

# HONEST REPORTING AS HERESY: MY RESPONSE TO *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*

by Gary North

In the Feb. 20, 1987 issue of *Christianity Today*, a cover story appeared, "God's Law for a New Order," subtitled, "What Christian Reconstructionists Really want." The subtitle says exactly what we want: God's law for a new order. More to the point, we want other Christians to recognize, first, that God's law is still binding on all the world, and second, that Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension already have inaugurated a New World Order, whose outward manifestation was the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army in 70 A.D. (See David Chilton's magnificent 730-page book, *The Days of Vengeance*, published by Dominion Press, 1987.) All men live under the requirements of God's law whether they believe this truth or not, and we all live in Christ's New World Order, whether we believe it or not.

The actual article, however, was entitled, "Democracy As Heresy." Somehow, the cover's title got lost in the shuffle. Author Rodney Clapp makes this statement early in the article: "More startling than any degree of influence, however, is what Reconstructionists actually propose for society: the abolition of democracy and reinstitution of slavery, for starters" (p. 17). Let us look at the evidence for these two accusations before we pursue Mr. Clapp's general conclusions. I will say here and now, however: he fibbeth.

## Democracy

It is no secret that the three men discussed in the article—R. J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, and I—are Calvinists. We are all followers of Calvinist philosopher Cornelius Van Til. The article specifically discusses this fact. We are also self-conscious followers of the colonial American Puritans. (See the three issues of the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* that I edited and Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation published: *Puritanism and Law*, *Puritanism and Society*, and *Puritanism and Progress*.) So it would seem to be relevant to mention briefly something of Calvin's views and the Puritans' views concerning democracy.

## Calvin

In Volume V, No 4 issue of *Christian History* magazine (1986), Calvinist historian W. Stanford Reid has written an informative essay, "John Calvin: One of the Fathers of Modern Democracy."

Calvin had been trained originally as a lawyer. Reid points out that

Calvin believed in a *theocracy*, not an *ecclesio-ocracy*. Both the rulers of the church and the civil magistrates are directly responsible to God for their actions. The church may admonish the magistrate as to what God's law says, but cannot determine how the law is to be applied in matters of civil jurisdiction. The magistrate may advise the church concerning matters relating to civil affairs, but cannot force the church to conform to civil rules in its teachings, worship, or government. In this, Calvin laid down very clearly the principle of the separation of the functions of church and state. They are related and mutually supportive, but also independent of each other (p. 28).

This would serve as a good introductory statement of the Christian Reconstruction movement's view of civil and ecclesiastical authority. Reid goes on to say that

Calvin believed that the church's form of government was to be fundamentally democratic. In this way it served as a pattern for the state to imitate. He did not believe that ministers and other church officials should be imposed on the church by the civil government or by a small group of wealthy or aristocratic individuals. Instead, he believed that ministers, elders, and deacons should be appointed by the people of the church as a whole.

This is the Reconstructionists' outlook, too.

## The Colonial American Puritans

Now, let us take a quick look at the Puritan experiment in colonial America. The first small group arrived in 1629 in what was to become the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and a larger group arrived the next year. They immediately established the General Court of the colony, which quickly became a legislature (1634), with deputies elected by the townspeople. The legislature met together, and was made up of two parts: assistants selected by the governor (an elected official) and the deputies. Each group had to reach a majority decision for a law to be enforced. In 1644, they set up a true bicameral legislature, as a result of a division between assistants and deputies over who really had owned a dead pig. (I

someday intend to write an article called, "The Pig that Shaped American Constitutional Law.")

The Puritans believed in the rule of law — biblical law — but also in political representation (an aspect of the Calvinistic doctrine of the covenant). It is often argued that the first constitution ever written by citizen's representatives to create a new government was the "Fundamental Orders of Connecticut" (1639); this was followed shortly by the "Body of Liberties" of Massachusetts (1641). Thus, concludes Andrew C. McLoughlin in his excellent little book, *The Foundations of American Constitutionalism* (1932):

In the case of Massachusetts, whose practices strongly affected the rest of New England, representation began during the early processes of adaption of a corporate charter to the needs of a commonwealth. In a corporation, authority, the authority which is the source of administrative power and action, rests in the main body of its membership. The source of authority was the freemen, and the deputy was the vehicle by and through which the will of the freemen was expressed. Thus we see the basis, the fundamental groundwork, of the democratic idea, that people are the possessors of power and government is their agent (p. 58).

