

WESTMINSTER'S CONFESSION

The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy

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WESTMINSTER'S CONFESSION
The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy

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Tyler, Texas

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This book is dedicated to the most accomplished instructor I had at Westminster Seminary,

Norman Shepherd

who combined Machen's eschatological optimism, Van Til's presuppositional apologetic, and Murray's precise theological language. He was a loyal defender of Westminster's original confession.

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It was Dr. Van Til who shocked the new students into doctrinal awareness. No fact is unrelated to the God of the Bible, he declared. All truth, to be known aright, must be seen in the light of the revelation of the Creator and Redeemer. By God's grace we, his redeemed creatures, think God's thoughts after him. Christianity is not probably true; it is truth. All merely human philosophy and science is challenged and found wanting. God upholds all things, including unbelievers. The believer and the unbeliever have everything in common metaphysically, but epistemologically they have nothing in common. In our proclamation of God and his grace, we present the triune God as the sole ground for all our salvation from sin, for all of life, and for all our thinking.¹

If it is indeed not our King's intention for the civil authority to enforce the first great commandment, then among the five alternatives Bahnsen offers as possible standards for civil law, natural revelation as indeed "a sin-obscured edition of the same law of God" "suppressed in unrighteousness by the sinner" is that to which we must appeal. . . .

William S. Barker²

1. *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936-1886*, edited by Charles G. Dennison (Philadelphia: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), p. 324.

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

FOREWORD

One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: 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.

Abraham Kuyper (1897)¹

Calvinism is in crisis. It is shrinking, both numerically and in terms of its cultural impact, and has been since 1660, when King Charles II returned to the English throne. How did this happen? Calvinism was once a dominant force socially in Northern Europe, not because there were many Calvinists, but because they were influential out of proportion to their numbers in charitable works, scholarship, science, and business. Yet Calvinism today is unknown to most people. Why? There are many reasons, but the most significant one that Calvinists could and should have prevented was this: the intellectual and spirit-

1. Cited by John Herdrik de Vries, "Biographical Note," Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1931), p. iii.

ual leaders within Calvinism have, for over three centuries, voluntarily surrendered the culturally relevant aspects of Calvinism by accepting the dominant humanist worldview that has assailed the Church. Eventually, Calvinists even abandoned the idea of *Christendom* – one of John Calvin's fundamental assumptions: the precious legacy of Augustine, the post-Nicene Church fathers, and the early monastic orders.² Meanwhile, the humanists robbed them blind.

From 1660 to 1789, the humanists took the fundamental doctrines of Calvinism and secularized them. They stripped these ideas of all biblical theological content and produced a new man-centered worldview, which became dominant in the West. *First*, they took the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and made it the sovereignty of nature and nature's finest product, autonomous man. The twin idols of nature and history again became the idols of man, as they have been throughout pagan history.³ *Second*, the Calvinist doctrine of the priesthood of all believers became the foundation of modern democratic theory, beginning with the Levellers in the Cromwell period. Calvinism's concept of the right of the laity to vote in church elections became the model for politics. *Third*, the Calvinist view of God's law and man's God-given ability to recognize it and apply it to this world became the foundation of modern science and technology. *Fourth*, Calvinism's doctrine of God's sanctions in history – blessings and cursings – became, in the writings of the anti-Calvinist Scottish common sense rationalists,⁴ the concept of the impersonal market forces of supply and demand. *Fifth*, Puritanism's unique concept of the triumph

2. Roland Bainton, *Christendom*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), I, ch. 5.

3. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, [1983] 1990), p. 11.

4. The right wing of the Enlightenment.

of the kingdom of God in history became the foundation of the Enlightenment idea of mankind's inevitable progress.

Importing Alien Goods

What is even more remarkable is that once secularized, these doctrines were then re-imported by Calvinist intellectual leaders, and were baptized by them, but without re-establishing their original biblical and covenantal foundations. These alien categories – based on the doctrine of autonomous nature and autonomous man – were then reported by Calvinist leaders to be in full accord with the fundamentals of Calvinism. There is no better example of this baptism of alien intellectual categories than late-Puritan theologian Cotton Mather's praise of Newton's unitarian and Deistic concept of scientific law. Mather titled his book, *The Christian Philosopher* (1721).

So, the initial strength of the West's humanist worldview after 1660 was based on stolen goods. Calvinism re-imported these goods and thereby lost control over its own intellectual destiny. Steadily, Calvinist intellectuals drank from unitarianism's temporarily overflowing well (natural law theory) in order to refresh themselves. But that well steadily became polluted as the covenant-breaking presuppositions of autonomous man began to erode the foundations of humanist civilization. The unitarian humanists steadily ran out of stolen Calvinist wealth to deposit in their moral and epistemological bank accounts. Shifting metaphors, the Calvinists found themselves trapped on board an alien ship. They had adopted the categories of humanism as universal, natural, and religiously neutral categories. This humanist ship began to sink. But they could not abandon humanism's sinking ship without leaving everything but the Bible behind. Shifting metaphors again, they now lived as members of a ghetto, supported by the "public utilities" of humanist civilization. They had narrowed their definition of Calvinism to a handful of exclusively theological principles that

the humanists and the Arminians were uninterested in stealing, namely, TULIP.⁵ Hardly anyone was interested in a TULIP. So, the only thing they had left of their own was something that nobody wanted.

And so Calvinism shrank in influence, decade by decade, to the point of cultural invisibility. Its legacy is nearly lost.

In the United States, there are perhaps ten Calvinist theological seminaries, most of them with fewer than a hundred students, some with only a dozen. There are about four supposedly Calvinist colleges,⁶ but none of them has restructured its curriculum to reflect the creeds and confessions of Calvinism. None of them teaches the six-day creation in its science classes. Therefore, the larger Calvinist seminary campuses have grown since the mid-1960's by recruiting students from fundamentalist and neo-evangelical colleges and graduates of standard humanist colleges. Seminary students on these larger campuses are not required to take a course on Calvin's *Institutes* in order to graduate. There are no required courses on the history, creeds, and confessions of Calvinism. The result is predictable: *graduates who know very little about Calvinism*. This leads to the watering down of Calvinism within those denominations that accept these graduates without rigorous screening. One denomination that does carefully screen its candidates for the ministry is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It has paid a heavy price for this. The entire denomination has about 9,000 fewer members than the First Baptist Church of Dallas. A similar growth vs. screening crisis has stymied the Reformed

5. Total depravity of man, Unconditional election, Limited (particular) atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints.

6. Calvin College, Dordt College, Covenant College, and Geneva College. In a full-page ad in *Christianity Today* (March 11, 1991), Geneva College did not mention Calvinism under its list of "distinctives." It did list its location in the lowest crime region of the country and its award from the Consolidated Natural Gas Foundation.

Presbyterian Church of North America, the Protestant Reformed Church, and the Reformed Episcopal Church.

Calvinism is not only in an institutional crisis; it is in a philosophical crisis. Its advocates no longer agree on what Calvinism is or what it means. In this sense, it has a great deal in common with every other movement on earth. Calvinism's leaders, generation after generation, have signed up almost all of their followers to sail on a ship run by humanists. Now that ship is visibly sinking.

The West's Philosophical Crisis: Disintegration

The cultural moorings have been ripped up: in Communist Europe and in the Western democracies. The universities of the West in principle became multiversities a century ago with the creation of the elective system at Harvard. Since then, knowledge has exploded into more and more tiny fragments. But with this fragmentation, the coherence, meaning, and wisdom of humanist education have disappeared. This is not an epistemological crisis limited to the ideologically disruptive social sciences; it is basic to the physical sciences, too.

Quantum physics since 1927 has taught us that there is nothing holding the universe together at the subatomic level except mathematical equations, except when there is a human observer. *No observer means no "down there."* Only when measured by a human being does material reality in the form of wave functions return to subatomic nature, we have been told.⁷ This has been accepted in theory by most theoretical physicists; only recently have a series of experiments suggested that there really is something "down there" besides equations in between scientific observations.⁸

7. John Gribbin, *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat: Quantum Physics and Reality* (New York: Bantam, 1984).

8. I refer here to the experiments conducted by a team of physicists led by

Another anomaly: everything in the universe is connected simultaneously at the subatomic level, said theoretical physicist John Bell in 1964, and no one has been able to prove him wrong. Every experiment backs him up. Here is the remarkable implication of Bell's Theorem: the speed of light, modern man's last agreed-upon constant, disappears as a limit at the subatomic level. Furthermore, because everything in the universe is connected with everything else, anything can conceivably influence everything else. His theorem tells us that non-local influences do not diminish with distance. They act simultaneously. They link up without crossing space. "A non-local interaction is, in short, *unmediated*, *unmitigated*, and *immediate*."⁹ As physicist David Mermin puts it, "Anyone who isn't bothered by Bell's Theorem has rocks in his head."¹⁰

Modern physics has become the domain of the absurd, unless we assume that there is a Creator God who sustains the universe and provides ultimate meaning and coherence beneath the seeming absurdities. Otherwise, modern physics is driven mad by questions that make no sense. Assertion: "Space is curved." Question: "Compared to what?" Assertion: "The universe is expanding." Question: "Into what?"

This arcane intellectual material from the realm of physics has led to a monumental judicial crisis. One of the first men to recognize this was Harvard Law School's dean, Roscoe Pound. In 1940, he delivered an address to students at the Claremont colleges in southern California. He announced: "Nothing has been so upsetting to political and juristic thinking as the growth of the idea of contingency in physics. It has taken away

Professor Terry Clark of the University of Sussex. See "Schrödinger's SQUID," *The Economist* (Jan. 12, 1991), pp. 79-80.

9. Nick Herbert, *Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985), p. 214.

10. James Trefil, "Quantum physics' world: now you see it, now you don't," *Smithsonian* (Aug. 1987), p. 75.

the analogy from which philosophers had reached the very idea of law. It has deprived political and juristic thought of the pattern to which they had conceived of government and law as set up. Physics had been the rock on which they had built."¹¹

Problem: to the extent that Christian scholars have adopted the "latest findings" of the secular humanist world as their professional standard of academic discussion and inquiry, they are trapped on board without lifeboats. But now the good ship *Rational Cause and Effect* is visibly sinking.

The Newtonian Ideal

How long had this connection between physics and civil law been true? When did physics become the primary model for social theory?¹² From the seventeenth century, especially after 1660. When Cromwell's reign ended and Charles II returned to the throne, social thought turned from the Bible and medieval (organic) natural law theory to physics. Descartes had set the mathematical ideal early in the century; Sir Isaac Newton and the Fellows of the Royal Society after 1661 established the mathematical-experimental ideal in physical science, and the magnitude of their achievements restructured the realm of social theory.¹³

This triumph came at the expense of biblical Christianity, especially Puritanism. Newton was a unitarian (Arian) theologically, although he kept his theological opinions quiet.¹⁴ He

11. Roscoe Pound, *Contemporary Juristic Theory* (Claremont, California: Claremont Colleges, 1940), p. 34. Cited by R. J. Rushdoony, "The United States Constitution," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, XII (1988), p. 35.

12. There is a competing humanist viewpoint, organic social theory, with biology as the model.

13. Louis I. Bredvold, *The Brave New World of the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).

14. Gale E. Christiansen, *In the Presence of the Creator: Isaac Newton and His Times* (New York: Free Press, 1984), pp. 470, 564.

would have lost his job as Director of the British Mint had they become known. His hand-picked successor at Oxford, William Whiston, did go public with his own Arian views, and he was dismissed.¹⁵ In private, Newton was also a practicing alchemist. His magical experiments were conducted in secret, and his successors in physics successfully suppressed this information. It did not become known until the British economist John Maynard Keynes bought the Newton papers at auction. He wrote an essay on these experiments, published posthumously in 1947.¹⁶ Even today, only a handful of historical specialists are aware of this occult side of Newton's thought.¹⁷ Keynes called him the last of the Babylonians and Sumerians, for Newton looked at the universe as if it were a gigantic riddle. For quantum physics, it is a much more puzzling riddle than it was for Newton and his followers, 1660-1927.

The first social science, economics, was developed in the seventeenth century as a conscious reaction against the English Civil War and the subsequent cultural disruptions (1640-60). The Christians could not agree on anything; thus, concluded the fledgling economists, a truly scientific approach to social theory would have to renounce any appeal to the supernatural. It would have to renounce morality, too. Science would have to be morally and religiously neutral. Writes historian William Letwin: "Nevertheless there can be no doubt that economic theory owes its present development to the fact that some men, in thinking of economic phenomena, forcefully suspended all judgments of theology, morality, and justice, were willing to consider the economy as nothing more than an intricate mechanism, refraining for the while from asking whether the mecha-

15. *Ibid.*, p. 471.

16. John Maynard Keynes, "Newton the Man," in *Newton Tercentenary Celebrations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947).

17. Betty J. T. Dobbs, *The Foundation of Newton's Alchemy; Or, "The Hunting of the Green Lyon"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

nism worked for good or evil.”¹⁸ He writes this at the beginning of his chapter, “John Locke: Philosopher as Economist.” It was Locke’s vision of religiously neutral politics that triumphed after 1690: the Whig tradition. This Whig tradition replaced Puritan social theory. In doing so, it restructured Calvinism itself. Whig political theory was the philosophical basis of the American Presbyterian revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1788.¹⁹ Newton and Locke by 1700 had triumphed philosophically over Aquinas and Calvin. The ultimate political victor (posthumously) was Roger Williams.

Why Did I Write This Book?

This book is a refutation of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (1990), written by the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary. I do not regard either book as a classic. My book is what some people will call a “quickie.” The Westminster book is, too, but it took about five years to get it into print; mine will take about five months. While writing this book, I finished *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn’t* (1991), which I co-authored with Gary DeMar. I finished work on *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990). I wrote my usual three newsletters per month. I oversaw the shutting down of my investment newsletter office in Texas and its move to Phoenix, Arizona. I spent my normal ten hours a week on writing my economic commentary on the Bible (Leviticus). Finally, I tried (without much success) to keep up with the war in Iraq. In short, I did not devote my full attention to writing this book. (And when I say “writing,” I mean typing with my lone index finger.) So, it is hardly a great

18. William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1965), pp. 158-59. Published originally by MIT Press, 1963.

19. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 543-50.

book. It does not have to be a great book. It just has to be better than *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

I do not have to cover everything. What I neglect will be covered by Greg Bahnsen in the book I commissioned him to write, *No Other Standard*. What he neglects will be covered by the contributors to *Theonomy: An Informed Response*. We will present in three volumes our case for theonomy and against Westminster's critique.

I do not like to write or publish exclusively defensive books. I much prefer to take the offensive. (A lot of people have said that I am offensive, and I have to agree.) It is my deeply felt belief that you cannot beat something with nothing. It is not sufficient to show here that Westminster Seminary has self-consciously gone down a pathway leading to a cultural dead end. I have to point out the correct path and explain why it is correct. I have attempted to do this in *Westminster's Confession*.

But *Westminster's Confession* is intended to be more than a monograph on how a particular Calvinist institution sold its birthright for a pot of message. What Westminster Seminary has done is a representative example of a much larger process that has been going on for well over three centuries. It is a case study of how the intellectual leadership of Calvinism refuses to adopt the heritage that God has graciously given to Calvinists, and only to Calvinists. Instead, the leaders return again and again to the fleshpots of academic Egypt. They also allow their enemies to set the covenantal war's agenda. Worse; they submit to certification by their enemies before they even begin to do battle. This has been going on from the very beginning of Calvinism. It is time to call a halt to the process. *Westminster's Confession* is a warning to Calvinist leaders of the future: "Just say no."

Cornelius Van Til taught us how to say no. Let us follow his good example.

PREFACE

And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:39-41). (emphasis added)

In the first month of the year of our Lord, 1973, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision, *Roe v. Wade*. It annulled all state laws that prohibited abortion. No Protestant seminary in the United States said a word in protest, as far as I am aware. There were no outraged manifestos. In that year, every one of them that remained silent lost its moral legitimacy.¹ They announced by their silence: "In matters of life and death, we have nothing to say." The humanist world had suspected this for many decades.

Later that year, Rousas John Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* appeared. Rushdoony had for many years pointed to the impotence of the modern Church. He had warned his readers in 1970 about the growing pressure within the medical community in favor of abortion.² He attacked the abortionists

1. The Reformed Episcopal Church later did take a stand, and by implication, so did Reformed Episcopal Seminary (Philadelphia Theological Seminary).

2. *Chalcedon Report* (July 1970). Reprinted as *Rushdoony on Abortion: Distant Early Warning* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

again in August of 1973, with this warning: "Moral reform does not mean the ability to recognize evil but the power to do good and to rebuild in terms of righteousness and justice."³ But seminaries in 1973 had not yet advanced even to the preliminary stage of recognizing evil. In the year of our Lord, 1991, they still haven't.

In 1973, Greg L. Bahnsen submitted his Th.M. thesis to the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, "The Theonomic Responsibility of the Civil Magistrate." It was accepted. For seventeen years, some members of the faculty remained unhappy with the decision to award him his degree. For over seventeen years, they have successfully blocked his appointment as professor of apologetics, despite the fact that he played by the seminary's rules and earned a Ph.D. in philosophy at a secular university. But they never publicly offered a reason.

Then, in late October, 1990, they finally offered an indirect excuse for this exclusion: *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.⁴ This symposium can be analyzed from many angles, but one angle surely is this: the book is a dressed-up theological defense of two decisions taken by the seminary a decade earlier: (1) not to hire Greg Bahnsen; (2) to fire Norman Shepherd.⁵ The seminary has long needed a cover for these two decisions. It has needed a specifically theological justification. Now it has one. The theological justification that the faculty has now adopted is this: *a denial that the establishment of Christendom is a valid biblical goal*. Bahnsen and Shepherd came far too close to this ancient Christian ideal. Thus, they had to be excluded from Westminster Seminary. They had rejected Westminster's confession.

3. *Chalcedon Report* (August 1973).

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

5. See Appendix E: "Julius Shepherd."

Motivation

I will say it again: the real motivation behind this book was personal as well as theological. It was to provide a retroactive theological justification for the Board's hiring and firing policy. When Shepherd was fired, every faculty member should have quit in protest. The job market being what it is in the world of seminary education, they did not even threaten to quit, and now they have publicly justified themselves a decade late. Shepherd strayed too close to the traditional Calvinistic ideal of Christendom, and he paid the price. The faculty is saying with this book that he deserved to pay that price. But they are unwilling to say this openly, so they have used Bahnsen as a convenient surrogate. Shepherd was a not-quite theonomist; Bahnsen is the real thing.

Furthermore, they really have agreed with the Board in its permanent and ongoing decision not to hire Bahnsen. They do not want him around. They will not, however, as gentlemen academics, simply announce that "Bahnsen is a personal pain in the neck, a nit-picking, faculty meeting-disrupting, know-it-all who quite frankly is a lot smarter than we are. We don't have to hire him, and we won't. He can take his Ph.D. and stick it in his ear. Nyah, nyah, nyah." (Neither did Reformed Theological Seminary when it refused to re-hire him in 1979.) The Board long ago decided not to come to him with this offer: "Look, Bahnsen, you are the best mind in apologetics, now that Van Til is dead. We don't like you, but the students and the Church need you. Therefore, we will make you a deal: stay out of our faculty meetings, and we will pay you a salary comparable to a tenured professor's salary. Cause us any trouble outside of the classroom and you're gone. Keep your nose clean and your mouth shut outside of the classroom, and you can teach here until you die." No, they had to publish a book against an entire movement in order to justify themselves.

Had they really wanted to attack theonomy as such, the editors would have assigned specific topics to each of the contributors, and each of them would have been told to search through the whole corpus of theonomic literature, examining anything dealing with his assigned area. (This body of published material is now in excess of one hundred volumes, plus hundreds of newsletters.) The editors did not do this. It would have been too much work for everyone concerned. The target would have been much too large.

The footnotes in their symposium reveal the underlying motivation of the contributors. Rare is a footnote to anything except Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977) and (occasionally) to volume 1 of Rushdoony's *Institutes*. Thus, the very title of the book is misleading. Do not be fooled by it. It is not *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* that they offer; it is *Bahnsen: Why He Was Not Hired Here, and Never Will Be*.

They did get the book published, though not by the original company that agreed to do the deed. They have publicly given us 400 pages of secondary theological reasons for their opposition to theonomy. (Well, not quite; 400 pages minus the essay by Moises Silva.) Undergirding all of their secondary theoretical reasons is the main theological reason: *they are no longer willing to defend without qualification Cornelius Van Til's absolute rejection of natural law theory, both ancient and modern*. Here is Westminster's dilemma: it had to break publicly with Van Til's philosophy in order to justify its rejection of theonomy. It had to reject his monumental legacy to the Church. Yet even now, the faculty has refused to admit openly that most of them have made this break. This is the thesis of my book. The reader will have to judge whether I prove my case.

The reader must also understand in advance that I am not particularly interested in refuting Westminster Seminary as such. The school, however, is representative of a particular approach to the question of God's kingdom in history, and for

this it deserves attention. Institutionally, it does not. It is just another small, struggling, debt-ridden seminary that cannot make up its collective mind whether it is biblically wrong to kill unborn babies. That is the bottom line on Westminster Seminary. On the issue of abortion, it is Laodicea Theological Seminary. Sadly, it is not alone. *It is paralyzed by its moral and judicial agnosticism.* This agnosticism runs deep; it is the heart and soul of its opposition to both Van Til and Bahnsen. Its opposition to Bahnsen is now a matter of public record; its concomitant opposition to Van Til is concealed. It is my goal in this book to get into the open this concealed opposition to Van Til.

Conclusion

I shall end this Preface with a question for those disciples of Van Til who have faithfully supported Westminster Seminary financially, year after year. Here is the question: Was Edmund P. Clowney a disciple of Van Til when he took control of the seminary? If the answer is no, then I propose a second question: Exactly whose disciple was he? You need to know. After all, he restructured the seminary, 1962-1981.

When you get these two questions answered clearly, you will have a lot of other answers. Until then, save your money. Stop donating to Westminster Seminary. Let those who agree with its new confession support it. Start imposing sanctions. *Law without sanctions is not law.* Do not subsidize those who teach what you do not believe. If you support it, you are implicitly saying that you really do believe in it. J. Gresham Machen was defrocked in 1936 by a theologically corrupt church for affirming this basic principle and acting in terms of it. It is still worth affirming and acting upon.

But the law had also to be given as a regulator of the life of those who were redeemed. It was to the people to whom God had given the promises. It was to the children of Abraham and to no one else in ancient times that the law came. They alone had been graciously redeemed. The law is a part of the covenant of grace. Can the "facts" prove that the law was not a part of the saving plan of God for man?

As part of the saving plan of God the law was absolutely other than the code of Hammurabi or any other law that expressed "tribal experience" up to that time. We will not seek to debate about the similarities and dissimilarities between the law that Moses gave and the laws of other nations. We expect a great deal of similarity. We could hold again that even if there had been existing somewhere a code identical in form to the code of Moses, the two would still have been entirely different as to their meaning and interpretation. As a matter of fact, there is no law formulated among the nations outside the pale of Israel that demands absolute obedience of man, just as there is nowhere a story that tells man simply that he is the creature of God and wholly responsible to God. Thus the absolute otherness of Moses and Christ's interpretation of the past and of the present can only be cast aside by those who are bound to do so by virtue of their adherence to a metaphysical relativism.

Cornelius Van Til*

*Van Til, *Psychology of Religion* (Syllabus, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1961), p. 124.

INTRODUCTION

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand (Matt. 12:25).

In the final days of October, 1990, the long-predicted book by the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary finally appeared: *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, edited by William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey.¹ This appeared two years after the appearance of another Westminster symposium, *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic* (1988), edited by Harvie Conn. Conn's book was dedicated to the memory of Cornelius Van Til. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* reveals to what extent that dedication was institutionally misleading. The Westminster faculty produced *Scripture and Confession* (1973). Prior to that, there had been only one other Westminster symposium, *The Infallible Word* (1946). This averages one volume every fifteen years, 1929-90.

Something else is worth noting. In six decades of Westminster Theological Seminary, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is the first collection by Westminster faculty members that is devoted to an attack on a particular, identifiable group of rival theologians. We are still waiting for Westminster Seminary's pub-

1. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic.

lished critiques of Roman Catholicism, dispensationalism, Lutheranism, Episcopalianism, Barthianism, Bultmannism, death of God theology, liberation theology, New Age theology, occultism, or any of a dozen other theological trends. So far, we have waited in vain. What clearly disturbs Westminster Seminary is theonomy.

The reason for this concern should be obvious to anyone who knows the history of ideological warfare: the most dangerous enemies to any movement are those splinter groups that are within the camp of the faithful or so close to it that they attract the movement's followers, especially the brightest, most aggressive, and most dedicated followers. Lenin's first wave of oppression was not launched against the Czarists and capitalists but against the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionary Party, and the anarchists,² all of whom had participated in the October Revolution. These mass arrests began in the spring of 1918.³ The Communists' systematic suppression of the churches and Christians came later, in the 1920's.⁴ Similarly, Hitler first went after the Roehm faction of the Nazi Party in the famous

2. On the anarchists in the Russian Revolution, see Voline [Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eichenbaum], *The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921* (New York: Free Life Editions, [1947] 1974).

3. Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956, An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, I-II (New York: Harper & Row, [1973] 1974), p. 30. To the critic who replies, "Tell that to the Czar!" I point out that the supposed execution of the Czar and the royal family in July of 1918 has the earmarks of having been a hoax used by Lenin, first, to suppress hope by pro-Czarist military forces in a restoration of the monarchy, and, second, to have the family as a bargaining chip in case he lost the revolution and had to flee to the West. The first strategy worked, and the second was never needed. The Czar and his family were rescued by a team of Westerners in 1918. The family laid low thereafter, probably out of fear of assassination. No relative ever claimed the fortune deposited by the Czar in Western banks prior to World War I. The relatives knew the main branch of the family was still alive. The banks therefore kept the money. Guy Richards, *The Hunt for the Czar* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970); Richards, *The Rescue of the Romanovs* (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: Devin-Adair, 1975); Gary Null, *The Conspirators Who Saved the Romanovs* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971); Anthony Summers and Tom Mangold, *The File on the Czar* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

4. Solzhenitsyn, p. 37.

night of the long knives in 1934; only after this did he concentrate on the Communists, the capitalists, and the Jews.

Westminster's faculty decided to scratch in public where the itching has become most intense. The comprehensively Reformed theology of the theonomists is what produced almost two decades of itching – a condition that has intensified sharply since 1981, when I finally got control over enough money to put the theonomic publication machine into high gear. You can put out a lot of books by spending a million or so dollars, net, not counting any of the income from book sales.

The Tar Baby Strategy

In Joel Chandler Harris' delightful *Tales of Uncle Remus*, there is a story about a tar baby made by B'r'er Fox to trap B'r'er Rabbit. (It was included in the 1946 Disney movie, *Song of the South*, but in a recent Disney book version, it has become the glue baby – white – a pathetic rewriting of the story, presumably for racial reasons.) The rabbit says "Howdy" to the tar baby, but the tar baby says nothing. The rabbit says "Howdy" again. Silence. Finally, in exasperation, the rabbit hits the tar baby and is then trapped. He hits again, then kicks. He cannot get free. The more he struggles, the more trapped he gets.

I recognized the existence of the seminary blackout against theonomic materials at least twenty-five years ago, when there was no public acknowledgment of the existence of R. J. Rushdoony's books or work.⁵ He became a "nonperson." When, in the late 1970's, I decided that if I ever had enough money in the ICE bank account to run my own version of the tar baby strategy, I would launch it. But in my version, I am a chatty tar baby, and the seminaries are silent rabbits. I keep saying in print that they do not have the theological goods to deal with

5. Gary North, "Publisher's Foreword," Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. xxxvii-xliv.

the crises of modern society because they neglect biblical law and postmillennialism, and they just sit there, silent, proving my point. Finally, one of the faculty members hits back, and from that point on, he is trapped. I finance a book in reply. The only way for him to save face publicly is to write a reply, and then I publish another book. This goes on until there are no more replies. Then I announce a victory and target a new victim. This strategy is expensive, but it works.

It took until the late 1980's to get a Dallas Seminary professor to respond: H. Wayne House (with Rev. Thomas D. Ice), *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse* (1988).⁶ Immediately, Bahnsen and Gentry responded: *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (1989). Almost immediately thereafter, House disappeared from the Dallas Seminary faculty. Mission accomplished! There was only one additional response from Dallas, a brief and misleading book review in *Bibliotheca Sacra* from John Walvoord, which both Gentry and I answered in the monthly ICE newsletter, *Dispensationalism in Transition*.

I decided to take a more subtle approach to Westminster Seminary: no direct confrontations. All we would do is show, case by case, that to be consistently Reformed is to be theonomic and postmillennial. I decided to publish positive alternatives to the traditional pietist-Scottish common sense rationalism that had undergirded the apologetic methodology of American Presbyterianism. In this task, I was merely following the lead of Cornelius Van Til. I also wrote Bible commentaries: the four volumes of my Economic Commentary on the Bible, Genesis and Exodus (3 volumes). I wrote and published five additional volumes of appendixes to these four volumes. I published a ten-volume set called the Biblical Blueprint Series, which offered positive biblical answers to ten problem areas in society.⁷ Because I adopted a positive publishing strategy rath-

6. Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press.

7. Dominion Press, 1986-87. I wrote four of these.

er than a negative one, it took longer for us to flush out anyone at Westminster, but a symposium is more than I ever dreamed of. Now, I get to target sixteen birds with one stone. But, like David against Goliath, I have added some extra stones. Bahnsen has written *No Other Standard* (1991). ICE publishes it. It also published my book, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990), which deals with some of the issues involved.⁸ Finally, it publishes *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (1991), a collection of essays that respond to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. I believe in stuffing the critics' mouths with footnotes. In this case, the critics may well choke. I dearly hope so.

A Positive Confession

Like all of our critical books, *Westminster's Confession* is a positive statement. The archetype is DeMar and Leithart's *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (1988),⁹ which is not merely a response to Dave Hunt. It is a very clear statement of the theonomic-Christian Reconstructionist position. Similarly, David Chilton's *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider* (1981)¹⁰ is more than a response to Sider; it is a positive statement of Christian economics.

This takes me to one of my familiar slogans: "You can't beat something with nothing." It is not enough to demonstrate that someone is wrong; you also must show what is correct. Cornelius Van Til made this principle the bedrock application of his apologetic method. It was not enough to demonstrate that his opponents' own systems of thought were internally inconsistent; he also showed why Christianity is the *only* logical alternative. His only weakness in this regard was his refusal to offer an

8. Chapters 6 and 7 of this book include rewritten sections of *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

9. Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press.

10. Institute for Christian Economics.

explicitly biblical alternative to the natural law theory that he so thoroughly refuted.¹¹

"Why Are You So Mean?"

Some critics (and even a few supporters) of theonomy profess astonishment and public consternation at my style of responding to published critics. They say that I have treated critics in print as if they were liars, buffoons, and theological incompetents. I have taken this approach self-consciously, primarily because these critics have been liars, buffoons, and theological incompetents. Anyone who reads Hal Lindsey's attempt to tar theonomists with anti-Semitism can see what I am talking about.¹² When the best-selling Christian author of this generation informs his followers regarding the Christian Reconstructionist movement, "This is the most anti-Semitic movement I've seen since Hitler,"¹³ what is the proper response?¹⁴ (It occurs to me that Hal Lindsey has had only one fewer wife than Westminster Seminary has had published symposiums. My public references to Lindsey's marital status are regarded by some of his fundamentalist followers as far more damaging to me than his divorces are to him. Fundamentalist priorities are sometimes ethically peculiar.)

What very few Christians recognize today is that direct confrontation through verbal abuse was basic to the Protestant Reformation; indeed, it has been basic to the whole history of Church doctrine. Few readers today are familiar with Luther's

11. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3.

12. Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1989). See Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Legacy of Hatred Continues* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

13. Lindsey, "The Dominion Theology Heresy," audiotape #217. This is a review of David Chilton's *Paradise Restored* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1985).

14. Gary North and Gary DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), Question 13: "What Is the Proper Response?"

vitriolic attacks on all his opponents. These published attacks were vastly more confrontational than anything I have ever written. Two detailed historical treatises discuss his tactics, both written by Mark Edwards: *Luther and the False Brethren* and *Luther's Last Battles*.¹⁵ The second volume reprints some of the infamous woodcuts used by Luther in his pamphlets, including "The Pope, God of the World, is Worshipped," in which a knight is defecating into the Pope's mitre, and "Kissing the Pope's Feet," in which two men have their bare backsides exposed to the Pope.

But what of John Calvin? He was the greatest scholar of the Reformation. Surely he was not drawn into such unbecoming verbal exchanges. On the contrary, Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is filled with pejorative adjectives attached to his opponents, many of them Trinitarians. These adjectives go way beyond the standards of what is today regarded as polite theological discourse.

Roman Catholics: "raving madmen" who "prate"¹⁶

Bullingerites: "squeamish men"¹⁷

Osiander (Lutheran): "perversely ingenious,"¹⁸ "ignorantly babbling"¹⁹ "absurd" "rubbish,"²⁰ a "Sophist"²¹ writing "bombast,"²² "mad error,"²³ and "deceits"²⁴

15. Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975); *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531-46* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

16. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Library of Christian Classics, vol. XX, Book I, Chapter XI, Section 3.

17. *Ibid.*, I:XIII:3.

18. *Ibid.*, I:XV:3.

19. *Ibid.*, II:XII:6.

20. *Ibid.*, II:XII:7.

21. *Ibid.*, III:XI:7.

22. *Ibid.*, III:XI:8.

23. *Ibid.*, III:XI:10.

24. *Idem.*

Arminians: “dogs” who “vomit forth these blasphemies” and “rave,”²⁵ “impious and profane men”²⁶

Anabaptists: “madmen” who preach “pestilential error”²⁷

Scholastic theologians: “babble childishly” and “chatter,”²⁸ a “mad school of wranglers,”²⁹ “blockheads”³⁰

Calvin described Jews as “sharp-nosed faultfinders” and “dogs.”³¹ He treated Epicureans, Socinians, Servetus, and other non-Christian opponents in the same way. There is no question that no Christian publishing house would issue either man’s writings if he were alive today unless heavily edited to remove such language. John Knox was, if anything, more intemperate. So, with respect to style, I am far closer to the tradition of the Reformation and the tracts of the Puritan pamphlet wars of seventeenth-century England than my squeamish critics have been. If anything, I am overly tame by those earlier standards. But academic politeness – a politeness born of a desire to escape life-threatening confrontations during a period of life-and-death religious confrontations – has become the standard of Western academic discourse. The rhetorical etiquette of the sideline-sitters has triumphed institutionally.

Any ideological movement that disregards the requirement of this etiquette cannot enter the narrow gates of the academically certified. This standard exists primarily to guard the tenured holders of respectable authority from the slings and arrows of outrageous life-and-death issues. The subdued whispers of conventional academic discourse are supposed to soothe the troubled souls of those who would shout a warning to a

25. *Ibid.*, I:XVII:2.

26. *Ibid.*, I:XVIII:3.

27. *Ibid.*, II:X:1.

28. *Ibid.*, III:II:8.

29. *Ibid.*, III:II:43.

30. *Ibid.*, III:XX:25.

31. *Ibid.*, I:VIII:11.

collapsing social order. Calvinism, which once called the West to repentance and sought to restructure Western Civilization, is nearly forgotten. Because Calvinism's proponents have attempted to adopt contemporary academia's alien rhetorical standard, its opponents have been safely able to ignore it. In its most toothless and feckless form, Calvinism enlists that underfunded academic curiosity, the theological seminary. No one pays much attention. It was not Westminster Seminary, Reformed Seminary, Calvin Seminary, or Covenant Seminary that called forth Lindsey's *The Road to Holocaust*, Hunt's *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, House and Ice's *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?*, and Dager's *Vengeance Is Ours*. It was my rhetoric and my publishing money that did. To make an impact, you have to put your money where your mouth is, and it helps to have a loud mouth.

The defenders of the mild-mannered, Clark Kent approach to theological debate call their approach *irenica*. The word means peaceful or non-polemical. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Schaff's *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*: "Irenical Theology, or Irenics . . . presents the points of agreement among Christians with a view to the ultimate unity . . . of Christendom." While there are periods in Church history when the issues have not been sorted out, the goal of orthodoxy has to be the elimination of all false theological opinion in the long run. But those theological doctrines that are regarded at all times as fundamental threats to the faith must not be dealt with irenically. They must be challenged root and branch – an old Puritan phrase. They must also be challenged rhetorically. An irenic approach is completely inappropriate in such cases. But academic Calvinists cannot grasp this. For them, *irenics* is not a temporary tactic; it is a way of life. The character in literature who is the embodiment of this way of life is Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide*.

Why are modern Calvinists, of all theologians, irenic? Because they have begged at the tables of their enemies for so

long. They have begged humanists and theological liberals for academic accreditation. They have sent their ministers to secular universities. They have sought to remain in theologically liberal denominations as minority tokens. They have lost their faith in the victory of Christianity in history, let alone the victory of Calvinism. They have seen themselves as minority status citizens in a world forever controlled by their enemies. Thus, they have sought to avoid confrontations. They have become psychologically irenic.

Not so Luther and Calvin. They were not in the least interested in gaining the positive sanctions of the Roman Church. They had no interest in irenic debates. They wanted to identify areas of disagreement, not areas of agreement. They adopted a highly confrontational rhetorical style. But the average Calvinist or Lutheran knows almost nothing of the rhetoric of the Reformation. Christians rarely study Church history. Protestants do not even study the history of the Reformation. Perhaps they may have sat through a Sunday school series twenty years ago that surveyed the Reformation. Maybe they have read a 140-page book on the Reformation written by a non-confrontational seminary professor whose rhetorical model is modern academia. If the Reformation had been run by today's seminary professors, it never would have begun.

The typical Calvinist has never read Calvin's *Institutes*. It sits on his shelf unread. "Someday, I'll read it," he vows to himself, but he knows he never will. "Anyway, our pastor has read it. He knows." Ha! If every Calvinist pastor in America who has not read the *Institutes* cover-to-cover had to resign on a Thursday, there would be a lot of empty pulpits the next Sunday. The whole of the *Institutes* is not assigned in any Calvinist seminary that I know of. Calvinists simply do not know the history of their movement. They do not know what the Reformers did in order to leave the legacy of the Reformation to their spiritual heirs. They have never read the rhetoric of the Reformation. They accept the Reformers' legacy but reject their methods.

A New Testament Tradition

Some defenders of non-confrontational rhetoric still may not be satisfied with this answer. They may ask: "But what was Luther's or Calvin's theological justification for using such confrontational rhetoric?" Answer: *Jesus set the example*. Even with His friends, He was rhetorically devastating and uncompromising. When Peter assured Him that He would not have to die, "he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23). Sharp and right to the point! When Nicodemus discussed theology with Jesus, coming as a student to a master teacher, Jesus responded to his deceptive response: "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" (John 3:10). This was putting him in his place! Paul acted the same way. When Peter sat apart from the gentiles at Antioch, out of fear of the Judaizers, Paul did not hesitate to embarrass him publicly: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11).

What about His responses to His enemies? What did He say to those whose opinions and practices were wrong, and who were not about to change? For example, what did Jesus say of Herod? "The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected" (Luke 13:31-32). This was a major civil ruler. What did Paul say of the Judaizers inside the church of Galatia? "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you" (Gal. 5:11-12). "Cut off" here probably refers to their total circumcision: physically and ecclesiastically – a very graphic use of words. No doubt this is regarded as being in extremely poor taste by modern Calvinists.

Verbal Shock Therapy

Sometimes the verbal shock therapy of harsh rhetoric does persuade an opponent. But the fact is, very few opponents are ever swayed by anything that the pioneer of a new viewpoint says. Thus, the use of sharp rhetoric is adopted for reasons other than persuading one's opponents. It is adopted to persuade one's followers or those not yet committed. It is used to rally your troops more than it is to disperse your opponent's troops. General George Patton's famous speech to his troops – a toned-down version was used to begin the 1970 movie, "Patton" – was not delivered to persuade the Germans to surrender. Neither was *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* written to persuade Bahnsen to abandon theonomy for the judicial grab-bag that Westminster Seminary's faculty teaches these days. It was written to persuade students that the faculty really does have legitimate theological reasons for not adopting theonomy, and more to the point institutionally, for refusing to hire the only professionally certified, Ph.D.-holding Calvinist philosopher and follower of Van Til to fill Van Til's position.

Why am I the theonomists' main practitioner of confrontational rhetoric? First, Rushdoony does not respond to his critics in print, politely or otherwise. He never has. I call this the Dwight Eisenhower strategy. Second, Bahnsen is still governed by the etiquette of the American university community. He writes as if rigorous logic and masses of Bible verses might conceivably persuade his opponents. It never seems to, but he keeps trying. Devotion! Third, Gentry also prefers classroom etiquette. I think it is just a matter of taste with him. Fourth, DeMar has only recently decided that a decade of lies and misrepresentations by our opponents, especially dispensationalists, is not ethically random. He is not yet fully comfortable with my approach. While he is beginning to catch on, he is hampered by being a nice guy. Fifth, Sutton is also a nice guy. Chilton, in *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators*, proved himself to be a rhetorical master, but he no longer

writes. His subsequent books were more academic, and he seemed to lose his gift of verbal blood-letting. The other major Reconstructionist authors are still interested in landing seminary jobs. This leaves it to me to serve as the movement's hard-liner. Every movement needs at least one. If none is present, sheer boredom on the part of the readers will doom it. Luther understood this. His rhetoric changed the Western world. But never forget: it did not persuade the Roman Catholic Church. It was not intended to, any more than Knox sought to persuade Bloody Queen Mary to abdicate the throne of England when he wrote *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Their goal was not to persuade their opponents; rather, it was to persuade the undecided.

"You attract more flies with honey than vinegar," the old saying goes. But who wants to attract flies?

Self-Defense

Let the reader also understand what we theonomists are reacting to. We are not dealing with a group of self-restrained fellows who guard every word, who judge every phrase by its many possible outcomes. We are dealing with a seminary that opened access to the pages of its scholarly journal to Meredith G. Kline, who wrote: "The tragedy of Chalcedon is that of high potential wasted – worse than wasted, for its most distinctive and emphatically maintained thesis is a delusive and grotesque perversion of the teaching of Scripture."³² No judicious, scholarly editor blue-penciled that bit of vitriol. "Delusive and grotesque perversion": try to find anything comparable to that dose of invective in my writings regarding another Reformed author! Yet the theonomists are regarded as the pit bulls of theological discourse, primarily because of my somewhat colorful nose-tweaking of opponents. (It amuses me that Kline com-

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

plained about "the overheated typewriter of Greg Bahnsen."³³ Three years later, I got my first word processor. Now Bahnsen has one, too. "Overheated" is understated.)

Winston Churchill once remarked that if you get a reputation for being an early riser, you can sleep till noon. This is what Westminster Seminary's original faculty bequeathed to the school's present faculty: a reputation for academic precision and an uncompromising *and uncompromised* defense of confessional Calvinism. It is my belief that Edmund P. Clowney and most of his appointees frittered away much of that institutional inheritance, but the old reputation lingers on. Kline can get away with rhetorical murder today because Edward J. Young was a gentleman.

I want to be positive, not just negative. I am not recommending some sort of theological revolution at Westminster Seminary. However, I am recommending what would be an institutional revolution. I am suggesting that it is time for Westminster Seminary to adopt John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as its first semester's systematic theology textbook. It is also time to require a course on the Westminster Confession *and the two catechisms* for all first-year students. This would surely involve studying the life and era of Oliver Cromwell, which would horrify certain members of the Westminster's faculty, who seem to be concerned lest the students discover that *the* representative Puritan political figure of the era of the Westminster Assembly was not a precursor of George McGovern. Oliver Cromwell was not someone whose work was praised by the late Paul Woolley, Westminster Seminary's pro-abortion, liberal Democrat, the school's Church historian for forty-seven years. I do not remember hearing Edmund Clowney say anything good about Cromwell, either. Cromwell and the Scottish Covenanters are Westminster Seminary's problem; so are the New England Puritans, 1630-60. The one time that

33. *Idem.*

the theology of the Westminster Confession was partially applied to society, including politics, the results were generally theocratic and conservative. This has led to a discreet silence on the part of the Westminster faculty, up until *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, regarding both the legitimacy and judicial character of the Puritan social experiment.

A House Divided

It was obvious from the start that the theonomists were self-consciously neo-Puritans, and not the pietistic, socially uninvolved Puritans of the cloister, whose writings the Banner of Truth Trust has reprinted for the last three decades. It is equally obvious that applied Puritan theology was theocratic. So, Westminster's problem for a generation – indeed, Calvinistic American Presbyterianism's problem for two centuries – has been to justify its commitment to modern religious and political pluralism in terms of the Westminster Confession's judicial standards. Most obviously of all, it has been Westminster Seminary's self-consciously postponed intellectual burden to reconcile Van Til's absolute rejection of common-ground natural law theory with any theory of democratic politics, from Grotius and Roger Williams to the present. This is a heavy burden: there is no possible reconciliation. But the faculty has been double-minded on this point: proclaiming to their financial supporters their commitment to Van Til's apologetics, they have also rejected the theonomists' neo-Puritan standard of a theocratic republic. Proclaiming their rejection of natural law theory, they have simultaneously denied the idea that the Bible is the bearer of biblical blueprints or judicial frameworks for anything outside the four walls of the Church and the Christian home. In short, they have abandoned any ideal of a Christian *society*, i.e., Christendom itself.

This is Westminster's social and cultural confession – a theologically negative confession, proclaiming in the name of the original Westminster Assembly what society ought *not* to be, but

never daring to suggest what it should be. It is the offense of Christian Reconstruction that in the name of the original Westminster Confession, we proclaim an exclusively biblical ideal, based on the idea that *the general equity of civil law can be progressively achieved in history only through a self-conscious application of biblical law (theonomy)*. If Van Til was correct about the corrupting effects of sin on fallen man's ethical sense, and if he was correct about the illegitimacy of natural law theory, then there can be no other interpretation of the general equity clause of the Westminster Confession (XIX:4). But Westminster Seminary has played a game of *sic et non* with Van Til's legacy, saying "yes" to his rejection of natural law but "no" to the theonomists' application of it to civil law and the Confession's general equity clause. *Westminster's confession is a confession in conflict*. Westminster Seminary is inherently a house divided against itself. So is any form of Christianity that adopts Westminster's new judicial confession.

Christian Reconstructionists paraphrase Van Til: "Christian society is not one possible working model among many; it is the *only* possible working model. Every other model is wrong and will be judged wanting by God in history." To silence this positive confession,³⁴ Westminster's faculty decided to write *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

Sadism and Natural Law Theory

Because this is an introduction, I need to warn the reader well in advance: this book is about natural law theory and its implications for applied theology. Make no mistake about it: *all Christian theology is applied theology*. This may not be apparent in all cases, but it is always the case. There is no neutrality in life. Christianity is a way of life. Every religion is a way of life, and every way of life is grounded in some religion.

34. Note: it is a positive *judicial* confession, not a positive magical confession.

If you want my thesis of natural law theory in one graphic sentence, I will provide it: *the most consistent defender of natural law theory was the Marquis de Sade*. De Sade's incomparable perversity was self-consciously based on his observation of the workings of nature. In this sense, he was a faithful late-eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinker.

De Sade came about as close as anyone ever has in literature to become the fully consistent covenant-breaking man. The American literary critic Edmund Wilson once wrote that the only writer that he could not bear to read while eating breakfast was de Sade. When you think "natural law theory," always think *sadism*. Natural law theory apart from God's grace, both special and common, leads to sadism.³⁵ So does its logical corollary, political pluralism. If you doubt me, how do you explain *Roe v. Wade*? Think of 25 million unborn American infants silently screaming, 1973-1990. This is the Marquis de Sade's moral legacy to America, and Roger Williams' political legacy. "We, the politically sovereign People" have spoken.³⁶

De Sade was a true Enlightenment republican. He wrote these stirring words: "We need a faith, a faith suited to the republican character and far removed from ever possibly resuming that of Rome. In an age when we are so convinced that religion must rest on morality, and not morality upon religion, we need a religion in tune with our way of life, as it were the development, the inevitable extension of it, a religion which can elevate the soul and keep it perpetually at the level of that precious liberty which it venerates today as its only idol."³⁷ He was a man opposed to harsh civil sanctions, such as the death

35. If common grace is running out, as Van Til argued, all the more reason for Christians to turn to biblical law.

36. North, *Political Polytheism*, Part 3.

37. Marquis de Sade, *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*, in *Selected Writings of De Sade*, edited by Leonard de Saint Yves (New York: British Book Centre, 1954), pp. 215-16; cited by R. J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1965] 1978), pp. 64-65.

penalty.³⁸ He also opposed civil laws against prostitution, adultery, incest, rape, and sodomy. After all, these are all natural urges and practices; they are found in nature. Marriage and monogamy are not normal in nature. "Can we possibly imagine Nature giving us the possibility of committing a crime which would offend her?"³⁹

When a man chooses between natural law and biblical law, let him understand well in advance just what the theoretical implications of his choice really are. The faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary has not yet understood these implications, yet it has long since made its collective choice.

Conclusion

The Calvinist or Reformed Protestant world today is an exceedingly narrow one – one might even say institutionally incestuous, which is the fate of newly developing movements and also fading ones. The Reformed world, being small and few in number, can muster only a few scholars, and fewer published ones. But Calvinism's influence in the American Protestant world has been way out of proportion to its numbers ever since 1800, when Baptists and Methodists began to out-strip the Calvinists on the growing mission field of the Western United States.

Why this disproportional influence? One reason is that the various non-Reformed camps (Lutherans excepted) did not do the work of detailed biblical scholarship until after World War II, when neo-evangelicalism appeared. The fundamentalist world still relies heavily on non-fundamentalists to defend itself against the higher critics of the Bible. So, as defenders of the faith, especially against German liberalism, Reformed scholars were the watchmen on the American churches' watchtower. After 1900, this watchtower meant primarily Princeton Semi-

38. *Ibid.*, p. 247; cited in *ibid.*, p. 65.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 258; *idem.*

nary until the split in 1929, and it meant Westminster Seminary and Covenant Seminary until quite recently. This is why *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is important. To understand that book, however, the reader needs to know more about its historical background. There is a great deal more than meets the eye here, especially since certain segments of the book are designed to blacken the eyes of Christian Reconstructionists.

It is worth recalling that after Dr. Kline was answered in detail, point by point, by Bahnsen,⁴⁰ he neither retracted his essay nor apologized. He also never responded. Instead, he went into twelve years of intellectual hibernation, from which he is unlikely ever to emerge. Kline's performance was an academic hit-and-run operation, but when his victim managed to get up and then identify the driver, nobody at Westminster Seminary pressed charges against Kline. But at least Kline stopped "writing while under the influence."⁴¹ He has left to his followers from Gordon-Conwell – a vastly less gifted crowd intellectually – the task of spewing venom, not to mention disinformation, which they do in style in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. And so, Gary North now gets a legitimate opportunity to spell out in greater detail some of the concerns he has, not with Reformed theology, but with Westminster Seminary's present confession. So do some of his associates. Let the reader understand: this is a response to public criticisms, not a direct attack initiated at this end of the theological spectrum. We are merely trying to defend ourselves from specific accusations – accusations that did not appear, as if by magic, out of a neutral investigation of the primary source documents of Christian Reconstruction. There are some hidden agendas scattered about, and it is time to pay closer attention to them.

40. Greg L. Bahnsen, "M. G. Kline on Theonomic Politics," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (1979-80).

41. Anyone who tries to read *Kingdom Prologue* may not believe me when I say that he no longer writes under the influence.

THE QUESTION OF INHERITANCE

If you dip into any college, or school, or parish, or family – anything you like – at a given point in its history, you always find that there was a time before that point when there was more elbow room and contrasts weren't quite so sharp; and that there's going to be a time after that point when there is even less room for indecision and choices are even more momentous. Good is always getting better and bad is always getting worse: the possibilities of even apparent neutrality are always diminishing. The whole thing is sorting itself out all the time, coming to a point, getting sharper and harder.

C. S. Lewis (1946)¹

Revolutions do not just happen. They are not the products of “impersonal social forces.” They are planned and executed by individuals. They are *led*.

This book is the story of a revolution. Actually, it is the story of a revolution and a counter-revolution. The revolution was launched philosophically by Cornelius Van Til. He did not carry it to its conclusion, but others have extended it in his name. The counter-revolution was launched by Edmund P. Clowney. It was successful institutionally. We have the proof of

1. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 283.

his initial success in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. The question that my book attempts to answer is this: Was this also a successful counter-revolution intellectually and theologically? You know my answer already: *no*. Now I must prove my case.

In 1964, Robert D. Knudsen assigned *That Hideous Strength* to his entire class (i.e., me) on "The Fate of Freedom in Western Philosophy." Lewis' book was a revelation to me. In this 1946 novel, some of the major issues of the next half century were spelled out. It covered the revival of occultism, the growth of State-funded humanist science, the control of the press by narrow elites, the bureaucratic war against Christianity, and much more. But it was the above-quoted statement, made by the character in the novel who was most like Lewis, that grabbed me. Here, in one brilliant paragraph, was Van Til's view of history: the ever increasing self-consciousness of both covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. History does not move backward. It cannot remain ethically neutral. It moves forward in a series of conflicts – not class conflicts but *covenantal* conflicts. There is no escape from choosing. The lines are drawn ever more sharply and tightly over time.

Little did I know as I sat in my basement room in Machen Hall, reading Lewis' novel, that upstairs in the Westminster Seminary administration offices, the reality of Lewis' vision was being played out. Fundamental choices was being made, day by day. These choices were being forced upon the seminary because of three institutionally inescapable events. These decisions were to determine the direction the seminary was to take over the next quarter century.

Institutional Turning Points

The two crucial events in the life of any organization are its founding and its first transition at the death or retirement of the founder. Westminster Seminary, however, had three crises. The third came when the seminary's constitution was restructured in 1965 in order to lodge greater power in one office,

the newly created presidency. The issue raised at Westminster's second and third crises relates to point five of the biblical covenant model: succession.² The institutional question is simple: Who will inherit? The answer, however, is rarely simple.

In the case of Westminster Seminary, the first major event had taken place 35 years before the third event: J. Gresham Machen's³ hiring of Cornelius Van Til. With that decision, Machen made a break – a fundamental break – with the entire history of Christian apologetics. This break was nothing short of revolutionary. I doubt that Machen fully understood the magnitude of Van Til's radical discontinuity with all previous apologetic approaches. Whether he did or didn't, he made the decision to hire Van Til.⁴

The second event was Machen's death on January 1, 1937. He was the acknowledged spokesman of conservative American orthodox Protestantism. He was the founder of the seminary. He was the founder of what soon became known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He was the visionary, the backbone, the Moses and Joshua of conservative northern Presbyterianism, and he did not cross over into the promised land. Worse; he had only recently led them out of Egypt. His followers began their wandering in the wilderness, where they still find themselves. They had begun to think of their mission as a wilderness experience. He was the last of the postmillennialists at Westminster for the next quarter of a century. Amillennialism – the eschatology of wilderness living – became the

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 5.

3. For the record, his name was pronounced J. GRESSum MAYchin.

4. Bahnsen argues that Machen was not a defender of Warfield's rationalism, but was an historical apologist who instinctively adopted Van Til's presuppositional approach without actually articulating it. Greg L. Bahnsen, "Machen, Van Til, and the Apologetic Tradition of the OPC," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, edited by Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), pp. 259-94.

dominant force at Westminster Seminary, which it still is. The first stage of the inheritance was completed during stage two: from the Old Princeton's postmillennial optimism to the New Amsterdam's amillennial pessimism.

This vision of historical despair was best articulated by Van Til. Instead of adopting the view of God's sanctions in history that is presented in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 – where covenant-breakers get weaker over time, and covenant-keepers get stronger – he reversed the roles played by each group. He asserted that as each side becomes more self-conscious and more consistent (Lewis' vision), covenant-breakers will become culturally dominant, while covenant-keepers will lose influence and become increasingly tyrannized by their enemies. Van Til wrote:

But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for "the day of grace," the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.⁵

The third event was institutional: the accession of Edmund Prosper Clowney, S.T.M., to the office of Dean of Academic Affairs in 1963, a position that he held for almost 20 years. In the 1965 academic year, he became the acting president of the seminary, a newly created office, and then in 1966, the year he was awarded his honorary doctorate from Wheaton College, he

5. Van Til, *Common Grace* (1947), in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 85.

became president – the seminary's constitution had to be revised in order to create this office⁶ – a position he also held until he retired in 1982.⁷ An opportunity to reshape the seminary for the second time now appeared. Once again, the question was: Who would inherit?

As things turned out, it would not be the New Amsterdam.

The Inheritance

The seminary's donors in 1965 were mostly Christian Reformed Church members and Orthodox Presbyterian Church members.⁸ This make-up of the donors reflected the make-up of the seminary's faculty. Whatever changes were to be made could not threaten this donor base until a new base had been built up. From what took place over the next two decades, I believe that Clowney fully understood this limitation. But what he could not have foreseen in 1963 soon became apparent: the second half of the 1960's offered a tremendous opportunity to change the seminary's student base. American society was shaken by the arrival of the anti-war movement and unprecedented social ferment, for which traditional theologies and traditional churches had no answers. The West blew up culturally in 1965, and academic institutions were given an opportunity to respond.⁹ Few did.

Concomitant with the Vietnam war were draft deferrals for students, especially seminary students. This allowed seminaries to grow rapidly, and Westminster did exactly that. The question facing Clowney was this: Could he shift the seminary's

6. *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936-1886*, edited by Charles G. Dennison (Philadelphia: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), p. 323.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 330.

8. In the spring of 1964, I was in the mail room one day, and I curiously scanned through several file card drawers of addressees. It impressed me at the time how many of them had Dutch names.

9. Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), pp. 6-11.

student base without endangering its donor base? The second question was this: How could he do this without also shifting the seminary's theology? He couldn't. This led to the third question: How could the seminary's theology be shifted without damaging the reputation of the school and its income, without blowing up the faculty, and without seeming to have shifted? It would take a very skilled manager to engineer this. Edmund Clowney was very skilled.

Westminster Seminary could no longer escape this choice: (1) side with Van Til by rejecting totally the underlying ethical and judicial foundations of humanist thought and culture, but without abandoning the Bible, or else (2) break with Van Til and adopt a more ecumenical apologetic method. To have stayed with Van Til's apologetic would have meant launching a frontal assault on the so-called counter-culture.¹⁰ But this counter-culture was increasingly popular with seminary students. Furthermore, such a commitment to Van Til's apologetics would have meant publicly extending Van Til's frontal assault against all forms of Arminianism, which would also have threatened the new pool of students, who were being recruited from outside the Reformed camp. This created a major institutional problem for the successors of that first generation. They had to decide: *If not Van Til, then what?*

In that era of turmoil, students were demanding answers to real-world problems. This was the dilemma of Bible-believing American churches in 1965-70 – an opportunity that all of them missed: to provide new, Bible-based answers to the real-world concerns of a vocal, inquisitive, and intensely disillusioned generation. This was Westminster's grand opportunity. All it would have taken was a self-conscious dedication in applying Van Til's presuppositional apologetic to those areas of

10. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1969); William Braden, *The Age of Aquarius: Technology and the Cultural Revolution* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970).

thought and culture that were “up for grabs” in the late 1960’s. It was an opportunity forfeited.

It was forfeited because of an inescapable conflict. Two legacies were set before the seminary after 1965. Only one could pass to the heirs. The first was Van Til’s legacy of a complete break with the philosophy of self-proclaimed autonomous man. This included all forms of natural law theory. The second legacy was “everything else,” meaning *anything else*. This legacy is the legacy of Western apologetics: various attempts to mix the Bible with prevailing “neutral” theories about “the way the world works,” meaning *works autonomously*. Van Til had spent his career warning against all past attempts to construct these hybrid mixtures. Like mules, he warned, they are all sterile. Now his institutional heirs would have to make a choice between these two legacies.

I believe that the bulk of the evidence points to this conclusion: Edmund Clowney made a self-conscious choice, namely, *the rejection of Van Til’s apologetic legacy*. The seminary kept Van Til’s millennial vision: “Fort Contraction in the wilderness.” But it abandoned his apologetic vision. New Amsterdam’s eschatological pessimism remained, but the campus was invaded, year after year, by Gordon-Conwell Seminary’s political theology and the ecumenical vision of Wheaton College. The seminary changed its positioning, its marketing, its donor base, its character, and ultimately, its confession. The latest product of that transformation is *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

Westminster’s Early Tradition

What is Westminster Seminary? From 1929 until 1937, everyone with any influence in the American evangelical world knew: it was Machen’s seminary. It was Calvinistic, Presbyterian, and academic. It was in the center of the fight for the theological integrity of the Presbyterian Church, USA. Machen was front-page news in those years, and I mean front page in the

New York Times.¹¹ He testified before Congress on educational affairs. But after the amputation of the fundamentalist-orthodox wing of the PCUSA in 1936, nobody paid much attention any more. Machen died on January 1, 1937.¹² From then on, for a generation, there was no remaining intellectual leadership in American evangelicalism. There was no one with Machen's stature. Comparatively speaking, there still isn't, but at least there are numerous competitors. From 1937 until the 1960's, there were none. This was a wilderness period.

From Machen's death until the revision of the seminary's constitution in the mid-1960's, Westminster became a kind of academic cloister. It staffed its faculty increasingly with Christian Reformed men and amillennialists who had been trained by them. The original postmillennial Princeton eschatology had begun to fade from the beginning, and disappeared after Machen died. Van Til became the seminary's most prominent member. Ned B. Stonehouse and Edward J. Young defended the infallibility of the New and Old Testaments, respectively. John Murray, an immigrant Scot, delivered magnificent classroom prayers and linguistically precise, nineteenth-century lectures, to be regurgitated verbatim on all exams. R. B. Kuiper, an academic and a bureaucrat, taught practical theology. Paul Woolley taught Church history and wrote almost nothing. The campus disappeared from public view.

As I have already argued, with his accession to the ad hoc post of "acting president" of the seminary in 1965, Edmund Clowney began to broaden its base, both financially and promotionally, by moving Westminster into the evangelical "mainstream." That mainstream was heading over the cultural falls by the late 1960's, and as the student body grew, the original theological distinctiveness of the campus became murky.

11. "Machen Proposes a New Seminary," *New York Times* (June 18, 1929), p. 1.

