season. Like the pens for animals, the seeds of the crop had to reside in a particular place. Seed and land had to be linked.

Policing this law would have been easy. The person who deliberately planted two crops in an organized way within the confines of a specific field (boundary) would soon face the visible evidence of his violation: rows of mixed crops. A priest could easily identify a violation.

What about genetic experimentation? The same prohibition applied. There could be no lawful, systematic mixing of seeds. Man was not to apply his ingenuity to the creation of new species of plant. Hybrid animals and seeds were illegal to develop. They could be purchased from abroad, but since most hybrids are either sterile (e.g., mules) or else they produce weak offspring, there was little economic incentive to import hybrids except as a one-generation consumer or producer good. Such imports were legal: *with no "inheritance" possible, there was no symbolic threat from hybrids*. A hybrid was not prohibited because of its status as a hybrid. It was illegal to produce hybrids deliberately because of the prohibition against mixing seeds, which was fundamental. The practice of seed-mixing was illegal, but not because this practice produced biological hybrids.

As evidence of this statement, I offer the mule. Here is the classic animal hybrid: the sterile product of horse and donkey. It is a very strong work animal. It was used as a military animal in ancient Israel (II Chron. 12:40).<sup>47</sup> The presence of mules in the household of the kings (II Sam. 13:29; I Kings 10:25) and the presence of 240 mules among those who returned to Jerusalem from Medo-Persia (Ezra 2:66) indicate that there was never any "creation ordinance" against hybrids. If there had been, Ezra and Nehemiah would have kept such beasts out of the land when they returned to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the temple. Mules could be imported, even though it was not legal to breed horses and donkeys to produce them. The deliberate mixing of seeds was illegal, not the offspring as such.

It needs to be pointed out that this law did not apply to the familiar practice of grafting the branches of one species of fruit tree into the trunk of another.<sup>48</sup> Leviticus 19:19 was specific:

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47. The mascot of the United States Military Academy (Army) is a mule. Mules were still being used in wartime as late as World War II.

48. Rabbinic opinion on this verse forbade grafting. See Nachmanides (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, the Ramban), *Commentary on the Torah: Leviticus* (New York: Shiloh, [1267?] 1974), p. 295. He cites the Talmud: *Kiddushin* 39a.

it dealt with seeds planted in a field, not with branches grafted into an adult tree. The tree's trunk is the primary agent, symbolic of the covenant itself. The branch would become part of the older tree. It was not a competing seed. The imported branch was "adopted" by the older tree. This was always a legal option in Israel, as the marriages into the seed line of Judah by Rahab and Ruth indicate. The technique of grafting was symbolic of conversion, which was why Paul used this imagery as the archetype in discussing the fate of the old branch of Israel and the grafting in of the gentiles (Rom. 11:17-21).

### **Clothing**

Mixed clothing made of linen and wool was under a different kind of prohibition. It was illegal to wear clothing produced by mixing these two fibers. There was no law against producing mixed clothing for export, however. Why was wearing it wrong but exporting it allowed?<sup>49</sup>

No other form of mixed-fiber clothing was prohibited by the Mosaic law. Did this case law by implication or extension prohibit all mixed fibers? This seems doubtful. It would have been easy to specify the more general prohibition rather than single out these two. Deuteronomy's parallel passage also singles out this type of mixed fabric (Deut. 22:11) Then what was the nature of the offense? Answer: to wear clothing of this mixture was to proclaim the equality of Israel with all other nations. This could not be done lawfully inside Israel. But as we shall see, it could be done by non-Israelites outside Israel.

Linen was the priestly cloth. The priests were required to wear linen on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:30-34). Linen was to be worn by the priest in the sacrifice of the burnt offering (Lev. 6:10). During and after the Babylonian captivity, because of their rebellion in Israel, the Levites and priests were placed under a new requirement that kept them separate from the

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49. In biblical law, if something is not prohibited, it is allowed.

people: they had to wear linen whenever they served before the table of the Lord. They had to put on linen garments when they entered God's presence in the inner court, and remove them when they returned to the outer court. No wool was to come upon them (Ezek. 44:15-19). The text says, "they shall not sanctify the people with their garments" (Ezek. 44:19). Priestly holiness was associated with linen.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, the laws of leprosy were associated with linen and wool. The test to see whether leprosy was present was to examine wool or linen garments (Lev. 13:47-48, 52, 59). No other fabric is mentioned. The question arises: Why linen and wool? Why were they singled out? More to the point, why were they spoken of together in this prohibition?

### *No Sweat*

Wool is produced by sheep, while linen is a product of the field: flax. Why? It probably had something to do with sweat as man's curse (Gen. 3:19). Linen absorbs moisture. The priest was required to wear a garment of pure linen. He was to wear a garment that absorbed sweat. His judicial covering was to reduce the amount of sweat on his body. Wool, in contrast, is produced by the same follicle that produces sweat in a

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50. On this point I disagree with James Jordan and all of the authorities he cites, both gentiles and Jews. Their argument is that because the high priest's clothing was colored, it had to be a mixture of wool and linen because linen is difficult to dye. Jordan cites Exodus 28:5-6. But this passage says that even the thread had to be linen (v. 6). I can find no passage that indicates that the priests wore anything but linen when they brought sacrifices before God. This includes Exodus 39:29, which Jordan also cites. This is unquestionably the case in the post-exilic period. I think it is safer to go with the language of the texts than with a theory of ancient dyeing techniques. Jordan and several of the authorities he cites claim that the mixture of fabrics was itself holy, so non-priests could not lawfully wear such mixed clothing. I argue the opposite: pure linen was holy, so the wool-linen mixture was forbidden. See James Jordan, "The Law of Forbidden Mixtures," *Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper No. 6*, pp. 3, 6. In any case, this issue was holiness. It had to do with the separation of priests from non-priests: within the land of Israel and between the priestly nation of Israel and the non-priestly nations.

sheep.<sup>51</sup> Wool tends to retain human sweat on the wearer's body. So, wool and linen in the same garment were at cross-purposes biologically – and, as we shall see, ritually.

Clothing covers a person. This is symbolic of God's judicial covering of Adam and Eve. They wanted a covering of the field (fig leaves); God required a covering from a slain animal. This means that to mix wool and linen was to mix ritual opposites. *The wearing of such a mixture was symbolic of the mixing of priests and non-priests.* It was all right for a nation of non-priests to wear such a mixture; it was prohibited to a nation of priests. This is why the export of this cloth was not prohibited. The recipient nations had no priestly status in God's covenant, and hence the mixture would have no ritual meaning.<sup>52</sup> God did not threaten non-priestly nations with negative sanctions if they violated some ritual requirement for priests in Israel. Their sacraments had no power to invoke God's sanctions, positive or negative. Had some group or nation been circumcised under God, then these clothing requirements would have applied.

Inside a priestly nation, such a mixture was a threat to the holiness of the priests when they brought sacrifices before God. As between a priestly nation and a non-priestly nation, this section of Leviticus 19:19 symbolized the national separation of believers from unbelievers. Deuteronomy 22:11 is the parallel passage: "Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts: [as] of wool and linen together." Its immediate context is another case law, one which we know from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians refers to people, not just animals: "Thou shalt not plow an ox and an ass together" (Deut. 22:10). Paul wrote: "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14). It is legitimate to apply the

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51. "Wool," *Software Toolworks Illustrated Encyclopedia (Grolier Encyclopedia)* (1990).

52. That is to say, the sacramental sanctions were absent.

principle of "unequal covenantal yoking" to Leviticus 19:19c, but *only* insofar as it applied to national separation.

Inside the boundaries of Israel, however, the law symbolized sacrificial separation: the tribe of Levi was set apart as a legal representative before God. In this *intra-national* sense, this law did have a role to play in the separation of the tribes. This is why it was connected to the two seed laws in Leviticus 19:19.

### *A Change in the Priesthood*

It is still prohibited to mix covenantal opposites in a single covenant: in church, state, and family. Is the wearing of this mixture of these two fabrics still prohibited? No. Why not? Because of the change in the priesthood. We must return to Galatians 3.

Our new covering is Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27-29). Here it is again: *inheritance is by God's promise to Abraham*. The sign of this inheritance is no longer circumcision; it is baptism. This is our new clothing. The old prohibition against mixing wool and linen in our clothing is annulled. The new priesthood is under a new covering: Jesus Christ. This covering is legal. It covers our judicial nakedness before God. The clothing law of Leviticus was an aspect of this judicial covering: priestly garments.

Because of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, the curse of the ground no longer threatens us ritually, only economically. Thus, man's sweat is no longer a matter of ritual purity. The prohibition against mixing wool and linen is no longer nationally relevant: priestly vs. non-priestly nations. There are no longer any negative sanctions attached to this unique mixture of fabrics.

The ritual curse of the ground was finally removed at the resurrection. The land is no longer under ritual sanctions, nor does it act as an agent of God, vomiting out covenant-breaking inhabitants, as the Promised Land did with the Canaanites (Lev. 18:28). The vomiting land no longer threatens us as it threatened the Israelites (Lev. 20:22). Jesus vomits out lukewarm churches (Rev. 3:16).<sup>53</sup>

The physical and economic curse is being progressively removed in history, including the curse of sweat. Men increasingly do not work by the sweat of their brows. The air conditioner is one of the wonders of modern life, enabling men to escape from the oppression of heat and humidity. This enables them to work more efficiently. Workers who work indoors – the primary place of work in modern economies – in tropical climates can now compete with workers in temperate climates.

### Conclusion

This essay has attempted to answer three questions: What did Leviticus 19:19 mean? How was it applied? What hermeneutic principles should we bring to the verse? These are the questions that Poythress says must be answered. I have tried to provide biblically coherent solutions to all three problems. They relate to the principle of separation, but not national separation, except insofar as the clothing law separated a priestly nation from non-priestly nations. I hope that this exercise will serve as a representative model for a valid hermeneutic of the case laws. Let us review my answers.

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53. For this reason, I believe that the predictable relationship between covenantal cursings and blessings is no longer applicable to floods and earthquakes. God's covenantal blessings and cursings are imposed by men as God's covenantal agents in New Covenant history. Men now exercise dominion over a creation that no longer acts directly and predictably as God's covenantal agent. This is another reason why I am a preterist: the earthquakes described in the Book of Revelation completed God's judgment against national Israel. These land-applied curses are no longer part of the New Testament era. They ceased being covenantally relevant in A.D. 70.

*What Did the Verse Mean?*

Specialized breeds of animals could be imported and used by the Israelites. These breeds could not be lawfully produced by design or neglect (unrepaired fences) in Israel. Their use was legal; their production was not. In contrast, the mixed fiber cloth could be produced in Israel but not worn by an Israelite. It had to be sold to resident aliens, exported, or used for purposes other than clothing. The language of the clothing law was specific: "neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woolen come upon thee."

These differences in the laws point to different symbolic meanings. Leviticus 19:19 is a case law that illustrated a single principle: *the necessity of separation*. First, the separation of the tribes of Israel: the prohibition against (1) genetic mixing of animals and (2) the simultaneous planting (mixing) of more than one crop in a single field.

Second, section three illustrated the holy (separated) condition of Israel as a nation of priests: mandating the separation of wool and linen in an Israelite's garment. These two fibers are at cross purposes with respect to man's curse: sweat. They were at cross purposes ritually with respect to priestly sacrifices. Therefore, they could not be cross-woven into clothing intended for use by Israelites. The cloth could be exported to non-priestly nations. It did not matter what they did with it. No lawful sacrifices could be offered in their lands.

Third, the clothing law also was part of the tribal separation laws because this law separated commoners from the Levites during formal services, especially in the post-exilic period. But its primary function was to separate a priestly nation from non-priestly nations. The separation was therefore primarily covenantal, not tribal.

The first two laws governed what was done in a man's fields. The fields were under his control. Thus, whatever separation the breeding laws required had to be achieved by establishing boundaries inside a man's property. If there was a functional



distinction within a species, these breeds had to be physically separated from each other, presumably by fences. Similarly, the seeds of several crops had to be kept separated. Each crop needed its own field at any point in time. This is why the first two laws symbolized the situation inside the national boundaries of Israel. Whatever was outside a family's landed property – its inheritance – was not under its authority. These laws applied inside the boundaries of the inheritance.

This is evidence that the seed laws did not symbolize the covenantal separation between Israel and the world. Israelites had no covenantal authority over the world outside of Israel. They did have authority inside Israel's boundaries, just as they had control over their own fields. So, the separation of their fields symbolized the separation among the tribes. This tribal separation was not covenantal but rather *prophetic*. It had to do with inheritance and the promised seed. The tribes had the same confession (unity); they could not mix maritally (diversity), except through forfeiting their landed inheritance. To keep their names in the land, families had to be separated tribally.

In contrast to the mixed-seed prohibition, the prohibition of mixed-fiber clothing did symbolize the separation between Israel and its neighbors. The judicial issue here was what was lawful for priests to wear. In relation to the world, Israel was a nation of priests. This law was an aspect of Israel's unique covenantal status internationally. This law did not apply to non-priestly nations. Thus, the cloth could be exported. It was not its production that was prohibited, merely its use as clothing by Israelites or residents of Israel. This law's authority was restricted: it applied only inside the national boundaries of Israel, where God's sacrificial system was located.

This three-fold law was temporary. It ended with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, or at the latest, at the destruction of Jerusalem (and from Pentecost to A.D. 70, the law applied only inside national Israel). *Spiritual adoption has overcome tribalism as the basis of inheritance in the kingdom of God.*

The gift of the Spirit is the basis of Christians' inheritance, not physical reproduction. National Israel was disinherited in A.D. 70.<sup>54</sup> The kingdom of God was taken from national Israel and given to a new nation, the church (Matt. 21:43). The jubilee land laws (Lev. 25) have ended forever. So have the prohibitions against genetic mixing and mixed crops.

When people are baptized into Christ through the Spirit, this new priesthood puts on Christ. The older requirements or prohibitions regarding certain types of garments have ended forever. What remains is the judicial boundary between covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers. This separation is eternal (Rev. 20:14-15).

#### *How Were These Laws Applied in Ancient Israel?*

Earlier, I asked the question: Was Leviticus 19:19 itself an economic curse? In some respects, yes. It restricted the development of newer, specialized herds. But these breeds could have been lawfully imported and then kept separate. The law did reduce innovations in animal breeding inside national Israel. But this scientific development came very late in Western history anyway.

This law may have encouraged crop rotation. Since one crop had to be planted in one field, it was likely that after the harvest, a different crop would have been planted in that field. Crop rotation benefits agricultural productivity by replenishing the soil.

