

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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STONES AND CORNERSTONES IN CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION

by Gary North

The imagery of the cornerstone is found throughout Scripture. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone for Christianity. The cornerstone is the marker by which the other corners of the house are measured before the walls go up. To the extent that any movement reflects this structural arrangement — and I think the analogy is useful for many of them — the best understanding that anyone can attain concerning some movement is to locate the cornerstone and the three other corners.

I think this can be done with the Christian Reconstruction movement. This movement is now divided into two branches, as I think most of the old timers (recruited earlier than 1985) have recognized. With this in mind, let us examine Division One and Division Two in terms of the cornerstone model.

Reconstruction Towers: Division One

There is no question regarding the initial cornerstone. It was R. J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Craig Press, 1973; today, Presbyterian & Reformed). I knew it would become just that, so I submitted three essays that I wanted to go into the book as appendixes. I wanted "a piece of the action" when the historians finally figured out what the source of this movement was. I recognized early that this book would launch a movement and a reformation, so I staked out my claim as early as possible. By including them in the *Institutes*, Mr. Rushdoony did me his second greatest favor. (The greatest was in letting me marry his daughter, who is worth a lot more than three appendixes, or even rubies.)

Corner two was Greg Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), his Master's thesis at Westminster Seminary. It offers a formidable academic defense of the main thesis of Rushdoony's *Institutes*: the continuing validity of Old Testament law. To gain the respect of scholars — well, anyway, to gain their grudging silence — Bahnsen had to write the book in the arcane language of Theologian, a nearly dead tongue today. (A funny thing happened on the way to the typesetter's, by the way: all references to the *Institutes* disappeared from the text. Peculiar. This was matched by the loss of all references to Bahnsen's *Theonomy* in Rushdoony's post-1977 books. Most peculiar!)

Corner three was my book, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (Institute for Christian Economics, 1982). It begins with an exposition of Genesis 1, the source of Van Til's Creator-creature distinction, and also the source of God's command for men to exercise dominion over the earth. It offers detailed evidence that Darwinism is a rival religion,

and it shows how Darwinism is sustained by a two-step sleight-of-hand operation: first, declare man the **Son of Slime**; second, declare man **God by Default**. The book also offers a specific case study of how a uniquely Christian epistemology can and must be used to restructure an academic discipline, in this case economics.

Corner four was David Chilton's *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Dominion Press, 1985). This book explains the biblical foundations of postmillennial eschatology as no other book ever has. It introduces readers to biblical symbolism, showing how biblical prophecies are to be interpreted first and foremost in terms of biblical symbols. For example, when stars are predicted to fall from heaven, civilizations or religious systems are the focus of the prophecy, not giant thermonuclear reactors in the galactic heavens. Its impact has been very great, for it has attracted tens of thousands of people who are becoming increasingly skeptical regarding the various forms of **pessimillennialism**, a term coined by Dr. Dr. Rev. Prof. Francis Nigel Lee, a South African theologian teaching in Australia who agrees with all four books, yet who somehow is not usually identified as a Christian Reconstructionist. I suspect it may be the language barrier. Nic invents his own language as he goes along. "Pessimillennial" is unquestionably his greatest contribution to his native English. ("The case of the missing footnotes" also reappears with Lee, what you might call the "Bermuda Triangle" of Bahnsen, Lee, and Rushdoony — all of their footnotes to each other that fly into it disappear forever.)

Reconstruction Towers: Division Two

There is no doubt that *Institutes* launched a movement. Rushdoony was able to put together for the first time in history three major ideas: Van Til's presuppositional apologetic method, biblical law, and postmillennialism. He mentions "covenant" throughout the book, but he does not explain it. This is understandable; Ray Sutton was the first theologian ever to unravel it. Rushdoony also presupposes but does not emphasize in the *Institutes* the Calvinist doctrine of the sovereignty of God, meaning absolute predestination. That, of course, is the bedrock presupposition of Van Til's system, yet he, too, does not devote as much space to this doctrine as he does to, say, the Creator-creature distinction, or the theme of the one and the many, or law and flux, or even continuity-discontinuity.

But *Institutes* was not enough. It was not the bait that attracted the most fish; it was only the hook, and it has snared relatively few people so far, judging by its total sales (under 1,000 copies per year). Other issues served

as bait, most notably his continuing eloquent witness-stand defenses of the Christian school movement, but also such things as political action, survivalism (in the late 1960's – terminated by the ill-fated "Ranch project" in Paso Robles, California), and most recently his defense of the dietary laws. Thus, *Institutes* serves only as the second stone of Division Two.