12. For H. L. Mencken's obituary of Machen, see Appendix A.

Rushdoony's Challenge

In the 1963-64 academic year, as Clowney was beginning to take control, Rushdoony was invited to speak for the first and last time at Westminster Seminary. He had been writing for the *Westminster Theological Journal* for over a decade. His study of Van Til's philosophy, *By What Standard?*, had been published in 1959. This was followed by a shortened version, *Van Til* (1960), *Intellectual Schizophrenia* (1961), and then *The Messianic Character of American Education* (1963), which remains the finest critical analysis of the philosophy of American progressive education. The *Westminster Theological Journal* did review his two books on Van Til, but from then on, Rushdoony's books went down the *WTJ* memory hole, with only one exception – an exception that proves the rule. This means that successive editors “spiked” over two of his dozen books.

The reader may not understand the implications of such a blackout. The *Westminster Theological Journal* for years was regarded by its contributors and its handful of subscribers as the last bastion against the horde of liberal theologians who were laying waste outside the walls. There seemed to be no German language theology treatise too obscure to be regarded as off limits to a critical *WTJ* review. There were long book review articles, too, much longer than is common in most scholarly journals. The Westminster faculty and its more literate graduates would pound away at topics so arcane that few of its subscribers could know what it was all about. “Reading German theologians is dirty, thankless work, but somebody has to do it!” (Be thankful that it isn't you or I.)

Another task of a theological journal is to comment on positive and negative movements within the camp of the faithful. When a Reformed scholar of Rushdoony's capacity appeared on the scene, one would expect (naively) to find reviews of his books. But reviewing controversial Reformed books creates a problem for the reviewers. A critical review will raise the question: Whose side are you on? A positive review raises an even

more difficult question: Why don't you teach what he teaches? What Rushdoony was teaching was biblical activism and institutional confrontation with the secular humanist world. This is exactly what Westminster Seminary was seeking to avoid under Clowney's leadership.

Academia has been forced to become extremely narrow in its specialization. The occupational disease of the specialist is tunnel vision. He cannot see what is going on three feet to the left or right of him. He cannot confidently interact with the broad issues of life, except as a non-specialist, which makes him nervous. Rushdoony was doing what Presbyterian scholars did in the middle of the nineteenth century: commenting on the whole sweep of modern secular scholarship. But by 1900, this tradition was long gone. Thus, Rushdoony's writings were a threat to the insulated and isolated scholarship of any seminary, even Westminster.

What was he going to get Orthodox Presbyterians into, anyway? How closely was his social theory tied to his theology? If his theology was orthodox, as it seemed to be, then how could Calvinists reject his social theory? Rushdoony's Goldwater-type conservatism was repugnant to political liberals such as Paul Woolley and Edmund Clowney; it was considered institutionally off limits by Van Til and Murray, who were traditional anti-New Deal Republicans, but who kept their mouths shut publicly on such matters. The faculty was very nervous about him, especially Van Til, whose cause Rushdoony espoused.

In 1967, Rushdoony's review of E. L. Hebden Taylor's *Christian Idea of Law, Politics and the State* (1966) was published by the *Journal*. This book was a literate, well-written history of Western social philosophy, written from a conservative Dooyeweerdian perspective. Rushdoony's review was favorable. Like Rushdoony, Taylor was both a pastor and an academic outsider. Rushdoony mentioned in his review that Taylor's book was in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper, the most famous repre-

sentative of the Netherlands' Anti-Revolutionary Party. But Rushdoony made a tactical error: he observed that this political party had become the Semi-Revolutionary Party. Given what has happened in the Netherlands since then, this was an accurate assessment, but Rushdoony was never again asked to review a book in the *WTJ*.

Only one subsequent review of a Rushdoony book ever appeared, faculty member John Frame's late 1976 review of *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973), which had not been assigned to him or anyone else, and which encountered opposition from the *WTJ*'s editor (Robert Knudsen). It appeared over three years after the book had appeared. Frame concluded that there were some good parts of the book and some not so good parts, but on the whole, the book was well worth reading – his standard *sic et non* analysis, for which he has become, if not legendary, then at least well known to insiders.

Thus, there was a struggle for the minds of Calvinists going on in the late 1960's. It was an era of transition. No one had a fully developed position to present to the Reformed community. It was a period of ferment, intellectually and culturally, on campus and off, and no Calvinist had a comprehensive alternative. This gave Edmund Clowney and his allies a window of opportunity.

The Need for a Two-Pronged Attack

To have taken advantage of that brief era of intellectual ferment, Westminster Seminary needed a two-pronged attack. First, it needed a comprehensive critical analysis of the failure of humanism. Van Til had provided this. Second, it needed a comprehensive positive alternative that in no way rested on the presuppositions of humanism, yet which would be reliable because of its origin in God's Word. Van Til had not given them this. They looked elsewhere.

In each case, the move was away from a passive Calvinism toward . . . what? We are still not sure. To the extent that

Theonomy: A Reformed Critique is representative of the new Westminster, there is no way we can be sure. All we know is that the change has taken place. At least five major alternatives were offered on campus. Each of the suggested alternatives moved away from the judicial theology of biblical covenantalism, i.e., the theology of the original Westminster Confession. As the conservative columnist Garet Garrett put it in 1944, "the revolution was."

Beginning in 1965, Edmund Clowney was given a unique opportunity to redirect the focus of the seminary, both in terms of its underlying apologetic approach and its constituency. He could use the traditional requirement of academic etiquette – never publicly challenge a faculty colleague with respect to his first principles – to restructure the seminary without visible opposition. Fire someone, yes, but never publicly admit why. (This is exactly what the Presbyterian Church, USA, did to Machen and his followers. Never was the real dividing issue admitted by the Church's bureaucrats: theology. Always this issue was denied.) No one on the faculty would dare to appeal directly to the donors, for example, in order to impede this restructuring. That would be bad manners. The restructuring could therefore continue quietly over many years. There would be no Princeton-like explosion. The agenda of the president of a seminary will always be dominant unless there is open rebellion from below. Step by quiet step, the opponents are isolated. Faculty attrition allows the person in power to impose his agenda. The Board sees the president as "its man," but if the Board is like most academic boards, it generally defers to "its man." The fact is, the Board is "his Board."

What took place at Westminster Seminary after 1965 offered Van Til and his followers an opportunity to learn first-hand what I have been saying for a long time: "You can't beat something with nothing." Others offered partial "somethings." Without a direct appeal to biblical law, Van Til's negative critique of humanism was no match for what appeared to be legitimate

alternatives, but which were not, and could not become, comprehensive biblical worldviews.

1. *The Cosmonomic Alternative*

For a brief period, some of the faculty and students looked to Herman Dooyeweerd. (Knudsen still does.) Dooyeweerd had charted the history of the pretended autonomy of human thought, case by case, in his *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, focusing especially, as Van Til had, on Kant and his successors. But he offered no positive alternatives. There was no explicitly biblical content in his fifteen "modal spheres." Indeed, he denied the validity of any attempt to infuse these spheres with biblical content. He stated emphatically in his rejoinder to Van Til that his cosmonomic philosophy

does not aim at a "defense of the Christian faith" but at laying bare the central influence of the different religious, basic motives upon the philosophical trends of thought. For that purpose it was necessary to show the *inner point of contact* between theoretical thought and its supra-theoretical assumptions which relate to the central religious sphere of human existence. This is why this transcendental critique is obliged to *begin* with an inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience *as such* and *not* with a confession of faith.¹³

Let us pass over his verbiage, for which he and his followers have rightly become famous. He self-consciously offered no confession of faith, yet he was, for a decade or so, taken seriously at Westminster as an alternative to Van Til. Because of

13. Herman Dooyeweerd, "Cornelius Van Til and the Transcendental Critique of Theoretical Thought," in E. R. Geehan (ed.), *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (no place of publication listed: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971), p. 76. I never heard of E. R. Geehan before the book, and I never heard of him after. I guess he was the James Halsey of the early 1970's.

this absence of confessional, creedal, and biblical content, Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic law approach seemed to offer common intellectual ground with the lost: the transcendental "heart" – undefined and vaguely Kantian in tone.¹⁴ The modal spheres also seemed to be universal.

Van Til knew better. This quest for common ground, according to Van Til, is the consequence of covenant-breaking man's assertion of his own autonomy. Having denied the only possible common ground among all men – the image of God in man – the covenant-breaker then searches for a replacement. He seeks for neutral ground for both God and man to stand on. This quest, Van Til taught, is demonic: Satan's original temptation.¹⁵

Dooyeweerd was adamant about his rejection of the Bible as the source of the content of his philosophy. He summarized Van Til's thesis: ". . . listening to Scripture, obeying the voice of God speaking through Christ in Scripture, means making every human *thought* subject to divine *thought* expressed in scriptural *concepts*, so that man has to 'think God's thoughts after him.' " This is indeed Van Til's position, and Dooyeweerd would have none of it.

Is this really a biblical view? I am afraid not. Nowhere does the Bible speak of obeying the voice of God in terms of subjecting every human thought to divine thought. The New Testament understanding of obedience is doing the Father's will revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, by believing with all our heart that we belong to him. There is no real obedience to the will of God that does not result from the heart, in the pregnant

14. Ronald H. Nash, *Dooyeweerd and the Amsterdam Philosophy: A Christian Critique of Philosophic Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 66, 94. Van Til had warned against Kantian features of Dooyeweerd's thought in the first edition of *The Defense of the Faith*, to which Dooyeweerd replied in *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 83-85.

15. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Den Dulk Foundation, 1969), pp. 19-23.

biblical sense, as the religious center of our existence, which must be regenerated and opened up by the divine moving power of the Holy Ghost.¹⁶

Inevitably, the question arises: How do we *know* that we truly love God and that He truly loves us? Jesus was clear on this point: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). It is this *judicial component of saving faith* that Dooyeweerd strove to avoid. He appealed to the heart, and in doing so, opened the floodgates to irrationalism and experience as tests of faith, rather than to our obedience to God's Bible-revealed law.¹⁷ But Van Til could not pin him down, for he himself was vague about the content of this law and where we must turn in the Bible to discover it.

Dooyeweerd was Dutch. He had taught at the Free University of Amsterdam. By adopting Dooyeweerd, Westminster could quietly move away from Van Til without risking a significant defection of the seminary's Christian Reformed supporters. Dooyeweerd appeared to be Reformed theologically. He was visibly hostile to humanism. His statement on the non-confessionalism of his system did not appear in print until 1972, and then only in an obscure book. In short, Dooyeweerd was institutionally safe: a halfway house, common-ground apologetic on the road back to natural law theory.

Interest in Dooyeweerd on campus faded as the 1970's wore on, but interest in Van Til did not revive. The late 1960's had done their work. What had been a quiet philosophical division within the faculty, 1929-65 – common sense rationalism vs. Van Til's biblical presuppositionalism – became less and less a division within the faculty, as Van Til's radical position was steadily

16. Dooyeweerd, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

17. For a critique of Dooyeweerd's illegitimate separation of law and faith, see John Frame, *The Amsterdam Philosophy: A Preliminary Critique* (no publisher, no date), pp. 27-40.

abandoned. The hiring of Clowney's son David marked the tombstone over the legacy of Van Til on campus at Westminster East. (At Westminster West, John Frame still keeps the flame alive, although buried under several layers of outlines.)

What had gone wrong? Basically, it was this: Van Til had not followed through with the revolution he had launched. His intellectual revolution had been framed as a negative critique, not as a positive alternative. His was a system that was immediately useful only for blowing up bad things, not rebuilding. The foundation stones for developing a positive alternative were in place: the doctrine of creation (the Creator-creature distinction), the doctrine of the Trinity (the one and the many), the self-attesting nature of Scripture, the non-neutrality of man, the identification of the doctrine of the ontological subordination of Jesus as the foundation of all heresies, and so forth. But he had no way to get from his systematic dynamiting of natural law theory to comprehensive social reconstruction, except by way of biblical law. Rushdoony and I took that path in the late 1960's.¹⁸ Van Til would not follow.

2. The New Life Church Alternative

Rev. C. John Miller had worked with Rushdoony and me at the William Volker Fund in Burlingame, California, in 1963. I was just starting out; he was at a turning point in his career. He seemed to be a dedicated follower of Van Til. While employed by the Volker Fund, he wrote a three-volume manuscript on the failure of public education. It was never published. In 1966, he joined the faculty at Westminster.

The counter-culture deeply affected Miller. He adopted new approaches to evangelism. They were people-oriented, but not

18. Readers may forget: Rushdoony also offered only negative published critiques of humanism prior to the publication of *The Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973. This is why he was willing in 1960 to write the Introduction to Dooyeweerd's *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1960). He did not yet see the threat that Dooyeweerd's common-ground philosophy represented.

theology-oriented. He pioneered the first of what have become known as "new life" Presbyterian churches. They have not officially departed from confessional orthodoxy. Nevertheless, their focus has not been on traditional confessional preaching and Calvinist doctrine. They have been more closely associated with the church growth movement. In achieving greater growth, they have created confusion within Reformed Presbyterian circles about the proper balance between creedal preaching and the personal needs of new converts.

New Life ecclesiology was one alternative in the late 1960's to the older ecclesiastical traditions that had been defended at Westminster. It was not an explicit denial of confessionalism, but it was unquestionably a different approach to church growth. The concerns of the older faculty members with the details of Reformed theology did not seem all that relevant in the cultural crisis of the late 1960's. When the seventies cooled things off, the concern of many students remained church growth, since they had not entered Westminster as Calvinists anyway. They wanted good jobs. This is the whole idea behind academic certification anyway. They wanted what the seminary wanted: *accreditation*. Theology was secondary for them.

Miller's church-building program was not self-consciously grounded in the older judicial theology of Calvinism. This is one reason why so many students accepted the New Life alternative. Judicial theology has not been acceptable to Arminians for well over two centuries, and really has never been very acceptable to them. It has not been acceptable to the lost, ever. So, by failing to bring to the attention of the unbeliever *the comprehensive judicial claims of Christ on him* from the moment he walks into the church, the New Life churches have gained members but have lost the cutting edge of the older Calvinism. Only by a self-conscious follow-up program based on judicial theology can this New Life approach build explicitly and self-consciously Calvinist churches, long term, but by adopting such follow-up preaching, the old question arises: Why won't the

members walk across the street to join the Baptists, who may even have a free gymnasium? At some point, *the judicial cutting edge of Calvinism must be presented* – more than this, it must be pushed forcefully into the consciousness of church members. Do the graduates of Westminster Seminary, East and West, really understand this? Are they taught before they leave campus how to do this? What books are assigned that convey this necessity and a detailed program to achieve it?

What Miller did was to provide an ecclesiastical alternative to the older Westminster tradition. It softened the edges of the older Calvinism in its attempt to broaden the base. It was, as some cynics still call it, “Miller lite.”

My point is not that New Life churches are inherently a dead end. They are no more a dead end than the Baptist churches are. My point is that as a seminary-taught ideal, New Life ecclesiology is a partial alternative to Van Til and theonomy. What these churches offer their members is something less than a comprehensive worldview. They do not motivate their members by preaching the vision of Christendom. They are not yet geared to offering such a theological construct, for their focus is not primarily theological.

3. The Nouthetic Counselling Alternative

Jay Adams, Ph.D. (speech), became in 1970 a nationally known Christian counsellor. His book, *Competent to Counsel* (1970), was ideal for the “me decade” of the 1970’s, as was Lindsey’s *Late, Great Planet Earth* (1970). The excesses of individualism created a market for both Adams (getting your world put back together) and Lindsey (preparing to move out of this world altogether).

Adams’ counselling methodology was based on the principle of personal responsibility for one’s actions. This is the correct approach. But this approach was not explicitly biblical in the sense of being built upon the Old Testament’s laws and sanctions. The “nouthetic” counsellors were not trained to go to

specific Bible verses that deal with law and restitution when setting forth solutions to disturbed Christians. Nouthetic counselling was a move away from individualism and autonomy, but it was not a move toward the concept of the *biblical covenant* as the *sole valid model* for personal and comprehensive rehabilitation. It was far better than the rat-maze behaviorism that was parading as academic Christian psychology in 1970, but it lacked an explicitly biblical judicial focus. This lack of a biblical judicial focus was the problem with everything that was coming out of Westminster in this period, with the exception of Norman Shepherd's brief, preliminary excursions into the question the relationship between law and grace. For these preliminary excursions, he was fired in 1982.

4. *The Intrusionist Alternative*

In the writings of Old Testament theologian Meredith G. Kline, we have the foundation of a reconstruction of covenant theology. His 1960's essays in the *Westminster Theological Journal* on the structure of the covenant, its relationship to ancient suzerainty treaties, and on the ecclesiastical covenant sanctions are all remarkable contributions to Christian scholarship. They were later assembled into pathbreaking books, most notably *By Oath Consigned* (1968) and *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (1972). But, like Van Til's apologetics, Kline's system has a problem. He did not do anything positive with his discoveries. Worse; his goal was to keep anyone else from doing anything with them. His theory of the entire Mosaic economy as an *intrusion* into covenant history tore the judicial heart out of the covenant model that he said had prevailed in Israel.¹⁹ By breaking with the Mosaic economy, he created a *judicial discontinuity* that rivaled anything that C. I. Scofield and the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary had suggested. By denying that

19. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), Pt. 2, ch. 3.

the laws of Moses have anything to do with the New Covenant economy except as types and symbols of Christ's death and resurrection and the post-judgment kingdom of God, he went far beyond the Westminster Confession of Faith and its supporting proof texts.

Kline was another useful means of deflecting the seminary from the judicial implications of Van Til's system. Kline was a defender of the "framework hypothesis," which argues that the six days of creation are not literal, but are literary devices: day one is linked to day four, day two to day five, and day three to day six. Edward J. Young had attacked this thesis in his *WTJ* articles that later became *Studies in Genesis One* (1964), politely using Nic Ridderbos as surrogate in his attack on his colleague Kline. Being a sweet, lovable man, Young lost the fight. Few of the students even knew there was a fight going on.

Kline made it intellectually acceptable for bright Calvinist students to reject six-day creationism. He also enabled them to reject any notion of the judicial relevance in New Testament times of God's Old Testament law-order. This is just what Clowney needed in the late 1960's: a non-covenantal Calvinism that would appeal to the neo-evangelicals coming out of the evangelical colleges.

When Kline joined the faculty of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, maintaining full professorships at both, it was perfect. The institutional link was sealed between the post-Van Til Calvinism of Westminster and the social ethics of neo-evangelicalism. The confession of neo-evangelical social ethics is basically this: "We can legitimately adopt ten-year-old political fads that have now been discarded by the liberals, and all in the name of relevant Christianity." This was perfect for Clowney's restructuring of the seminary. It could preach Christian social relevance without the conservative judicial constraints of biblical law.

5. The "Almost Liberation Theology" Alternative

I have in mind here the missions classes of Harvie Conn and the social activism of David Clowney. Clowney was fired in 1988 for his views on women's ordination. As I write, Conn is under investigation by his presbytery, also over the question of ordaining women. Clowney never published books defending his ideas, but Conn wrote several, including *Bible Studies on World Evangelism and the Simple Lifestyle* (1981) and *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* (1982). He promoted the ideal of social concern in missions – legitimate, in my view – but without grounding his suggested reforms in the specifics of biblical law. This form of social activism has never received any systematic biblical exegesis in its defense.

The liberation theology movement in Latin America is mostly Marxist.²⁰ Anyone who wants evidence of its economic and political radicalism can read dozens of books published by Orbis Books, the publishing arm of the Maryknoll order. The Protestant version is less ideological. It is a muddled mixture of Old Testament allusions, welfare State economics, and criticisms of "corrupt institutional structures." Ron Sider is the most popular neo-evangelical promoter of this theology, or was until David Chilton wrote *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (1981), a book Sider studiously avoided mentioning in the revised edition of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1984), whose cover promised that the book would answer his critics. The first edition was co-published by the liberal Roman Catholic Paulist press and InterVarsity Press. (Another co-publishing venture is the paperback series, *Mission Trends*: Paulist Press and Eerdmans. See especially *Mission Trends No. 4: Liberation Theologies*, 1979.)

Marxism was buried as an ideology in late 1989. Liberation theology is, at least for the moment, in an something of an

20. Malachi Martin, *The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), Parts 3 and 4.

intellectually catatonic state. The appeal of liberation theology, while it lasted, was a potent combination of rhetoric, envy, guilt, statism, and a call to social justice (compulsory wealth redistribution). Still, it was the one comprehensive Christian alternative to the activism of Christian Reconstruction in the 1970's and 1980's. Now there is none.

Consolidating the Revolution, 1975-1985

With several available alternatives to choose from, the new Westminster moved away from something resembling the older university ideal to a multiversity. Everyone offered a partial alternative; no one offered a comprehensive alternative. This was an ideal situation for those who wanted to move away from Van Til's legacy of total confrontation with both humanism and the compromised Christian philosophical tradition. They did not have to appear dogmatic about which option to choose. Van Til's position could therefore be considered as one among many. This view was in tune with American evangelicalism's apologetic methodology: *a smorgasbord apologetic for a pluralistic world* – a little rationalism, a little evidentialism, a bit of intuitionism; mix well and heat to 350 degrees for twenty minutes. In short, just pick and choose. It was not crucial for the president of the seminary to specify exactly where the new Westminster was headed; *what mattered most was what it was steadily leaving behind*. It was leaving behind a theological revolutionary whose dogmatic ideas had become an embarrassment in a pluralistic evangelical world. Westminster was broadening its base.

From what I could see at a distance, Clowney had no significant public problem until the mid-1970's with the implementation of his strategy of base-broadening and confession-thinning. There was no positive, exegetically Reformed worldview available as an alternative until *The Institutes of Biblical Law* appeared in 1973. But Rushdoony had left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1970. Later, his not-so-subtle reference to the

"Orthodox Pharisees Church" (OPC) sealed this departure.²¹ He had always been an outsider in the OPC from the day he left the PCUSA and joined in 1958. Also, he had no advanced theological degree beyond the B.D. His M.A. in education did not impress the faculty. He remained outside any local church after the *Institutes* appeared; he also ceased taking the Lord's Supper. There was no way that any Reformed seminary could hire him. In any case, he was not interested in leaving California. The followers of Van Til therefore had a major problem: Who should replace him after he officially retired in 1972? There was no clear choice until the mid-1970's. Then it became obvious to just about everyone, especially Clowney: Bahnsen.

This was Clowney's problem. Bahnsen had been awarded a Th.M. from Westminster in 1973. He was working on his Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Southern California. Why not hire Bahnsen? After all, he was Van Til's choice. But Bahnsen was more than the defender of a negative critique of humanism; he had developed, in a highly systematic form, a positive judicial alternative to natural law theory, namely, theonomy. He had provided the formal apologetic for biblical law. He had done all this in the arcane language known as *theologian*. Rushdoony does not speak it; neither do I. Also, Rushdoony's wide cultural vision was not acceptable to a seminary; neither was mine. But Bahnsen had narrowed the scope of his presentation to fit the self-imposed limits of theological academia.

When Bahnsen was granted his Ph.D. in 1979, I think he became Edmund Clowney's worst nightmare: *a theonomist with a terminal degree* – something that David Clowney and John Frame did not possess. From 1979 forward, there was no legitimate *academic* reason for Westminster not to hire Bahnsen. Yet this was not to happen. In 1982, the Board failed to renew

21. R. J. Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Post Millennialism* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1977), p. 9.

Norman Shepherd's contract. (Try and find anyone who can tell you what theological grounds they had. His presbytery found none.) Next, they hired Clowney's son David, Wayne State University M.A. in hand, to fill Van Til's position as the resident apologist at the Philadelphia campus. The transformation of Westminster East was sealed. For the next seven years until David Clowney's dismissal, apologetics at Westminster's Philadelphia campus meant *always having to say you were sorry* – sorry for being white, masculine, middle class, educated, American, and living in Philadelphia's suburbs.²²

The primary *institutional* task of Westminster's resident apologist, whoever he may be – the ultimate institutional task for which he is being paid – is to declare publicly (if only by his silence) what Westminster isn't: *theonomic*. It was this priority that made an M.A. from Wayne State more academically acceptable than a Ph.D. from USC. They bent the academic rules. Surprise, surprise! It was one more bit of evidence supporting Van Til's claim that neutrality is a myth.

A New Confession for Westminster?

Theonomy: A Reformed Critique is a symposium written by faculty members and former faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary. The book appeared a bit late, seventeen years after: (1) *Roe v. Wade*, (2) Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law*, (3) the publication of my *Introduction to Christian Economics*, (4) *Chalcedon Report* started publishing my "Economic Commentary on the Bible" column, and (5) the acceptance by the Westminster faculty of Bahnsen's Th.M. thesis; and fourteen years after the thesis was published, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. So far, we have published well over one hundred volumes of theonomic books and scholarly journals. *Theonomy: A Reformed*

22. David Clowney was dismissed from the faculty in 1988. He was replaced by a man whose one book is on Christianity and music. His real job description is this: "Keep Bahnsen out."

Critique appeared in the same month that the 25th anniversary issue of Rushdoony's *Chalcedon Report* appeared.

"Better late than never," theonomy's critics may imagine, unless the book is really wrong. My conclusion: better "never," at least for them. Terrific for me. The book is eminently useful to me as a foil. I get to come in as a defender of others, since I am rarely referred to in the book. What may strike some readers as even more peculiar is this: the essays in the Westminster symposium refer comparatively infrequently to Volume I of Rushdoony's *Institutes* in their criticisms of the theonomic position (and even less frequently to the far less rigorous Volume II, *Law and Society*), even though they would all freely acknowledge that Rushdoony's book was the first study to present the theonomic position in detail – almost 900 pages of detail. Instead, the essays focus far more attention on Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977).

There are several plausible reasons for this. First, the bulk of Bahnsen's book was originally accepted by the Westminster faculty as his Th.M. thesis. There seems to be a sense of guilt and remorse about this among some of the faculty critics. On the other hand, the seminary never endorsed Rushdoony's *Institutes*, let alone the hundred-plus volumes of materials (not counting newsletters) that we theonomists have written before and after 1973. So, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is to some extent an exercise in academic atonement. Some of the essays, most notably Frame's and Poythress', are also attempts to atone for Meredith Kline's 1978 critique of Bahnsen. Others, however, are extensions of Kline's critique. This is why the symposium is both judicially schizophrenic and judicially agnostic.

Second, as mentioned earlier, Bahnsen wrote *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* in that arcane foreign tongue known as *theologian*. Those who still speak it or at least lisp it usually take more seriously those books that are written in it. Third, Bahnsen is an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which (years ago) was loosely related to Westminster

Seminary.²³ (In a peculiar sense it still is. Faithful OPC members keep sending in checks to keep CRC and PCA faculty members employed.) For ecclesiastical old times' sake, perhaps, they pay greater attention to Bahnsen.²⁴ Fourth, Bahnsen's book is an apologetic. It has a narrower focus and a more limited goal than *Institutes of Biblical Law* or my *Tools of Dominion*. The scholar who attempts to refute it is not risking getting entrapped in some academic mine field he is not familiar with. Fifth, Bahnsen has not written very much over the years. The critic is less likely to get sandbagged by the classic retort: "If Professor Dork had just read my book on. . . ." The critics did not have to read very much in order to form a theologically defensible opinion of theonomy, or so they seem to have believed. If they believed this, they were wrong. They needed to pay far more attention to his arguments. Judgment cometh!

On the One Hand; On the Other

The essays in the *Theonomy* critique were written by men holding advanced theological degrees and, at least at some point during the five-year effort to produce it, who were in some way connected with Westminster Seminary. Because Westminster Seminary has long enjoyed the reputation as the most academic of Presbyterian-related conservative seminaries, and perhaps even the most academically rigorous of all Bible-affirming seminaries, every essay in this book should have been a cut above the fundamentalist diatribes that have greeted the work of theonomists since about 1985. Such is not the case. Compared to Timothy Keller, Dave Hunt is a pillar of scholarship and self-restraint. Compared to John R. Muether, Wayne House is Augustine.

23. Today, there are few full-time WTS professors who belong to and attend an Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

24. One of the authors, Dennis Johnson, was his classmate at Westmont College and at Westminster.

Rhetorically and structurally, this book resembles an exercise in Hegelianism. Time and again, the authors use the traditional *thesis-antithesis* approach to attack theonomy. They adopt the *sic et non* (yes and no) strategy that Abelard used in the eleventh century to undermine men's faith in the Church fathers. But Hegel implied that there would be a temporary resolution of each pair of synthesis-antithesis dichotomies. Each synthesis would become the next thesis. Where, then, is Westminster's synthesis? *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* offers a collection of antinomies without resolution, dichotomies without healing. It is a confession of fifteen theologians and a librarian in search of a synthesis. It offers a new confession. The question is: What is the nature of this new confession? It is this: "A positive confession regarding the legitimacy of Christendom is itself not biblical. Therefore, Westminster could not hire Bahnsen and had to fire Shepherd."

Conclusion

The thesis of the present book is that Westminster Seminary faced a crisis in 1965. Would it remain true to Van Til's apologetic? Would the members of the faculty at last do what they had never done before? Would they take Van Til's insights on the failure of natural law theory and apply them systematically and fearlessly to their own disciplines? Would they break with their academic peers and begin to pioneer a whole new worldview based on Van Til's decisive break with humanism? Would they offer reconstructions of their own academic disciplines based on Van Til's insistence that only the Bible is a valid foundation of truth in every field of thought? Would they, in short, become theological revolutionaries?

We know the answer today. Like a dog returning to its vomit, the anti-theonomists have gone back to natural law theory. They have abandoned the legacy of Van Til. The quasi-theonomists on the faculty watch silently from the sidelines. They have not made it clear either to their students or their

readers that their colleagues have taken this step backward into medieval Scholasticism.

Westminster Seminary still proclaims its commitment to John Calvin. If my thesis is correct – that there is a new confession at Westminster Seminary – then how could this transition away from Van Til have taken place? Is Westminster being faithful or unfaithful to Calvin by abandoning Van Til? Was Van Til faithful or unfaithful to Calvin? Is the follower of Van Til faced with a choice between Calvin and Van Til? To answer these questions, we need to consider the divided judicial legacy of John Calvin.

CALVIN'S DIVIDED JUDICIAL LEGACY

If we distinguish between a theoretical and strict "Theonomic" viewpoint on the one hand, and more practical and loose "theonomic" viewpoint on the other, we might say that Calvin was not a Theonomist but a theonomist. That is, an examination of Calvin's theoretical writings on the judicial aspects of the Mosaic law will reveal that he believed that they were given to Israel in a rather unique fashion, and are not binding on modern civil governments. Yet, an examination of Calvin's practical writings and sermons (such as the sermons on Deuteronomy) will reveal that he used the Mosaic law, including its judicial aspects, as the foundation for social, political, and legal wisdom, and generally favored imitating the Mosaic laws in the modern world.

James B. Jordan (1990)¹

John Calvin was a transitional figure. (Adam and Jesus Christ were the ultimate transitional figures; everyone else is either a mini-transitional figure or a micro-transitional figure.) He inherited a great deal of philosophical baggage from the past. He scrapped only part of it. Whenever he relied on the Bible or Augustine, he was usually secure from misinterpreta-

1. James B. Jordan, "Editor's Introduction," John Calvin, *The Covenant Enforced: Sermons on Deuteronomy 27 and 28* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

tion. But in several key doctrinal areas, he was confused. I do not mean merely muddled; I mean double-minded. He proclaimed opposite positions on different occasions. He offers a "yes" on one occasion and a "no" on another. This litany of *sic et non* has continued down through the centuries in Calvinism. This dualism has led to the creation of rival wings within Calvinism, wings that are still flapping against each other. As a result, Calvinism does not soar; it scurries around on the ground like a frightened chicken.

Calvin's confusion parallels the confusion of the Christian Church from the fifth century onward. This confusion is closely related to the biblical covenant model; indeed, it is an historical manifestation of that covenant's five points: the transcendence of God, the hierarchy of institutional authorities, the law of God, the sanctions of God in history, and the millennium. The early Church correctly formulated the Trinitarian doctrine of God. No one in the camp of the orthodox is suggesting the need to revise the early creeds on this point. Had the Church failed here, we would all be Arians, or even worse – just like the vast majority of our neighbors are today. On the question of the absolute sovereignty of God, however, the Pelagians steadily triumphed over the Augustinians in the West after Augustine's death in 430. It was only with the revival of Augustine's doctrine of predestination by Luther and Calvin that the Reformation began to recover the abandoned Augustinian heritage.

On the other four covenantal doctrines, there has never been any agreement. In 1054, Eastern Orthodoxy split with Western Catholicism over the question of proper hierarchy: Pope vs. Patriarch, Church vs. State. Questions of Church and State in the West came to a head in the eleventh century, culminating with King Henry IV's decision to stand barefoot in the snow at Canossa for three days in 1077, in his successful attempt to get Pope Gregory VII to remove his 1076 excom-

munication.² This debate over the laity's control of the Church (investiture) still goes on today. Vatican II in the early 1960's was an extension of this ancient debate within Catholicism, and this debate has escalated.³ There has been no settlement.

Next, the debate over the nature, function, and connections of canon law and civil law in the West began shortly after Gregory granted Henry his wish.⁴ There has been no settlement of this debate, either. No one pays much attention to canon law.

Three and a half centuries after Canossa, the Reformation split Europe and Western Christendom over the question of ecclesiastical sanctions: Who has the right to excommunicate whom? What is the nature of the sacraments (baptism and holy communion)? How many sacraments are there? There has been no settlement.⁵ (The Roman Church's sale of indulgences – escape routes for the dead out of a place of sanctions called purgatory – was the catalyst for the debate.)

Finally, millennialism remains this century's great point of contention within evangelical Protestantism.⁶ (That other great eschatological movement, Marxist Communism,⁷ visibly collapsed as an ideal in late 1989.) As the twentieth century has

2. Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, State, and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, [1940] 1948).

3. Malachi Martin, *The Keys of This Blood* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

4. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

5. The secondary question of the relationship between civil and ecclesiastical sanctions led to the Thirty Years War in Germany (1618-48), with this settlement: people in each prince's kingdom would adopt his religion, i.e., Erastianism. This settlement was steadily abandoned as a result of the Enlightenment, culminating on the Continent in the defeat of the Hapsburg Empire by the Allies in 1918, and in the U.S., by the abandonment of a Christian commonwealth by the U.S. Constitution in 1788. See Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3.

6. James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), pp. 29-30.

7. Francis Nigel Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1974).

worn on, the debates over eschatology have intensified. The latest is the debate over the New World Order.

The Sovereignty of God

Calvin left no doubt regarding his view of the sovereignty of God. He was an Augustinian. (So was Martin Luther,⁸ but his successors, beginning almost immediately with Philip Melancthon, returned to a far more Pelagian outlook.) Calvin left few doubts about hierarchy, either. The Church is Presbyterian in structure, and the State is to protect the Church. "Yet civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility."⁹ He affirmed the ideal of the Christian State.¹⁰ (This outlook has been a major embarrassment for his post-1788 American followers.)¹¹ For Calvin, as for Aquinas, Christendom included the State and all other institutions. In the post-1788 era, the very concept of Christendom has become anathema to almost all Protestants, indicating that the Deists, the Unitarians, and the post-Münster Anabaptists have triumphed over original Calvinism specifically and pre-Newtonian European thought and culture generally. But in the era of the Reformation, Calvin's viewpoint was not revolutionary. Indeed, any departure from such a view would have been regarded as revolutionary. Not until the Civil War

8. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (1524). This has been reprinted in the Library of Christian Classics, volume XVII: *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969).

9. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book IV, Chapter XX, Section 2.

10. *Ibid.*, IV:XX:14.

11. Excepting only the Covenanters: The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

of the 1640's did even a handful of Englishmen regard this view of Church and State relations as dangerous to religious liberties. Where we see a divided Calvin is in two aspects of the biblical covenant model: law and historical sanctions.

Civil Law and Civil Sanctions

Calvin in the *Institutes* declared a view of civil law that was clearly Scholastic. He defended the concept of natural law.¹² In his sermons on Deuteronomy, however, he declared a view of civil law that has to be regarded as theonomic. He appealed to the Old Testament case laws to justify capital punishment for apostasy (Sermons 87-89, 103), murder (113), eye for eye: false witness (115-16), rebellious teenagers (123), adultery (128-29), and kidnapping (138).¹³ There seems to be a conflict in Calvin's thought between judicial theory (*Institutes*) and practice (*Sermons on Deuteronomy*).

In the *Institutes*, Calvin rejected the idea that the State has an obligation to adopt the civil laws of the Israelites. He rejected as "perilous and seditious" the opinion of those "who deny that a commonwealth is duly framed which neglects the political system of Moses, and is ruled by the common laws of nations."¹⁴ This statement appeared in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*,¹⁵ published just one year after the fall of the communist, polygamous Anabaptists at Münster. Calvin divided the Mosaic laws into the familiar categories of moral, ceremonial, and judicial. He recognized that "ceremonial and judicial laws

12. A solid introductory study of Calvin's view of natural law is Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, [1959] 1982), pp. 141-47.

13. John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987). These sermons on capital punishment are scheduled be reprinted in a modernized language form by the Institute for Christian Economics in late 1991.

14. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV:XX:14.

15. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986), VI:48, p. 215.

pertain also to morals.”¹⁶ The ceremonial laws are abrogated. So are the judicial laws. “But if this is true, surely every nation is left free to make such laws as it foresees to be profitable for itself.”¹⁷ But he added this warning: “Yet these must be in conformity to that perpetual rule of love, so that they indeed vary in form but have the same purpose. For I do not think that those barbarous and savage laws such as gave honor to thieves, permitted promiscuous intercourse, and others both more filthy and more absurd, are to be regarded as laws. For they are abhorrent not only to all justice, but to all humanity and gentleness.” Some civil laws are not binding civil laws.

What are the criteria of morally binding civil laws? Justice, humanity, and gentleness. He summarized these three in the term *equity*. “Equity, because it is natural, cannot but be the same for all, and therefore, this same purpose ought to apply to all laws, whatever their object.”¹⁸ In short, “equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws.” All of this was utterly conventional, and had been since at least the twelfth century, but especially after Aquinas. This was medieval Scholasticism. It did not survive Newton’s worldview, or Kant’s.

Van Til’s Half-a-Legacy

Nevertheless, no post-1788 Reformed Protestant theologian officially abandoned Calvin’s view of civil law until 1973: R. J. Rushdoony’s *Institutes of Biblical Law*. Rushdoony was unfamiliar with the Calvin’s sermons on Deuteronomy. He considered only the *Institutes’* defense of natural law theory. The philosophical and ethical foundation of Calvin’s theory of civil law was his view of *equitable* natural law. It was this assumption that had been abandoned over four decades earlier by Van Til, beginning in the 1920’s. It was Van Til alone who rejected all

16. *Institutes* (1559), IV:XX:14.

17. *Ibid.*, IV:XX:15.

18. *Ibid.*, IV:XX:16.

traces of natural law theory in apologetics, meaning the intellectual defense of the faith. He traced Scholasticism's rationalist methodology down through Lutheranism and modern fundamentalism, which he attacked at every point. He dedicated his career to demonstrating that any appeal to the hypothetical neutrality and universality of the reason of self-proclaimed autonomous man is a snare and a delusion. Thus, Van Til's system broke cleanly and totally from the view of civil law that Calvin defended in the *Institutes*. But Van Til was careful never to discuss civil law; he only discussed the narrow issues of philosophy, i.e., natural law as it relates to such topics as epistemology (the Scholastic proofs of God, etc.).

Because of this unwillingness on his part to extend the obvious implications of his presuppositional thought to the realm of social theory, Van Til could claim that he was not a Christian Reconstructionist. His intellectual position was reminiscent of Charles Lyell's, the systematizer of uniformitarian geology, who insisted for several years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* that he himself was not a Darwinist, since he did not believe that man had evolved. Man was discontinuous from nature, he insisted.¹⁹ Yet it was Lyell's doctrine of continuity in geological development (measured by the presence of fossils) that had led Darwin to his theory of organic continuity. It was Darwin's reading of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1833) on the famous voyage of the *Beagle* that persuaded Darwin to adopt a new explanation of biological development, evolution by natural selection. (Late in life, almost a decade after the *Origin* appeared, Lyell finally adopted Darwin's views.)²⁰ Similarly, it was Rushdoony's reading of Van Til in the 1950's that led him in the late 1960's to begin to develop

19. Loren Eiseley, *Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It* (Garden City, New York: Anchor, [1958] 1961), p. 267.

20. William Irvine, *Apes, Angels, and Victorians: The Story of Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), p. 210.

the structure of theonomy.²¹ This cautiousness on Van Til's part has created tactical problems for his theonomic followers. They have difficulty with the question, "Why didn't Van Til follow?" Not until I wrote *Political Polytheism* did any theonomist address this question directly.²²

Rushdoony appealed directly to Van Til's work as his philosophical starting point for theonomy. In other words, he appealed to Van Til rather than Calvin. Hence, in this sense, Rushdoony admitted from the start that Calvin was not a modern theonomist, since Calvin was not a Vantilian. Theonomy is therefore a package deal. It was Calvin's defense of natural law theory that drew Rushdoony's ire.²³ But Rushdoony's rejection of Calvin on this point was simply an extension of Van Til's original attack on Aquinas, Lutheranism, and fundamentalism. Van Til prudently skipped Calvin when he directed his withering fire on natural law theory, preferring instead to emphasize Calvin's view of the sovereignty of God, the Creator-creature distinction, the Holy Spirit, the ethical fall of man, the Trinity, and so forth.²⁴ Rushdoony gets into trouble with anti-theonomic Calvinists who claim to be Van Til's disciples, yet their quarrel is really with Van Til.²⁵ (Bahnsen, following Van Til's example, long remained judiciously silent on this aspect of Van Til's thought: Calvin vs. Van Til on natural law theory.)²⁶

21. He began this reconstruction in a series of lectures on biblical law beginning around 1968. These became *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973).

22. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 3.

23. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 9.

24. See, for example, Van Til's discussion of Calvin in *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Den Dulk Foundation, 1969), ch. 8.

25. W. Robert Godfrey, "Calvin and Theonomy," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 300.

26. There is no reference to Van Til's writings in the text of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977), although Van Til is quoted on the page facing the dedication page. There is no reference to Van Til in *By This Standard* (1985).

Was Calvin a Theonomist?

The question remains: Why did Calvin devote so much time to the civil laws of Deuteronomy? Why did he recommend the continuing enforcement of the capital sanctions required by several of those laws? The answer is simple: *because he was a theonomist in his view of Old Testament law*. He saw those laws as the embodiment in covenantal history of God's principles of civil justice. While he did not insist that they are universally required today, he did not dismiss them as not being applicable in a Christian State. In the *Institutes*, Calvin made this defense of Old Covenant law, specifically the so-called Second Table: "Now we can understand the nature of the fruits of repentance: the duties of piety toward God, of charity toward men, and in the whole of life, holiness and purity. Briefly, the more earnestly any man measures his life by the standard of God's law, the surer are the signs of repentance that he shows. Therefore, the Spirit, while he urges us to repentance, often recalls us now to the individual precepts of the law, now to the duties of the Second Table."²⁷ While the modern Calvinist can always argue, "Yes, but Calvin meant only the rule of law in each individual's heart," this hardly squares with Calvin's view of Christendom, and with his insistence that the civil magistrate should not neglect enforcing the "First Table" of the law, let alone neglecting the "Second."²⁸

With respect to individual judicial guidelines, Calvin was also a defender of Old Covenant law. In his *Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists* (1544), he wrote:

27. Calvin, *Institutes*, III:III:16.

28. I agree with Meredith Kline on the two tables of the law being two separate tablets, each with all of the commandments on it. They were placed in the Ark of the Covenant as legal documents: one for God and one for the nation of Israel. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 123-24.

Let us hold this position: that with regard to true spiritual justice, that is to say, with regard to a faithful man walking in good conscience and being whole before God in both his vocation and in all his works, there exists a plain and complete guideline for it in the law of Moses, to which we need simply²⁹ cling if we want to follow the right path. Thus whoever adds to or takes away anything from it exceeds the limits. Therefore our position is sure and infallible.³⁰

Natural Law in the Sixteenth Century

What should be clear to anyone who investigates this question is that Calvin's view of natural law, like Aquinas' view, was colored by the existence of a general view of ethics that had been formed by centuries of Christian preaching, legislating, and ethical disputing. Calvin had been trained in the law, and the Scholastic legal order was heavily Christian. In Northern Europe, the Italian Renaissance's revival of classical rationalism, as well as classical and Jewish occultism (Kabbalah), did not completely penetrate the culture.³¹ The sense of justice, humanity, and gentleness that prevailed in early modern Northern Europe was understood in terms of biblical moral standards. This meant the Ten Commandments. What the commentators perceived as universal principles were in fact Old Testament legal principles that had also been adopted sporadically by other civilizations.

Calvin warned against the sufficiency of natural law. "Accordingly (because it is necessary both for our dullness and for

29. Simply! Calvin *must* have been a theonomist, according to the argument of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* regarding theonomists as judicial simpletons. See below, pp. 199, 203-6, 208-9, 240-41, 256.

30. John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, translated and edited by Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 78.

31. Stephen A. McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Vintage, [1964] 1969).

our arrogance), the Lord has provided us with a written law to give us a clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law, shake off our listlessness, and strike more vigorously our mind and memory.”³² Here he was speaking of lawful worship. This, too, was a Scholastic heritage: the knowledge of God’s will was regarded as clearer for civil law than His law of worship. Nevertheless, Calvin did state with respect to civil law that “the Lord through the hand of Moses did not give that law to be proclaimed among all nations and to be in force everywhere; but when he had taken the Jewish nation into his safe-keeping, defense, and protection, he also willed to be a lawgiver especially to it. . . .”³³ By separating the specifics of Old Testament civil law from the general equity principle of civil justice, he left the door open to generations of Calvinists who could, in good conscience, call themselves Calvinists and still accept a wide range of political and economic humanism, including the legalization of abortion (as publicly advocated, for example, by Westminster Seminary’s late professor Paul Woolley).³⁴ Natural law is devoid of authoritative content; the phrase merely serves as a covering for whatever judicial system a natural law theorist chooses.

There are few natural law theorists remaining in our day, however. In principle, Kant’s system overwhelmed most of the non-Christian defenders of the idea, and modern democratic humanism – Darwinian to the core – has overwhelmed the rest. Only within Christian circles and isolated pockets of the libertarian movement do we still find defenders of natural law theory. Both movements have been split by the abortion question. Natural law has not led to a resolution of this issue.

John Calvin accepted the natural law theory of his day, an outlook heavily influenced by Christian teaching. He saw Old

32. Calvin, *Institutes*, II:VIII:1.

33. *Ibid.*, IV:XX:16.

34. He debated Westminster’s John Frame on this issue.

Testament laws as examples of natural law theory in history. He advocated the imposition of public execution for many of the infractions listed in the Old Testament's Mosaic law. Thus, his defense of natural law theory was of a very different character from anything proposed by post-Newtonian, post-Darwinian, post-Heisenberg, and post-Van Til Calvinist defenders of "Christian" political pluralism, who would strip away every trace of the Mosaic law from contemporary civil law and return us to Noah, whose only direct command from God to impose a specific negative sanction involved the crime of murder.³⁵ Having abandoned both Calvin and Van Til, they would return us to the unitarian politics of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and do so in the name of Jesus.

God's Sanctions in History

Here we find a similar discrepancy. Calvin wrote in his sermons on Deuteronomy that God's positive and negative sanctions apply directly to individuals in history. If this is true, then it becomes possible for men to construct ethical theory in terms of God's law. If covenant-keepers *as a class* are generally blessed in history because of their outward and inward obedience to God's law, and covenant-breakers *as a class* are generally cursed in history because of their rebellion against God's law, then the expansion of Christian civilization is assured. On the other hand, to the extent that this positive covenantal correlation does not apply in history, it becomes less possible for men to construct ethical theory in terms of God's law. If covenant-keepers as a class are not *predictably* blessed in history, and covenant-breakers as a class are not *predictably* cursed in history,

35. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 112-13. He is followed in this argument by dispensationalists H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988), pp. 126-27. It is interesting that the dispensationalist critics were forced to appeal to a traditional Reformed view of the covenants in order to defend their position.

then the expansion of Christian civilization is impossible. The Church will remain a ghetto within a pagan civilization.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin's affirmation of the historical predictability of God's sanctions was more muted. This has led to confusion among his followers regarding his actual beliefs. So, let us begin with his statements asserting the inescapability of God's predictable historical sanctions. We return to his sermons on Deuteronomy. I begin with his view favoring the continuing validity of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments), the words of the law. He cites Deuteronomy 27:26: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen." His comments do not indicate any doubt on his part regarding the comprehensive claims of God's law in history. They are so great that we need His mercy.

For this cause, therefore, it is said, "Cursed be he who does not confirm the words of this law." He is not here speaking of one or two commandments, or of some part of them, but of the whole law, every part and parcel thereof without exception. And indeed, we ought to think of how St. James says that He who has forbidden to steal, has also forbidden to commit adultery; and that He who has forbidden to murder has also forbidden false witnessing. We must not rend God's justice in pieces. In whatever way we offend, we violate God's law, and despise His majesty. But He will be acknowledged in His law throughout in all points, and not just in part, as I have told you before.³⁶

But here is a dreadful sentence, and such a one as ought to make the hairs stand stiff on our heads: "Cursed shall he be who does not perform all the words of this law." Who says this? It is God Himself. It is, then, a definitive sentence, such as admits of no appeal beyond itself. God will have all men confess it so, yea He will have every man confess it with his own mouth. What, then, remains for us to do? Where is the hope of salvation?

36. Calvin, *Covenant Enforced*, p. 64. Sermon 152.

From this we see that if we had only the ten commandments of the law we should be utterly undone and perish. It is necessary for us to have recourse to His mercy, which outstrips His justice, as St. James says (Jas. 2:13). God's goodness, then, must be manifest towards us to deliver us from the damnation all of us would experience if this curse should stand and there be no grace to overcome it.³⁷

The Case Laws

Did he take the details of the Mosaic case laws seriously? Yes. He went to Leviticus 18 and 20 in search of the definition of incest. He writes that "these degrees of consanguinity should be observed. For without such order, what would become of things? How would we differ from bulls and asses?"³⁸ He did not make his judicial case on the basis of an appeal to natural law theory.

This comparison of a brute beast and a man without God's law is a familiar one in Calvin's judicial theology:

How are we made the people of God except by being His Church, and by having the use of His sacraments, and that is all the same as if He appeared among us? For we may not expect that God should come down from heaven in His own person, or send His angels to us. Rather, the true mark whereby He will be known to be present among us is the preaching of His Word purely unto us, for there can be no doubt but that then He bears rule in our midst. So then, let this thing profit us, that we know that our Lord receives us to Himself and will have us to be of His own household. Seeing it so, *let us take pains to obey Him in all our life, and to keep His commandments.* Let us not wander like brute beasts as the wretched unbelievers do, because they never knew what it was to be of the house of God.³⁹ (emphasis added)

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67. Sermon 152.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 54. Sermon 151.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 33. Sermon 150.

Calvin's Judicial Theology

Calvin believed in the primacy of obedience. This is why his theology is intensely judicial.

And we can see that the promise is not empty when we continue reading, "Keep the commandment I set before you this day," says Moses, "that You swerve neither to the left nor to the right to go after strange gods and to worship them." We see how God continually reminds us of obedience to His Word so that we should serve Him, though not in that hypocrisy to which we are so much inclined. Let us remember therefore this lesson: That to worship our God sincerely we must evermore begin by hearkening to His voice, and by giving ear to what He commands us. For if every man goes after his own way, we shall wander. We may well run, but we shall never be a whit nearer to the right way, but rather farther away from it.⁴⁰

Here Calvin's view of God's sanctions in history is clearly theonomic. When he expounded the actual texts of the Old Testament, he wrote in the present tense. *Calvin believed that these sanctions still apply in New Testament times.* But his sermons on Deuteronomy are not familiar to most Calvinists. They were printed in English in 1583, almost two decades after his death, and then not reprinted until 1987. The average reader knows him, if at all, only from the *Institutes*; a few readers may have consulted his commentaries. In the *Institutes*, he qualifies his explicit exegesis of the Deuteronomy sermons. He says of God that "he frequently allows the wicked and malefactors to exult unpunished for some time, while he permits the upright and deserving to be tossed about by many adversities, and even to be oppressed by the malice and iniquity of the impious."⁴¹ This points to the fact that "when he leaves many sins unpunished, there will be another judgment to which have been

40. *Ibid.*, p. 128. Sermon 155.

41. Calvin, *Institutes*, I:V:7. Cf. I:V:10.

deferred the sins yet to be punished." The question is, what does he mean by the phrase, "for some time"? How long is this? He does not say. He does say this: "And to urge us in every way, he promises both blessings in the present life and everlasting blessedness to those who obediently keep his commandments. He threatens the transgressors no less with present calamities than with the punishment of eternal death."⁴² He says that "a long list of present blessings and curses is also enumerated in the law." Here it is: *sanctions*.

He says that "the temporal punishments inflicted upon a few scoundrels are testimonies of the divine wrath against sin, and of the judgment someday coming to all sinners, though many go unpunished till the end of this life."⁴³ This does not have the same force as his sermons on Deuteronomy. The question is, do these negative sanctions come often enough to instill fear in the hearts of the wicked, if they would but pay attention to the external events of their lives? In the Deuteronomy sermons, he says that this is the case. He does not say this in the *Institutes*, however.

Trials and Tribulations: The Institutes

His discussion in the *Institutes* of the patriarchs points to their trials and tribulations on earth. Abraham was a wanderer. He lived among barbarous neighbors. He had no natural son until late in life. He was asked to sacrifice his natural son. "In short, throughout life he was so tossed and troubled that if anyone wished to paint a picture of a calamitous life, he could find no model more appropriate than Abraham's!"⁴⁴ Yet the Bible clearly says that Abraham was a very rich man (Gen. 13:2). He defeated his enemies in battle (Gen. 14). He lived a long life, fathering nations long after Isaac had married (Gen.

42. *Ibid.*, II:VIII:4.

43. *Ibid.*, II:VIII:21.

44. *Ibid.*, II:X:11.

25). Calvin recognizes that someone would object and point out that Abraham "finally came safely through so great tempests. We will not say that he leads a happy life who struggles long and hard through infinite difficulties, but he who calmly enjoys present benefits without feeling misfortune."⁴⁵ Why, then, does Calvin focus on the more troublesome aspects of Abraham's life? He does the same thing with Isaac and Jacob.⁴⁶ Apparently, he is trying to persuade the reader that eternal life is worth the effort to persevere. "Finally, it is clearly established that in all their efforts in this life they set before themselves the blessedness of the future life."⁴⁷

He selectively cites David's psalms. "He lets good men languish in darkness and filth, while the wicked almost shine among the stars. . . . So very greatly does impiety prosper and flourish."⁴⁸ Then comes the capstone. Citing Psalm 73, which David begins by admitting that he was troubled by the prosperity of the wicked. The psalm ends, however, with an affirmation of David's faith that God sets evil men in slippery places (v. 18). Here is the heart of the whole psalm, the reason why David wrote it: the period of good times for the wicked eventually ends *in history*. Calvin ignores this crucial aspect of the psalm, and then concludes:

Let us, therefore, learn from this confession of David's that the holy patriarchs under the Old Testament were aware how rarely or never God fulfills in this world what he promises to his servants; and that they therefore lifted up their hearts to God's sanctuary, in which they found hidden what does not appear in the shadows of the present life. This place was the Last Judgment of God. . . .⁴⁹

45. *Idem*.

46. *Ibid.*, II:X:12-13.

47. *Ibid.*, II:X:14.

48. *Ibid.*, II:X:16.

49. *Ibid.*, II:X:17.

Trials and Tribulations: The Commentaries

Yet if we turn to his commentary on this psalm, we see that he there maintained his belief in God's temporal sanctions. Commenting on verse 18, the "slippery places" verse, Calvin writes that "David, having now gone through his conflicts, begins, if we may use the expression, to be a new man; and he speaks with a quiet and composed mind, being, as it were, elevated on a watchtower, from which he obtained a clear and distinct view of things which before were hidden from him."⁵⁰ Now David could see the truth about the wicked of this world. They are being set up by God for a fall. Calvin then offers this opinion: ". . . when God perceives that we are so slow in considering his judgments, he inflicts upon the ungodly judgments of a very severe kind, and pursues them with unusual tokens of his wrath, as if he would make the earth to tremble, in order thereby to correct our dullness of apprehension."⁵¹

For the person who knows Calvin through his *Institutes*, it may appear as though Calvin saw no judicial or covenantal pattern to God's sanctions in history. But if we turn to his commentaries, we find just the opposite. How the reader is to account for this is a challenge. When Calvin expounded specific passages in Scripture, he offered a theonomic view of God's sanctions in history. But in the *Institutes*, this clarity of vision is lacking. I cannot offer a plausible explanation. Perhaps he was writing for a different audience: scholars who were heavily influenced by the categories of Scholastic natural law theory rather than laymen sitting in a church. All I can say with confidence is that this dualism in his writings has created problems for all subsequent Calvinist ethicists, especially those interested in social ethics.⁵² The theonomists can appeal to his exposition

50. Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1557] 1979), III, p. 144.

51. *Ibid.*, III, p. 146, at verse 19.

52. I do not find things as clear as Jack W. Sawyer does; I do not find Calvin

of Old Testament law, and the non-theonomists can appeal to the *Institutes*. His judicial legacy is divided.

Foundations of Calvin's Social Theory

What is the nature of social change? This is *the* question of modern social theory.⁵³ Humanist scholars usually focus on the perceived dualism between mind and matter: ideas vs. history as the primary basis of social development. The Bible, in contrast, focuses on the question of ethics: covenant-keeping vs. covenant-breaking. This raises the key issue in biblical social theory: *God's sanctions in history*.⁵⁴

In his sermons on Deuteronomy, Calvin's view of history is straightforward: God brings His sanctions – blessings and cursings – in the midst of history in terms of each man's obedience to His law. Each man reaps what he sows *in history*. Calvin did not qualify this statement in any significant way, and he repeated it over and over:

For if any one of us should reckon up what he has suffered all the days of his life, and then examine the state of David or Abraham, doubtless *he will find himself to be in a better state than were those holy fathers*. For they, as the apostle says (Heb. 11:13), only saw things afar off, things that are right before our eyes. God promised to be their Savior; He had chosen them to be, as it were, of His household; but meanwhile where was He who was to be their promised Redeemer? Where was the doctrine that is made so clear to us in the gospel concerning the resur-

"perfectly consistent throughout." Jack W. Sawyer, "Moses and the Magistrate: Aspects of Calvin's Political Theory in Contemporary Focus," Westminster Theological Seminary, Th.M. thesis (1986), p. 61. There is no way to get consistency out of theonomy law and natural law theory. You can be constantly inconsistent throughout and hold both positions, but not consistent.

53. Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

54. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), chaps. 7, 8.

rection? They knew the same afar off, but now it is declared to us in the gospel in such a way that we may indeed say, as our Lord Jesus Christ gives us to understand, that blessed are the ears that hear the things that are told us concerning Him, and the eyes that see the things that we see, for the holy kings and prophets longed for the same, and could not obtain it (Matt. 13:16f.). (emphasis added)

We therefore have a much more excellent estate than they had who lived under the law. This is the difference of which I speak, which needed to be supplied by God because of the imperfection [lack of completion] that was in the doctrine concerning the revelation of the heavenly life, which the fathers only knew by outward tokens although they were dear to God. Now that Jesus Christ has come down to us, and has shown us how we ought to follow Him by suffering many afflictions, as it is told us (Matt. 16:24; Rom. 8:29), in bearing poverty and reproach and all such like things, and to be short, that our life must be as it were a kind of death; since we know all this, and *the infinite power of God is uttered in His raising up Jesus Christ from death and in His exalting him to glory of heaven, should we not take from this a good courage?* Should not this sweeten all the afflictions we can suffer? Do we not have cause to rejoice in the midst of our sorrows?

Let us note, then, that if the patriarchs were more blessed by God than we are, concerning this present life, we ought not to wonder at it at all. For the reason for it is apparent. But no matter how things go, yet is this saying of St. Paul always verified: that *the fear of God holds promise not only for the life to come, but also for this present life* (1 Tim. 4:8). Let us therefore walk in *obedience to God*, and then we can be assured that *He will show Himself a Father to us, yea even in the maintenance of our bodies, at least as far as concerns keeping and preserving us in peace, delivering us from all evils, and providing for us our necessities. God, I say, will make us to feel His blessing in all these things, so that we walk in His fear.*⁵⁵ (emphasis added)

55. Calvin, *Covenant Enforced*, pp. 100-1. Sermon 154.

Blessings in History: The Fruit of Obedience

Calvin was not speaking merely of the great sweeping movements in mankind's history. *He was speaking of the small things of each man's life.* There is orderliness in a man's life because there is a coherent, predictable relationship between obedience and blessings. *God does not limit His covenantal blessings to the afterlife.*

Let us therefore be persuaded that our lives will always be accursed unless we return to this point whereto Moses leads us, namely *to hearken to the voice of our God*, to be thereby moved and continually confirmed in the fact that *He cares for our salvation, and not only for the eternal salvation of our persons, but also for the maintenance of our state in this earthly life*, to make us taste at present of His love and goodness in such a way as may content and suffice us, waiting till we may have our fill thereof and behold face to face that which we are now constrained to look upon as it were through a glass and in the dark (1 Cor. 13:12). That is one more thing we ought to remember from this text, where it is said that *we will be blessed if we hearken to the voice of the Lord our God.*

This is to be applied to all parts of our lives. For example, *when a man wishes to prosper in his own person* – that is, he desires to employ himself in the service of God and to obtain some grace so that he may not be unprofitable in this life but that God may be honored by him – let him think thus to himself: “Lord, I am Yours. Dispose of me as You will. *Here I am, ready to obey You.*” This is the place at which we must begin if we desire God to guide us and create in us the disposition to serve Him, so that *His blessings may appear and lighten upon us and upon our persons. So it is concerning every man's household.*⁵⁶ (emphasis added)

The same thing is true concerning cattle, food, and all other things. For we see here [in this text] that *nothing is forgotten.* And God meant to make us to perceive His infinite goodness, in that He declares that *He will deal with our smallest affairs, which one of*

56. *Ibid.*, p. 107. Sermon 154.

our own equals would be loath to meddle with. If we have a friend, we should be very loath, indeed, and ashamed to use his help unless it were in a matter of great importance. But we see here that God goes into our sheepfolds and into the stalls of our cattle and oxen, and He goes into our fields, and *He cares for all other things as well.* Since we see Him abase himself thus far, shouldn't we be ravished to honor Him and to magnify His bounty?⁵⁷ (emphasis added)

God promised the Israelites that they would be blessed, so as to confirm His covenant with their fathers. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18). Calvin echoed this view: *God's blessings in history point to His faithfulness in eternity.*

Let us conclude, then, that when God says that He shall bless us in the fruit of the earth, and that He shall bless us in the fruit of our cattle, it is a most certain argument that He will not forget the principal thing. *These things are lowly and of little count, and many times men despise them, and yet we see that God takes care of them notwithstanding.* Since this is so, will He forget our souls, which He has created after His own image, which also He has so dearly redeemed with the sacred blood of his Son? Surely not. First of all, therefore, *let us acknowledge God's favor toward us, in abasing Himself so far as to direct and govern everything that belongs to our lives and sustenance.* And from there let us rise up higher, and understand that *He will not fail us in the things that surpass this present life,* but rather that in the chief things that belong to our life, indeed even in this world, *God will stretch forth His hand to furnish us always with all things that are needful.*⁵⁸ (emphasis added)

57. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

In the *Institutes*, he did not go into comparable detail. Thus, we find there no basis of determining what Calvin's view of social change was. It is not possible to construct a concept of judicial cause and effect in history based on Calvin's *Institutes*. This is why those Calvinists whose goal is to assert the indeterminacy of Calvinistic social theory – a Cole Porter view of social theory: "Anything Goes," meaning a theory of *social open-endedness* – concentrate their attention on the *Institutes*. The anti-theonomists are self-consciously not interested in exploring the Calvin of the sermons on Deuteronomy. This is understandable, but it has produced misleading historical scholarship.