As for wool-linen clothing, it has never gained popularity. Fustian was a mixture of wool and cotton. This was not prohibited. In any case, linen in the summer and wool in the winter would have been the choice fibers for those who could afford both of them.

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54. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

This law imposed few costs, although it imposed some costs. That was the whole point: there was a trade-off between the *seed of the land* and the *seed of the name*, between landed wealth and tribal promise. Bearing these minor costs was an easy test of Israel's obedience. It symbolized the separation of the tribes in the land until the promised seed arrived, transferring His inheritance to His people, a new nation of priests.

### *How Should These Laws Be Applied Today?*

The biblical principle of not mixing seeds, whether of animals or crops in a single field, applies to us only indirectly. The basic judicial application of the seed laws is that we must be faithful to Jesus Christ, the promised seed, who has come in history. In Him alone is true inheritance. But there is no New Covenant application with respect to tribal boundaries. The tribes of Israel are gone forever. Thus, there is no application of this verse genetically. We are allowed to breed animals and plant various crops in the same field at the same time. (The law never did have anything to do with a prohibition on hybrids.)

The other application of the principle of separation in this verse prohibited mixed fiber garments. It applies to us today through baptism, for by baptism we have received our new clothing in Christ. This principle of separation still can apply nationally, for it is covenantal, not tribal. The clothing law referred to the distinctions between priests and non-priests, between priestly nations and non-priestly nations. Nations that covenant with God as nations become priestly. They can act as God's anointed agents in history. They can lawfully bring His negative sanctions, just as the land could under the Old Covenant. The principle of separation is applicable to the distinction between Christendom and every other world system. But it has nothing to do with fabrics any longer. We can wear linen and wool together without violating biblical law. (I cannot imagine why anyone would want to wear such a combination, however.)

### *The Hermeneutical Principles*

Because this law is in Leviticus, the third book of the Pentateuch, I initially assumed that it is in some way related to the third point of the biblical covenant model: ethics.<sup>55</sup> Leviticus is the book of holiness, meaning legal or ritual "set-apartness." This led me to consider the question of boundaries, an aspect of the third point. I call my commentary on Leviticus, *Boundaries and Dominion*.

The two boundary laws of the field were obvious starting points for any discussion of Leviticus 19:19. They led me to consider the location of these field boundaries: on one family's property. This answer raised the question of authority: Who owned the field? Answer: the head of a household. This pointed me to the related issues of seed and inheritance. The principle of separation here was tribal, not covenantal.

The third law of Leviticus 19:19 was not a law governing the field; it was a prohibition on certain kinds of clothing. I asked myself: What boundary did this relate to? I had to determine what the distinguishing features of wool and linen were in Mosaic Israel.

Leviticus concentrates on priestly laws, so this line of investigation became a possibility, once I was sure the third law had little or nothing to do with seed and inheritance. I looked up references to linen.<sup>56</sup> Linen was the exclusive fabric of priestly sacrifice after the exile. I was led to this conclusion: the prohibi-

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55. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 3.

56. To cross-check the references, I used NavPress' Wordsearch computerized Bible search program. To activate it, I hit two keys. (I use the Wordsearch Bridge accessory program.) In five seconds I was inside Wordsearch. I then pulled up all verses in which linen was mentioned. This took about 30 seconds. Then I removed from this list all verses that did not also mention wool. This took another 30 seconds. Then I read the remaining verses. This took a few minutes. Anyone who works with biblical texts needs a Bible search program like this one. It enables me to do in minutes what normally takes hours. That means, I am willing to do what I might have neglected. The program also searches by Strong's numbers.

tion related to the boundary between priest and non-priest; hence, it related primarily to the boundary that separated Israel from the nations. The principle of separation was priestly. It was therefore essentially national, not tribal, except insofar as ritual divided Levi from the others.

In questions of *covenantal continuity*, we need to ask: What is the underlying ethical principle? God does not change ethically. The moral law is still binding. Its application may not be. This raises the question of *covenantal discontinuity*. I begin my investigations of discontinuity with the following questions. First, is the law related to the priesthood, which has changed (Heb. 7:11-12)? Second, is it related to the sacraments, which have changed? Third, is it related to the jubilee land laws (e.g., inheritance), which Christ fulfilled (Luke 4:18-19)? Fourth, is it related to the tribes (e.g., the seed laws), which Christ fulfilled in His office as Shiloh, the promised seed? Fifth, is it related to the middle wall of partition, which the gospel has broken down (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14)? Sixth, is it an aspect of the weakness of the Israelites, which Christ's ministry has overcome, thereby intensifying the rigors of an Old Covenant law (Matt. 5:21-48)? Seventh, is it an aspect of the Old Covenant's cursed six day-one day work week rather than the one day-six day pattern of the New Covenant's now-redeemed week (Heb. 4:1-11)? Eighth, is it part of the legal order of the once ritually polluted earth, which has now been cleansed by Christ (Acts 10; I Cor. 8)?

In analyzing this case law, the first five hermeneutical principles proved fruitful.

Once a person has these rules clear in his mind, the kind of exercise that Dr. Poythress insists on becomes much easier. I wrote this essay, plus the 20-page appendix on Rushdoony's treatment of Leviticus 19:19 as an aspect of what he calls "Hybridization and law," in about a week. It takes some work, but not a superhuman display of scholarship. Any pastor ought to be able to do it quite routinely. A seminary professor should have no serious hermeneutical problems most of the time.

If the expositor does have trouble here, then this may be because he has not internalized these principles of interpretation. More to the point, he is probably so unused to thinking in terms of the *judicial continuities* between the two testaments that the basic hermeneutical problem of judicial continuity and discontinuity does not concern him.

Neither does the question of Christendom.

## **A PASTOR'S RESPONSE TO THEONOMY: A REFORMED CRITIQUE**

*John Maphet*

Heretical! Cultic! Diabolical! These are the words I heard from a couple in a church I pastored while sitting in their living room discussing the issue of theonomy. This was their response to the controversy that rages around the political application of the Law after they had read *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. The ensuing disruption that came in the church was not pleasant and left a sorry taste for many in the body of Christians I served. I would therefore like to address from a pastor's perspective the effect *T:ARC* had on at least one congregation of God's people.

Apart from John R. Muether's article, I think the editors and authors of *T:ARC* have made a sincere effort at critiquing today's theological hot potato known as theonomy. In reading *T:ARC* I found that many of the authors agree with the basic tenets of theonomy, discovered some helpful criticisms, and I was very appreciative of the challenge and gracious tone of D. Clair Davis. Nevertheless, *T:ARC* has continued to foster a number of common misconceptions over the issue of theonomy that are rampant in Christian circles today.

The worst misunderstandings and even misrepresentations of theonomy have come from dispensational circles, as seen in the poorly researched and written propaganda piece *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?*<sup>1</sup> This is to be expected, since the hermeneutical differences between dispensationalism and Reformed theology are rather severe. One would therefore hope that interaction with the theonomic perspective from a distinctly Reformed angle would be more constructive. Unfortunately, from personal observation, this has not been the case. For the average layman with little knowledge of the debate, *T:ARC* has furthered the misunderstandings, and has made it difficult to discuss the contemporary application of God's Law in an intelligent and rational fashion.

I am writing this article as a PCA pastor who holds to the historic creeds of the church such as the Apostles', Nicene, and Chalcedon, and who has sworn to uphold the Westminster Confession of Faith as "the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures."<sup>2</sup> I thus choose to be labeled an orthodox, Reformed evangelical Christian. Coming from a Reformed perspective in particular, I desire to teach and preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), which will entail teaching on the Law and how it applies to us, both personally and corporately. Though I eschew the label "theonomy" because of the serious misrepresentations that abound today, I am convinced that the basic principles of theonomy as outlined in *By This Standard*<sup>3</sup> are biblical and in accord with both the Westminster Confession of Faith and the historic teachings of the church,

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1. H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988). For an intelligent response to House and Ice see Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

2. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Decatur, Georgia: The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America), 24-5, question #2.

3. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985).



especially the teaching and preaching of the Reformers and Puritans. I also recognize that there is much exegetical work needed to be done to learn how Old Testament Law applies to our contemporary situation, and I am not aware of anyone who is claiming to have all the answers, though it might be perceived that way. All this is meant to serve as background for the following. . . .

### **A Church's Struggle and Response to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique***

The church's struggle did not begin with the issue of theonomy *per se*. When I was called to the pastorate, I openly and honestly answered questions concerning theonomy, and the pulpit committee and elders had no difficulties at the time with my position. The struggle began with church discipline.

Recognizing that the three marks of the church are and have been commonly recognized as the preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and church discipline, the session began to make efforts (admittedly imperfect efforts) at restoring and reclaiming some within the congregation who had strayed. Many in the congregation appreciated what we were doing and understood the biblical requirement and teaching concerning church discipline. But there were those few who had serious objections, and their reasons for opposing the implementation of church discipline are familiar to any pastor who has endeavored to be faithful in this area: "we have never done it this way before," "discipline is unloving," "discipline is legalistic," and so on.

The vocal opponents to the implementation of church discipline had to find some reason the pastor and session were being "so mean and harsh." Theonomy became the convenient scapegoat. As diligent as the session and I were in trying to convince people that Matthew 18:15-20 and I Corinthians 5 were the reasons for doing church discipline, not theonomy, our opponents were convinced otherwise, and they began to

collect an arsenal of weapons to prove that only theonomists did these harsh things (discipline). *T:ARC* became one of the more formidable and widely used weapons, along with some of the dispensational diatribes. What followed afterwards was a church that was marked by dissension, struggle and suspicion, and most of the conflict was blamed on theonomy.

In assessing and observing the conflict and misunderstandings within the particular body (and others as well across the country), the reaction to theonomy ranged from the ridiculous to the slanderous. The one thing that stands out in the approach many have taken in confronting the issue of theonomy is this: instead of going to primary sources, such as *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*<sup>4</sup> or *By This Standard*<sup>5</sup> or Rushdoony's *The Institutes of Biblical Law*<sup>6</sup> or Gary DeMar's fine work, *The Debate over Christian Reconstruction*,<sup>7</sup> the critics have relied solely on secondary sources, such as *T:ARC*. This seems to be endemic with the modern-day opponents of theonomy. With this approach the theonomist will never get a fair hearing. From my own experience, it is noteworthy that those who do read the primary sources are surprised at what all the fuss is about and are excited to find that the Old Testament is not the Word of God "emeritus." From a moral perspective, there are some issues of integrity, scholarship, and honesty at stake.

Needless to say, because I was the pastor, I have received the brunt of much of the criticism from vocal critics within the congregation due to my sympathies for the theonomic position. The following is a sample of the things that were said to me directly, or about me through the grapevine, and much of it

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4. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1977] 1984).

5. Bahnsen, *By This Standard*.

6. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

7. Gary Demar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988).

was fueled by *T:ARC*. Though *T:ARC* cannot take all the blame, these are nonetheless the perceptions that arose.

### *False Perceptions*

1. "If one is a theonomist, then he is a legalist and denies the work of the cross." This is a common misconception, regardless of how effectively one argues against it. I am not a legalist in terms of thinking that the Law could save or that our standard of conduct is determined by man made rules. The Scripture makes it clear that "by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20), and I joyfully and heartily maintain that a man is saved by God's sovereign grace alone (Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 2:11-14). I could not count the number of times I was told, "John, you need to read the book of Galatians." I have read it many times and rejoice in its message that, because of what Christ did on the cross, I am free from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13) in that Christ as my Head and Substitute has fulfilled all its demands and suffered all its penalties in my place! But this book of Galatians which so magnificently affirms salvation by grace through faith alone also teaches that the Law is not contrary to the promises of God (Galatians 3:21). As Paul affirms in another place, the Law is established by grace (Romans 3:31 in the context of 3:21-31). As a standard for Christian ethics, the Law is still binding on us today (Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13,14; I Timothy 1:5).

2. "If you are a theonomist, then you believe that you force people to change and put to death those who disagree." Only the Holy Spirit can change a person's heart as he is irresistibly drawn (John 6:37,44) to Jesus Who is the Desire of All Nations (Haggai 2:7). The method the Holy Spirit uses to draw people to the Redeemer is not worldly (John 18:36) and thus coercive, but He uses the faithful testimony and lives of Christians. Christians do not conquer through the sword but through the Gospel (Matthew 18:28-30) and the spiritual weapons God gives us

(II Corinthians 10:3-6; Ephesians 6:10-18). The Kingdom does not expand through the use of raw brutal force as typified by the Muslims. Neither is a society that has been Christianized and has as the foundation of its law God's Law an oppressive Khomeni-type regime. The Law is a law of *liberty* (James 1:25).

3. A rather severe criticism that came out of the woodwork was that "yes, John preaches salvation by grace, but because he is a theonomist, he must be a liar." Has the reaction (or overreaction) to theonomy become so heated and fearful that things like this have to be said to refute the position? Serious damage is done to reputations with this line of reasoning.

4. "Theonomists are the ones who cause the trouble when the issue comes to the forefront in a church." This statement was relayed to me several times in the controversy here and I have heard it said in other circles as well. In *T:ARC*, this is implied when the statement is made that former students who are now pastors come to the authors "because of the disruption of their churches over a sincere layperson's zeal for theonomy as the one true understanding of the Scripture's teaching."<sup>8</sup> The impression is given that the theonomists are the ones behind all the trouble. No doubt there have been theonomists who have upset churches by not presenting their position in a gracious or patient manner, but there have been many situations where the non-theonomists have stirred the pot to boiling, and my situation was one. There are churches and pastors that take a strong Theonomic stance and are well balanced in their overall teaching. Theonomy *per se* is not the cause behind the disruption in churches. How people respond to it and portray it is. Moreover, when the controversy became rather intense, certain members of the congregation who were "deeply concerned" at how "divisive" theonomy was sought out the advice of outside "authorities." Theological celebrities and personalities as diverse as S. Lewis Johnson, John Frame, and David Hock-

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8. Preface, *T:ARC*, p. 10.

ing were giving their counsel and advice to members of this congregation. Never mind that the PCA has a system of church courts to address issues of doctrinal error and church division. What was it that so scared the critics?