By his silence about this historical background, Mr. Clapp distorts the political heritage of Calvinism and Puritanism as a major source of republican civil government. He knows that we three Reconstructionists are Calvinist Puritans. A quick reading of the Tyler group's Geneva Ministries' book catalogue would have revealed a 1980 reprint of E. C. Wines' *The Hebrew Republic*. (Unfortunately, Mr. Clapp never contacted Geneva Ministries.)

His headline announces that Reconstructionists regard democracy as a heresy. The very thought of such a thing no doubt sends chills down the spines of tenured Christian college professors and neo-evangelical pastors. Only later in the article does he acknowledge in its "fine print," so to speak, that what he really means is that Reconstructionists promote the idea of a Bible-based *republic*: "In a Reconstructed society, government will be republican, with the Bible as the charter and constitutional document" (p. 19).

#### **Republican Civil Government**

Ah, yes, a republic. You know: that system of representative government which the authors of *The Federalist* offered as an alternative to classical democracy, since direct democracy was greatly feared by voters in the early American Republic. Madison wrote in Federalist No. 10:

Hence it is, that such Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and conten-

tion; have ever been found incompatible with personal security, or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives, as they have been violent in their deaths.

"Democracy as Heresy," Mr. Clapp? Dirty pool, Mr. Clapp? Snookering your readers, Mr. Clapp? Slander by headline, Mr. Clapp? It is an old technique: readers tend to remember headlines more easily than buried evidence indicating that the headline is a fraud. It is a corrupt technique, but it works.

Reconstructionists do indeed want a decentralized republic whose primary charter is the Bible. We would never say that the Bible is the only charter. Calvinists believe in creeds, after all. We believe in other kinds of written documents: covenants, contracts, and charters. Calvinists invented constitutionalism. But all covenants, contracts, and charters, like all creeds, are subject to the ultimate authority of the Bible. Why does *Christianity Today* mock this?

Now, if Mr. Clapp's essay had been titled, "Secular Humanist Democracy as Heresy," it would have been an accurate reflection of our publicly stated views. But, then again, such a title would also have reflected the views of literally millions of American fundamentalists, and not just some strange and dark conspiracy of Reconstructionists. All the fun would have gone out of the game for Mr. Clapp.

And also a good deal of the misrepresentation.

#### **Slavery**

Are Reconstructionists in favor of imposing slavery? No, but we are opposed to today's nearly painless declarations of bankruptcy. In the Old Testament, debt was understood as slavery, for "the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7). A person could not simply declare himself bankrupt and walk away from all responsibilities to a creditor. He could be sold into indentured servitude for up to seven years, at which time all debts were cancelled nationally, and all Hebrew bondservants released (Deut. 15). Not a bad system.

Mr. Rushdoony has made his position quite clear. In fact, he devoted an entire chapter to "The Return of Slavery" in his collection of essays, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Tyler, Texas: Thoburn Press, [1970] 1978). He says that slavery to the modern State is today a universal phenomenon. He links this statist slavery to sin. He concludes that salvation in Christ is the means of escaping slavery in history. He says that Christians are not to become slaves, citing I Corinthians 7:21-22. There can be no confusion about what he has taught, assuming the reader has actually read the material:

In the biblical form, slavery was rather a form of bond-service. The term "servant" or "slave" was used to describe anyone owing service to another, permanently or temporar-

ily. Thus David and Daniel described themselves as God's servants (Ps. 27:9; Dan. 9:17), and the virgin Mary described herself as "the handmaiden of the Lord" (Luke 1:38). Biblical slavery was a form of feudal association and protection. The stealing of men for the purposes of sale was strictly forbidden by law, so that what is popularly known as slavery was outlawed (Deut. 24:7), and Paul restated this condemnation and associated "men-stealers" with "whoremongers," homosexuals, liars, perjurers, and heretics (I Tim. 1:10). Unless the runaway were a thief, a slave could leave his master's home and could remain legally with anyone in whose house he took refuge (Deut. 23:15, 16) . . . (p. 23).

From the biblical perspective, therefore, slavery is not itself intrinsically evil; the failure to live as free men, the dependency or incompetence of a slave mind is, however, regarded as an inferior way. The believer cannot revolt against his situation, but he cannot become a slave in good conscience, voluntarily, for *any form* of slavery is an infringement of Christ's total rights over him (I Cor. 7:22, 23) (p. 24).

Mr. Clapp obviously did not read this passage. Nor did he read James Jordan's master's thesis (Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, 1981): "Slavery in Biblical Perspective." We know this, because John Mauldin, in questioning him by telephone concerning what Reconstructionists books Mr. Clapp had read, elicited the revealing admission from the author that he had not had time to read our books in detail, for the Reconstructionists publish too much.