Ray Sutton's book, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Institute for Christian Economics, 1987) is the cornerstone of Division Two. It sets forth the five-point biblical covenant model that must serve as the necessary classification scheme for all orthodox Christian theology. This book will be of greater long-run importance to Christianity than the *Institutes*, for its model will eventually serve as Christian orthodoxy's cornerstone, though it may take centuries for everyone else to figure this out. It is more general and more timeless than the *Institutes*. But its content is fully informed by the Reconstructionist breakthroughs made in the *Institutes*.

That You May Prosper is now the required "cookie cutter" for the **Biblical Blueprint Series** (Dominion Press). These books demonstrate how effective the Bible's five-point covenant model is for every aspect of society. Without this model, the series would not be nearly so effective. It was providential that as editor I decided on the ten-and-three chapter structure of the series a few weeks before Sutton had first preached about his discovery: ten chapters on biblical principles and three on applications, meaning (in most books) church, family, and state. These are the covenantal institutions. By adopting a five-and-five structure for the first ten chapters, the writers show that the best way to understand the institutions of this world is by looking to the covenant model. Thus, the Blueprint books reconfirm Sutton's book, and add to everyone's confidence in it.

The third stone is David Chilton's Bible commentary, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Dominion Press, 1987). Chilton's impressive scholarship offers a case study of the **fusion of covenant and symbol** that marks Division Two of Christian Reconstructionism. He shows that the Book of Revelation is divided into the five points of the covenant, although he uses the terminology of Meredith Kline's older five-point model to present Sutton's concepts, a tactic that has not escaped the attention of Dr. Kline, who is not in the least appreciative – apoplectic is closer to it. Chilton also demonstrates that the Book of Revelation is both a worship service and a covenant lawsuit against Israel. Chilton's *Days of Vengeance* can and should serve as the representative model of what the "new, improved" Christian Reconstruction movement is really all about: the fusion of covenant and symbol. This is the distinctive theological insight of what people (including me) have called **Tyler theology**. (The distinctive organizational feature is "Tyler's" emphasis on the sacraments.) This book replaces my *Genesis* commentary as a representative model; mine is too narrow in focus: one academic discipline, not a way of expositing all of the Bible.

Corner four has not yet been written, but I know what it will have to be: a book on biblical interpretation (hermeneutics). It will have to put into one unit the distinctive features of Sutton's book and Chilton's: **covenant and symbol**. It will have to show readers and expositors how any

particular biblical text can in principle be dealt with, especially Old Testament texts, in terms of **biblical theology** (the increasing light thrown on biblical truths by the biblical writers, Genesis to Revelation), and **covenant theology** (the integrating five-point structure).

You may have noticed a missing pillar: Bahnsen's *Theonomy*. We in Tyler are nervous about its self-conscious separation of theonomy (ethics) from postmillennialism. We argue for postmillennialism in terms of the ethical cause-and-effect system of God's judgments in history (Deut. 28): righteousness wins, evil loses. We think we hear a time bomb ticking in *Theonomy*. (Maybe it's just a metronome.) We also are more interested in pursuing biblical theology and biblical symbolism than he is.

Obviously, there are Reconstructionists who will disagree with me on all this. In effect, I am hereby announcing the theological foundations of the next phase of Christian Reconstruction. I believe that this new arrangement of the stones will characterize the future of the movement. I could be wrong. Maybe the fourth book will not be a book on hermeneutics. I cannot imagine what else it might be, however. So, I am speculating about the construction plans of a future theological edifice that is at present missing a major piece in its foundation. Until this final stone is laid, I doubt that the movement will produce a reformation. On the other hand, when that final stone is laid, I do expect a reformation – bigger than the one Luther began.

Furthermore, I have the HTLV-III AIDS lentiviruses and all its mutating cousins working to help prepare the way. Luther had only syphilis germs working as the advance agents for him – pipsqueaks compared to HTLV-III.

Conclusion

The five points of the biblical covenant are:

Transcendence/Presence
Hierarchy/Authority
Ethics/Dominion
Oath/Judgment
Succession/Inheritance

Anyone who doubts that Christian Reconstructionism is a movement had better face up to the fact: we are unquestionably a movement because we now have an acronym: **THEOS**. Plus, we have newsletters and mailing lists. These are the distinguishing marks of any modern movement. ("No newsletter – no movement!")

All over America, people are asking this question: "Can I be a Reconstructionist and deny any of these five points?" I have now provided the answer: **heaven, no!** Admittedly, there will be ceaseless debates over how to fill each point with specific biblical content, and how to apply each of them to real-world problems, but without the five-point covenant model, you are not a Christian Reconstructionist. And if you are not a member in good standing of a local church, you are on the movement's fringe.

This is Christian Reconstruction. Accept no substitutes! (This public service message has been brought to you by the co-founder of Christian Reconstruction. Stay tuned for the next exciting installment of "Christian Reconstruction – the Newsletter!")

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