5. One of the more amusing misconceptions was that I am "a follower of a white-haired Indian guru in California." I assume the proponent of this statement was referring to Mr. Rushdoony. He is white-haired, but he is neither an Indian nor a guru.<sup>9</sup> The penchant for not finding out all the facts seems to be another trait of those who are endeavoring to interact with or critique theonomy. *T:ARC* contributes to this by not presenting the Theonomic system in a systematic fashion and thus endeavoring to critique it piecemeal. Furthermore, in light of the "tens of thousands of pages of written material in the past two decades,"<sup>10</sup> the quotations extracted from the Theonomic camp were paltry and selective. Many of the difficulties raised by the authors of *T:ARC* have been addressed, as we shall see in one example.

### *Residual Effects*

The preceding statements were real live flesh and blood responses to the issue of theonomy as it boiled over in the church and as people tried to understand it by reading books such as *T:ARC*. Thankfully, many of the misunderstandings were remedied, but the leftover effects were still harmful.

One missionary supported by the church was almost denied further support because of his Theonomic leanings, in spite of the fact that he has a tremendous impact on the mission field where he serves, he is faithful in evangelism (using Evangelism

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9. Ironically, Rushdoony served as a missionary to the Western Shoshone tribe in northern Nevada and southern Idaho in the 1940's and the early 1950's. He has an adopted son who is an Indian.

10. Footnote in Tremper Longman III, "God's Law and Mosaic Punishments Today," *T:ARC*, p. 41.

Explosion), and he is well respected by the missionary agency that sends him.

Young Christians were confused over the issues at stake. Much energy was diverted from evangelism, discipleship, diaconal ministries and visitation by putting to rest the different misconceptions and misrepresentations that abound over theonomy.

Seeds of doubt regarding the pastor's motives and agenda were planted, thus making it very difficult to minister effectively (I was accused several times of having a hidden agenda that is related to theonomy). Newcomers did not stay long because of the tension in the air. Oldcomers departed over the strife.

### *Using T:ARC as a Weapon*

In addition, there were certain words that were difficult to use in my preaching. If I used the word *law*, then my "hidden agenda" had risen to the surface and I was showing my "legalistic" bent. Never mind that the concept of Law as a standard for godly living is simple vanilla Reformed theology (Westminster Confession, ch. XIX)? Jesus is clear that if we love Him, we will keep his commandments, and is not the Law part of those commandments (Matthew 5:17-20)? The apostle John makes it clear that the truth does not abide in the one who does not keep His commandments (I John 2:4).

If I used the word *authority*, then I was being authoritarian. This statement came immediately after a sermon on Matthew 20:25-28 where the heart of the message was that the way to influence people was through *service*.

The prejudices against theonomy are becoming more hardened and blind as time goes on. It got to the point with certain members of the congregation after their reading of *T:ARC* and other critiques that everything had a Theonomic tinge: the confession of sin in the worship service (that's a new one!), the Sermon on the Mount (the very words of Jesus), and the Ten

Commandments as a Confession of Faith in worship (very common in Reformed circles).<sup>11</sup>

Though there is much helpful material in *T:ARC*, there are several statements made in the book that contribute to the paranoia and misconceptions that the average Christian has over the issue of theonomy, as seen above. For example, Tremper Longman III remarks that "According to Bahnsen and Rushdoony, the only way to avoid autonomy and achieve theonomy is to *simply* apply the entire Old Testament Law and its penalties to modern society" (emphasis mine).<sup>12</sup> No wonder the average reader who has no familiarity with the primary sources is scared. I don't want to live in the shadows of the Old Covenant either, now that the substance has come (Colossians 2:17). However, Bahnsen emphatically states that "making modern day applications of the authoritative standards of the Old Testament is *not an easy or simple task*. It is not always readily apparent to us how to understand an Old Testament commandment or use it properly" (emphasis in the original).<sup>13</sup> In other places Bahnsen speaks of the underlying principles (general equity) that must be drawn from the cultural application and language of their day.<sup>14</sup>

Dennis Johnson abrasively captures the present day alarm over the Christian Reconstructionist's "prospect of a 'Christianized' state wielding 'the sword' against the unrighteous, executing the advocates of false religion, those guilty of sexual sins, defiant children, and others."<sup>15</sup> With statements like these, I

11. For a critique of the modern tendency to read sinister meanings into perfectly legitimate biblical words, see Bob and Gretchen Passantino, *Witch Hunt* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1990), pp. 128f, 134, 135.

12. Longman, "God's Law and Mosaic Punishments Today," *T:ARC*, p. 49. Also see Poythress' statement that the more simplistic Theonomist sees the Old Testament Law kept in "a literal and straightforward way," Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Effects of Interpretive Frameworks on the Application of Old Testament Law," *T:ARC*, p. 122.

13. Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, p. 7.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 138, 175.

15. Dennis Johnson, "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Mosaic Penal Sanc-

am beginning to see why certain members of my congregation thought I would stone them if I disagreed with them and why others thought I was just a little bit "strange." If Dr. Johnson would read pages 78 and 79 of *House Divided*,<sup>16</sup> he would see that he has given a gross caricature and false presentation of "reconstructionism."

In addition, Dr. Johnson implies in an unwarranted fashion that according to Theonomic principles, "The state should execute church members who apostatize but not Hindus who persist in their ancestor's idolatry."<sup>17</sup> Show us where any theonomist teaches this or how it logically follows. No wonder there are those who thought I believe in salvation by law.

Finally, Richard Gaffin claims that postmillennialism obscures the dimension of suffering for the Gospel and as such distorts "the church's understanding of its mission in the world."<sup>18</sup> However, Gary DeMar directly addresses this in his *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction*, seeing no contradiction between the theme of victory and suffering.<sup>19</sup> Statements such as Gaffin's only make it more difficult to traverse the theological minefield before us.

### Pastoral Reflections and Concerns

In observing the controversy that has for the last fifteen years whirled around the label theonomy and has to this point culminated with the writing of *T:ARC*, there are several concerns that have arisen that have a direct bearing on the church.

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tions," *T:ARC*, p. 171.

16. Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*: "Theonomy most assuredly does not endorse capital punishment for rebellious 'adolescents'."

17. Johnson, "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Mosaic Penal Sanctions," *T:ARC*, p. 189.

18. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism," *T:ARC*, pp. 217f.

19. Demar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction*, pp. 24-26, 153-160.



*"The Law Is Too Harsh!"*

First, in much of the criticism of theonomy and its proponents, there is the tacit assumption that the Law is harsh. As a result of this criticism, Christians are shying away from a considerable amount of material in the Bible which would help them to live more faithfully for Christ. I sense this frequently from other believers in their comments and conversation: they fear a harsh Law.

What does the Bible say? The coming of Shiloh (which is Christ's first name and it means peace) is connected with His being a lawgiver (Genesis 49:10); and we know that the rule of Christ is not harsh (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 11:28-30).

The Psalmist writes that his *delight* "is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law he meditates day and night (Psalm 1:2). Psalm 19 says that "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (19:7,8). Psalm 119 is an entire Psalm (and a lengthy one at that) devoted to the *excellencies* of God's Law: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord" (119:1).

The premier promise of salvation in the Old Covenant includes as one of its *blessings* that God would put His "Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33; cf. Hebrews 8:10).

Jesus, our King and Redeemer, affirms that man shall *live* by "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Paul removes any distinction from the Law and the Spirit by writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that "the righteous requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).

Further along in the book of Romans, Paul states that "he who loves another has fulfilled the Law" (Romans 13:8). In receiving Paul's instruction for a young pastor, Timothy learns

that the *purpose* of the commandment is "love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (I Timothy 1:5).

Finally, the apostle of "love" teaches unequivocally that the commandments of God "are not burdensome" (I John 5:3).

Moreover, in light of the protection Old Testament Law provides for capital offenses (Deuteronomy 19:15), are the penal sanctions of the Mosaic Law that harsh? I am constantly surprised at how horrified people are at the thought of imposing these in our own day and time (with a recognition that this comes through the grid of the New Covenant - Hebrews 7:12). Was God an "ogre" in the Older Covenant? Are we not standing in judgment upon God for imputing "harshness" to Him? Would not our streets be safer if there were stricter civil laws enforced today in accordance with the principles of the Mosaic statutes? A number of women have commented to me that they think capital punishment should be reinstituted for rape. Would not the penal sanctions of the Mosaic statutes be gracious in this case?

The Law of God is harsh for the unbeliever because it exposes his sin and rebellion against God (Romans 3:20, 7:7), but, for the one who is in Christ and knows His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30), God's Law is neither harsh nor legalistic. As Ernest Kevan has written, "Christian experience in keeping the Law of God is the antithesis of legalism: it is neither irksome servility nor legalistic morality."<sup>20</sup> I fear that the reaction to the label theonomy has put the Law in a bad light contrary to the biblical perspective (Psalm 19:7-11).

From personal experience I have discovered that people who interact with me according to God's Word and God's Law are much more gracious than those who impose extra-biblical manmade standards. The judgmentalism and harshness of

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20. Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 227.

those who neglect the Law of God as their standard for living and discerning is wearisome and oppressive. *From those within the midst of the church who had been the most critical of theonomy came the most shrill and unkind criticisms.* I have several lengthy letters on file from the most ardent critics of theonomy who have "graciously" tried to point out all our problems. The anti-Law people have in a number of cases been the most lacking in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

*"Theonomists Are Troublemakers!"*

Second, the label "theonomy" is becoming a catch-all term for "troublemaker." If one desires to smear another's reputation, then all he has to do is label him a "theonomist."

Before I came to this pulpit, the pulpit committee was warned about not hiring a "theonomist." Comments such as "watch out for him; he is a theonomist" are common in churches today. If this isn't raw and blind prejudice, I don't know what is. Not only are good men's reputations being hurt, but this form of bigotry makes it difficult to intelligently and rationally discuss the modern day application of the Mosaic Law.

There are three classes of people that Christians today have created in response to the heated issue of theonomy. The first class is the average Christian whom Jesus says we are to love (John 13:34,35). The second class is our enemy whom we are to love as well (Matthew 5:44). Then there is the "theonomist." With this class it is acceptable and even commendable to impute ungodly motives (for example, "hidden agenda"), smear his reputation, or plant seeds of doubts in others' minds concerning his orthodoxy. (I actually had a family question whether I was a true believer when the issue of theonomy came up!) No doubt there are "brash," "partisan" and "hard-nosed" theonomists, but this doesn't follow for everyone who adheres to that perspective. The critical net has been catching fish that don't belong.

Theonomists don't have a monopoly on sin. There are difficult people in every theological camp. Related to this tendency for portraying theonomists in the worst light is the penchant for judging them in light of the worst representatives or what appears to be objectionable. This is the fallacy of "guilt by association," where "a position is objectionable because of other positions (or people) which are associated – or may be made to *appear* to be associated – with the position."<sup>21</sup>

Many things have come to me about what other "theonomists" have been doing (much of which I have not given credence to) and since I am a theonomist, I must be just like them. This simply isn't true. Not all dispensationalists should be judged unfairly because of R. B. Thieme; neither should all theonomists be judged according to poor representatives or what people perceive to be a poor representative of the position. I Corinthians 13:7 has application to theological debate as well.

### *What Is the Alternative?*

Third, if the theonomists are not on the right track, then what are the answers? It is easy to talk about "natural law," but which version are we to espouse? There have been a number through history.

The man in the pew needs specific answers and details. For the everyday Christian to be faithful in his walk and calling, he needs relevant answers from the Bible, not the imaginations of man (II Corinthians 10:4,5).

It is disconcerting to read statements such as, "Christians who find themselves with governing responsibilities in such a situation may indeed search all of God's Word for *reflections* of his justice that will aid them in their task, made so difficult by the *mixed* situation of 'the present evil age' (Galatians 1:4)"

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21. Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, p. 58. Emphasis his.

(emphasis mine).<sup>22</sup> Apart from the neo-orthodox language, is there anything concrete here for the Christian lawyer or politician who wants to be faithful to Christ in his walk? Are there absolutes which can be applied to the political realm? In light of the anti-authority mood of today,<sup>23</sup> it seems that contemporary Christians are falling into the quagmire of relativism when they endeavor to apply their Christianity to the civil sphere without a clear word from God.

### Conclusion

Having assessed *T:ARC* in a somewhat negative cast due to the effect it has had on the man in the pew, I would also be careful to say that as a Reformed pastor, I found several of the articles very constructive and helpful.

John Frame gave a helpful critique recognizing that both sides (theonomist and non-theonomist) have problems they need to work through. I especially appreciated his emphasis on the need to "put most of our effort into the exegesis of specific texts."<sup>24</sup> The labels are getting us nowhere and when it does come to particular application of even an Old Testament text, I am surprised at how much in common Christians have in their understanding and how often they agree on the application.

Vern Poythress impressed me with his effort at appreciating the strong points of theonomy while at the same time challenging what he perceives as "popularized Theonomy."<sup>25</sup>

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22. Johnson, "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Mosaic Penal Sanctions," *T:ARC*, p. 191.

23. "Seldom if ever in its long history has the world witnessed such a self-conscious revolt against authority." John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 51.

24. John M. Frame, "The One, The Many, and Theonomy," *T:ARC*, p. 98.

25. Poythress, "Effects of Interpretive Frameworks on the Application of Old Testament Law," *T:ARC*, p. 121.

But to Dr. Davis, I would express special gratitude for both the content and tone of his article.<sup>26</sup> I found his to be the most "pastoral" - if I may use an overworked term. He expressed sincere appreciation for the work of theonomists and the positive challenge they can be to the church today, recognized that "Doubtless Theonomists are not totally to blame for the way they are perceived;"<sup>27</sup> and challenged the adherents of theonomy to work within the bounds of the church,<sup>28</sup> something which many are striving to do.

However, the misconceptions still abound. In the halls of academia, *maybe* there is a balanced understanding and appreciation of the theological debate over the modern application of God's Law. But what is filtering down to the average Christian, as I have observed it from a pastor's perspective in not only the congregation I served but in many others, is not balanced. Fellowship is being broken, suspicions are being raised about godly Christians, qualified and gifted men are being denied pulpits because of their Theonomic leanings, reputations are being unjustly hurt, serious, unsubstantiated, slanderous accusations are being made, and fear is becoming the trait which characterizes those who are grappling with Theonomic implications for the first time.

Has *T:ARC* contributed to this state of affairs? For the well-read Christian the answer would have to be no. For the believer who has never even heard of theonomy, yes. Those who are not familiar with the primary sources and who have not taken the time to seriously read them are not getting either the whole or proper picture of theonomy as it is portrayed by authors such as those in *T:ARC*.