Nevertheless, he felt called by God (or an editor) to misrepresent us anyway. Misrepresentation requires hardly any preliminary research. His article is a classic "hit and run" hatchet job. It is designed to mislead the reader. I trust that this response will reduce at least some of this deliberately induced confusion.

### **The Complexity of Christian Responsibility**

Reconstructionists are attempting to set forth a worldview that encompasses every area of life. Now, might we expect some complexity in pursuing this world-transforming task? Of course. This is one reason why Mr. Clapp rejects this cultural task altogether, for Mr. Clapp rejects the very thought of complexity:

The point is that there are hundreds of such details to be sorted out and applied to the contemporary situation. Reconstructionism does not actually provide the clear, simple, uncontestedly "biblical" solutions to ethical questions that it pretends to, and that are so attractive to many conservative Christians. Reconstructed society would appear to re-

quire a second encyclopedic Talmud, and to foster hordes of "scribes" with competing judgments, in a society of people who are locked on the law's fine points rather than living by its spirit (p. 23).

Ah, yes: "living by the spirit." A noble goal, indeed. Precisely the goal of the Anabaptist revolutionaries who tore Europe apart in Luther's day. (Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon*, Harper & Row, 1980, chap. 2.)

To see more clearly where Mr. Clapp is headed, try this experiment. Rather than thinking "Reconstructed society" to yourself, substitute "Constitutional law and republican guarantees of liberty." There is no doubt about it, such a system of civil government involves complexity. Do you see a place for legislatures filled with people who debate details carefully before they agree to any policy? Do you see a court system in which judges often disagree, and which takes time, debate, thought, and contending lawyers to sort out the truth? Do you see voters who disagree? Do you see, in short, a system of political and judicial liberty? Isn't this the essence of constitutionalism? But would Mr. Clapp impress his readers by coming out forthrightly against constitutional law?

The only practical alternative to judicial complexity in history that comes to my mind is the tyranny of arbitrary law, which in our day was best incarnated by Josef Stalin, who, when he was awakened by the barking of a blind man's dog one evening, ordered the dog shot. Also its owner. (Nikolai Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981, p. 38.) No muss, no fuss, no lawyers ("scribes"). No "Talmudic" debates over details.

What Mr. Clapp fails to recognize is that it is judicial complexity that restrains tyranny. It keeps the tyrannical state at bay. It is careful debate that keeps societies from excess in the name of some "simple" ideal. Life is difficult, though not impossible; the Bible is complex, though not self-contradictory. Mr. Clapp pretends that all he wants from Reconstructionism is a simple handbook that tells Christians what to do in every decision of life. But if we could produce one for him, he would then write an article for *Christianity Today* ridiculing "simple-minded" ethical handbooks that try to accomplish too much.

*Christianity Today* is never happy unless it can find a way to blur biblical distinctions. Whenever the Bible is sufficiently clear to prohibit some modern practice (for example, abortion) that trendy neo-evangelicals have adopted in the name of "broad Christian understanding," *CT* then takes the position that this clarity is based on a worldview more appropriate to an ancient agricultural people, not to the modern world.

What really seems to disturb Mr. Clapp is the thought that Christianity might actually capture modern culture, and that Christians could someday

be called upon to write most of the books of the civilization. About 40,000 book titles a year are published in the U.S., or so I am told. Worldwide, it may be a million titles. If revival comes, the Spirit-filled citizens of this world's nations—or at least a vast majority of citizens—will be called upon to take up all the intellectual burdens that the God-haters of today carry. Most lawyers will be Christian lawyers. Most university professors will be Christians. The same will hold true for scientists and journalists. The Spirit of God will convert the bulk of those who lead this world. What petrifies antinomians like Mr. Clapp is the thought that Christians might do what Reconstructionists recommend: turn to the Bible in search of specific answers to real-world problems. They might covenant with God, and bring the whole world publicly and officially under the terms of the covenant, God's revealed law. It is understandable why this terrifies antinomians: they are in ethical rebellion against God, and they resent the restraints that God's law unquestionably imposes on them and their intellectual allies, trendy humanists.

Politically liberal antinomians can easily enlist the support of instinctively conservative antinomian pietists, who also reject God's law. Representatives of both groups—fundamentalist conservatives like Dave Hunt and neo-evangelical liberals like Rodney Clapp—can march arm in arm against the perceived threat of covenant theology. Modern pietistic Christians are petrified at the prospects of a worldwide Christian revival. If it comes, Christians will be called upon to provide specific biblical answers to questions in every area of life. Neither their theology nor their training has provided pietists with the necessary tools of leadership. Certainly their hostility to biblical law leaves them without the required intellectual resources. So they deny that it will ever happen. Better a world without personal biblical responsibility than a world where billions of people are converted to faith in Christ. Better to see multitudes in hell than Christians in power. Better pessimism than postmillennialism.