Conclusion

John Calvin assumed far more regarding Christendom than he put on paper. Thus, those of his followers who today reject both the historic ideal and possibility of Christendom – "Constantinianism," in the jargon of Calvinistic pluralism⁵⁹ – are not continually confronted in his writings with the magnitude of the difference between Calvin's worldview and their own. Having dismissed Calvin's clear-cut assertion of the State as the protector of the Church, they also dismiss his ideal of Christendom. They necessarily pass over in silence his sermons on Deuteronomy regarding the legitimacy of the Mosaic law's civil sanctions, as well as his defense of the existence of God's sanctions in history. Then they recoil in shock, horror, and outrage from the task that the theonomists have placed before them since 1973: to offer a Calvinistic view of social theory without (1) Calvin's view of civil sanctions and (2) Calvin's view of the future of the gospel.⁶⁰ They point defensively to his acceptance of sixteenth-century Protestant natural law theory, yet

59. The term is used against Calvin by Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1964), p. 82. Theodore Beza was even worse: "undiluted Constantinianism" (p. 83).

60. On his millennial views, see Appendix D, below.

they also reject the Christian foundations of that theory – the foundations that Van Til's apologetics destroyed.

In the case of the pluralists on the faculty of Westminster Seminary, they publicly proclaim their commitment to Van Til's apologetics, yet they steadfastly ignore the implications for social and political theory of his rejection of natural law theory. They cling to Van Til's pessimistic amillennialism – itself a departure from Calvin – and then they justify their rejection of God's predictable, biblical law-based sanctions in history on this basis. Some of them even come in the name of both pluralism and Calvin. But they have this nagging problem: *Calvin's handling of Servetus*. They have refused for sixty years to address this thorny political problem, yet it is at the heart of Calvin's view of society. It is time for every Calvinist to ask himself and his seminary instructors these questions:

If it was morally and judicially wrong for Calvin to have approved of the execution of Servetus, then how much of Calvinism must we scrap, and on what *biblically* exegetical basis? What does this comprehensive theological replacement for Calvin's equally comprehensive worldview look like? Finally, why haven't post-1788 Calvinists offered us this alternative?

Students at Westminster Seminary have been unclear from the opening of the seminary in 1929 regarding the conflicting legacies of Calvin and Van Til. This should not be surprising. Van Til did his best to cover up these conflicts throughout his career, and not even Rushdoony and Bahnsen could get him to clarify his position. His students did not perceive that there was a problem, since Westminster Seminary rarely (if ever) assigns a book by Calvin, let alone his sermons on Deuteronomy. What is surprising, however, is that the faculty decided in 1990 to go into print with *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, with these conflicting legacies visible to the careful reader. They have now opened that controversial can of worms that Van Til spent half

a century trying to keep sealed up tight. He gave us the can opener – his rejection of natural law theory – and then systematically refused to use it on the can marked “civil law.”

The theonomists picked up Van Til's can opener in 1973 and went to work on that can. For seventeen years, we poured the worms into Calvinism's kitchen sink. Then came *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, which generally continues to pretend that after seventeen years, these worms aren't stinking up the sink. I now formally invite Westminster's faculty to help us theonomists get them either tossed into the garbage or added, for cultural nutrition's sake, to Calvin's casserole. We may need some exegetical spices for this latter operation.

It is time for the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary to stop playing an academic version of the children's game of “let's pretend.” They must make their choices publicly: (1) Calvin's judicial legacy in the *Institutes* or in his *Sermons on Deuteronomy*; (2) Van Til on natural law or Calvin on natural law. The choices are inescapable. To defer making them is to live with either judicial schizophrenia or judicial agnosticism.

A POSITIVE BIBLICAL CONFESSION IS MANDATORY

But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:8-10).

The evangelical world proclaims the necessity of each individual's making a positive confession in public regarding his confidence in the saving work of Christ on Calvary as his only hope of eternal life. The individual covenant between God and man is grounded on a positive public confession. This confession is *judicial*. It proclaims that Jesus Christ's atoning work on Calvary has satisfied *God's legal claims* against the confessor, now that he has made this public declaration.

But what about the other three covenants: ecclesiastical, familial, and civil? What about confession? Each involves taking a self-maledictory oath before God: invoking God's lawfully applied negative sanctions should the oath-taker violate the

terms of the covenant.¹ Only these three institutions are legally authorized by God to impose self-maledictory oaths: Church, State, and family. There must be positive judicial confessions in all three, either made in public or implied. For example, the Christian declares his faith in Christ, but then declares his commitment to Christ's Church. To gain legal access to baptism and the Lord's Supper, he must join the Church. This involves taking a vow of obedience. There are historical sanctions attached to this confession-based membership: positive (the sacraments) and negative (excommunication).

Then comes the family. Marriage is unquestionably covenantal. Under God, a man and woman establish a family unit. In most vows, the phrase "till death do us part" is required. This is God's ultimate negative sanction in history, and this is why divorce is by death only: either covenantal death or physical death.²

Then comes the State.³ Its required oath of allegiance is usually only implied, although political office, military service, and naturalization usually require some sort of public oath. The President of the United States takes his oath of office with one hand on the Bible. The presence of a Bible is traditional, though not required by law. Testimony in a court of law requires an oath. Until quite recently in the U.S., a witness swore with his right hand raised toward heaven and his left hand on the Bible. He invoked God's name: "So help me God." In recent decades, atheists have been allowed merely to swear on their own authority that they will tell the truth. God's name is not invoked. This means that the individual is taking a self-maledictory oath to the State, not to God.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 4.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

3. Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for Government* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

Christendom

There is little debate among Christians regarding the legitimacy of a confession in the first three cases: personal, ecclesiastical, and familial covenants. But with the triumph of unitarian theology in the U.S. Constitution, followed by the rise of secular humanism, accelerating in the twentieth century, American Christians have begun to doubt the legitimacy of a Christian civil oath. Such oaths are expressly forbidden by the U.S. Constitution (Article VI, Section III) – the opposite of state oaths prior to the American Revolution.⁴ This means that Christians have abandoned any idea of the biblical covenantal requirement for a positive Christian confession for civil government. While they will defend the idea of a biblical blueprint or required framework for the Church and the family, they assume that there is no similar blueprint for civil government. The conservative American affirms the U.S. Constitution as the valid model – a model bordering on the divine – and the liberal generally agrees, although there will be a great debate about the proper interpretation of the Constitution. But, apart from the theonomists, there is no Trinitarian Christian group still defending the Puritan ideal of a theocratic republic. The Church is regarded as theocratic; the family is regarded as theocratic (laws against polygamy indicate this); but *the State is seen as religiously neutral, and the Bible is said to be devoid of any model for the State*. This is Westminster's confession.

Then what of society in general? What kinds of positive confessions are appropriate for a Christian social order? What kind of society should the four covenants – personal, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil – produce as history draws closer to the final judgment? Calvinists prior to 1660 debated this issue. They spoke to these issues in the name of God. They no longer do. Worse; they no longer regard it as either possible or reli-

4. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 9.

giously necessary to require a Trinitarian oath in civil affairs. This is Westminster's confession.

By self-consciously abandoning the idea of a positive Christian confession in the realm of civil government, *Christians have actively participated in the de-Christianization of society*. While the State does not create society, it is a legitimate covenantal institution. It is an inescapable, God-mandated covenantal institution. Without the presence of a Christian confession for the State, serving as it necessarily does as the third institutional pillar of an expressly Christian society, there cannot be an expressly Christian society. Those who deny the legitimacy of Christian civil government understand this; *they also self-consciously reject the idea of Christendom*. Necessarily, they also accept the idea of another law-order, another confession for the State, and therefore for society, but they refuse to discuss its details.

In the days of the Westminster Assembly, such a confession of another law-order was understood to be a confession for another God; such a confession would have been unthinkable, except in the distant North American colony of Rhode Island. Today, the Westminster Assembly's vision of confessional Christendom is unthinkable among Calvinists, except for the theonomists and Covenanters. The broad, international vision of the Assembly has disappeared. What has taken its place?

A Degree of Confusion

Calvinism is known generally for its doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. For most people, this means the doctrine of predestination. The English-language acronym TULIP presents a clear, concise summary of Calvinism's predestination: Total depravity of man, Unconditional election by God, Limited (specific) atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints. This is a five-point predestination model.

To a lesser extent, Calvinism is known as covenant theology. For well over four centuries, no Calvinist theologian presented a clear, concise, and biblically supported definition of what this

covenant is. We can see this by searching the Westminster Confession and its catechisms for a definition of "covenant." There is none. This absence of any definition did not hinder the acceptance of Calvinism, any more than Marx's refusal to define *class* hindered the acceptance of Marxism. The word *covenant* became a kind of mantra that was repeated over and over whenever the Calvinist was asked to distinguish his theological position from the others. "We believe in God's covenant." What is this covenant? "A personal-legal bond." How does it apply to the real world? "Covenantally." What are its unique features? "Covenantal." How are they different from any other legal bond? "God imposes it." But how? "Sovereignly." What do you mean, sovereignly? "TULIPly." And from there, the Calvinist could deflect the discussion away from the covenant and back to the familiar five points of predestination, of which he was the textual master. If the questioner pursued the matter of the covenant, he would be given long shrift – if necessary, three years long: seminary.

The Calvinist's seminary education does not clarify the covenant. It *systematically* does not clarify the covenant. The student may be assigned Hodge's three-volume *Systematic Theology* (1873), which devotes more space to a refutation of the philosophy of Sir William Hamilton (you remember him, of course) than it does to the doctrine of the covenant. Or perhaps he is assigned L. Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, which has a skimpy eight-page index for 738 pages of text, and which lists *covenant* under "covenant of grace," "covenant of works," and "covenant of redemption," a traditional tripartite classification device that few if any Calvinist theologians are willing to defend any more. This division is surely not emphasized in the classroom. The student looks up "covenant of grace," and learns that: (1) it is a gracious covenant; (2) it is a Trinitarian covenant; (3) it is an eternal and therefore unbreakable covenant; (4) it is a particular and universal covenant; (5) it is essentially the same in all dispensations, though its form of administration changes. This

takes less than a page and a half to present (278-79). Berkhof then goes on for four pages to explain point five, not one idea of which is remotely memorable.

But what is the covenant? He never says, exactly. Neither have any of his academic colleagues. But the student is not supposed to notice. And, quite frankly, almost none of them ever have. Generation after generation of students calling themselves covenantalists cannot tell you what a biblical covenant is – surely not with the same precision and confidence that they can rotely exposit TULIP for you.

Ask a Calvinist to find a single passage in Scripture in which TULIP appears, and he will assure you that TULIP is derived from many texts, which he has marked in his Bible. Ask him where *covenant* appears in Scripture, and he may say the entire structure of the Book of Deuteronomy, but that is about as much as he will say.

He needs to say more.

The Five-Point Biblical Covenant Model

The solution came in 1985: Ray R. Sutton's *That You May Prosper*, which presents the five-point biblical covenant model: (1) Transcendence/immanence; (2) Hierarchy/authority; (3) Ethics/law; (4) Oath/sanctions; and (5) Succession/inheritance. Now there is THEOS to complement TULIP. Subsequently, Sutton showed in his monthly newsletter, *Covenant Renewal* (1987-), how this structure appears in Bible passage after passage. (The newsletter is sent free to any seminary student who requests it.)⁵

Do Reformed seminary professors assign *That You May Prosper*? Do they tell students about the free subscription? Hardly. They do not mention the book, its thesis, or the subsequent published documentation. To do this would be to admit public-

5. P. O. Box 8000, Tyler, Texas 75711.

ly that the Calvinist movement floated on a handful of proof texts for over four centuries without ever discovering what the covenant is. Worse; it would be to admit that the discovery of the unique biblical covenant model was not made by a resident seminary professor. And so, if a student mentions the five-point model, he is told that "there are many points to the biblical covenant." To which the student should respond: "Name six." What he will get is the five points and an extra one that clearly is an application or subdivision of one of the five. If he asks to see a biblical text with more than five, he is likely to create a great deal of trouble for himself.

Paradigm shifts do not take place inside universities and seminaries; they take place outside them, and are imported by later generations of professors. What is a paradigm shift? It is a radical change in the kinds of questions asked, the kinds of procedures acceptable for answering them, and the kinds of solutions accepted. These revolutionary events take place frequently in the humanist academic world.⁶ There has not been one in American Calvinism since 1788. One is on its way. To head it off, the faculty of Westminster Seminary wrote *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. They prudently focused on Bahnsen's writings rather than Sutton's. Had I been in charge of the project, I would have done exactly the same thing: for strategic reasons rather than intellectual. (This assumes that the decision to publish had been made already; otherwise, I would have recommended continued silence. No use giving one's opponents an opportunity to blow numerous holes in that rusting hulk of a ship, the *U.S.S. Civil Religion*, on which members of the Westminster faculty, as with all other Calvinist seminary faculty members, serve as low-paid porters. Why give your students an opportunity to see the whole faculty challenged?)

6. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). This is not to deny continuity, which is basic. God's providence is continuous. But within this providential order there is change – sometimes rapid.

A Question of Sustained Vision

It has been a recurring theme in almost all of the published criticisms of theonomy that the founders of the movement – Rushdoony, North, and Bahnsen – do not agree on all points. Added to this is the fact that we do not get along with each other. (I actually like Bahnsen; it is the recurring essay deadline problem that separates us.) Bahnsen and I are indeed united against Rushdoony's view of the Church, which is at best theologically imprecise and is unquestionably colored by his personal rebellion: Rushdoony does not belong to a local church, nor has he taken communion in two decades, except when he is on the road, speaking at a church that has a policy of open communion or is unaware of his non-member status.⁷

7. His shift in opinion from Presbyterianism to independency can be seen in his essay, "The Puritan Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Summer 1979), which is really a defense of the anti-Puritan Great Awakening and revivalism. In 1964, Rushdoony was still in the OPC, and he was hostile to the Great Awakening: "The decline and defeat of the Great Awakening is sometimes seen as the end of the commonwealth idea. In actuality, the defeat of the Great Awakening . . . was a triumph of the holy commonwealth idea." Rushdoony then attacks Jonathan Edwards as an experientialist, a Platonist, and a follower of John Locke. R. J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1964] 1978), p. 105. He attacks revivalism as undenominational and anti-denominational. "It was not greatly concerned with saving the church, in many instances, but rather with reviving America. Its cry was 'Save America' " (p. 107). He reverses this whole argument in the 1979 essay. "With the Great Awakening, there was a growing break with civil religion" (p. 25). He attacks Nathan Hatch's *Sacred Cause of Liberty* for arguing as he had in *This Independent Republic* that the Great Awakening was the first major move in America toward a civil millennialism and civil religion (pp. 21-24). The Great Awakening was positive, he says. Why? Because lay people challenged Church hierarchy in the name of the priesthood of all believers. "No longer was it the duty of the laity merely to listen silently and obey: they were now an aggressive priesthood" (p. 23). Compare this analysis with Charles Hodge's heavily documented account of the anti-ecclesiastical, disrupting impulse of the Great Awakening: *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851), II, chaps. 3-5. Rushdoony then praises the rapid growth of Baptists and Methodists after 1800, "both of whom in those days placed great stress on the priestly role of the laity" (p. 25). He praises Baptist founder Isaac Backus as against the Puritan clergy, who "were still fearful of the people's priesthood" (p. 19). By 1979, Rushdoony had become an noncommuning independent.

He has not spoken with either of us for many years.⁸ But this is Rushdoony's problem, not ours. It is also of no particular theological benefit to theonomy's critics.

The presence of personal rivalries within a denomination or movement is not exactly front-page news these days. Machen was not on close terms with fellow Presbyterian Robert E. Speer. Van Til was not on close terms with fellow Presbyterian Gordon Clark. Now let us look at dispensationalism. Charles Ryrie is not on close terms with Dallas Seminary. John Whitcomb is not on close terms with Grace Seminary. John MacArthur is not on close terms with Zane Hodges. Bob Jones (any number) is not on close terms with Billy Graham. Is Bob Thieme on close terms with anybody? And then there is Constance Cumbey, the *sine qua non* of "not on good terms."

When you get down to it, Martin Luther was not chummy with John Calvin. The division between them was expressly theological: *sanctions*, the nature of the Lord's Supper. Does this call into question the legitimacy of the Protestant Reformation?

Judicial Inconsistency and Psychological Relief

Why, then, all the commotion among theonomy's critics about this or that intra-theonomic debate over the application of a particular case law of the Old Testament? I think it has something to do with the constancy of the theonomic vision: our assertion that Old Testament case laws *and their civil sanctions* still must be honored, unless there is a New Covenant

8. Several Christian leaders have attempted to get me and Rushdoony to sit down and discuss our problems. I have in every case agreed, even flying to Washington, D.C., in 1981 to meet with him. He backed out of his agreement when I walked in the room, and he has refused all mediation ever since. The mediator was John Whitehead, whom I sent back again to get Rushdoony to agree. He failed. My church has a large file documenting the many attempts. The latest attempt was made by Dennis Peacock. I subsequently agreed to subordinate myself to a committee put together by Jay Grimstead, but he could get only one other Christian leader to agree to sit on it, which I had told him would happen. He had to back out.

passage or principle to the contrary. This very constancy stands as a threat to the present confession of the entire modern Church, but especially those Protestant branches that emphasize the written Bible, in contrast to Church tradition (Roman Catholicism), communal mysticism (Eastern Orthodoxy), or metaphysical sacramentalism (Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy). It is our judicial constancy that both threatens and exposes the incomparable cacophony of the modern Church, an institution which now prides itself on its lack of judicial and cultural specifics in its peripheral confrontations with humanism. The modern Church holds on tightly to an empty bag, and declares: "The Bible has answers to every problem." Ask for one, and you are then told, "The Bible does not provide blueprints for [whatever you just asked about]." This has been going on for well over a century. It is a charade.

In the United States, the Christian-humanist conflict, to the extent that the Christians acknowledge its existence, can be seen in the attitude of the churches toward the public schools. This attitude is either favorable or officially neutral. The situation boils down to this: an operating alliance between the escape religion (Protestantism) and the power religion (humanism). Those few Protestant Christians who openly reject secular public education – fast becoming New Age public education – are themselves divided between two views: (1) the Christian school as a refuge from secular culture and (2) the Christian school as a boot camp for the conquest of secular culture by Christianity. The rhetoric of boot camp Christian education is common, but the schools' curriculum materials give the lie to it. The higher the grade level, the less intellectually rigorous and less visibly Christian the curriculum. By the end of graduate school, there is no visible difference at all. Graduate school Christians think and vote like everyone else in their peer group, i.e., liberal. (I like to think of this as "the Gordon-Conwell effect.") Christians either are absorbed by their enemies ideologically or withdraw from the arena of confrontation.

Sometimes both take place within a single institution. (I like to think of this as "the Westminster effect.")

In stark contrast to this process of either ideological absorption or withdrawal is the Christian Reconstruction movement. We end right where we begin: with the capital sanctions of the Old Testament.⁹ It is these sanctions that define us. It is these sanctions that repel our critics, whose name is legion. Even our vaguely respectable fellow travellers, such as Vern Poythress, get nervous at the word "stoning."¹⁰ The fact is, contemporary Christians feel far more threatened by the thought of people getting stoned legally (Moses' word) than people getting stoned illegally (Timothy Leary's word). And the result is the widespread acceptance in the Church of a cultural version of Dr. Leary's 1969 recommended mantra: "Tune in, turn on, drop out." (That Dr. Leary, a former Harvard professor [untenured],¹¹ went down this chemical-mystical pathway should be no more surprising than the fact that today he has returned from chemical bliss to become a computer software promoter. As Van Til said, when you see assertions of total rationalism, get prepared for total irrationalism, and vice versa.)

The critics of theonomy therefore rejoice when they see a division of opinion within the theonomic camp, for it reassures them that there really is no judicial consistency of God in this, the New Covenant era. Judicial consistency was the burden of the Old Covenant, from which we have supposedly been set free. This discovery of unresolved differences among the theonomists relieves critics psychologically from the tremendous

9. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Jurisprudence* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

10. On five reasons in favor of public stoning as the proper mode of public execution, see Gary North, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986), pp. 122-25.

11. He was joined in his quest by fellow untenured psychology professor Richard Alpert, who later adopted the name Baba Ram Dass. I read somewhere that his father referred to him as Rum-Dum. This story may be apocryphal, but I hope it isn't.

moral pressure of searching for judicial consistency on God's part, justifying it theologically, and, most threatening of all, publicly pressuring the civil government to honor this consistency in its laws and especially its sanctions. In short, they feel themselves hard-pressed to survive on the fringes of Western civilization, let alone to move toward its judicial center in the name of Jesus Christ.

When the Bough Breaks

But there is this lurking problem: What presently unifies the judicial foundation of Western civilization? What moral base provides the continuing legitimacy, stability, and public faith in Western civilization? Christians, as members of the Church Militant, are in history, like it or not. They want out, but they cannot lawfully get out except on God's terms. They are not immune to the disruptions that are now escalating in the world. If God is not the source of these disruptions, then what is? If Christians no longer believe that God brings sanctions in history, then what hope can Christians offer to a world in crisis?¹² Dispensationalism offers the Rapture,¹³ but Rapture fever, like all other fevers, produces the familiar symptoms of uncontrollable shaking and hallucinating in its victims, grim afflictions that are only marginally more debilitating than amillennialism's *pre-parousia paralysis*: God's frozen people.

If Christians are in the world, then they are supposed to be either on top of things under God or at the bottom of the heap under Satan. There is no doubt where the theonomists think Christians should be, if the Church were to become covenantally (judicially) faithful to God for a few generations – not only an historic possibility but an inescapable future reality, say the

12. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 8.

13. Dave Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1989).

postmillennialists. There is also no doubt about where contemporary dispensationalists think Christians should and must be prior to the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, and the Second Coming: cleaning out the cesspools of humanism's civilization. The best we can hope for, in their view, is an electric suction pump instead of a hand-driven one, or worse (visions of gasoline tank siphon hoses). But Westminster Seminary is neither theonomic nor dispensational. Where, then, do its faculty members think that Christians should be in the cultural and political hierarchy? And how do they think the covenantal Church, State, and family should get us there?

Jerusalem or Athens?

Since 1973, the Westminster faculty has faced a growing theological challenge: theonomy. The theonomists claim that there is a workable alternative to the judicial pluralism of the modern world: biblical law. That our world is suffering from the devastating effects of moral pluralism no Calvinist doubts. That this moral pluralism is the product of an underlying theological pluralism, no Calvinist doubts. Men reject the God of the Bible, and so He turns them over to their own evil imaginations (Rom. 1:18-22). But the question that the theonomists have raised needs to be answered: If the long-run intent of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to eliminate theological pluralism and moral pluralism, why isn't it inescapably also the long-run goal of the gospel to eliminate judicial pluralism? Furthermore, if judicial pluralism goes, then so will political pluralism.

It is this final step that the critics of theonomy all see as a necessary outcome of the transformation of pluralism. But if this is a legitimate long-run goal of the gospel, then Christianity is in ultimate conflict with the right wing of the Enlightenment, meaning all forms of democratic theory that promote universal suffrage without respect to creedal confession. Ultimately, it means the rejection of the political polytheism of the

U.S. Constitution.¹⁴ This degree of judicial radicalism is too much even for Rushdoony, just as Rushdoony's *Institutes* was too much judicially for Van Til.¹⁵ But the critics of theonomy have been saying this about the implications of Rushdoony's *Institutes* from the beginning. They could see where the judicial theory of the *Institutes* was inevitably heading: back to the theocratic republicanism of the pre-1788 North American English colonies (except for Rhode Island and possibly Georgia). The critics are correct. This is exactly where theonomy leads, as surely as natural law theory leads to sadism.

In short, the biblical ideal is Jerusalem, not Athens. Van Til made it clear, as no Christian philosopher had before him, that there has to be a philosophical break with Athens. This was the heart of his contribution to apologetics. The assumption of human autonomy is the heart of man's rebellion against God. It pervades all non-Christian thinking, Van Til insisted, and it has infected Christian apologetics from the beginning. But if Van Til is correct, *then there has to be a break with the politics of "Athens."* (The real Athens, like all the other ancient city-states, was a theocracy. No one could participate in the political life or legal life of Athens who was not eligible to participate in the religious rites of the city, which is why resident aliens, women, and slaves had no legal standing.¹⁶ "Athens," the mythical ideal of the eighteenth century, is still the ideal that dominates modern democratic political theory.)

Every defense of pluralism as a legitimate long-term ideal, in whatever guise, is a return to "Athens." As a short-term tactic during a temporary cease-fire, pluralism is a legitimate goal, but never as a long-term goal. Cease-fires are to be used by Christians to build up the earthly kingdom's offensive capabili-

14. North, *Political Polytheism*, Part 3.

15. *Ibid.*, Appendix B: "Rushdoony on the Constitution."

16. Numa Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (1864). Reprint by Anchor Books, 1955.

ties in the war against Satan's earthly kingdom, not to sit by the fire and reminisce about the bad old days.

Van Til's declaration of war against philosophical Athens was total. But in making this declaration, he necessarily called the Church of Jesus Christ back into the war room. Van Til insisted that the Church had been epistemologically AWOL – absent without leave – for almost 2,000 years. The Church, not covenant-breaking man, must declare the terms of war and peace. The kingdom as a corporate entity is to rest judicially on God's terms for man's surrender in history.¹⁷ The kingdom of God is God's *civilization*, both in heaven and on earth, in time and eternity.¹⁸

Van Til's declaration of covenantal war, if taken seriously, must be accompanied by several events: letting down the drawbridge, sounding the trumpets, and arming the troops. The troops must be given their marching orders. The idea of permanent comfort inside the castle is an illusion; the castle is useful only during temporary sieges. As surely as the city of Jerusalem was a death trap for those who occupied it before David captured it, and again when Titus captured it over a thousand years later, so is the familiar comfort of the ecclesiastical castle when serious enemies are determined to take it and raze it. The ghetto is a place to avoid during a pogrom. Van Til warned us that the pogroms are coming, for as covenant-breakers progressively recognize the threat that covenant-keepers pose to their way of life, the covenant-breakers will tyrannize the Church.

Rushdoony's postmillennialism also sounded a warning: to the covenant-breakers. The coming "pogroms" will be spiritual, the products of the irresistible saving grace of God. But at this

17. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory* (3rd ed.; Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988).

18. Gary North, "God's Covenantal Kingdom," in Gary North and Gary DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), Part I.

stage of the conflict, Christians are fearful that the theonomists' sounding of the trumpets was premature. Our humanist opponents are said to be too powerful; they could become aroused. As dispensational author David Allen Lewis warns: "Unnecessary persecution could be stirred up."¹⁹ Nevertheless, fundamentalists have begun to sound a similar alarm with respect to public education. The home school movement has sounded an alarm, and is now offensively engaged. Some of the anti-abortionist groups have given up any further reliance on common-ground, natural law defenses of the rights of the unborn. Battlefield by battlefield, Christians are responding to the trumpets. They are beginning to venture outside their ghettos.

Yet Westminster Seminary still refuses to sound the alarm. Such an alarm would openly split the faculty, as *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* indicates. Worse, it might threaten funding. The school still refuses to face up to the revolution that Van Til hath wrought. It still cannot make up its mind: Jerusalem or Athens. It desperately seeks an alternative. It continues to echo the message that W. C. Fields is said to have had inscribed on his tombstone: "Frankly, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."

The Need for Confession

To say what Westminster Seminary is, we must identify what it confesses. We can identify it by discovering what it believes about the Bible. The editors of the symposium state that "The Westminster Seminary tradition is one of academic freedom within a framework of firm commitment to the authority of the Bible and to our doctrinal standards as a faithful expression of that truth."²⁰ Academic freedom is as academic freedom *does*. To put it bluntly, "tell it to Norman Shepherd!" But in any case, there comes a time to put into action one's formal com-

19. David Allen Lewis, *Prophecy 2000* (Green Forest, Arkansas: New Leaf Press, 1990), p. 277.

20. Editors, "Preface," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 11.

mitment to the authority of the Bible (point two of the biblical covenant model). It must be put into operation covenantally in points three through five: law, sanctions, and eschatology.

The Need for Answers

Those who claim allegiance to the Bible must use it to answer fundamental questions. Without this willingness to apply the Scriptures to real-world issues, the assertion of the editors regarding the Bible and the confessions could be interpreted in a Barthian fashion, as indeed such statements were interpreted in the Presbyterian Church, USA, from 1936 (Machen's expulsion from the PCUSA) until the Confessional revision in 1967. Therefore, let us ask the faculty some basic questions of theology and applied theology. Let us ask them to write about these issues if they have not yet published any formal position papers. Let us seek clarification. These are the questions that theonomists have been grappling with ever since Rushdoony's *By What Standard?* appeared in 1959.

Was the world created in six 24-hour days?
Was the earth created on day one?
Were the stars created on day four?
Is the earth older than the stars?
Are stars billions of light years away?
Was the speed of light always a constant?
Is modern cosmology ("Big Bang") fraudulent?
Is modern historical geology fraudulent?
Was Noah's Flood universal?
What is the geological evidence for it?
Do we need geological evidence to prove it?
When did the Flood occur?
When did dinosaurs disappear?
How old are the pyramids?
What year was the temple built?
When did the Exodus occur (I Ki. 6:1)?
Was Rahab wrong to lie?

Are spies legitimate in wartime?
Is it wrong for spies to lie?
Is military camouflage immoral?
Did Jonah preach biblical law to Nineveh?
How long will people live in the new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65:20)?
Will anyone die in this era (Isa. 65:20)?
Will people die after the final judgment?
Have the new heavens and new earth already begun?
Is there anything left to be fulfilled (Isa. 65:20)?
What is the millennium?
What is the kingdom of God?
What is the kingdom of Satan?
Is the kingdom of Satan in part social?
Is the kingdom of God in part social?
Has sin corrupted every institution?
Does God's offer of redemption extend to every institution?
Has Satan's kingdom corrupted the State?
Can God's grace redeem the State?
What are the limits on God's redemption?
Are some civil laws satanic?
Are some civil laws biblical?
Are some civil sanctions satanic?
Are some civil sanctions biblical?
How can we be sure?
Is a 10% income tax immorally high (I Sam. 8:15, 17)?
What crimes are capital crimes biblically?
Is abortion murder?
Who should enforce the sabbath?
What are the valid pro-sabbath sanctions?
Is chattel slavery biblically wrong?
When did it become wrong (Lev. 25:45-47)?
What is the Adamic "covenant of works"?
What does "general equity" mean in the Confession?
Was Van Til correct about natural law?
Should wine be used in the Lord's Supper?
How often is the Lord's Supper required?

- What was Calvin's view on this question?
- Should infants be baptized?
- Should infants take communion?
- Are communing children full church members?
- Should women be ordained as deacons?
- Should women be ordained as ruling elders?
- Should women be ordained as teaching elders?
- What is a teaching elder?
- Is healing by elders still valid (James 5:14)?
- What is the purpose of the oil (James 5:14)?
- Does God impose negative sanctions in history?
- Is syphilis the judgment of God?
- Is AIDS the judgment of God?
- Is there equality in heaven (I Cor. 3:14)?
- Is there equality in hell (Luke 12:47-48)?
- Is there intellectual equality among men?
- Is there moral equality among men?
- Is long-term national poverty a judgment of God (Deut. 28:15-68)?
- Are most Africans poor because most Americans aren't poor?
- Who should have the right to vote in church?
- Why does any church structure itself in terms of Robert's Rules of Order?
- Who should have the right to vote in civil government?
- Is the U.S. Constitution a better guide to civil government than the Old Testament is?
- Is compulsory state education immoral?
- Is accreditation necessary for seminaries?
- Do seminary professors need advanced degrees?
- Are Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Edinburgh, or Oxford Divinity School degrees worth anything in God's sight? (Be specific.)
- Would Peter and Paul have qualified to teach at a seminary?

The trouble is, these are the sorts of questions that are considered too technical or too obscure to warrant detailed discus-

sion at most Presbyterian seminaries. Seminary students do not raise such questions, so seminary professors do not answer them. What kinds of questions do seminary professors answer? Questions such as these:

Was Barth's theology Alexandrian or Antiochan?

What was Barth's interpretation of Schleiermacher?

What was the doctrine of God in the theology of Paul Tillich?

What is the echo narrative technique in Judges 19?

How were the Isaianic servant songs used in the missiology of Acts?

How do we solve the unidentifiable interlocutor problem of James 2:18a?

Preliminary answers to these crucial questions appear in the *Westminster Theological Journal* (Fall 1990), the same quarter in which *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* appeared. As you might imagine, the *WTJ* is not a mass-circulation publication. To answer these professional sorts of questions, a Christian needs a willingness to devote his career to the study of the irrelevant and the very nearly irrelevant. He must be willing to do this without being sidetracked by such extraneous outside events as the economic collapse of Communism or an accelerating series of crises in Western civilization (e.g., AIDS). This single-minded dedication is what all tenure-seeking scholars are asked to adopt in every academic discipline. This is why that iconoclastic winner of the Nobel Prize in economics, George Stigler, once asked a group of scholars: "I'd like to know why it is that in an entire year, there is not a single journal article published in the economics profession that is worth reading." This is why Robert Nisbet, the distinguished sociologist, admitted to me in 1977 that he had stopped reading professional sociology journals several years earlier. Nobody reads such essays, and nobody is expected to. They are written for the sake of proving oneself a full member of a guild. Each essay represents one

more brick in a gigantic pile of bricks strewn randomly across the academic landscape²¹ – a pile that has been expanding exponentially for a century.²²

To answer the controversial kinds of questions that I listed above, a Christian must take risks. He also needs a systematic worldview. He needs a handbook of biblical law. Because the modern Church believes that “the Bible is not a textbook on [fill in the blank],” it has nothing authoritative to say to the world except to warn people to flee the world. Yet even this is not possible, since history is a package deal: you do not just flee it, except by dying. We must live in the world. But to live in it, we must either make institutional peace with it as the historically defeated servants of God, or else change it in order to manifest God’s kingdom standards on earth, including God’s civil-judicial standards. Theonomists recommend the latter. All other major Christian groups recommend the former.

There is no permanent cease-fire with Satan in history. There is also no zone of neutrality between Christ and Satan. This compels us to choose. If we refuse to choose, we are brought under God’s negative sanctions anyway. History is a realm of decision-making. “No decision” is still a decision.

Both campuses of Westminster Seminary are under siege from all sides. From the “east,” each campus is threatened by the liberal accrediting agency: “Get women on your board or we’ll revoke your accreditation. Choose!” On the “west” side, each campus is threatened by traditional donors: “Make up your mind whether you are Calvinists or mush-mouthed neo-evangelicals. Choose!” On the “north” side, each campus is threatened by the challenge of the theonomists: “Be true to Van Til. Choose!” On the “south” side, each is threatened by students: “This place is too academic. Lighten up!” Underneath

21. Bernard K. Forscher, “Chaos in the Brickyard,” *Science* (Oct. 18, 1963), p. 339.

22. M. King Hubbert, “Are We Retrogressing in Science?” *Geological Society of America Bulletin*, vol. 74 (April 1963).

the Philadelphia campus is radon. Underneath the Escondido campus is the San Andreas fault. Decisions, decisions.

Westminster Seminary as an institution does not want to choose. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* makes this clear. The faculty has never devoted much time or effort to answering the kinds of questions I listed – not Machen's faculty, not Clowney's, and not today's. To answer them, you have to have a paradigm: a set of intellectual tools and standards that enable you to frame questions and also the valid approaches to possible answers. In short, you have to have a *framework*.²³

Confessions and Frameworks

The Westminster Confession was such a framework in its day. But its focus was circumscribed to the primary concerns of the institutional Church. Christianity involves far more than the institutional Church. So does God's kingdom. The Church must speak authoritatively to the whole of life, since its members participate in the whole of life. If the Church remains silent, then its members will hesitate to exercise authority in their callings. This is exactly what has happened.

The self-imposed limitations of the Westminster Assembly became the Anglo-American Reformed theological standard. Thirteen years after the Assembly ended its work, Charles II was restored to the throne, and a generation of persecution against Calvinists began. Only with the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 did persecution lessen, but the new society was increasingly rationalist, unitarian, and contractual, not covenantal. The vision of a national covenant faded, even in North America. Casuistry – the application of Christian ethics to specific cases – died as a discipline by 1700.²⁴ Newton triumphed

23. Yes, I have already thought of it: the title for a John Frame newsletter. Four pages of outlines, every month!

24. Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity During the Seventeenth Century* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), pp. 32-36.

over Althusius and Richard Baxter. In the late nineteenth century, Darwinism triumphed over Newton's presumed providential order.²⁵ What the Westminster Assembly had begun, no other self-consciously Christian organization extended. It was the last of the great confessions.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Princeton Seminary had a broader view of Christian civilization, a view reflected in its scholarly journal, but after the era of the American Civil War, academia began to walk down the ever multiplying, ever narrowing pathways of specialization. No longer would Presbyterian seminary journals run lengthy reviews of political studies such as Alexis de Tocqueville's *The Old Regime and the Revolution* or Francis Lieber's *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government*.²⁶ The Ph.D. was imported from Prussia in the late nineteenth century; a generation later, so was the kindergarten. The broader academic vision faded. No institution dared to speak with a unified voice except the State. There was a universal deferral of authority to the State. And so the State has inherited, generation by generation.

Confessions and Confrontation

Theonomy: A Reformed Critique is not a major source of concern for those of us who have been struggling with these larger questions. It is more of a testimony to what Westminster Seminary has been unwilling to do than a challenge to what we theonomists have been doing self-consciously for the last eighteen years. The book is a negative critique, and a negative critique is next to useless if it is not accompanied with a comprehensive alternative to whatever is being criticized. As I never cease reminding our critics, *they cannot beat something with noth-*

25. Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (2nd ed; Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), Appendix A: "From Cosmic Purposelessness to Humanistic Sovereignty."

26. *Princeton Review*, XXX (Oct. 1858), pp. 621-45.

ing. They cannot beat the theonomists, secular humanism, modern science, and surely not Islam. Luther came before Christendom and called men to a better form of worship – a positive activity. Calvin called Christendom to a broader vision of what Christian society means. The counter-Reformation, most notably the Jesuits, did the same: the Jesuits called men to examine themselves and dedicate their lives to serving God and the Papacy.²⁷

Meanwhile, Erasmus stayed on the sidelines, vainly protesting that good men should sit around in peace and read ancient Greek manuscripts. Erasmus remained inside the artificial and temporary sanctuary of the library. There have been very few safe libraries ever since. Surely there were none in Germany a century later during the Thirty Years War. Christian men may begin their journeys in a library: Luther did and so did Calvin. But they are rarely allowed by God to stay there, and if their academic efforts are to bear fruit outside the library, neither may their followers stay there. Yet it is Erasmus' example that still dominates the realm of academia. This is why academia is impotent. Academia is the kingdom of lost causes.

This is why seminaries need confessions. They need to seek out donors who will contribute support in terms of this public confession. When the confession grows muddled, support will grow tenuous. Donors must sense that they are participating in a righteous, meaningful cause. They are not interested in financing kamikaze attacks or fruitless defenses of culturally barren ground. They want to support a vision like the one which Machen offered so many years ago:

We who are reckoned as "conservatives" in theology are seriously misrepresented if we are regarded as men who are holding desperately to something that is old merely because it is old

27. Malachi Martin, *The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), Part II.

and are inhospitable to new truths. On the contrary, we welcome new discoveries with all our heart; and we are looking, in the Church, not merely for a continuation of conditions that now exist but for a burst of new power. My hope of that new power is greatly quickened by contact with the students of Westminster Seminary. There, it seems to me, we have an atmosphere that is truly electric. It would not be surprising if some of these men might become the instruments, by God's grace, of lifting preaching out of the sad rut into which it has fallen, and of making it powerful again for the salvation of men.²⁸

Conclusion

That postmillennial vision – that *positive historical confession* – is long gone from Westminster. A new confession has replaced it, a confession of what Christianity *isn't* in history, of what the kingdom *cannot* accomplish on earth, and of what the Bible *doesn't* provide: blueprints. What Westminster's confession proclaims is the impossibility and undesirability of establishing Christendom. The kingdom of God in history has been internalized and ghettoized by this new confession.

It is not enough to proclaim one's hostility to a particular position. What must also be proclaimed is an agreed-upon, comprehensive alternative to whatever is formally rejected. But Westminster Seminary has offered only a negative confession, though disguised in the swaddling clothes of Christian cultural relevance – a cultural relevance without the biblical authority, law, sanctions, or millennial victory. This confession, culturally speaking, calls Christians to content themselves with tiptoeing through TULIP. It therefore rejects Christian Reconstruction. The incompatible positive confessions of the book's individual authors reveal an institution and a tradition in the throes of a monumental crisis.

28. J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity in Conflict," in Vergilius Ferm (ed.), *Contemporary American Theology* (New York: Round Table Press, 1932), I, pp. 269-70.

Negative confessions will not persuade men who are caught in a cultural crisis to die in order to defend them. The bulk of the contributors to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* have forgotten a fundamental rule of life: whatever is not worth dying for is not worth living for, either.

A NEGATIVE CONFESSION IS INSUFFICIENT

At the same time it must be said that Chalcedon is not without roots in respectable ecclesiastical tradition. It is in fact a revival of certain teachings contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith – at least in the Confession's original formulations. These particular elements in the Confession, long since rejected as manifestly unbiblical by the mass of those who stand in that confessional tradition (as well as by virtually all other students of the Scriptures), have been subjected to official revision. The revision, however, has left us with standards whose proper legal interpretation is perplexed by ambiguities, and the claim of Chalcedon is that it is the true champion of confessional orthodoxy. Ecclesiastical courts operating under the Westminster Confession of Faith are going to have their problems, therefore, if they should be of a mind to bring the Chalcedon aberration under their judicial scrutiny.

Meredith G. Kline (1978)¹

The first published, full-scale, uncompromising, academic critique of the position known as theonomy or Christian Reconstruction came in 1978, five years after the publication of

1. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 173.

Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* and my *Introduction to Christian Economics*, and one year after the publication of Greg Bahnsen's *Theonomy and Christian Ethics*. It came from Meredith G. Kline, a professor of Old Testament at both Westminster Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. While he was at Gordon-Conwell, Dr. Kline wrote an essay for the *Westminster Theological Journal*, "Comment on an Old New Error." It was a review article of Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. This Gordon-Conwell connection is, in my view, extremely important in the whole Westminster Seminary vs. theonomy debate. The kinds of criticisms emanating from the Kline graduates of Gordon-Conwell are of a very different style and content from those coming from within the traditional Presbyterian and Reformed camp at Westminster.

The publication of Kline's essay involved a very peculiar review procedure. First, the main section of Bahnsen's book had been accepted by Westminster Seminary in 1973 as his Th.M. thesis. This fact should never be forgotten by the readers of *Westminster's Confession and Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. Second, Rev. Bahnsen was not allowed to reply to Kline in the *WTJ*. Here is how I described the problem in the 1979-80 issue of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, when I published Bahnsen's reply, "M. G. Kline on Theonomic Politics." Dr. Kline and the editor of the *WTJ* in 1978 (W. Robert Godfrey) have had eleven years to lodge a complaint against the accuracy of my statement; they never have. As editor, I wrote:

We want to be fair. We offer Dr. Kline the right to reply to Dr. Bahnsen's piece. We did not make a verbal deal with Dr. Bahnsen, as the editor of the *Westminster Theological Journal* made with Dr. Kline, that no one will be allowed to publish a rebuttal to his essay.²

2. "Editor's Introduction," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Winter 1979-80), p. 9.

From 1978 to this day, Dr. Kline has remained steadfastly silent in print regarding Dr. Bahnsen's books and views. Given the devastating thoroughness of Dr. Bahnsen's 1979 reply, one can hardly blame him. I still believe, as I said in my 1985 Prologue to Dr. Bahnsen's book, *By This Standard*, that this exchange was a case of Bambi meets Godzilla, with Bambi actually having launched the attack.³ In any case, the traditional rule of formal debating should be borne in mind by the reader: the second rebuttal is where the debate is usually won or lost if the debaters are of equal talent. Dr. Kline never offered a first rebuttal. He apparently does not believe in debate.

Now, however, a dozen years after Kline's essay appeared, the faculty of Westminster Seminary has offered a kind of first rebuttal. Well, not exactly. A rebuttal assumes that a debater is defending his initial presentation. What is glaringly obvious in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is the absence of any contribution by Dr. Kline. Two of the essays, by Frame and Poythress, are basically critical of Kline's position, and a third, by Moises Silva, is specifically critical. It is the members of the "Gordon-Conwell faction" who seek to defend Kline in this book. These are men who are fellow travellers with the Wheaton College-*Christianity Today*-InterVarsity axis, which I have described elsewhere as "trendier than thou" evangelicalism.⁴ What is noticeable about Westminster's collection of critical essays is its three-fold division: the "biblical law without its most rigorous civil sanctions" group, the "Church concern" group, and the Gordon-Conwell group. The activists are members of the Gordon-Conwell group. They are the ones who are most upset with the political and economic views of Christian Reconstruction, i.e., the Old Testament's case laws.

3. Gary North, "Prologue," Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), p. xviii.

4. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), p. 75.

Kline's Confession

Kline made it clear in 1978 that his objection was to the work of the original Westminster Assembly (1643-47). Those men, sometimes called the Westminster divines, were in Kline's view confused theologically. Their work needed major revisions. While he refused to specify precisely what revisions to the Confession were later made, or when, he must have had in mind the revisions suggested by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. – suggestions made in the same city (Philadelphia) and the same week that the Constitutional Convention began (May 28, 1787), and approved by the synods during 1788, while the ratification debate of the U.S. Constitution was also going on. Those creedal revisions were made in part because colonial Americans had adopted a great deal of Scotland's post-Newtonian, eighteenth-century, unitarian natural law theory, as had the framers of the Constitution. By 1788, both the political revolutionaries and the theological revolutionaries in Philadelphia were ready to impose a new covenantal order on the new American nation.⁵ *Philadelphia has become the model for the defenders of political pluralism.* Nevertheless, the revision of 1788 altered only a few words of the Westminster Confession. But those words were covenantally crucial.

The supposed biblical basis of adhering to the theological and philosophical foundations of that eighteenth-century national covenantal order was exposed as philosophically fraudulent by Cornelius Van Til. Van Til's unwavering rejection, on biblical grounds, of all common-ground philosophy and all natural law theory destroyed the intellectual possibility of the American synthesis between Christianity and "neutral" humanism. So did the work of Charles Darwin and his successors. So has the U.S. Supreme Court. The question for Bible-affirming Christians today is this: *What now?* Hardly anyone wants to

5. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part 3.

think about it. Even fewer want to ask the question in public. But for those who call themselves disciples of Van Til, the question cannot be honestly deferred. Nevertheless, most of his academically tenured disciples have done their best to defer it for a generation. The latest example of this deferral is *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. Judicially speaking, both campuses of Westminster Seminary are located in Philadelphia.

Theonomists come to the Westminster Confession with a principle of interpretation (hermeneutic) similar, though not identical, to the one they use with the Old Testament. Theonomists assert, with respect to Old Covenant civil laws *and their specified sanctions*, that anything not rejected by the New Testament, either specifically or by implication, is still in effect judicially. Similarly, unless the Westminster Confession has been revised, all of it should be accepted as still binding on those who swear allegiance to it. If we adopt the further hermeneutical principle of *original intent*, we need to go, first, to the two catechisms, which were official final documents of the Assembly; second, to the debates of the Assembly; and third, to the contemporary published exchanges relating to the issues dealt with by the Assembly. If the theologians of Westminster Seminary ever attempt this project in depth, and then publish their findings, we will then have a far better understanding of Westminster's new confession. I do not expect to see such a volume.

Here is a significant fact about *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*: there is only one indirect reference to either of the catechisms in the book, as far as I can see: D. Clair Davis' brief mention of the responsibilities of inferiors to superiors.⁶ There are none in the footnotes. (It is difficult to check, however, because the editors did not bother to include a subject index, which indicates that they really did not take their book very seriously. They surely did not take the readers very seriously. No one hates the task of indexing more than I do, except possibly

6. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 391.

Nigel Lee, but I always see to it that the books published with money I control include complete subject indexes.⁷ The readers deserve no less.)

The Westminster Confession of Faith

No greater assembly of theologians of comparable biblical wisdom has ever been assembled. For almost five years these men labored to produce a comprehensive yet concise statement of what God reveals about Himself and His Church in history. The Assembly brought together the most rigorous theologians in a distinctly theological era. They came in the midst of a civil war. There were no protective cloisters in Great Britain during the 1640's. There was no place to hide.

Why Westminster? Why not someplace else? Presbyterians are rarely told why. The British Parliament met at Westminster, and in 1643, with King Charles I and his forces wintering in the city of Oxford, Parliament acted. It called an assembly of Puritan theologians, Presbyterians and Independents, to deliberate on the nature of the Church. Great Britain was an Erastian theocracy: the King was legally head of the Church. Thus, with this head in headlong flight – a head that would literally be removed in 1649 – Parliament's war against the King necessarily involved a war against the King's servants, which meant the Anglican hierarchy. The old refrain – "No bishop, no King" – was believed on both sides of the conflict in 1643. (It was also believed during the restoration era of Charles II after 1660, as testified by the Act of Uniformity in 1662.)

The modern American Church believes what it has been told by anti-Christian political pluralists, namely, that the American civil religion can tolerate no expressly theological grounding in the Bible or the Trinity. Religion is useful social cement; biblical religion, however, must not be used to build a

7. One exception: George Grant's *The Dispossessed*, which I co-published with Crossway Books.

national covenantal foundation. This is the central assertion of the American Civil Religion.⁸ It is *the* religion of Christian American academics.⁹ It was a revolutionary idea in 1787-88. No one on earth took any Church confession such as this seriously in 1645, except in the tiny North American colony of Rhode Island.

In 1643, Parliament faced a monumental crisis. England was in the midst of the first modern revolution. William Haller described this crisis in the late 1930's. Religion was believed to be central to the outcome of the Civil War and the nation. "The question of how and in whose interest the church was to be governed involved also the question of how and in whose interests the loyalties and beliefs, the intellectual and spiritual life, in a word the public opinion of the nation, were to be directed."¹⁰ In our day, the self-imposed, self-declared cultural isolation and impotence of the Church is taken for granted; not so in 1643.

Parliament called the Assembly in order to reorganize the Church. What it should have done was to disestablish the Church, thereby abandoning Erastianism. Had it done so, there would probably not have been an American Revolution, for in that later English civil war, colonial opposition to the

8. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (eds.), *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Sidney E. Mead, "American Protestantism During the Revolutionary Epoch," *Church History*, XXII (1953); reprinted in *Religion in American History: Interpretive Essays*, edited by John M. Mulder and John F. Wilson (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978); 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); Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Crossroad Book, Seabury Press, 1975); Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1988).

9. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 5.

10. William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1938] 1957), p. 374. I appreciate the book's subtitle: *Or, THE WAY OF THE NEW JERUSALEM AS SET FORTH IN PULPIT AND PRESS FROM THOMAS CART-RIGHT TO JOHN LILBURNE AND MILTON, 1570-1643*.

appointment of a colonial Anglican bishop was fundamental: a denial of Parliamentary control over colonial legislatures.¹¹

History moves forward, not backward. We cannot go back and show our predecessors where they erred. Were they to see what the Church has become in today's society, they would pay no attention to us anyway. The American civil religion is the fully developed product of the unitarian rationalism of Newton and the Royal Society, which was Charles II's abiding gift to Anglo-American civilization, not Cromwell's. It is the product of a later generation of politically unitarian rationalists: Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, and above all, Madison.¹²

An Ancient Tradition

Parliament exercised its authority to call the Westminster Assembly for advice on ecclesiastical and theological matters. This was hardly a shock in 1643. In 325 A.D., Constantine brought another assembly to Nicaea for consultation, an assembly which set the standard for all subsequent Church assemblies. It was at Nicaea and the subsequent early Church assemblies that the theological and moral foundations of Western Civilization were hammered out – a thesis offered by R. J. Rushdoony in his *Foundations of Social Order* and systematically ignored by modern Church historians, especially at Westminster Seminary. By rejecting Arianism, the early Church broke with the idea of the divinization of man, and therefore with the State-worshipping political order of the ancient world. Jesus Christ, and He alone, is God incarnate, an ontological status that was the product of a virgin birth rather than moral or metaphysical evolution. And with this creedal assertion came law. Rushdoony writes:

11. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Scepter: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

12. North, *Political Polytheism*, Part 3.

It is significant, and it was inescapable, that, as the early church formulated the creeds, the councils that announced the creeds also announced canons, or canon law, to govern the church and believers, and to declare God's law to the state. It was impossible for creedalism to develop without a parallel development of canon law. As the creeds progressively formulated the reality of God's sovereign power and Christ's role as priest, prophet, and king over man and history, the councils simultaneously brought life under the canons of the faith, under Biblical law and morality. . . . Christianity not only formulated a canon law, but, in terms of Christian faith, it reformulated civil law.¹³

Westminster Seminary ignores this relationship between canon law and civil law. This is not surprising. Canon law is regarded as culturally irrelevant. Mainstream American evangelical seminaries have taught nothing except the American civil religion from the beginning. Prior to Princeton Seminary¹⁴ (1812) were the log college and its subsequent incarnation, the College of New Jersey, where the Presbyterian foundations of this civil religion were first developed.¹⁵

What is interesting is that secular humanist scholars have begun to recognize the close connection between canon law and the development of civil law in Western culture. Harold Berman's *Law and Revolution* was published by Harvard University Press in 1983, which identifies the origin of the Western legal tradition as the legal revolution of Gregory VII in 1076. We need comparable studies for previous centuries, but it is unlikely that Reformed Christians will write them in this gener-

13. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1968] 1978), pp. 6, 7.

14. The Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America at Princeton.

15. Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989); cf. North, *Political Polytheism*, pp. 317-20, 547-48.

ation. They are too immersed in the common-ground theologies of the American civil religion and Abraham Kuyper's common grace theory.¹⁶

Constantine called together the Council of Nicaea. It is this appeal back to Constantine's precedent that alienates the modern Christian defenders of religious and political pluralism. They see clearly that the intellectual conflict within the Church over the legitimacy and possibility of Christendom has always been between the Constantinians and the pietists, and they have self-consciously sided with the pietists. The idea of a Christian ruler in an explicitly and legally Christian society is morally repugnant to them. They prefer to believe in religious neutrality, natural law, and a civil government that imposes sanctions other than those specified in the Bible. Those colonial Presbyterians who shared this outlook revised the Westminster Confession of Faith to remove this one minuscule trace in the creed of *the subordination of the civil magistrate to God*, for if the civil magistrate is not entitled to call a Church assembly for counsel, then he surely is not required by God to listen to any pronouncements by such an assembly. If there is absolutely no legal connection between Church and State, then there is no judicial obligation for a civil magistrate to listen to a Church council. What appears to be an intrusion by the State into Church affairs – calling a Church assembly for counsel – is in fact a legal acknowledgment that the State must consider the judicial pronouncements of the Church: not automatic subordination, but at least co-authority. The political pluralists recognize this, and have therefore denied the right of the Church to tell the State what the Bible requires of its magistrates.

Then who should tell magistrates what is required of them? "The *sovereign people*, the creators and sole enforcers of the civil covenant!" Who, then, is the god of such a national covenant?

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

*The Offending Clause*¹⁷

Having been called into session by Parliament, the Assembly had no qualms about adding this justification of Parliament's act:

As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with, about matters of religion; so, if magistrates be open enemies to the Church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons upon delegation from their Churches, may meet together in such assemblies (XXXI:II).

This was a two-fold justification: (1) why they came to Westminster and (2) why they were taking over control of the Church from the King and his bishops. The "open enemy to the Church" was clearly Charles I. The Puritans of New England were in New England because of him and his father, James I. The Puritans did not need to be persuaded about the theological legitimacy of a synod to deal with Charles I or the call by Parliament to assemble. They responded with enthusiasm, and they sat for four long years to complete their work.

It is this clause that the American revision of 1788 removed. It is this clause that still retroactively bothers the consciences of those who profess allegiance to the revised Westminster Confession of Faith. Why? The clause no more authorizes the magistrate to tell the Church what to conclude than the Arian emperors could lawfully tell the early Church what to believe. The magistrate calls the synod only for consultation. "Aye, there's the rub." The modern humanist asks rhetorically: Why should a magistrate call a synod for consultation? The modern pietist asks the same. *Consultation about what?* The modern humanist asks: Isn't this a violation of the fundamental princi-

17. The 1788 revision also removed the clause identifying the Papacy as the Antichrist: XXV:VI. This was clearly an improvement.

ple of the separation of Church and State? The modern pietist asks the same.

But, the theonomist asks, what of the far more fundamental principle of the *inseparability of religion and State*? This is Van Til's legacy: to show that all self-professed religious neutrality is a myth and a deception, that all morality is inescapably religious, and that all law is grounded in a particular moral outlook. Civil laws forbid specific acts. They apply specific sanctions. There can be no civil sanction *against* something without interfering with the affairs of those who practice the forbidden act. Any act can be defended in terms of religion: smoking peyote, polygamy, ritual executions, *anything*. The question then must be: *Which religion*? It is this question that American Presbyterians and all Trinitarian churches save one have refused to face squarely. That lone holdout is the tiny Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

An Idol for Destruction

The RPCNA (the Covenanters) still uses the original 1647 Confession. The Covenanters' parallel political organization, the National Reform Association, founded in 1864, has been dedicated to getting a Constitutional amendment passed that will put the name of Jesus Christ into the U.S. Constitution. This political pressure group deeply offends the modern, Calvinist, pluralist intellectual. Gary Scott Smith writes: "Despite all their protestations to the contrary, the root problem of NRA advocates was that they confused the Old Testament theocracy with the pluralistic pattern of civil government taught by the New Testament."¹⁸ His view of the New Testament is representative of virtually all contemporary American churches. Yet this view of the New Testament, first propounded politically by

18. Gary Scott Smith, *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America, 1870-1815* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian College Consortium and Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), p. 67.

Roger Williams in Rhode Island in the 1640's, has yet to be defended biblically by any of its advocates. They write as if there were a large body of published material that shows *exegetically* that this view of the New Testament is correct. On the contrary, there is not a single detailed book in political theory that attempts this necessary task of biblical exegesis. *Every* defense of pluralism in the name of Christianity appeals to some version of natural law theory. We have heard assertions about the New Testament's alleged commitment to pluralism for three and a half centuries, but always without any expressly biblical evidence. Nevertheless, American Protestant churches have clung to the American civil religion as if it were expressly biblical.¹⁹ Whenever we theonomists mention this anomaly in public, it deeply offends the pluralists. A major offense of the theonomists is our public insistence that "the Christian pluralistic emperor has no clothes."

Herbert Schlossberg has performed yeoman service in exposing the dangers of any civil religion not grounded in a transcendental faith in the God Who Is There, and Who Made Everything That Is Here. "A religious statement, on the other hand, which says 'do not be conformed to the values of society' swings an axe at the trunk of civil religion. Civil religion eases tensions, where biblical religion creates them. Civil religion papers over the cracks of evil, and biblical religion strips away the covering, exposing the nasty places."²⁰

The American civil religion has become an idol. Schlossberg warns us regarding idols: "Idols are hard to identify after they have been a part of the society for a time. It became 'normal' for the people of Jerusalem to worship Molech in the temple, and it seemed odd that people calling themselves prophets

19. James H. Nichols, *Democracy and the Churches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951); Thomas G. Sanders, *Protestant Concepts of Church and State* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964).

20. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation With American Society* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, [1983] 1990), p. 252.

should denounce the practice. Molech was part of the establishment religious scene, one that had directed the national cult throughout living memory. The idol was supported by all the 'best' elements of society, the political, economic, and religious power structure. . . . That is why the vocation of prophet is so unpopular and so hazardous."²¹

What Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, and Schlossberg all failed to grasp was that the true prophet comes with a covenantal message that is both positive and negative. He calls men to repent *from something* in order that they may turn *to something*. He comes with a *covenant lawsuit* which threatens God's negative sanctions in history for a society's continuing disobedience, and promises God's positive sanctions in history for a society that repents. The archetype is Jonah's covenant lawsuit against Nineveh. The prophet did not attempt to overthrow the existing social idol without offering an alternative. He was not so foolish as to attempt to overthrow something with nothing. He did not suggest that his listeners replace something specifically evil with nothing in particular. He did not, in short, adopt the religion of civil neutrality. The sad fact is, Van Til, Schaeffer, and Schlossberg rejected the role of New Covenant prophet.²² They have all defended the idol of pluralism – not actively, but by default. They have rejected religious neutrality within the churches, but they have affirmed it (or refused to deny it) for the civil order.²³ They have all been faithful Presbyterians – faithful to the denomination's covenantal sell-out of 1788. So has Westminster Seminary. With respect to a positive confession, they have all remained mute.

Are they also deaf and blind?

21. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

22. A prophet brings a covenant lawsuit against society. An Old Covenant prophet had access to God's secret revelation of the future (Amos 3:7). This is not given to the New Covenant prophet, for the canon of Scripture is closed.

23. On Schaeffer, see North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 4.

The Problem of the Drawbridge

The problem for those who reject the Chapter XXXI:II is the problem of the Christian who seeks permanent safety behind a raised drawbridge in a castle. To attack the enemy, he must first lower the drawbridge, but to lower the drawbridge is to invite attack. War is a two-fold process; there can be no offense without a defense, and vice versa. A perfect defense destroys all offense. To live behind an impenetrable shield is to remove oneself and one's religion from history. The only place where this kind of safety from offensive attack is available is the grave. The ghetto is the cultural version of the graveyard.