For the sake of the health of the church, I hope those within Reformed circles will be more careful to represent theonomy

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26. D. Clair Davis, "A Challenge to Theonomy," *T:ARC*, pp. 389-402.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 395.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

fairly and accurately. One would not expect the dispensationalist to do so, but one would expect those who in many ways appreciate the underlying principles of theonomy to do so. Maybe the contributors to *T:ARC* assumed the average reader would understand the basic tenets of theonomy and its strengths. If this is the case, then the assumption was wrong. The man in the pew is getting a much different picture, and it is not a pleasant one to behold. As the Holy Spirit continues to drive each of us to the infallible Word of God, the misconceptions will be remedied and agreement will be reached. In the meantime, may the critics of theonomy be more careful in their scholarship and assessment of this perspective and of these men who are endeavoring to grapple with the "whole counsel of God."





## **CONCLUSION**

We may bring out this point by discussing briefly the section of Scripture found in Matthew 5:21-48. It is to this section particularly that appeal is made to prove that the New Testament standard of ethics is really a quite different standard from the Old Testament standard.

With respect to this, we note that the presumption would be wholly against this. The Old and the New Testaments present not two Gods, but one God. The Old and the New Testaments base all their teaching with respect to redemption upon the background of the creation story. Hence they both hold that God did originally demand of man absolute perfection. For this reason, we have seen, there is on this score no difference at all between the Old and the New Testaments. We would have the picture of a *changeable* God if we had to believe that he set essentially *different* standards at different times. In the second place, if we should say that in the Old Testament the law was given to man as a way of life, it would mean that there would be no teaching about Christ and salvation by grace in the Old Testament. Yet we know that the Old Testament is full of teaching with respect to Christ. The law itself was given in close conjuncture with the sacrifices that pointed to the Messiah.

In the second place, we note that in the introduction to this section Christ says specifically that he came to fulfill the law (vs.17), even to a jot and a tittle (vs.18). And this statement applies not only to the prophecies about himself, but about the least of the commandments.

Cornelius Van Til (1958)\*

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\*Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, Vol. III of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1958] 1980), p. 147.

## EDITOR'S CONCLUSION

Several years ago, my wife and I were having dinner with a group of financial advisors. One of them was (and is) an atheist, an anarchist, and a man who lives openly with a woman who is not his wife. (So far, you cannot identify him; there are a lot of men in the business who fit his description.) When we meet, he almost always gets into a discussion with me about God and death. After a few minutes, my wife asked him this: "What are you going to say to God on the day of judgment when He condemns you to eternal torment?" His answer was immediate: "I will tell Him, 'You have no jurisdiction over me.' "

This is *the* implicit answer to God by every covenant-breaker in history, from Satan to the present. The covenant-breaker denies God's jurisdiction, meaning God's authority to speak the law to him. It was to refute this deadly confession of faith that the Second Person of the Trinity came into history as a man.

Let us get something straight from the start: *Jesus Christ brought the most ferocious message in history*. He announced to His enemies, meaning God's enemies, that if they refuse to submit to His jurisdiction in history, they will be judged by God and sent to hell first, and after that comparatively brief and mild experience, they will be dumped into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15). At least in hell they will have the ability to communicate, though not to their advantage (Luke 16:22-31). In preparation for the lake of fire, God will give them perfect bodies at the resurrection, so that they will be better able to experience

the horror of His eternal torture chamber when He dumps hell into the lake of fire. This is the God revealed only in the New Testament by "sweet Jesus, meek and mild." This is why Jesus announced: "But I forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath the power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him" (Luke 12:6).

Why is it that Christians worry about such minor sanctions as stoning and burning when they freely tell covenant-breakers about the horrors of eternal punishment? They regard public executions as barbaric, yet they insist that God's eternal torture chamber is unquestionably righteous. But it goes beyond even this. Most Christians are either premillennialists or amillennialists. They are united in their opposition to postmillennialists, who argue that at least during an earthly millennial era, more people will be on the road to glory than to perdition. Our critics call us *utopians* and *triumphalists* for daring to challenge the common view that virtually everyone we know is bound for God's eternal torture chamber. The Calvinists even add that it was predestined this way from before the beginning of time.

But public executions in the name of Jesus? Unthinkable!

### Squeamish for Jesus

God promised to bring the following sanction against His people: "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee" (Deut. 28:53). This prophecy was fulfilled:

And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there

cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress? And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh (II Kings 6:24-30).

Hosea prophesied to the Israelites: "Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up" (Hos. 13:16). When it comes to imposing judgments in history, God is not squeamish. He has embarrassed the vast majority of modern Christians.

There are a lot of squeamish Christians who get very upset about Christian Reconstruction, just because a few of them – specifically, your editor – recommend the public stoning by witnesses and average citizens of people convicted of capital crimes. It sounds so . . . so *sick*!<sup>1</sup> We are told that executions should be done, if at all, only behind closed prison doors by full-time professionals who are unknown to the general public. But the Bible is explicit about mandatory public executions:

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1. In July of 1991, Gary DeMar and I were on a Christian call-in radio show. One outraged fundamentalist called in and asked if I advocated public stoning. I said yes. He announced: "You're sick!" So, I responded: "I'll take two aspirins and call you in the morning." When I pressed him on whether he believed in capital punishment, he said that he did. Then I asked him: "To whom should the state delegate the responsibility of executing a convicted murderer?" He was evasive. I asked him again. More evasion. Finally, he admitted that the state does have to delegate this responsibility to someone. I pointed out that the Bible tells us exactly to whom this task is delegated: the witnesses for the prosecution, then the people.

"The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you" (Deut. 17:7).

Notice what the critics are saying. God used to require the Israelites to stone certain convicted criminals. "Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones" (Lev. 20:2). Obviously, God used to be sick. He was the Sick Old Being in the sky. But then Jesus came and replaced the Sick Old Being.

This is an ancient heresy. It is called Marcionism. Marcion in the second century A.D. proposed a two-gods theory of history: the malevolent Creator of the Old Testament and the merciful redeemer of the New Testament. While Christians do not go this far, they still have a similar view of God's civil sanctions. He used to be a hard-nosed S.O.B. in His Jewish phase, but now He pays no attention to what civil governments legislate or don't legislate, enforce or don't enforce: *God, the civil creampuff*.

Then the theonomists came along and started calling attention to what these modern judicial Marcionites are really saying. This has upset the Marcionites terribly.

### *"Abortion Is Murder, Sort Of"*

The theonomists keep upping the ante. They have even recommended the passage of new laws requiring the execution of abortionists and the former mothers who paid the physicians' to do these specialized acts of murder on their behalf. But squeamish Christians think that such a punishment is uncalled for. These poor women need compassion, we are told. The theonomist answers: But what about justice in the name of the lifeless victims? What about compassion for the babies yet to be conceived? Who will protect them? Irrelevant, we are told by

Bible-professing Christians.<sup>2</sup> In short, the vast majority of Christians believe that frying or dicing 50 million or so unborn babies a year, worldwide, is judicially tolerable, although of course in bad taste, biblically speaking, but to recommend stoning convicted murderers is literally perverse. Even the anti-abortion groups that are willing to state publicly their biblically valid assertion that abortion is murder are unwilling to say that an anti-abortion law should be enforced (but not *ex post facto*) by the only civil sanction that the Bible mandates for murderers: public execution. I contend that the anti-abortion movement is impotent politically in part because it is impotent theologically. Its members do not take God seriously, so their opponents do not take them seriously. *They mock God's law and then get mocked.*

### **Sweet Jesus in Heaven (and *Only* in Heaven)**

What has all this got to do with *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*? A great deal. That volume, published by the academic arm of a fundamentalist publishing house, lends support to the most widely shared Christian myth of our era, namely, that Jesus Christ abolished the civil sanctions that the Trinitarian God had established in Israel. God required these capital civil sanctions in order to serve as warnings to those who would break His covenant by disobeying His laws. The capital sanctions established by God in Old Covenant Israel were to serve as public warnings – pledges – of what would take place when the criminal's soul was transferred by an act of the civil government – execution – into God's court of primary jurisdiction.

Most of the authors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* believe that the civil sanctions specified by the Mosaic law have been abolished. This is the common view of every Christian in the

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2. I note as an aside that a good number of Christians also take offense at those few people who picket local abortion clinics. I speak here from many years of personal experience. Announcing themselves as Bible-believing Christians, they shout: "Do you think God is proud of you people? You're an embarrassment to God!"

world. They have all adopted the opinion of my atheist libertarian friend: *God has no civil jurisdiction in New Covenant history.* When it comes to the civil sanctions of the Mosaic law, the faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary stand shoulder to shoulder with every covenant-breaker on earth, and with virtually all Christians, too. They announce publicly to God: "You have no civil jurisdiction over us!"

Suggest for a moment that God still requires capital punishment for anything except murder (and maybe even not excepting murder), and a wail goes up from the Christians. "Not Jesus! Not our sweet Jesus! We're under grace, not law!" On the contrary, the theonomists point out, we're visibly under pagan politicians, bureaucrats, and lawyers.

Fundamentalists are accused by their critics as promoting a religion of "pie in the sky, bye and bye." On the whole, this criticism is accurate. Except for the so-called positive confession charismatics, fundamentalists do reject the notion of God's positive sanctions for covenant-keepers in history. So do non-fundamentalist amillennialists. But in saying this, they also are forced to conclude that there will be no predictable, corporate negative sanctions imposed by God until judgment day. This is why both groups get upset when theonomists say that civil governments are still required by God to impose His specified sanctions in enforcing His revealed laws. They deny that God brings corporate negative sanctions against societies that break His revealed laws. Under the Old Covenant, critics admit, God threatened to impose His sanctions directly if Israel failed to enforce His laws. If pressed, they will even admit that this same threat hung over Nineveh (Jonah 1-3). But every Christian group except the theonomists insists that this system of corporate sanctions was abolished by Jesus. Therefore, they conclude, there is no reason for Christians to seek to legislate God's Old Covenant laws, let alone those embarrassing civil sanctions.

They are wrong. God's judgment in history is coming. Will it be civil or more directly imposed?



### Round Three

This book is the third in a three-stage response to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. First came my personal response: *Westminster's Confession*. Then came Dr. Greg Bahnsen's reply to 17 years of criticisms, *No Other Standard*. Finally comes this collection of theological responses.

Why did I write one, edit one, and publish all three? There are several reasons. First and foremost, the ICE is a publishing organization. Its job is to produce books. Westminster's faculty gave theonomists one more opportunity to clarify our views; so, we took three. We know that Christian Reconstruction is sometimes rejected because of people's confusion about our views, so we are always happy to be given a legitimate opportunity to explain the details of our position one more time (thrice).

*Second*, there is the question of tactics. In any movement, there are followers who want to be sure that its leaders can defend the system. This is especially true of an intellectual and ideological movement, which Christian Reconstruction is. There are also potential recruits on the sidelines who are waiting to see who gives the best account of himself. We would like to recruit seminary students, and the Westminster faculty has given us a tremendous opportunity to recruit Westminster students. I am not one to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Then there is the tactical question of heading off additional attacks. If potential critics see that the faculty of Westminster Seminary did not succeed in damaging the theonomic position, and in fact opened themselves up to some serious questioning, then it may not pay others to take us on in print. By taking on "the best and the brightest," and giving a credible account of ourselves, we may be able to head off trouble from other critics down the road. This seemed worth the extra effort: responding with three books to Westminster's one.

So much for tactics. For me, there is a *third* aspect of this confrontation. I really do believe in what Cornelius Van Til accomplished intellectually. I really do believe that Westminster

Seminary has now abandoned Van Til's legacy. In its rejection of theonomy, Westminster has returned to a vague natural law theory: a retrograde move if ever there has been one in the history of the church. So, it is my goal to call into question the wisdom of such a move backward. Van Til's legacy is too precious to surrender. The church waited for almost two thousand years to escape from Athens. Van Til accomplished this. I am willing to go to some extra trouble and expense to defend Van Til and his system from those who are eager to abandon it.

Van Til stripped Christian apologists of any valid reason to appeal to man's hypothetically neutral reason in a philosophical defense of the faith. But he did more than this: he stripped Christian social theorists of any valid reason to appeal to pagan man's natural law theory. Once he had done this in the name of Calvinism, he opened the door to a revival of interest in biblical law, whether he appreciated this revival or not (and he did not). By pushing Calvinists back to the Bible in philosophy, he necessarily also pushed them back to the Bible in ethics.

This book has enabled us to make a fundamental point: *Calvinism is inherently theonomic*. It is not simply that theonomy has in the past been Calvinistic in perspective; it is that Calvinism is inescapably theonomic if Van Til's approach to philosophy is correct. By responding to the Westminster faculty, we have been given an opportunity to make this point. The faculty may reject it, but to make this rejection plausible, they must do one or more of the following, and do it in public: (1) reject Van Til's apologetic system in favor of evidentialism or rationalism or a mixture of the two; (2) spell out in detail where Van Til went wrong theologically and logically; (3) openly revive some clear, straightforward version of religiously neutral natural law theory; and (4) give a theoretical defense of political pluralism, meaning a Bible-based defense, which has never been done in church history. In short, to respond to this book and the two previous books we have produced in response to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, the Westminster faculty will have to move

from the narrow academic theology of the seminary classroom to the applied theology of world-and-life Calvinism.

There is a *fourth* reason why I decided to publish this book. I believe that it is not sufficient merely to respond to attacks. It is also necessary to set forth a positive case. You know my rule: "You can't beat something with nothing." This book gave me an opportunity to present the outline of what might be called a *hermeneutic of judicial discontinuities*. This is what Vern Poythress said theonomists had to do and had not yet done. He identified "the" passage that had to be exegeted by means of such a hermeneutic. I offered a positive response to a specific challenge. If the approach that I have suggested is biblically valid, then others will be able to deal with different problem passages.

The Westminster faculty may respond with another book. I doubt it, but they may. We will then reply again. But for now, we have made our point. By publishing three books to their one, one right after the other, I have adopted what Gary DeMar calls a Norman Schwarzkopf saturation bombing debate strategy. Now I can get back to the task at hand.

### The Task at Hand

The task at hand is not a kind of intellectual shadow-boxing with seminary professors, or a lawyer,<sup>3</sup> or an accountant,<sup>4</sup> or a serial polygamist.<sup>5</sup> The task at hand is to set forth the theological and judicial foundations for the reconstruction of an old world order which is at the edge of a cliff, and which seems to recognize this fact, despite its New World Order rhetoric.

We live in a crucial period of history. The rhetoric of this century is indicative. The Nazis announced a New Order. It did not survive. The Communists announced a New Order. It did not survive. President Bush in 1990 announced a New World

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3. Constance Cumbey.