Mr. Clapp ridicules the complexity of Reconstructionist discussions of biblical law. He insists on a simple world for Christians, a world of few disagreements or intellectual difficulties. But should we expect disagreements in a Christian society? Of course. Through disagreements comes progress. Look at the history of the creeds. Look at the Reformation. Why else did Dr. Luther nail his 95 points of disputation on the church door, if not to elicit formal public debate? People daily hammer out the truth through publishing, experimentation, and market competition. Yet here is Mr. Clapp, horrified by the thought of Christians having to exercise such awesome responsibility. Better to leave such matters to the humanists, he implies. Better to leave it to the 600,000 humanist lawyers in the U.S. Better to "live by the spirit." That way, tyranny will have no Christian opponents. In such a world, Christians will be able to remain culturally

irrelevant, all nicely covered by a thin veneer of humanist respectability. Christianity will have its teeth removed. It will be nourished only by the baptized pabulum of humanism.

This is what *Christianity Today* has been recommending for a generation. I called attention to this practice over a decade ago, in an essay I originally wrote in 1970. ("Drifting Along with *Christianity Today*," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. II, Winter, 1975-76.) Unlike the dog that returns to its vomit, *Christianity Today* never leaves it.

Rushdoony's concluding comments in his chapter on the Second Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.), "The Fallacy of Simplicity," are appropriate:

The council, moreover, was unafraid of complexity and refinement of doctrine. It drew the line sharply, because the alternative was to erase or at least blur the lines between Christianity and humanism. A retreat towards simplicity of faith is a retreat into death. The scorn men reserve for those whose teachings are difficult is no evidence of character but is in their throats the death-rattle of a church and culture. The churches today which draw the line sharply are small and lonely congregations, growing only with difficulty, whereas the modernists and Arminians who erase the line of offense and introduce humanism into the church seem to flourish. But their growth is simply the growth of corruption, and their only light is the phosphorescence of decay (p. 112).

#### The Article *Christianity Today* Rejected

Three years ago, *CT* accepted Prof. John Hannah's offer to write an article on Reconstructionism. Prof. Hannah teaches church history at Dallas Theological Seminary, a dispensational institution. Dr. Hannah is therefore not a Reconstructionist. He is, however, a serious scholar. His article was a fair-minded summary of the basic theology of Reconstructionism. I know this, because he sent a copy to his former student, Pastor Ray Sutton. Pastor Sutton showed it to me.

I wrote a letter to Dr. Hannah telling him that *CT* would reject the piece because it did not discuss the splits and in-fighting of the Reconstructionist movement. A few weeks later, *CT* rejected it. He told Pastor Sutton that the editor had told him that they had hoped for an essay that went into the details about the Reconstructionists' in-fighting. Dr. Hannah refused to rewrite it.

*Christianity Today's* editors waited three years for someone with Dr. Hannah's reputation and academic credentials to submit a hatchet piece. They waited in vain. So they finally assigned the job to Rodney Clapp. (Just for the record, the executive editor's name is Muck. You probably won't believe me, but that really is his name: Terry C. Muck. Muck and Clapp—a Reconstructionist's dream come true.)

### **Who Is Rodney Clapp?**

In 1983, he co-authored the infamous article for *Christianity Today*, "If not Abortion, What Then?" (May 20, 1983), and subtitled, "Why pro-life rhetoric is not enough." It was this article that earned Franky Schaeffer's well-deserved wrath: "*Christianity Today*, by discussing abortion in terms of its impact on 'poor people,' once again was up to the same old evangelical trick of trying to appear fashionable while half-heartedly stating the Christian position. Having their cake and eating it too. Fashionable, because poverty is in while abortion is out. Fashionable, because trying to hector the prolife movement for supposedly too much rhetoric and not enough compassionate action, they became a shill for the secular media version of the prolife movement and its activities." (*Bad News for Modern Man*, Crossway Books, 1984, p. 54.)

Schaeffer then went on to expose the perversity of the article's title and subtitle:

**If Not Slavery, What Then:  
Why Abolitionist Rhetoric Is Not Enough**

**Pro-Jewish Rhetoric Is Not Enough:  
If Not Gassing Jews, What Then?**

Mr. Clapp had demonstrated his commitment to the *CT* line on abortion. The editors therefore trusted him to produce an appropriate piece on Reconstructionism and biblical law. And to be quite honest, he actually got some things correctly.