For the Church of Jesus Christ to have significant influence in society, it must first formulate a worldview. It must apply the principles of this worldview to every area of life in which sin presently reigns, i.e., to everything. This is the long-lost discipline of *casuistry*, which died in the West around 1700, when Newton's unitarian vision was on the ascendancy. The casuist must seek for legal principles – ecclesiastical and civil – either in the autonomous mind of man or else in the Bible. Van Til denied the legitimacy of the former quest. The theonomists have taken him seriously. The faculty of Westminster Seminary has not.

So fearful of interference from the civil government are the pietists, and so vehement are the defenders of the autonomy of the Church, that they have joined with the humanists and anti-Christians in proclaiming the theology of the raised drawbridge. The Church agrees to say nothing about law or politics, and the politicians grant it tax exemption in exchange. The arrangement involves a commitment to *a theology of Christian irrelevance in history*. The Church learns to remain silent, and the State promises to leave the Church alone. But once the Church has lost its voice, the State moves in to control it, compel it to side with the State, and finally even destroy it. The experience of the churches in Communist nations is proof

enough. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 guaranteed freedom of religion. So what?

If there is no neutral ground, then the drawbridge must remain lowered. Even if it is raised during a temporary attack, a secret passageway must remain open (e.g., missions). The Church must always be on the offensive. The Great Commission must be pursued by the Church day and night: not the pseudo-Great Commission of modern pietism – the “save souls, not culture” view of the Great Commission – but the *comprehensive* Great Commission issued by the God-man who possesses all power in heaven *and* on earth.²⁴

Today's Christians reject such a view of the Great Commission. Such a view leads directly to a huge increase of personal and corporate responsibility for Christians. They do not want this added responsibility. They want to remove the Church and Christians generally from all political conflict. They do not want Christians speaking authoritatively in the name of God in the world outside the local church and the Christian home. This is a view of Christianity as a movement that is somehow above and outside history rather than the religion of a God who is above and over history. It is, in short, Protestant gnosticism.²⁵ “Raise the cultural drawbridge,” they cry, “and keep it raised!” This is Westminster's confession: ghetto theology.

The Issue Is Sanctions

The Augustinian monk Martin Luther launched the Reformation with a public challenge to the Roman Catholic Church: Prove that God's positive sanction of eternal life is in any way earned by semi-autonomous (Pelagian) man. (Luther was a dedicated predestinarian.)²⁶ With the Reformation itself came

24. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

25. Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

26. He made this plain in *The Bondage of the Will* (1524), his attack on Erasmus.

the next challenge to Rome: Prove from the Bible that the sanction of excommunication of those Protestants proclaiming the "sola Scriptura" position is lawfully imposed by the Roman Church.

There was a third question, which split the Protestants: Identify the lawful sanctions of the civil government. Luther, an ethical dualist, appealed to natural law.²⁷ So did the bulk of the post-1660 Puritans. But John Calvin, at least some of the time, affirmed the continuing validity of the Old Testament's specified civil sanctions.²⁸ So did the long-neglected early seventeenth-century political theorist Johannus Althusius, who cited a body of late sixteenth-century expository literature to confirm his thesis. So did Hugo Grotius in the early years of the century (he switched to natural law two decades later). Finally, so did at least some of the English Puritans prior to the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660. It was only after 1660 and the immediate rise and triumph of Newtonianism that contractual natural law theory totally replaced covenantal biblical law theory in the thinking of Presbyterians.²⁹

The reader needs to ask himself this question: If the specified civil sanctions of God's Old Covenant law are no longer binding on modern civil governments, then how can *any* aspect of God's moral law still be binding in the civil realm? If the answer is "natural law," then how can Van Til's critique of natural law and man's self-proclaimed autonomous reason be correct? If the answer is "not natural law," but "not biblical law, either," then what is the answer? This is the crucial question –

See *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, edited by Philip S. Watson, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), vol. XVII.

27. Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Foundations of Luther's Social Views," in John H. Mundy, et al, *Essays in Medieval Life* (Cheshire, Connecticut: Biblo & Tannen, 1955), pp. 71-87. See also Gary North, "The Economic Thought of Luther and Calvin," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Summer 1975), pp. 76-89.

28. John Calvin, *The Covenant Enforced: Sermons on Deuteronomy 27 and 28*, edited by James B. Jordan (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

29. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 6.

intellectual and practical – facing the Christian world in general and Westminster Seminary in particular.

Without so much as a footnote, Van Til threw out political pluralism's baby with the Scholastic and Newtonian bath water, yet Westminster Seminary simultaneously (1) parades itself as a spiritual heir of Van Til and (2) defends the ideal of political pluralism.³⁰ This has been Westminster Seminary's epistemological problem for a generation. If Van Til is correct, then religious, intellectual, and political pluralism cannot possibly be correct. Is Westminster Seminary going to abandon Van Til publicly in favor of modern political pluralism, or scrap pluralism publicly and defend Van Til? *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* once again has dodged the issue.

This being the case, allow me to state the issue one more time. Civil law, at the very least, is the realm of negative sanctions. These sanctions are physical or economic; they are also compulsory (the "sword"). There is an inescapable principle in all civil government: *no sanction, no law*. As the New England Puritans put it in their 1647 law code, "*The execution of the law is the life of the law.*"³¹ In 1973, I put it this way in Appendix 4 of *Institutes of Biblical Law*, and I even put it in italics: "*If covenant law is binding, then covenant law enforcement is equally binding.*"³²

Theonomy: A Reformed Critique is Westminster Seminary's long-delayed attempt to respond to the implications of this easily understood statement, although no contributor cited it. The reader must judge the competence of this response. *Westminster's Confession* is my attempt to assist the reader.

30. William S. Barker, "Theonomy, Pluralism, and the Bible," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

31. "Book of the General Laws and Liberties Governing the Inhabitants of Massachusetts, 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.

32. North, "The Economics of Sabbath Keeping," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 829.

The Issue Is the Ascension

As he reads this book and the Westminster book, the reader should ask himself this question: "What role in Westminster Seminary's theology and social theory does the doctrine of Christ's bodily ascension to the right hand of God play?" It is not sufficient to announce that Jesus rose from the dead bodily. It is not sufficient to refer continuously to Christ's resurrection. That He rose from the dead is significant; that He ascended to the throne of God is equally significant. He is both King of kings and High Priest as a result of His ascension to the throne of God. The following question is inescapable: "What is the relationship between the biblical doctrine of the ascension and the biblical doctrine of New Covenant history?"

The best place to begin such a study is Calvin's *Institutes*. In Book II, Chapter XVI, he discussed the Apostles' Creed. He discussed the implications of Christ's ascension in parts 14-16. He said that it was the ascension that transferred power to Christ, and from Him to His Church. He tied the doctrine of Christ's ascension to the doctrine of God's kingdom in history. "Now having laid aside the mean and lowly state of mortal life and the shame of the cross, Christ by rising again began to show forth his glory and power more fully. Yet he truly inaugurated his Kingdom only at his ascension into heaven."³³ His departure allowed Him to send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). "As his body was raised up above all the heavens, so his power and energy were diffused and spread beyond all the bounds of heaven and earth."³⁴

He therefore sits on high, transfusing us with his power, that he may quicken us to spiritual life, sanctify us by his Spirit, adorn his church with divers gifts of his grace, keep it safe from all harm by his protection, restrain the raging enemies of his

33. Calvin, *Institutes*, II:XVI:14.

34. *Idem*.

cross and of our salvation by the strength of his hand, and finally hold all power in heaven and on earth. All this he does until he shall lay low all his enemies [I Cor. 15:25; cf. Ps. 110:1] (who are our enemies too) and complete the building of his church. This is the true state of his Kingdom; this is the power that the Father has conferred upon him, until, in coming to judge the living and the dead, he accomplishes his final act.³⁵

Finally, what is the relationship between the biblical doctrine of sanctification – definitive, progressive, and final – and the biblical doctrine of the ascension? What is the role of the doctrine of progressive sanctification in Westminster's confession? Is progressive sanctification in history restricted to the regenerate heart, the institutional Church, and Christian families? If so, on what biblical basis is it so limited? Why can't there be progressive sanctification in civil government? Why not in the economy? There was under the Old Covenant: "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18). Why not progress in society generally? What about in education? Science? Technology? Does Westminster's faculty have a doctrine of progress for New Covenant history? Can any amillennialist or premillennialist have a doctrine of progress for New Testament history?³⁶

Conclusion

These are a few of the questions that we hope Westminster's faculty will answer some day. But will we have to wait another seventeen years?

35. *Ibid.*, II:XVI:16.

36. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 4.

THE QUESTION OF LAW

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10).

Love is without question the fulfilling of the law. It might be more accurate to say that love is the fulfilment of the law. It will surely not be challenged if we say that love is both emotive and motive; love is feeling and it impels to action. If it does not impel to the fulfilment of the law, it is not the love of which the Scripture here speaks. In a word, the action to which love impels is the action which is characterized as the fulfilment of the law.

John Murray (1957)¹

Which law does love fulfil? This is the question that has divided Christian ethicists from the beginning. For the last three centuries, however, Protestants have refused to acknowledge the existence of this unsolved problem. With the demise around 1700 of the judicial art of casuistry, Christian theologians have not worked to develop specifically Christian applications of permanent moral standards to real-world problems,

1. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 22.

especially social problems. Today, with modern society for the first time since the Flood facing a universal worldwide crisis, the whole world needs answers. So far, very few Christians are even asking the questions.

Twentieth-century Calvinism, like twentieth-century evangelicalism in general, is immersed in this worldwide moral and judicial crisis. It is more than just a financial and cultural crisis; it is a theological crisis. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is evidence of this crisis within Calvinism, not because it opposes a particular subset of Reformed theology called *theonomy*, but because the men who wrote it self-consciously refuse to suggest any equally comprehensive judicial alternative. Nevertheless, there are always alternatives lurking in the shadows: covenant-breaking alternatives. There are no judicial vacuums in this covenantal world. There can be no judicial neutrality, any more than there can be moral neutrality. The theological problem for the Christian ethicist is that these judicial alternatives today are all self-consciously non-Christian. Their defenders were not always equally self-conscious. For centuries, the principles of natural law were assumed to be morally neutral and common to mankind as a rational species. Newton's laws of physics were the model. No one, however, who proclaims intellectual allegiance to Charles Darwin, Werner Heisenberg, or Cornelius Van Til can consistently believe such a thing today.

Natural law theory was always an illusion, whether in its medieval form (realism) or its modern form (nominalism).² Therefore, today's contemporary theological crisis has been brewing for well over three centuries. It began during the Puritan revolt in England (1640-60). The Presbyterians and the Independents did not agree on the question of Church hierarchy. The Levellers did not agree with the first two groups on

2. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 34-36.

political hierarchy: they were democrats who rejected the idea of religious or economic restrictions on the right to vote. The Diggers did not agree with the first three on economic hierarchy: they were communists. These issues were not settled during Cromwell's era. Then Charles II returned to the throne, and the Calvinists were driven out – out of Oxford and Cambridge, out of political office, and out of the pulpits of the land. Only a few pietistic Calvinists were willing to sign the Act of Uniformity (1662) in order to retain their positions, men like William Gurnall, whose *Christian in Complete Armour* is a gigantic exercise in pietistic introspection: a manual of personal reform to the exclusion of social reform. This culturally retreatist outlook is inherent in all pietism: the denial of any ethically necessary connection between the individual's regeneration and society's transformation.

The Pietist-Unitarian Alliance

Pietism is the worldview of both Christian individualism and the closed small society (e.g., the Amish). Anglo-American pietism has for over three centuries been in an alliance with political unitarianism: both proclaim the legitimate autonomy of politics from the judicial claims of the Bible. The triumph of Locke's Whig political vision in 1690 (developed during his stay in the Netherlands in the early 1680's) was an extension of the unitarian theology and social views of Isaac Newton, not the Calvinism of Oliver Cromwell.

American Presbyterianism is a product of the Confessional revision of 1788. That revision was grounded in the worldview of Newtonianism. A year after the 1788 Synod, in May of 1789, the General Assembly had Rev. John Witherspoon chair a committee to prepare an address to the newly elected President of the United States. The committee drafted a lengthy report in which it expressed those sentiments that have been passed down from textbook to textbook. Echoing Washington's familiar Masonic rhetoric regarding the social utility of religion in

general, the address announced: "Public virtue is the most certain means of public felicity, and religion is the surest basis of virtue. We therefore esteem it a peculiar happiness to behold in our Chief Magistrate a steady, uniform, avowed friend of the Christian religion, and who on the most public and solemn occasions devoutly acknowledges the government of Divine Providence." The address then identified the role of the newly reformed Presbyterian Church in the American political religion: "We shall consider ourselves as doing an acceptable service to God in our profession when we contribute to render men sober, honest, and industrious citizens, and the obedient subjects of a lawful government."³ Here was a new vision: the Church as cheerleader.

Presbyterianism, like Protestantism generally, remains politically Newtonian, for it is still silent regarding the biblical requirements of the civil government. This theological silence on civil affairs is the essence of Whig political theory. It is the foundation of the American civil religion. Princeton Theological Seminary, like the Log College and the subsequent College of New Jersey, was Whig from its inception. The presupposition of such an outlook is the acceptance of natural law theory. The faculty at Princeton Seminary adopted the common sense rationalist tradition of Scottish Presbyterian apologetics.⁴ This tradition was abandoned by Van Til. But it was never self-consciously abandoned by the faculty of Westminster Seminary. The implications of this epistemological schizophrenia are still being worked out. The trouble is, they are not being worked out systematically and self-consciously. If anything, these implications are being avoided.

3. Cited in Jacob Harris Patton, *A Popular History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: Mighill, 1900), p. 209.

4. Mark A. Noll, "Introduction," in Noll (ed.), *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), pp. 30-33. Noll provides bibliographical citations.

The Revolt Against Old Princeton

A revolt took place at Princeton Seminary in 1929, when the liberals and the stand-patters took control of the Board of Directors at Princeton. Four conservative professors left: Allis, Machen, Wilson, and Van Til. This revolt was a two-pronged revolt, however – a fact that has never been discussed in detail by the heirs of that schism. The Old Princeton tradition (pre-1929) did not survive. Both its eschatology (postmillennial) and its apologetic tradition (common sense rationalism) were abandoned by its two successors. The successors at Princeton went Barthian.⁵ The successors at Westminster went Dutch.⁶

Van Til was the key to Westminster's abandonment of the Princetonian apologetic tradition. He was a presuppositionalist. He broke from all previous Christian apologetic traditions in his radical abandonment of the idea of natural law in any form. At Princeton Seminary, he had earned a Th.M. At Princeton University, he had earned a Ph.D. under A. A. Bowman. (One of his two graduate student compatriots with Bowman was Philip Wheelright, who later distinguished himself as an expert on Heraclitus.) With these as rock-solid academic credentials, Van Til had been appointed to the chair of apologetics at Princeton Seminary for the 1928-29 academic year – the equivalent of full professor.⁷

In the summer of 1929, just before the Great Depression began, Princeton Seminary split. The Bible-believing conservatives left to form Westminster Seminary. That summer, Van Til

5. See, for example, Princeton's 1933 Stone Lectures by Adolf Keller, *Religion and Revolution: Problems of Contemporary Christianity on the European Scene* (New York: Revell, 1934).

6. Even John Murray, a Scottish Presbyterian, was half-Dutch until the mid-1960's: he was amillennial for most of his career. His exposition of Romans 11, on the conversion of the Jews, was traditional Princetonian postmillennialism, but this perspective never worked its way into his lectures on eschatology in senior systematics. He did not discuss apologetics.

7. William White, *Van Til: Defender of the Faith* (New York: Nelson, 1979), p. 79.

left Princeton and went into the pastorate in Michigan. J. Gresham Machen appealed to him repeatedly throughout the summer to come to teach apologetics at Westminster, but Van Til rejected the call. Then, as the academic term opened, he relented and joined the faculty in Philadelphia.

Machen understood that the new seminary needed a program in apologetics. He had defended the faith himself with academic rigor in *The Origin of Paul's Religion* and *The Virgin Birth of Christ*. Machen either accepted the old Princeton's rationalist apologetic or at least he never publicly rejected it. Van Til had already broken with that tradition. Machen hired him. William White asks: "Did Machen understand how far from the old Princeton apologetic the new Westminster apologetic really was? Did Machen realize that Van Til, R. B. Kuiper, and Ned Stonehouse had brought to Philadelphia the best of Amsterdam? Had the thought actually registered that a new direction in apologetics in America was being charted?"⁸ Years later, Van Til was not sure, White says. "It is a known fact that Machen, as far as he comprehended it, fully endorsed Van Til's thinking and gave it his hearty and unqualified backing."⁹

R. B. Kuiper (homiletics) and Ned B. Stonehouse (New Testament) never wrote on apologetics. What they brought was another aspect of "Amsterdam": amillennial eschatology. Van Til rarely (as far as I know, *never*) mentioned the word "eschatology" in his writings, nor did Edward J. Young (Old Testament) emphasize it, but both men were amillennialists. It is assumed in their writings, which is why Van Til's view of common grace in history was governed by the vision of a coming era of increasing persecution for the Church.

So, while Westminster and its graduates have always liked to refer to themselves as heirs of the Old Princeton, the claim was never valid. To understand this, we need to apply the Bible's

8. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

9. *Idem.*

five-point covenant model.¹⁰ With respect to TULIP¹¹ (point one of the biblical covenant model: God's absolute sovereignty), Westminster was a legitimate heir of Princeton: Westminster was Calvinistic. With respect to point two, hierarchy, it was also Princetonian, i.e., Presbyterian. With respect to point three, law, it was never made clear that a definitive break had been made: from natural law theory to . . . ? Van Til never made clear what he was substituting for natural law. His was an exclusively negative judicial confession. This lack of clarity on the question of civil justice is at the heart of today's debate over theonomy.¹² Point four – sanctions – was also a major transition: from the traditional Princetonian hope in God's blessings on the Church in history to a view that predicted escalating cursings. Finally, eschatology: Westminster abandoned Princeton's traditional postmillennialism – the eschatology of Answer 191 of the Larger Catechism. So, in three crucial respects – law, sanctions, and eschatology – Westminster Seminary became a Dutch enclave within American Presbyterianism. The Old Princeton really did perish in 1929. It left no heirs, either theologically or institutionally. Today's Calvinistic postmillennialists are virtually all Vantilian in their apologetics: the Christian Reconstructionists. Yet on the question of law, the theonomists are neither Vantilian nor Princetonian: they are neo-Puritan.

Two Views of the State

Francis Schaeffer asked: *How Should We Then Live?* This is the question! He never provided an answer. Neither has any theological seminary since the demise of Princeton. If there is

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

11. See above, pp. 76-77.

12. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

a gaping hole in the curriculum of every Bible-believing theological seminary today, it is ethics. Social ethics is part of biblical ethics, and this is the topic that theologically conservative seminary faculties will do anything to avoid. The moment they begin to speak of social ethics in the name of the Bible, the school's finances are threatened. There are too many shades of social, economic, and political opinion within any school's donor base. Nevertheless, social ethics and personal ethics are inextricably linked. The Social Gospel's advocates recognized this fact early, and by addressing it forthrightly, stole the hearts and minds of at least three generations of Christian students. Liberation theology, until the public demise of Marxism in late 1989, successfully carried forward this tradition. The conservative seminaries, including Westminster, Covenant, and Reformed, remained institutionally silent on social ethics. They had to. Scottish common sense rationalism offered no Bible-based alternative; neither did Abraham Kuyper's Calvinism.

Kuyper's Legacy: The State As Healer

Abraham Kuyper's longest lasting political legacy to the Netherlands as Prime Minister (1901-1905) was his higher education school finance law of 1905. It involved national State subsidies to the *gymnasia*, the academic high schools. It also established State-funded technical institutes. It forced the State to grant equal legal status to all university degrees – an indirect but important subsidy to Kuyper's own Free University of Amsterdam, which had been the only private university in the Netherlands from 1880 to 1903. "To the Free University, the law was a priceless boon, a silver anniversary gift of inestimable value, one which had stood at the head of its gift list for years," writes Kuyper's biographer. Indeed it was! It led to the liberalization of the school, and in such a way that its Christian victims never perceived the shift. "Now the school could really exist and grow and flourish. Indeed, the Free University faced

a bright and shining future.”¹³ Klaas Schilder was to learn better a generation later. This subsidy destroyed the theological moorings of the Free University and then Kuyper’s denomination. Kuyper never sensed the inescapable danger.

This transformation was guaranteed from 1905. The money and the monopoly grant of power (degree-granting) inevitably corrupted the Free University. Here is the great and predictable irony: “Kuyper’s ultimate goal was none other than the liberation of higher education from the state and its return to the people.”¹⁴ The result, of course, was exactly the opposite. The source of the funding – in this case, *coercively confiscated tax revenues* – always determines the standards and character of the recipient institutions. The non-public universities had to meet the standards of the State.¹⁵ These standards were supposedly religiously neutral; in fact, nothing is religiously neutral. What Kuyper should have demanded was the removal of all State sanctions from education: money, examinations, and supervision of academic degrees. But such a view is radical even today, despite a century of public school tyranny and declining standards, let alone in 1905. Instead, he sought State subsidies.

This infusion of money and monopoly degree-granting authority led, decade by decade, to the destruction of Christian education in the Netherlands. The Dutch Catholics by the 1960’s had become the Roman Church’s most flaming national pocket of radicals,¹⁶ while the confession-affirming Calvinists have continued to shrink in influence, going along with Dutch socialism with only mild and half-hearted protests. Kuyper had supported social welfare legislation from the beginning.¹⁷

13. Frank Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, [1960] 1978), p. 219.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

16. See, for example, *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), put out by the Bishops of the Netherlands.

17. Vanden Berg, *Kuyper*, p. 191.

Government money, like free cocaine, produced the predictable results: the creation of *dependency* on the part of the Christians. With that stolen money came a humanist worldview. What the Free University of Amsterdam steadily became was the kind of university that Kuyper had worked so hard to replace a century earlier.

Then he did to the elementary schools what he did to higher education. He got a law passed that subsidized the non-public elementary schools. "Moreover, the new law brought the non-public school teachers into the pension system which existed for their colleagues in the state schools and gave them the same legal status."¹⁸ The previous Prime Minister had rammed through a compulsory school attendance law, passed 50-49 in the Second Chamber when two defectors from the political Right's coalition voted with the Socialists and Liberals.¹⁹ Kuyper did not seek to repeal that law. He was in favor of compulsory school attendance laws.²⁰ So, he persuaded the Christians to get their hands into the government's till. It took very little persuading. (The idea of school vouchers is popular among private schools today: another attempted grab for State money, despite the fact that the Federal government took over private higher education in the U.S. by means of Federal student aid grants – the famous Grove City College case. They never seem to learn: "Take the State's nickel and you take its noose.")

How does Kuyper's biographer describe this political triumph? "The law's provisions showed that the government was in dead earnest in its concern for the moral interests of the nation." To which he adds: "And further, Kuyper's liquor law was a salutary law. Its effect, combined with the efforts of total

18. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

abstinence and temperance groups, appreciably reduced the consumption of alcoholic beverages in Holland.”²¹

Machen's Legacy: The State as Spoiler

Machen was a nineteenth-century political liberal. This was the Old Princeton tradition. He did not trust the State. He testified to the U.S. Congress against the creation of a Federal Department of Education.²² He specifically identified his opposition to the proposed 1926 education bill as paralleling his opposition to the attempted child-labor amendment to the Constitution.²³ Machen understood what Federal money inescapably would mean: the unwarranted expansion of Federal power. He warned the Congressmen that “money given for education, no matter what people say, always has a string tied to it. That appears in gifts of money by private foundations, and it appears far more, of course, when the gift comes from the Federal Government. . . .”²⁴ Machen continued:

It is to be opposed, we think, because it represents a tendency which is no new thing, but has been in the world for at least 2,300 years, which seems to be opposed to the whole principle of liberty for which our country stands. It is the notion that education is the affair essentially of the State; that the children of the State must be educated for the benefit of the State; that idiosyncracies should be avoided, and the State should devise that method of education which will best promote the welfare of the State.

That principle was put in classic form in ancient Greece in the *Republic* of Plato. It was put into operation, with very disastrous results in some of the Greek States. It has been in the

21. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

22. Testimony of Feb. 25, 1926; reprinted in Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State* (Jefferson, Maryland: Trinity Foundation, 1987), pp. 99-123.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

24. *Idem.*

world ever since as the chief enemy of human liberty. It appears in the world to-day.²⁵

In his cross-examination session by members of the committee, he observed – prophetically, it has turned out: “I think we are having to-day a very marked intellectual as well as moral decline through the gradual extension of standardization in education.”²⁶ What is really interesting is that one proponent of the bill kept pressing Machen to admit that the Bureau of Education had done some good things in administering the schools in Washington, D.C.²⁷ Machen did not take the bait. Today, there are few if any Congressmen who send their children into the hell-holes of the Washington, D.C., public school system.

One of the Senators asked him a perceptive question. It is *the* educational question of questions in the United States. It has been the question ever since the decision of the Puritans in Massachusetts to pass a compulsory school attendance law in 1642 – a precedent used by Horace Mann two centuries later to make America a unitarian nation:

I am just wondering whether there is any such thing as moral conduct in the United States Congress or among the citizens of the United States apart from a distinctly religious basis. I am just wondering whether the public schools have any function in the way of teaching morality which is not distinctively religious in its basic idea.

Here is Machen's reply:

I myself do not believe that you can have such a morality permanently, and that is exactly what I am interested in trying

25. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-18.

to get other people to believe; but I am not at all interested in trying to proclaim that view of mine by any measures that involve compulsion, and I am not interested in making the public school an agency for the proclamation of such a view; but I am interested in diminishing rather than increasing the function of the public school, in order to leave room for the opportunity of a propagation of the view that I hold in free conflict with all other views which may be held, in order that in that way the truth finally may prevail.²⁸

Here Machen laid down the gauntlet: *the need for a drastic reduction in the influence of government-funded education*. The theonomists walk down this path to its logical conclusion: no public education.²⁹ No compulsory education laws, either. No interference with the God-given assignment of the education of children by the family or its authorized agents. But there is a war going on against the family and its authority: sometimes by the Church and sometimes by the State. The locus of authority is blurred. This weakens the will of Christian parents to fight.

So much for Machen's view of Federal aid to education. His view was antithetical to everything Kuyper believed. What was Machen's view of Prohibition? He was opposed to it. He was consistent. He did not believe that the Federal government had any jurisdiction over the consumption of alcohol.³⁰ This stand got him in trouble with the fundamentalists. (Prohibition was the last crusade of the fundamentalists, who achieved their political goal through an alliance with theological liberals and humanistic political progressives.)³¹ In short, Machen the social theorist was the antithesis of Abraham Kuyper the politician.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-23.

29. Possible exceptions: police academies and the U.S. military academies.

30. Stonehouse, *Machen*, pp. 387-88.

31. James H. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900-1920* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Murray N. Rothbard, "World War I as Fulfillment: Power and the Intellectuals," *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, IX (Winter 1989), pp. 83-87.

Kuyper believed in common grace. In his system, this became a theory of epistemological common ground. Machen did not explicitly oppose common sense rationalism. This also had long served as a epistemological common ground. Van Til rejected all forms of common-ground philosophy. He also did not accept theonomy. His successors at Westminster formally proclaim allegiance to Van Til. Where does this leave Westminster Seminary? Drifting along. Going with the flow. Waiting for the parousia. Condemning biblical law. Denying Christendom.

Blackout at Westminster

At Westminster Seminary, none of this Presbyterian history is ever publicly discussed. Students are not warned that in order to hold Kuyper's view of society, it is necessary to reject Machen's, and vice versa. Machen's views on society and economics are never discussed. Worse; the students have been deliberately misled about his views. Consider the 1977 book on Machen by faculty member and Church historian Paul Woolley, *The Significance of J. Gresham Machen Today*. In this brief and misleading "biography" of Machen, nothing of Machen's political views is mentioned.³² Half the 84-page book is devoted to promoting Woolley's liberal political beliefs: women's liberation, labor unions, and abortion. As I said in my review of the book, "The book might better be titled, *The Significance of the Opinions of Paul Woolley, Using Machen's Name as a Sales Device*." The book was a fraud, a piece of unconscionable propaganda, but I was the only person to say so in print. The old boy network at Westminster closed ranks around the aging Woolley. (He should have been fired years before because of his pro-abortion stance; he should have been fired decades before because of his lousy lecturing, both in terms of content – no explicit framework, little attention to the creeds, no meaningful conclusions,

32. Paul Woolley, *The Significance of J. Gresham Machen Today* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977).

no discussion of the relevance of Christianity for Western civilization, few lessons from the past – and his endless nervous coughing. He was among the very worst lecturers on history I ever heard, and I heard a career full. He would have made a superb librarian or bibliographer, not to mention a railway clerk.³³ He missed his calling.) I ended the review with this statement, which I think is still appropriate today:

... it is indicative of the state of the seminary today that Mr. Woolley never hesitated to state his opinions frankly on campus, while the politically conservative faculty members at Westminster Seminary, such as Dr. Van Til and John Murray, chose to keep their political views hidden, sticking to exegesis and their academic disciplines. The liberals use the classroom for their purposes, and the conservatives use the classroom for theirs. Unfortunately, the classroom goals of the conservatives have been far too limited to promote an effective, long-range program of Christian reconstruction. The liberals win by default. That is the significance, not of J. Gresham Machen, but of his orthodox followers who share his outspoken political beliefs but who do not speak out, as he did.³⁴

There are other related aspects of Westminster's history that have been blacked out. It is time to let our light shine on them.

Abandoning Machen's Legacy: Stage One

R. B. Kuiper was professor of systematic theology at Westminster the first year, 1929-30. He left for three years to become president of Calvin College, 1930-33. He returned to become professor of practical theology at Westminster in 1933, a position he held for two decades. He ended his career as

33. He used to memorize U.S. and Canadian train schedules as an exercise. In his dotage, he directed trains from his living room. When you promote abortion in the name of Christian ethics, God deals with you accordingly.

34. *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, IV (Winter 1977-78), p. 180.

president of Calvin Seminary, 1953-56. When Machen died, Kuiper was made chairman of the Westminster faculty. Less than three years after Machen's death, Kuiper brought the cultural worldview of this New Amsterdam before the readers of the *Westminster Theological Journal*. This essay is representative of the modified Kuyperian views of conservative Dutch Calvinism. It was titled, "The Christian Pulpit and Social Problems."³⁵ Like all of Dutch social apologetics, this essay stated clearly what it was against and was distressingly vague about what it was for.

The essay is 33 pages long. Kuiper spent nine pages attacking "The Social Gospel of Liberalism." He spent eight and a half pages refuting "The Individual Gospel of Dispensationalism." He spent seven pages on "The Quietistic Gospel of Barthianism." The final eight and a half pages were devoted to "The Comprehensive Gospel of Calvinism." First, he praised Calvin's work to create "a reformation of public morals in the city of Geneva." Second, he praised Abraham Kuyper's Calvinism. "Today Holland boasts numerous institutions of Christian mercy, an influential Christian labor alliance, and a Reformed university with high scholastic standards, and a strong Calvinistic political party. . . ."³⁶

This defense of Calvin and Kuyper took one whole paragraph. Already, Kuiper felt the pressure of modern pietism. "Too much, too much!" he could hear the fundamentalist critics crying. "Calvinism is all social gospel!" Kuiper immediately went on the defensive. "Not for a moment may the thought be harbored that Reformed preaching stresses the social teaching of the Bible at the expense of its message of individual redemption. Hardly anything could be farther removed from the truth. The charge so often laid at the door of Calvinism that it does not show sufficient interest in the salva-

35. *Westminster Theological Journal*, II (Nov. 1939), pp. 1-33.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 26

tion of souls is utterly false.”³⁷ He then linked the salvation of society directly to the salvation of souls, a perfectly biblical perspective: “Of all men no one is more firmly convinced than the Calvinist that there can be no such thing as the salvation of society apart from the salvation of the individuals constituting society; . . .”³⁸

This raises a crucial millennial question: If there will never be widespread conversion of souls, can there ever be, in Kuiper’s words, “the salvation of society”? Kuiper was well aware that postmillennialists would ask that question; there were still a few of them around (though not on the faculty) in 1939. As an amillennialist, he steadfastly refused to answer this question directly. (His spiritual heirs would answer it five decades later.) Instead, he went from the question of the possibility of society’s salvation to the motivation of Christians to work toward it. In short, he individualized his social message.

The question how effective his message will prove does not trouble the Reformed preacher out of measure. What concerns him is that he has marching orders. Most assuredly, he prays with all the fervor at his command that God the Holy Spirit may cause the seed of the Word to bring forth fruit a hundredfold. He is also confident that his labors will not be in vain in the Lord. But he does not need the postmillennial view of the future to sustain him in his work. Likely a minority of Reformed preachers today take the position that through the preaching of the gospel the kingdom will be brought to perfection.³⁹

Notice the final phrase, “through the preaching of the gospel the kingdom will be brought to perfection.” Here Kuiper resorted to that familiar amillennial rhetorical trick – read: *lie* – of attributing to one’s postmillennial opponents a prediction

37. *Idem.*

38. *Idem.*

39. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

of a future earthly perfectionism that none of them has ever asserted, and that postmillennialist B. B. Warfield specifically identified as heretical.⁴⁰ Kuiper knew; he had studied at Princeton under Warfield. Without this rhetorical trick, among several others, the amillennial view of the Church's future is easily identified as pessimistic. Calvinist amillennialists therefore have felt compelled to invent a completely mythological postmillennial "utopianism" in order to make their culturally defeatist position look "realistic." In short, *they lie* – to build Jesus' spiritual kingdom, of course. This deliberate misrepresentation by amillennial theologians does annoy us postmillennialists, but we have had no way until recently to answer our critics. They control Calvinism's academic journals. They have indulged in their misrepresentation of "postmillennial perfectionism" for so long that they probably do not even think twice about it. "Postmillennialism = perfectionism = utopianism" is a single equation in their thinking. No matter; they are stating a falsehood that they will admit under cross-examination is a falsehood, but then they go on writing about "postmillennial perfectionism" because it is traditional in amillennial circles to do so.⁴¹ And those postmillennialists who use the word *liars* to describe them are considered terribly gauche. So they are afraid to use it. I am not. *R. B. Kuiper lied*. He waited until Machen was dead to go into print with this nonsense. He knew that the amillennialists had inherited Machen's seminary, and

40. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1918-22] 1958).

41. The premillennial version of this amillennial lie – the "utopian" accusation – is to equate postmillennialism with the Social Gospel or liberalism. Postmillennialists are said to promote the view that *man* can save society, when what postmillennialists really teach is that covenant-keeping men will eventually replace covenant-breaking men in positions of authority. The fundamentalist has no self-conscious doctrine of *representation* in history: Satan's followers and God's. This is why he will not baptize infants: no doctrine of parental representation. Therefore, he is unable to think in terms of God's actions on earth through His covenant people. God cannot save society, he says, until Jesus returns bodily and sits on a throne somewhere on earth. So, postmillennialism just has to mean that man will save society.

there was nothing any postmillennialist could do about it. Other than writing from off-campus, there still isn't.

What will the Church face in the future, according to Kuiper? Cultural defeat. He said emphatically that "when the present dual process of the evangelization of non-Christian peoples and the development of the forces of evil shall have run its course, the victory to all appearances will be on the side of the price of darkness."⁴² He could not have made it any plainer. Only a radical discontinuity from beyond history that ends history will at last – at *the* last – bring victory. "However, with catastrophic suddenness Christ will appear in person, destroy Satan and his domain, and upon its ruins perfect his own everlasting kingdom."⁴³ Then he admitted the obvious, which he specifically identified as obvious: "Those who take this view are obviously much less optimistic about the immediate results of the presentation of the social teaching of the gospel than are their postmillenarian brethren."⁴⁴ Notice his use of the word *immediate*. By this word, he really means *in all of history*, but he did not have the courage to say this plainly. He then went on to defend the not-so-obvious regarding amillennial preachers of social salvation: "But let no one think that they are for that reason less zealous for their task."⁴⁵

Kuiper said that the preacher must "deal with social problems in the pulpit because it is his duty to preach the whole Word."⁴⁶ Fine; this brings us to the question: What does the Bible teach about society? Here, he grew vague. He was not ready to affirm in Christ's name the late nineteenth-century political liberalism that Machen had espoused. After all, Kuiper was Kuyperian. But he did insist that Christian preachers must

42. Kuiper, p. 30.

43. *Idem*.

44. *Idem*.

45. *Idem*.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

go to the Bible, including the law, to discover these great social principles:

... the Reformed preacher brings a social message because he finds such a message in God's Word. He finds it in the preaching of the prophets, the Baptizer, Jesus, and his apostles, but also in many portions of Scripture which are not themselves sermons. He finds it here and there and everywhere in Scripture. Determined as he is to declare the whole counsel of God, he cannot keep silent.⁴⁷

Would he take the leap? Would he say it? Would he say those crucial words, "Mosaic law"? Not quite. He drew up to the edge of the chasm, but he would not leap. He did say this, however: "The Calvinist sees in the Bible both law and gospel. The two are interwoven. To distinguish between them is not only valid but highly necessary. Yet to separate them is to do violence to Holy Writ. The Old Testament contains both law and gospel. The New Testament contains both gospel and law. . . . Both gospel and law are intended for all men."⁴⁸

Whoa, there, R. B. *For all men*? Is that what you said? You are beginning to sound like Norman Shepherd, who, as we all suspect, is only a few steps behind Greg Bahnsen. This is why neither of them teaches at Westminster. Like Hans Brinker, you are skating on thin ice. Watch out for Edmund Clowney and his blowtorch!

Abandoning Machen's Legacy: Stage Two

Four decades after Kuiper's piece appeared, the *Westminster Theological Journal* published Edmund Clowney's article, "The Politics of the Kingdom." Kuiper had written: "Of all men no one is more firmly convinced than the Calvinist that there can

47. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

48. *Idem.*

be no such thing as the salvation of society apart from the salvation of the individuals constituting society; . . ." But he had denied that this widespread salvation of souls will ever take place in history. Therefore, society will not be saved (i.e., *healed*). Clowney saw the implications of this statement, and he did not shrink from announcing them, although carefully shielding himself from critics by adopting the pejorative word "sacralized" for the biblical word "healed": "The world cannot be sacralized by the fiat of the new theology to form the community of love Christ came to establish. The world lacks the new life of the Spirit who sheds abroad the love of Christ in human hearts. It cannot be governed by the spiritual structure of Christ's kingdom."⁴⁹ This shifts *all* of the Christian's covenantal-institutional concern to the Church and away from politics. (Note: What ever happened to the family?) "The politics of the kingdom demand that Christians take seriously the structure of the church as the form of the people of God on earth."⁵⁰

In short, Clowney was preaching the *non-politics* of the kingdom. But a kingdom in history without civil sanctions is not a civilization; it is merely a ghetto. What Clowney was really preaching was the *non-politics of the non-kingdom*. This is **TULIP pietism**: the sovereignty of a God without judicially predictable sanctions in history. This is *predestined* cultural impotence.

Christians: Devoid of Unique Skills

He assured his readers that "Christ has not promised to make us wise in world politics, skillful in technology or talented in the arts."⁵¹ No? Then He has surely short-changed His Church, for this is exactly what He did for the Israelites as they

49. Edmund P. Clowney, "The Politics of the Kingdom," *ibid.*, XLI (Spring 1979), p. 309.

50. *Idem.*

51. *Idem.*

fled from Egypt. He raised up Aholiab and Bezaleel and endowed them with great technological skills, so that they could carry out the building of the tabernacle. He also enabled them to teach others.⁵² But if one's vision for Church history is a ceaseless wandering in the wilderness – a Christian ecclesiastical ghetto called the kingdom of God in history – then any suggestion of God's endowing His people with *cultural talents* implies His burdening them with *cultural responsibility*. This, above all, is what pietists resent and reject. So, they deny Christendom.

Clowney, like all of his amillennial colleagues at Westminster, preached the hope of our future resurrection. What he and they never, ever preach is a theology of Jesus' past *ascension*. I can hardly overemphasize this. It is this implicit denial of the historic cultural impact of Jesus' ascension that is at the very heart of their worldview. Listen to Clowney's exhortation: "The politics of the kingdom of heaven is the politics of faith, hope and love: faith that confesses the risen Savior, hope that looks for his appearing, love that is enflamed by his sacrifice on the cross. Only the realism of resurrection hope can sustain the Christian as a pilgrim travelling home."⁵³ Here it is: pietism with a vengeance. It is the pilgrim motif – a pilgrimage *out* of cultural responsibility in this world, not into it. It is a *pilgrimage of suffering*, not a pilgrimage of conquest. We supposedly never enter the Promised Land on earth and in history; our marching orders are *to march in circles until Jesus comes again*. "The heavenly community of Christ is called to an earthly pilgrimage. The people of God may not abandon the program of his kingdom – 'if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him' (Rom. 8:18)."⁵⁴ Nowhere in Clowney's theology is the intensely judicial doctrine of the Lord's Supper:

52. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 34: "The Ability to Teach."

53. Clowney, p. 308.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

"And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30). No, that office of judge is not what Clowney had in mind. "The military and police power needed to maintain a political community in this world cannot be sought in Christ's name."⁵⁵ It can't? To which theonomists ask: *In whose name must it be sought?* Silence. Endless, self-conscious silence. Endless, self-interested silence. And so we are back to square one covenantally: By what standard? In whose name? Under whose authority? Taking an oath to whom? There can be no neutrality. This is what Van Til taught. *But Edmund Prosper Clowney was never a follower of Van Til.* He was a defender, implicitly but inescapably, of natural law theory. He insisted: "In judging the good or evil performance of the state the Christian may not, however, judge the state as a form of the people of God but only as an ordinance given to all men to preserve life. The distinction between the state as the form of the city of this world and the church as the form of the heavenly city remains essential."⁵⁶

Redefining Kingdom and Church

What part does the family play in all this? His words are clear: "The church and only the church is established by Jesus Christ as the earthly form of the new and heavenly people of God."⁵⁷ The theonomist asks: Is the family also only "an ordinance given to all men to preserve life"? Clowney answers in the affirmative: "The family remains as the institution of God for the propagation of life; . . ."⁵⁸ This is, of course, the old Roman Catholic definition of the family. Clowney's definition

55. *Idem.*

56. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

57. *Idem.*

58. *Idem.*

is self-consciously removed from the traditional Reformed emphasis on *the family as the primary agency of dominion in history*. It places Christian families outside the definition of the kingdom of God, i.e., it removes the family from the list of covenanted institutions. Only the Church is lawfully a covenanted, oath-bound institution under Bible-revealed laws and sanctions.

We must pay close attention to Clowney's use of "body of Christ" – the familiar definition of God's Church – and the kingdom of God in history. He winds up equating Church and kingdom, and then he removes all traces of the kingdom from anything outside the institutional Church. This is the standard pietist definition of Church and kingdom. It has not been the historic Reformed definition. Substitute the word "family" for "state" in this sentence, and see what effect it has on the definition of the kingdom of God in history: "To suppose that the body of Christ finds institutional expression in both the church and the state as religious and political spheres is to substitute a sociological conception of the church for the teaching of the New Testament. . . . The church is the new nation (I Pet. 2:9), the new family of God (Eph. 3:15)."⁵⁹

The theonomist asks: Does this mean that families are not to be judged in terms of biblical law? Does this mean that the laws of divorce are neutral, universal, and outside of biblical law's requirements? Does this mean that civil laws against polygamy are wrong? Does this mean that civil laws against sons marrying their widowed mothers are wrong? Clowney knows that this list of questions follows from his presentation, so he hurries to escape the obvious trap. He brings the family back into the kingdom, sort of. He asserts, with no proof, that "The family, as a form of God's creation, is restored in relation to the church in a way that the state, an institution made necessary by the fall, is not." Yet he immediately insists: "In God's kingdom there is restoration of creation, fulfillment of the ordinances of

59. *Idem.*

God for a fallen world, and anticipation of the new creation."⁶⁰ So, the State is not to be restored, but the family is. To which the theonomists say: this is a presupposition, not a conclusion, of pietism's rejection of the oath-bound legal status of the civil government. What we need is biblical evidence.

He then writes: "Yet even the family is not identified with the new order of the kingdom."⁶¹ What does this mean? Exactly how is it different in this regard from the State? For that matter, how is it different from the Church in this regard? Would any Reformed scholar argue that the institutional Church is to be identified with the kingdom of God in history? None that I know of. Yet this is where Clowney's argument logically leads. But he is clever. He has read Vos; he knows that his identification of institutional Church and kingdom is not a biblical argument. So he ends his discussion at this point. He moves on, leaving confusion in his wake.

He has clearly and self-consciously broken with Vos' view of the kingdom, which he described in the final paragraph of his book on Church and kingdom. Vos wrote:

Finally, the thought of the kingdom of God implies the subjection of the entire range of human life in all its forms and spheres to the ends of religion. The kingdom reminds us of *the absoluteness, the pervasiveness, the unrestricted dominion*, which of right belongs to all true religion. It proclaims that religion, and religion alone, can act as *the supreme unifying, centralizing factor* in the life of man, as that which binds all together and perfects all by leading it to its final goal in the service of God.⁶²

Van Til always said that he derived much of his theology from Vos.⁶³ It is clear how Van Til could have come to his

60. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

61. *Idem.*

62. Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 103.

63. William White, *Van Til: Defender of the Faith* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson,

idea of the Christian's task of "thinking God's thoughts after Him" as a result of his exposure to Vos' concept of God's kingdom as implying "the subjection of the entire range of human life in all its forms and spheres to the ends of religion." Vos made it clear that the kingdom of God in history encompasses *everything*. This is the kingdom of God on earth as civilization, as *Christendom*. It is the very antithesis of Edmund Clowney's narrow definition of God's earthly kingdom as the institutional Church alone. Clowney had a different confession. He systematically reshaped Westminster Seminary to make it conform to his confession.

Edmund Clowney rejected the Scottish-Puritan view of the kingdom of God. What he taught was pietism. He taught what London's Baptist Metropolitan Tabernacle's pastor Peter Masters has preached. Masters proclaims the new Westminster's confession, and for the same reasons. He, too, rejects theonomy: "Reconstructionist writers all scorn the attitude of traditional evangelicals" – read: traditional pietists – "who see the church as something so completely distinct and separate from the world that they seek no 'authority' over the affairs of the world."⁶⁴ *No authority over the affairs of this world*: these are the key words. This is what Clowney seeks. This is what Masters seeks. This is what all pietists seek. This is what Westminster's confession proclaims. In terms of its view of God's revealed law, Christian corporate responsibility, and the kingdom of God in history, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is merely the Clowney-Masters pietism writ large.⁶⁵

By identifying the kingdom of God in history solely as the institutional Church, Clowney and his disciples remove all

1979), ch. 6.

64. Peter Masters, "World Dominion: The High Ambition of Reconstruction," *Sword & Trowel* (May 24, 1990), p. 18.

65. With a few mild-mannered dissenters, who as yet have offered nothing concrete to substitute for it.

other institutions from the required sanctions of biblical law.⁶⁶ *This is why they adopt these non-biblical, non-Reformed definitions of both Church and kingdom.* They resent the sanctions associated with biblical law. They also resent the enormous, comprehensive cultural responsibility that is inescapably transferred to Christians by their grace-imparted legal status as saints in God's kingdom in history.

Whose disciple was Edmund Clowney? He never said publicly, as far as I know. Nobody ever asked him to say. But the Board rewrote the seminary's constitution and hired him to run it. And so Westminster abandoned Van Til's priceless legacy. (Machen's legacy had been abandoned long before.)

A Wayfaring Stranger

The hymn most consistent with Clowney's theology is not "Onward, Christian Soldiers." It is instead the traditional folk song of American pietism: "I'm just a poor, wayfaring stranger, travelling through this world of woe." Indeed he was; and he did not do a blessed thing to make this any less of a *civil* world of woe. He ridiculed as wrong-headed anyone who tries to work to improve civil affairs in the name of Jesus. For him, the kingdom of God is not a civilization; it is a lifeboat. He preached lifeboat theology and called it historic Calvinism. He preached the worldview of the rescue mission and called it covenant theology. He not only abandoned Machen and Van Til; he even abandoned R. B. Kuiper. Kuiper said that we have been issued our marching orders. Clowney dispersed the army, but invited these new civilians to come down to the cultural soup kitchens of life to spend the whole of their lives ladling soup and handing out gospel tracts. (I'm not even sure they were TULIP tracts.) He parroted in the name of Calvin the pietist theology that is the common gospel vision of our age. It

66. The most systematic defense of this position in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is Dennis Johnson's essay.

is this that has produced the condition of the Church that he lamented: "Today the church stands not so much as an institution as a ruin."⁶⁷ The cause of this ruin is not the postmillennial vision of world conquest that the Puritans proclaimed⁶⁸ and the older Princeton at least whispered. Postmillennialism has not been the dominant eschatology of this century. The cause of this ruin is Clowney's anti-judicial theology: pietism.

And when Norman Shepherd hinted ever so mildly that there is more to our marching orders than this, and hinted ever so mildly that postmillennialism is true,⁶⁹ he got fired. Clowney then retired as president. Mission accomplished!

Conclusion

Abraham Kuyper was a late nineteenth-century European conservative, a welfare State interventionist in the Bismarck tradition. His ideals are reminiscent of England's conservative leader, Joseph Chamberlain. Machen was a nineteenth-century liberal in the tradition of Andrew Jackson, Grover Cleveland, and the pre-Bryan Democratic Party. He did not trust the State. Woolley was a twentieth-century liberal. Not only did he trust the State, he embraced it. His politics were the politics of Presbyterian Woodrow Wilson, not Presbyterian Grover Cleveland. R. B. Kuiper was vague about the ethical standards of the kingdom as civilization. Edmund Clowney was not vague: he denied the legitimacy of even a consideration of the kingdom as civilization. The kingdom of God in history is a ghetto, not a civilization, in Clowney's view.

Kuyper, Machen, and Woolley came to their students in the name of Calvinism and Presbyterianism, just as Cleveland,

67. Clowney, p. 309.

68. J. A. de Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions, 1640-1810* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1970).

69. Norman Shepherd, "Justice to Victory," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Winter 1976-77), pp. 6-10.

Bryan, and Wilson came to the American electorate as both Presbyterians and Democrats. How could this be? Each man supposedly tied his ethics explicitly to the Bible; each promoted his views in the name of Christianity. They did not agree on much of anything with respect to social ethics. Why such confusion? Because they did not say exactly where they had derived their social ethics. One thing is clear: none of them appealed directly to biblical texts, both Old and New Testaments.

The theonomists do. This is their offense.

THE QUESTION OF GOD'S PREDICTABLE HISTORICAL SANCTIONS

And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil (Zeph. 1:12).

And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways.

Meredith G. Kline (1978)¹

Does God bring His positive and negative sanctions in New Covenant history? Are these sanctions predictable in terms of His Bible-revealed law? Are these sanctions culture-wide? The Christian's answers to these three questions will determine his social theory. The theonomists answer all three positively; the pluralists and amillennialists answer the first with a whispered

1. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

"yes," the second with a hesitant "possibly" (in Church and Christian family), and the third with a resounding "no." The humanists answer all three with a categorical "no."² The battle lines between Christian social theory and humanist social theory are inescapably drawn in terms of these answers.

Christians recognize that in the days of Zephaniah, God brought predictable sanctions in history. The debate begins with the bodily death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Did this interlocked series of judicial and historical events – covenantal to the core – destroy the predictability of God's sanctions in history? If not, did this predictability end with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70? For the most part, Christian theologians and leaders have long assumed that at least some of the predictability of the Old Covenant's sanctions has been muted in the New Covenant. The question is: How muted has this predictability become? Kline and the common grace amillennialists are clear: totally muted. According to Kline, God's sanctions in history today are, as far as we can observe, random. Van Til was even worse. He thought that God's New Covenant sanctions are predictable. They are in fact inverse to the Old Covenant's system of sanctions: blessings increase for covenant-breakers and cursings increase for covenant-keepers until the day of doom.

But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for "the day of grace," the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on

2. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 7.

the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.³

This was Van Til's amillennialism at work.⁴

Mystery and Irresponsibility

There is no better way for a Christian to proclaim his own personal and cultural irresponsibility in history than to proclaim the mystery of God's specific revelation. Mystery is defined as man's permanent ignorance. Mystery cannot be overcome. It does exist, of course: "The secret things belong unto the LORD God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). Notice that mystery and biblical law are contrasted. The impenetrable mysteries of God are not to discourage us, because we have His revealed law. But in denying the legitimacy of biblical law in New Testament times, modern antinomians are implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) substituting mystery for biblical law. This can lead to mysticism: personal withdrawal into the interior recesses of one's incommunicable consciousness (escape religion). It can also lead to antinomian Pentecostalism: direct authoritative messages from God to a few uniquely gifted leaders (spokesmen in history: point two of the biblical covenant) — messages that replace God's law, since God's law is no longer binding. That this (power religion) leads again and again to ecclesiastical tyranny should surprise no one. In either case, there is an increase of personal irresponsibility.

To classify as one of "the secret things of God" the idea of God's predictable sanctions in history requires a leap of faith.

3. Van Til, *Common Grace* (1947), in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 85.

4. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3.

The question is: Is such a leap of faith biblical? Or is the Old Testament's message of God's predictable sanctions in history itself part of our covenantal legacy from God, meaning "those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law"?

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness (Deut. 4:5-11).

No mystery here! The children of Israel were ready for this message of law and the appropriate covenantal sanctions. These sanctions were basic to Israel's understanding of their relation to God.

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And

when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: *for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers*, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:11-20). (emphasis added)

The vast majority of Bible-affirming theologians today assume that there has been a radical New Covenant break from Old Covenant citizenship.⁵ They assume (though seldom, if ever, attempt to prove exegetically) that the Old Covenant's close links between the social rewards of covenant-keeping and the social cursings of covenant-breaking are no longer operative in the New Covenant order. More than this: *there are supposedly no predictable covenantal sanctions in New Covenant history, meaning no sanctions applied by God in terms of biblical law*. Kline and his disciples argue that God does not bring predictable covenantal sanctions against a social order at all, i.e., that the historical sanctions in the New Covenant era are random from

5. On Old Covenant citizenship, see North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 2. The fundamental idea of citizenship is the legal authority to bring negative sanctions in the civil realm. The stranger-foreigner did not possess this right in ancient Israel.

jaws of covenant-breakers at the last day. Christians could then learn nothing culturally from their experiences in history that will carry over into the final state, although Muether and his many common grace colleagues never put things so bluntly. Except for the personal salvation of individuals, history for them resembles what Macbeth said it is: a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

This view of Church history is why modern Calvinism is not covenantal. It is individualistic. New Covenant history for the amillennialist has meaning only as a means of separating the saved from the lost. This is why it is pietistic.

The Non-Lessons of History

Let us think about Muether's assertions for a few moments. If we can learn nothing of eternal value culturally from history, since nothing of cultural value carries over into the resurrected state, then how can we have any confidence that we can learn anything useful regarding the success or failure of *personal* ethics in history? If Christians' social efforts in history are as devoid of eternal significance as those of non-Christians — a variant of the familiar neutrality hypothesis — then why not also Christians' personal ethical efforts? If there is no covenantal relationship between our *cultural* efforts in history and our rewards in history, then on what basis can we expect to discover a covenantal relationship between our *personal* ethical efforts and rewards in history?

Furthermore, what about our familistic and our ecclesiastical corporate efforts? Why single out politics as an area of Christianity's necessary historic irrelevance and impotence? Why not also include the Church and the family? Muether does not mention this obvious implication of his theology of God's random historical sanctions. Neither do his common grace amillennial peers. This would be too much for most Christians to swallow. "Pessimism, yes, but not *that* much pessimism!" To say that all our corporate (institutional) efforts are doomed would

be to commit theological suicide in full public view, and no one wants to do this. So, they verbally concentrate on politics and culture, even though their pessimistic worldview cannot in principle be separated from all other covenantal and social institutions.

The critics of Christian Reconstruction imply (and sometimes explicitly state) that the primary concern of Christian Reconstructionists is political, even though we consistently deny this. (My slogan is "politics fourth.")¹⁶ Muether, for example, calls his opponents "political utopians."¹⁷ Why do these critics of theonomy persist in this misrepresentation? I contend that it is because *their theological strategy is to call people's attention away from their comprehensive denial of Christianity's social relevance.* They can readily sell their anti-theocratic views to people raised on the humanistic theology of pluralism, but they do not want to pursue the logic of their position to its inescapable conclusion: *the historical irrelevance of Christianity for both the Church and the family.* Thus, the theonomists' affirmation of the relevance of the Bible for the civil covenant becomes the focus of their attempted refutations, ignoring the fact that this very affirmation is inextricably entwined with our affirmation of the relevance of the Bible for Church, family, and everything else. For rhetorical purposes (offensive), these anti-covenantal theologians and pastors attack our covenantal political stand. For equally rhetorical purposes (defensive), they remain prudently silent about the connection between our view of the covenant and all the other areas of society. They want to deny the covenantal relevance of Christianity for politics, while implicitly retaining faith

16. North, *Political Polytheism*, p. 559. It is my concern after individual salvation, church membership, and family membership.

17. Muether, p. 15. He does not identify exactly who he is talking about in this essay, perhaps because donors' money to Reformed Seminary is on the line. But he uses the phrase "political utopianism" to describe theonomists in his essay in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 257. If there are repercussions from incensed donors, let Westminster bear the negative sanctions! The school no longer employs him. In this area, at least, Mr. Muether acted prudently. Westminster didn't.

in the covenantal relevance of Christianity for other institutions. They cannot do this logically or theologically, but they attempt it anyway. It makes for good editorial copy. It also makes for incoherent book-length studies. Hence, they refuse to write book-length studies. They confine themselves to essays.

Muether's Verbal Legerdemain

Muether's language of God's historical inscrutability, of *this world's historical open-endedness*, is a carefully contrived illusion, an example of verbal legerdemain. On the one hand, he says that the Church is in exile in history. This is its permanent historical condition. This condition is guaranteed by a Calvinistic, predestinating, totally sovereign God. On the other hand, he asserts that God's ethical randomness is manifested in history. "Things may improve, things may get worse. Common grace ebbs and flows throughout history."¹⁸ He defines "exile" as an *indeterminate condition* in which things may get better or may get worse, yet on average stay pretty much the same throughout New Covenant history. (Would you like to construct an ethical system or social philosophy in terms of this view of history? How about a theory of business? Or technology? No? Neither would anyone else.)

This assertion of indeterminacy, as I have already argued, is a contrived illusion. If God applied His sanctions randomly, then the institutional, covenantal outcome would hardly be random; it would be perverse. Covenant-breakers would retain control over culture throughout Church history, despite the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ to the right hand of God the Father. But this is precisely what Calvinist amillennialists say must happen. It is predestined by God this way.

Kline, Muether, and the Random Sanctions amillennialists are all bearers of Bad News. A *flatline eschatology* in a world

18. Muether, p. 18.

presently dominated by covenant-breakers is bad news. It is also difficult to defend exegetically. No eschatological position that I am aware of has ever been defended exegetically which asserts the existence of what is in effect a horizontal flat line for the social and cultural efforts of Christianity in history. Without exception, systematic theologians have argued that the Church's influence will either decline over time until Jesus comes again, or else increase. *There is no millennial neutrality.* Common grace does not "ebb and flow" apart from *history's directionality*: either inclining or declining. Like an electronic sine wave on a screen, common grace does indeed oscillate around a linear development, but this linear relationship is not flat; it is inclined over time, either up (postmillennialism) or down (traditional amillennialism and "Church Age" dispensational premillennialism). I assume that Muether, as a seminary professor, must know this, yet he refuses to mention it in his essay. In this sense, he follows the tradition of Meredith Kline, who has also steadfastly refused for well over a decade to pursue in print the implications of his theory of God's random sanctions in history.

A Rigged System of Justice

Here is what Kline and his disciples really believe. In order to keep the Church suppressed in history, God does not apply His sanctions according to the covenantal standards in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Why not? Because the randomness of God's historical sanctions would guarantee the *non-neutrality of the outcome*, since God's non-neutrality (covenantal faithfulness) ensures the victory of His covenant people in history.

But wait. Is it merely neutral or random for God to prevent the visible outcomes that He specified in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28? Can God go from *visible* covenantal faithfulness to *visible* randomness without becoming *visibly covenantally unfaithful* in history? Not if neutrality is a myth. But as Kline and his disciples know, Van Til proved biblically that neutrality is a

covenant-keeping man's point of view. "God's sanctions are mysterious."

What readers may not immediately recognize is that such an argument is a cover for a very different ethical conclusion, namely, that *historical sanctions should therefore be imposed in terms of some rival system of historical sanctions*. There must always be sanctions in society, imposed by the State, the family, the market, and numerous other associations. The five covenantal questions are: (1) Who establishes these sanctions? (2) What agent or agency enforces them? (3) What is the moral foundation of these sanctions? (4) What sanctions apply to which acts? (5) Does the society prosper and expand its influence when these sanctions are enforced? To say that the Bible does not provide this covenant order in the New Testament era is to say that *some other covenant is legitimate for society*. But the opponents of biblical covenant social order never dare to admit this. They hide their implicit call for the establishment of *some other covenantal standard* in the language of ethical neutrality or judicial randomness. But there is no ethical neutrality. So, are God's sanctions in history really random, covenantally speaking? The Old Covenant surely teaches the opposite. Where in the New Covenant is this Old Covenant teaching abrogated? John Calvin did not think so:

Let us note, then, that if the patriarchs were more blessed by God than we are, concerning this present life, we ought not to wonder at it at all. For the reason for it is apparent. But no matter how things go, yet is this saying of St. Paul always verified: that the fear of God holds promise not only for the life to come, but also for this present life (1 Tim. 4:8). Let us therefore walk in obedience to God, and then we can be assured that He will show Himself a Father to us, yea even in the maintenance of our bodies, at least as far as concerns keeping and preserving us in peace, delivering us from all evils, and providing for us our

necessities. God, I say, will make us to feel His blessing in all these things, so that we walk in His fear.⁶

The Church's Exile, Yet God's Inscrutability

John R. Muether [MEEther], whose essay on theonomy appears in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*,⁷ rejects this view of God's predictable sanctions in history. It is important to consider the underlying worldview that Muether offers, for it is an extension of Meredith Kline's. Muether does not inform the reader of these presuppositions in his *Theonomy* essay, but a few months prior to the publication of the book, another essay by Muether appeared. In it, he sketches the implications of Kline's amillennialism, meaning less pessimistic than Van Til's.