4. Dave Hunt.

5. You know who!

Order.<sup>6</sup> These announcements have the foul scent of the tower of Babel about them. God keeps bringing into judgment these rival orders to the New World Order of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The problem that the church of Jesus Christ faces today is that it has nothing systematic to offer to replace these humanistic, counterfeit, New World Orders. God brings them under judgment, one by one, but not through the public efforts of the church of Jesus Christ in the West. So, we keep facing new ones, each one promising healing (salvation) in history. This is exactly what the early church faced.<sup>8</sup> But the early church had an alternative: *the ideal of Christendom*. It had a vision of a world system that was explicitly and self-consciously Christian. This *kingdom vision* was a development of Christian philosophy, even though this philosophy was not self-consciously political philosophy. It necessarily led to political philosophy when classical philosophy collapsed, taking classical politics with it.<sup>9</sup>

That historical development is paralleled today by Christian Reconstruction's application of Van Til's thought. We are living in an era in which similar or even greater changes are possible than those that took place between the death of Jesus Christ and the fall of Rome – changes that can be beneficial for the spread of the gospel, the transformation of lives, and the transformation of cultures, worldwide. Eschatologically, we may be approaching a period of extensive millennial blessings in response to an historically unprecedented spread of the gospel. This is my daily prayer.

6. *New York Times* (Sept. 12, 1990).

7. When a \$220 billion annual U.S. federal deficit in 1990 jumps to an expected \$350 billion deficit in 1992, just two years after the arrival of a New World Order was announced by the President Bush, this New World Order, to quote the President again (in another context), is in deep doo-doo.

8. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955).

9. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957).

I am willing to do whatever I can to accelerate this development, or at least not be found wanting, even if this is not the crucial turning point that I believe it is. Our postmillennial eschatology motivates me and my colleagues to work hard, on the assumption that this could be that hoped-for turning point. Westminster's amillennial eschatology denies the possibility of any such outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament era, or any such transformation of pagan culture. *This is why eschatology matters.* Westminster's faculty is unprepared to seize the moment, whether or not this really is an eschatologically significant moment. Amillennialists teach that the only significant eschatological moment ahead of us is Christ's return at the last judgment, a moment that cannot be seized by Christians. For this reason, they have not had the motivation to investigate and then set forth biblical principles of social reconstruction. Kline is forthright about this. Frame and Poythress may be exceptions, but they are voices crying in a tenured wilderness.

Let me tell you why I believe that we are in a crucial period of history. Let me also tell you why traditional Calvinism is not in a position to take advantage of it for the kingdom of God.

### *The Breakdown of Enlightenment Faith*

After more than two centuries, the left wing of the Enlightenment died on August 21, 1991, when the Communist coup in the Soviet Union failed. This was an unexpected blessing from God, one that will be in the history textbooks for a long time. Christianity must now overcome right-wing Enlightenment thought and culture. This will be much more difficult. For almost three centuries, Protestant Christians have accepted right-wing Enlightenment thought as inherently Christian, even though Newton was an Arian (proto-Unitarian), and not a Trinitarian. Christian scholars and theologians from at least 1700 have attempted to integrate Newtonian natural law theory

and the Bible.<sup>10</sup> Protestant casuistry – the application of the Bible to real-world problems – disappeared after 1700.<sup>11</sup> Adam Smith and the constitutional settlement in the United States publicly buried Protestant casuistry. By 1800, the right wing of the Enlightenment reigned almost triumphant in the English-speaking world. It was challenged only by the left wing of the Enlightenment. In matters civil, Christianity had disappeared as a separate intellectual force. This situation has not changed.

Today, free market economics, political pluralism, and the public school system have become part of the American civil religion. Virtually all American Protestants, including the Calvinists,<sup>12</sup> have enthusiastically adopted the basic creedal position of the American civil religion.<sup>13</sup> The American Presbyterian Church in 1787-88 modified the Westminster Confession of Faith in order to make it conform to the theology of this civil religion.<sup>14</sup> Even the Covenanters (the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America), who have refused publicly to buy this pluralist package, have done so in private. Geneva College is just as liberal as Wheaton College, and not significantly more Calvinistic in its worldview. This illustrates *the* problem for Calvinism: college. The liberal arts college has been Calvinism's soft underbelly for over four centuries.

There is a very good reason for this: a very bad policy. It is also a very old policy: basic to Calvinism's tradition.

10. An early example of this is Cotton Mather's book, *The Christian Philosopher* (1721).

11. Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity During the Seventeenth Century* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), pp. 32-36.

12. Gary Scott Smith, *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America, 1870-1915* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1985).

13. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (eds.), *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Mead, *The Nation With the Soul of a Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

14. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 543-50.

### A Pair of Self-Imposed Burdens

Why? Why did the Calvinists buckle – worse, *bow* – to Newton's Arianism in philosophy and John Locke's Unitarianism in political theory? Because they have carried a unique burden in the modern history of the Church International: the burden of scholarship. They have long regarded it as their unique, God-assigned task to meet the humanists on a supposedly level playing field – the pluralists' myth of neutrality – and present the case for Christianity. Only the Jesuits have carried a greater academic burden. Calvin and Loyola studied at the University of Paris in the 1520's at the College de Montaigu. Calvin left in 1528, the year Loyola entered. The two men went on to build rival movements that were strongly committed to the intellect as a tool of evangelism. This strategy was certainly true of the Jesuits, and true of Calvin's followers, if not of Calvin himself.

This strategy has proven to be suicidal for the Jesuits and nearly so for the Calvinists. Both groups decided that the best way to do battle was by sending their brightest young men into the fleshpots – or inkpots – of academic humanism. What can be called the “German marathon” became a gauntlet for Calvinists, and very few survived this ordeal. Almost none survived it intellectually unscathed, as Van Til did his best to prove throughout his career. “Get that Ph.D., my boy, and then you will be entitled to join the Order,” said the leaders of both orders, Jesuit and Calvinist. The Jesuits often required two Ph.D.'s from their “boys.” But this strategy consistently failed. The Jesuits kept “going native” on the foreign mission field, while the Calvinists kept going pluralist on the home mission field. (The biographies of famous Calvinist foreign missionaries in the twentieth century could be published in a book as short as one of my favorite short books, *Famous Gentile Violinists*.)

The Jesuit Order went radical almost overnight, 1965-66.<sup>15</sup>

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15. Malachi Martin, *The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Touchstone, 1987); cf. Garry Wills, *Bare Ruined Choirs*:

The Calvinists, unlike the Jesuits, have just bumped along, mortgaging the presuppositional farm to the humanists, generation by generation. Both sides decided that they had to play the academic game by the rules of their humanist enemies. Both sides have now lost the war. For centuries, the leading academic representatives of both movements have stood before their churches with this message regarding the latest fad of humanism: "We, too, but slower!" Then, overnight, the Jesuits announced: "We, too, but faster!" Today, a quarter century later, the Marxist flagship has sunk. The Jesuits invested the Order's assets in a smaller Marxist vessel, *Liberation Theology*. It also is visibly sinking. The Jesuits are in a major crisis.

Calvinist scholars today are seldom liberation theologians. Feminists, occasionally. Welfare statist, frequently. Pluralists, always. They have paid a heavy theological price for their attempts to integrate humanist academic fads with Calvinism. More to the point, Calvinists in the pews have been asked to pay this price. Intellectual Calvinists are rarely self-financed. The tithes and offerings of the conservative faithful have been used to subsidize the vagrant journeys of the intellectuals.

### *What The Laymen's Tithes Have Financed*

What have the faithful tithers received in return over the last two centuries? Not much. Their leaders' commitment to academic certification has not led to anything like Calvinism's intellectual dominance, either in the church or in the world of scholarship. The scholars' acceptance of political pluralism as an ideal made impossible any uniquely Calvinist or even Christian social theory that they might have developed. Calvinist scholars have done their best work in defending the inspiration and authority of the Bible, a crucially important task, but they have not been able to reproduce themselves in recent years. Robert



Dick Wilson, O. T. Allis,<sup>16</sup> Ned B. Stonehouse, and Edward J. Young were textual defenders of high repute internationally. No one has replaced them in this generation. Today, traditional Calvinism's stream of technically precise biblical scholarship has run, if not dry, then at least dangerously shallow.

Post-1788 Calvinists have not been major academic figures in any field outside of theology, except possibly when defending an existing humanist academic paradigm by means of accepted humanist academic techniques (e.g., George Marsden's technically excellent but stylistically "neutral" history, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*).<sup>17</sup> "Look, look: we can do it, too!" is not a battle cry of cultural conquest.

Consider the major intellectual force in modern life, Darwinism. Darwin's *Origin of Species* appeared in 1859. It took until 1872 for Charles Hodge to respond with *What Is Darwinism?*, a negative analysis that concluded that Darwinism is atheism. But Hodge was virtually alone among conservative seminary professors in his rejection of evolution's timetable. The defenders of long eons of time and a doctrine of progressive creation were A. A. Hodge, Charles Hodge's son; Francis Patton, who became the president of Westminster Seminary in 1902; B. B. Warfield of Princeton Seminary; W. G. T. Shedd, a conservative teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York; and Baptist A. H. Strong of Colgate-Rochester Seminary.<sup>18</sup> The men who supported Charles Hodge's forthright rejection of Darwinism and its timetable were not seminary professors.<sup>19</sup> This situation has not changed in more recent times.

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16. All of Allis' major books were written after he had retired from Westminster Seminary. His extraordinary output of books began in 1945, when he was in his sixties. He died in 1972, writing almost until the day he died.

17. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

18. Smith, *Seeds of Secularism*, p. 98.

19. *Idem*.

In our own day, Westminster Seminary has been a leader in the church's rejection of the creation science movement. Davis Young, Edward J. Young's son, has always had access to the *Westminster Theological Journal*.<sup>20</sup> The younger Young is a geologist and a dedicated defender of "eons of time" geology, arguing for the standard 4.6 billion-year-old earth, saying that there is no incompatibility between this evolutionary time scale and the Bible's account in Genesis 1.<sup>21</sup> He was formerly a tenured professor (i.e., ideologically safe) teaching conventional geology at a state university in North Carolina, and he now teaches at Calvin College. Henry M. Morris singles out the "very negative review" of *The Genesis Flood* written for the *Westminster Theological Journal* by the seminary's librarian, Arthur Kuschke.<sup>22</sup> (Kuschke set a standard which librarian John R. Muether still upholds.) It was Rushdoony, not a Westminster faculty member, who personally intervened with Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company to get *The Genesis Flood* published when no other Christian publishing firm would touch it.<sup>23</sup>

What about the seminary's response to Communism? Silence on campus. I wrote *Marx's Religion of Revolution* in 1968, when I was a graduate student. I was told by a Westminster faculty member that it would be reviewed by the *Journal*. It never was. Francis Nigel Lee wrote *Communism Versus Creation* (1969) and *Communist Eschatology* (1974), but he was not employed by a seminary at the time. His six-day creationism, among other conservative views, including theonomy, kept Lee, a holder of two earned doctorates, and a Presbyterian Calvinist, from ever becoming a Westminster Seminary faculty member. When it

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20. Davis A. Young, "Some Practical Problems in the Application of the Mature Creation Doctrine," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XXXV (Spring 1973).

21. Davis A. Young, *Creation and the Flood: An Alternative to Flood Geology and Theistic Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 87.

22. Henry M. Morris, *History of Modern Creationism* (San Diego, California: Master Book Pubs., 1984), pp. 167-68.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

comes to someone who believes in both theonomy and six-day creationism, the seminary's attitude can accurately be summarized: "Better professors with no terminal degrees than with two of them, if theonomy and creationism are part of the deal!"

What about the seminary's response to abortion? Paul Woolley, who taught church history at Westminster for almost half a century, was a vocal pro-abortionist. He kept his job. The Board sees no inconsistency between abortion and biblical ethics. The seminary has taken no stand on the abortion question.

In short, regarding the life-and-death issues of our day, Westminster Seminary, Reformed Seminary, and Covenant Seminary have remained officially silent. No use stirring up controversial, donor-alienating trouble! Better a systematic silence than a donation-threatening "Thus sayeth the Lord!" If the three schools (five campuses) ever decide to unite, the new institution should be called Laodicea Theological Seminary.

### *Predestination Plus Amillennialism*

The Calvinists have also labored under a second burden, one that the Jesuits always avoided: the doctrine of predestination. This doctrine teaches that man is fully responsible, yet God is completely sovereign. Add the eschatology of inevitable historical defeat for the church (amillennialism) to the doctrine of predestination, and you have a cultural blueprint ideal for ghetto-building. A few amillennial Calvinists do proclaim the legitimacy of a Christian worldview (undefined), but they also preach against the possibility of its triumph in history.

Twentieth-century Calvinism has been overwhelmingly amillennial. The postmillennialism of the Scottish tradition disappeared; the Dutch amillennial tradition has triumphed in Calvinism's academic circles. Amillennial Calvinists have correctly concluded that if amillennialism is true, then their victories will be few and far between. They have therefore tended to engage only in those battles that they have believed they had an outside possibility of winning. Academically, this means battles of

their own making, in which there is no visible opponent.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the amillennial Calvinist scholar's idea of a battle for the minds of men is a debate over the Alexandrian vs. the Antiochan basis of Barth's theology.<sup>25</sup> No one cares who wins it.

This is why Rushdoony's books have always scared academic Calvinists, even Van Til. After the publication of *Intellectual Schizophrenia* (1961), the editors of the *Westminster Theological Journal* decided not to review his books. He was taking Van Til's comprehensive critique of all non-Christian thought and – horror of horrors – attacking the public school system, even including higher education. Westminster Seminary's professors are required to attend graduate school, which means either a secular humanist university or the Free University of Amsterdam, which in 1961 was rapidly becoming a kind of baptized humanist university. Rushdoony had become far too hot a potato for Westminster Seminary to handle. He actually believed that we need to apply Van Til's philosophical critique of humanism to the institutions and practices of humanism!

Well, this sort of thing sounded like theocracy to them. And we all know what James Madison thought about theocracy! So the blackout on Rushdoony's books began, even though Rushdoony publicly defended Madison's political theory.<sup>26</sup> The faculty suspected that an unspoken evil lurked within his comprehensive, Vantillian critique of humanism: a denial of political pluralism. His *Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973) intensified this suspicion, and Bahnsen's Th.M. thesis (1973) persuaded them of its reality. It took 17 years of simmering for the faculty's

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24. This may be why Westminster waited 17 years to criticize theonomy in print.

