

THE Geneva Review

No. 18

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March, 1985

THE "RECONSTRUCTIONIST MOVEMENT"

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Last month the Institute for Christian Economics published an essay by Gary North entitled "The Sabbath Millennium." In this essay, Dr. North suggested that the year 2000 may be a significant turning point in human history, since it is the beginning of the seventh millennium of creation. Dr. North drew on a section of my book, *The Law of the Covenant*, to give support to this idea, but he carefully pointed out that I myself had not advanced the idea that the year 2000 is important. Rather, Dr. North was making an application of his own from my study of the 3rd/7th day pattern in Scripture.

AH the same, I have received correspondence and phone calls asking if in fact I hold some position on this. I do not. I am not persuaded that Dr. North has drawn a necessary inference from what I wrote. After all, we might just as easily argue that Jesus was raised on the 3rd day, which was at the beginning of the 5th millennium after creation. That would mean each "day" is 2000 years long, not 1000. Thus, the 7th day would correspond to the 13th and 14th millennia after creation, and would begin around the year A.D. 8000. I don't, by the way, advocate that position either.

It should be noted that all Dr. North offered was a suggestion, not a position. Moreover, the notion that A.D. 2000 is prophetically important is not a new idea, though I don't think it can be said that a majority of scholars have ever held it. Dr. Francis Nigel Lee, who holds to an A.D. 2000 position, delivered a series of lectures on this subject at Geneva Study Center a few years ago. The tapes of these lectures are available (7 tapes entitled "The Fulfillment of Prophecy in our Time," \$21.00, plus \$2.00 postage, from Geneva Ministries). Dr. Lee surveys the history of this position, and gives arguments for it. A full study of this would make an interesting Master's thesis.

Don't get me wrong, though. Given human nature, the turn of a millennium is always a period of crisis. Also, given the state of affairs in the U. S. S. R., the revival of orthodox Christianity worldwide, and other factors, things might make a significant turn around the year 2000. Personally, I'd love to live on into a period of Christian triumph. I believe what Gary North wrote in his most recent *Remnant Review* about the comparative strengths of the USA and the USSR, and I hope we are not taken over. I hope there is a worldwide revival in our day, and that Russia becomes a Christian nation once again. I hope America does, too.

All the same, I remain unconvinced of the idea that the Bible gives us any specific date-setting clues as regards the outworking of the New Covenant, either in general or concerning the year 2000 in particular. This affair, however, provides me an opportunity to discuss the whole matter of Christian Reconstruction and what is perceived as a "movement." It is easy to get the impression that "Theonomy" and "Christian Reconstructionism" are a "movement," and I suppose to some extent that impression is correct. There are dangers in thinking that way, however, and I wish to address

them in this paper.

Some of those who call or write apparently do not realize that Geneva Ministries and the Institute for Christian Economics are two separate and distinct organizations. Dr. North is an active member of Westminster Presbyterian Church, which sponsors Geneva Ministries, and Dr. North occasionally writes for Geneva. And, those of us who work at Geneva Ministries occasionally write for Dr. North's publications—indeed, ICE published my first book. Thus, we have a fairly close working relationship, but we are not the same. Dr. North is not somehow "responsible" for positions we take here at Geneva, nor are we "responsible" for his writings.

Some people, when they discover that Christian Reconstructionists disagree among themselves on certain points, are distressed. That is because they are thinking that Christian Reconstructionism is some kind of terribly important "movement," which desperately ought to "present a united front." Such is not the case, nor has it ever been the case. Actually, "Christian Reconstructionist" is a convenient term to use to describe men whose writings agree in presenting a certain theological perspective. These men do not live in the same places, nor do they agree on every point. What they have in common is a belief in three specific manifestations of the sovereignty of God: a triumphant eschatology (post-millennialism), grounded in a presuppositional philosophy (articulated best by Van Til), and guided by Biblical law ("theonomy").

Now, just because I believe these three things, and I have written on them, does not mean I think they are the most important three things needed by the Christian faith today. In fact, I do not think so. I think they are very important, but not most important. There are more important things, and I have disagreements, sometimes strong ones, with some other Reconstructionists over those more important things.

Moreover, the fact that all of us are committed to the Reconstructionist distinctive does not mean we agree on every application of those distinctive. There are a number of items of debate among Reconstructionists. It is not "airing dirty linen" to call attention to these. On the contrary, it shows that we are, after all, mere men, and we don't have insight into everything. We are not some sect which claims to have all the answers, nor do we follow some guru who has spoken definitively on every issue.