### **What Mr. Clapp Got Correctly**

He identifies us as followers of Van Til's presuppositional apologetic method. We do take the Bible as the *self-attesting* Word of God which judges the mind of man, and is not judged by it. The truth of the Bible must be presupposed, either implicitly or explicitly, for human thought to be possible. Every thought must be captive to Christ.

We are theonomists. We believe in the continuing validity of biblical law in New Testament times. Only if an Old Testament law is explicitly or implicitly repealed by the New Testament through fulfillment by Christ is an Old Testament requirement no longer judicially binding.

We are postmillennialists. He is correct when he writes: "Reconstructionists are the eschatological equivalents of geologists: human lifetimes are nearly insignificant periods of time in their schema. The long-term perspective is what matters—200, 500, 2,000 years. There are periods of decline and growth, but in the final analysis, the church is winning over the world, just as a glacier ultimately crawls forward." This is precisely what we believe, although all of us recognize that there are "speeding up" periods in history, such as the Protestant Reformation.

He is correct about our hostility to taxpayer-financed schools. We believe that families are primarily responsible for educating children, not the civil government.

He is correct when he cites me as saying that the poverty of the Third World stems from its commitment to socialism and outright demonism. I have said that these societies are cursed. I would now add that the depopulation of central Africa from AIDS is a direct judgment of God on the universal promiscuity of these nations. God will not be mocked.

He is correct when he says that a Reconstructed society would have no prisons, except as holding pre-trial institutions. Prisons as correctional institutions are an invention of paganism, from Egypt to Rome to the present. The Bible imposes restitution, either economically or God's required restitution payment to Himself, the death penalty.

Reconstructionists do deny the validity of violent revolutions, except those along the lines that Calvin spells out in Book IV, Section 20 of his *Institutes*: revolutions led by local civil magistrates against lawless tyrants above. We all agree with Rushdoony, as cited: "Too many churchmen have no sense of time, no sense of history. They expect everything to be accomplished overnight."

He cites Joseph Kikasola, my former classmate at Westminster Seminary, now a professor in the School of Public Policy of Pat Robertson's CBN University: "We do not believe in revolution or in massive and rapid social change. . . . What is important is bottom-up-ism, grassroots-transforming, moral and spiritual change. This will require the salvation of souls and world mission, as well as legislative reform, for we cannot allow our social base and religious liberty to deteriorate in the meantime" (p. 20).

We would agree with Clark Pinnock's assessment that we are "the liberation theologians of the Right." My book, *Liberating Planet Earth* (Dominion Press, 1987), specifically argues that the battle for the souls and minds of men in the Third World is between the false liberation theology of Marxism and the true liberation theology of Christian Reconstruction.

He is partially correct when he writes that "North evidences a glee for polemical bloodshed. . . ." Because I want to become a universally respected elder statesman (whose books then sell like hotcakes, I am promised), and because I am growing mature (read: stodgy), these days I only exercise this taste for blood as an appetizer. The "old Gary North" only appears in the introductions I write to other Reconstructionists' books that I publish. (And in an occasional essay like this one.)

He is undoubtedly correct when he writes that "The Reconstructionists are frequently criticized for not adequately appreciating the historical and cultural distance between nomadic, agricultural Israel and modern technological America." We are criticized this way by *blatant Darwinian relativists who are masquerading as Christians*. I am devoting thousands upon thousands of pages to show just how relevant Old Testament law is in today's economic world. These full-time antinomian skeptics who say such nonsense—post-Mosaic Israel was never nomadic, for example—are trying to run from the law of God, who is utterly hostile to their recom-

mended humanistic policies of socialism, Keynesian interventionism, and liberation theology. Furthermore, they have not done their homework. They have not shown just exactly how God's laws against theft, debt, inflated fiat money, false weights and measures, and similar evils have been annulled by the gospel of Christ. Yet they whine endlessly about "oppressive capitalism." They are simply apologists for humanism's economic whoredom.

Finally, Mr. Clapp is unfortunately correct when he writes:

The Reconstructionists are also a distinct minority in their conviction that Israel was not the only nation God intended to be a theocracy. In a paper criticizing Bahnsen's *Theonomy*, Columbia (S.C.) Graduate School theologian Paul Fowler states the commonly accepted interpretation that "God set Israel apart to be a model of righteousness in an unrighteous world, and numerous judicial laws were given to keep her pure as a nation." Israel was divinely elected and given a special vocation: her theocratic relationship to God was unique, for one time and one nation (p. 22).