25. In the Fall, 1990, issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal*, the quarter in which *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* appeared, there were essays on the following topics: (1) Was Barth's theology Alexandrian or Antiochan? (2) What was Barth's interpretation of Schleiermacher? (3) What was the echo narrative technique in Judges 19? (4) How were the Isaianic servant songs used in the missiology of Acts? (5) how do we solve the unidentifiable interlocutor problem of James 2:18a?

26. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1965] 1978), pp. 72-75.

politically pluralist pot to boil over in public, but eventually it did: *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. This spilled natural law theory all over the theological stove. The question now is this: Will anyone at Westminster wipe it off before it becomes a permanent baked-on mess? Someone in authority had better act fast. If no one does, donors should stop giving. Ultimately, it is the donors' responsibility to impose the one sanction that all academics really do fear: the withholding of funds.

### **Credentialism: Calvinism's Self-Inflicted Wound**

In 1790, the Calvinists – Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians – were the dominant theological and social force in the United States. By 1840, they had been dwarfed by the Methodists and Baptists, who had sent hordes of minimally trained men to pastor an exploding number of churches in the West. The Second Great Awakening, beginning in 1800, offered a unique opportunity to build churches. The churches that actually got built were not Calvinistic.<sup>27</sup>

The Baptists and the Methodists headed West. Meanwhile, back in New Jersey, the Presbyterian Calvinists could not produce pastors fast enough to meet the demand for pastors with their lone college's tiny handful of graduates. So, when they saw they could not meet this new demand, they did the typical Calvinist thing: they invented the theological seminary. This added three extra years to the academic gauntlet for ordaining ministers. This constricted the supply of ministers even more.

Why did they do this? Because of a fundamental Calvinist belief: *the ideal of the well-trained ministry*. There is nothing wrong with this ideal, but it has always been seriously flawed in its Calvinist version: *a bureaucratically trained, academically certified ministry*. The result was that Calvinism in the nineteenth cen-

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27. The old line: "Baptists walked into the West, Methodists rode on horseback, Presbyterians went by steamboat, and Episcopalians waited for regularly scheduled train service."

tury steadily became a phenomenon of educated people on the Eastern seaboard. Only the arrival of the Dutch changed this after 1870. (Calvinism has in our day become a phenomenon mainly of rural Michigan and Lynden, Washington.)<sup>28</sup>

### *The Theological Seminary*

The theological seminary as an institution is a dinosaur. It always has been. (The seminary was never the academic equivalent of a tyrannosaurus rex; it was always much closer to the nanosaurus.) The institution has outlived its usefulness in its traditional form. Invented by American Calvinists during Jefferson's and Madison's presidencies,<sup>29</sup> the seminary was from the beginning a makeshift institution. It was supposedly needed because the colleges that supplied churches with ministers no longer had either the theology or the interest to train anyone except Unitarians for the ministry. The seminary was designed as a supplement to a theologically failed experiment: the biblically orthodox college. The seminary became a secondary authority for screening candidates for the ministry. The college retained the preliminary authority. Many candidates still had to run a Unitarian gauntlet before becoming eligible for seminary.

The theological seminary has always rested on the assumption that attending college is the tried and true means of training ministers. This faith in college education as the nurturing place for ministers had always been the presumption of the Calvinists. This total ecclesiastical dependence upon the college

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28. By 1985 in the Netherlands, the Schilder church had about 240 congregations, one-third of them without pastors. Its college-seminary took ten years to finish and was turning out fewer than half a dozen pastors a year. Not being allowed to preach, the ruling elders in the pastorless congregations were required to read aloud two printed sermons each Sunday, which the denomination sent out. Members could not take frequent communion. This is the lust for certification with a vengeance.

29. Princeton Seminary in New Jersey (1812) and Andover Seminary in Massachusetts (1808). On the founding of Andover, see Joseph W. Phillips, *Jedediah Morse and New England Congregationalism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), pp. 138-40.

for ministerial training had always been corrupting, both epistemologically and institutionally. Greek intellectual presuppositions and Roman Catholic teaching methods were imported into the Protestant church by way of the college's classical curriculum. The Puritans had long recognized this threat, but not even Oliver Cromwell and his army could eradicate the power of Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>30</sup> Harvard and Yale became equally immune in New England. These bastions of heresy, not orthodoxy, were honored. Yet today, Bible-believing seminaries prefer faculty members who are certified by Harvard or Yale.

Formal certification is the today model for all education, but the original model was the European university of the twelfth century. This worship of academic certification has always been the weak link in Calvinism as an institutional phenomenon.<sup>31</sup> First came the Protestant scholastic gauntlet. Then came the Unitarian gauntlet. Finally came the seminary. Until Van Til came on the scene, this also served as a Scholastic-type gauntlet: Scottish common sense realism.<sup>32</sup>

The seminary's graduates, few in number, at graduation are thrown into a glutted market that can pay them practically nothing. Ignoring the task of imparting a marketable skill – tentmaking – the seminary teaches students a few rudimentary skills of biblical exegesis, mainly in the form of writing one or two sermons per year, if that many. It also requires students to develop their undergraduate skills in taking examinations. These examinations are the same sort of academic exercises that were once imposed on the seminary's faculty members by the secular universities that granted them their degrees.

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30. John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Conclusion.

31. The lust for certification has been a lust of middle aged men that is then imposed on youth. Youth normally has more interesting lusts to contend with, a fact that has never sat well with middle aged men.

32. Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), pp. 30-33.

Then these prospective teaching “elders” – age 24 – are sent into the cut-throat ecclesiastical world of squabbling wives, adulterous elders, mortgage payments, youth meetings that are supposed to offset the effects of 30 hours a week spent in a public high school, and dwindling memberships. “But all I can do is write sociology term papers illustrated with Bible verses!” the young man wails. Indeed; this really is just about all he can do. To gain this unmarketable skill, he is required to give up three years of his life, many thousands of dollars, and whatever public speaking ability he has at age 21. (Nothing is better designed to kill the ability of young men to preach than the practice of preaching for – never to – seminary professors.)

Apprenticeship has always been the best way to train ministers and managers of all kinds. This is not just my eccentric opinion. The foremost theorist of modern management is Peter Drucker. Here is his assessment of professional training: “The [business] schools that have done the best in the last ten years, like Stanford, are going to have a very rough time. They are staffed with so many young, rigid academicians who have no exposure to the practice. You can get Ph.D.s quickly, but experience takes time. I’m a reactionary. I don’t believe in journalism schools either. I have very little use for schools. A practice starts with apprenticeship.”<sup>33</sup> What he says about the prospects of business schools in the 1990’s is equally applicable to theological seminaries. They are not delivering the product buyers need: pastors who know how to shepherd Christ’s flock.

The best way to train competent ministers is to place them under the personal direction of competent ministers. The worst way to train ministers is the theological seminary. Staffed by non-ministers whose only institutionally mandatory skill is the ability to write unpublishable term papers in secular humanist universities, the modern seminary is neither an efficient training place for ministers nor a true graduate school in theology.

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33. *Forbes* (Aug. 19, 1991), p. 72.



*New Technology and Old Pedagogy*

Almost everything that a seminary imparts academically could be achieved much more effectively by a notebook computer and a 5-inch CD-ROM laser disk that contains 350,000 pages of printed materials. Retail price per disk? Maybe \$50, plus the CD-ROM reader (\$400 and dropping). Put a ministerial candidate in close proximity to a pastor's working library, and he gets access to whatever books the disk lacks.

But what about Greek and Hebrew? Helpful, but not crucial. A person does not need them to do real-world theology.<sup>34</sup> Even less does he need them for successful preaching. He can get most of what he needs for preaching in the various Bagster & Sons biblical language course-cheating (excuse me: course-*enhancing*) grammar tools and interlinear Bibles, which are the only really important linguistic tools that most seminary graduates ever use (if they use any). Then all he needs is a good computerized Bible search program that has the Strong's numbers in it (e.g., NavPress' *Wordsearch*). In any case, the student can take Greek and Hebrew in college; he can forget both of them just as easily this way as by taking them in seminary. A seminary can run a one-month cram course in either language in the summer, just to keep up academic appearances. The fact is, Greek and Hebrew are required mainly to keep traditional donors happy and also to keep humanistic or apostate academic accreditation committees happy. (It is much the same with the foreign language requirements for Ph.D. programs in most American universities. Tradition, not people's actual use of the crammed-in skills, is why these requirements are retained.)

The economics of the fully staffed seminary reveals what is going to happen: *extinction by attrition*. Costs are high: salaries

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34. If you need expertise in either of these languages in order to make fewer mistakes, you can always hire someone part-time to check your usage. Those people who can perform this service are always underpaid, and are happy to get the extra income. The division of labor is an important principle (I Cor. 12). Nowhere is it better applied than with Hebrew grammar.

plus the true (forfeited income) real estate rents in places like southern California and suburban Philadelphia. Tuition costs do not cover the actual costs. Costs keep rising. The number of students willing and able to pay even today's subsidized tuitions is not growing significantly. There is a head-on collision coming: the cost of the service vs. demand for the service.

### *Costs and Benefits*

These costs of operation could be cut by at least 50% within three years. An entire seminary curriculum can easily be put on videotape. With the videotapes comes a workbook. (The CD-ROM laser disk is desirable but optional.) If these tapes need occasional updating, this can be done by the lecturer in a couple of weeks, perhaps during the summer. The tapes can be viewed the same way that students at Frances Schaeffer's L'Abri were trained: part-time. Students worked in the morning or afternoon, and listened to audiotapes in their off-hours. The ministerial students can work for the local church, or in a day-care,<sup>35</sup> and then view the tapes after work. They can discuss what they have learned with the pastor twice each week.

The seminary can give its usual quota of written examinations and term papers. This can all be handled by mail on a cost-per-exercise basis. Exams can be administered by the local pastor. The faculty is paid on a piece-rate basis. The seminary can issue the degree through an external degree program. If the seminary's humanist-apostate accreditation association should object, the members of that committee can be told to take a hike. They are all on the road to hell anyway, so why should an orthodox Christian seminary humor them?

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35. The day care center is one of the best tentmaking jobs possible. It can help launch a new church, and give a young man and his wife anywhere from \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year income, plus a retirement program. All it takes to get licensed in most states is for the wife to take 12 semester hours of young child care development courses at a local college. A year of experience in any capacity in a licensed center then qualifies the person. Financing can come from profit-seeking capitalists.

For that matter, why should any Bible-affirming seminary seek accreditation from non-Christians? Why should a seminary submit to atheists, humanists, and apostates? Doesn't this place God's enemies in indirect authority over the ordination of Calvinist ministers, since seminary training is required for Calvinist ministers? (To receive forthright answers to these important jurisdictional questions, write to the Board of Trustees, Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, PA 19118. Ask to be put on the mailing list for a copy of their forthcoming special report: *Why God Has Mandated That Covenant-Breakers Sanction the Academic Performance of Covenant-Keepers in the Training of Ministers: A Study in Natural Law Theory*.)

The bricks and mortar of a modern seminary are mostly wasted. All that is needed are a small administration building (rented, preferably in rural Iowa, where rents are cheap), a few filing cabinets, a telephone, a photocopy machine, and teachers with computers, modems, and printers. Requiring students to come to a central campus is ridiculous. This requirement tends to eliminate married men with families – the people specified by Paul as those qualified for the pastorate (I Tim. 3:1-11).

So, the initial step is to videotape the professors' lectures. (This would, of course, enable donors to see exactly what they are paying for, which may be why no seminary has decided to take this radical step.) Next, the instructors would be required to produce workbooks that link the videotaped lectures and the collateral reading assignments. Then, after all of the courses are on tape (three to four years), the seminary sells its building. Some of the funds are used to pay off the faculty members, who are then dismissed from full-time employment. Tuitions will then be structured to cover all costs. No more begging!

The technological revolution is here. Seminary professors in the year 2000 may need to find salaried employment elsewhere. Price competition from the new electronic technology is going to put pressure on their careers. They may have to earn their seminary-based income through the mails: student by student,

written exam by written exam. It is not a question of *if*; it is only a question of *when*. Theirs will not be the first occupation in history to be restructured by a new technology. Theirs will also not be the first in which the members were unprepared.

### *The Pastoral Function*

Everything a seminary can impart pastorally – which is just barely above zero – can be picked up in two or three weeks under a successful pastor. It is the additional three years of apprenticeship that will make the young man fit for duty.

Many students go to seminary and then drop out, or else graduate and then leave the ministry after a short time. They receive subsidies while they are in seminary. To reduce the risk of making subsidies that do not pay off, every subsidized candidate must be put into church service at the beginning. He can discover what the calling of minister is really all about, guided by a man who knows what is required. This way, the student does not get confused about what it takes to be a pastor. Writing term papers has very little to do with it. Subsidizing students while they write term papers is not a good way to finance successful candidates for the ministry. Having them serve as apprentices makes a lot more sense. They start producing early.

Professors may object that pastors are likely to be incapable of training pastors. This means: (1) non-pastors are more capable of training pastors than pastors are; (2) the seminary system has produced a generation of incapable pastors. I think the church is better served by retaining confidence in pastors. I do not see how the church would be poorly served by a careful rethinking of the costs and benefits of the theological seminary.

If we really do need a graduate school in theology, let us finance one. But let us no longer fool the donors into believing that this sort of rarified academic institution is necessary or even useful for the training of pastors. A graduate school of theology is a luxury that few Calvinistic denominations can afford. It is time to start building up churches that will be able

to finance such a luxury in a few decades. For now, let us get on with the task at hand: the evangelization of the world.

If Calvinists refuse to listen, as they did after 1790 in the United States, the results will be similar: the expansion of non-Calvinist churches that worship God somewhat loosely rather than worshipping the academic degree very tightly.

### The Theonomic Vision

Being postmillennialists, theonomists see far greater possibilities for Calvinism. We see that new technologies have made it possible for outsiders of all kinds to make an impact in areas that had previously been closed to them. Beginning in 1981, the ICE has proven to its satisfaction, and its critics' dissatisfaction, that new publishing technologies allow small, struggling organizations to crack through even the most rigorously enforced blackouts. This is why the Westminster faculty was finally driven to write *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

Our vision is far more than merely academic. It is pastoral and ecclesiastical. It is familistic. It is political. It is economic. Theonomists recognize that during a major cultural crisis, which we are surely well into today, small groups with a comprehensive vision can gain influence way out of proportion to their numbers. This is not possible in quiet, stable times. Calvinists need to prepare to take advantage of this opportunity. Calvinism possesses a uniquely comprehensive worldview.