He speaks of the New Testament era as a period of exile for the Church. This is the language of pessimillennialism.⁸ Simultaneously, he speaks of God's random sanctions. "Our exile has no guarantees, few securities. It affords no occasion for triumphalism. We have no promise from God regarding our cultural achievements. Unlike the promises to the holy nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the common grace state possesses no special guarantees of a material blessing as a reward for its obedience to the law of God. Rather prosperity and adversity are experienced unpredictably through the inscrutable sovereignty of God's will."⁹ Here is the familiar theme of Kline's common grace amillennialism: *the inscrutability of God in history*. Muether asserts the indeterminate nature of the New Covenant

6. John Calvin, *The Covenant Enforced: Sermons on Deuteronomy 27 and 28*, edited by James B. Jordan (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), Sermon 154, pp. 100-1.

7. See Chapter 10, below.

8. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 4. The term "pessimillennialism" was coined by F. N. Lee.

9. John R. Muether, "The Era of Common Grace: Living Between the 'Already' and the 'Not Yet,'" *RTS Ministry*, IX (Summer 1990), p. 18. This magazine is published by Reformed Theological Seminary.

era's sanctions. "Things may improve, things may get worse. Common grace ebbs and flows throughout history."¹⁰

This is an important admission on the part of this disciple of Kline's. The *exile condition* of the Church in history is based on God's *random sanctions*. What I argue, here and in my book on common grace,¹¹ is that all amillennialists are in fact "exile" theologians. They believe that *God brings negative sanctions against His covenant people in history, no matter what they do*. Van Til said that these negative sanctions will grow progressively worse. Kline, the "optimist," insists only that there can be no victory of Christianity in history. Christians are in a cultural hole, and there is no reason to believe that God will ever pull us out of it in history.

Why say, then, that there are no guarantees in history? If you argue that history develops (or fails to develop) in a particular way, you are asserting a guaranteed scenario. If you are a Calvinist, and therefore believe in God's providential control of history, you *have* to believe in guarantees. Muether systematically misleads his readers when he says that there are no guarantees in history: "Our exile has no guarantees." Of course there are guarantees. If the Church is in a condition of permanent exile, we have a guarantee: no deliverance in history. The language of *no guarantees* is the language of *neutrality*. Neutrality is a myth, here as everywhere. There can be no neutrality in millennial speculation. Muether is a pessimillennialist, although he nowhere mentions this crucial fact in his essay. (Van Til also neglected to mention this same eschatological commitment in his "unleaven" essays.)¹² For all but the postmillennialists — that is, for all forms of pessimillennialism — there are indeed God-given guarantees: *guarantees of historical cultural failure for*

10. *Idem*.

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

12. North, *Political Polytheism*, ch. 3.

Christians in general and the Church specifically. There is nothing random about exile.

Muether's theology of cultural defeat is self-conscious, for he thoroughly understands exactly what his pessimillennialism implies: "First, we cannot get caught up in the things of this world. This world is penultimate; it will pass away, and so we must eagerly await the new world to come."¹³ He goes on: "The church in this world, in other words, is a people in exile. We are far short of the kingdom of God. . . . The church is called to suffer in this world."¹⁴ From this we can legitimately infer what is never stated publicly by these defenders of Christianity's cultural impotence in history: *covenant-breakers are not in comparable exile and are not called to suffer nearly so much as the Church is.* Why did God change the rules after the ascension?

Muether's Total Discontinuity: Final Judgment

What is most significant about Muether's essay in terms of social theory is that he clearly asserts a radical discontinuity between what he calls the coming kingdom and this world of Church history. "The kingdom of God will come from above, not made with human hands, and no cultural activity, redeemed or unredeemed, will carry over into the new order."¹⁵ This is a consistent and inescapable assertion of the common grace amillennialism's worldview: *the self-conscious denial of the eternal cultural relevance of anything men do in history.* All of mankind's cultural efforts are completely doomed, whether produced by covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers.

If this were the case, the works of covenant-keepers and the works of covenant-breakers would be *equal in historical impact.* There would be no cultural "earnest" — no cultural down payment by God — in history. God would pull victory out of the

13. Muether, p. 15.

14. *Idem.*

15. *Idem.*

myth. So, what they are really saying is that *God holds His finger on the scales of justice so that covenant-breakers can maintain both cultural and judicial control throughout history*. In short, according to the historical-judicial criteria of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, God externally rewards covenant-breakers in history far more than they deserve, and He curses His covenant people far more than they deserve. Thus, Muether's language of God's judicial neutrality is a smoke-screen. *Random historical sanctions means a rigged system of justice: rigged against covenant-keepers*.

The *historical outcome* of God's system of rewards and punishments in history is not inscrutable for the pessimillennialist. The supposed inscrutability of God's historical sanctions guarantees a highly predictable — that is, *inevitable* — outcome: the defeat of Christianity in history. This is what pessimillennialism teaches. This system of judicial sanctions is not merely random; it is *ethically perverse*. God is said to reward covenant-breakers with external success even if they break His covenant laws, and He drives covenant-keepers into "exile" even if they remain faithful to the terms of His covenant. It was not this way in the Old Testament, these theologians are forced to admit (Lev. 26; Deut. 28), but it is today. These are the inescapable ethical implications of common grace amillennialism, yet its defenders refuse to admit this.¹⁹ Such a frank admission apparently hurts too much; also, it would make it difficult to gain new recruits, and they do not have many followers as it is. Calling Christians to a life of guaranteed cultural frustration is not a good way to gain disciples, especially activists.

Why would anyone believe in such a perverse system of justice? Because a person *must* believe this if he defends a pessimillennial eschatology: bad people win, despite the gospel and God's historical sanctions. The *ethical non-neutrality* of the outcome of the work of the gospel in history is the fundamental

19. This is my chief criticism of Cornelius Van Til's apologetic system: North, *Political Polytheism*, pp. 144-46.

presupposition of all pessimillennialism. Bad fruit does not come from good trees. Similarly, bad results do not come from neutral sanctions. Conclusion: *these amillennial sanctions are neither neutral nor random*. God's historical sanctions must be rigged against Christianity in order for covenant-breakers to maintain cultural control. For evil to triumph in history, God must refuse to reward His covenant-keeping people and also refuse to retard the efforts of covenant-breakers. Pessimillennialists have therefore implicitly rewritten the Second Commandment:

. . . for the LORD thy God is not a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto thousands of generations of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto the third and fourth generation of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Muether is not alone in this view of God's providence and the Church's future. This outlook — "God's inscrutability unto cultural irrelevance" — is in fact *an eschatology of inevitable historical defeat*. Dispensational theology teaches the same thing about the cultural efforts of Christians during the so-called "Church Age."²⁰ (An exception: the premillennialist who has adopted Van Til's even more pessimistic vision.) But Muether's view is worse, for being both Calvinistic and amillennial, it offers no hope for Christians in history, not even the Rapture. Applying Rushdoony's dictum, John R. Muether is basically a premillennialist without earthly hope. So are all of his amillennial colleagues at Westminster. The difference is, they hesitate to admit this in print. They prefer to remain silent, as if these practical eschatological issues can be avoided by the Church.

20. Douglas Oss has correctly noted the similarities between Kline's thesis of the common grace "intrusion" period of the New Covenant era and dispensationalism's "Church Age" or "great parenthesis." Oss, "The Influence of Hermeneutical Frameworks in the Theonomy Debate," *Westminster Theological Journal*, LI (Fall 1989), p. 240n.

In response, I argue that it is never a question of God's predictable historical sanctions vs. no sanctions. The question rather is this: *Against whom* will God's negative sanctions be predictably imposed, covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers? There can be no neutrality. The amillennialist and the premillennialist both insist that prior to the next prophesied eschatological discontinuity, which they insist is Christ's Second Coming or the Rapture, God's negative sanctions will be imposed either *equally* against covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers (Kline's Random News) or *progressively* against covenant-keepers, with covenant-breakers acting as God's appointed agents (Van Til's Bad News). The familiar denial of God's predictable negative sanctions in history is in fact an affirmation of the inevitability of His negative sanctions against the Church, from Pentecost to the bodily return of Christ in power and glory.

The postmillennialist, in sharp contrast, denies that covenant-keepers will be the primary targets of God's negative sanctions throughout history. He argues that the message of the Bible is covenantal: faithfulness brings God's blessings, while rebellion brings God's curses (Deut. 28). This is the message of the Old Testament prophets. They brought covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah, judicially calling all covenant-breakers back to covenantal faithfulness, and threatening them with direct, culture-wide, negative sanctions if they refused. Furthermore, in a shocking disregard of the non-theonomists' principle that only ancient Israel was under the judicial requirements of God's covenant, Jonah was sent to Nineveh to announce the same message: in 40 days, God would bring His sanctions against them. Jonah, initially acting in a non-theonomic fashion, remained faithful to his principle that God was not really interested in bringing Nineveh under the terms of His covenant. He steadfastly refused to bring this covenant lawsuit against Nineveh, and he suffered an unpleasant three-day experience as a result of this refusal. He was given time to rethink his position, which he did, becoming theonomic. He

then was given another opportunity to prosecute God's lawsuit, which turned out to be successful — unique in the Old Covenant era.

Conclusion

What if I were to come to you and try to recruit you to a difficult missionary field, namely, the city of Sodom. No, I don't mean San Francisco; I mean the original city. I would then tell you that in fact the whole world is Sodom, or will progressively become so in the future. You are being asked to spend your life there, just as Lot spent his days there: *vexed*. I assure you that no angels will come to lead you out. There will be no widespread conversion of the city, either — not in your lifetime or in anyone else's lifetime. There will be no fiery judgment until the last day, and I refuse to tell you when that will be. The best news I can tell you about your assignment — indeed, the only good news — is that your wife will not be under any risk whatsoever of being turned to salt. I then assure you that this program is called a *victory assignment*, part of a missionary program known as *realized eschatology*. What would you think of my recruiting strategy? You would probably regard me as either a madman or a Calvinistic seminary professor.

This is why the present-day theology of our sanctions-denying Calvinistic seminaries tends to undercut evangelism. If graduates believe in God's predestination, they had better not be taught that God will inevitably bring either negative sanctions against covenant-keepers or at best random sanctions, compared to how he will deal in history with covenant-breakers. The Dutch version of common grace is a negative legacy. Yet it is this aspect of Van Til's theology rather than his attack on natural law theory that is emphasized by his disciples at Westminster Seminary, not to mention Mr. Muether, who is now the librarian of Reformed Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

The theonomists have abandoned Van Til's Bad News millennialism, but have adopted his view on natural law theory. The Westminster faculty retains his millennial views, but has abandoned his views on natural law. The theonomists have adopted biblical law theory, which Van Til never proclaimed. The Westminster faculty has rejected biblical law, but has offered no *biblical* judicial alternative. Thus, no one defends the full legacy of Van Til, any more than anyone defends the Old Princeton: non-theonomic postmillennialism and Scottish common sense rationalism. History moves forward. The problem is, sometimes one's legacies wind up at war with each other. It was said by Warfield that the Reformation took place when Augustine's doctrine of grace came into conflict with Augustine's doctrine of the Church.²¹ Such is also the fate of the divided legacies of both Calvin and Van Til.

Van Til followed the Dutch tradition of *amillennialism* coupled with formal social concern (*anti-individualism*). Yet this social concern was never translated into a uniquely biblical social theory. The preaching of the Dutch tradition remains that of the ghetto-cloister. Why? Because amillennialism, like premillennialism, rejects the covenantal idea of God's predictable sanctions in history. If God does not bring His negative sanctions against covenant-breakers in history, then there is no way to bring a covenant lawsuit against a civilization. You can bring one against individuals (the threat of eternal damnation), but not against collectives. This inevitable pessimillennial rejection of the concept of the covenant lawsuit against *corporate* covenant-breaking has converted all modern preaching into individualism. *There can be neither covenant theology nor covenant preaching if there is no doctrine of God's covenant sanctions in history.* This is why Westminster's confession is no longer covenantal.

21. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, "Augustine," in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), II, p. 224; reprinted in Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1956), pp. 321-22.

THE QUESTION OF MILLENNIALISM

We who are reckoned as "conservatives" in theology are seriously misrepresented if we are regarded as men who are holding desperately to something that is old merely because it is old and are inhospitable to new truths. On the contrary, we welcome new discoveries with all our heart; and we are looking, in the Church, not merely for a continuation of conditions that now exist but for a burst of new power. My hope of that new power is greatly quickened by contact with the students of Westminster Seminary. There, it seems to me, we have an atmosphere that is truly electric. It would not be surprising if some of these men might become the instruments, by God's grace, of lifting preaching out of the sad rut into which it has fallen, and of making it powerful again for the salvation of men.

J. Gresham Machen (1932)¹

Westminster Seminary and Reformed Presbyterians in general need to return to the optimistic vision of the future presented by Machen in 1932, in the midst of his courageous battle against theological liberalism in the Presbyterian Church, USA. As a postmillennialist of the Princeton Seminary variety,

1. J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity in Conflict," in Vergilius Ferm (ed.), *Contemporary American Theology* (New York: Round Table Press, 1932), I, pp. 269-70.

he believed in a coming discontinuity, a burst of new power. In a 1925 essay, "Faith and Knowledge," he had made a very similar statement; indeed, the first sentence in the 1932 passage was lifted almost verbatim from the 1925 essay. (Why not recycle good passages? I surely do.) He announced: "A revival of the Christian religion, we believe, will deliver mankind from its present bondage, and like the great revival of the sixteenth century will bring liberty to mankind."²

Sadly, he failed to articulate his postmillennial eschatology or defend it exegetically, and his successors at Westminster abandoned it. The amillennialism of Dutch Calvinism soon triumphed at Westminster. His academic and ecclesiastical successors have had no faith in the burst of new power that he dreamed of. In this sense, it is the Christian Reconstruction movement that is the spiritual heir of Machen.

A different millennial view is taught at Westminster today, and has been for fifty years. It rests on a rejection of God's historical sanctions set forth in the Old Testament. The amillennialist (or "realized millennialist") insists that it is illegitimate to appeal back to the Old Testament in search of a message of visible, historical, covenantal faithfulness on God's part in the New Testament era. Amillennialists understand what the Old Testament says, but they are compelled by their eschatology to deny that we should accept the Old Testament's covenantal message at face value. They contrast the New Testament's supposed message of humiliation and exile for the Church with the Old Testament's far more straightforward message of covenantal predictability. Writes Richard Gaffin, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary:

Briefly, the basic issue is this: Is the New Testament to be allowed to interpret the Old — as the best, most reliable interpre-

2. Machen, "Faith and Knowledge" (1925); reprinted in *Education, Christianity, and the State*, edited by John W. Robbins (Jefferson, Maryland: Trinity Foundation, 1987), p. 5.

tive tradition in the history of the church (and certainly the Reformed tradition) has always insisted. . . . Or, alternatively, will the Old Testament, particularly prophecies like Isaiah 32:1-8 and 65:17-25, become the hermeneutical fulcrum?³

What of this initial presupposition, namely, that the New Testament teaches suffering and cultural defeat for the prosecutors of God's covenant lawsuit – the gospel of Jesus Christ – throughout history? Can this claim be substantiated exegetically? No. But it has been repeated so often in the twentieth century that most Calvinistic Christians probably think that it can be and has been substantiated exegetically. This is because they are unfamiliar with the Anglo-American Calvinist tradition. They do not recognize the Continental accents of those Calvinistic theologians who articulate eschatology today.

Progressive Sanctification

Because this doctrine is so often ignored by Christians, especially those few who bother to comment on the covenantal meaning of New Covenant history, I need to remind the reader of the biblical doctrine of sanctification. God grants judicially the *perfect humanity* of Christ to each individual convert to saving faith in Christ. This takes place at the point of his or her conversion. Subsequently, this implicit, *definitive* moral perfection is to be worked out in history. We are to strive for the mark. We are to run the good race (strive to win it, by the way; not to hope for a covenantal tie, i.e., pluralism).⁴ We are to imitate Christ's perfect humanity, though of course not His divinity, which is an incommunicable attribute.

The doctrine of definitive sanctification, if taken by itself, would mean that a redeemed individual is perfect. Certain

3. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, pp. 216-17.

4. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

perfectionist sects and cults have taught this, but this is clearly not Christian orthodoxy.⁵ "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). On the other hand, if the doctrine of progressive sanctification as a pure gift of God is not balanced by the doctrine of definitive sanctification as a pure gift of God, then it would appear as though man can save himself by his own efforts, i.e., that he is not the dependent recipient of God's grace throughout history. It would deny the maturation process. We need both doctrines.

It is my argument in *Millennialism and Social Theory* and in my book, *Dominion and Common Grace*, that these same dual concepts of definitive and progressive sanctification apply to corporate groups, especially covenantal associations, and above all, the Church. Thus, the fact that the Church has been definitively granted Christ's moral perfection does not deny the possibility and moral necessity of its progressive sanctification in history. Similarly, the fact that there is progressive sanctification in history does not in any way deny the fact of Christ's perfection, which was definitively granted to the Church at the point of its covenant-based creation. This applies also to the family and the State.

This simple concept completely baffles Professor Gaffin. He has read my *Dominion and Common Grace*, for he offers a brief, exegetically unsupported sentence criticizing its cover, but, predictably, refuses to refer to its thesis or its documentation, and even this he confines to a footnote.⁶ He ignores the book's documentation. (It should be noted that in his essay against Christian Reconstruction, Gaffin does not once cite any Reconstructionist author in the body of the text, and includes only three brief footnote references, one to my book's cover illustration and two to David Chilton's *Paradise Restored*. In fact, most

5. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1918-22] 1958).

6. Gaffin, p. 216n.

of the essays in this compilation are remarkably devoid of actual citations of our writings, except Bahnsen's *Theonomy*. To say that this is a peculiar way to respond to a movement that has published well over one hundred volumes of books and scholarly journals, plus 25 years of newsletters is, to say the least, revealing. But, as I always say, you can't beat something with nothing. I think the faculty at Westminster Seminary understands this, so they have avoided direct confrontations with the primary sources of Christian Reconstructionism.)⁷ Here is Dr. Gaffin's position:

Nothing has been more characteristic of current postmillennialism than its emphasis on the kingship of the ascended Christ; nothing fires the postmil vision more than that reality. Yet it is just this reality that postmillennialism effectively compromises and, in part, even denies. . . . 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 is less than victorious.⁸

"Less than victorious"? If what the Church has experienced over the past 1,900 years is a victory equal to what the Bible promises God's people in history for their covenantal faithfulness in history (Deut. 28:1-14), then I would surely hate to see a defeat! He then insists: "The New Testament, however, will not tolerate such a construction." What he means is that *he* will not tolerate such a construction. The New Testament does:

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.
The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put

7. This has been going on for well over two decades. For my comments on the practice, see my Publisher's Foreword to Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. xxxvii-xli, "Dealing With the Academic Black-Out."

8. Gaffin, p. 202.

all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:25-28).

This *footstool condition* of God's enemies is definitive, as Gaffin knows, for he correctly cites Ephesians 1:22: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church."⁹ But why does he deny the progressive aspect of this definitive victory? Because he rejects the idea of the kingdom's victory in history. He is an amillennialist.

Progress in the Creeds?

If I were to ask Professor Gaffin if he has a great appreciation for the Westminster Confession of Faith, he would tell me that he does. I would then ask him: "Do you appreciate it more than the Athanasian Creed or the Nicene Creed?" If he says yes, he has just accepted the concept of creedal progress in history. If he says no, he has just submitted his resignation from Westminster Seminary. So, I suppose he would answer that "each has its proper place in the Church," as indeed each does. (I would hate to have to sing the Westminster Confession of Faith each Sunday morning, the way I sing the Nicene Creed!) But if I were to ask him if the Westminster Confession is more theologically rigorous than earlier creeds, he would tell me it is. It was the product of centuries of creedal advance.

So, Professor Gaffin, I now ask you this: Can you imagine the possibility that the Westminster Confession will be improved upon as time goes on? Yes? Then are you now ready to begin working on such an improvement? I know I am. But more to the point, do you think such improvements in creedal

9. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

formulations will parallel and reinforce the maturation of the Church? Finally, will such maturation have positive effects in society? If not, then are you saying that the progress of the Church and the creeds is socially irrelevant? Please be specific. And when you have got your answers ready, don't forget to discuss them with your students. Perhaps some of them may remind you of this assignment periodically. They do pay your salary.

Let us continue, this time with the family. The marital vows are definitive. The working out of these vows in the lives of a married couple is progressive: love, honor, obey, cherish, etc. Are we to say that an older couple has in no way matured covenantally since their wedding day? No. But does this in any way denigrate the integrity of those original vows, taken so long ago? No. The vows were *definitive*. The covenantal process of both personal and corporate maturing in terms of these vows is *progressive*. This is so clear that even seminary professors ought to be able to understand it. They won't, of course. They acknowledge dual sanctification with respect to the individual Christian, but as soon as you raise the possibility that sanctification in both aspects also applies to institutions, you get a blank stare — what we might call *blank stare apologetics*. (If pressed, the professor might respond, "I see." He doesn't.)

Maturation Beyond the Cloister and the Family

Now, let us get to the heart of the matter: the application of biblical law and its sanctions to the world outside of the institutional Church and the family, leading progressively to the triumph of Christendom in history. Here is where the pietist gags. The pessimillennialist cannot tolerate the suggestion that the same principle of definitive and progressive sanctification applies to Christian societies, despite the fact that it applies to the Church and to the Christian family. What biblical principle do they invoke to prove the existence of such an interpretive discontinuity between the world outside Church and family

and inside the Church and family? None. There is none. They simply refuse to discuss what they have done. They assert, as Gaffin asserts, that any concept of covenantal progress in history outside the Church and family is biblically illegitimate. (His language is so strong in this regard that he could become as confrontationally rhetorical as I am, if he would just work at it. He has clearly displayed the basic talent; now he just needs to develop it.)

Gaffin's problem is that he holds to the theology of Eastern Orthodoxy with respect to history: *moral progress only through suffering*. No Calvinist amillennial theologian has articulated this position any more clearly. He has developed an entire worldview based on this presupposition. He calls this his most substantial reservation against postmillennialism.¹⁰ It has taken seventeen years of theological pressuring since Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* was published to get so forthright a statement out of a Calvinist amillennialist. No one has demonstrated more visibly the accuracy of Rushdoony's judgment: amillennialists are premillennialists without earthly hope.

Personal Moral Progress Only Through Suffering

Gaffin calls amillennialism *inaugurated eschatology*, a variant of realized eschatology. Understand, this is the equivalent of *definitive eschatology*. There would be nothing wrong with it if it had the necessary complement, *progressive eschatology*. But he is appalled by the very thought of progressive eschatology, for it would necessarily deny the heart of his ethical system: personal maturation through suffering. We *need* persecution in history.

The inaugurated eschatology of the New Testament is least of all the basis for triumphalism in the church, at whatever point prior to Christ's return. Over the interadvental period in its entirety, from beginning to end, a fundamental aspect of the

10. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

church's existence is (to be) "suffering with Christ"; nothing, the New Testament teaches, is more basic to its identity than that.¹¹

He cites II Corinthians 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." This imagery of man as a vessel is familiar in Scripture. Paul uses it in Romans 9:

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Rom. 9:20-24).

The question is not whether we are vessels. The question is: *Which vessels get progressively smashed by God in history, the vessels of wrath or the vessels of glory?* The answer to this question is biblically clear, and nowhere is it clearer than in Psalm 2, one of the most disconcerting Bible passages for the amillennialist:

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11. He cites his essay, "The Usefulness of the Cross," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (1978-79), pp. 228-46. He could also have cited Edmund Clowney's essay, which also defended suffering as an idea for Christians: "The Politics of the Kingdom," *ibid.*, XLI (Spring 1979), p. 303.

have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. *Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.* Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him (Psa. 2). (emphasis added)

Lest we imagine that this is merely another Old Testament proof text,¹² consider Revelation 2:26-29: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." There is a two-fold process of overcoming: personal and cultural. They are linked ethically and judicially. They are also linked eschatologically. This means *historically*.

Clay jars, Gaffin writes, are believers "in all their mortality and fragility."¹³ Well, so what? What does this professor of systematic theology think covenant-breakers are made of, stainless steel? But, as with every amillennialist, *he gets his biblical imagery backwards*. He sees the Christians as clay pots and the covenant-breakers as rods of iron, *from now until doomsday*. It is true that the covenant-breaker is sometimes employed by God as a rod against us (negative sanctions in history), but never apart from the promise of a future reversal of the sanctioning relationship:

12. "Proof text" is the phrase used by critics to dismiss a biblical text that proves something they don't like one little bit.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, *be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt.* For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction. And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing (Isa. 10:20-27). (emphasis added)

After the manner of Egypt. Every covenant-keeper is supposed to remember what happened to Egypt after that nation broke the Israelite vessels: destruction in history. But such a message of reversed roles, of victory, Gaffin says is strictly limited to Old Testament history; it has nothing to do with the history of the Church of the resurrected Christ. How do we know this? Because of Philippians 3:10: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."¹⁴ He then spends several pages explaining Christ's sufferings and His death. *He defines Christ's resurrection in terms of His suffering.* Here is without a doubt the heart of the amillennial message, a message of incomparable pessimism: "By virtue of union with Christ, Paul

14. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

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."¹⁵ Again, "to 'know'/experience Christ is to experience the power of his resurrection and that, in turn, is to experience the fellowship of his sufferings – a total reality that can then be summed up as conformity to Christ's death."¹⁶

Question: isn't to "'know'/experience Christ" to experience also the victory of His bodily resurrection and His bodily ascension to the right hand of God? Not in Gaffin's theology. He never even mentions this possibility. The Christian Reconstructionist and the traditional postmillennialist answer: the total reality of Christian living is a great deal more than "conformity to Christ's death." The total reality of Christian living is our comprehensive, progressive conformity *in history* to the total *historical* reality of Christ's *death, resurrection, and ascension*. Amillennial theologians publicly ignore the existence of such an interpretation. We can hardly blame them, given the limits of their eschatology and the even greater limits of its appeal.

Prior to World War II, the great amillennial Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder wrote a trilogy: *Christ in His Suffering*, *Christ on Trial*, and *Christ Crucified*. He needed three more volumes: *Christ in the Grave*, *Christ Resurrected*, and *Christ Ascended*. But there is not much to say about Christ in the grave, and amillennialists get very nervous discussing Christ resurrected, let alone Christ ascended. They interpret the history of the Church in terms of Schilder's three volumes. They do not think culturally and socially except in these terms. The Dutch in Kuyper's day and Schilder's day tried to design a Christian culture, but without Old Testament law. World War II and its aftermath ended all such attempts. Schilder's trilogy was resur-

15. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

16. *Idem.*

rected in Van Riessen's sociology of suffering, which Gaffin has adopted.¹⁷

Resurrection, Then Crucifixion

Gaffin insists that the Bible's "eschatology of victory is an eschatology of suffering. . . ." Then he adds what he regards as his *coup d'grace*: "Until Jesus comes again, the church 'wins' by 'losing.'" He then asks a rhetorical question: "What has happened to this theology of the cross in much of contemporary postmillennialism?"¹⁸ I shall provide him with the answer: *it has been modified by the theology of resurrection and ascension.*

Professor Gaffin has managed to reverse the sociological order of events at Calvary. In his sociology of suffering, the crucifixion follows Christ's death and resurrection. He argues as clearly as anyone ever has that our historical condition is to be crucified with Christ; resurrection is strictly a post-historical experience. But Gaffin has a problem: *Jesus Christ announced the Great Commission only after His resurrection.* Gaffin's sociology of suffering would reverse Matthew 27 and 28. For Gaffin, the Great Commission is a message of cultural crucifixion. In all honesty, the Roman Catholic crucifix should be Gaffin's symbol of the Great Commission, not the empty cross of Protestantism. The crucifix is appropriate for the Roman Church, which is also amillennial. Those of us who are postmillennial much prefer the symbol of the empty cross. It conforms to our eschatology. So does the empty tomb.

Yes, we take up our cross to follow Him. But that burden is easy (Matt. 11:30). It is not a burden so crushing that Christians are beaten down historically. Carrying the cross of Christ means extending His kingdom in history, *not* being pushed out by Satan's leaven. It is Satan's doom in history to suffer prog-

17. See Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 5.

18. Gaffin, p. 216.

ressive frustration, not the Church's. It is his representatives who are called upon to suffer as God's kingdom unfolds in history. *Christ was nailed to the cross so that Satan could be nailed to the wall.* What is true of Satan is also true of his kingdom.

Gaffin presents the reader with this rhetorical question: "Is it really overreacting to say that such triumphalism is repugnant to biblical sensibilities?"¹⁹ Now, there are perfectly good uses for rhetorical questions, even aggressive questions. But there are risks, too. Your target may have an opportunity to respond. He may re-work your rhetorical question, changing only one word, making you the target. He may ask: "Is it really overreacting to say that such *masochism* is repugnant to biblical sensibilities?" Some readers may prefer triumphalism to masochism. Not Gaffin:

Suffering is a function of the futility/decay principle pervasively at work in the creation since the fall; suffering is everything that pertains to creaturely experience of this death-principle. . . . Until then, at Christ's return, the suffering/futility/decay principle in creation remains in force, undiminished (but sure to be overcome); it is an enervating factor that cuts across the church's existence, including its mission, in its entirety. The notion that this frustration factor will be demonstrably reduced, and the church's suffering service noticeably alleviated and even compensated, in a future era before Christ's return is not merely foreign to this passage; it trivializes as well as blurs both the present suffering and the future hope/ glory. Until his return, the church remains one step behind its exalted Lord; his exaltation means its (privileged) humiliation, his return (and not before), its exaltation.²⁰

Christ is now resurrected, yet the Church will continue to be humiliated. Christ has ascended, yet the Church will continue

19. *Idem.*

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 214-15.

to be crucified. Were Christ's resurrection and ascension historical? Yes, says orthodox Christianity. Will the Church experience a progressive taste of either resurrection or ascension in its effect on culture in history? No, says the amillennialist. The Great Commission is a commission to a millennium of defeat.

Understand what this means. Gaffin says it well: the Church of Jesus Christ in history remains *one step behind* the Lord. But the Church's experience is humiliation throughout history. So, what does this tell us of Jesus Christ's influence in history, who is just one step ahead of His Church? Except for saving individual souls, His influence is nil. Zip. Nada. "Satan 1,000, Christ 0." This is the essence of the amillennial view of history. It reduces covenant theology to pietistic Anabaptism: *save souls, not culture*. It is premillennialism without earthly hope.

It is New Amsterdam's confession, once the verbiage is stripped away.

The Addiction to Verbiage

Sadly, Gaffin simply could not leave it at this. It was not in him. Having produced a masterpiece of amillennial masochism, he could not resist the lure of the standard Dutch doubletalk. He shifts to the familiar language of optimism. In the appropriately titled subsection, "The Church in the Wilderness," he denies that he has proclaimed "an anemic, escapist Christianity of cultural surrender. Without question, the Great Commission continues fully in force, with its full cultural breadth, until Jesus returns; . . . That mandate, then, is bound to have a robust, leavening impact — one that will redirect every area of life and transform not only individuals but, through them corporately (as the church), their cultures; it already has done so and will continue to do so, until Jesus comes."²¹

Leaven, again. The leaven of victory. The leaven of victory in history. The leaven of victory in culture. But he has already

21. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

denied this possibility with respect to the general culture. So, what does he mean here by "culture"? He means the institutional Church. What this means is this: *the only culture that the Great Commission of Christ's gospel actually leavens in history is the institutional Church*. "It's ghetto time!"

What, then, is the true meaning of history? We never get a straight answer from the amillennialist. What we get, first, is *doubletalk*. Gaffin denies that his view of Christ's kingdom is static. "If, as some charge, this position is 'staticism,' involving a 'static' view of history, so be it. But it is not a staticism that eliminates real, meaningful progress in history." Second, we get *verbiage*: "It is, we may say, the 'staticism of eschatological dynamism,' staticism in the sense of the kingly permanence of the exalted Christ being effectively manifested — in its full, diverse (and ultimately incalculable, unpredictable) grandeur — over the entire interadvental period, from beginning to end."²²

"What does this mean?" you ask. It means that Calvinistic amillennialism has no doctrine of historical progress and no doctrine of covenantal cause and effect in history. It means that the *covenantal promise* of God to enforce His law by means of direct sanctions (Deut. 28) was *chronologically limited* to the Old Covenant era, and even then, only inside national Israel (except for that one confounding case of Nineveh). It means that Dr. Gaffin is as embarrassed as all the other pessimillennialists are by the obvious implications of their eschatologies. They do not want to be called cultural defeatists just because they happen to be cultural defeatists. They want to clothe themselves in the optimistic language of postmillennialism. So, the amillennialist's strategy is to spray verbiage all over the page. (In contrast, the premillennialist keeps talking about how great it is going to be on the far side of Armageddon.)

There is another academic strategy, however: offer no cultural alternative, but criticize the present humanist world order

22. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

relentlessly. This does not change anything, but at least it allows Christians, in Gaffin's words, to get in a few licks.²³ Thus, one avoids controversial specific transgressions, such as abortion. I will be more impressed when they focus on this one issue as the representative transgression of the whole society. Until then, criticism of the humanist order in general remains little more than a verbal smoke screen for inaction. It is the theologians' systematic refusal to bring a specific covenant lawsuit against this God-rejecting society. They do not believe that God will prosecute such a lawsuit in history by imposing His negative sanctions, so they see no impelling reason to bring it.

In contrast, the theonomist asks: "What level of progressively accumulating sanctions is now hanging over a nation that executes a million and a half unborn infants each year?" There will be no tenured security anywhere in a society that comes under such sanctions.

The Consequences of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension

For many years, I have taunted non-theonomists with this slogan: "You can't beat something with nothing." They have said nothing public in response, but they have not needed to. Their implicit answer is clear; it is based self-consciously on their two (or three) pessimillennial eschatologies: "With respect to social theory, we know we have nothing culturally to offer, but since God does not really expect the Church to defeat anything cultural in history anyway, nothing is all we need."

The more intellectually sophisticated among them have contented themselves with writing critical analyses of modern humanist culture. By implication, they are calling Christians to avoid the pits of Babylon. But calling Christians to "Come out from among them!" without also providing at least an outline of a cultural alternative to come *in to* (i.e., to construct) is sim-

23. *Ibid.*, p. 222n.

ply to mimic the fundamentalism of an earlier era: no liquor, no cigarettes, no social dancing, and no movies. It is a scholarly version of fundamentalism's old refrain: "We don't smoke; we don't chew; and we don't go with the boys who do!" We cannot seriously expect to recruit dedicated, intellectually serious people into "full-time Christian service" with a worldview that says little more than "we don't go to R-rated movies."²⁴ So, what good are these negative intellectual critiques? They serve as outlets for highly frustrated Christian intellectuals to produce other highly frustrated Christian intellectuals.

I shall put it as bluntly as I can: *Amillennialism is an eschatology that ignores the theological, intellectual, and social consequences of the fact that both Christ's resurrection and His ascension were events in history.* These were trans-historical events, too, but they were events in history. Deny this, and you remove the very heart of Christianity. If Christ did not rise in history, then our faith is vain. Theological liberals, like the Pharisees before them, fully understand this. They deny the historicity of Christ's resurrection in their attempt to destroy the Church. They are following the rival "Great Commission" of the enemies of Christ, which is recorded in the text of Matthew's gospel immediately prior to Jesus' issuing of His Great Commission to the Church:

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will

24. I am not exaggerating about the continuing prevalence of such views. Writes one critic of Christian Reconstruction, one of the leading pastors in England, who holds the pulpit in Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle: "In many cases it [Christian Reconstruction] leads in a subtle way to worldliness. (After all, if Christians are commissioned to take dominion over the arts, and so on, they had better start by participating in them and enjoying them.)" Peter Masters, "World Dominion: The High Ambition of Reconstructionism," *Sword & Trowel* (May 24, 1990), p. 19.

persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Matt. 28:11-15).

Bible-believing Christians must publicly affirm the reality of the bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ in history. This means that *Christians must also affirm the consequences of both the resurrection and the ascension, including their social and cultural consequences*. Amillennialism's hermeneutic of persecution is therefore not valid as a primary classification device to evaluate the entire work of the Church in history. There is more to the progress of the Church in history than its persecution. In short, *there is more to Christianity's victory in history than its hypothetical cultural defeat in history*. But this is what amillennialism explicitly and self-consciously denies. It proclaims cultural defeat. It calls this defeat *victory*.

Herbert Schlossberg understands that there has to be more to the interpretation of history than this. But as an amillennialist and a non-theonomist, he does not speculate in public about what this might be. He writes: "We need a theological interpretation of disaster. . . ." ²⁵ The Church has needed this for many centuries. So have the humanists. The devastating Lisbon earthquake of 1755 shook not just the foundations of Lisbon; it shook the foundations of Enlightenment optimism. So have major catastrophes ever since. If man is essentially good, then why do such terrible things happen to large numbers of us?

What the Bible has given us is a *covenantal* theory of disaster: men will be called to account in history by God whenever they systematically refuse to obey His Bible-revealed laws. But this is too much to swallow for millions of Christians and billions of non-Christians, who agree on one thing: God's Bible-

25. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, [1983] 1990), p. 304.

revealed laws for society are null and void today. So are His sanctions.

The Final Judgment

Gaffin ends his essay with a footnote, one which makes a very important point, though astoundingly misleading. He argues that the final judgment is part of history. Nothing could be farther from the accepted use of language. The final judgment is the consummation of history: a radical, discontinuous event that cannot be accelerated or retarded by any normal, continuous actions of men in history. It is exclusively God's intervention into the historical process; it will in fact abolish the historical process. "The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world" (Matt. 13:39-40). This is *the end of*, not *an aspect of*, the historical process.

He offers his theory of why people become premillennialists and postmillennialists: they seek evidence of God's sanctions in history. I believe he is correct. This is surely what my book, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990), is all about. But this search, in Gaffin's eyes, is a major misunderstanding of the Bible. He pulls no punches. (I really do appreciate his vitriolic confrontational style, so unlike the normal academic discourse of theologians; it helps to keep the readers awake. My main regret is that he put this gem in a footnote; vitriol ought to be right up there in the middle of the text, where it belongs. As I said before, Gaffin has the polemical gift. My disappointment is his use of a wishy-washy, academic phrase, "it seems.")

My surmise is that, for many, a significant factor disposing them toward either a premil or a postmil position stems from etherialized, even insipid, less-than-biblical understandings of the eternal state. Such rarified, colorless conceptions give rise to the conviction — compounded by a missing or inadequate aw-

areness of the realized eschatology taught in Scripture — that eventually God must somehow “get in his licks” and “settle things” in history, as distinct from eternity. But what is the eternal order other than the consummation of *history*, the historical process come to *its* final fruition? The new heavens and earth, inaugurated at Christ’s return, will be the climactic vindication of God’s covenant and, so, his final historical triumph, the ultimate realization of his purposes for the original creation, forfeited by the first Adam and secured by the last. Inherent in both a postmil and a premil outlook, it seems, is the tendency, at least, toward an unbiblical, certainly un-Reformed separation or even polarizartion of creation and redemption/eschatology.²⁶

The New Heavens and New Earth are exclusively future, he insists, contrary to Isaiah 65:17-23. Professor Gaffin preaches a “realized eschatology,” except when it actually comes to *real* realized eschatology. Then he preaches *deferred eschatology*: victory beyond history.

He tells us that Jesus secured what Adam forfeited. Indeed, Christ regained title to the whole world.²⁷ Adam had the legal authorization from God to leave an inheritance to his heirs. So does Jesus. But amillennialists insist that Jesus merely secured title; *title will not be transferred to His people progressively in history*. Again, this is “definitivism” apart from progressivism; it is the fundamental theological error of all amillennialism. It has no vision of the progressive realization of Christ’s definitive conquest in history. Christ’s conquest in history is assumed to be based exclusively on power, not on covenantal faithfulness, and it will be achieved only *ultimately*, i.e., outside of history: in heaven (Church Triumphant) and at the end of history (Church Resurrected). It supposedly has nothing to do with the Church Militant (history). In amillennialism, there is no

26. Gaffin, p. 222n.

27. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), pp. 61-62.

progressive *kingdom* development in history toward the present triumphant condition of the Church in heaven. While our citizenship is in heaven, this heavenly "passport" progressively entitles us only to the kinds of rights and benefits given to someone in Iraq who holds an Israeli passport. (This defeatist outlook on Church history is equally true of premillennialism.) The result is predictable: the Church Militant has become in our day the Church Wimpetant.

Some critics of Reconstructionism resent our calling amillennialism pessimistic. Yet the system is intensely pessimistic. There is no developed system called "optimistic amillennialism." There can be none. Occasionally, an amillennialist admits this fact in print. In a review of Kenneth Gentry's book, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Rev. Stuart Jones, a Westminster graduate, forthrightly admitted the correctness of our accusation when he challenged the book's argument for a pre-A.D. 70 date. While he did not actually summarize the author's thesis or provide a coherent alternative, Rev. Jones did make his position clear: "This weakens the argument for preterism (present rather than future fulfillment), and leaves room for pessimism."²⁸ He learned his millennialism well at Westminster. Pessimism as a way of Christian thinking must be defended. He is a staunch defender of pessimism. So are his eschatological peers.

Conclusion

If this is "realized" eschatology, I'd prefer another option. So would a lot of other Christians, which is why Calvinistic amillennialism cannot recruit and keep the brighter, more activist students. Gaffin tells his disciples that they, like the Church, have a lifetime of frustration ahead of them. This comforts the pietists among them, but it drives the activists in

28. *New Horizons* (Feb. 1991), p. 23. This magazine is published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The essence of his review can be seen in his statement, "But I digress." The whole review is a digression.

the direction of covenantal postmillennialism, which offers a consistent and Bible-based alternative. Gaffin's amillennialism of pre-1940 Holland cannot compete effectively against it.

Naturally, the amillennialists at Westminster – as far as I can tell, this means the entire faculty – believe that amillennialism is quite serviceable. But there is a problem. They have not yet begun to articulate the kind of social theory that amillennialism produces. Deuteronomy 28 provides the Christian Reconstructionist with the judicial foundation of social theory. It presents the case for God's predictable historical sanctions. It offers hope to covenant-keepers regarding the long-term efficacy of their efforts, on earth and in history. In short, it offers them the possibility of transferring to their covenantal heirs the judicial foundations for building Christendom. But amillennialists deny the New Testament reality of Deuteronomy 28 and its sanctions. They deny that, over time, covenant-keeping produces victory. They offer to their spiritual heirs only the prospects of assured defeat in history. They offer them the sociology of suffering. Theonomists also proclaim a sociology of suffering. However, we proclaim it to covenant-breakers. This makes all the difference.

SIC ET NON: THE DILEMMA OF JUDICIAL AGNOSTICISM

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (Jas. 1:5-8).

Westminster's *Theonomy* symposium suffers from the paralysis of indecision, an indecision rooted in theological and philosophical double-mindedness. Praising Van Til, they have abandoned Van Til. Criticizing theonomy, they offer no alternative to theonomy. Left to themselves as a faculty, they do not agree on the answer to that crucial practical question: What is to be done?¹ They have attempted to do what no one should ever attempt: beat something positive with nothing specific.

Indecision is a common academic affliction, but is especially noticeable on seminary faculties. The faculty members hesitate

1. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 13: "What Is To Be Done?"

to speak prophetically and without qualifications. "Thus sayeth the Lord, more or less, give or take a little, on the average!" is their battle cry against the pagan, apostate academic world that granted them their academic degrees and has accredited their programs.² Having been forced by the seminary's hiring policies to submit themselves for anywhere from seven to ten years to secular humanist higher education (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.), they are not used to conducting offensive, head-on, academic confrontations. They have been trained to lie low, to de-emphasize their unique Christian outlook. They have been trained to seek a common-ground compromise. Van Til was an exception, but his precedent of total confrontation with humanism and philosophical autonomy has not been followed on campus: at Westminster or anywhere else.

Seminary faculty members do not choose to bite the hands that fed them their academic certification. They even seek out continuing approval from their covenantal enemies by submitting the seminaries to formal accreditation. They cannot deal with the idea that it is Christians, and *only* Christians, as the exclusive covenantal agents of God's kingdom in history, who are supposed to do the certifying. They cannot seem to shake loose a deeply rooted Christian inferiority complex. "Tell us that we meet your standards, we beg of you! Tell us what to do, and we will do it. We know that your academic standards are entirely neutral, so we will submit!" Yet it is to them that Christian laymen turn for counsel on how to fight the good epistemological fight of faith.

Certification as Initiation

The academic certification issue has been at the heart of the retreat of Christianity for about eight centuries. The legally independent universities of Europe³ steadily became the

2. They have placed themselves under a hostile authority.

3. This independence can be traced back to 1242, when the Pope granted new

screening mechanisms for all literate men in a hierarchically structured society. The centralized bureaucracy of the Roman Church became the model for civil government. Every bureaucracy must screen access to its positions. The popes, kings, and princes all recognized this fact early, and they sought to exercise control over the universities. The pagan Emperor Frederick II of Sicily in the early twelfth century established the University of Naples in order to secure total State control over all civil justice.⁴ Others who saw their opportunity were the various heretical religious orders. The "Spiritualists" invaded the universities and could not be driven out.⁵ The universities of Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge all fought and lost the war against heresy during their initial three centuries. Only after the Reformation was orthodoxy restored at the English universities, and they soon moved towards Arminianism. (Emmanuel College at Cambridge did become a center for Calvinism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but then came under Archbishop Laud's attacks.)⁶

The English Puritans recognized that the humanism and rationalism of Cambridge and Oxford constituted a major problem, but they were unable to take control of those two sacrosanct institutions, even after military victory in a civil war.⁷ The Puritans in New England built Harvard College in a wilderness in 1636, adopted a European rationalist curriculum, and prayed that immersion in Latin, Greek, Hebrew,

universities privileges enjoyed by the religious orders. See Gerhard W. Ditz, "The Protestant Ethic and Higher Education in America," *Oxford Review of Education*, IV (1978), pp. 164-65.

4. Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194-1250* (New York: Ungar, [1931] 1957), pp. 132-35.

5. Friederich Heer, *The Medieval World: Europe, 1100-1350* (New York: World, 1962), chaps. 9, 10.

6. John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 247ff.

7. *Ibid.*, Conclusion.

Aramaic, and Ames' *Marrow of Sacred Divinity* would save them.⁸ They lost the bet. Harvard went downhill, generation by generation, until the climax in 1805, when Unitarian Henry Ware, Sr., was appointed professor of divinity.⁹ After that, the Unitarians took over. Yet no one could enter the preaching ministry in Puritan New England who was not a Harvard, Cambridge, or Oxford graduate, except for a few men in the howling wilderness of Maine and New Hampshire.¹⁰ The result is described well by Westminster's Samuel Logan: "The Calvinist tulip was transformed first into an Arminian dandelion and then into a Unitarian ragweed. . . ."¹¹

In 1812, Princeton Theological Seminary was begun in order to train men for the ministry, since their undergraduate educations could no longer be trusted theologically. From the beginning, then, the theological seminary was a stopgap, defensive measure. Yet this most conservative of all theological seminaries adopted Scottish common sense realism as its apologetic foundation – precisely the system that Harvard College was proclaiming.¹² This tradition ended at Princeton only with Van Til's appointment in 1928, and the next year, he left Princeton and joined the Westminster faculty.

Can you imagine Martin Luther's insisting that all candidates for the Protestant ministry first be granted a degree from the Pontifical Institute in Rome? Yet this is approximately what

8. David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 178.

9. Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth Century Harvard* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, [1970] 1988). Published originally by Harvard University Press.

10. Hall, *Shepherd*, p. 183. Lay preaching was made illegal by the General Court in 1652: Hall, p. 184.

11. Samuel T. Logan, Jr., "Where Have All the Tulips Gone?" *Westminster Theological Journal*, L (1988), p. 2.

12. Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, ch. 1.

all modern Presbyterian seminaries require. They normally require a B.A. from an accredited college for all entering students. The Presbyterian denominations still require seminary attendance for ordination. The seminaries, in turn, usually require their faculty members to have an M.A. or Ph.D. from a humanist university, or a Th.D. from another seminary, very often liberal. In short, officially they say "no" to humanism when trying to raise money from Christian donors, but they require everyone seeking any position of academic authority on campus to run the humanist academic gauntlet. This has been going on in Christian higher education for about eight centuries. When will this tradition end?

In our day, the drift into political and theological liberalism has gone on, decade after decade, in the Christian colleges.¹³ The result is visible for all to see: the triumph of humanism in the vast majority of the Protestant churches, and the total isolation of tiny pockets of "Christian scholarship" – scholarship that self-consciously refuses to challenge the humanist social order head-on in the name of the Bible. Well did *Journey* magazine summarize "What's Wrong With Our Reformed Seminaries": secularization, the body count problem, the wimp syndrome, evangelicalization, the de-emphasis of systematic theology, the loss of the Vantilian apologetic, the "practicalization" of theology, and the loss of the covenant theology perspective.¹⁴ The seminaries have steadily drifted toward liberalism.

Mumbling for Jesus

It is the offense of the theonomists that we have understood Van Til's comprehensive challenge to modern humanism, and have therefore launched sustained academic attacks on many fronts. By doing this, we are implicitly asking (and I am explic-

13. James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

14. *Journey* (Jan.-Feb. 1987), pp. 5-6.

itly asking): "Where are the Calvinist institutions of higher learning in this fight? Why are they silent? Why are they afraid to defend publicly the six-day creation, or attack the immorality of socialism (i.e., liberation theology), the illegitimacy of State certification and financing of education, and abortion as murder?" In short, *why do they mumble?* We know the answer: *they have not yet broken with the comprehensive humanist worldview that Van Til challenged, if not root and branch, then at least root.* We theonomists are doing our best to cut off some of the branches that Van Til chose to ignore. This is our offense. This has called forth *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. Our academically certified critics on campus still refuse to attack the humanist educational system that certified them and the worldview they were taught while undergoing their required initiation.

And now, having gained its institutionally useless certification from a non-Calvinist, non-Christian academic accrediting association, Westminster is facing the removal of that unneeded accreditation because its Board does not have any women.¹⁵ Westminster Seminary has long refused to recognize the fundamental rule governing respectable humanism's relations with Christianity: "You play ball with us, and we'll smash you in the teeth with the bat."

Westminster Seminary is worse than foolish. Westminster Seminary is naive. Van Til warned all who would listen about compromises with humanism, but Westminster refused to listen. The siren song of public acceptance by the seminary's mortal enemies was just too alluring. And like the sirens of *The Odyssey*, they have lured the school toward the rocks. Better never to have sought and gained accreditation than to have it removed. God is not mocked!

With this as background, I come now to the actual essays in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. The faculty's critique of theonomy is not unified. There is no agreed-upon view of civil law

15. "Seminary May Lose Accreditation," *Christianity Today* (Oct. 22, 1990), p. 51.

that links together the contributors to the symposium. What they are agreed on is that the specific defense of theonomy that was set forth by Greg Bahnsen in 1973 is either wrong (the majority view) or exegetically inadequate. On such a meager foundation as this negative presentation, cultural skyscrapers are not built.

The Westminster faculty is not unified regarding the judicial substance of its critique, but only its form: "Not Bahnsen, not here, not ever!" This is why the careful reader cannot discover what, exactly, the contributors suggest as an alternative to biblical law. They have no idea. They do not say. All they know is that they do not want biblical law as the basis of civil law. If the U.S. Supreme Court authorizes the murder of unborn babies, that is good enough for Westminster. If it should reverse itself, that is also good enough for Westminster. What is not good enough is Bahnsen's formulation of theonomy.

So, in this chapter, we will scan the highlights of eight essays that tell us why theonomy is just not good enough, plus one.

Robert D. Knudsen

Having taken a class from Dr. Knudsen, I can say that he is a decent lecturer, even when there is only one person enrolled. That was the case with me. He would come into class, put his lecture notes on the podium, give the lecture, and walk out. (I could not cut *that* class!) The class was "The Fate of Freedom in Western Philosophy." The only problem I ever had with it was that I could never understand what exactly he was offering as an alternative. One thing seemed certain, and most of his students knew it: Knudsen had little use for the philosophy of Van Til. In 1963, we knew the department of apologetics was divided. He was a Dooyeweerdian to the extent that he was anything, and his unwillingness to write only made things more difficult for us. We never could figure out what he wanted Christians to *do*, other than preach a soul-saving gospel. (That was our problem with Van Til, too.) He would never raise or

answer the crucial question: "What is to be done?" His lack of specifics is the same problem I face in explaining his essay, "May We Use the Term *Theonomy*?" The essay contains not one footnote, not one reference to Bahnsen, and not one mention of Rushdoony.

Dr. Knudsen's chief problem in writing about theonomy is that he just does not know what to believe about law. I can understand this; he spent his career immersed in Dooyeweerd's *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. (In the original Dutch!) He writes of the Ten Commandments: "These are indeed commandments, but they are not formulated in legal terms. It is not stipulated exactly what would constitute keeping them or transgressing them, or exactly what the rewards and punishments might be."¹⁶ This is vague enough to satisfy every state-licensed abortionist in America. (To the reader: keep the word "abortion" in the back of your mind as you read these essays on what Christian ethics supposedly does *not* require us to believe.)

How Should We Then Live?

Well, then, even the marginally inquisitive student might ask, how did the ancient nation of Israel know what to do? More to the point from the perspective of civil law, how did its residents know what they were *prohibited* from doing? They must have turned to the case laws that follow Exodus 20. This is Rushdoony's thesis in *Institutes*, but Knudsen does not mention Rushdoony. This is also my thesis in *Tools of Dominion*, which appeared far too late for Knudsen also to ignore.

Ah, but Knudsen has a unique solution to this problem. He defines Christian responsibility, not in terms of knowing what to do, but in *not* knowing what to do. "In all their relationships New Testament believers do not have less responsibility than

16. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 21.

their Old Testament counterparts for obeying God's will as expressed in his law; in fact, they have greater personal responsibility, because it is not legally stipulated exactly what they should and should not do."¹⁷ The Israelites knew what was expected; Christians don't. They had less responsibility; we have more. In other words, "from him to whom less has been given, more is expected," and vice versa. This is the opposite of what Luke 12:47-48 teaches, but as I said before, Dr. Knudsen has immersed himself in Dooyeweerd's books. The more of this he got, the less anyone ever expected from him or received from him (e.g., footnotes).

Amusing as all this may be, it brings us to the grim reality of Knudsen's view of civil law. This view of civil law is a perfect prescription for tyranny. In the civil realm, if the State is not limited by law in what it can and cannot legitimately do, then the nation becomes subject to the whims of the leaders and the bureaucrats. This was the lesson I learned in Knudsen's class when he assigned C. S. Lewis' novel, *That Hideous Strength*, which literally changed my life. But Knudsen obviously does not understand what Lewis was getting at. He does not see the threat posed by any civil government that is authorized to rehabilitate criminals at will, but is not forced to specify specific punishments for specific crimes. The evil policewoman of the novel, Fairy Hardcastle, did understand:

"You've got to get the ordinary man into the state in which he says 'Sadism' automatically when he hears the word Punishment." And then one would have *carte blanche*.¹⁸

17. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

18. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 69. Lewis expands on this theme in his essay, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1972).

The two-fold purpose of statute law is to limit the criminal and limit the State. If men do not know what the law of God requires, the covenant-breaking State can declare anything as a crime, and then enforce its law without judicial limits. We have seen this happen again and again throughout the twentieth century. Here is the fate of freedom in Western legal philosophy: *without biblically specified limits on the State, freedom steadily disappears*. But Knudsen substitutes pragmatism for biblical law: "The dispensation of the law, which I have likened to a chrysalis, has been set aside; the new age has come. Any specific, legally qualified provision of the Old Testament may be applied in this new age only if it fits. The criterion for its usefulness will be a New Testament one."¹⁹ New Age, indeed: a world without the judicial aspects of the Ten Commandments to restrain it.

What is the God-ordained alternative to biblical law? He does not say. Instead, he treats us to a fine example of some typically Dooyeweerdian verbiage. Ready? Here we go!

In view of the above characterization of "the law," we can understand that it could not be conceived properly as resting in itself. Even though it had a legal quality, the law constantly acted so as to break through its own constraints. Within the old dispensation there were strands that were not legally qualified, and these acted so as to break through the legal form. Throughout, the old covenant offered glimpses of what lay beyond it and on what it depended.²⁰

Anyone who thinks that this line of reasoning is a reasonable substitute for Van Til's apologetics and biblical law is probably a Westminster Seminary graduate. But at least Knudsen has not abandoned Van Til's legacy. He never did accept it.

19. Knudsen, p. 36.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

During much of the Clowney era, Knudsen was either the editor or the managing editor of the *Westminster Theological Journal*. Like Clowney, he did his work quietly to restructure Westminster's confession.²¹

Tremper Longman III²²

Chapter 2 of the book begins with the presupposition that Chapter 1 implicitly rejects: the connection between the case laws and the Ten Commandments. Writes Dr. Longman: "However, what is the Mosaic case law but the application of the Ten Commandments to the nation of Israel? None of the civil or moral laws is independent of the Ten Commandments; they are all summarized in them. The case laws are specifications of the general principles of the Ten Commandments."²³ One would be hard-pressed to find a better statement of the theonomic position on the Decalogue.

What is the catch? Why is this essay in a book critical of theonomy? Because Dr. Longman finds that the application of biblical law to specific cases is "very difficult."²⁴ That's it? That, basically, is it. "In reading the standard works of theonomy, one can easily get the impression that Old Testament laws are simple and clear-cut. We have already seen evidence to dispute this, at least from the perspective of the modern interpreter."²⁵ (Note the word "simple." We shall see it again in this connection.)

There is little indication in his footnotes that he has read the standard works of theonomy. (Neither have most of his col-

21. Years under Knudsen as editor or managing editor: 1968-70, 1971, 1975-78, 1980. Godfrey's era: 1978-81. Silva took over in 1982, the year Clowney retired. The journal became far less hostile to our books after that.

22. What a great name!

23. Tremper Longman III, "God's Law and Mosaic Punishments Today," *ibid.*, p. 46.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

leagues.) He does not cite any of the following books: James Jordan's *The Law of the Covenant*, my economic commentary on Genesis, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, and my commentaries on Exodus: *Moses and Pharaoh*, *The Sinai Strategy*, and *Tools of Dominion*. Well, this is not quite true. He does refer to my view on stoning, which appears in *The Sinai Strategy*, but he refers to H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice's book, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?*, as his authority.²⁶ He has obviously not looked at my books. This is understandable; I am not the issue, since I was not rejected for a job at Westminster, never having applied. Bahnsen is different.

Dr. Longman insists that the penalties in the Old Covenant were flexible. This means that the maximum penalty was always only that: a maximum.²⁷ I agree entirely; this is the thesis of my book, *Victim's Rights*, which is basically a 300-page extract from *Tools of Dominion*. The key question that Dr. Longman fails to address is this: On what basis could the judges have imposed a penalty less than the maximum? The answer, biblically, is easy: *the victim of the crime specified the penalty*. The standard interpretation of the *lex talionis* that the rabbis have taken for over a thousand years is that the judges could substitute a monetary payment for a strict "eye for eye" penalty.²⁸ I argue that the victim's right to substitute penalties keeps a godly society from becoming the victim of arbitrary civil judges. These two crucial issues are ignored by the defenders of judicial flexibility: (1) how to place judicial limits on civil judges; (2) how to defend the rights of the victim.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 47n.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

28. Cf. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides, the Ramban), *Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York: Shilo, [1267?] 1973), p. 368. The same position was defended by the early nineteenth-century founder of the movement that has become known as Orthodox Judaism, Samson Raphael Hirsch: *The Pentateuch Translated and Explained*, translated by Isaac Levy, 5 vols. (3rd ed.; Gateshead, London: Judaica Press, [1967] 1989), II, p. 315.

Judicial Flexibility

What Dr. Longman wants is judicial flexibility.²⁹ Specifically, he and all of his colleagues want flexibility regarding *the Old Testament's penal sanctions*. (Dr. Logan says the New England Puritans adopted this.)³⁰ This is what the whole anti-theonomy debate has been about from the beginning. *Theonomy's many critics are horrified by the long list of capital crimes in the Old Testament*. So, they appeal to judicial flexibility as a way to escape their dilemma. The problem is, in this era of moral relativism, any judicial flexibility that is not qualified by the biblical principle of victim's rights transfers authority to the civil government to do whatever it pleases. But this does not concern Dr. Longman. What concerns him is Bahnsen:

Bahnsen is so blinded by his idiosyncratic translation and interpretation of Matthew 5:17 that he can't see that Jesus, as the Son of God, does indeed introduce adaptations of the Old Testament law for a new redemptive situation.³¹

This leads me to a crucial point: Where, in the seventeen years separating Bahnsen's Th.M. thesis and Westminster's book, did any faculty member of Westminster Seminary go into print with a detailed refutation of Bahnsen's 47-page exposition of Matthew 5:17-18, which is the bedrock foundation of his thesis? The faculty here pretends that someone, somewhere, sometime has definitively refuted Bahnsen on this point. Yet the book never offers so much as a footnote to that refutation. This author just tells us that Bahnsen is exegetically idiosyncratic.

What we are waiting for is proof. We need arguments, not assertions that are seventeen years too late. *Theonomy: A Re-*

29. Longman, pp. 52-53.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

formed Critique does not supply arguments on this, Bahnsen's bedrock exegesis. Why not?

I offer this suggestion: because none of them is confident that Bahnsen can be answered by means of Westminster's new confession. Silence is the better part of valor in this instance. They just pretend that someone else has answered him, the same way that the defenders of Christian pluralism pretend that someone has presented a biblical, exegetical case for pluralism. It is convenient. It is not intellectually honest, of course, but it is convenient.

Bruce K. Waltke

I cover Dr. Waltke in greater detail in Chapter 10. Besides, he is long gone. His wanderlust returned, and he left.³² I will say this: he knows where the real conflict lies. He knows who the proper source is. In rejecting Bahnsen, he cites the political views of Edmund Clowney.³³ This has been the dividing issue at Westminster for a quarter of a century: Clowney vs. Van Til, Clowney vs. Bahnsen, and (finally) Clowney vs. the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Edmund Clowney's career deserves a book, or at least a complete issue of *Journey*.

John M. Frame

Frame likes some aspects of theonomy, but he doesn't like others. Did anyone expect anything else? *Sic et non John* strikes again! In the words of one professor at Covenant Seminary:

There have been three approaches to apologetics at Westminster Seminary. Van Til said that everyone else was wrong. Frame thinks that there are some correct things in everyone's

32. Perhaps he knew something about the financial condition of Westminster East that I don't know.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

system and some incorrect things. Poythress thinks that everyone is correct, from a certain point of view.