This statement would be applauded by Westminster Seminary's Meredith G. Kline and millions of other full-time Christian antinomians throughout history.

Consider what Fowler's line of argumentation necessarily assumes. If Israel was the only nation in history set apart as a theocracy, then in the post-Calvary world, there is no "model of righteousness in an unrighteous world." The cultural world is still at least as corrupt as it was before Calvary, these people universally contend, and now there is no alternative model, for Israel is gone, and we dare not regard Israel's civil laws as binding on us. In short, what these admittedly conventional Christians are arguing is that the testimony of God regarding national righteousness after Christ's resurrection is vastly less clear than before Christ's resurrection. Rewriting a popular hymn according to this theology, we should be singing, "Sin that is greater than all God's grace." This, I contend, is the heart, mind, and soul of the needless and self-imposed cultural impotence and irrelevance of Christians over the last century. This theology delivered the world by default (and sometimes even with active cooperation) into the grasping hands of the secular humanists.

Reconstructionism will enable Christians to take back this world, which is rightfully our inheritance as adopted sons of God. (Gary North, *Inherit the Earth*, Dominion Press, 1987). This is why antinomians despise Reconstructionism. It endangers their implicit alliance with the humanists.

#### What Mr. Clapp Got Incorrectly

Mr. Clapp writes that in the Reconstructionist view, "The family will be ordered in a patriarchal fashion" (p. 19). If Mr. Clapp means the patriarchal family like Abraham's, who gave Sarah's tent

to Isaac when Isaac married (Gen. 24:67), and who then left and journeyed east to remarry and establish a new family (Gen. 25:1-4), giving all that he owned to Isaac (Gen. 25:5), fine. But Mr. Clapp does not make the necessary distinction between the biblical patriarchal family and the Armenian patriarchal family, which was a clan family, not a covenant family. So far as I know, all of the younger Reconstructionists reject Mr. Rushdoony's Armenian (note: not Arminian) view of the patriarchal family (p. 19). This is a major area of disagreement within the Reconstructionist camp. The "Tyler Group," as well as Greg Bahnsen, holds to the biblical nuclear family, where the departure of sons and daughters to set up new covenantal family units (Gen. 2:24) establishes a clear covenantal break with parents. No man will tolerate living in his father's household with his wife and children unless forced to by custom or economics.

Another Armenian church practice that the article refers to is the practice of sacrificing animals at the door of the church, which Rushdoony discusses in *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 782-3. Unquestionably, we in Tyler would utterly reject such a practice as a heretical throwback to Old Testament "shadows" that were completely fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Christ.

It is our rejection of what Mr. Clapp correctly identifies as Rushdoony's "Armenian Connection" that ultimately led to the split in the Reconstructionist camp: Tyler vs. Vallecito.

#### The Tyler-Vallecito Split

Mr. Clapp has hung out some dirty wash—which is unquestionably dirty, and which he had no obligation to suppress—so I choose to respond. The time has come to stop covering up what really is going on.

Mr. Clapp pieced together a garbled version of the story of the split between Rushdoony and Tyler. He says that as the editor of Chalcedon's *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I submitted someone's article for publication which dealt with the meaning of the Passover blood, and that Rushdoony rejected it because it "reeked of a fertility cult." Mr. Clapp correctly reports that Mr. Rushdoony and I have not spoken to each other since then. If this story were true, then the reader could safely conclude that the Reconstructionist leadership borders on the egomaniacal, and should not be taken seriously.

This version Mr. Clapp reports is incorrect. I was the sole editor of the *Journal*. Mr. Rushdoony always gave me a nearly free hand regarding what went into it. Here is what really happened. I submitted to his *Chalcedon Report* my monthly essay. It relied on an insight regarding biblical symbolism in James Jordan's 1981 Westminster Seminary master's thesis. My essay discussed the background symbolism of the Passover. Rushdoony sent it back and insisted that I rewrite it, saying that it was heretical, and even worse. I refused to rewrite it. I did



not insist that he publish it; I just refused to rewrite it. He had rejected one other article of mine in the past, so I was not too concerned.

He refused to let the matter rest. He challenged me to make my theological position clear, to prove to him that it was not heretical. I then wrote an extended defense. He still said it was heretical. He then said that Jordan and I would have to recant in writing, and also agree in writing never to publish our essays in any form, before he would agree that we were no longer heretical. When we refused, he submitted a protest to our church elders informing them of our heresy, and asking them to discipline us both. When the Church sent the essay (and my extended defense of it) to other theologians, including Westminster Seminary's John Frame, they replied that it was somewhat peculiar but certainly not heretical.