History of "Reconstructionism"

The term "Christian Reconstruction" was coined by Gary North for use with the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, which began publication in 1974. At that time, North, Rushdoony, and Bahnsen were all located in the Los Angeles area, and associated with Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation. Thus, there is a sense in which there was a "Reconstructionist movement" afoot at that time. Since then, these three men have gone their separate ways, making career decisions which led Bahnsen into a pastorate in the Los Angeles area, Rushdoony to a study center retreat in the mountains of northern California, and North to various enterprises located in Fort Worth and Tyler, Texas.

Additionally, since then other persons have begun writing and speaking for the principles of Christian Reconstruction. These include, just for example, Joseph Morecraft and the Chalcedon Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, the American Vision group also in Atlanta, James Jordan and Ray Sutton of Geneva Ministries in Tyler, as well as others. With all of this growth and geographical dispersal have come differing emphases, and differing opinions on some topics. Thus, it would be better not to think of a "Christian Reconstruction Movement" any longer, but rather to take each writer or speaker on his own, as a spokesman for his own viewpoints.

Dietary Laws

Let me mention several areas of disagreement in the "Reconstructionist camp." The first of these is the place of the Old Covenant dietary regulations. R. J. Rushdoony has advanced the position that the food laws of Leviticus 11 are no longer binding as sacraments, but they are still "mandatory" (his word) as health rules under the sixth commandment (*Law and Society*, p. 701f.). He has advocated this position in the *Chalcedon Report*, and in his "From the Easy Chair" tapes. In conversation with me in the past, Mr. Rushdoony has said that under the principle of sacrifice, he will eat "unclean" foods rather than give offense to a hostess, but he will never eat them on his own initiative.

Now, to my knowledge Mr. Rushdoony is alone among major Reconstructionist figures in advocating this position. In disagreement with him are such other Reconstructionists as Gary North, Greg Bahnsen, Robert L. Thoburn, Francis Nigel Lee, Joseph C. Morecraft III, Gary DeMar, Ray R. Sutton, and myself. These others hold one of two other positions. The first alternative is to hold that the food laws have absolutely nothing practical to say to us today. They were exclusively symbolic and sacramental in character, and in the New Covenant, they have no function. Some hold this position.

The other position, which I personally hold, is that these laws were given for sacramental/symbolic reasons, and these are no longer binding; but that the ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant were healthy for the people then, and still are of general value to us as guidelines and pointers today. Medical science confirms that a steady diet of pork is not as healthy as a steady diet of beef and chicken, for instance. Circumcision is generally regarded as a wise practice, for reasons of health. Thus, though we occasionally have pork chops and ham at my house, we don't eat pork regularly. The other ceremonial laws, while not binding on us as such, also give good guidelines for healthy living. (For more on this, see my tape series, "Food and Faith," 15 tapes, \$45.00 plus \$3.00 for postage, from Geneva Ministries.)

The 30-Year Mortgage

A second area of debate has to do with debt. Some Reconstructionist writers believe the Bible forbids going into any kind of debt for a period of more than six years, and they see the 30-year mortgage as sinful. An example is "What about the 30 Year Mortgage?" in the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* X:2, 1985, edited by Rushdoony and Scott. This strident and anonymous essay ends with the statement "GOD'S LAW OR CHAOS? THE CHOICE IS YOURS!" The writer cites Deuteronomy 15, but out of context. The law only states that interest-free charity loans made to fellow believers are to be cancelled in the sabbath year. There is nothing about business loans.

Debt is a complicated issue. Is it debt when a company sells shares of stock? What are the differences between business loans and charity loans? And what about buying "on time"? Is this debt, or is it simply a matter of "leasing to-ward purchase"? The definitive study of this whole matter has yet to be written. Gary North has been working on it off and on for a number of years. He can tell you it is not an easy issue.

Looking, for instance, at the 30 year mortgage, the fact is that the bank takes virtually no risk in "loaning" me the money for my house. If I default, they take possession and can sell it. I am not putting them at risk. And what is my risk? If I have to sell it, I get some money back. So, how is this debt? The bank makes money, I get a house (one piece at a time), and everybody is happy. I am no one's slave.

If I default, I have been living in the house for x number of years. How is this different from renting? In fact, I have to live somewhere. I either rent for \$xxx per month, and have nothing after 30 years, or I buy for slightly more than \$xxx per month, and acquire property.