Judicial Simpletons

Frame suggests that "the greatest appeal of the Christian reconstruction movement, or theonomy, lies in the simplicity and radicalism of its proposal."³⁴ I reply: radical, yes; simple, no. We have never regarded our task of reviving biblical casuistry as a simple task. Casuistry is difficult. It is simply ridiculous even to hint at this supposed simplicity of our self-imposed vision. In 1972, in the concluding words of my Ph.D. dissertation on the decline of the New England theocratic view of economics, I wrote the following:

In a transitional era – one in which the burdens of the inherited intellectual and cultural paradigm seem too great to bear any longer – the innovators regard their predecessors as men enmeshed in a tangled web of conflicting policies. The web no longer seems to hang together. Under these circumstances, the innovators are seldom aware of the possibilities for multiple applications of their own philosophical Archimedean point. It makes the task of reconstruction appear far easier than it really is.³⁵

Could I have made it any plainer? Do my 650+ pages of exegesis on three chapters of Exodus, limited to a discussion of economic questions, indicate that I regard this task as simple?³⁶ Of course, I keep forgetting: I don't count, since I never applied for a job at Westminster.

34. Frame, "The One, The Many, and Theonomy," *ibid.*, p. 89.

35. Gary North, "From Covenant to Contract: Secularism in Puritan New England, 1691-1720," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Winter 1979-80), pp. 193-94.

36. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 209-873.

Here is the place to point out one very clever strategy that our critics have adopted. They point to Bahnsen's *apologetic defense* of theonomy and conclude that it is simplistic. *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* did not attempt to apply all of the case laws to contemporary issues. It was a rigorous defense of a particular hermeneutic. But we have published over a hundred books and scholarly journals that apply our hermeneutic position, both positively and negatively, to the affairs of this world. The critics fail to mention this somewhat annoying fact. They do not offer us even the courtesy that House and Ice, as dispensational critics, extended: providing a lengthy annotated bibliography of our works. The reader is left with the impression that we are simplistic.

They are not reticent to cite the journalistic hatchet job written by Rodney Clapp and published in *Christianity Today*.³⁷ References to Clapp's essay appear seven times in the Westminster book. Yet Clapp recognized clearly that what we theonomists are suggesting is the very opposite of simplicity. We have never pretended otherwise, contrary to Clapp.

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, incontestably "biblical" solutions to ethical questions that it pretends to, and that are so attractive to many conservative Christians. 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).

To which I replied:

37. Rodney Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," *Christianity Today* (Feb. 20, 1987). I replied to his article, accusation by accusation, in my report, "Honest Reporting as Heresy," a newsletter sent out by the Institute for Christian Economics in 1987, which none of the Westminster authors notes. Reprinted as Appendix B, below.

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.³⁸

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.³⁹ No muss, no fuss, no lawyers ("scribes"). No "Talmudic" debates over details.

Why, then, are we accused of being, basically, judicial simpletons? It was Rushdoony who first identified what he called the fallacy of simplicity, and he turned to the Second Council of Constantinople (552 A.D.) to refute it.⁴⁰ Theonomists recognize that simplicity is the officially stated goal of humanist legal reformers from the University of Padua eight centuries ago, to the Napoleonic Code, to the modern day. It never simplifies; it always leads to endless volumes of bureaucratic rules. The judicial reform that we propose is to subsume all

38. Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (Harper & Row, 1980), ch. 2.

39. Nikolai Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981), p. 38.

40. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1968] 1978), ch. 9.

civil laws under the Ten Commandments, as illuminated by the case laws. Simple, no; radical, yes.

Kline and Pluralism

Frame goes after Meredith Kline far more than he goes after Bahnsen, making this one of the better essays in the book. He sees clearly that Kline's system relies on the idea of religiously neutral law (the Noahic covenant): the foundation of pluralism.⁴¹ This is why the pluralists in the book rely on Kline. Frame states forthrightly: "Religious neutrality is not only a wrong goal but also impossible in the nature of the case. All crime comes from false religion. . . ."⁴² In this sense, *Frame is being faithful to Van Til's legacy*. This is what marks his essay as exceptional in this collection.

He calls both the theonomists and the intrusionists to get to work exegetically. I have no objection; I have spent a million dollars and seventeen years doing this. But I must remind Frame and Poythress (who calls for the same thing), *doing detailed exegesis requires motivation*. Which system of theology provides this motivation? A system that declares that God's laws and sanctions are still operational in New Testament times, or a system that declares all of the Mosaic legislation as an intrusion in history that is not in any way judicially binding on civil governments today?

The answer is obvious. *Where is Kline's exegesis of the law?* (For that matter, where is Kline's post-1980 exegesis of anything?) Where are his followers' exegeses of the law of God? There are none. They are pluralists, one and all, as later essays in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* indicate. They are unhappy with Frame's work. They wish, many years ago, he had been hired somewhere else. Then they would be able to say today: "Therefore, Westminster could not hire Frame," as they say

41. Frame, p. 94.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

today: "Therefore, Westminster could not hire Bahnsen, and Shepherd had to be fired."

Vernon Sheridan Poythress

Dr. Poythress is basically "Me, too, John," with minor qualifications. He writes as though he thinks that Frame is just too hard core. Poythress wants to smooth over all differences. Sometimes I am tempted to call him Vernon Sheridan Pangloss.

Dr. Poythress loves to play with texts. He rolls them around in his word processor the way children roll around bright stones in their fingers. Then they drop them into a box and forget about them. So does Poythress. For example, he cites Leviticus 19:19: "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 woollen come upon thee." He spends seven precious pages discussing how this text might be interpreted in different ways by theonomists and intrusionists, but he never suggests how it should be interpreted by faculty members.

He then invokes Frame's familiar tripartite division of ethics (and just about everything else) into normative, personal, and situational: three more pages gone. No conclusions. Then he cites Deuteronomy 4:6-8:

Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

Guess what? The theonomists can interpret this passage one way, while intrusionists can interpret it another way! What is the proper interpretation? We just don't know yet. "It is too easy to read into a passage what we afterwards read out."⁴³ This took three and a half pages.

Then he refers to Deuteronomy 17:2-13, which he does not actually quote. This law specifies stoning for false worship. Theonomists can interpret this literally or symbolically. Two and a half pages.

Then comes the rousing finish: *penal law*. Some laws are restitutional. Some are ceremonial. They all point to Christ. What should we do? Nothing much. "But it is wiser not to impose our classification at all, lest we compress the richness of the passage or prejudice the limits of its implications. Instead we should patiently try to understand the function of the particular law in its context and on this basis discern how it applies – perhaps in a variety of respects – in the New Testament era."⁴⁴ Perhaps we could call this approach "judicial multi-perspectivalism."

The problem here is the civil judge's inevitable question to the jury: "Guilty or innocent?" To which the jury is no doubt supposed to reply, seminarian-like: "That all depends, your honor." Poythress' version of judicial theology is essentially the theology of the hung jury.

Up a Lazy River Without a Paddle

He ends his essay with a plea to hard work. No more laziness, theonomists! No more laziness, intrusionists! "We will have to do our homework to understand the whole Bible in depth." Some theonomists and intrusionists have just not done their homework. "Some theonomists' simple arguments" –

43. Poythress, "Effects of Interpretive Frameworks on the Application of Old Testament Law," *ibid.*, p. 117.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

notice that familiar word, *simple* – “to the effect that Old Testament law is confirmed in the New Testament and therefore must be kept now in a literal and straightforward way are not adequate. Some intrusionists’ simple arguments to the effect that many laws are not found outside of the Mosaic era and therefore may safely *not* be kept are equally inadequate.” No names are mentioned. No wonder. Now, here is the capper, the absolute crushing climax:

Both of these routes are the lazy way out in the sense that they do not come to grips with the full richness of Old Testament revelation. We have to work to understand what God is saying.

...⁴⁵

Funny thing: when I sent Dr. Poythress my manuscript for *Tools of Dominion* in 1988, he wrote back to tell me how surprised he was to learn that I was working on the case laws of Exodus. And what, pray tell, did he think would follow my two volumes on Exodus, with volume two ending with Exodus 20? (Add to this an appendix to *Tools* that reached 700 pages of text: *Political Polytheism*.)

He admits that “The best representatives of both theonomy and intrusion are of course not so simplistic. But I think that even they may be able to learn by some more sensitive listening to the other side.”⁴⁶ First, I feel compelled to ask Dr. Poythress: When is it time to stop “listening sensitively” and start preaching decisively? When do the endless qualifications cease? Second, I have yet to see a single piece of exegesis of any biblical law by any intrusionist that is said to be applicable to the New Covenant era. We have waited patiently for twenty-eight years.⁴⁷ How long do we have to wait? All I see are defenses of political pluralism without any exegesis whatsoever. Where

45. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

46. *Idem*.

47. Kline’s *Treaty of the Great King* appeared in 1963.

are the intrusionists' exegetical goods? All I have seen so far from intrusionists is a systematic rejection of God's law.

Panglossianism is not the solution. The solution is to see what Westminster has done in the case of Bahnsen and all other theonomists. Panglossianism has not governed the hiring practices of the Clowney and post-Clowney era of Westminster Seminary. Don't take my word for it; ask Norman Shepherd.

Dan G. McCartney

Dr. McCartney, one of the Gordon-Conwell crew, fails to cite a single work by any theonomist in his article. In fact, he cites only two books, both showing that the term *prophet* applies to the whole of the Old Testament. Wow!

He sees the issue: Old Testament law and its specified penal sanctions.⁴⁸ He replies in an entire section that "Law Is Christological and Covenantal." Very good. Unfortunately, he fails to define "covenantal" – a traditional game of covenant theologians that stretches back about 400 years. Instead, he shifts ground and says that the law is Christocentric. The Old Covenant's law was not made for the nations around Israel, he says.⁴⁹ This means that he needs to refute Bahnsen. (It also means that he needs to refute Jonah.) He does not even mention Bahnsen. This is *neutral scholarship*, apparently, which means *never having to refer to the specific arguments of your targeted victims*. To refer to them by name would, no doubt, be in poor taste. Worse; one's students might actually discover where the victims' arguments are developed in depth, and thereby reject one's own unsubstantiated assertions.

He takes a unique – and necessary – approach. He systematically ignores the theonomists' case for the civil use of the Old Testament laws. He includes a section, "Historical or Covenan-

48. McCartney, "The New Testament Use of the Pentateuch: Implications for the Theonomic Movement," *ibid.*, p. 129.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

tal Use of the Pentateuch." He neglects to mention the civil covenant anywhere in the seven-page section – a not-so-odd oversight. Then he offers us "Ecclesiastical Use of the Pentateuch": three pages. Then we get "Ethical Use of the Pentateuch." We are getting warmer. This could include civil law. But, of course, it doesn't. In none of Jesus' five references to the Pentateuch, he says, does "the question of sanction or appropriate punishment arise, and in no instance does the issue of state involvement or enforcement appear." He pulls no punches; he italicizes the following: ". . . *Jesus does not seem to be concerned with the civil application or civil enforcement of the Mosaic legislation.*"⁵⁰ In short, he says, "Where legal questions arise, he is concerned with the law's internal application, not its external enforcement."⁵¹ Conclusion: no biblical civil penal sanctions are valid today. This is Westminster's confession.

Internalization

I appreciate his forthrightness; I wish that the other hostile contributors had been equally forthright. Let us examine his strategy. First, he ignores Bahnsen's fundamental claim: that a case law that is not revoked by the New Testament is still binding. He does not so much as mention this thesis. He assumes the opposite: if it is not re-invoked, it is no longer binding. I refer to this as the *bestiality hermeneutic*: Jesus did not condemn bestiality, nor did He call for the execution of the human and the beast, as the Old Covenant did, so we are today left free to decide whether or not to pass laws against it.⁵² And what about marrying your sister? (When James Jordan asked this question in class at Reformed Theological Seminary, the anti-theonomic professor obliged him: this is no longer a *biblical*

50. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

52. Gary North, *75 Bible Questions Your Instructors Pray You Won't Ask* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1984] 1988), Question 26.

legal issue, he said. Then Jordan wimped out, as he later admitted. "I should have asked him, 'How about marrying your widowed mother?' ")

Second, he has relegated politics to the realm outside the bounds of biblical ethics. *If* the civil covenant is *not* in fact a covenant, and if biblical ethics *is* part of the New Testament (his argument), then civil government is beyond biblical law and its sanctions. This is in fact the position of Westminster's faculty. *This is Westminster's confession.* It internalizes God's law:

In summary, the most basic use of the Pentateuch in the New Testament is to establish the covenantal nature of the gospel. Since the law is covenantal, it is the inward obedience of the heart stemming from the relationship to God that determines the New Testament's positive use of the law. The ecclesiastical and ethical applications of the law to the church all flow from this covenantal basis, inasmuch as the only contact between the Gentile church and the law of Moses is through Christ, the covenant mediator.⁵³

The law of the covenant is said to be internal. There is a huge problem lurking around in these shadows: *his argument undermines the idea of the family as a covenantal institution.* He does not say this explicitly, but his silence testifies to it. Only the Church is a covenantal institution, he implies. Yet this radical departure from the concept of the biblical covenant needs to be proven, not just asserted (civil covenant) and ignored (family covenant). He writes, "Not once in the New Testament is the civil aspect of the Old Testament law applied to the civil authority as an ideal."⁵⁴ If this were not the case, then political liberalism would be anti-Christian. Let it not be! Better to remove all of God's civil sanctions from civil law, even though in doing so, we bring God's sanctions down on us. (If anyone

53. McCartney, p. 144.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

asks me, "Are you suggesting that AIDS is God's sanction against society for refusing to enforce God's civil laws against homosexuality?" I reply, "If it isn't, it is the best imitation since syphilis!") The Christian antinomians who take this position – that the State is not a covenantal institution under God's covenantal laws and sanctions – must also argue, as Kline does, that God no longer brings His predictable corporate sanctions in New Covenant history.⁵⁵

McCartney is a pietist, pure and simple. He insists on the internalization of kingdom law and kingdom sanctions in New Covenant history. The case laws are out!

Therefore, the New Testament's approach to the Old Testament is not an attempt to readapt or contemporize case law, in the way the Rabbis did. The law, or rather the Old Testament as an entirety, is focused on Christ, and *through him* it becomes applicable to believers. Thus case law is not *directly* applicable, even to believers; it is applicable only as a working out of God's moral principles, an expression of God's character revealed in Christ.⁵⁶

Sanctions Removed

The Church is the only institution in which God's sanctions still apply, he says, and there is only one final sanction: excommunication. "As we have noted, the New Testament gives no indication of the law's sanctions as applicable to any except Christ and, through him, his people. . . . There may indeed be punishment for people *within the church* (2Co 10:6), but this does not involve civil authority or those outside the church (1Co 5:12), and its only form is various degrees of removal from fellowship (being 'cut off' from the people)."⁵⁷

55. See above, Chapter 6.

56. McCartney, p. 146.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

In short, as far as unmarried, non-Church members are concerned, it's "Grab your animal partners, boys; we're under grace, not law!" (From this point on, whenever I think of the name, "Dan G. McCartney," it will take an act of will on my part not to visualize a group scene best left undescribed. But every participant is smiling.)

What this man and millions more just like him cannot seem to grasp is this fundamental judicial principle: *without negative sanctions, there is no law*. That is what hell is all about. It is not surprising that modern evangelical scholars, adamant in their rejection of God's law and sanctions, are becoming increasingly unwilling to affirm the existence of hell.⁵⁸

The issue is sanctions. Well over four centuries after Luther raised the issue with respect to the sacraments and the indulgences, it is still the same issue. Until Christians stop thinking of the Old Testament as barbaric, sanctions will remain an unresolved issue.

Moises Silva

Dr. Silva, unlike several of his colleagues, uses footnotes: long, block footnotes. Pages of footnotes. There is one brief reference to a theonomist.⁵⁹ This is reasonable, however; nowhere in his article does he challenge a single theonomic idea. Instead, he targets Meredith G. Kline. Silva's is by far my favorite article in the book.

The article considers Galatians 3:21: "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should

58. I refer here to the May, 1989, meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals, at which 385 scholars attended. There was a debate over "annihilationism" or "conditionalism," the Seventh Day Adventist doctrine. J. I. Packer argued in favor of the doctrine of hell, but when the vote came, his side lost. *World* (June 3, 1989), p. 9.

59. Moises Silva, "Is the Law Against the Promises? The Significance of Galatians 3:21 for Covenant Continuity," *Theonomy*, p. 154n. He cites Bahnsen.

have been by the law." He spends two pages to prove to us that this verse means that the law cannot impart life. No problem here for theonomists.

The he cites Galatians 3:18: "For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." Silva argues that verse 21 is an extension of verse 18. No problem here for theonomists, but it is a big problem for intrusionists! Citing Kline, Silva writes, "it appears that we cannot really appeal to verse 18 in support of the contention that Paul sees a 'radical opposition of the law covenant of Sinai to the principle of inheritance by promise.'⁶⁰ In fact, it can plausibly be argued that the very burden of the passage is to deny any such opposition."⁶¹ Silva is correct: ". . . the antithesis is not between law and promise merely, but rather between inheritance-by-law and inheritance-by-promise. . . ."⁶² It is not the law that Paul opposes but rather "the law as life-giving source. . . ."⁶³

Silva goes on to discuss some technical problems associated with Galatians 3:12: "And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them." He states emphatically that "Galatians 3 – that is, the Pauline passage that most directly addresses the question of covenant continuity – gives no support to recent attempts among Reformed scholars to redefine the relationship between the old and new covenants."⁶⁴

Why this article appears in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is beyond me. But I would like to see it included in any forthcoming Westminster symposium called *Intrusionism: A Reformed Critique*.

60. Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, p. 23.

61. Silva, p. 160.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

63. *Idem.*

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-67.

Dennis E. Johnson

First, I hate even to refer to Dr. Johnson's essay. It is the target of one of the most careful, scholarly, mild-mannered, and intellectually devastating critiques that I have ever read. What Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., does to Dennis Johnson is so complete that Greg Bahnsen's brief essay targeting Johnson is a piddling firecracker compared to a Tomahawk cruise missile. Second, it still amazes me that Dr. Johnson wrote an essay in the very first issue of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*. Until just before he was hired by Westminster, he was known as a theonomist. He changed his views, he later told Greg Bahnsen, regarding the role of Old Covenant pagan kings. He needed to write about this topic. Nebuchadnezzar did (Dan. 4).

Civil Sanctions and Christian Responsibility

I regard Johnson's essay as the most important in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, not for the caliber of his arguments but for the nature of his conclusions. It has long been my contention that the Christian opponents of theonomy have a hidden agenda. This agenda is the escape from any personal responsibility for the pursuit of national covenantal renewal. They recognize the inescapable connection between the civil sanctions of the Old Testament and the personal responsibility of enforcing them. They have self-consciously denied the legitimacy of these sanctions. This is the underlying theological agenda of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*.

He begins with Westminster's familiar *yes* to the comprehensive lordship of Christ. "Christians are bound to acknowledge the lordship of King Jesus in the political arena as in all other dimensions of life."⁶⁵ In other words, "Say *yes* to Christianity's relevance!" Then comes the perennial question from the theon-

65. Dennis E. Johnson, "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Mosaic Penal Sanctions," *ibid.* p. 172.

omists: *How?* From that point on, it is all downhill. The remainder of the essay is an extended *no* to biblical law.

Let us review the Old Testament's capital sanctions. First, Old Covenant law required the witnesses to take the lead in executing the convicted criminal (Deut. 17:7). Second, death by stoning was mandatory in most capital crimes. All the men of the local community were to participate (Deut. 21:21). God has not changed these laws. Of all the applications of biblical law that I have proposed, none has received the ridicule and outrage that this one has, yet the case law texts are quite clear.⁶⁶ Why such resistance? The critics cannot bring themselves to believe that a Christian would take these specified requirements seriously. Even those Christians who still favor capital punishment want it done behind sealed walls by a paid executioner. They do not want to participate personally in such an act of lawful public vengeance. In short, *they do not want to become fully responsible biblical witnesses*. This was Adam's sin, too.⁶⁷

Basically, Christians really do believe that the God of the Old Testament was – and I stress *was* – a barbarian. They would deny this verbally, if questioned; nevertheless, they accept it psychologically. Marcion was a second-century heretic who said that the fierce God of the Old Testament was different from the benign God of the New Testament. And when it comes to a choice between Marcion's theory of the Bible's two gods – Old Testament vs. New Testament – and theonomy's assertion of a continuity between Old Covenant civil sanctions and New Covenant civil sanctions, they choose *operational Marcionism* every time.⁶⁸ They see stoning as a mark of this barbarism. They really will not use the word *torture* when describing

66. Gary North, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986), pp. 122-25.

67. Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (2nd ed; Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), Appendix E: "Witnesses and Judges."

68. See my section on "The Continuing Heresy of Dualism" in the Epilogue, "What Are Biblical Blueprints?", in all ten volumes of the Biblical Blueprint Series.

hell, yet it is obvious that hell and the lake of fire are instruments of God's cosmic torture. Christians cannot stomach a God who imposes serious sanctions, and they reject the very suggestion that in a holy commonwealth, they would be responsible personally for imposing God's earthly sanctions. Thus, they have rejected theonomy. They would rather live under any version of humanism and demonism than be personally responsible for stoning a convicted criminal. God has given them their desire.⁶⁹

Johnson's essay is typical of the worldview of modern pietism, both Reformed and Arminian. It is a theological defense of Christianity without legitimate sanctions outside the local church cloister. The only ultimate biblical negative sanction in New Covenant history is excommunication. *This lets Christians off the cultural hook.* They know that covenant-breakers care nothing about excommunication. Covenant-breakers do not perceive excommunication as a personal threat, assuming they know what it is, which they don't. (How many Christians are aware that *excommunicate* is related grammatically to the word *communion*, as in holy communion? Not many.) Therefore, covenant-keepers are seemingly let off the hook for the evils of covenant-breaking society. Christianity's triumphs are confined to the cloister for the sake of reduced cultural responsibility.

Kingdom Without Sanctions

Theologically, this is a concept of God's kingdom without sanctions. God is seen as imposing His predictable sanctions only after death. For pietists, Jesus is King of dead Kings and Lord of dead lords. God's earthly sanctions are random, Kline and Muether tell us. The sanctions might as well be Satan's. (With such a view of historic sanctions, they *are* Satan's: covenantally perverse, a reversal of Deuteronomy 28.)⁷⁰ God still

69. And has sent leanness into their seminaries.

70. See Chapter 6, above.

has kingdom agents in history, but their New Testament jurisdiction is supposedly confined inside the four walls of the institutional Church – and only the orthodox churches at that. In short, there can be no valid concept of Christendom. Christendom was a heresy of the Middle Ages, and, sad to say, of Calvin and the pre-1660 Puritans. But we have been freed from all that by the 1788 revision of the Westminster Confession. “Free at last, free at last; Lord God half-mighty, we’re free at last!” Free to serve as civil slaves of Satan’s agents in history.

No one has articulated the theology of this new freedom better in such a short space than Dennis Johnson. The penal sanctions of the Old Covenant were legitimate, but only because the people of Israel were formally covenanted to God as a nation. “Certain penal sanctions belong to categories of laws that set Israel apart from all the noncovenantal nations as a holy people, with God’s temple in their midst. . . . Since the coming of Christ, God’s covenant people are no longer a single nation that uses physical force and penalties as means to maintain the community’s purity and integrity.”⁷¹ How does he make such a conclusion? By redefining terms and by obscuring these new definitions. “Purity” and “integrity” are implicitly defined as *exclusively personal*; the “community” is defined as *exclusively ecclesiastical*. This is what his essay is designed to do: redefine the words without explicitly admitting it.

“We’re Under Grace, Not Angels!”

He offers the most bizarre argument to defend this thesis that I have yet encountered. He offers others, but this deserves special attention. He says that Old Covenant civil law was mediated by angels; when Jesus removed the angels as mediators, He removed Old Covenant civil law. Trust me; he really says

71. Johnson, p. 176.

this. No, you're right; you should never trust a summary of anything this bizarre. I need to prove it.

Jesus is superior to the angels, the heavenly mediators of the law (Heb. 1:1-2:18). The central passage is Psalm 8:5-7, which indicates that humanity's subordination to the angels (through the angelically mediated law of Moses) was only temporary, now that Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor.⁷²

Questions: If the heavenly angels mediated Old Covenant law to national Israel, then which angels mediated the "law of nations" to all the other nations? And more to the point, now that Jesus has removed the penal sanctions of Old Covenant law because He has removed His heavenly angels, which angels now remain as civil mediators in history?⁷³ Using which civil laws? We Christians are now under these non-biblical laws in civil affairs. Why did Jesus, as Lord of lords, transfer such civil authority to fallen angels in New Covenant history? And if He did not transfer such sovereignty to them, then why did He adopt their standards of civil law when He replaced them? But Johnson prudently avoids this line of reasoning, for which we can hardly blame him, given the magnitude of his thesis and the paucity of its argumentation.

He also argues that the civil penal sanctions were closely – i.e., indissolubly – related to the Old Covenant priesthood and sanctuary.⁷⁴ “. . . the Mosaic penal sanctions belonged in the context of the discipline and purity of the covenant community. They pointed toward the exclusion of apostates, whose lives showed contempt for the Lord of the covenant, from the com-

72. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

73. Or is Dr. Johnson implicitly denying the existence of demonic influences in post-A.D. 70 history? If so, he has a *really* tough thesis to defend. See Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986).

74. Johnson, pp. 185-86.

munity of the people of God.”⁷⁵ (Then what did economic restitution point to?) But now this community is defined strictly as the Church. “The concern of Hebrews is with an offense that can be committed only by a member of the covenant. . . . Under the new covenant the purity of the covenant community is maintained not by physical sanctions but by spiritual discipline: excommunication, not execution. . . .”⁷⁶

Not to put things too graphically, but what if the State wants to put ritual prostitutes at the foot of our communion tables every Sunday morning? Preposterous? Maybe, although I seem to remember something about Antiochus’ sacrificing pigs in the temple some years back (I Macc. 1:47). What about the purity of the community then? If we define the community as members of the institutional Church, then what protects the purity of whatever goes on inside its four walls?

If Johnson should suggest that we Christians could then appeal to “natural law’s” protection of private property – enforced under which angels’ mediation? – then I have another question: What if the civil government allows a nationally franchised, for-profit, ritual prostitution center across the street from the local church? What then? Silence? Silence out of respect for the Epistle to the Hebrews?

All right, I am using hyperbole. I will stop (for a moment or two). Analogous question: What if the government allows a nationally franchised, for-profit abortion clinic across the street from the local church? Now I am being realistic. No exaggeration here, except possibly for zoning law considerations. What then? Silence? Silence out of respect for the Epistle to the Hebrews?

It is time to end the silence at Westminster. But judicial agnosticism leads directly to silence on such controversial issues as these. It leads to a muddled confession.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

Who Gets the Children?

Johnson for some reason skips over the non-capital penal sanctions. In short, he ignores the Old Testament's fundamental principle of civil justice: *victim's rights*.⁷⁷ Let me pose this all-too-familiar problem. A Christian couple splits up. Who should get legal custody of the children? In Victorian England, the husband automatically did. The authorities assumed that the wife would then be less likely to leave, and so would the husband.⁷⁸ Wives always became the victims of adulterous husbands. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, mothers in the United States are almost automatically awarded custody of children under age 14. The wife leaves, taking the children, or the husband leaves, leaving the children. This has created what Nicholas Davidson has called America's greatest social catastrophe: "Life Without Father."⁷⁹

What does the Bible teach? The victimized spouse should get custody of the children permanently, plus all the assets owned by the couple as a legal unit.⁸⁰ This is *divorce by execution*, either physical execution or covenantal separation (where the State refuses to execute adulterers or the victim refuses to demand the death penalty).

But Johnson denies that biblical civil sanctions apply in New Testament times. So, let us say that the wife leaves. If she is the victim, she is not awarded the total assets of the couple. She is almost immediately impoverished by the divorce, the statistics tell us: by about 70% of her total wealth in the first year.⁸¹

77. North, *Victim's Rights*, *op. cit.*

78. William Tucker, "Victorian Savvy," *New York Times* (June 26, 1983).

79. Nicholas Davidson, "Life Without Father: America's Greatest Social Catastrophe," *Policy Review* (Winter 1990). *Policy Review* is published by the Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C.

80. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pp. 300-8.

81. Leonore J. Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution: The Unexpected Social and Economic Consequences for Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1985), p. xii; cited by George Grant, *The Dispossessed: Homelessness in America* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), p. 79.

This is an economic disaster for a victimized wife. If she is guilty of leaving without a valid biblical reason, she probably keeps the children anyway, which is covenantally disastrous for the children. Johnson may choose to argue that the guilty party will surely be excommunicated. As far as the children are concerned, so what?

The point is, the State must adopt some standard of guilty and innocent. It must enforce some system of sanctions. The question is: Which standard? What sanctions? Johnson and his colleagues are remarkably silent about this obvious application of the principle of theonomy. All the nouthetic counselling⁸² in the world will not overcome one basic problem: *if the State's laws of divorce are not biblical, then they are anti-biblical*. This is Van Til's legacy: *there is no neutrality*. But the present faculty of Westminster refuses to adopt this legacy as its own. Better to adopt pluralism for civil law and pietism (and suffering) for the Christian heart. In short, they have adopted this principle of civil justice: *covenant-breaker's rights*.

Pietism Revisited

Johnson proclaims the traditional pietist's concept of purity: *the personal serenity of one who has attained moral purity in the midst of a cultural sewer*. This is the "sewer serenity" doctrine of progressive personal sanctification according to Ed Norton (1950's) and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (1990's). It sure sounds like Eastern mysticism to me. But, then again, pietism always has been innately mystical.

The pietist does not usually want to sound like a cultural retreatist. So he adopts the language of a higher calling, a higher self-discipline. He says things like this: "The punishments of the Mosaic Law belong clearly to the old order, and thus they point ahead to the higher privilege and the resultant

82. See above, p. 37.

higher accountability of the new covenant order established in Jesus.”⁸³ Let me get this straight: by denying any responsibility on the part of Christians for pursuing biblical standards in civil government, we elevate their calling. By eliminating Christians’ judicial accountability in history, we raise their accountability. By drastically restricting the arena of our covenantal conflict with covenant-breakers, we become more accountable to Jesus. If this sounds to you like the old liberal line about the promised spiritual uplift attained from a debunking of the veracity of the Bible – calling its stories “myths,” and then proclaiming myth as “a higher mode of understanding” – then you’re with me. This is exactly what Johnson’s line sounds like.

In short, *King of dead kings and Lord of dead lords*.

“It is clear,” he writes, “that the author to the Hebrews is not answering the question of how to set up a Christian political system, which interests many North American Christians today. His readers were in no position to need or to implement whatever counsel he might have offered on such a topic.”⁸⁴ Now then, Mr. Reader, do *you* ever read the Epistle to the Hebrews? You do? Well then, I guess you must conclude one of two things: (1) you had better forget about such earthly political concerns, or (2) the epistle’s author never intended for you to read it. It is quite clear that Johnson wants you to take the first option. After all, *he* has. So have most of his colleagues at Westminster (and on every other seminary campus). *They hate the idea of biblical civil sanctions, and they hate its corollary: Christendom. Why? Because they hate responsibility outside the cloister.*

Richard B. Gaffin

I have said my piece in Chapter 7. I will say this for Gaffin: he tried to defend Shepherd. After Gaffin retires (or Westmin-

83. Johnson, p. 190.

84. *Idem*.

ster East goes bankrupt), perhaps he will write a book about the whole ugly affair. If I am still around, I will publish it.

William S. Barker

Now we get to the practical part of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, where the exegetical rubber hits the political road. We come at last to pluralism. Barker asks the question: "Is pluralism biblical?"⁸⁵ Since this issue has not been dealt with exegetically since Roger Williams first propounded it – Williams appealed exclusively to natural law – I had hoped for something more to the point than three pages devoted to the *coin* in Jesus' "render unto Caesar" confrontation.⁸⁶

But before Barker gets to the coin incident, he goes right to the appropriate historical source for his theology, the 1789 statement of the Presbyterian Church of America, "Preliminary Principles." This was written the year after that Church had rewritten the original Westminster Confession of Faith. That 1788 ecclesiastical assembly did not justify its actions exegetically. The next year, it passed the "Preliminary Principles." It also sent a letter of congratulations to President Washington. Echoing Washington's Masonic rhetoric on the close tie between religion in general (but not Christianity specifically) and public virtue, the address announced: "Public virtue is the most certain means of public felicity, and religion is the surest basis of virtue. We therefore esteem it a peculiar happiness to behold in our Chief Magistrate a steady, uniform, avowed friend of the Christian religion, and who on the most public and solemn occasions devoutly acknowledges the government of Divine Providence." The address then identified the role of the Presbyterian Church in the American political religion: "We shall consider ourselves as doing an acceptable service to God in our profession when we contribute to render men sober,

85. Barker, "Theonomy, Pluralism, and the Bible," *ibid.*, p. 228.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-36.

honest, and industrious citizens, and the obedient subjects of a lawful government."⁸⁷ *Here is common-ground religion with a vengeance*: the Church of Jesus Christ is reduced to the equivalent of a cheering section at a football game in which it may not morally or legally compete. It is clear why Barker appeals to the 1789 position paper of the Presbyterian Church rather than to the declarations of the Westminster Assembly.

Barker gives as an example of the illegitimacy of the State's interference with religion "the requirement of prayer or acts of worship in the public schools."⁸⁸ Fine and dandy. We theonomists agree. So did Machen. The two fundamental educational questions that the theonomist raises are these: (1) By what *biblical* standard can anyone defend the legitimacy of State-funded, State-controlled education? (2) What has happened to the educational responsibilities of the family?⁸⁹ These questions do not even occur to Dr. Barker, or if they do, he suppresses them. Rushdoony asked them as long ago as 1961 in his book, *Intellectual Schizophrenia*. He pursued the theme in his *Messianic Character of American Education* (1963). But there are no references to Rushdoony in Barker's chapter.

Barker says that the State should not promote a specific religion, namely, Christianity.⁹⁰ We theonomists agree.⁹¹ We maintain that civil law is used to suppress evil public acts, not promote the general welfare, including the general religious welfare. The State is to bring God's specified negative sanctions. But this is not the focus of Barker's essay. He wants the State to promote the general welfare. He just does not want it to promote Christianity.

87. Cited by James Harris Patton, *A Popular History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: Mighill, 1988), p. 209.

88. Barker, p. 239.

89. Robert L. Thoburn, *The Children Trap: The Biblical Blueprint for Education* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986). Thoburn holds the Th.M. from Westminster.

90. Barker, p. 232.

91. See Bahnsen's essay in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*.

The Stranger in the Land

The judicial question I raised in *Political Polytheism* is this: Is the non-Christian in a Christian nation to be a citizen or a stranger in the land? This assumes that the civil government is a covenantal organization that is lawfully established by a self-maledictory oath under the God of the Bible. Put another way, is it biblically legitimate for Christians to do what the state of Israel has done and what Islamic nations have done: covenant nationally with an identified god? If so, then should the non-Christian be given the right to exercise political sanctions against Christians? Should he have the right to vote?

The stranger in ancient Israel did not serve as a judge, although he received all the benefits of living in the land. The political question is this: By what *biblical* standard is the pagan to be granted the right to bring political sanctions against God's people? We recognize that unbelievers are not to vote in Church elections. Why should they to be allowed to vote in civil elections in a covenanted Christian nation? Which judicial standards will they impose? By what *other* standard than the Bible? But Barker does not refer to *Political Polytheism*. He does not address any of these questions. He has made his stand: no covenanted nations and no restriction of the franchise. This is political pluralism, and he insists that it is biblical.

Natural Law

Then whose law should reign in civil government? Not God's Bible-revealed law. We are back to natural law theory, just where it all began under Roger Williams in the 1640's. But no one wants to say this openly, since they all suspect the truth: *there is no such thing as neutral natural law*. So they do not tell us what law-order they want. It is an open question. It is an open question that they do not intend to close. *They remain judicially agnostic*. They say *yes* to Van Til, and then say *no* to the incapable political implications of his position. Here is my case

against Westminster: proclaiming Van Til, they reject Van Til. So did Van Til, but he wisely avoided discussing politics. His successors at Westminster do not. None is more forthright in his rejection than Barker. For this forthrightness he should be praised. He makes his position clear:

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-obsured edition of the same law of God" "suppressed in unrighteousness by the sinner"⁹² is that to which we must appeal – on the basis of our own knowledge of special revelation and with the intent of bringing more of the unbelieving population to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the way Paul operated in the Roman Empire and the way any Christian must operate in a missionary situation.⁹³

Is this how Paul used natural revelation? Not at Mars hill! He used some references in Greek poetry to tell them that everything they had learned about God from natural revelation was wrong. God would put up with their nonsense no longer. Then he warned them of the coming judgment:

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter (Acts 17:29-32).

92. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pp. 399-400.

93. Barker, p. 240.

God would no longer wink at such ignorance, Paul announced. But Barker wants to make such cursed ignorance the basis of our appeal to the natural man until such time as we Christians are a majority, i.e., in a "non-missionary" situation. Therefore, natural law is *that to which we must appeal*. There it is, in black and white. This is Westminster's confession, in the words of the book's co-editor.

Barker states: "This is the way Paul operated in the Roman Empire and the way any Christian must operate in a minority situation." Let us explore this "minority situation" idea. Question: To what should Christians appeal when we are no longer a minority? This distinctly postmillennial question is the one that Barker and his pluralist and amillennialist colleagues steadfastly refuse to answer in print. If he says "theonomy," then he has given up his pluralist theology. Christian pluralism then loses its status as a serious political philosophy; it becomes merely a tactic, a pragmatic con job to fool the covenant-breakers until such time as we Christians get the votes. On the other hand, if he says "natural law," then he is trapped: his appeal to our present minority status as the basis of our need to appeal to natural law is revealed as a rhetorical con job to fool the followers of Van Til. So, he is trying to fool either the pagans or the Vantilians. I think it is the latter.

My assessment of his real judicial commitment is this: he has no intention of ever appealing to theonomy; he is a defender of natural law theory. With respect to our *present* minority status and our supposed need to appeal to natural law when trying to persuade pagans, it is just another case of *sic et non*. Our minority status is supposedly permanent, so natural law is to be our permanent guide.

Why go on with this? But I will. We need specific, detailed answers. Whose version of natural law? Not in the U.S. Constitution, surely, which places all judicial sovereignty in "We, the People," but none in a higher law. Where have these principles been stated and defended? What societies have adopted this

natural law code? Have they prospered? Which Bible verses allow us to transfer such judicial sovereignty to a common-ground system of jurisprudence?

We get no answers. Year after year, decade after decade, century after century, we get no answers from the Christian defenders of natural law theory. We just get accusations that those who object are a bunch of theocrats. (And we all know what Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt thought of theocrats!)

Barker tells us that he relies on the writings of Paul Woolley and Edmund P. Clowney – an honest admission.⁹⁴ This came as no surprise to me.

John R. Muether

I reserve my comments for Chapter 10. I will only note here that he ends his essay with an appeal to the political views of Edmund P. Clowney.⁹⁵ This was predictable, since Muether has a degree from Gordon College (“Gordon-Conwell Lite”).

Timothy J. Keller

See Chapter 10. He, too, relies on the insights of Edmund Clowney.⁹⁶ Keller has a degree from Gordon-Conwell.

D. Clair Davis

At least Dr. Davis is not from Gordon-Conwell. He is from Wheaton College (as both student and professor). Dr. Davis writes “A Challenge to Theonomy.” He praises theonomists for providing specific details about how the Bible can be applied to modern society. He alone in the book mentions *Roe v. Wade*, and he identifies it as paganism in action.⁹⁷ He says that

94. *Ibid.*, p. 239n.

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 283n.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

"Christians have had to rethink what they mean by tolerance."⁹⁸ I am not sure what Christians he has in mind. If we should not tolerate abortion, then on what judicial basis should we oppose it? Biblical law or natural law?

He asks. "Is it impossible to harmonize the theonomic vision of a biblical society and the New Testament picture of a persecuted church? Not necessarily."⁹⁹ This is the resolution of *sic et non*: the Great Maybe.

He says we must exercise creedal humility.¹⁰⁰ (Did the original Westminster divines exercise creedal humility?) He warns that there will be ecclesiastical divisions, as there have been in the past, if any group presses too hard. (Didn't the Westminster divines understand this?) In short, so what?

He raises some major questions: "What actions should evangelical groups today take regarding civil disobedience over abortion (e.g., Operation Rescue)? Should churches discipline those who encourage disobedience of the state's trespass laws? Should they discipline those who refuse to take part in significant action designed to uphold God's law? If the answer to one of those questions is yes, then the evangelical church will be just as divided as it was by abolition and the Civil War."¹⁰¹ If only this were the case! The evangelical church does not care. A church that does not care does not raise questions like these. It defers consideration of questions like these. It does what President James Buchanan did about slavery and the pressures for secession, 1857-61: nothing. The Church just wants to be left alone in its slumber. In this sense, it is the seminary writ large. But at least Davis asks some good questions. He just never offers any answers them. This is the dilemma of judicial agnosticism: it provides no answers.

98. *Idem*.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 392-95.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

Division in the Ranks

Davis understands that theonomy is a divisive issue. If we theonomists continue to argue that ours is the only correct view, it will be impossible for others in the creedal churches to work with us.¹⁰² Why? It all depends on how we press our case. If we teach, convert the best and the brightest to our position, and wait for God's covenantal sanctions to transform people's thinking, what is wrong with this? We have time. We are postmillennialists. We can afford to wait. A few victories, and pessimillennialists will switch. Pessimillennialism exists primarily to justify failure; when Christianity starts to win, pessimillennialism will be abandoned by younger activists. This is how paradigm shifts work. Theonomists can bide their time.

He observes: "Theonomists appear to be committed to 'conservative' politics. If that is so, is theonomy really the political position supported by the Bible?"¹⁰³ He does not answer his question, of course. If he were to say *yes*, he would have to account for the long presence of his mentor, Paul Woolley, on the faculty. If he said *no*, he would alienate a lot of donors, since few church members in the pews support the political ideas of Paul Woolley. So he prudently refuses to answer. We have seen this strategy before:

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a

102. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 396.

prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things (Matt. 21:23-27).

Davis goes on and on, asking good questions and offering no answers. The reader can read all this for himself. His is an exercise in constructive politeness. It is the very incarnation of judicial agnosticism. I appreciate his politeness, I suppose, but it really does not get us anywhere. There is one question – *the* question – that he refuses to ask: “Isn’t it time for Westminster to offer Bahnsen a job, so as to let him get our students to start thinking about these real-world questions?” That question he does not dare to ask. His colleagues are afraid of real-world questions and answers. Westminster has been avoiding them since the death of Machen in 1937. And so, all his questions are just a form of academic shadow boxing. They never get us to the point of taking action. Academic questions seldom do. That is why they get asked.

Conclusion

I still have six articles to go: three historical (Chapter 9) and three abominable (Chapter 10). But if you have followed me so far, you see my line of reasoning. Theonomy’s critics do not tell us the answer to the crucial judicial question: “If not biblical law, then what?”

I think it is legitimate to ask: Why did it take them five years to produce this molehill? And why did they begin the project twelve years after Bahnsen was granted his Th.M?

ABUSING THE PAST

The appeal to the 'ancestral constitution' satisfies the canon that it must 'seem rational and persuasive', that both its proponents and those they persuaded could, if pressed, defend themselves 'by some rules of logic and evidence that they would themselves accept'. It is therefore a legitimate historical exercise to examine the argument seriously. . . .

M. I. Finley (1975)¹

We come now to the topic in which I can claim professional certification: history. The last two decades of my life have been spent rather like the character described in a Stephen Leacock story: "He leaped onto his horse and rode off in all directions." Multi-directionalism is the Christian Reconstructionists' version of Vern Poythress' multi-perspectivalism. Such furious omnidirectional riding is the burden of Christian Reconstructionists. Everything needs reconstructing, so everything becomes a reformer's snare and temptation.

History, however, is where I know best how the game is played. There are at least a few legitimate reasons for going to graduate school, but the best one is that if you pay careful

1. M. I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 35.

attention, and you do not get taken in, you will learn how professionals in a particular field systematically fool the laity. If the reader ever begins to doubt the reality of this process, he should think back to the scene in the movie, "The Wizard of Oz," where Dorothy's dog Toto pulls aside the curtain, revealing the little man and his machine, and the Wizard's giant floating head commands Dorothy and her friends, "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!"

On the contrary, pay very close attention to the man behind the curtain.

Ancestral Constitutions

Finley speaks of the "ancestral constitution." There are three ancestral constitutions in Anglo-American Presbyterian Calvinism. Only the first two are ever discussed, yet the third one is by far the central one today. The first constitution is the immense body of literature written by John Calvin, but above all, his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. A constitution is always brief, however, and brevity was not Calvin's gift. Thus, his writings have become a gigantic grab-bag for constructing retroactive constitutions. This is why so many groups have been able plausibly to appeal back to Calvin, even the Barthians. One thing is clear, however: no Calvinist today accepts Calvin's view of the Church-State relationships; most of them – but not the theonomists – side politically with Servetus.² This was not true of the authors of the second constitution.

The second constitution is the Westminster Confession of Faith and its two catechisms (1647), although very little attention is paid to the catechisms, especially the larger one. As far as I know, there is only one detailed commentary on it, Thomas Ridgely's, published in 1731. The only major commentary on the shorter catechism is Samuel Willard's *Compleat Body of Divinity*, published in 1726. Written in the midst of a religion-

2. Theonomists would exclude Servetus from the franchise, not from life.

launched Civil War, the Westminster Confession was self-consciously stripped by its authors of most of Calvinism's political character. Yet the English Civil War was the product of a battle between Calvinism and a strange alliance between Catholicism and Arminianism. Without Calvinism, and particularly without the Scottish Covenanters, it is inconceivable that the war would have occurred, Marxist historians to the contrary notwithstanding. English Calvinism of the seventeenth century could not be contained inside the cloister until after 1660.³

The third constitution is the 1788 revision of the 1647 Confession, and very few Presbyterians can tell you what was changed, when, and especially *why*. They do not know that these changes were first proposed during the same week and in the same city that the Constitutional Convention had assembled. With the exception of the brief account concerning the links between these two events that I wrote in *Political Polytheism*, no recent Calvinist historian has commented on it.⁴ When the eighteenth-century Presbyterians became Whigs Ecclesiastical, the political and judicial character of Presbyterianism changed radically. The Presbyterians became the black-robed anointing army of the social philosophy and politics of the Scottish Enlightenment. The confessional revision of 1788 is the judicial foundation of modern Presbyterianism's political pluralism, yet this is seldom acknowledged publicly, and never discussed with the historical background. In this instance, the past has not merely been abused; it has been self-consciously buried. The fundamental political fact of the 1788 revision is also never discussed: *it represented the triumph of Servetus*. It is politically unitarian. Not so in the seventeenth century.

The editors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* did me a favor when they bunched three essays together in one section, "The-

3. Cloistered Puritanism is the Puritanism of The Banner of Truth Trust. William Gurnall's *Christian in Complete Armour* is the model.

4. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 543-50.

onomy and the Reformed Heritage: Historical Connections." W. Robert Godfrey tells us what Gordon-Conwell Seminary would like us to believe about Calvin. Sinclair B. Ferguson takes us through the Westminster Assembly. Finally, Samuel T. Logan turns the New England Puritans into such flexible fellows that one has difficulty understanding why Roger Williams tramped through the snow in the middle of a Massachusetts winter just to escape from them.

W. Robert Godfrey

I first heard of Dr. Godfrey the day I brought my new wife in 1972 to Westminster Seminary for a three-hour visit. I had not expected that it would take so long. That day, there was a special lecture on campus by (then) Mr. Godfrey (Ph.D., 1974, Stanford University, plus several years at Gordon-Conwell). It was a very special kind of lecture. It was a job audition. He was being considered for a post on the faculty. As I say, I had never heard of Dr. Godfrey. Nevertheless, I told my wife the following (which she still remembers clearly): "You are about to hear the most boring lecture you have ever heard." She answered: "How do you know that?" I replied: "The guy is after a job. He has to 'show his stuff,' which means he has to prove that he is a scholar. This means, above all, that he must avoid getting caught making a mistake. So, what he will do is summarize his doctoral dissertation, since doctoral dissertations are so narrow that if they are selected properly, nobody previously has bothered to write directly on the topic. This is why he will summarize his dissertation. That way, it is unlikely that any professor will catch him in a mistake." I knew what I was talking about; I was then completing my doctoral dissertation.

We went to the lecture. The room was warm. The lecture was incredibly dry. It was, of course, a summary of what later became his doctoral dissertation. Afterwards, my wife said, "I was so embarrassed. I kept dozing off. That was the most boring lecture I've ever heard."

Actually, I found it kind of interesting – dry beyond belief, but technically interesting. I had never imagined that James I was a semi-sympathizer of Calvinism, which is the distinct impression I got from Mr. Godfrey's lecture.⁵ (It was also not the impression I got from Otto Scott's biography of James I, but Scott never went to college, so what does he know?)

I have no idea whether Dr. Godfrey can speak well. Someone told me that he can. But merely being able to speak well has zero bearing on the predictable nature of job-seeking academic performances. The medium shapes the performance. What impressed me at the time, however, was that the James I, whom I had come to hate – a legacy perhaps of my having read the Puritans' opinions of James I and his archbishop, Laud – was presented in a very different light. I marvelled at the ability of Dr. Godfrey to create a kind of professionally retouched portrait.

When I read his chapter on Calvin, I marvelled once again.

My basic answer to Godfrey is Chapter 2, "Calvin's Divided Judicial Legacy." There the reader is directed to citations from Calvin's writings, especially his sermons on Deuteronomy. Let me point out here that *Godfrey does not once refer to the existence of these sermons*. Thus, it is relatively easy for him to make the case that Calvin was not a theonomist. If you deliberately ignore the documentary evidence that supports the view of Calvin as a theonomist, then polemical tract-writing disguised as historical scholarship becomes duck soup. Most readers are none the wiser. Misled, yes, but none the wiser.

Is he unfamiliar with those sermons? Of course not. Even if he has not read them, Jack Sawyer cites them repeatedly in his 1986 Westminster Th.M. thesis, which Godfrey refers to in footnote #2. Did he just forget to mention them? Then he is not taking theonomy seriously, since James Jordan began his project of republishing Calvin's sermons on Deuteronomy in a

5. Greg Bahnsen was also in the audience. He got the same impression.

newsletter, *Calvin Speaks*, published by Geneva Ministries from 1980 to 1984. Sawyer's thesis also refers to *Calvin Speaks*.⁶ Godfrey was remiss in not discussing the sermons at length, since their very existence refutes his thesis of Calvin as a theologian who systematically opposed the Old Testament's civil sanctions. Sometimes Calvin did oppose them, and sometimes he didn't.

Godfrey shows that Calvin believed in a Christian State, in which the magistrate brings sanctions against heresy. Calvin believed in the State's enforcement of all ten commandments.⁷ Already, one thing is sure: Calvin was surely not a 1788 American Revised Westminster Confession man!

Calvin rejected the Old Testament's civil laws as no longer binding on the New Testament civil magistrate, Godfrey says. He is correct. But on what basis could Calvin argue this way? This is the old theonomic question: "If not biblical law, then what?" Godfrey knows full well how Calvin argued, and he cites the *Institutes*: Book IV, Chapter XX, Section 16. This is Calvin's defense of natural law theory. "The law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men. Consequently, the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been prescribed in it. Hence, this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws."⁸

Godfrey makes it plain, at least with respect to Calvin's *Institutes*, that "Calvin uses the law of nature to criticize the law of Moses and declare it morally inferior."⁹ This is why Rushdoony was so explicit in his rejection of Calvin on this point.

6. Jack W. Sawyer, "Moses and the Magistrate: Aspects of Calvin's Political Theory in Contemporary Focus," Westminster Theological Seminary, Th.M. thesis (1986), p. 53n.

7. W. Robert Godfrey, "Calvin and Theonomy," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, pp. 300-3.

8. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 303.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 308.

He correctly identified the source of Calvin's error: his training in classical humanism.¹⁰ *Rushdoony is a loyal follower of Van Til on the question of natural law.* He knew that he had to break publicly with Calvin on the natural law question. Godfrey, in contrast, does not break with Calvin on this point. He is a faithful defender of Westminster's new confession.

What is astounding is that Godfrey says that "Calvin's conception of natural law and civil government is drawn from Scripture (especially Romans 1, 2, and 13) and is used to interpret Scripture."¹¹ Here it is again, the inescapable choice: *Calvin or Van Til.* You cannot have both. And it is clear in this book what Westminster's new confession is: *Calvin, not Van Til.*

Godfrey says that theonomists teach that the State should execute apostates.¹² He offers no proof, and Bahnsen categorically denies this interpretation of theonomy.¹³ (As co-editor, Godfrey would have been wise to pay closer attention to Dennis Johnson's article, which clearly states that theonomists and non-theonomists *agree* that "Under the new covenant the purity of the covenant community is maintained not by physical sanctions but by spiritual discipline: excommunication, not execution. . . .")¹⁴

Let me give another example of the kind of contempt for God's law that is now common at Westminster. Godfrey writes: "Theonomists believe that adulterers should be executed because Moses said so. It is as simple as that."¹⁵ May I ask: What is wrong with obeying what you believe is God's command,

10. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 9.

11. Godfrey, p. 310.

12. *Idem.*

13. See his essay on "Westminster Seminary and Penology" in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, edited by Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

14. Dennis Johnson, "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Mosaic Penal Sanctions," *Theonomy*, p. 189.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

even if you do not understand the reasons why? What kind of arrogant rationalism has now captured Westminster? *We should search for the reasons behind God's laws, not because we require Him to justify Himself when asking our obedience, but in order that we might obey God's commands more thoroughly.* In any case, Godfrey's accusation is misguided. This is the old *theonomists as judicial simpletons* argument that Frame¹⁶ and Muether¹⁷ adopt: our supposedly simplistic appeal to Scripture.

What are the facts? Ray Sutton devotes an entire book to the concept of divorce by covenantal execution, with the capital sanction as the Bible's archetype.¹⁸ Not one author cites Sutton's *Second Chance in Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. (You might conclude from this remarkable absence that today's Reformed churches have no problems with counselling divorced people. "Covenantal divorce? What's that?") In my recent book, *Tools of Dominion*, I devote seven pages to a discussion of the capital penalty for adultery, and why the Mosaic law specified that the victimized spouse was responsible for both prosecuting and setting the penalty.¹⁹ I have explained why this capital sanction was consistent with the Bible's judicial general principle of victim's rights, and I also discuss why this law of adultery strengthens the family. I spend four pages in both books on the woman taken in adultery²⁰ – probably a waste of my time, according to McCartney and Johnson.²¹

16. " 'Just read the law and do it!' appears to be the admonition of theonomists." *Ibid.*, p. 90.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

18. Ray R. Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

19. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 301-7.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 290-94; Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 29-33.

21. Dennis Johnson thinks that John 7:53-8:11 was probably not in the original canon of Scripture: *Theonomy*, p. 179. Dan McCartney refers to this encounter as a "textually dubious incident" that "may yet be an authentic tradition" (p. 142). Bahnsen agrees: *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, p. 230.

So, to put it bluntly, *Godfrey is faking it*. While he has a legitimate excuse for not having read my very recent expositions, he has no excuse for not having read Sutton's 1987 book. It was in the Biblical Blueprint Series. His article gives almost no indication that he has read anything we have written. He cites neither Bahnsen's *Theonomy* nor Rushdoony's *Institutes*. Both of these books include sections on the biblical sanctions against adultery, and they refute what he says that we say. First, Bahnsen states specifically that adultery was not always punished by execution (p. 106, note). Second, Rushdoony spends 9 pages on the social reasons for the capital sanction (pp. 392-401).

Godfrey then says that Calvin was not like the theonomists. Yes, Calvin did say that adulterers should be executed. (Would this decimate America's antinomian pastoral ranks in a hurry!) "He does not simply appeal to Moses, but reasons from the equity of the moral law."²² Get the picture? Biblical revelation is not sufficient; we also need equity. And equity, as Godfrey points out, is tied to natural law theory in Calvin's theology. He is correct; it is.

Calvin or Van Til? Calvin or Van Til? They cannot escape the choice, nor have they. They have abandoned Van Til.²³

He ends with this attempted *coup d'grace*: the theonomists "are far from Calvin's sober amillennialism."²⁴ No; we theonomists are merely far from the Sunday school lessons of Dr. Godfrey's youth in the Christian Reformed Church. If Calvin was anything, he was postmillennial. (See Appendix D.)

In summary, Dr. Godfrey's essay is systematic in its avoidance of those primary source documents that refute his case.

22. Godfrey, pp. 310-11.

23. Not Frame, of course. Frame has not yet made up his mind. There are a lot of good things in Van Til. There are a lot of problems, too. There are a lot of good things in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. There are a lot of problems, too. Ask him sometime if he has made up his mind about Edmund Clowney. (Don't get me wrong. I like John. There are a lot of good qualities about John. But. . . .)

24. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

Sinclair B. Ferguson

Dr. Ferguson's title asks: "An Assembly of Theonomists? The Teaching of the Westminster Divines on the Law of God." His answer gives away half the store to the theonomists. This is why I have few complaints. He is faithful to the diversity of judicial opinion at this remarkable committee of the saints. It is this diversity which the opponents of theonomy at the presbyterial level have steadfastly refused to acknowledge. It is not Ferguson who abuses history; it is theonomy's Presbyterian opponents who will now have to answer to Ferguson. His essay, like Moises Silva's, is not what I would call critical. Crucial, possibly, but not critical.

No, he says, they were not theonomists. Of course, some of them did believe in executing people for the following crimes: adultery, witchcraft, and blasphemy.²⁵ George Gillespie, in *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, a book dedicated to the Assembly, did write:

I know some divines hold, that the Judiciall Law of *Moses*, so far as concerneth the punishments of sins against the moral Law, Idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, adultery, theft, &c, ought to be a rule to the Christian magistrate; and, for my part, I wish more respect were had to it, and that it were more consulted with.²⁶

Samuel Bolton saw the moral law of Christ as the extension of Mosaic law: "Acknowledge the moral law as a rule of obedience and Christian walking, and there will be no falling out, whether you take it as promulgated by Moses, or as handed to you and renewed by Christ."²⁷ Here is a concept that is almost exactly what we in the "Tyler group" regard as ours: the

25. Ferguson, p. 340.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 343.

Mosaic law *renewed by Christ* in his death, resurrection, and ascension.

Ferguson refers to the general equity clause of the Westminster Confession. Fine; if it meant that natural law theory has replaced the Old Covenant obligations – Westminster Seminary's new confession – then Van Til was wrong. Someone on the faculty should say so in public. Nobody ever does. On the other hand, if Van Til was correct, then it is time to teach that the Westminster Assembly was presupposing a Christian interpretation of natural law, which is just fine with us theonomists, but fatal for Westminster's new confession.

The historical argument has come a long way since 1973. Who in 1973 would have imagined that there were members of the Westminster Assembly who held views remarkably similar to Bahnsen's? Only someone such as James Jordan.²⁸ Today, Ferguson is willing to admit that "No single position on every aspect of the doctrine of the law was held by the Divines at Westminster. They represented a variety of hues within a conservative spectrum, on many doctrines, and specifically on the doctrine of the law of God."²⁹ The Assembly was an example of "Reformed inclusivism."

Question: On what basis, then, do certain Reformed presbyteries maintain an unofficial standing policy not to ordain ministers who are theonomists? And why is it that no theonomists teach at any Reformed Presbyterian seminary campus? All talk of "Reformed inclusivism" is salve for guilty faculty consciences. It is a smoke screen for *Reformed exclusivism*. There is no inclusivism at Westminster Seminary that is broad enough to include the theonomists' view of the law of God. Such a view of God's Bible-revealed law and its predictable historical sanctions is a violation of Westminster's confession.

28. James B. Jordan, "Calvinism and 'The Judicial Laws of Moses'," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, V (Winter 1978-79), pp. 39-43.

29. Ferguson, p. 345.

Therefore, Westminster could not hire Bahnsen and had to fire Shepherd.

Samuel T. Logan, Jr.

It is time to sail the Atlantic and join the New England Puritans. This is the area of my own formal specialization, so I get to play Toto. It's curtain time!

Dr. Logan offers us "New England Puritans and the State." While he never mentions their existence, he is doing his best to refute the essays in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (Winter 1978-79): Symposium on Puritanism and Law. In that volume, Bahnsen wrote an essay, "Introduction to John Cotton's *Abstract of the Laws of New England*." Rev. John Cotton was asked in 1636 to write a law code for the colony. He did. It became known as *Moses His Judicials*. He later wrote an abstract of the laws of New England. (It was reprinted in the same issue of the *JCR*.) These laws were theonomic. The capital crimes of the Old Covenant were included. It was never enacted into law, but it did serve as a model for Rev. Nathaniel Ward's proposed civil code, which in turn was used by the Massachusetts General Court as a model for the 1641 Body of Liberties.

How important was Cotton's model? Consider the evaluation of Charles Lee Haskins, perhaps the major specialist in the area of early Massachusetts law:

Cotton's draft was never enacted into law, and probably for that reason its importance has been generally ignored. Nevertheless, there are several reasons why it deserves to be remembered. To begin with, it was the first constructive effort to carry out the mandate of the General Court and to produce a written body of laws which would serve as a constitution for the colony. Second, its heavy reliance upon Scripture provides an important illustration of the strong religious influence which infused Puritan thinking about law and the administration of justice. This attitude was not confined to the Massachusetts leaders but ap-

peared also in England, particularly in the Interregnum, when Fifth Monarchists urged the abolition of the common law and the enactment of a simple code based upon the law of Moses. Third, it became the basis of the early laws enacted at New Haven and Southampton, and thus had an enduring influence outside Massachusetts. Finally, and most importantly, a number of provisions relating to crime and civil liberties found their way through the Body of Liberties of 1641 and the Code of 1648 into the permanent laws of the colony.³⁰

Before we consider Dr. Logan's curious thesis, let us consider the 1641 Body of Liberties, eleven years after John Winthrop arrived on board the *Arbella*.³¹ As you read these laws, keep asking yourself: *theonomic or neo-evangelical?*

1. If any man after legal conviction shall have or worship any other god but the Lord God, he shall be put to death. Deut. 13:6,10; Deut. 17:2,6; Ex. 22:20.

2. If any man or woman be a witch (that is, hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit), they shall be put to death. Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:27; Deut. 18:10.

3. If any man shall blaspheme the name of God, the Father, Son, or Holy Ghost with direct, express, presumptuous or high-handed blasphemy or shall curse God in the like manner, he shall be put to death. Lev. 24:15,16.