The then elders asked Mr. Rushdoony to submit formal charges against us regarding the specific heresy involved. He refused. They also reminded him that he was not a member of any local congregation, and therefore was not subject to discipline himself should his accusations prove false. He blew up when challenged on this. He then publicly fired me and Jordan from Chalcedon, announcing our dismissal without explanation in the *Chalcedon Report*. This surprised Jordan, since he was not even aware he was employed by Chalcedon, not having received money from Chalcedon in years.

My full essay, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," was later published in Geneva Ministries' *Christianity and Civilization*, No. 4 (1985), and sank without a trace. I have never received a single letter about it, pro or con. The "crisis of the essay" was clearly a tempest in a teapot. But it points to the underlying tension which Mr. Clapp refers to.

What is this disagreement all about? It is Tyler's disagreement with Mr. Rushdoony about the requirement of local church attendance and taking the Lord's Supper. We think all Christians need to do both. The Tyler church practices weekly communion. In contrast, Mr. Rushdoony has refused to take Holy Communion for well over a decade, nor does he belong to or attend a local church. This underlying difference of opinion finally exploded over a totally peripheral issue.

*Christianity Today's* readers are being led to believe that the split between me and Mr. Rushdoony is over a trifle. The conflict over the article was indeed a trifle. Being accused before your elders of being a heretic is not a trifle.

Several Christians have attempted to intercede over the years. I have agreed to allow each of them to try. Mr. Rushdoony always refuses to meet. Lawyer John Whitehead got Mr. Rushdoony to agree to a meeting with him and me in Washington, D.C. in 1981. I flew in; we were all attending a conference. I walked into the room, sat down by Whitehead, and told him I would meet with Mr. Rushdoony immediately after the conference meeting. Whitehead walked over to set up the meeting. Mr. Rushdoony then refused to meet. I sent White-

head back to try again. He returned, and told me, "He's stubborn. He refuses to meet." Rushdoony has never spoken to me, Jim Jordan, or Pastor Ray Sutton since, though he and I are in the same room about three times a year at meetings. Charles Simpson also tried to intervene, with no success.

Do you want to try? Be my guest. Just call Mr. Rushdoony in Vallecito, California, and set up a meeting. I will meet with you and him and anyone else. I hope that Jim Jordan also is asked to attend; I will pay his way. He successfully defended his thesis before his faculty committee at Westminster (who never raised an objection to his theory regarding Passover); I think he will present an equally effective defense today. I would also hope that you (and all other potential mediators) would first read the disputed essay. I think you will then understand that something a lot deeper must have motivated Mr. Rushdoony to send me and Jim Jordan the ultimatum.

As the sage once said, "So you think you've got in-law problems!" Have your in-law problems been published in *Christianity Today*? And a garbled version at that?

I would have preferred to avoid going public about all this, but if Rushdoony and I are going to be pilloried by *Christianity Today* over our mutual dirty washing, let readers at least be clear about the nature of the gunk on the material.

### Other Errors

Mr. Clapp lists three key doctrines of the Reconstructionists: presuppositional apologetics, biblical law, and postmillennialism. He left out one crucial doctrine: predestination. These were the four that David Chilton and I listed in our essay, "Apologetics and Strategy" in *Christianity and Civilization* 3 (1983). Since late 1985, those of us at Tyler would add to that a fifth doctrine: the five-point covenant structure. Mr. Clapp's failure to consider predestination led him to another error.

He continually writes as though Reconstructionists are attempting to stage a kind of *coup d'état*. "If D. L. Moody thought the world was a sinking ship from which souls should be rescued, the Reconstructionists want to commandeer the ship, repair it, and sail toward their own destination" (p. 19). What neither Mr. Clapp nor any of our premillennial and amillennial critics can get straight is a very simple fact: *postmillennialism teaches eventual widespread salvation*. In other words, Christians (let alone Reconstructionists) do not have to "commandeer" anything by force. People someday will voluntarily begin to adopt Reconstructionist viewpoints. Now, by "voluntarily," I mean "by means of the irresistible leading of the Holy Spirit." We Reconstructionists do not rely on human compulsion to override the intellectual objections of our opponents; we assume that God will bring His people to the proper view—Reconstructionism—in the same way that He converts sinners: by irresistible grace.