That does not mean that the 30 year mortgage is ideal, but if it seems the best of the options God is currently making available to me, there is no explicit Biblical reason not to take advantage of it.

Use of Statist Services

A third area is the use of government welfare and other services. I am opposed to state welfare in principle, and when we Christians take over, welfare will go back to the Churches where it belongs. We have not taken over yet, however. I heard a story recently, told me by a Reconstructionist leader, of a woman who got so inspired at a Christian political rally that she stood up and said, "I'm tired of trusting in Caesar; I'm trusting Christ and His Church from now on," and she ripped up her welfare check and food stamps in front of the crowd.

That's fine, and probably was what this particular woman needed to do at this particular time in her life. But, what if God has simply not given her church the resources to take care of her? Does she now have God in a full Nelson lock? Is God obliged to take care of her in the way she thinks best?

I would also refuse to take money from the State (with a capital "s," the state as false god), but I would not refuse to take it from God. I confess that God controls the state, that the state is nothing before Him, and if He wants to provide for me through the state, I may as well take advantage of it.

The argument used by political libertarians and conservatives is that if I take money from the state, I will be unable to resist the state at other points. True, if it is ultimately the state I am looking to. But it is not. The Egyptian state provided for Israel for a couple of centuries, but once they were free from Egypt, they were able to set up a proper theocracy. Most of the Israelites proved to be statist after they were delivered, and they wanted to go back on Egyptian welfare – but this was not true of all of them. It is a matter of faith.

I have known conservatives (including some Reconstructionists) who avoid as much as possible the use of public libraries, public transportation, etc. because they will not make use of anything provided by the state. Such people would find it hard to live in the USSR, where the state provides everything. Nor could they have lived in Egypt or Babylon. This was not, I believe, the attitude of Joseph or Daniel. Though they lived under statist systems, they took advantage of what God provided for them, awaiting a time of reformation. They were not compromised, for they realized that it all came from God, not from the state. Thus, they did not refuse state-sponsored higher education (Daniel 1), the state-sponsored grain dole (Genesis 41 and 47), etc.

I think that this whole question boils down to whether or not we may eat meat sacrificed to idols. In fact, the idols were killed by Christ, and are dead. They are nothing. The strong believer is, thus, able with a clear conscience to eat meat sacrificed to idols. The weak and superstitious believer fears to eat such meat. Similarly, the weak and superstitious Christian thinks that if he makes use of social security, or food stamps, he is not being faithful to Christ. But in fact, the idol, the state, is dead. The state is nothing. When we realize that, we are able to pay our taxes, and we are able to make use of what God provides for us.

Of course, Christians should avoid running to the state or to any charity, but extreme situations do come up. A man is seriously injured on the job, but has no insurance. It will take him a year to recover. The church simply has no money to provide for his family for a full year. So, the church permits, even advises, him to take advantage of government relief, and use food stamps. (Christians should always seek the advice of their church rulers in such situations.)

Or, a child is very seriously injured, and the family has no insurance. The church does not have the thousands of dollars needed to take care of the situation, and thus advises the family to seek help through secular, even state, charities.

Before I became a pastor, it was easy for me to take a harder line on this type of thing, but in the day to day life of the Church, God has brought me face to face with reality. Part of the tribulation we must undergo as a result of the Church's failures is that we are forced to make use of non-Christian relief agencies sometimes. But we can always keep in mind that ultimately it is the Lord who provides the relief.

Not all Reconstructionists agree with me on this. Some reason that since the Bible condemns statism, we should infer that it is wrong for individual Christians willingly to go along with a statist system. I think, rather, that Christians should take full advantage of whatever proper opportunities God provides through the present statist system, while working to replace it with a Biblical theocracy.

Part of the issue here is the means of reconstruction. Some believe that the state will be reformed when enough individuals refuse the dole. I personally do not think so. I think that such a line of thinking betrays the influence of American democratic individualism. The reformations which we see in the Bible, during the period of the kings for instance, did not happen this way. The Bible shows us that social influence flows primarily from the top down, with some feedback from the bottom up. This is the immediate implication of federal/covenant theology, and it is seen everywhere in Scripture. The history of Israel is not a history of mass movements, but of judges, high priests, prophets, and kings—a history of leaders, of covenant heads. I should say that the state will be reformed when the leaders of Church and state begin to function properly, and the present welfarist system is dismantled and overcome. Gradually the Church will grow stronger, and will provide options and alternatives. In other words, it is not wrong to send your children to a public school, if that is your only choice; but it is better to send them to a Christian school if it is at all possible.