The breakdown of the reigning paradigms of humanist civilization is already upon us. This presents an opportunity for social transformation which Christians have not seen since 1860, when Darwin and Huxley began their work of reconstruction, and which Calvinists have not seen since the restoration of Charles II to the British throne in 1660. This time, however, there is a worldwide civilization: Western humanism. This has not been the case since the tower of Babel. This makes the present opportunity historically unprecedented.

To take advantage of this crisis, Christians will require a comprehensive cultural alternative. This alternative must be based entirely on the Bible. No halfway house world-and-life view is capable of replacing a collapsing social order that recognizes that its fundamental principles have collapsed, not just the upper stories of the civilization's structure.

### *A Radical Message*

The gospel of Jesus Christ announces the necessity of just such a radical restructuring of the foundations. This is why a version of the gospel that denies the existence of consistent biblical blueprints for the whole social order will not be taken seriously by people who are ready for a root-and-branch reconstruction. A person who recognizes that the collapse of the structure's foundation was responsible for the collapse of the structure is not going to be satisfied with a comforting message of either a new foundation without a totally new blueprint for the social order (Christian pluralism) or else a remodeling job on top of the shattered foundation (New World Orderism).

Traditional Calvinism is not in a position to take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity for world evangelism. It preaches the necessity of a new, personal, spiritual foundation, but not the necessity of a new social foundation. It rejects the idea of explicitly biblical blueprints for society.<sup>36</sup> Traditional Calvinism has imbibed on 50-proof political pluralism for too long. It needs to sober up. Theonomy may fail in this generation, but today's inebriated Calvinism surely must fail.

Traditional Calvinists can easily acknowledge the truth of the second half of my assertion. After all, amillennial eschatology assures traditional Calvinists that Christianity, let alone Calvin-

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36. The hostility of John R. Muether to my Biblical Blueprints Series is a case in point: *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 255. He dismisses the series contemptuously with the term "biblicism." He also dismisses the six-day creation doctrine as biblicism (p. 254). I wonder how he identifies the doctrine of biblical infallibility.

ism, must fail in any attempt to transform civilization, so what better time than today for the manifestation in history of the culmination of this prophesied failure? "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of non-salvation." To prove their case, Westminster's faculty wrote *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. To the extent that they persuade their readers of the truth of their worldview, to that same extent will their readers remove themselves from the battle for the minds of men in this (or any) generation.

Their withdrawal inevitably transfers to the theonomists the task of establishing the theological terms of the cultural debate within Calvinism. This is a great benefit of both premillennialism and amillennialism from the postmillennial viewpoint: they voluntarily surrender the field of intellectual battle to post-millennialists. We are truly appreciative of this subsidy.

### Conclusion

The Westminster faculty has attempted to do on a broad scale what Meredith G. Kline did on a narrower scale with his disciples: offer them reasons for doing nothing special. Kline persuaded his students for over three decades that the Old Covenant is unrelated judicially to the New Covenant. Therefore, to the extent that Calvinism is a system of judicial theology – and it is by far the most rigorous judicial theological system in history – Kline's hermeneutic destroyed his disciples' ability to preach Calvinism. His hermeneutic destroys ethically relevant preaching altogether. So, his followers have written only a few essays, fewer books, and nothing coherent. Neither has Kline since 1981. *Kingdom Prologue* was his career's epilogue, at least as of 1991. Each of his books after *By Oath Consigned* became increasingly ethereal as each became more consistent with his semi-dispensational hermeneutic of total judicial discontinuity.

Those who model their writing and preaching after *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* will not become ethereal. They will just become culturally muddled. This is better than ethereal, I must

admit. Culturally muddled preaching has been a long and accepted tradition in American Calvinism. When the American Presbyterians gutted the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith in 1787-88, they moved forthrightly onto a long road that leads into culturally muddled theology. Thus, to avoid the contradictions involved in this revision – that is, to avoid the inescapable contradictions between the Westminster Confession and the American civil religion – American Presbyterian Calvinists have concentrated on making their sermons theologically precise and practically useless. Otto Scott has described the technique as “museum-piece preaching.” They have nothing to say about the moral crises of our age except to remind their listeners that things are surely in a sorry state, as prophesied by the Bible. Being Calvinists, they are far more skilled at spelling out the historical and philosophical origins of these crises than the typical fundamentalist pastor is. After all, they attended seminary. Some of them have the ability to footnote their listeners into a state of near-catatonic paralysis. Meanwhile, fundamentalist churches attract large numbers, raise wads of money, and build gymnasiums (“family life centers”).

Theonomists think the bride of Christ can do a great deal more than this. We think Christendom is not only possible; it is eschatologically inevitable. The King of kings has given His church both its marching orders and the biblical blueprints necessary to achieve its God-assigned task of equipping its members to build Christendom until Christ returns in glory.

The faculty of Westminster Seminary disagrees with this assessment of the task and future of Christianity. I think there is a reason for this disagreement. It has to do with Van Til’s assertion that Christian theology must begin with the Creator-creature distinction. This means that *a Bible-believing seminary must begin with six-day creationism*. But this is the topic that seminaries everywhere try to avoid discussing, let alone affirming in public. A Reformed, non-dispensational faculty that is unwilling to affirm a literal six-day creation is not about to acknowledge



that the theonomists are correct in their assessment of the church's possibilities in fulfilling the dominion mandate in history (Gen. 1:26-28). Similarly, a Reformed, non-dispensational seminary that refuses to acknowledge publicly that Genesis 1 imposes a mandatory blueprint for the discussion of the origins of the universe and mankind's place in it is not likely to acknowledge publicly that the Pentateuch imposes an equally mandatory blueprint for social reconstruction.

It boils down to this: a Calvinist who believes that the origin of the universe is chronologically indeterminate, and who also believes that the cultural failure of Christianity in history is eschatologically determined in a wholly predestined universe, is not in a strong position to lead Christians into the battle for the minds of men in a time of crisis. He will not readily march into the machine gun nests and barbed wire of humanism. If you doubt the accuracy of this negative assessment, then I suggest that you read *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

It is time for Calvinist seminaries to allow theonomists to come on campus and engage in public debate with faculty members in front of the assembled student bodies. If the various faculties are unwilling to do this, as they have been ever since Bahnsen was fired by Reformed Theological Seminary, then the students need to recognize the hit-and-run tactic that has been adopted by the various faculties. They have all substituted this tactic for their earlier one: academic blackout. First, the blackout failed at Dallas Seminary. Dallas professor H. Wayne House decided to join Rev. Tommy Ice in writing *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* Dr. House is now employed elsewhere. Next, the blackout failed at Westminster Seminary. The faculty decided to write *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. This tactic has now proven equally disastrous. What next? Public debate? Will we get to see Bahnsen and Gentry vs. two (or more) members of the Westminster Seminary faculty? "More fun to watch than world championship tag-team wrestling!"

Gentlemen, it is time for you to make some hard decisions.

## APPENDIX

### THE SORRY STATE OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

Gary DeMar

*Certainly a Christianity that avoids argument is not the Christianity of the New Testament. The New Testament is full of argument in defense of the faith. The Epistles of Paul are full of argument – no one can doubt that. But even the words of Jesus are full of argument in defense of the truth of what we are saying. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him.” Is not that a well-known form of reasoning, which the logicians would put in their category? Many of the parables of Jesus are argumentative in character. Even our Lord, who spoke in the plenitude of divine authority, did condescend to reason with men. Everywhere the New Testament meets objections fairly, and presents the gospel as a thoroughly reasonable thing.*

J. Gresham Machen (1932)<sup>1</sup>

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1. J. Gresham Machen, from a lecture given in London, June 17, 1932, sponsored by the Bible League. Reprinted in “Christian Scholarship and the Defense of the Faith,” chapter 9, *What is Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 127.

The late Walter Martin, noted cult expert and author of *Kingdom of the Cults* and many other books related to cults and the occult, wrote: "Controversy for controversy's sake is sin, but controversy for truth's sake is biblical and vital to the church."<sup>2</sup> No one likes a troublemaker who stirs the pot of controversy for the purpose of deliberately agitating the body of Christ (see Num. 16:1-50; 1 Chron. 2:7). But as Dr. Martin pointed out, controversy in the pursuit of truth is fundamental to the Christian faith.

Jesus was not afraid of controversy for the sake of truth. He described Himself as "the way, and the *truth*, and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus took on the Scribes and Pharisees and publicly exposed their fraudulent theologies. Jesus did not hide from the opposition when confronted about the tax issue. He was always ready with an answer (Matt. 22:15-22). The opposition was left dumbfounded (v. 22).

Jesus "used to sit in the temple teaching" openly (Matt. 26:55). He welcomed debate. The multitudes were being won over. The Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees "feared the multitude" because of the biblical sense Jesus was making (Mark 12:12). Initially the Scribes and Pharisees challenged Jesus in open debate. But as so often occurs when error meets truth, error was routed.

The unholy troika of Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees had other ways of dealing with the truth. "They plotted together to seize Jesus by *stealth*, and kill Him" (Matt. 26:4). The Pharisees knew that repeated public exposure of their errors would mean a rejection of their entire theological system. Their livelihood was riding on their bankrupt theology. Jesus had to go one way or another. If He would not shut up voluntarily, they would forcibly silence Him. For Jesus, the cross was the cost of truth.

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2. Quoted in *Christian Research Journal* (May 1988), p. 3.

### "The Index"

The cover-up of truth is still with us. And what is even more distressful, the cover-up of meaningful debate over issues vital to the church is going on right here in River City. It seems that many well-known evangelical and fundamentalist writers have developed a Protestant version of the Roman Catholic "Index." The Roman Catholic Church, because it sees its role as "the custodian of divine revelation,"<sup>3</sup> believes it has the duty and right to control the literature that its members read. While the Roman Catholic Church "has taken an active role in the development and spread of books," the Church has also taken "a controlling hand. She exercises this control in two ways: requiring certain books be submitted for her examination and permission before publication (prior censorship), and prohibiting the publication, reading, retention, sale, or communication of bad books (prohibition of books)."<sup>4</sup> There is no such centralized bureaucracy within Protestantism. Protestant censorship is sporadic and less efficient. But there is no doubt that it happens on a regular basis.

#### *The Humanist "Index"*

The humanists have their version of censorship. Textbook bias is one area where the humanist "Index" is prominent. "Religion, traditional family values, and conservative political and economic positions have been reliably excluded from children's textbooks. This exclusion is particularly disturbing because it is found in a system paid for by taxpayers, and one that claims, moreover, to be committed to impartial knowledge and accuracy."<sup>5</sup> Others have chronicled the anti-Christian bias in

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3. Redmond A. Burke, *What is the Index? A Clear and Complete Explanation of the Catholic Church's Position on Reading* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Bruce, 1952), p. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

5. Paul C. Vitz, *Censorship: Evidence of Bias in Our Children's Textbooks* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books, 1986), p. 1.

the American news media.<sup>6</sup> We generally expect cover-ups and the rigging of the game by humanists. A comprehensive *Los Angeles Times* study found "that the press often favors abortion rights in its coverage, even though journalists say they make every effort to be fair."<sup>7</sup>

Consider the creation-evolution debate. When they want to slam creationists, evolutionists are quick to turn to the media because they recognize its secular bias. "Following minor creationist media victories in late 1981, Samuel P. Martin of the Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois, felt compelled to suggest in a letter to *Science* ('Confronting Creationism,' February 5, 1982) that large science organizations such as the AAAS [American Association for the Advancement of Science] and the National Academy of Science (NAS) use their funds 'to initiate a major media assault on the creationists now – before the cracks in the dike turn to fissures.'"<sup>8</sup>

The evolutionists sing a different tune, however, when they are confronted in open debate with their creationist antagonists.

On October 13, 1981, Duane Gish of the Institute for Creation Research debated biologist Russell Doolittle of the University of California. According to spokesmen for the scientific community itself, Gish routed Doolittle. Unfortunately for the biologists, the debate was recorded for broadcast on national television at a later date. In the November 6, 1981, edition of *Science* Roger Lewin was making excuses beforehand. Members of the NAS and the National Association of Biology Teachers (NASBT) were "appalled" by the debate. They describe Gish's presentation as "slick" and "timed to the last second." Doolittle's

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6. Marvin Olasky, *Prodigal Press: The Anti-Christian Bias of the American News Media* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1988).

7. David Shaw, "Abortion Bias Seeps Into News," Reprinted from *Los Angeles Times* (July 1, 1990), p. 1.

8. William R. Fix, *The Bone Peddlers: Selling Evolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), p. 314.

is said to have been "heavy, labored and poorly organized." But they aren't going to admit that the creationist won that debate fair and square. Doolittle, they concluded, "had been trapped." They complain that "the creationists are well practiced in this kind of presentation. Scientists are not." Lewin reports that at an NAS meeting at which the debate was discussed, "all but one voice" agreed that "debating with the creationists should be avoided."

Such is the fearless progress of science. Apparently it has been a shock to discover that some of the creationists are actually intelligent.<sup>9</sup>

How could an evolutionist claim that he "had been trapped" if creationism is indefensible? So then, why do evolutionists avoid debating creationists? For one simple reason: the creationist position is irrefutable and the evolutionist position has nary a leg to stand on. The best way to keep these facts from the public is to tell only one side of the story and not give the other side an opportunity to speak.

### *The Protestant "Index"*

Don't think that this tactic is unique to the secular community. Christians perform a similar type of refutation from afar. The debate over Christian Reconstruction has been raging for some time. Its tenets are simple and straightforward: (1) God is sovereign, (2) God's kingdom is actively present in the world and He will advance it through the power of His Spirit and the agency of His faithful people, and (3) God's law, as it is found from Genesis to Revelation, is applicable to every area of life.<sup>10</sup>

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9. *Idem.*

10. See Gary North and Gary DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). Some have debated openly. Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice are two examples. But their writings rarely reflect the results of the debates. They continue to perpetuate the same myths (lies?) even after they have been given detailed explanations of what Reconstructionists have always taught and how Christian Reconstruction distinctives have been part of

There are surprisingly many Christians who take issue with these biblical ideas. There is nothing wrong with disagreement. But why do many who disagree with the tenets of Christian Reconstruction hide from open debate? If the Christian Reconstruction position is so wrong and easily refuted, one would think that they would be clamoring for open debate. I could cite you many examples of "refutation by avoidance of public debate."

I know of one seminary bookstore that will not carry Reconstructionist books. This same bookstore stocks books from all types of theological traditions that would be considered heretical in terms of this seminary's affiliation with the tenets of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). The WCF is theonomic in ethics and postmillennial in eschatology.