4. If any person commit any willful murder, which is manslaughter, committed upon premeditated malice, hatred, or cruelty, not in a man's necessary and just defense, nor by mere casualty against his will, he shall be put to death. Ex. 21:12; Numb. 35 [25]:13,14,30,31.

5. If any person slayeth another suddenly in his anger or cruelty of passion, he shall be put to death. Numb. 25:20,21; Lev. 24:17.

30. Charles Lee Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: A Study in Tradition and Design* (New York: University Press of America, [1960] 1985), p. 125.

31. Ten other ships also arrived, but we only remember the *Arbella*, since Winthrop was on it.

6. If any person shall slay another through guile, either by poisoning or other such devilish practice, he shall be put to death. Ex. 21:14.

7. If any man or woman shall lie with any beast or brute creature by carnal copulation, they shall surely be put to death. And the beast shall be slain and buried and not eaten. Lev. 20:15, 16.

8. If any man lieth with mankind as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed abominations, they both shall surely be put to death. Lev. 20:13.

9. If any person committeth adultery with a married or espoused wife, the adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death. Lev. 20:19 and 18:20; Deut. 22:23,24.

10. If any man stealeth a man or mankind, he shall surely be put to death. Ex. 21:16.

11. If any man rise up by false witness, wittingly and of purpose to take away any man's life, he shall be put to death. Deut. 19:16,18,19.

12. If any man shall conspire and attempt any invasion, insurrection, or public rebellion against our commonwealth, or shall endeavor to surprise any town or towns, fort or forts therein, or shall treacherously and perfidiously attempt the alteration and subversion of our frame of polity or government fundamentally, he shall be put to death.³²

This list was Part 94 in a 98-part code.

These capital laws were theonomic. Dr. Logan is not about to admit this fact. He denies that it is a fact. Yet he cannot easily deny that these laws were theonomic. Therefore, he takes the only other logical approach: *Logan denies that they were laws!* He spends his essay trying to prove this. I give him an A for effort and a D- for performance. What the reader needs to pay particular attention to is how Logan misuses Haskins' book.

32. "The Body of Liberties - 1641," in *U.S. Colonial History: Readings and Documents*, edited by David Hawke (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), pp. 127-28.

It is worth noting that *Dr. Logan does not reproduce this crucial list in his essay*. He only talks mentions it briefly.³³ Reading it makes all the difference. It shows that the Puritans were essentially theonomic in their view of capital crimes, given what was believed by all of non-Puritan Christendom regarding civil law in the mid-seventeenth century. But Logan writes that "this should not be taken to mean that Massachusetts Bay now had a law code."³⁴ This is an odd argument. Please follow his justification for making such a statement. He quotes Haskins.

As Haskins points out, "The Body of Liberties was less a code of existing laws than it was a compilation of constitutional provisions. . . . [Note: the three extra dots are Logan's - G.N.] Viewed as a whole, it resembles a bill of rights of the type which was later to become a familiar feature of American state and federal constitutions."³⁵

Citing Haskins is crucial at this point, for Haskins seems to buttress Logan's argument that the 1641 legal code was not *really* a legal code. Because this code was visibly theonomic, Logan has to call into question its historical authority. He cites the fact that the legislators continued to work on the codification project. He thereby seeks to persuade the reader that the 1641 code was not all that significant. But it was significant.

There is a major problem with Logan's argument: Haskins' statement is being misused. Haskins was *not* arguing that these laws were not laws. He was arguing only that taken as a whole, they did not constitute a code in the *structural* sense because of their lack of order. Logan knows this, which is why he left out Haskins' crucial explanatory statement by "three dotting" it. (When you find a controversial quotation with three dots in the middle of it, history graduate students are taught, check the

33. Logan, p. 381.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 373-74.

original source.) Let us consider the missing passage: "Its one hundred sections were, for the most part, framed in no logical order, and the majority of them dealt in a broad and general manner with such matters as the institutions of colony and town government and the relations between them, the relations between church and state, and judicial safeguards and processes."³⁶ But he insists that the actual laws were taken seriously; it *was* a law code in terms of judicial *content*. Things now become clearer. Let us get them crystal clear. Haskins continues:

The Body of Liberties marked a notable step not only in the direction of reducing the colony laws to writing but, more importantly, toward the development of a commonwealth of laws and not of men. Almost all of its provisions, most of them in more extended form, were ultimately reenacted in the Code of 1648 and became part of the permanent law of the colony.³⁷

Was It a Law Code in Terms of Content?

Was the 1641 Body of Liberties merely a bill of rights? What did John Winthrop think the Body of Liberties was? His diary records the following entry: "This session [of the General Court] continued three weeks, and established 100 laws, which were called the *Body of Liberties*."³⁸ Puritan era specialist Darrett Rutman calls it "the commonwealth's first code of laws."³⁹

From the 1950's through the 1980's, and probably even today, the most respected and influential American historian of the early New England period was Yale's Edmund Morgan. His biography of Winthrop is a classic and is still assigned in

36. Haskins, *Law and Authority*, p. 129.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

38. *Winthrop's Journal "History of New England," 1630-1649*, edited by James Kendall Hosmer, 2 vols. (New York: Barnes & Noble, [1908] 1966), II, pp. 48-49.

39. Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1963), p. 159.

college classes. Here is how Morgan describes the 1641 code. (Hint: watch for that most despised word of all: "blueprint.") "But the code was not merely a bill of rights to protect the inhabitants of Massachusetts from arbitrary government. It was a blueprint of the whole Puritan experiment, an attempt to spell out the dimensions of the New England way."⁴⁰ (I can almost hear Dr. Logan screaming in agony. His screams are about to grow louder.)

After much discussion and revision the code of liberties was finally accepted by the General Court in December, 1641. Winthrop recorded the fact in his journal without comment. He would doubtless have been happier if its provisions had been left unexpressed, but he probably found little to quarrel with in the substance of them. They defined the New England way for all to see, and if this might bring trouble, it might also prompt the world to imitation.⁴¹

But if we are to accept Dr. Logan's peculiar explanation of this code – it was not a code, and it therefore was not law – then we must conclude that Edmund Morgan just did not know what he was talking about. Poor old Edmund Morgan. (How could Morgan hold such a view of the 1641 Body of Liberties? Is it because Bahnsen never was academically eligible to teach in Morgan's history department?)

Let us look at another passage from Haskins that Logan failed to cite. This passage traces the capital crimes sanctions back to John Cotton's *Moses His Judicials*. "Among the most important of the public law provisions were those relating to capital crimes. Nearly all of these were drawn from, and were annotated to, the Mosaic code of the Old Testament, and many undoubtedly had their origin in John Cotton's proposed draft

40. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p. 170.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

of 1636.”⁴² Notice the phrase, “public law provisions.” These were *laws*. The same capital laws also became the laws of Connecticut in 1642.⁴³

(I am afraid that Dr. Logan suffers from a very severe case of *conveniently selective quotations*. Let the reader be aware of the professor’s intellectually debilitating condition. In writing this essay, he abandoned his calling as an historian in order to become a polemicist. Since he is not a very competent polemicist, let us hope that he will soon return to his original calling.)

Work on the colony’s legal code continued until 1648. The 1641 code was not a permanent constitution, nor was it intended to be. Winthrop had feared as early as 1639 that any absolute, final legal codification of New England’s laws could be used by the colony’s enemies in England if the judicial specifics seemed to be different from English common law. “For that it would professedly transgress the limits of our charter, which provide, we shall make no laws repugnant to the laws of England, and that we were assured we must do. But to raise up laws by practice and custom had been no transgression; . . .”⁴⁴ This second Body of Liberties was published in 1648.

The year before, another large judicial code was produced by the authorities, “Book of the General Laws and Liberties Governing the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts, 1647.” It was the model for the 1648 code. This explanatory sentence was added to the document’s introduction: the older code of 1641 was “published about seven years since, which contains also many laws and orders both for civil and criminal causes, and is commonly, though without ground, reported to be our fundamentals. . . .”⁴⁵

42. Haskins, *Law and Authority*, pp. 130-31.

43. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper & Row, [1956] 1964), pp. 34-35.

44. *Winthrop’s Journal*, I, p. 324.

45. “Book of the General Laws and Liberties Governing the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts, 1647,” in W. Keith Kavenaugh (ed.), *The Foundations of Colonial*

What did this mean, *fundamentals*? This probably refers to the original constitutional document of Connecticut, passed in 1639, which is sometimes said to be the first written republican constitution in history. It was called "Fundamental Orders of Connecticut." It spelled out the structure of the civil government, specified twice yearly general assemblies, identified state officers, etc. It was not a law code; it was the frame of civil government.⁴⁶ The Code of 1647 specifically stated that neither it nor the 1641 document should be regarded as fundamentals. They still had their eyes on England.

We have not published it as a perfect body of laws sufficient to carry on the government established for future times, nor could it be expected that we should promise such a thing. For if it be no disparagement to the wisdom of that high court of Parliament in England that in four hundred years they could not so compile their laws and regulate proceedings in courts of justice, etc., but that they had still new work to do of the same kind almost every parliament, there can be no just cause to blame a poor colony, being unfurnished of lawyers and statesmen, that in eighteen years has produced no more nor better rules for a good and settled government than in this book holds forth.⁴⁷

The document continues: "These laws which were made successively in divers former years, we have reduced under several heads in alphabetical method, that so they might the more readily be found; . . . For such laws and orders as are not of general concernment we have not put them into this book, but they remain still in force and are to be seen in the book of the records of the Court." What were these general laws? They dealt with limiting the civil government, protecting men from unlawful arrest, establishing county courts, the Council, elec-

America: A Documentary History, 3 vols. (New York: Chelsea House, 1973), I, p. 296.

46. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 352-55.

47. "Laws and Liberties," *ibid.*, I, p. 297.

tions, defining freeman and non-freeman, access to courts, magistrates, and voting.⁴⁸ This section does sound more like a bill of rights.

The 1648 code printed document reprints the 1641 list of capital crimes, but without the Bible verses.⁴⁹ Haskins says that this 1648 code "became the fountainhead of Massachusetts law during most of the seventeenth century, and even thereafter, and its provisions were widely copied by other colonies, or used by them as models in framing their own laws."⁵⁰

So important were these capital laws in the thinking of the residents of Massachusetts that in 1642, they passed one of the worst laws in American history, the first compulsory education law, with the requirement that the town treasuries should be used to support indigent students. What was the stated justification of this law? In 1648, they added this explanation: to provide "their children and apprentices so much learning as may inable them perfectly to read the english tongue, and knowledge of the Capital lawes; . . ."⁵¹

They did not have a fully developed biblical casuistry of the case laws, since they were still under the influence of medieval Scholasticism, but they were farther along than Westminster Seminary is today. Wherever the penalties were specified in the Old Testament, the Massachusetts Puritans adopted them. The issue for them was faithfulness in honoring God's required sanctions. They put this principle in italics in the 1647 code: "*The execution of the law is the life of the law.*"⁵² It is this fundamental judicial principle that Westminster Seminary has been

48. *Ibid.*, I, p. 306.

49. Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*, 4 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, [1934] 1964), I, p. 458.

50. Haskins, *Law and Authority*, p. 120.

51. Cited by Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion & Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 87-88.

52. "General Laws and Liberties," *Foundations*, I, p. 297.

trying to escape. So has all of modern evangelicalism. This is why there is such hostility to the Puritans as they really were.

Studied Flexibility

Why spend so much space on this? Because Dr. Logan tries to prove that none of this can be used to support the thesis that Puritan New England was theonomic. He devotes page after page to this remarkable and historiographically unique effort.⁵³ His goal is to prove that the New England Puritans were devotees of something he calls *studied flexibility*. (Shades of Gordon-Conwell!) “‘Studied flexibility’ does seem, therefore, to be the best way to characterize the Puritan use of the Mosaic judicial law.”⁵⁴ It does seem this way, *if* you are trying to lead the reader away from the fact that in 1641, the colony compiled a law code that specified execution for the crimes the Old Testament specified as capital crimes, and then cited the verses of these case laws.

So, Logan sees only studied flexibility. Question: Flexibility within which worldview, that of modern jurisprudence or that of the Old Testament? The Puritans began with the Old Testament. The chief question is, *what did they specify as the general legal guide for their civil courts?* This was made plain by the 1641 code. It was also maintained by Winthrop: “All punishments, except such as are made certain in the law of God, or are not subject to variation by merit of circumstances, ought to be left arbitrary to the wisdom of the judges.”⁵⁵ This statement appears on the page following his description of the 1641 Body of Liberties as a list of 100 laws. What was quite plain to the man who was repeatedly elected the governor of the colony is not clear to Dr. Logan, who has a vested interest in blurring the issues. What is that interest? To justify the fundamental propo-

53. Logan, pp. 373-83.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

55. *Winthrop's Journal*, II, p. 50.

sition of Westminster's confession: "The very idea of Christendom is barbaric. Therefore, Westminster could not hire Bahnsen and had to fire Shepherd."

Winthrop's diary reports that a couple convicted of adultery in 1644 was executed. "They were both executed, they both died very penitently, especially the woman, who had some comfortable hope of pardon of her sin, and gave good exhortation to all young maids to be obedient to their parents, and to take heed of evil company, etc."⁵⁶ In 1648, the year of publication of the *Body of Liberties*, Margaret Jones was convicted of witchcraft. She was hanged.⁵⁷

Does this sound like Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary or Mt. Sinai?

Let me conclude with Haskins' assessment of the importance of the Mosaic law in Puritan Massachusetts' criminal law. Compare this with Logan's assessment.

The capital laws are by no means the only part of the colonial criminal law that reflect biblical influence. The limitation on whipping sentences to forty stripes, in contrast with the English formula "until his body be bloody," was apparently based upon Deuteronomy 25:2 and 3. Similarly, the fornication statute, which empowered the magistrates to enjoin the parties to marriage, was clearly agreeable to the Word as set forth in Exodus 22:16, as contrasted with the then current practice of English justices of the peace, who were primarily concerned with the economic problem of fixing responsibility for support of a bastard child upon its reputed father. . . .

Another striking departure from English law which apparently owed much to biblical authority was the colonists' adoption of multiple restitution and involuntary servitude for theft. At common law, the theft of a shilling, like other felonies, was

56. *Ibid.*, II, p. 163.

57. *Ibid.*, II, p. 344.

punishable by hanging, and theft of a lesser amount by whipping. Under a number of English statutes, restitution – single, double, or treble – was a common penalty imposed by justices of the peace for a variety of specified property crimes. The Bible, however, prescribed multiple restitution as the penalty of the thief in most cases, or “if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.”

From the beginning, the colonial magistrates regularly followed the biblical patterns, imposing double restitution when the offender was capable thereof, and requiring thieves unable to make restitution otherwise to satisfy the court's sentence by a term of service. The exaction of these penalties was without specific statutory authority until 1646. Prior thereto, the colonial treatment of theft furnishes an example of the shaping of law by magisterial discretion in the way favored by Winthrop. When restitution was feasible, it was usually the only punishment imposed, but the courts did not hesitate to combine it with one or more of a variety of other penalties, ranging through whipping, the stocks, a fine to the court, and degradation from the rank of gentleman.⁵⁸

Logan ends his essay with a familiar, though implied, accusation against the “simplistic theonomists.” He writes: “Whatever else they were, the New England Puritans as a group were not simplistic. They did not see themselves as some kind of reincarnation of the nation of Israel, and they did not want to see Israel's judicial code reincarnated in their commonwealth.”⁵⁹ Here it is again: theonomy as simplistic and theonomists as judicial simpletons. When the faculty of Westminster Seminary hears the words, “biblical law,” they immediately think, “simplistic!” They, of course, are much too sophisticated for such simplistic laws as those that God specified to the peo-

58. Haskins, *Law and Authority*, pp. 153-54.

59. Logan, p. 384.

ple of Israel. Biblical casuistry is not for them. Natural law will do just fine.

Dr. Logan is the Dean of Academic Affairs at Westminster, the same post held for two decades by Edmund Clowney (1963-82). It is a very important position. It establishes the seminary's academic standards. The academic performance of the man who holds it inevitably becomes a symbol of those standards.

Conclusion

History moves forward. No Christian group can claim that any predecessors in Church history came fully to the ideal order set forth by the latest representatives of that tradition. *There is progressive corporate sanctification in history* – a statement that cannot be accepted by common grace amillennialists, despite the fact that they cannot study Church history and the history of the creeds and come to any other valid conclusion. So, to imagine that we can find the comprehensive position of the modern theonomic movement expressed in Puritanism would be naive. Such a statement would rest upon a view of history that is amillennial – Muether's flatline historical development⁶⁰ – rather than postmillennial.

The historical question is more complex: What foundations of the present worldview can be found in the past, as consistently applied then as the times allowed? Ask this question, and you can begin to study historical origins. Dr. Ferguson's article comes reasonably close to understanding this task. Dr. Godfrey's and Dr. Logan's do not.

The question Dr. Godfrey needs to ask is this: *What about Calvin's sermons on Deuteronomy?* The question Dr. Logan needs to ask, and then answer in detail, is this: *What prior judicial tradition in Church history was best represented by the New England*

60. See above, pp. 159-60.

Puritans of the first generation? If he cannot find any – and this, in my view, is the case⁶¹ – then the first-generation New England Puritans (1630-60) must be seen as *judicially revolutionary*, constituting a significant discontinuity in Church history. They can be connected with some of the Scottish Covenanters, perhaps, and surely with Calvin's sermons on Deuteronomy – a possibility left unexplored by Dr. Godfrey. But if we are asking the question in terms of an actual cultural-judicial experiment, the first-generation New England Puritans were unique. More than this: *they self-consciously viewed themselves as unique*. Their covenantal experiment – their city on a hill – would, they hoped, become a model to fallen Europe and also to a growing new nation in the future, a nation founded in the wilderness. They had been delivered from Egypt; they were in the wilderness; and they hoped to enter the Promised Land. They understood that they were in both a geographical and spiritual wilderness.⁶² Being postmillennialists,⁶³ they did not expect to remain there.

In this sense, the theonomists are the spiritual heirs of the New England Puritans. The Westminster faculty is not.

61. This was also Dr. Bahnsen's opinion in 1985, when he had an exchange of letters with Dr. Logan on this point. The kinds of criticisms that I have made of Logan's essay were made years ago by Bahnsen in private correspondence. What is remarkable is that Logan offered his essay in 1990 without any interaction with Bahnsen. If he had taken Bahnsen more seriously, he would not have suffered this public drubbing.

62. Peter N. Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier, 1629-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

63. Symposium on Puritanism and Progress, *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, VI (Summer 1979).

AN EDITOR'S TASK: JUST SAY NO!

[Harold Ross, the editor of The New Yorker] lived always in the wistful hope of getting out a magazine each week without a single mistake. His checking department became famous, in the trade, for a precision that sometimes leaned over backward. . . . But overchecking was better than underchecking, in his opinion, even if it did sometimes lead to the gaucherie of inflexibility. Ross's checkers once informed [H. L.] Mencken that he couldn't have eaten dinner at a certain European restaurant he had mentioned in one of his New Yorker articles, because there wasn't any restaurant at the address he had given. Mencken brought home a menu with him to prove that he was right, but he was pleased rather than annoyed. "Ross has the most astute goons of any editor in the country," he said.

James Thurber (1958)¹

The editors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* desperately needed some astute goons to do some serious verification work. They needed them for at least three reasons: Waltke, Keller, and Muether. Especially Muether. I challenge the reader to ask himself as he reads this chapter: Where were Barker and Godfrey?

1. James Thurber, *The Years With Ross* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1958), pp. 29-30.

Bruce K. Waltke

Waltke is not a Westminster product, nor is he a Calvin College-Free University of Amsterdam product. He is also not a Gordon-Conwell product. He is a product of Harvard University and the *Scofield Reference Bible*. By examining his essay, as well as one of his previous contributions, we can get a better idea of what the underlying problem is with *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. This problem is easy to state: the authors are united only in what they do not like. They do not like theonomy in its present form. But they have no alternative to offer. Therefore, most of them grow testy when asked by me to suggest something. They prefer to proclaim a resolute judicial agnosticism.

Bruce Waltke is not a follower of Meredith G. Kline. He is not a follower of anybody, as far as his footnotes indicate. This is his theological problem. He wings it theologically every time he writes.

In *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, Waltke, Th.D. (Dallas Seminary), Ph.D. (Harvard), offers a critique of the theological work of Greg Bahnsen. Rest assured, Professor Waltke is a very clever fellow. He understands the impact of rhetoric. He divides his essay into three main parts: Dispensationalism, Reformed Theology, and Theonomy. You get the picture: theonomy is clearly not dispensational, but it is not Reformed, either. We are talking about three separate theological systems. If the theonomists were to concede this, we would lose the argument. Waltke merely assumes it, but if he can get the reader to conclude it, he wins the argument.

He is careful to offer us theonomists this left-handed compliment: "We commend theonomists for their conviction, with Reformed theologians, that the law is a compatible servant of the gospel. . . ."² Yes, he is so very, very happy to have us

2. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 79.

theonomists standing side by side "with Reformed theologians." *In short, baby, the theonomists just ain't Reformed.* He calls his essay, "Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies." The title tells all!

What is Waltke implicitly saying? First, that the faculty of Westminster Seminary in 1973 was theologically blind. It awarded Bahnsen a Th.M. on the basis of a defense of theonomy. Second, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was woefully amiss in having ordained Dr. Bahnsen to the pastorate and by allowing him to retain that office, since the man espouses a non-Reformed theology. But does he prove this pair of unstat- ed accusations? No. As we shall see, he does not even come close to proving them.

Waltke's Strategy

How does Waltke attempt to prove that theonomy is not Reformed? He structures his essay as if this were the case, but there is more to a valid argument than mere rhetoric. He raises the question of the language of the Westminster Confession regarding the "general equity" of biblical law (Chapter XIX:4). Fair enough. I now raise the crucial response: *if the Confession's general equity clause unquestionably means "natural law" in the medieval Scholastic sense, then Van Til's work is also not Reformed.* It is therefore the Reformed theologian's responsibility either to abandon Van Til – meaning *answer* him theologically and philosophically – or else admit that the Confession is flawed. This would mean adopting either John Gerstner's evidentialism or Gordon Clark's rationalism.

Rushdoony takes the view that the Confession needs revising or clarifying so as to make a break with natural law theory. So do I. Bahnsen takes another approach: to deny that the general equity clause means "natural law" or that it meant that to the Westminster Assembly. But Waltke ignores the underlying strategies of this difference in approach between Rushdoony

and Bahnsen; he merely notes the existence of the difference.³ *So, for that matter, has the entire faculty at Westminster Seminary since 1929, including Van Til.*

Like the 20 million land mines that the Soviets planted in Afghanistan before they retreated in 1989, Van Til planted bombs all over the traditional Reformed landscape; they are still exploding. They will continue to explode, with or without Dr. Waltke's tramping around the countryside without a theological road map. Waltke declares, "Westminster folk applaud them [theonomists] for basing themselves squarely on Cornelius Van Til's apologetics."⁴ Excellent; now all we need the "Westminster folk" to do is to follow the logic of Van Til's apologetics and (1) make a public denial of political pluralism and (2) make a formal clarification of the general equity clause of the Westminster Confession. It is to Waltke's credit that he does recognize this two-fold challenge to Westminster's faculty, as well as our challenge to their amillennial eschatology.⁵

The trouble is, in his section on "Weaknesses," Waltke attempts to dismiss the whole of Bahnsen's thesis . . . in six pages! (Shades of the late Robert Strong of Reformed Seminary, who took only three.) Bahnsen's arguments are "exegetically flawed"; they are "logically defective."⁶ He then appeals to "Ockham's razor."⁷ To use this sort of offhand language when dealing with a work as profound and rigorous as *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, written by a man with a Ph.D. in philosophy, seems a bit presumptuous. (Bahnsen replies to his critics in his book, *No Other Standard*; I do not need to defend him here.) More than this; Waltke ceases to argue in favor of his essay's thesis: the non-Reformed character of theonomy. There is not one reference to a Reformed confession, systematic theology, or

3. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

5. *Idem.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

7. *Idem.*

tradition. It is at this point that we might have expected the editors to intervene. They should have insisted on documentation. They obviously didn't. So he just kept going.

He tells us that "Bahnsen underestimates the role of natural law. . . ." Bahnsen is the person Van Til wanted to see replace him as professor of apologetics; sadly, he does not understand natural law! Well, now, just what has Waltke ever written to indicate that he is qualified to make such a judgment? It gets worse and worse: "In fact, the Book of the Covenant probably draws heavily from the Code of Hammurabi. . . ." ⁹ Here it is again, the same old liberal line: Moses (i.e., God) borrowed the case laws from the pagans. (This is why Westminster Seminary needs to offer a course on biblical chronology, focusing on the revisionist work of Isaac Newton, Immanuel Velikovsky, Donovan Courville, and others on re-dating the ancient pagan kingdoms half a millennium later than what is taught in the textbooks.) ¹⁰ Someone should have told Dr. Waltke: "When you're in a hole, stop digging."

The Case of the Missing Book

Just how seriously should we take Waltke's scholarship? About as seriously as any doctoral dissertation advisor would take a dissertation that was found to refer to nonexistent sources. On page 74, Waltke cites Bahnsen, just before his critique begins. I quote footnote 24 verbatim:

Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1977), p. xiii. His book *The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva, 1983) popularly explains theonomic ethics.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

9. *Idem.*

10. Gary North, *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion vs. Power Religion* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), Appendix A: "The Reconstruction of Egypt's Chronology."

This is not a particularly reassuring way to introduce an intelligent reader to a critique of a brilliant theologian's life work. First, there is no book by Bahnsen called *The Authority of God's Law Today*. Second, by late 1983, there was no publishing house called "Geneva," which happened to be a name trademarked by the Presbyterian Church USA's Westminster Press in Philadelphia, and which told the Geneva Divinity School to cease using the name in 1982. (Tyler's Geneva Divinity School had not known of the quiet trademarking of Geneva Press by the PCUSA.) What Waltke did was to assume that a book that had been scheduled to appear actually did appear. It never did. But he refers to it anyway.

A small error? Perhaps. Bahnsen did refer to this book – in unwarranted high hopes – in the Introduction to the 1984 version of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. He still expected it to appear soon when he wrote the Introduction in 1983. But Waltke's essay appeared in late 1990. He had lots of time to discover that the book had never appeared. Why didn't he?

Here is my point: when a man contributes an essay to a critical and confrontational book – an essay which purports to prove that an ordained Orthodox Presbyterian Church minister and Reformed scholar is in fact outside the Reformed theological tradition – the critic owes it to God, himself, the reader, the targeted victim, and the victim's presbytery to read all of the offending books that supposedly prove that the man's theology is deviant. Professor Waltke did not bother to walk to the campus library and check out the supposed book. *He therefore clearly had no intention of reading it.* Why bother? Waltke already was certain what it must have said. No need to waste time reading another Bahnsen book! Nevertheless, he thought he would impress his naive and trusting readers (and the equally naive and trusting editors) with the comforting illusion that he had read this phantom book cover to cover, for he said it was a popular account. In short, he announced: "Yes, sir, folks, I have done my homework. I have read this man's books,

and I have found all of them sadly deficient." Even the phantom one.

A single word suffices in dealing with Professor Waltke: "Gotcha!"

That the editors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* failed to spot Waltke's intellectual posturing testifies to their own lack of care in proofreading the essays. Editors should know the rule in academic publishing: word for word, more errors pop up in footnotes than anywhere else in a scholarly manuscript. Editors need to verify them, one by one, especially in critical books.¹¹ Nobody bothered. When the editors laid their academic reputations on the line by publishing a book that is basically an attack on the theological integrity of one man – for Bahnsen is the primary identified target in most of these essays – they owed it to themselves to see to it that all of the cited offending materials actually do exist. Their sloppy editing was matched by Waltke's sloppy research. Of them it can truly be said: they deserved each other.

Any Ph.D. candidate who dared to hand in anything as sloppy as Waltke's essay would be called before his dissertation committee and threatened with dismissal from the program. Or so it was in my day.¹² It may be that dissertation committees these days are sometimes as careless as the editors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* were. It is revealing, though, that once certified and tenured, academic critics such as Professor Waltke do not take equally great care when launching their attacks on the likes of theonomists. The end – the destruction of a rival movement's reputation – justifies the means: misleading documentation.

11. I have had my own share of spelling errors and page reference bloopers in my footnotes. I know of which I speak. But as far as I know, I have never cited a phantom book.

12. One of my graduate school colleagues was caught in such an attempt; he was told to write another dissertation. He quit the program. He then got a job at a junior college.

Who Is Bruce Waltke?

Once upon a time, Bruce Waltke was Professor of Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary (confession: dispensational). Once upon a time, he was Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary (confession: Calvinist). In between, he was a Professor at British Columbia's Regent College (confession: always open to suggestion), to which he has again returned, shaking both the dispensational and Reformed institutional dust off his sandals. (This is a major problem with *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*; so many of its contributors are no longer associated with Westminster Seminary. There is a price to be paid for delaying publication for years on end.) So, having taught students on various occasions that each of these rival theological systems is closest to the Word of God, and never having put into print the details of whatever it is that he believes is the true and reliable theological system, Professor Waltke was an ideal candidate in the editors' eyes for writing an essay comparing all three systems. Objectivity, don't you know!

Most revealing of all, once upon a time, Waltke was a dedicated abortionist.

The Fetus Factor

I first came across an essay by Professor Waltke when I read a pro-abortion book published by a group of neo-evangelicals, mostly physicians. The book was published in 1969, when the Church desperately needed to take an anti-abortion stand: pre-*Roe v. Wade*. The book was co-published by the Christian Medical Society and *Christianity Today*. The book, a symposium, revealed the predictable two-fold goal of the sponsoring organizations: (1) to infuse a primary plank of political liberalism's agenda into evangelical Christianity (*Christianity Today's* perpetual goal) and (2) to provide moral comfort and theological support for a bunch of self-proclaimed Christian physicians

who were about to scrap the anti-abortion provision of the Hippocratic oath and begin the slaughter of the innocents for fun and profit. To this symposium came Bruce Waltke.

To him was given the honor of submitting the first individually signed essay in the book, appropriately entitled, "Old Testament Texts Bearing on the Problem of the Control of Human Reproduction." As Professor of Old Testament, he could speak with academic authority to the other certified experts in their respective fields. This was altogether appropriate. A doctor of theology would show doctors of medicine that eternal life begins only at birth, so that no one need have any qualms about murdering the unborn. What better way to help end the conflicts between modernism and evangelicalism! Dr. Waltke was continuing the tradition of a familiar Old Testament office, that of court prophet.

In his essay, he contrasted the modern world with the world of rural ancient Israel, a world which "valued a large family because it provided both economic and national security. Survival demanded growth and expansion."¹³ However, in stark contrast to this ancient economic condition, "For us, children tend to be a financial hindrance rather than help." This raised a question in his mind – you can see it coming already, can't you? – "How relevant is the obviously favorable attitude toward large families in the Old Testament for us?" In order to relieve this second tension, we must select only those texts that indicate the eternal purposes and attitudes of the Creator."¹⁴ His underlying but unstated presupposition is clear: *economics is primary*. Economics takes precedence in questions of biblical hermeneutics. That this is only a step away from Marx's economic determinism should have been obvious to every attendee at that symposium, but profit-seeking professionals are seldom

13. *Birth Control and the Christian*, edited by Walter O. Spitzer and Carlile L. Saylor (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House; London: Coverdale House, 1969), p. 8.

14. *Idem*.

critical of their own presuppositions. And so he began his discussion with a consideration of abortion – in a book on human reproduction!

“The first argument in favor of permitting induced abortion is the absence of any biblical text forbidding such an act.”¹⁵ Already, the assembled physicians must have begun to breathe easier. They could almost hear the cash registers ringing (pre-computers). But isn’t the unborn child a soul? God forbid! Let us not refer to “unborn child.” It is properly called a *fetus*. This sounds safely impersonal.

A second argument in favor of permitting induced abortion is that God does not regard the fetus as a soul [Hebrew *nephesh*], no matter how far gestation has progressed. Therefore, the fetus does not come under the protection of the fifth commandment. . . . We should note this contrast between the Assyrian Law and the Mosaic Law: the Old Testament, in contrast to the Assyrian Code, never reckons the fetus as equivalent to a life.¹⁶

Well, now: all those in favor of identifying their views on abortion with the pagan Assyrian Code, which we all know was clearly opposed to the Bible, please stand up!

As I said, Professor Waltke is a clever man. He structures his arguments with great rhetorical skill. The problem is, he has made an academic career out of switching arguments.

In order to end his argument with authority, he added: “The Talmud appears to reflect the biblical balance by allowing abortion when the life of the mother was in danger (*Mishna, Oholot*, 7:6).”¹⁷ Surely, we should all conclude, the Talmud is a more reliable commentary on the Old Testament’s view of unborn children than the New Testament is, for the New Testament says:

15. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy (Luke 1:41-44).

Funny thing, how one impersonal fetus leaped when another impersonal fetus entered the room. Just another random event which is all too easily misused by anti-abortion bigots!

What did this apologist for convenient murder think was in Mary's womb? The "impersonal fetus" of God? And had one of these professional shedders of blood performed an abortion on Mary, what would his colleagues imagine that God's response would have been? We can be pretty sure about the answer of the attendees of that symposium. "It all depends on whether the abortionist in question was state-licensed or not."

Go With the Flow!

That Waltke later reversed himself and became an anti-abortionist is to his credit. It was just a little late. He had already given his blessing to those Christian professionals who, four years later, began to ply their bloody trade legally in the United States. He will someday meet face to face in heaven the unborn victims of his academic presentation. Each person has his own horrors of final judgment to think about; if I were Waltke, this one would be mine.

Bruce Waltke has had a checkered career. First dispensational; then Reformed. First a pro-abortionist; then an anti-abortionist. First a Dallas Seminary professor, then a Regent College professor, then a Westminster Seminary professor, and once again a Regent College professor. Of Bruce Waltke, it can be truly said: "A double minded man is unstable in all his

ways" (James 1:8). James elaborated on this point: "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was" (James 1:23-24). But Dr. Waltke does remember this one thing: he doesn't think theonomy is orthodox.

It was remarkably unwise for the editors to rely on the insights of this theological and institutional drifter to help them make their public case against Bahnsen and theonomy. How does anyone know what Waltke will teach next week? (We could call this either the "Harvey Cox effect" or the "Clark Pinnock effect.") Now he has drifted away again, leaving them holding the bag. They should have seen it coming. At the very least, they should have checked his footnotes.

Timothy J. Keller

First, Dr. Keller (D.Min.) is the author of one book, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*. Second, he is one of the Gordon-Conwell imports. He offers us "Theonomy and the Poor: Some Reflections." His concern is that Ray Sutton, David Chilton, and I do not have the proper view of charity.

Whenever you come before the public and assert that your opponent does not have the correct view of something, it is morally and intellectually imperative that you are capable of presenting the proper view. To the extent that you are unsure of the specifics of the proper view, you are to that extent incapable of pressing your case against your opponents. This is the basis of my perennial claim, "You can't beat something with nothing."

What is Dr. Keller's positive program? He refuses to say. He tells us only what he does not like. He does not like the massively researched studies of recent critics of the public welfare system that show that as the welfare State has grown, so has poverty. Having cited these studies briefly, Dr. Keller says, "My own appraisal is that the statistics do not support any one

ideology well at all.”¹⁸ Fine. We all know that statistics can be used to prove conflicting positions. But I feel compelled to ask: His appraisal based on *what*? What is the neglected cause of poverty that the State has not solved, the free market has not solved, and the Church has not solved?¹⁹ We all admit that poverty exists, but can we ever get rid of it? Will there ever be a time when there is no “lower third” in the income distribution in the land? Was Jesus misguided when he insisted that the poor would always be with us (Matt. 26:11)? Or was He speaking only of His own day? I am willing to hear arguments, but Dr. Keller does not offer any. He only insists that “neither the liberal whitewash of welfare nor conservative denigration is completely warranted.”²⁰ This is judicial agnosticism.

Here is what he does tell us. “*Anyone* in need is my neighbor – that is the teaching of the Good Samaritan parable.”²¹ Nowhere have I heard it more clearly presented: the Jericho road is every highway and byway on earth, and all the off-road residences as well. This statement, if taken seriously – and no one on earth has ever taken it seriously *institutionally*, including Dr. Keller – means that there is no escape from the ideal of absolute equality. No matter where we are on earth, if we have a brass farthing more than anyone else on earth, we are not being good Samaritans. Now, Dr. Keller would no doubt rush in to add the inevitable qualifications. He really didn’t mean

18. Keller, *Theonomy*, p. 269.

19. It does no good to complain about a problem for which there is no solution in history. It is illegitimate to accuse someone of being insensitive about such a problem just because he offers no solution to the problem. For example, it would make no sense for Keller to argue that the Reconstructionists are insensitive to the suffering caused by death. It is equally preposterous to accuse us of being insensitive to the suffering induced by poverty unless he has a solution to poverty that we Reconstructionists are ignoring for ideological reasons. Keller must tell the reader exactly what causes poverty, what the solutions are, why they work, how they have worked in the past, why they are biblical, and then show that the Reconstructionists have rejected them. He does not do this.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-70.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

that *anyone* in need is my neighbor, if that also means that I am in any way legally or morally obligated to help my neighbor. (If it does not mean this, why bring it up?) He means something else. He never says what he means.

David Chilton calls this guilt-manipulation.²² Rushdoony calls it the politics of guilt and pity.²³ I call it the politics of zero conditions: *unconditional bankruptcy*.

Dr. Keller presents his theology of welfare in the section, "The Issue of Conditions." In it, he attacks Ray R. Sutton's paper, "The Theology of the Poor." Sutton argues there that churches are not required by God to give money to drug addicts and drunks. A chronic repeater of some offense is also not entitled to aid. "To give to him unconditionally, sight unseen, is a waste of God's money." The underlying covenant theology – a covenant theology with *sanctions* (point four) – leads Sutton to this conclusion. This conclusion is precisely what repels Keller. Sutton replies to Keller in detail in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*. Here I need only to summarize Keller's position.

Keller insists that "When God's grace first comes to us, it comes unconditionally, regardless of our merits."²⁴ This is true, although here is the proper place for Keller's discussion of the perseverance of the saints. Keller then makes this leap of faith: "At first, we should show mercy to anyone in need, as we have opportunity and resources. We should not turn them away by analyzing them as 'undeserving' even if sin is part of the complex of their poverty."²⁵ Where is a single Bible reference? Are we omniscient, the way God is? No. Then why dis-

22. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider* (5th ed.; Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1981] 1990).

23. R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1970] 1978).

24. Keller, p. 276.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 276-77.

cuss our obligations to give charity in the context of what a sovereign God does? Why not turn to biblical law to decide what we are responsible for? Answer: *because that would be theonomic*. And we all know what Keller thinks of theonomy! "Many of my criticisms of their response to the poor rest on deeper reservations I have with their interpretation of the Old Testament civil code."²⁶ "But the reconstructionists in their mode of interpretation and application of the Old Testament do not appear to me to be sensitive to the progress of biblical theology."²⁷ But, of course, "Nothing that I just said is meant to deny that Israel's code is full of God's wisdom and is all applicable to our own culture. No area of life is untouched by God's law."²⁸

Year after year, theonomists get this sort of criticism. "No, we don't want Old Testament laws. Yes, these laws are valuable. No, there are no biblical blueprints. Yes, we must honor biblical principles. No, we must not appeal to the Old Testament law code for our civil laws. Yes, we must respect them. No, we should not be biblicists. Yes, we must pay attention to God's moral principles." On and on and on: *doubletalk*. It is dialecticism for conservative Christians. It is judicial agnosticism. All they know is this: the negative sanctions of Deuteronomy 28:15-68 sound politically right wing and "insensitive."

The Blessings of Serfdom

What is highly revealing is Keller's appeal to Edmund P. Clowney's interpretation of Joseph in Egypt. In a long footnote, Keller cites my view of the famine in Egypt and Joseph's purchase of the entire nation (except the lands owned by the priests) as a curse. Keller says that Clowney denies this. "In fact, Edmund Clowney has suggested to me (in a personal

26. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 288-89.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

conversation) that this was the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy that Abraham's descendants would be a 'blessing to the nations.' " Keller continues: Joseph "was acting on the basis of a principle – that a good civil magistrate is concerned for the temporal welfare of his people. God did *not* briefly give Joseph permission to do something sinful. And if it was not sinful, then the principle remains that the government can do charity."²⁹

Joseph, acting as the head of a pagan State, provides us with an acceptable model for a civil magistrate. The key question is this: In what circumstances is his model judicially legitimate? In a pagan State or a Christian State? I argue that his model is valid only in the former case. *Pagans who break God's civil laws deserve to be enslaved politically, since they are enslaved religiously.* This is the message of Genesis. Joseph did the righteous thing in extracting everything from the Egyptians in the first two years: their land, their animals, and their money. Then, when they faced starvation in the third year, he gave them a choice: either perpetual bondage to Pharaoh, plus a perpetual obligation to pay 20% of their increase in taxes, or else starvation. This rate of taxation was double the rate that Samuel said would constitute God's judgment against Israel (I Sam. 8:15, 17). (A side note: to return to the "double tyranny" taxation rate of Egypt, every Western industrial nation would have to cut taxes by at least 50%. You think this century is not under God's judgment? But seminary theologians have yet to notice.)

We are told that Joseph extracted "all the traffic would bear," in the classic line of the capitalist villain in Frank Norris' socialist novel, *The Octopus*. This was a blessing of God, concludes E. P. Clowney. For some, it was; in history, every blessing can become a curse, and every curse on the covenant-breaker can become a blessing if he repents. This is not what Clowney had in mind. Keller's argument comes through as

29. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

clear as crystal: the blessing was part of the new Egyptian welfare State. "I am sure everyone in Egypt would have called the program a *blessing*; the alternative was mass starvation."³⁰ This shows that Dr. Keller does not understand economics. The text shows that Joseph made the Egyptians pay dearly to stay alive. He bought their lands in the name of the State. He brought them into permanent slavery. He bargained sharply.

There was another quite obvious alternative: *Joseph could simply have given away the food, year by year*. The people would have retained their land and their legal status as free men. Later, Joseph gave food to his family; he did not enslave them. But Dr. Keller does not mention this alternative. Why not? I offer this possibility: *because he is "insensitive" to the tyranny of the welfare State*. The obvious does not occur to him when he discusses the workings of the welfare State. The same is true of Clowney. Clowney goes so far as to say that this action on Joseph's part was an aspect of the prophecy that Abraham would bless the nations.³¹

I argue in my commentary on Genesis that what Joseph did was tyrannical: not immoral but righteous, for he brought a pagan, God-hating nation under God's negative sanctions in history. *He enslaved them*. This was God's curse against them.³² (As a side note: I first heard the argument that Joseph in Egypt provides a legitimate model for accepting the ideal of a welfare State when I was a student at Westminster Seminary. The idea was attributed to a professor at Covenant College. I knew I had my life's work cut out for me when I heard that one.) But Keller says that Joseph was "acting on the basis of principle – that a good civil magistrate is concerned for the temporal welfare of his people." Got that? *The temporal welfare of his people*.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 283n.

31. *Idem*.

32. Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (2nd ed; Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), pp. 227-30.

Right: just have the State take 20% of men's food for seven years, store it in State-owned warehouses, sell it back to them at high prices when famine hits, legally enslave them in the process, and then tax them forever at twice the rate that God identifies as tyrannical. Keller and Clowney call this "grace."

This is what passes for theological scholarship at Westminster Seminary today. Would Machen be proud? Would Van Til?

Now, consider Keller's discussion of a private individual who dares to rent an apartment to anyone who will offer a higher rent than a particular poor man is willing to pay. "Should the government legislate against homosexuality but not against landlords who gouge poor tenants with unfair rents?"³³ Here it is: *the familiar call for government-mandated rent controls* – the classic means of reducing the supply of rented space.

First, I want to see in print exactly which negative sanctions Dr. Keller proposes that the State impose against homosexuals. Be specific, sir. Let us see if this is merely rhetorical flourish on your part or a serious political recommendation. Let us read your opinion regarding the specified biblical civil sanction against homosexuality: execution (Lev. 20:13). Be frank.³⁴

Second, I want to see the biblical and *predictable* civil standard of fairness that Keller thinks the State should enforce on owners of rental property. Also, why limit this to rentals? By what theoretical argument can rent controls be distinguished from other price controls? Why not enforce standards of "fairness" on every price charged to the poor? Here we are again: right back in early medieval Scholasticism's just price theory. (The later Scholastics abandoned it.)³⁵ The New England Puritans tried this approach and abandoned it as unworkable three centuries ago.³⁶ But now it is being revived, and all in the

33. Keller, p. 282.

34. Be frank about Massachusetts' Congressman Barney Frank!

35. Alejandro Antonio Chafuen, *Christians for Liberty: Late-Scholastic Economics* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986).

36. Gary North, *Puritan Economic Experiments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Chris-

name of the latest scholarship at Gordon-Conwell Seminary and Westminster.

Why was Joseph a bringer of God's blessings, according to Keller-Clowney? Their implicit answer: because he was a State bureaucrat. Why is price gouging wrong? Apparently, only because it is a private, voluntary transaction. I ask: What is rent-gouging? How can it be defined, either biblically or economically? Yes, an owner sometimes raises the rent. This is because he thinks that another would-be renter is willing to pay him more money. Keller does not understand this fundamental principle of free market pricing: *renters compete against renters*, while *owners compete against owners*.

Why is it wrong for a house owner to accept an offer from someone to rent his house or apartment at a rent that another renter is unwilling to pay? Why blame the house owner for gouging? Why not blame the new renter as a "cut-throat competitor" against the original renter? Why does the principle of "high bid wins" outrage Keller in this case, but not when Joseph honored it by enslaving the Egyptians? Because in this case, a private individual is making money. Keller offers us no other way to distinguish the two kinds of pricing.

My point in my Genesis commentary was this: when the State has a monopoly, tyranny is always a threat. But when one renter bids against another to rent scarce space from one house owner among thousands, there is nothing remotely questionable morally about allowing the owner to rent to the highest bidder. *Renters compete against renters*. It is an auction process for allocating scarce space. Keller, Protestant Scholastic that he is, does not understand this. To prove that rent-gouging exists and is immoral, he cites Richard Baxter, who wrote three hundred years ago, and who offered no Bible verses to support his position. Baxter, of course, was a Protestant Scholastic (e.g., *A Christian Directory*). I guess this persuaded the editors.

No Theonomic Programs

Now we come to the climax. Keller argues that we theonomists have suggested no positive, privately funded programs to help the poor. But he has a serious problem. George Grant has proposed lots of workable programs, and he personally created and directed one such program in Humble, Texas. American Vision published George Grant's *Bringing in the Sheaves* (1985). I published his book, *In the Shadow of Plenty: The Biblical Blueprint for Welfare* (Dominion Press, 1986) as part of my Biblical Blueprint Series. I also published his book, *The Dispossessed: Homelessness in America* (Dominion Press, 1986). Keller agrees with Grant's views, and he says so. Therefore, he offers the following explanation of the theonomists' lack of charitable concern: *George Grant is not a theonomist*. Keller devotes his final four pages to this thesis.

We theonomists are always being accused of putting politics at the top of our agenda. This is a misrepresentation, but it is common. Now, would you imagine that I would hire a non-theonomist to write the Biblical Blueprints book on political action? No? Neither would I. The book is *The Changing of the Guard: Biblical Blueprints for Political Action*. Its author? George Grant. Does Keller mention this? No.

That's it, folks. Here we have it: the second-best example of the demise of the scholarly tradition of the older Westminster. (The best example is Muether: see below.) When the facts don't fit, just deny the facts.

Several years ago, ICE paid George Grant to write a how-to manual on operating a local church charity program. This was before he went to work at Coral Ridge Ministries. Since I am still awaiting that manual, I figured I had better find out if George is still a theonomist. So I sent him a letter to get his present views. Here is his reply:

I have never hidden my bushel under a basket. Anyone who reads my work can tell immediately what schools of thought

have influenced my thinking. I am a Calvinistic, Reformed, Covenantal, and Post-Mil Presbyterian. Spurgeon, Berkhof, Warfield, Schaff, Van Til, Frame, Poythress, Jordan, North, Schmemann, Belloc, Chesterton, and (yes, I am not afraid to admit it in public) Francis Schaeffer are the men who have most shaped my theology. (Letter dated Sept. 24, 1990)

This eclecticism is not a denial of theonomy; it is an assertion of intellectual independence. He says later in his letter that he is not a theonomist in the Bahnsen and Rushdoony mold. So what? Keller's article does not even mention Bahnsen; it is an attack on me, Chilton, and Sutton. Furthermore, at the time that Grant wrote these books, he was a full-time pastor and a member of the presbytery the tiny (now defunct) Association of Reformation Churches, whose main congregation was Westminster Presbyterian Church in Tyler. That denomination was self-consciously Christian Reconstructionist. In any case, whatever I publish is consistent with Christian Reconstruction, irrespective of the confession of the author. Let me make myself perfectly clear: since I am putting up most of the money for the publishing of Christian Reconstruction books these days, it seems a bit silly for a critic to claim that I do not know what I am talking about, that what I publish in the field of local church charity is not in fact Reconstructionist material.

There is a phenomenon called the *division of labor*. It is a product of God's grant of many differing gifts to individuals (I Cor. 12). The fact that I personally have not written a book on private charity is irrelevant if I have commissioned someone else to write it for me. Does this make sense to the reader? This possibility apparently did not occur to Dr. Keller.

Keller's argument is this: we Reconstructionists have published no compassionate, help-filled books on how to alleviate poverty. Therefore, the Reconstructionist worldview is not compassionate. Then, when we present Grant's books as evidence that we have a compassionate worldview, he tells us that

Grant is not a Reconstructionist. I am reminded of Van Til's description of operational presuppositionalism. A man says, "My net can catch all the fish in the sea." A second man denies it. The first man then tosses in his net. The second man spots a small fish that got through the net. "Look," he says, "there goes a fish your net didn't catch!" To which the first man replies, "Anything my net doesn't catch isn't a fish." Dr. Keller threw down his net, and Grant swam through it. Hence, Grant is not a theonomic fish.

Therefore, Westminster could not hire Bahnsen and had to fire Shepherd.

John R. Muether

Waltke's essay is highly peculiar. Keller's is ridiculous. John Muether's is perverse. Mr. Muether was a librarian at Westminster when he wrote his essay, "The Theonomic Attraction." He is now a librarian at the Orlando campus of Reformed Theological Seminary. I have already presented my objections to his millennial views and his views on God's sanctions in history, as I made plain in Chapter 6. My objections there were strictly theological. Not so in the case of "The Theonomic Attraction." This essay is by far the most objectionable in the book. Indeed, short of Hal Lindsey's identification of the Christian Reconstructionists as "the most anti-Semitic movement I've seen since Hitler,"³⁷ Mr. Muether's article is the most vicious, hate-filled patchwork of lies that has yet been written about us, including the piece in *The Humanist*. There is simply no excuse for such a piece in a book representing Westminster Seminary. An essay like this can only backfire on him and the editors. The Ninth Commandment is still in force.

In the original version of my response, I outdid myself in the zingers I included, and some of the readers of this book

37. Lindsey, "The Dominion Theology Heresy," audiotape #217. This is a verbal review of David Chilton's *Paradise Restored*.

know that I'm pretty good in the barb field. But I have removed all of them. Mr. Muether's piece reflects not just spirited polemical discourse, which I always appreciate, but a nearly pathological hatred. It is not just that the essay is vitriolic. Who am I, after all, to complain about vitriol? No, his essay is a personal attack on my church, my intellectual integrity, and my commitment to scholarship. I deeply resent it.

The Initial Phase

The initial phase of the essay is not evil – silly, perhaps, but not evil. He first raises a “sociological question”: “If theonomy is the consistent teaching of Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith, why does it seem that we have discovered it only now, in late twentieth-century America? Why not, say, in seventeenth-century England or in nineteenth-century Holland?”³⁸ Notice how he drops a very important modifier: seventeenth-century *New* England. There he has a problem, as his colleague Dr. Logan has in Chapter 15. Theonomy was the operating foundation of the Puritan commonwealth in Massachusetts in the first generation, 1630-60. This is why Roger Williams fled and invented political pluralism.

The answer to his question can be found in two words: *Van Til*. He might have written – indeed, he is implicitly writing on every page of his essay: “If natural law theory is inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture, why does it seem that we have discovered this fact only now, in late twentieth-century America? Why not in seventeenth-century England or in nineteenth-century Holland?”

In Mr. Muether's system, as I have argued in Chapter 6, *there is no place for progressive sanctification of the Church in history*. The redemptive-historical world of the Old Testament, tied as it was to God's predictable covenantal sanctions in history, ends

38. Muether, p. 245.

for him, as it ends in Kline's theology, in 70 A.D. Muether is a thorough-going intrusionist.³⁹ So, he fails to grasp the possibility that Van Til created a significant revolution in the history of the Church – a revolution that categorically overthrew, biblically, natural law theory. Because he fails to comprehend the reality or even the possibility of significant historical development in New Testament times, he offers his rhetorical question.

He surveys the history of American pluralism since 1788 and concludes that America is not now a Christian nation.⁴⁰ He cites Will Herberg's book, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* to make his point,⁴¹ but not, I assure you, Herberg's brilliant essay on America's civil religion, in which Herberg identified this pluralistic religion for what it surely is, biblically speaking: *idolatry*. Herberg wrote:

But, if it is an authentic religion as civil religion, America's civil religion is not, and cannot be seen as, authentic Christianity or Judaism, or even as a special cultural version of either or both. Because they serve a jealous God, these biblical faiths cannot allow any claim to ultimacy and absoluteness on the part of anything or any idea or any system short of God, even when what claims to be the ultimate locus of ideas, ideals, values, and allegiance is the very finest of human institutions; it is still human, man's own construction, and not God himself. To see America's civil religion as somehow standing above or beyond the biblical religions of Judaism and Christianity, and Islam too, as somehow including them and finding a place for them in its overarching unity, is idolatry, however innocently held and whatever may be the subjective intentions of the believers.⁴²

39. I have dealt with him in greater detail in Chapter 7 of *Millennialism and Social Theory*.

40. Muether, p. 248.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

42. Herberg, "America's Civil Religion: What It Is and Whence It Comes," in Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (eds.), *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 86-87.

So far, Muether is merely ill-informed. He is an amateur who is in too far over his head academically. He has not done his homework. This is typical of our critics. As such, his efforts would be worth a few zingers, a little public roasting. But this is not the heart of his criticism of the theonomists. The essay then degenerates into a personal attack on my integrity, and not just an attack: a tissue of lies.

"Sola Scriptura": Beneath Contempt

Mr. Muether attacks what he calls "The Biblicism of Theonomy." In his view, biblicism – also known in Church history as *sola Scriptura* – is a liability. He specifically identifies an example of a comparable biblicism: belief in the six-day creation. He identifies belief in such a view of creation as fundamentalism. (And you know what they think about fundamentalism at Gordon College!) "Fundamentalists use the Bible as a textbook on geology, finding evidence of a literal six-day creation and a ten-thousand-year-old earth."⁴³ What? The Bible as a textbook? Outrageous! (Substitute the word "marriage" for "geology," and see if you like the result.) This view of creation is standard fare at the neo-evangelical institutions that have been waging war against Calvinism since the end of World War II.

Sadly, there is no course at Westminster Seminary on the necessity of the six-day creation, any more than there is a section in the required ethics course on abortion as murder. This is why the editors were willing to allow this passage to get into the book. It was not enough to be "neutral" on the six-day creation; Westminster Seminary is now publicly represented by someone who is verbally contemptuous of it. Westminster's confession gets worse and worse over time.

Then Mr. Muether overplays his hand. In doing so, the tone and character of his essay changes. He goes beyond rhetoric.

43. Muether, p. 254.

He lies. Let us not try to put a good face on it. *He lies*. He lies for Jesus. He lies for the kingdom of God. He lies for the sake of revenge. He deliberately misleads the reader. I become his visible target, but his reader is the real victim.

The Gold Standard

He identifies my *Biblical Blueprints Series* as an example of biblicism. He specifically cites my book, *Honest Money*, and asks: "Why, for example, should the United States return to the gold standard? Because careful and prudent economic analysis suggests it will produce a healthier economy? No, because Deuteronomy 25:15 says that you shall have just weights and measures."⁴⁴

Two comments are in order. First, why should I trust modern economists more than I trust Deuteronomy 25:15? (Why should anyone in his right mind trust modern economists, with or without Deuteronomy 25:15?) Second, *Honest Money* specifically teaches that the United States should *not* return to the gold standard. I wrote the book in order to deny the legitimacy, biblically, of the traditional gold standard. Yet in order to ridicule me and my "biblicism," Muether deliberately twists what I wrote. (I am assuming here that he read the book. If he did not read it, then he is not a liar; he is merely a phony.) In the chapter called "A Biblical Monetary System," under the subhead called, "The Gold Standard," I wrote this:

For the State to say that only gold should circulate is a restriction on individual liberty. For the State to say that only gold is legal tender (a legally mandatory form of money) is also a violation of individual liberty. Let people decide how and what they use as money, provided that no fractional reserves are involved.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

A traditional gold standard requires the State to define its official currency in terms of weight and fineness of gold, and then to buy and sell gold at this defined price. This gets the State into the money business. There is no warrant for this practice in the history of Old Testament Israel. The New Testament example is the Roman Empire – not a morally uplifting example.

A traditional gold standard is better than a fiat (unbacked) money standard, but it transfers too much sovereignty to the State. It also allows the State to “change the rules” at its own convenience, that is, to redefine the currency unit (usually by defrauding present holders of the paper currency: less gold per currency unit), or to cease allowing citizens to make withdrawals. Better to have the State policing private issuers of gold and warehouse receipts to gold, and then to collect its taxes in a specified form of private currency. Under such an arrangement, the politicians have a greater incentive to police the State's source of tax revenues than they do to police the State's own monetary practices.

What freedom produces is *parallel standards*. Various forms of money compete with each other. The State is to establish no fixed, bureaucratic price between moneys. The decisions of free men can then determine which form or forms of money become most acceptable. There is nothing magic about money. It is simply *the most marketable commodity*. The market establishes this, not the coercive power of the State. *Money is the product of voluntary human action, not of bureaucratic design*. Money is the product of freedom, and it reinforces freedom.⁴⁵

Yet Mr. Muether equates my thesis in *Honest Money* with a biblical defense of the gold standard. In short, he faked the reference. He simply made it up. It made me look like a fool, he imagined: building my case for biblically honest money on the biblical *law* – not a suggestion – against false weights and

45. Gary North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986), pp. 107-8.

measures. Because he was neither academically or exegetically equipped to refute my thesis, he imputed to me the very idea I wrote the book to refute.

Or else he never bothered to read the book.

North the Charismatic

Muether identifies me as "a professed convert to charismatic thought."⁴⁶ A professed convert is someone who publicly adopts a particular position or belief. When, then, was my profession? What evidence does he offer for this accusation? He refers to a newsletter I wrote that reported that my wife was healed of a long-standing physical affliction the very day the elders of our church anointed her with oil and prayed over her.⁴⁷ But he does not mention that it was my wife who was healed. That would make my case look too strong – a personal witness to the truth. He begins with a partial citation of my account:

"[The healing]" – note, he uses brackets so as to avoid mentioning my wife – "did not lead to tongues-speaking, but it did lead to a new willingness to accept the fact that no one ecclesiastical organization has all the answers." This ecclesiastical relativism is astonishing from an allegedly Reformed author, but it is consistent with contemporary evangelicalism.⁴⁸

Notice the pejorative phrases. Ecclesiastical relativism! Contemporary evangelicalism! Yet Westminster Seminary has been developing its academic program for a quarter of a century by adopting the ideal of broad-based evangelicalism. My view is this: Calvinism is true, but the Calvinist Scholastic tradition has ignored biblically legitimate practices in other traditions.

46. Muether, p. 251.

47. North, "Reconstructionist Renewal and Charismatic Renewal," *Christian Reconstruction*, XII (May/June 1988).

48. Muether, p. 253.

What this man does not admit to his readers is that in Reformed circles prior to the nineteenth century, healing services were considered acceptable, and they are still practiced in Anglicanism and Episcopalianism. He neglects to mention that the "Tyler, Texas church" – prudently unnamed – that I belong to joined the Reformed Episcopal Church within a year after the cited newsletter appeared, a denomination which authorizes healing services based on James 5:14. Had he mentioned this, he would not have been able to insert the pejorative phrase, "allegedly Reformed author." But that would have spoiled all the fun.

This man obviously delights in the thought of scoring big with uninformed readers who are ignorant of Church history in general and my church background in particular. I will put it more bluntly than this; not having been gifted in life with a taste for the rigors of serious scholarship, Mr. Muether falls back on the time-tested hatchet techniques of innuendo and the deliberate deception of the reader. He does not understand that the biblical goal of rhetoric is to accent the truth for the benefit of the reader and your own cause; the goal is not deliberately to mislead the reader and then later get identified in print by your intended victim as morally lax. I well understand that Scofieldian antinomians Dave Hunt and Hal Lindsey do not recognize these principles of Christian rhetoric.⁴⁹ I do not understand why the Westminster symposium's editors didn't. They needed to explain these basic rules of efficient hatchet-job writing (an area in which I am certainly experienced) to this young man, who was just beginning his career as a writer.

That such an essay as his got past the editors is one more testimony to their embarrassing lack of editorial judgment. They just could not say no. They did not understand how important this willingness to say no is to the editor's task.

49. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 140-44.

North's Contempt for God's Church

He lists nine of the ten volumes in the series that my company financed and I edited, the Biblical Blueprint Series. He left out my book, *Liberating Planet Earth*, the introductory volume in the series. In a footnote, he adds this insight: "Note what is lacking in this series: there is no 'biblical blueprint' on the church. This is further evidence of theonomy's low view of the church."⁵⁰

What this man does not bother to mention is that in the year that the first four volumes of the Biblical Blueprints series were published, 1986, Geneva Ministries in Tyler published the fourth and final volume of the series, *Christianity and Civilization*. Its topic was *The Reconstruction of the Church*, edited by James Jordan. It has a 1985 date on it, but it actually appeared in 1986. It is about 350 pages long. I have two essays in it. There are three articles by Ray Sutton and one by George Grant, both of whom also wrote two volumes each in the Biblical Blueprint Series.

In the Introduction to that collection of essays, Jordan announced that the following year, his book, *The Sociology of the Church*, would appear, which it did, right on schedule, unlike the journal. Far from proclaiming a "low view" of the Church, Jordan's book proclaimed such a high church view that he was repeatedly accused of having moved either toward Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. Yet in 1990, John R. Muether, librarian, was either unaware of all this or was unwilling to inform his readers.