Other Areas of Debate

A fourth area of debate is the Church. A while back, at a Reconstructionist meeting held in another part of the country, a chart was displayed showing all the various areas of life which need Christian reconstruction. Conspicuously absent from both the chart and the presentation was the Church! Partially this was because the people involved have a relatively low, Americanized view of the Church. Partially, though, it was because Reconstructionists differ among themselves on the subject of church government, jurisdiction, liturgy, and paedocommunion.

A fifth area of debate is the sabbath. Some Reconstructionists believe in a strict sabbath, some in a looser one. Some believe in a "pick your own day" sabbath, others in a church-regulated Lord's Day sabbath. A sixth area of debate is whether the Bible prescribes a poll tax as the only proper way to finance the state (on this, see my essay on "State Financing in the Bible," in *The Law of the Covenant*).

To take one final example (though there are more that could be mentioned): Some Reconstructionists believe that the Bible teaches three separate tithes, while others believe the Bible teaches only one tithe. Some believe that the tithe must go to the Church under normal circumstances, and others believe that the individual may give the tithe wherever he pleases. (This is a debate over whether God has appointed elders or individuals to administer the use of tithe money. See my essay on tithing in *The Law of the Covenant* for some of the ins and outs of the debate.)

Agendas

A slightly different, and more serious, area of difference among Reconstructionists is the question of agendas. Each of us, as human beings, has an agenda. We have priorities. Some things are more important than others. There are a variety of answers to the question, "What do you think are the most important things needed by the Christian faith today?"

Reconstructionists differ on what they think are the most important things. That is to say, they differ as to agenda. Thus, I am sometimes unhappy when a fellow Reconstructionist makes a big deal out of something I happen to regard as unimportant, and I am sometimes disappointed when another Reconstructionist does not support my agenda as fully as I wish. But that is the way it is. The problem only becomes acute when a person begins to play god, and tries to force his own agenda and priorities on everyone else.

We should also distinguish between personal and ideological agendas. A man might believe, for instance, that the reconstruction of the Church is the most important thing needed today (ideological agenda), but he might believe he personally is called to work in the area of political activism (personal agenda). There are not just differing personal agendas among Reconstructionists; there are also differing ideological agendas.

So, let me declare my agenda; and let me assure you, courteous reader, that not all Reconstructionists will agree with my priorities. "Mr. Jordan, what do you think are the most essential and pressing matters before the Christian faith today?" Well, I think they are three: Church government, liturgy, and paedocommunion.

Church government: The American way is to regard the Church as a club where people go for Bible studies, and the only government is the state. This is not the Biblical view of the Church. In my opinion, the Church must once again become a true government. Churches must recognize one another's orders and jurisdictions. Discipline measured out by one church must be respected by others, as it was in the early days of Christendom. Church elders must learn to form courts, hold trials, and rule. We need a revival of canon law. In other words, the Church must become God's alternative government to the secular state.

Other Reconstructionists do not agree with this. I know personally of three different occasions in the last five years, when persons were put under proper discipline by a Church whose leaders are committed to Reconstructionist ideals. In all three cases, these persons phoned other Reconstructionist leaders, who gave them assurance that they need not heed the voice of the Church. Without going into further detail, I think you can see from this that not all Reconstructionists hold the government of the Church in high esteem. The tendency is to side with people who spout Reconstructionist ideals rather than with the voice of the Church, when these come into conflict. Thus, the question comes, which is more important: ideology or the Church? I answer firmly: the Church. To put an ideological "movement" before the Church is cultic, not catholic.

Second, I regard the rebirth of full liturgical worship as equally important as Church government. The Bible has quite a lot to say about worship, and worship is the central activity of human life. Presbyterians (of which I am one) have a lot to say in theory about following Biblical patterns of worship, but they have done little to implement it. There needs to be a return to congregational participation in worship.

In addition to the fact that God requires it, corporate worship, like army drill, creates community and builds militancy. Until the Church has it, she will be crippled. Again, while I do not hold with exclusive psalmody, the fact is that God has written for us hymns that He wants to hear us sing. Not just read, and not just read responsively, but sung. And not just sung in paraphrases, but chanted according to His literal text. In my opinion, the restoration of worship and psalmody is more important than convincing people intellectually of the truths of presuppositionalism, postmillennialism, and theonomy. By itself, convincing people of the Reconstructionist distinctive produces a few scholars and individualistic activists. Chanting the psalms, in the very words of Scripture, produces an army.