There is nothing in the distinctives of Christian Reconstruction that are out of accord with the WCF. When Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* was reviewed in the *West-*

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orthodox Christianity for centuries.

The most recent example of continued misrepresentation in spite of clear statements to the contrary – both in person and in print – is made by H. Wayne House, co-author of *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* House has had enough exposure to the Christian Reconstruction position before and after the publication of *Dominion Theology* so as to understand its distinctives. But House continues to misrepresent Christian Reconstruction in spite of evidence that teaches the *opposite* of what he claims Christian Reconstruction teaches. Here is one example:

There are, however, important reasons for recognizing that the Mosaic Law is no longer in effect for either the church or society in general. . . . [T]he New Testament does not apply the Old Testament penalties to sins which were capital offenses under the Law. Paul discussed a case of incest within the Corinthian congregation (1 Cor. 5:1-5), and he ordered the congregation to excommunicate, not execute. (H. Wayne House and John Howard Yoder, *The Death Penalty Debate: Two Opposing Views of Capital Punishment* [Dallas, Texas: Word, 1991], p. 10).

Christian Reconstruction has *never* maintained that the *church* has any *civil* jurisdiction. The church can only excommunicate; it can *never* execute. This was true in the Old Testament as well. The church has the power of the "keys" (Matt. 16:19) while the state has the power of the "sword" (Rom. 13:4).

*minster Theological Journal*, "the reviewer demanded that nobody be allowed to respond to him in print – and the editor yielded!"<sup>11</sup> It's unfortunate that the "Christian intellectual world is retreating to a new dark age – one which shuns open investigation of the truth, blackballs those who disagree, and works according to prejudice instead of analysis."<sup>12</sup> Such antics have been shunned by the best Protestant scholars. The victim says:

Our Christian forefathers through the ages staunchly maintained that the truth has nothing to fear from public exposure. They always figured that the easiest (and most honest) way to silence a contrary point of view was to refute it. The desperation to keep the Christian public from contact with hearing or considering the theonomic point of view makes one think we are dealing with pornography, rather than stodgy, age-old Puritan theology!<sup>13</sup>

Much of Protestant "scholarship" has adopted some of the tenets of the "Politically Correct" speech crowd. Just as there's a "politically correct" way to talk about race, sex, and class on college campuses,<sup>14</sup> there's a "theologically correct" way to talk about law, eschatology, and social action at many churches, Christian colleges, and seminaries.

### Is There "Liberty" at Liberty?

Consider a 1991 incident of this sort of "Christian scholarship." Dr. Bahnsen, who is a formidable debater and known as such, was invited by a professor at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, to speak on numerous topics. Dr. Bahnsen

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11. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), p. 1.

12. *Idem.*

13. *Idem.*

14. See *New York Magazine* (January 21, 1991), *Newsweek* (December 24, 1990), *Campus* (Winter 1991) for examples of the new intellectual fascism.



delivered eight lectures during his four-day stay at Liberty. This extended period of time and the open-forum atmosphere of his lectures gave any and all students and professors ample opportunity to question Dr. Bahnsen. In addition, there was plenty of time for a debate with those professors who took issue with Reconstructionist distinctives. The "heretic" was in their midst. Why not demonstrate to the entire student body that Christian Reconstruction is "heresy" by making a public spectacle of the position?

Why didn't those who opposed Christian Reconstruction intellectually "flog" Dr. Bahnsen openly? The critics of Christian Reconstruction have the same problem as the evolutionists: the Christian Reconstruction position is very strong and, so far, has not been successfully refuted by an appeal to the Bible (at least from what I've seen and read from the critics), and the critics' position is weak and nearly indefensible. How do you keep the public from finding this out? Answer: Avoid public debate and publish inaccurate critiques that would rate a grade of C- at any second-rate humanist college.

Three of the professors demonstrated their "scholarly" wares by hosting a forum on Christian Reconstruction *after* Dr. Bahnsen had left the campus. How convenient. Wait until the most articulate spokesman for the position leaves, create a theological straw man, burn him in front of an interested audience, and then claim that you refuted the position.

Dr. Norman L. Geisler, director of the Center for Research and Scholarship (it says here), was the chief antagonist. Liberty University's student newspaper called it "a *debate*."<sup>15</sup> Those professors and students who were sympathetic to Christian Reconstruction did not learn about the "debate" until they saw it advertised on a poster the day before Dr. Bahnsen was to leave the campus. The poster described the event as follows: "A

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15. Curt W. Olson, "Biblical Government Debated," *The Liberty Champion* (March 26, 1991), p. 6.

Faculty/Student Forum." At the bottom of the poster, these words are found: "EVERYONE IS INVITED." Everyone, that is, except Dr. Bahnsen.

Dr. Geisler supplied an outline of his message for those who attended the forum. As usual, it was filled with inaccuracies too numerous to list here. For example, I am listed as working for the "Institute for Christian Government." No such organization exists. I work for American Vision. This minor inaccuracy shows that Dr. Geisler has not read what Christian Reconstructionists have written. This error, along with many others, was repeated in a taped presentation that Dr. Geisler gave a few years ago. Let's play "follow the error." You can find it on page 21 of the book-length "critique" of Christian Reconstruction by H. Wayne House and Tommy Ice.<sup>16</sup> It appears again in Hal Lindsey's poorly written and scholarly inept *The Road to Holocaust*.<sup>17</sup> This error and many others like it were pointed out in *The Legacy of Hatred Continues*<sup>18</sup> and *House Divided*.<sup>19</sup> Certainly, this is a minor scholarly *faux pas*, but it indicates something of the level of scholarship of critics like Geisler.

A minor error should be corrected after it is publicly exposed as an error. A refusal to do this indicates a woeful lack of concern regarding the basics of scholarship, let alone fair play. If a critic cannot get even simple facts straight, then it should make us wonder whether he has understood the more difficult philosophical, exegetical, logical, and applicational elements of the position that he is attempting to critique.

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16. *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?: An Analysis of Christian Reconstruction* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1988). For a comprehensive response and refutation, see Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

17. Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), p. 34.

18. Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Legacy of Hatred Continues: A Response to Hal Lindsey's The Road To Holocaust* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

19. Bahnsen and Gentry, p. 83, note 72.

If this is the state of scholarship by professors at a Christian university that wants to compete with the secularists at their own game, then the dispensationalists are right – the world is getting worse and worse! Anyway, *their* world is.

Anyone familiar with Christian scholarship of the past knows that Christians were formidable debaters. They were also well respected by the opposition even though there was general disagreement over biblical distinctives. J. Gresham Machen was highly thought of by H. L. Mencken, even though Mencken did not agree with Machen's biblical distinctives.<sup>20</sup> Today, so-called Christian scholarship is considered a joke by the humanist world. Of course, there are good works of Christian scholarship. But these works rarely get much distribution in the broader Christian market since few Christians will take the time to read well thought through arguments. Writers like Dave Hunt, Hal Lindsey, and Norman Geisler are the best known. This is unfortunate since there is so much good literature available for Christians to take advantage of.

### **What's the Alternative?**

While you might still disagree with every Christian Reconstruction distinctive, consider Geisler's alternative:

- "I would rather cooperate with a secular humanist than a Reconstructionist." We could rephrase this by stating: I would rather cooperate with an atheist than a *Christian* Reconstructionist. I would rather cooperate with an abortionist than a Christian reconstructionist. I would rather cooperate with a homosexual than a Christian Reconstructionist. I would rather cooperate with a New Age advocate than a Christian Reconstructionist. I would rather cooperate with a \_\_\_\_\_ than a Christian Reconstructionist. You fill in the blank.

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20. See Mencken's obituary of Machen, "Dr. Fundamentalism," reprinted in Gary North, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), Appendix A.

● “Christian Reconstruction is contrary to the First Amendment.” No it’s not, but let’s assume it is. If Christian Reconstruction or any scriptural position is *biblical*, which would you choose, the First Amendment or the Bible? Let’s suppose the Supreme Court rules that preaching the gospel is contrary to the First Amendment? What would your response as a Bible-believing Christian be? More importantly, what would Dr. Geisler’s be? Christianity is contrary to Chinese law, Israeli law, and Saudi Arabian law. What should the Christian response be? (Acts 5:29).

● Christian Reconstructionists “believe Christianity is the only religion and any laws in the land must be based upon the Bible.” Guilty as charged! We do believe that Christianity is the only *true* religion. If God’s Word is not the standard, then what standard does Dr. Geisler have in mind? What if the standard he espouses conflicts with the Bible? Which would he opt for? Since he would rather cooperate with a humanist than a Christian Reconstructionist, I shudder to think what he might say.

● “Reconstructionism is a view that we (Christians) must Reconstruct society based on OT law.” Not true. Christian Reconstruction is more than a concern for the law. Of course, the NT tells us what adjustments have been made in OT laws based on the finished work of Christ. Geisler leaves the impression with his readers that Christian Reconstruction has no use for the NT. All of God’s law is applicable, including, but not limited to, the Old Testament. But Geisler doesn’t even believe that society should be reconstructed based on NT law. Certainly not all Christians agree with Geisler on this point. There are many who believe the NT is the new standard. But there is, for example, no NT prohibition against bestiality. Some assert that NT biblical law is only applicable to the Christian and the church. This further complicates things since this would mean the legalization of homosexuality, adultery, and polygamy. Sure enough, this is exactly what we have.

● Christian Reconstruction “confuses Christian government and moral government (1 Tim. 2:1-4).” What does Geisler mean by

"moral government" as opposed to "Christian government"? Does he mean that the State should not force people to become Christians, go to church, and pray? If this is what he has in mind, then there is no disagreement. But is it moral for the State to make abortion legal? If not, why not? How about polygamy and bestiality? If not, why not? If a law is Christian (biblical), does this mean that it's not moral? Confused? So am I.

Geisler's worldview is muddled. As he becomes more consistent with his faulty presuppositions, you will see him make further preposterous suggestions. When a Christian "scholar" would rather cooperate with those who are opposed to Christ and his law than Christians who believe God's Word is applicable to every area of life, we get the kind of world that we are living in today. The inevitabilities of Geisler's aberrational legal framework forces him to make such an unhealthy alliance.

### Conclusion

"To the pulpit, the *PURITAN PULPIT*, we owe the moral force which won our Independence."<sup>21</sup> Ministers of the gospel confronted the issues of their day by appealing to the people in terms of the Bible. The annual "Election Sermon" still "bears witness that our fathers ever began their civil year and its responsibilities with an appeal to Heaven, and recognized *Christian morality as the only basis of good laws*."<sup>22</sup> In addition, the clergy were often consulted by the civil authorities in the colonies, "and not infrequently the suggestions from the pulpit, on election days and other special occasions, were enacted into laws. The statute-book, the reflex of the age, shows this influence. *The State was developed out of the Church*."<sup>23</sup>

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21. John Wingate Thornton, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution or, The Political Sermons of the Period of 1776 with a Historical Introduction, Notes, and Illustrations* (New York: Burt Franklin, [1860] 1970), p. xxxviii. Emphasis in original.

22. Cited in *ibid.*, p. xxiii. Emphasis in original.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. xxii-xxiii. Emphasis in original.

There were some ministers, however, who refrained from appealing to the Bible for examples and prescriptions for reform. Rev. Nathaniel Ward (c. 1578-1652), pastor at Ipswich, Massachusetts, in his election sermon of June 1641, grounded "his propositions much upon the Old Roman and Grecian governments." John Winthrop (1588-1649), first governor of Massachusetts, described this as "an error." There was good reason for Winthrop's objection: Why should the church appeal to "heathen commonwealths" when it is the heathen principles that have made it necessary for the church to be involved in reform efforts? Winthrop believed that "religion and the word of God make men wiser than their neighbors," thus, "*we may better form rules of government for ourselves*" than to adopt the failed principles of the past, what he called, "the bare authority of the wisdom, justice, etc., of those heathen commonwealths."<sup>24</sup> It was the heathen past that had to be swept clean if the people of God were to become the model of Christian charity that Winthrop spoke about aboard the flagship *Arbella* in 1630. Such a task is no less true in our day. Centuries of specifically Christian activism must be swept under the historical rug if Christian scholars of Geisler's persuasion are correct.

Do these comments apply to the faculty of Westminster Seminary? That remains to be seen. We shall see if they respond in print or in classroom lectures to our three volumes of detailed answers to their published criticisms. We shall see if theonomists are invited to debate on campus. We shall see if their misrepresentations continue. We shall see if they continue to attack theonomy by adopting implicitly some version of natural law theory, the alternative explicitly adopted by Dr. Geisler.

Time will tell. So will a fair share of the seminary's brighter students. Jesus is the true vine (John 15:1). Rest assured, His earthly grapevine is alive and well. Cover-ups eventually fail.

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24. *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

## BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

### Theonomic Studies in Biblical Law

Bahnsen, Greg L. *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, (1985) 1991. An introduction to the issues of biblical law in society. (available in Spanish)

Bahnsen, Greg L. *No Other Standard*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991. A detailed response to the major criticisms of theonomy, including *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

Bahnsen, Greg L. *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, (1977) 1991. A detailed apologetic of the idea of continuity in biblical law.

DeMar, Gary. *God and Government*, 3 vols. Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990. An introduction to the fundamentals of biblical government, emphasizing self-government.

Jordan, James. *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21-23*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984. A clear introduction to the issues of the case laws of the Old Testament.

North, Gary. *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, (1982) 1987. A study of the economic laws of the Book of Genesis.

North, Gary. *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion vs. Power Religion*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985. A study of the economic issues governing the Exodus.

North, Gary. *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989. A 700-page critique of the myth of neutrality: in ethics, social criticism, U.S. history, and the U.S. Constitution.

North, Gary. *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986. A study of the five-point covenantal structure (1-5, 6-10) of the Ten Commandments. Includes a detailed study of why the Old Covenant's capital sanction no longer applies to sabbath-breaking.

North, Gary. *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990. A 1,300-page examination of the economics of Exodus 21-23.

North, Gary. *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990. An extract from *Tools of Dominion*.

Rushdoony, Rousas John. *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973. The foundational work of the Christian Reconstruction movement. It subsumes all of biblical law under the Ten Commandments. It includes three appendixes by Gary North.



Sutton, Ray R. *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987. A detailed study of the five points of the biblical covenant model, applying them to church, State, and family.

### **General Works on Eschatology**

Clouse, Robert G., ed. *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977. Advocates of the four major views of the millennium present each case.

Erickson, Millard J. *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1977. Examines modern views of eschatology: millennium, and tribulation.

### **Works Defending Postmillennialism or Preterism**

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