Before it was over, my profit-seeking company sank almost half a million dollars into the Blueprint series, if we count salaries and advertising expenses. Frankly, the project came close to bankrupting the firm. We promised early subscribers to the series ten volumes, and I had to write four of them in

50. Muether, p. 255n.

one year to meet the schedule, paying authors for five manuscripts that we had to reject. (Yes, I was an editor who had learned to say "no," even when it cost me.) Yet here we find Mr. Muether complaining to all the world that I did not also publish an eleventh volume on the Church, despite the fact – never mentioned by Muether – that in nine of the ten volumes in the Biblical Blueprint Series, there is a chapter on the Church and its responsibilities in the area of social change. This man is not to be taken seriously as a scholar.

I just ran a computerized word search on all the newsletters and cover letters that I personally have written for the Institute for Christian Economics, from May, 1985, through February, 1991. Of the 173 files on my hard disk, the word *Church* appears in 103 of them.

I operate a parachurch ministry. This means it runs on donations. Here is the my stated position on tithe money and donations. I wrote this in *Christian Reconstruction*, XIV, No. 2, March/April, 1990. See if it reflects a "low view of the church."

If I were a donor to a parachurch ministry (or any other kind of Christian ministry), I would specifically enquire of the head of the ministry regarding his local church membership and the name of the church's senior pastor.⁵¹ If he is not a member of a local church, I would cut off all contributions. (This is not the same thing as refusing to buy services or goods from a ministry.) Also, these ministries should make it clear that they do not seek people's tithe money (the first ten percent); they should be supported exclusively by *individual offerings above the tithe* and by *contributions from churches*. These are measures to be taken by donors.

Let me know when you see the head of any other parachurch ministry send this message to his donors. (I reprint this entire

51. Mine is the Good Shepherd Reformed Episcopal Church, Tyler, Texas, pastored by Ray Sutton.

newsletter as Appendix C, just to make everything as clear as possible.) Understand that I am reprinting this letter only because of Muether's outrageous accusation against theonomy.

Lest anyone imagine that I wrote this because I had an advance copy of Muether's essay (I didn't), I should point out that it has been my policy to send back large donations to donors to make sure that they are not sending money that is owed to their local church. In November of 1988, I sent back a \$25,000 check with a warning to the donor that if he was a church member, he owed 10% to his church before he owed any other organization.

Your donation of \$25,000 is much appreciated. It is a very large donation. While it is not normal for recipient organizations to refuse donations, or in any way discourage them, I want to get things clear in both our minds. It is my policy to recommend that donors tithe to their churches before making donations to ICE. I do this because parachurch ministries have invaded many of the traditional areas of church service, just as the State has, and this has weakened the churches. I also believe that the tithe is owed to God through the church.

Naturally, I have good uses for the donation. But I don't want to take the money on terms that will put either of us on God's hotseat. If you are not a member of a church because you are not a Christian, then I guess ICE is better than most places to spend the money. But if you're a church member, I want us both to be sure that ICE isn't draining off money that belongs elsewhere.

I will wait for you to let me know that for sure you want the money to go to ICE before I cash the check.

He was not a church member, so he sent it back. Only then did ICE cash it.

In *Biblical Economics Today*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (Dec./Jan. 1991), I wrote the following on the centrality of the church. The essay is titled, "Tithing and Submission." It proclaims the doctrine of

God's sanctions in history that John R. Muether emphatically rejects (see Chapter 6). Here is my position:

The presence of a self-maledictory oath is the mark of covenantal sovereignty. Only three institutions lawfully can require such an oath: church, state, and family. Such an oath implicitly or explicitly calls down God's negative sanctions on the person who breaks the conditions of the oath. These sanctions are historical, although few Christians believe this, despite Paul's warning: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (I Cor. 11:27-32).

Self-judgment, institutional judgment, and then God's judgment: all take place in history. But the modern church has grave doubts about this idea of God's negative sanctions in history. It therefore does not expect to experience God's promised positive sanctions in history. The next step is obvious: to lose faith in meaningful historical progress. Here is the origin of pessimillennialism's lack of confidence in the work of the church, the effects of the gospel, and the future of Christianity.

Without the oath and its associated sanctions, the church is not legally distinguishable from any other oathless institution. Furthermore, the oath that creates a new family is taken no more seriously than an oath of church membership. So, only one oath-bound institution remains that is still taken seriously, because of the sanctions attached to the oath: *the state*. The rise of statism is always accompanied by the decline of the church and the decline of the family.

Which oath is supposed to be central in society? The church's oath. Why? Because only the church survives the final judgment. It alone extends into eternity. It is the church that alone

has been assigned the task of baptizing whole nations in Christ's name (Matt. 28:18-20).

Today, this view of the centrality of the church is not taken seriously. Liberals affirm the centrality of the state. Conservatives affirm the centrality of the family. Both views are at war against the plain teaching of Jesus.

John R. Muether is unconscionable. He is an intellectually dishonest man. He lies. He is a disgrace to Reformed Theological Seminary, which now employs him. He is Westminster's disgrace for as long as this edition of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* remains in print.

Muether is not an academically gifted person. I do not mean merely intellectually; I mean above all morally. He lacks the moral fiber to engage in academic discourse. He not only lies; he lies incompetently. Had he contented himself with being a librarian, I would have no complaint, but the editors treated him as if he were a scholar. They did him and the readers no favor. While he may be intellectually capable of shelving books, John R. Muether has no place teaching on any Christian campus. I never remember writing this about anyone before. There is no excuse for what he did. He should be fired. I don't think he will be. He is "inside the club." Being inside the club means never having to say you're sorry for vilifying those outside it. Once inside the club, the Ninth Commandment no longer applies to those outside, or so the club members imagine. They have no fear of Achans.

Conclusion

To the editors, I say: Gentlemen, with power comes responsibility. You exercised power as editors, but you did not exercise it responsibly. In the case of Bruce Waltke, you published a man nearing the end of his career, one who has been adrift theologically for years. This was, at best, an unwise decision. He has now wandered off again. In the case of John Muether,

you published the essay of a young, theologically immature man at the very beginning of his career, a man who needed not only editorial counsel and spiritual counsel, but perhaps even psychological counsel – a man so eaten up with hatred of theonomy (God's revealed law and its historical sanctions) that he has rejected the Ninth Commandment as no longer binding on him. He really does act as though he thinks he is beyond God's negative sanctions. He was certainly correct in thinking that he was beyond yours.

Didn't you see that this man may be emotionally disturbed to the point of no longer being willing to discern fact from fiction? Didn't you check any of his footnotes? Wasn't the outrageousness of his claims – e.g., North as a converted charismatic – a tip-off that this man's judgment was poisoned by hate? Can't you distinguish rhetorical excess from outright lying?

Book editors should see to it that each of the contributions is theologically consistent internally. If the book is a critical evaluation of a movement or idea, they should also see to it that the contributions are generally consistent with the other contributions. At the very least, they should warn their readers of the differing bases of the critiques. Most crucial of all, they should see to it that all specific criticisms are accurately documented. You failed in all four of these tasks. The book presents no sustained argument against theonomy, no unified alternative viewpoint to theonomy, no agreed-upon principle of biblical interpretation, and remarkably few references to the body of theological literature known as theonomy, especially anything published after 1985. You seemed to be governed by only one principle: "If an essay casts some doubt on any aspect of theonomy, true or false, we'll publish it."

Ultimately, an editor's task is to reject lousy essays. That task, above all, is the one that you two shirked. As agents bearing lawful authority, men must either be willing to impose negative sanctions or else risk coming under them. It is clear to

me why the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company rejected this manuscript. Why Zondervan's Academie subdivision – its academic branch – accepted it is beyond me. They, too, needed a few astute goons to do some serious verification.

CONCLUSION

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (Josh. 1:6-8).

Turn neither to the right nor to the left. This passage makes an assumption, however: the listener is in fact moving forward. The person sitting down can obey the specifics of this law. He moves neither to the right nor the left. He just sits. Joshua was not to sit. Neither are we.

Modern Reformed churches have not understood that owning an accurate road map is not the same as using it to march forward. They preach Calvinism, but they also preach historical failure for Christendom. So have premillennial dispensationalists, but they have this advantage: they tell their followers that Jesus is coming again soon to Rapture His people to heaven. This is an optimistic message of escape, not simply a message of psychological preparation for inevitable cultural defeat in history.

Consider the Christian who hears two messages. In the first church, he is told that the world cannot be healed in history, but God does intend to rescue His people from the evil-doers of this world. In the other church, he is told that there is no earthly hope, but God is *not* going to Rapture His people. The first church has several thousand members, lots of programs, youth groups, a large building, and a gymnasium. The other church is tiny, has few programs, and has not grown for ten years. In this church, they preach Calvinist doctrine, which is unknown to most visitors, and alienates most of the others. But this church also preaches that there are no specifically Christian solutions to the problems of this world. Now, which form of pietistic retreat from this world do you think will sell?

Man is saved by grace (justification), not by doctrinal purity (i.e., theological sanctification). So, the person who selects the large church is no worse off, if doctrine is closely related to action (i.e., inaction). *With greater knowledge there always comes greater responsibility* (Luke 12:47-48). Thus, hearing rigorously doctrinal sermons places the listener under greater responsibility. But if his church preaches that Christians are not given any unique solutions to real-world problems, then what difference does all the doctrine make? It merely places the listener under greater condemnation. He would therefore be foolish to remain in a pietistic Reformed church. He should attend the equally pietistic Baptist church. And he will.

Christian Reconstruction preaches the triumph of Christendom. *It issues marching orders to an army that cannot lose in history.* It has been the goal of the Christian Reconstructionists to move forward in every sense. We have tried to move forward exegetically, which is why we have published Bible commentaries. We have tried to move forward philosophically, too. We have tried to move forward culturally. We have done this at considerable expense. And I assure you, we have had neither encouragement nor much constructive criticism from those Christian leaders who are committed to sitting on the sidelines, let alone

those who are moving either to the right (pietism) or to the left (liberation theology). We have not seen exegetical discussions that show us a better way to go. We have just been told repeatedly that the way we are headed is: heretical, misguided, utopian, this-worldly, tyrannical, legalistic, a delusive and grotesque perversion (pick at least one).

Westminster Seminary's Challenge

Theonomy: A Reformed Critique is a peculiar book. That is to say, it is a true reflection of Westminster Seminary's confession. The faculty is deeply divided regarding a biblically valid, positive alternative to theonomy. The extent of that division was never before so clear as it is in this symposium. I am not speaking here of their personal rivalries. I am also not speaking of disagreements over the proper application of this or that verse. I am speaking of a deep-seated opposition between two groups: (1) men want to see the Bible's specific case laws applied to New Testament society (e.g., Frame, Poythress), assuming we can ever get such judicial matters clarified; and (2) committed pluralists who are aghast at such an idea (e.g., Barker, Muehler). Others are somewhere in between, still silent about the whole debate, despite the insertion into the book's title of the word "critique." It is remarkable that they wanted this book in print.

It is amazing how few of the authors come to grips with the applicational side of the Christian Reconstruction movement. They prefer to argue about the technical aspects of Bahnsen's hermeneutical formulation when they mention any theonomic literature at all (several of the contributors did not mention anything). But the heart of the Christian Reconstruction movement is not its technical hermeneutic; it is (1) its call to re-think and rebuild the world in terms of God's Bible-revealed law and (2) its call to a systematically biblical view of the covenant.

Where was any discussion in the book of the biblical covenant model?¹ Nowhere.

Whatever Happened to Machen's Vision?

Pretend that it is half a century ago. Imagine some businessman in Boondocksville, Texas, attempting to take on the entire faculty of Westminster Seminary: Young, Stonehouse, Murray, Van Til, and R. B. Kuiper. (I skip over Paul Woolley; in the area in which he was technically competent, Church history, he seldom wrote.) Go back even earlier to 1930. Add J. Gresham Machen, O. T. Allis, and Robert Dick Wilson. What would be the result of such a confrontation? The businessman would have had his head handed to him. Not today.

Machen set a standard of personal scholarship that influenced the creation of the seminary. He deeply believed in Christian scholarship.² This faculty-wide standard has not been approached by any other evangelical seminary since its founding. My question is this: Can you imagine Machen's name as editor of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*?

What has happened since those early days of Westminster Seminary? How can it be that one man, armed only with a word processor and his personal library, can create doubts about the competence of the Westminster faculty? For that matter, how is it that it took the entire Westminster faculty (plus the back-up of ex-faculty members) to answer, basically, half a dozen men, and really only one, Greg Bahnsen – and then not even begin to answer him? How can such things be?

I have a two-word answer: *Edmund Clowney*. When Edmund Clowney took over Westminster Seminary, it was the premier

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

2. Machen, "The Importance of Christian Scholarship" (1932); reprinted in *What Is Christianity? And Other Essays*, edited by Ned B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1951).

academic seminary in the Bible-affirming, English-speaking world. He ran it, and it shows. He broadened the base, and it shows. He staffed it, and it shows. He did not see to it that Van Til's legacy was maintained, and it shows.

But it was more than Clowney. Clowney was only the symptom. When Westminster was founded in the fall of 1929, there was a far greater level of Christian influence in the United States. The spiritual capital base was much larger. The older Princeton apologetic still looked formidable to Christians, even though Kant had destroyed its foundations before 1800, Darwin replaced them in 1859, and Heisenberg had then begun the erosion of anything remaining in 1927. Van Til seemed radical back then. His message did not seem reasonable. Why, the humanist world was not really bankrupt!

And then, one month after the seminary opened, the Great Depression began.

Van Til was correct about neutrality. There is none. This includes *judicial* neutrality. But Westminster Seminary still does not recognize the magnitude of what Van Til achieved. It has not properly valued Van Til's legacy on the impossibility of neutral natural law.

The choice remains: natural law theory or Van Til. The implicit answer remains the same at Westminster: natural law theory. Explicitly, they offer no answer (except for Barker).

Therefore, Westminster could not hire Bahnsen and had to fire Shepherd.

A Challenge to Theonomy and Van Til

Those few critics (dispensationalists) who come to us (i.e., who have gone into print) in the name of a better pathway have at least done their best to warn us about our deviant theology.³ They have committed themselves to marching for-

3. I have in mind the books by Dave Hunt, Hal Lindsey, Albert James Dager, and David Allen Lewis.

ward. They have gone to the trouble of working out a road map with what they perceive as the biblical signposts. Their theology tells them where we theonomists have departed from the pathway of civil righteousness. Liberty University philosophy professor Norman Geisler is clear about the nature of our deviation: we have abandoned natural law theory and the doctrine of the Rapture. He understands the inescapable burden of the person who rejects biblical law in the name of Christianity: to put forward an alternative concept of civil law, i.e., *natural law*. He has been willing to do this. Unlike the faculty at Westminster Seminary, he is not attempting to beat something with nothing specific. The demonstration that this proposed dispensational alternative cannot stand the test of biblical revelation and biblical philosophy was Van Til's legacy to the Church in general and Reformed theology specifically. But at least they have identified the primary area of disagreement: natural law. They have denied that Van Til was correct on this point, and have then challenged our view of revealed law with an appeal to traditional natural law theory.

Our response to these fundamentalist critics is three-fold. *First*, where is your line-by-line refutation of Van Til? Where is there a book that demonstrates that Van Til was wrong about natural law theory? To go about one's philosophical business on the assumption that Van Til was wrong, but without publicly answering Van Til, is not sufficient. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (I Pet. 3:15). This includes one's hope in the earthly future.

Second, where is your body of published materials that shows how Christianity affects social theory and social policy? What is the distinctively Christian contribution to Stoic natural law theory that would make society Christian? In what ways will Roman Catholic social theorists in the Scholastic tradition differ from Protestants who adopt the medieval synthesis of Bible and

Greek philosophy? Protestants who adopt the medieval synthesis must also adopt the medieval concept of *Christendom*. Medieval theorists did not regard Christendom as baptized Stoicism. They regarded Christian civilization as a separate entity from pagan civilization, a unique civilization required by God and governed by Him. Neither the dispensationalists nor the Reformed amillennialists have ever presented a comprehensive statement of what their respective social theories are.⁴

Third, where are your actual applications of natural law theory to the whole of culture? They do not exist. Why should they? The defenders of natural law theory today have no faith in Christendom. They regard the concept as pre-modern, i.e., pre-Newton. They have no faith in the earthly future of the Church. The costs of working out the outline and the details of their alternative to biblical law are too high. No one who thinks that such a task has no institutional payoff in the future is going to expend a lifetime of effort and money that it necessarily requires to complete it.

Politics

One aspect of society is politics. Here the American critics of theonomy like to appeal to the U.S. Constitution. This is a wholly illegitimate appeal. James Madison and his associates removed any reference to natural law or natural rights from the Constitution. The appeal to natural rights was Jefferson's strategy in the Declaration of Independence. It was abandoned by the Framers of the Constitution. There is no appeal to higher law in the Constitution, only an appeal to the sovereign agent, "We, the People."⁵ Over the last two centuries it has become clear that a mere five people determine what "We, the

4. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

5. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 10.

People" will allow: a majority of the Supreme Court. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger drove home this point in a televised interview with Bill Moyers:

CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER: Constitutional cases – constitutional jurisprudence is open to the Court to change its position, in view of – of changing conditions. And it has done so.

MOYERS: And what does it take for the Court to reverse itself?

CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER: Five votes.⁶

So, we are still waiting. Our non-Vantilian critics have offered natural law theory as their substitute for theonomy, but "natural law theory" is just a phrase. The question is: What is the actual content of this theory? What, precisely, do we learn from this theory about how we are supposed to live? With respect to actual content, our non-Vantilian critics are still attempting the impossible: beating something with nothing.

A Challenge to Theonomy in Van Til's Name

Theonomy: A Reformed Critique is supposedly written from the point of view of Van Til. At least, no one in the symposium explicitly broke with Van Til. The conventional reader who knows anything about Westminster will suppose that if any apologetic position is represented by this symposium, it must be Van Til's. The editors stated in their Preface that the contributors were all committed to "a defense of the faith opposed to the autonomy of human reason. . . ."⁷ If this is not a reference to Van Til's *Defense of the Faith* and his multi-volume *In Defense of Biblical Christianity*, then the symposium's readers are being misled.

6. "The Burger Years," CBS News Special (July 9, 1986), p. 6.

7. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 10.

This public confession created a monumental problem for the faculty. They had to show how they embrace Van Til's approach to the supposedly autonomous ethical theories of covenant-breaking man, yet simultaneously show that there is a biblical alternative to theonomy that is consistent with the Bible – an alternative that in no way rests philosophically on a legal theory that is in any fashion dependent on common-ground philosophy. They could appeal to common grace, of course, but not to Kuyper's version (common ground) or any other version that rests on the presupposition that man's autonomous reason can (let alone will) become a reliable source of ethical knowledge. The fact that Van Til never attempted to present this judicial alternative to theonomy is immaterial; the theonomists appeared late in his career.⁸ He saw his work as philosophical, not exegetical and judicial. This was a weakness on his part. Nevertheless, the fact that he neglected to deal with this glaring missing link in his system does not excuse his successors from dealing with it. They still refused to deal with it in their symposium. It is this studied neglect that undermines their whole effort.

The reader of their book should ask himself, page by page, argument by argument: "So, what is the proposed alternative?" This is what the editors steadfastly refused to ask of every contributor. Specifying the biblical alternative to theonomy, case by case, should have been the primary assignment given by the editors to every author in the book. This was not done.

Beating Something With Nothing

What, then, was the approach of those authors who at least understood the nature of their apologetic dilemma? They adopted an ancient technique that has been used by Western philosophers since at least the days of Abelard (11th century).

8. We know one thing: he wanted Greg Bahnsen to succeed him at Westminster.

They took the Hegelian path, but one disguised as agnosticism. They said: *sic et non* – “yes and no.” They rejected Kline’s position – itself offered in the name of Van Til and amillennial common grace – and Bahnsen’s. Theirs was basically this announcement: “A partial pox on both houses.” Rushdoony once called this *smorgasbord religion*: “A little of this please; a little of that; but none of that over there: I never touch it.”

This criticism does not apply to the more hostile members of the Gordon-Conwell faction. They have no idea what Van Til wrote, as their essays indicate. They have never thought about natural law. They just vent their spleens on this or that practical application of God’s law that does not sound politically liberal to them.

Once again, let me ask this question: What were the editors thinking of? Where was their resolve to just say no?

The editors admit that “the reader will discover differences on secondary points” among the essays.⁹ It is my assertion that these differences are more than secondary. They in fact represent the utter absence of any consistent alternative to theonomy, as well as the absence of any agreement on how such an alternative might be developed, either intellectually or exegetically. The essays reveal a primary division within the Westminster Seminary faculty, even without a contribution by Meredith G. Kline.

Douglas Oss has correctly noted the similarities between Kline’s thesis of the common grace “intrusion” period of the New Covenant era and dispensationalism’s “Church Age” or “great parenthesis.”¹⁰ It is this radical discontinuity between the Mosaic economy and everything that preceded it or followed it that is the theological basis of Kline’s rejection of theonomy. Here is the problem facing Westminster Seminary’s

9. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

10. Douglas Oss, “The Influence of Hermeneutical Frameworks in the Theonomy Debate,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, LI (Fall 1989), p. 240n.

faculty: How to break from Kline's near-dispensationalism without embracing theonomy? How to survive in the middle and still be called Reformed? There was a time when such a declaration was intellectually acceptable in Reformed circles, but not after Van Til destroyed the common sense rationalism of the old Princeton apologetic system. Only those Reformed theologians who reject Van Til can safely reject both Kline and theonomy, but only by appealing to natural law theory. Escaping Kline and Bahnsen, they are trapped either by Aquinas or Newton. But how can you embrace Aquinas without also embracing Rome? And how can you embrace Newton without also embracing Darwin, Heisenberg, and Mandelbrot?¹¹

There is but one remaining alternative: *mysticism*. This is not a path open to Reformed theologians, since Reformed theology is explicitly judicial. In short, how can you embrace mysticism and not embrace either the individualism of John Wimber's signs and wonders charismatic movement or else Eastern Orthodoxy's communalism? And how can you build an explicitly Christian society on these non-judicial theologies?

Intrusionism Intruding

When push has come to shove exegetically, the Westminster faculty has always deferred to Kline. Kline, after all, is on the Westminster Seminary payroll; Bahnsen never has been. The seminary has already made its public decision. The overwhelming majority of its members prefer the ethical and judicial discontinuity of Kline's intrusion thesis to the continuity of theonomy. His intrusion thesis has the hallmarks of dispensationalism, and it no doubt makes them feel uncomfortable, but it does not make them academic outcasts: spiritual wanderers crying in the fully accredited wilderness. If I am wrong, then all sixteen contributors to *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* will no

11. On Benoit Mandelbrot's theory of chaos, see James Gleik, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987).

doubt be ready to contribute another sixteen essays to my proposed symposium, *Intrusionism: A Reformed Critique*. They will demonstrate exegetically how they have broken completely with his intrusionism, yet they will not cite a single Bahnsen-like argument to justify this break. The Institute for Christian Economics will pay for all typesetting and printing expenses, and it will donate one copy each to any 500 libraries in the United States. I just hope this project, once accepted, will not take seventeen more years.

This project will be accepted when shrimps learn to whistle.

Conclusion

The editors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* had a responsibility. They were to assemble essays by the Westminster faculty that would respond forthrightly to the substance of theonomy, meaning either (1) the work of the entire Christian Reconstruction movement, or (2) Greg Bahnsen alone. They owed it to their authors and their readers to specify which task they had undertaken. They did neither. The essays fire away at Bahnsen in an unsystematic fashion, yet Keller and Muether take on several reconstructionists other than Bahnsen. The book does not present a series of concentrated, point-by-point cases against Bahnsen's thesis, with each contributor using his specialized knowledge to attack one aspect of Bahnsen's thesis. Neither does each of the essays systematically survey a particular aspect of Christian Reconstruction as a whole. What we find is a slap-dash collection of unfocused essays that for the most part have only one message: "We just don't like theonomy!"

Machen left a legacy to Westminster, a legacy of moral integrity, personal courage, and impeccable scholarship, in that order. Muether's essay is a disgrace: no integrity. It shows recklessness, not courage. It shows zero scholarship. Keller's piece is only marginally better. The book as a whole generally reveals sloppy work, yet it took five years to get it out. Maybe my book is not great, but it took five months, and I typeset it,

indexed it, and designed the cover. It doesn't take all that much to produce a reasonably coherent polemical book, and this is all *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* is: a polemical book. It is not a work of scholarship.

When Machen wrote a polemical book, he guarded his language. He knew what he believed, and he could defend impeccably what he believed. When he said something was true, you could bank on it – in an era in which banks were going bust. He told the truth about the Presbyterian Church, USA, and very few people believed him. What he predicted would happen did happen. That denomination lost its soul. His ability to tell the truth, and to be able to back it up with meticulous scholarship, was basic to his reputation and his legacy. He hoped that Westminster Seminary would perpetuate this legacy. For twenty-five years after his death, it did. The first generation maintained that precious trust, though not his eschatology. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* has visibly betrayed that trust.

It is cheap and relatively easy to betray a trust. It is expensive to regain it. This is Westminster's dilemma today. Once lost, a reputation for scholarly precision is very difficult to regain. Sloppy Christian scholarship, like trendier-than-thou neo-evangelical theology, is a glut on the market. *Schlock with footnotes is still schlock*.

Westminster Seminary has now abandoned the legacies of both Machen and Van Til. What will replace these legacies? Meredith G. Kline's? If so, then whatever distinctiveness that Westminster still retains will soon be lost. It will become just another Gordon-Conwell, but for Calvinists. But what else besides Kline is there? Those men who restructured Westminster – above all, Edmund Clowney and Paul Woolley – did not write very much. They left nothing behind except a restructured institution. They preferred to use their bureaucratic skills to achieve their goals rather than a publicly stated theology. They won. In this sense, they are the spiritual heirs of the

theological inclusivists who captured Princeton Seminary in 1929 and the Presbyterian Church, USA, in 1936. But unlike the inclusivists of 1929 and 1936, the inclusivists at Westminster did it without getting caught. No muss, no fuss; just attrition and systematic exclusion. We have to give them credit. We ought not give them cash, checks, or money orders.

Those faithful long-term supporters who have given money to Westminster Seminary and who have recommended that students attend the seminary seem not to have noticed that the seminary is no longer the institution it was in 1960. Furthermore, it was not the institution in 1960 that it was in 1930. This is normal; times change, and institutions must adjust or die. The question is this: *Are the changes legitimate extensions of the institution's original principles?* Those who support any institution because of their commitment to those original principles have a moral responsibility to keep asking this question and seeking a correct answer. There is no legitimate escape from personal responsibility when your money funds these changes. You cannot legitimately assume that these changes are peripheral or cosmetic; you have to investigate the nature of these changes and their causes. The more support that you offer, the more carefully you must examine the changes. If you fail to do this, your continued support will be taken for granted by those who are consciously engineering the changes, namely, the president of the institution and its board of trustees. They will assume that you approve of the changes. They should assume this; after all, you are subsidizing them. If you are not getting what you are paying for, you have a moral obligation to stop paying.

You have read this book. Perhaps you have also read *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. Do you approve of the changes? Do you think the school is what it once was, and what its faculty members insist that it still is, namely, a Calvinist institution that is committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and also committed to the principle of academic freedom?

This much is certain. If Cornelius Van Til's apologetic method is correct, then we cannot successfully defend the truths of the Bible and Calvinism by an appeal to natural law theory. We cannot defend Christendom with pluralism. We cannot rebuild a civilization with *sic et non*. We cannot extend a great tradition into the future by inventing a mythical past. We cannot become culturally influential by proclaiming an eschatology of defeat. We cannot become culturally relevant as Christians by offering no explicitly biblical alternatives to a world that knows that it is in a major cultural crisis. Finally, no one should attempt to gain a reputation as a Christian scholar by faking evidence and lying for Jesus.

All of this should be obvious. It was obvious neither to the editors of *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* nor to a majority of its essayists.

One thing might have helped this book. The editors could have imitated Van Til. They could have written "Syllabus only" on the title page.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

H. L. MENCKEN'S OBITUARY OF J. GRESHAM MACHEN

Dr. Fundamental¹

The Rev. J. Gresham Machen, D. D., who died out in North Dakota on New Year's Day, got, on the whole, a bad press while he lived, and even his obituaries did much less than justice to him. To newspaper reporters, as to other antinomians, a combat between Christians over a matter of dogma is essentially a comic affair, and in consequence Dr. Machen's heroic struggles to save Calvinism in the Republic were usually depicted in ribald, or, at all events, in somewhat skeptical terms. The generality of readers, I suppose, gathered thereby the notion that he was simply another Fundamentalist on the order of William Jennings Bryan and the simian faithful of Appalachia. But he was actually a man of great learning, and, what is more, of sharp intelligence.

What caused him to quit the Princeton Theological Seminary and found a seminary of his own was his complete inability, as a theologian, to square the disingenuous evasions of Modernism with the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. He saw

1. Baltimore *Evening Sun* (January 18, 1937), 2nd Section, p. 15.

clearly that the only effects that could follow diluting and polluting Christianity in the Modernist manner would be its complete abandonment and ruin. Either it was true or it was not true. If, as he believed, it was true, then there could be no compromise with persons who sought to whittle away its essential postulates, however respectable their motives.

Thus he fell out with the reformers who have been trying, in late years, to convert the Presbyterian Church into a kind of literary and social club, devoted vaguely to good works. Most of the other Protestant churches have gone the same way, but Dr. Machen's attention, as a Presbyterian, was naturally concentrated upon his own connection. His one and only purpose was to hold it [the Church] resolutely to what he conceived to be the true faith. When that enterprise met with opposition he fought vigorously, and though he lost in the end and was forced out of Princeton it must be manifest that he marched off to Philadelphia with all the honors of war.

II

My interest in Dr. Machen while he lived, though it was large, was not personal, for I never had the honor of meeting him. Moreover, the doctrine that he preached seemed to me, and still seems to me, to be excessively dubious. I stand much more chance of being converted to spiritualism, to Christian Science or even to the New Deal than to Calvinism, which occupies a place, in my cabinet of private horrors, but little removed from that of cannibalism. But Dr. Machen had the same clear right to believe in it that I have to disbelieve in it, and though I could not yield to his reasoning I could at least admire, and did greatly admire, his remarkable clarity and cogency as an apologist, allowing him his primary assumptions.

These assumptions were also made, at least in theory, by his opponents, and thereby he had them by the ear. Claiming to be Christians as he was, and of the Calvinish persuasion, they endeavored fatuously to get rid of all the inescapable implica-

tions of their position. On the one hand they sought to retain membership in the fellowship of the faithful, but on the other hand they presumed to repeal and reenact with amendments the body of doctrine on which that fellowship rested. In particular, they essayed to overhaul the scriptural authority which lay at the bottom of the whole matter, retaining what coincided with their private notions and rejecting whatever upset them.

Upon this contumacy Dr. Machen fell with loud shouts of alarm. He denied absolutely that anyone had a right to revise and sophisticate Holy Writ. Either it was the Word of God or it was not the Word of God, and if it was, then it was equally authoritative in all its details, and had to be accepted or rejected as a whole. Anyone was free to reject it, but no one was free to mutilate it or to read things into it that were not there. Thus the issue with the Modernists was clearly joined, and Dr. Machen argued them quite out of court, and sent them scurrying back to their literary and sociological *Kaffeeklatsche*. His operations, to be sure, did not prove that Holy Writ was infallible either as history or as theology, but they at least disposed of those who proposed to read it as they might read a newspaper, believing what they chose and rejecting what they chose.

III

In his own position there was never the least shadow of inconsistency. When the Prohibition imbecility fell upon the country, and a multitude of theological quacks, including not a few eminent Presbyterians, sought to read support for it into the New Testament, he attacked them with great vigor, and routed them easily. He not only proved that there was nothing in the teachings of Jesus to support so monstrous a folly; he proved abundantly that the known teachings of Jesus were unalterably against it. And having set forth that proof, he refused, as a convinced and honest Christian, to have anything to do with the dry *jehad*.

This rebellion against a craze that now seems so incredible and so far away was not the chief cause of his break with his ecclesiastical superiors, but it was probably responsible for a large part of their extraordinary dudgeon against him. The Presbyterian Church, like the other evangelical churches, was taken for a dizzy ride by Prohibition. Led into the heresy by fanatics of low mental visibility, it presently found itself cheek by jowl with all sorts of criminals, and fast losing the respect of sensible people. Its bigwigs thus became extremely jumpy on the subject, and resented bitterly every exposure of their lamentable folly.

The fantastic William Jennings Bryan, in his day the country's most distinguished Presbyterian layman, was against Dr. Machen on the issue of Prohibition but with him on the issue of Modernism. But Bryan's support, of course, was of little value or consolation to so intelligent a man. Bryan was a Fundamentalist of the Tennessee or barnyard school. His theological ideas were those of a somewhat backward child of 8, and his defense of Holy Writ at Dayton during the Scopes trial was so ignorant and stupid that it must have given Dr. Machen a great deal of pain. Dr. Machen himself was to Bryan as the Matterhorn is to a wart. His Biblical studies had been wide and deep, and he was familiar with the almost interminable literature of the subject. Moreover, he was an adept theologian, and had a wealth of professional knowledge to support his ideas. Bryan could only bawl.

IV

It is my belief, as a friendly neutral in all such high and ghostly matters, that the body of doctrine known as Modernism is completely incompatible, not only with anything rationally describable as Christianity, but also with anything deserving to pass as religion in general. Religion, if it is to retain any genuine significance, can never be reduced to a series of sweet attitudes, possible to anyone not actually in jail for felony. It is,

on the contrary, a corpus of powerful and profound convictions, many of them not open to logical analysis. Its inherent improbabilities are not sources of weakness to it, but of strength. It is potent in a man in proportion as he is willing to reject all overt evidences, and accept its fundamental postulates, however unprovable they may be by secular means, as massive and incontrovertible facts.

These postulates, at least in the Western world, have been challenged in recent years on many grounds, and in consequence there has been a considerable decline in religious belief. There was a time, two or three centuries ago, when the overwhelming majority of educated men were believers, but that is apparently true no longer. Indeed, it is my impression that at least two-thirds of them are now frank skeptics. But it is one thing to reject religion altogether, and quite another thing to try to save it by pumping out of it all its essential substance, leaving it in the equivocal position of a sort of pseudo-science, comparable to graphology, "education," or osteopathy.

That, it seems to me, is what the Modernists have done, no doubt with the best intentions in the world. They have tried to get rid of all the logical difficulties of religion, and yet preserve a generally pious cast of mind. It is a vain enterprise. What they have left, once they have achieved their imprudent scavenging, is hardly more than a row of hollow platitudes, as empty as [of] psychological force and effect as so many nursery rhymes. They may be good people and they may even be contented and happy, but they are no more religious than Dr. Einstein. Religion is something else again – in Henrik Ibsen's phrase, something far more deep-down-diving and mud-upbringing, Dr. Machen tried to impress that obvious fact upon his fellow adherents of the Geneva Mohammed. He failed – but he was undoubtedly right.

Appendix B

HONEST REPORTING AS HERESY¹

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 title 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.² 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

1. This was published by the ICE as a 1987 report in response to *Christianity Today*.

2. See David Chilton's magnificent 730-page book, *The Days of Vengeance*, published by Dominion Press, 1987.

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 *ecclesiocracy*. 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, who were elected by the townspeople. Each 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, the 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 contention; 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 canceled 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*.³ 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 temporarily. 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

3. Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, (1970) 1978.

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 any of them, 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 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).

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.⁴

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.⁵ No muss, no fuss, no lawyers ("scribes"). No "Talmudic" debates over details.

4. Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), ch. 2.

5. Nikolai Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981), p. 38.

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 books a year are published in the U.S., or so I am told. Worldwide, it may be half a million. 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 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 God's that 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 pessimillennialism than post-millennialism.

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 1970.⁶ 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.⁷

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

6. "Drifting Along with *Christianity Today*," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, II (Winter 1975-76).

7. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1968] 1978), p. 112.

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."⁸

8. Franky Schaeffer, *Bad News for Modern Man* (Westchester, Illinois: 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 Kickasola, 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 recommended 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. I note the following two points. First, we Reconstructionists have been patiently waiting for a decade to see some confident and competent theologian to take on Bahnsen's 600-page book in some format other than unpublished papers or published papers in unread little in-house journals. Mr. Clapp correctly identifies this book as "magisterial"; its refutations are conspicuously absent or conspicuously unmagisterial. The critics' discreet silence indicates their problem: *they are intellectually incapable of answering Bahnsen*. They just don't have the horsepower, not because they are all stupid – though some of them aren't too bright – but because all of them suffer from the inevitable intellectual weakness imposed by antinomian theology. This is not "scathing arrogance," as Mr. Clapp calls it; this is our realistic assessment of our opposition after a decade of patient waiting.

Second, consider what this 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.⁹ 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,

9. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

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 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 Whitehead 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 of the 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 external triumph of Christians in history, they immediately jump to an illegitimate conclusion when they hear the message of theonomic postmil-

lennialism. "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'etat*. 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 mat-

ches 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*¹⁰ 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,

10. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, (1982) 1987.

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. It's 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 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.

* * * * *

Four years later, Clapp wrote a book review of Lesslie Newbigin's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. It appeared in *Christianity Today* (Jan. 14, 1991). His review was generally favorable. It was also judicially schizophrenic, in the Westminster Seminary way: *sic et non*.

Newbigin asks some of the same questions that we Reconstructionists have been asking. The problem, according to Newbigin, is that the Church has accepted humanism's dualism between facts (external) and values (internal). Clapp agrees: "Privatizing faith meant, in reality, trivializing it. No longer did the church forthrightly proclaim Christ as public truth, the most important fact *and* value of existence. Instead, Christianity was relegated to the same realm as mere opinion of preference" (p. 36). A privatized faith is fundamentalism's faith, and we all know what *Christianity Today* thinks of fundamentalism!

Now, most Christians might say they never assented to any such arrangement. But right up to the present, many Christians continue to interpret and understand the faith in individualistic and privatistic terms, which is a distortion of the biblical witness. Though not intended to, it undermines the social and indeed cosmic breadth of God's saving kingdom.

If this does not sound like a theonomic analysis, then I have misread it. Clapp sees where this is headed, and he pulls back.

Along these lines, it is a disappointment that Newbigin can still hope for some form of Christian society. Incredibly, given centuries of Constantinian rapprochement, he suggests this is a "question that has not been seriously followed up" (p. 38).

Clapp's enemy is still the same: Christendom. This is why he was cited so often by the authors in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*: they share a common enemy.

They all face the same problem: If not biblical law, then what? If not biblical covenantalism, then what?

Appendix C

THE PARALYSIS OF THE PARACHURCH MINISTRIES¹

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world (I Cor. 11:28-32).

Christians today are humble people. They have much to be humble about, as Winston Churchill supposedly said of Clement Atlee. (He did not actually say this.) Christians pride themselves on their humility. Matthew 5:5 rings in their ears: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." They do not perceive that *meek* in this case refers to meek *before God*. (They also do not perceive that *inherit the earth* means inherit the earth *in history*.) Meekness before God produces a confident, activist faith: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is

1. This essay appeared originally in *Christian Reconstruction*, XIV, No. 2, March/April, 1990. It was sent to all ICE financial supporters. In it, I deny that any institution but the Church is entitled to receive tithe money.

in the world" (I John 4:4). Instead, Christians perceive "meek" as meaning "meek before men and institutions."

If this perspective were true, why did the Psalmist say, "I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed" (Ps. 119:46)? Why did Solomon the king say, "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men" (Prov. 22:29)?

A Denial of Covenant Theology

Why have Christians achieved so little culturally in the last two centuries? Why, with the unique exception of Wycliffe Bible translators, have Christians not built institutions whose accomplishments dwarf those of their rivals? I think it has something to do with their progressive abandonment of covenant theology, with its five points: the absolute sovereignty of God, the doctrine of hierarchical representation, the doctrine of biblical law, the doctrine of God's sanctions in history, and the doctrine of inheritance. The Church does not preach it, and so it shivers in the shadows of humanist society.

The doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty is proclaimed today only by a tiny handful of Calvinists. Similarly, the doctrine of the continuing authority of biblical law has been denied by almost every Christian group, including the Calvinists. "No creed but Christ, no law but love" is the antinomians' battle cry of cultural surrender. The doctrine of long-term inheritance – postmillennialism – is having a revival today, but for well over a century, Christians have affirmed *pessimillennialism*: that until Jesus comes again bodily to reign on earth, the Church will experience a series of inevitable defeats.

Why such pessimism? Because in a world in which autonomous man rather than God is believed to have the final say regarding personal salvation ("decisions for Christ"), law ("natural"), and inheritance ("pie in the sky, by and by"), what else should we expect? So, what can we do to persuade ourselves and others that such a view of history is wrong? I suggest that

we examine the twin doctrines of authority and sanctions as they apply to the Church of Jesus Christ.

Sacraments and Authority

God blesses His Church. This is a positive sanction. It is His Church, the Bride of Christ, that He will elevate above all other institutions in eternity. What is generally denied today by Christians is that *God also elevates His Church progressively in history*. In this sense, they stand arm in arm with modern humanists, who also take a highly skeptical view of the authority of the Church and God's blessing it in history.

Christians acknowledge that the Church alone will survive as an institution in eternity. Both the family and historical civil governments will disappear in eternity. Non-Christians have no biblical doctrine of eternity, so they deny this unique status to the Church. This is why both *familism* (patriarchal clans) and *statism* have been the chief rivals of the Church in history.

What is unique about the authority of the Church? What does it possess that no other institution possesses in time and eternity? Answer: *the Church alone possesses the God-given monopoly of the sacraments*. It is through the sacraments that God draws near to men judicially. He brings regular judgment on them so that they in turn can lawfully bring His covenant lawsuit against a rebellious world. *He who is not publicly under the judgment of the institutional Church is not authorized by God to exercise judgment over others in His name*.

Without partaking of the sacraments a Christian is, at best, progressively relegated by God to the outer edges of relevance. The excommunicated person is publicly condemned in history to the eternity of hell and the lake of fire unless he repents in history: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (I Cor. 5:4-5). The *self-excommunicated* person

– the person who wilfully refuses to join a local church or take communion – announces that he prefers historical impotence to influence, irresponsibility to responsibility. God then gives this to him. We can see this process institutionally in the recent demise of the parachurch ministries.

The Crisis of the Parachurch Ministries

Again and again, the leaders of these ministries have refused to submit themselves and their organizations to the formal judgment of a local Church or a national ecclesiastical body. Even when they do formally submit, as soon as they are threatened with discipline, they remove themselves from any ecclesiastical jurisdiction. One by one, they have faded in influence. The 1980's have brought most of them down. The others are struggling mightily for mere survival. Only the women's ministries persist: Phyllis Schlafly's, Beverly LaHaye's, and James Dobson's ministry to women. (Even Dobson is now complaining publicly of financial cuts.) The Christian women of America have pulled the financial plug on these ministries, and in American Christianity, this means bankruptcy. *Women write most of the donation checks.* Paying the pipers, they call the tunes.

The case of Jim Bakker is the most glaring. He thought that he was above God's judgment. He refused to submit to God's laws governing marriage and debt. He refused to honor the Assemblies of God's threatened covenant lawsuit against him. The result was not just the decline of his ministry. He is in jail for a long, long time. First, the humanist media brought judgment against him. Then the civil government did. *Spurning the Church's covenant lawsuit, he came under the state's.*

Unleashing a media feeding frenzy, Bakker made his peers victims. Jerry Falwell tells the story of the time he got into a cab in the Northeast. The cab driver was staring into the rear view mirror at him. One of Falwell's assistants asked: "Do you know who this is?" The cabby answered: "I sure do. That bimbo sure got you, didn't she?" He had confused Falwell with

a Jimmy: either Bakker or Swaggart. It really did not matter which. This was Falwell's point: the collapse of those two Pentecostal ministries affected his morally untarnished fundamentalist ministry. December 1989 saw the final issue of Falwell's *Fundamentalist Journal* and the lay-off of 500 employees. He said he would now concentrate on his church's ministry and his college.

A Question of Sanctions

The modern Church, because it has no doctrine of the covenant, has little confidence in its own sanctions, either positive or negative. How many churches were involved in pro-life Sunday this year? Very few. How many churches publicly pray down God's curses on identified *pre-born baby killers* (commonly called abortionists)? Very few. The pastors do not believe that God will back them up. They really believe that God has vacated the judicial bench in history, or at least during the so-called "Church Age." They have preached this view of God in the pulpits of America for over a century. Thus, they now hesitate to bring God's covenant lawsuits.

When they do bring charges, they get sued in civil court or else the defendant thumbs his nose at the Church's jurisdiction, takes his money and his remaining followers, and walks away. Nevertheless, one by one, the nose-thumbers stumble. They never again recover the ministries that they controlled prior to their public fall. They fade away.

The churches have lost faith in negative sanctions. As a result, they are themselves under negative sanctions: *small budgets*. Churches are all short of money. Why? Because they do not preach *and formally enforce* tithing ("legalism"): negative sanctions. But it is not just negative sanctions that the churches have lost faith in. They no longer really believe in positive sanctions. They do not believe in Christian civilization. *They do not believe in the comprehensive nature of the gospel*. Christianity is said to be limited to the soul, the Church, and the family. The

churches are therefore unwilling to fund with a portion of their tithes the specialized activities of parachurch ministries. They have forgotten the inevitable rule: *those who pay the piper call the tune.*

This tight-fisted policy of non-support has encouraged the parachurch ministries to make a kind of *end run* around the churches, which radio, television, and direct-mail techniques have made possible. Technologically, the parachurch ministries have had great advantages since the 1920's.

The advantage is not simply technological; it is also personal. The parachurch ministries are frequently involved in dealing with Christians in the broader world of culture. The churches have self-consciously walked away from culture. For example, churches have not funded scholarships to Christian day schools, high schools, and colleges. They have ignored explicitly Christian education, for this would raise questions of explicitly Christian intellectual standards, i.e., *biblical law*. They have not preached biblical law to the exclusion of "neutral" natural law.

So, the sons and daughters of the faithful are sent by their parents to distant, tax-funded, humanist collegiate pits. Who is on campus to help them? Only the collegiate parachurch ministries. Churches located close to the campuses do not cooperate with churches back home to see to it that out-of-town students are attending Church regularly. To do so would imply that *the local churches are legal representatives of distant churches* – a denial of independent (Baptist) ecclesiology – and also that *the Church possesses lawful sanctions*. Thus, we have lost millions of college-age former Church members to the humanists. Only the parachurch ministries are there to help.

Conclusion

If I were a donor to a parachurch ministry (or any other kind of Christian ministry), I would specifically enquire of the head of the ministry regarding his local Church membership

and the name of the Church's senior pastor.² If he is not a member of a local Church, I would cut off all contributions. (This is not the same thing as refusing to buy services or goods from a ministry.) Also, these ministries should make it clear that they do not seek people's tithe money (the first ten percent); they should be supported exclusively by *individual offerings above the tithe* and from *contributions from churches*. These are measures to be taken by donors. But due diligence by donors is not sufficient to change the system. Until the churches start preaching covenant theology and enforcing it, there will be no fundamental change.

Time is now running out on independent parachurch ministries. This is why the 1990's will be the window of opportunity for the churches, meaning *the window of increased responsibility*. The churches are now faced with two major responsibilities: 1) replacing the parachurch ministries as the latter decline, which the churches are presently unwilling to do; or 2) bringing both positive and negative sanctions against the parachurch ministries, which they are equally unwilling to do. Without covenant theology, pastors flee responsibility like the plague. Preaching Christian impotence as a way of life, they produce it.

2. Mine is the Good Shepherd Reformed Episcopal Church, Tyler, Texas, pastored by Ray Sutton.

Appendix D

CALVIN'S MILLENNIAL CONFESSION

Dr. Godfrey refers to "Calvin's sober amillennialism."¹ Sober, yes; amillennial, no. If Calvin was anything, he was a post-millennialist, and if Dr. Godfrey and the Westminster faculty assert otherwise, they need to prove their case. They should not assume everything that they need to prove, but Godfrey does on this issue. He does not cite any book on the topic that confirms his thesis, nor does he even mention Bahnsen's early essay on the topic.² He just tosses out a gratuitous side comment, as if he were Moses coming down from Sinai. This is typical of the whole book: it does not interact with the body of theonomic literature that a 400-page critical symposium would be expected to refute.

I wrote in Chapter 2 that Calvin's writings reveal a dualism with respect to his views on civil law and God's sanctions in history. We find traces of the same annoying dualism in Calvin's discussions of the future of the Church and Christendom. I say "traces," because to the extent that Calvin espoused any consistently developed view of the future of Christianity, it was optimistic. But sometimes he adopted language that has led his

1. W. Robert Godfrey, "Calvin and Theonomy," *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, p. 312.

2. Greg L. Bahnsen, "The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, III (Winter 1976-77), pp. 69-76.

amillennial followers to conclude that their view of the future of Christianity was also his.

Calvin's Pessimism

An example of this pessimism is his discussion of salvation and peace, two promised blessings for believers in Christ. What is implied by this promise?

Hence these things are connected together, salvation and peace, not that we enjoy this joyful and peaceful state in the world; for they greatly deceive themselves who dream of such a quiet state here, as we have to engage in a perpetual warfare, until God at length gathers us to the fruition of a blessed rest. We must, therefore, contend and fight in this world. Thus the faithful shall ever be exposed to many problems; and hence Christ reminds his disciples, "in me ye have peace; but in the world" – what? Sorrows and troubles.³

Yet personal sorrows and troubles do not deny the possibility of kingdom expansion and victory in history. For example, we all recognize that individual inventors have many troubles and frustrations; this does not deny the possibility of technological progress. What about personal spiritual progress? It is not only possible; it is mandatory, Calvin taught.⁴ "No one shall set out so inauspiciously as not daily to make some headway, though it be slight. Therefore, let us not cease so to act that we may make some unceasing progress in the way of the Lord. And let us not despair at the slightness of our success. . . ."⁵

The question, then, is *the compound growth of righteousness*. Can it outpace the compound growth of wickedness in history?

3. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1563] 1979), IV, p. 255: Jer. 33:16.

4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III:XX:42.

5. *Ibid.*, III:VI:5.

Will the covenant-breakers overwhelm the covenant-keepers in history? Will the kingdom of Satan's leaven replace the kingdom of God's leaven in history? No. This is why we are told by Christ to pray, "Thy kingdom come." Calvin wrote in the *Institutes*: "From this it appears that zeal for daily progress is not enjoined upon us in vain, for it never goes so well with human affairs that the filthiness of vices is shaken and washed away, and full integrity flowers and grows."⁶ But what about the ungodly? On this point, Calvin had no doubts.

Meanwhile, he protects his own, guides them by the help of his Spirit into uprightness, and strengthens them to perseverance. But he overthrows the wicked conspiracies of enemies, unravels their stratagems and deceits, opposes their malice, represses their obstinacy, until at last he slays Antichrist with the Spirit of his mouth, and destroys all ungodliness by the brightness of his coming.⁷

The Kingdom of God

Calvin saw the kingdom of God as advancing throughout history. "Again, as the *kingdom* of God is continually growing and advancing to the end of the world, we must pray every day that it *may come*: for to whatever extent iniquity abounds in the world, to such an extent *the kingdom of God*, which brings along with it perfect righteousness, is not yet *come*."⁸ This is an important passage, for it shows that Calvin saw the two kingdoms as mutually exclusive: as one advances, the other retreats. They cannot both advance at once. Thus, any discussion of the advance of God's exclusively *ecclesiastical kingdom* paralleling Satan's advancing external, *cultural kingdom* – a basic theme of

6. *Ibid.*, III:XX:42.

7. *Idem*.

8. Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1555] 1979), I, p. 320: Matt. 6:10.

amillennialism⁹ – would have been unacceptable to Calvin. The war between the two kingdoms is external and continual. He made this quite clear in his commentary on Psalm 21:8:

... for it would not have been enough for the kingdom to have flourished internally, and to have been replenished with peace, riches, and abundance of all good things, had it not also been well fortified against the attacks of foreign enemies. This particularly applies to the kingdom of Christ, which is never without enemies in this world.¹⁰

Bahnsen cites Calvin's exposition of II Thessalonians 2:8. Referring to the final rebellion of the Antichrist, Calvin wrote: "... Antichrist would be wholly and in every respect destroyed, when that final day of the restoration of all things shall arrive. Paul, however, intimates that Christ will in the mean time, by the rays which he will emit previously to his advent, put to flight the darkness in which Antichrist will reign, just as the sun, before he is seen by us, chases away the darkness of the night by the pouring forth of his rays. This victory of the word, therefore, will shew itself in this world. . . ." ¹¹

Calvin cited Micah's prophecy that someday men will beat their swords into ploughshares, their spears into pruninghooks. He admitted that there are still wars going on. The Prophet's words have not yet been fulfilled. Calvin said, "that which the Prophet says here has not hitherto taken place; but inasmuch as the number of the faithful is small, and the greater part despise and reject the Gospel, so it happens, that plunders and hostilities continue in the world. How so? Because the Prophet

9. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 82-84.

10. Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1563] 1979), I, p. 350.

11. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1548] 1979), p. 335. Bahnsen, "Prima Facie," p. 70.

speaks here only of the disciples of Christ. He shows the fruit of his doctrine, that wherever it strikes a living root, it brings forth fruit: but the doctrine of the Gospel strikes roots hardly in one out of a hundred." So, in order to have a universal fulfilling of this prophecy, there must be a great multiplication of the disciples of Christ. This *will* take place in the future. "It seems that the Prophet does not describe here the state of the church for a time, but shows what would be the kingdom of Christ to the end."¹²

A Day of Small Beginnings

These and many other passages reveal Calvin's postmillennialism. So far, so good. But in his comments on the parallel prophecy in Isaiah 2:4, his pessimism intruded. This condition of ploughshares will come only when "the kingly power of Christ is acknowledged. . . . But since we are still widely distant from the perfection of that peaceful reign, we must always think of making progress; and it is excessive folly not to consider that the kingdom of Christ here is only beginning." This still is compatible with postmillennialism: a long time-frame. But then he added: "The fulfilment of this prophecy, therefore, in its full extent, must not be looked for on earth." To its full extent, yes; but what about in between? He did not say. He ended his comments with this: "It is enough, if we experience the beginning, and if, being reconciled to God through Christ, we cultivate mutual friendship, and abstain from doing harm to anyone."¹³

If the "we" here meant those living in his day, then there is nothing necessarily amillennial implied by the passage. But by focusing people's attention to the necessarily incomplete fulfil-

12. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1557] 1979), III, p. 265: Micah 4:3.

13. Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1550] 1979), I, p. 102.

ment of the prophecy on earth and the present distance from that future post-historical fulfillment, he unquestionably adopted the language of modern Calvinistic amillennialism. He focused on the personal relationships of Church and family rather than the real possibility of transforming the social and cultural aspects of a fallen civilization. This also is basic to Calvinistic amillennialism.

In his comments on Matthew 24:37, he compared the world of the era of the return of Christ to the days of Noah and Sodom. "Since indifference of this sort will exist about the time of the last day, believers ought not to indulge themselves after the example of the multitude."¹⁴ He did not link this prophecy to the last days of Old Covenant Israel, but to the last days of the world. So, we know that there will be scoffers and lax faith.

Calvin's Optimism

But consider his interpretation of I Corinthians 15:27: "For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him." Calvin wrote:

He insists upon two things – *first*, that all things must be brought under subjection to Christ before he restores to the Father the dominion of the world, and *secondly*, that the Father has given all things into the hands of his Son in such a way as to retain the principle right in his own hands. From the *former* of these it follows, that the hour of the last judgment is not yet come – from the *second*, that Christ is now the medium between us and the Father in such a way as to bring us at length to him. Hence he immediately infers as follows: *After he shall have subjected all things to him, then shall the Son be subjected to the Father.* "Let us wait patiently until Christ shall vanquish all his enemies, and

14. Calvin, *Harmony of Evangelists*, III, p. 156.

shall bring us, along with himself, under the dominion of God, that the kingdom of God may in every respect be accomplished in us.¹⁵

Calvin was a optimist regarding the long-term success of Christianity in history.¹⁶ In this sense, the mid-seventeenth-century Puritans were faithful to Calvin's legacy; so were the postmillennialists of Princeton Seminary in the nineteenth century. Today's amillennial Calvinists have abandoned this postmillennial heritage in the name of Calvin, but without the documentation from the corpus of his writings. They teach and preach as if they were faithful heirs of Calvin on the question of millennialism, but they are not. It is far easier to make the case that Calvin was not a theonomist than it is to make the case that he was not an optimist regarding the future of Christianity on earth.

Dialecticism?

It is possible, and has been done, to suggest a dialectical relationship between Calvin's view of the present world and the post-resurrection world. This is the standard interpretation of his millennial views within amillennial scholarship. The Barthian theologian Heinrich Quistorp writes of Calvin's view of hope: "What is promised to faith is properly the contradiction of all that is visible; righteousness where there is sin; eternal life in place of death; resurrection in place of extinction; blessedness where pain; fulness where hunger and thirst; divine help where a helpless cry. In face of these contradictions between the divine word and reality, faith can only subsist through hope which trusts in the word of promise more than

15. Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1546] 1979), II, p. 31.

16. James B. Jordan, "Calvin's Incipient Postmillennialism," *Counsel of Chalcedon* (March 1981), pp. 4-7.

in the reality of the world and of ourselves.”¹⁷ This Barthian dialecticism – Bible vs. history – is mirrored in very similar statements by Calvinistic amillennial theologians.¹⁸

The question is: What was Calvin’s view of progressive sanctification in history? Did he see it applying to institutions as well as to individuals? Did he view the race that Christians run in history as a relay, not just a one-man event? Did he see the growth in history of the cultural influence of the gospel? He did not address these questions directly, which creates problems for the historian. But it should be clear from the passages cited that Calvin did believe that the gospel’s influence would expand over time.

Conclusion

Because Calvin believed in Christendom, as did all of his Christian contemporaries, he did not address himself directly to the social implications of his millennial views. He assumed that there would be a tight relationship between individual conversion and social consequences. In short, he was not a modern evangelical pietist. He surely did not take the position of his modern amillennial followers, namely, that the eternal kingdom and the historic kingdom are in dialectical relation to each other, that is, that God’s eternal kingdom will encompass everything, but the historic kingdom excludes culture in general and civil government specifically.

Calvin’s millennial confession is not Westminster’s millennial confession. Therefore, Westminster could not hire Bahnsen and had to fire Shepherd.

17. Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Last Things* (Richmond, Virginia: Knox, 1955), pp. 19-20.

18. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 5.

Appendix E

A Speech from the Play JULIUS SHEPHERD

by

William Shakespirits¹

Friends of the Reformed faith, students, Board members, lend
me your ears;
They come to fire Shepherd, not to try him.
The questions that men raise live after them;
The answers are cut off with their dismissal;
So let it be with Shepherd. The noble Clowney
Hath told you Shepherd was controversial:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Shepherd answered it.
Here, now, before Clowney and the Board –
For Clowney is an honorable man;
So are they all, all honorable men –
Come I to speak in Shepherd's memory.
He was our professor, faithful and concerned for us:
But Clowney says he was controversial;
And Clowney is an honorable man.

1. Anonymous, 1982.

Shepherd hath brought many to love the Reformed faith and the covenant:

Their preaching did the common Christian edify:

Did this in Shepherd seem controversial?

And when we questions brought, he opened Scripture:

He called us to conform ourselves to it –

In life and word, in pulpit and in classroom,

We learned from him that God's Word still could teach us:

Controversy should be made of more objectionable stuff:

Yet Clowney says he was controversial;

And Clowney is an honorable man.

You all do know that in his teaching

Shepherd displayed his love for the Reformed faith,

Which he distinguished from broad evangelicalism: was this controversial?

Yet Clowney says he was controversial,

And, sure, he is an honorable man.

I speak not to disprove what Clowney said,

But here I am to speak what I do know.

In past years, against diluting Reformed truth the word of Shepherd

Resounded through Westminster's halls. Now are they silent,

And the Board holds kangaroo court while they are empty.

O brothers, if I were disposed to stir

Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,

I should do Clowney wrong, and Donald Graham wrong,

Who, you all know, are honorable men:

I will not do them wrong; I rather choose

to wrong the truth, to wrong myself and Westminster,

Than I will wrong such honorable men.

You will compel me, though, to state the case?

Then make a ring about the corpse of Shepherd and Westminster:

If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.

You all do know Machen's goal for Westminster:
To stand unflinching for the Reformed faith –
And nothing dearer lies to Shepherd's heart.
But funds from Reformed churches weren't sufficient
To realize Administration dreams;
And so broad evangelicalism was courted,
And fund-raisers appointed to the Board;
No longer only men of Reformed commitment,
But who could reach the wallet with their words.
Yet no one told them they were decoration,
And so they thought they theologians were –
Appointed for their expertise and knowledge,
Full of themselves, they were too wise to learn.
When questions then were asked which they'd not thought of,
They ready were to tear out questioning tongue:
Yet they are all, all honorable men.
Though faculty thrice declared Shepherd worthy,
And the Board's own judgments said fully the same,
Some Board members stopped up their ears against it,
And raged at him until they had their way.
The faculty, each man his own neck rubbing,
Soon found its throat was dry and could not speak;
Some feeble gestures were at times forthcoming,
But "life goes on: at least my job is safe."
So Machen's dream, and that of many others,
Lies shattered. True, Shepherd's just one man –
Yet you all know Shepherd wears Murray's mantle,
The man hand-picked by Machen, you recall:
That mantle is despised and now discarded;
Its wearer now an obstacle to goals.
The Board says it regrets the course it follows
As blood of Shepherd stains the hallowed cloak.
See, then, how sly the Board runs through its dagger:
See what a tear ambitious leaders make:
And now the trusted Clowney stabs so often:

He will resign if Shepherd is retained.
And all the while runs blood, and Shepherd falls.
O, what a fall is this, my countrymen!
Then I, and you, and Machen, too, fall down,
Whilst bloody treason flourishes over us.

Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up
To any sudden flood of mutiny.
They that have done this deed are honorable:
What secret plans they have, alas, I know not,
That make them do it: they are wise and honorable,
And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.
I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts:
I am no orator, as Clowney is:
But as you all can see, a plain blunt man
That love my friend and truth in word and action.
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor power of speech,
To stir men's blood: I only speak right on;
I tell you that which you yourselves do know;
Show you disdain for Machen poured on Shepherd,
And bid it speak for me. But were I Clowney
And Clowney in my place, then were an orator
Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
In every wound of Shepherd that should move
The stones of Machen Hall to rise and mutiny.

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