I could go on, but let me move to the third, equally impor-

tant, item at the top of my agenda: **paedocommunion**. Which is more important: Christian schools or **paedocommunion**? I answer without hesitation: **Paedocommunion** is 100 times more important than Christian schools. Other **Reconstructionists** would not agree with this. In my opinion, however, **paedocommunion** breaks down the last vestiges of Medieval works-salvation, and thus is supremely important to reinstitute in the Church today. In my opinion, the practice of **paedocommunion** is the -supremely important test of presuppositionalism. I shall say no more, since I have written on this at length elsewhere. (Papers on this subject by Ray Sutton and myself are available from Geneva Ministries for a contribution.)

So, I have confessed what I regard as top priority for the Church and the faith today. Neither the family nor the school can stand against the state, but the Church can. A strong Church has always been the preeminent bulwark against tyranny, and is the fountain of all culture and civilization, Judgment begins at the house of God.

Now, not all **Reconstructionists** would agree with my agenda. Some would totally disagree with these three items. Others would agree with me, but would prioritize other matters. That's the way it is. Because none of us is omniscient, we must be tolerant of the agendas of others, and not try to undermine them.

Conclusion: Methodologies

During my earlier years as a "Christian conservative: before I became a **Reconstructionist**, I used to hear quite a lot about how dedicated and aggressive the communists are. A book by Douglas Hyde, *Dedication and Leadership*, was usually referred to in this connection. Hyde talks about how super-committed and militant communists are. They go out on the street and confront people. They leave literature everywhere they go. They rise up early and go to bed late working for the party. . . . They bury their families for the sake of their fanaticism.

Well, I don't think we have much to learn from the communists, and here is another place where (I'm sorry but) I have to differ from some of my **Reconstructionist** brethren. The fact that the demonized communist movement has been able to accomplish seemingly great things in the last 100 years is no reason to imitate them. Christian faith is not the same thing as ideological fanaticism. It does not look the same. It does not act the same. It does not produce the same results.

Frankly, I'm tired of hearing about Marx, Lenin, communist cell groups, communist tactics, and all the rest. I don't think that Biblical Christians have anything at all to

learn from it. Let the John Birch Society imitate the communists; Christians have Someone better to imitate. (I don't wish to condemn Hyde's book, for it has real value, but I think it should be read critically.)

It is sometimes pointed out that communism parodies the Christian faith in that it has a vision of the future, and at one level, there is truth in that observation. More basically, however, the communist does not have a vision of the future; he only seems to have one. He prioritizes the present: the present party line, the present meeting. He sacrifices the future: his family. That is why communist activists burn out. That is why communist takeovers do not last, and degenerate into standard, garden-variety tyrannies. The Church builds more slowly, but she builds more surely. Let us not substitute short-range fanatical idealism for the long-range, wholistic vision of a truly Christian world.

Communism has never taken over any country in the entire history of the world. If you don't believe me, just read the ideology of communism, and compare it with the practice of so-called communist countries. Communist revolutions do not produce communist countries; they produce tyrannies. Why should we imitate these obvious failures?

Your four-year-old takes 45 minutes to make a castle out of wooden blocks. In two seconds, his two-year-old brother tears it down with a sweep of the hand. Which action is more impressive? Some people are impressed with the ability of communist parties to mobilize people for destruction. I am not. I am impressed with the historic Christian Church. We have a lot to learn from the early Church, from Byzantium, from the early Middle Ages, and from the Reformation. We have absolutely nothing positive to learn from communism. Sadly, modern Christian activists who are impressed by communist "dedication," generally know little or nothing about Byzantium or the early Middle Ages, the time when the Church made her most significant and long-lasting impression on culture and civilization. Hopefully this will change.

Christians ought not to feel guilty because they don't act like communists. Christian militancy is different. The Christian who learns to live a sacrificial lifestyle before his wife and friends, who learns to be a good father to his children, is learning to be the kind of man God will put into a position of leadership.

In this essay I have sought to make a bit clearer what "Reconstructionism" is, and what it is not. I realize that I can only speak for myself, but I hope that what I have written will be of help to you, the reader, as you come in contact with the differing viewpoints sometimes found among men committed to a like faith.

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