Because Arminians and eschatological pessimists do not believe that God has foreordained the exter-

nal triumph of Christians in history, they immediately jump to an illegitimate conclusion when they hear the message of theonomic postmillennialism. "You people would impose your view of society by force. You're out to set up an elitist, top-down theocracy." This totally misreads what we are saying. We believe that God's universe is always a theocracy: God (*theos*) rules (*kratos*). He will progressively bring this world's institutions into greater conformity to His required biblical models. This process of progressive social sanctification will parallel progressive personal sanctification. The theocratic republic we believe in will be the product of centuries of godly labor, preaching, and *self-government under God*. It cannot be the work of an elitist *coup d'état*. We are preaching the dominion religion, not humanism's power religion.

Yet our critics refuse to listen. They have Arminian and pessimillennial blinders welded to their faces. It does not matter how many times we insist that we believe in theocracy, not ecclesiocracy; it does not matter how many times we tell people that God, not human institutions, is the sole lawful agent of compulsion over men's minds; it does not matter how many times we insist that establishing God's kingdom is a bottom-up process, not a top-down process: we are told that we are preaching the abolition of freedom and religion by human compulsion. They simply cannot think in terms of our categories: predestination (providence), covenant, biblical law, presuppositionalism, and postmillennialism. They cannot imagine the worldwide triumph of the gospel by peaceful means. So they misrepresent us.

He also writes: "In the Reconstructed society, there will be no federal government" (p. 19). This is just plain nonsense. A vastly reduced federal government, yes. This will require a Christian era of peace, which is what we predict. Mr. Clapp simply invented this little doozy about no federal government. It sounds crazy. It *is* crazy. Here is Rodney Clapp's revision of the ninth commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor, unless he is a Reconstructionist." It matches his revision of the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill, except (possibly) infants in the womb."

### Scalpel and Hatchet

Mr. Clapp correctly observes that we Reconstructionists are followers of Cornelius Van Til. No one in the history of Christian philosophy has ever emphasized the personalism of the universe more than Van Til. He begins with two fundamental doctrines: the self-contained ontological Trinity, and the doctrine of creation. Thus, throughout his writings, he argues that all facts are God-created and therefore God-interpreted facts.

I begin my economic commentary of the Bible, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (Institute for Christian Economics, 1982) with a chapter titled "Cosmic Personalism." Yet Mr. Clapp ends his article with these words:

Is God really nothing more than the abstract, impersonal dispenser of equally abstract and impersonal laws? And is the objective of the Christian church, and its hope for the world, to concentrate on the Law itself—or to come to know the Lawgiver? (p. 23).

Here is the major Christian heresy of this century: *hostility to biblical law*. Here is ingrained hostility to God's law so intense that the writer self-consciously remakes the Reconstructionists' call for respect for God and His law into an appeal to an "abstract, impersonal dispenser of equally abstract and impersonal laws." This radical, deliberate misreading of our view is the product of hate. Rodney Clapp hates God's law. He thinks that God's law is evil, and that anyone who upholds it is a public menace. He hates God's law, but of course He loves God. He says of God, in effect: "I hate the sin but I love the sinner." There are millions more just like him. They love sweet Jesus, but not that nasty Old Testament God, who fortunately is in the far reaches of the universe, living on permanent disability payments. They think of the Old Testament as God's Word (emeritus).

God's law is just too harsh, and even worse, too complicated: "Reconstructed society would appear to require a second encyclopedic Talmud, and to foster hordes of 'scribes' with competing judgments, in a society of people who are locked on the law's fine points rather than living by its spirit" (p. 23). Spirit, man, Spirit: feel that Spirit! Especially in the abortionist's office. The scalpel or the hatchet: one is as good as the other, as long as the job gets done.

*Christianity Today* long ago sold its birthright for a mess of trendiness. Its motto is simple: "trendier than thou." Rodney Clapp's hatchet job on the Christian Reconstructionists is simply the latest in a long line of frivolous attacks on those Christians who believe that it is the Bible, rather than the latest essay on the Op Ed page of the *New York Times*, that should be the authoritative guideline for Christian activism.

Abstract law of an abstract God? Has Rodney Clapp ever read the 119th Psalm? Has his editor ever read it? How long will such mockery—or Muckery!—of God and His law go on?

To answer my rhetorical question: it will not go on much longer. AIDS, if nothing else, will bring such humanistic fashionableness to its well-deserved end. The judgment of God has sneaked up on this civilization from behind.

Are Reconstructionists concerned about what *Christianity Today* and Rodney Clapp have done to us in the eyes of today's neo-evangelical culture? Hardly. We're far more concerned about the cultural impact of AIDS than the cultural impact of Clapp.

P.S. I did like the cartoons and the cover, except that the cartoon of Bahnsen made him a lot better looking than he really is.