

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of the necessary evils of such a book as this is that one is compelled to concentrate on one's differences with persons with which one has much in common with. Vast areas of agreement are overlooked as one focuses on the distinctive views that define Christian Reconstructionists and set them apart from their non-Reconstructionist brethren. One is reminded that this is a luxury that we can rarely afford these days. Before the American War of Independence the nation was 98% Protestant and 67% Calvinist. Today Calvinists are a rare breed, a dying breed, that sometimes seems in danger of extinction. Under such circumstances it is especially difficult to critique friends and allies in the common struggle against Arminianism, antinomianism, and secular humanism. One feels the need to appreciate each other, to be thankful for each other, and to remember that we are all part of the body of Christ.

I am also reminded that I am indebted to many of my Theonomist and Reconstructionist brethren from whom I have gained many insights and learned many appropriate applications of the scriptures. I freely confess that I would much rather read Rushdoony, from whom I have gained much, than Matthew Henry or Arthur Pink. And although I may disagree with much of what Jim Jordan writes in *Biblical Horizons* I still consider his commentary on Judges one of the best in my library. In short I admit that there is a need to recognize the many positive contributions of these men. They have provided a healthy antidote to the antinomianism of this lawless age with its tendencies towards a touchy-feely theology. They have demonstrated a healthy respect for the law of God. They have done this without falling into the trap of legalism. They fully understand that the law is a guide to the redeemed that they might walk in the paths of righteousness and that its keeping is not a basis for one's salvation or a means of achieving merit with God.

They have also made significant contributions to developing a Calvinist worldview for our day. Their insights into the ideological foundations of our society, the pagan and/or humanist nature of those foundations, and the ultimate ruin that must come to any society so founded, has been helpful. It has formed a healthy antidote to the kind of jingoistic, mindless patriotism that has sometimes infected the "Christian Right". And of course most of them are conservative Presbyterians holding for the most part to historic Calvinism.

But with all that said and done the fact remains that they have departed from that Calvinism on more than a few issues. And it is these issues that define them and set them apart. And therefore it is just these areas that must be examined in this book. It is exactly these areas that must be identified, analyzed, and compared with the standard of scripture. That is what this book has sought to do. The reader must judge how well I have succeeded.

And finally the inescapable fact is that the world is not always precisely black and white. Whether we like it or not it comes in innumerable shades of gray. And Christian Reconstructionism is no exception. There is no one monolithic standard that they all conform to. The fact is that as usual one size does not fit all. I have sought to deal with those issues and trends that are typical of the movement and generally held by those who consider themselves Reconstructionists. However I am sure that some will complain, and perhaps justly so, that I have misrepresented their particular

position. For that I apologize, but I know of no remedy. Ultimately if the shoe fits then they must wear it and defend their position as best they can. I am sure their ability to do so will for the most part exceed my ability to define and critique it. The old adage that truth comes from conflict has a lot of merit to it. As the scriptures say, "*Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend*" (Proverbs 27:17). I pray that this book will be part of a debate that will sharpen our focus, define the issues, and bring us all into closer conformity to the truth and to Him who is the truth. May the Lord graciously so order it.

CHAPTER TWO

GOTTERDAMMERUNGS

What is a gotterdammerung? It is a German word. Literally it means a twilight of the gods. Practically speaking it is the death of a civilization. It is when the gods of a civilization fail and everything comes crashing down in ruin and chaos. Not just the physical, but the theological and ideological underpinnings of a civilization have deteriorated past the point of no return and society is falling apart like a house of cards in a dramatic, cataclysmic ruin. When this happens it is no longer possible to pick up the pieces. A whole new society has to be built from the ground up. The old faith has been thoroughly discredited and a new faith comes in to fill the vacuum and provide the basis for a new civilization. All societies are religious in nature. The question is not whether a society will be religious but rather which religion it will be founded on. Societies cannot exist, much less function, without some kind of common ideological consensus. That consensus is its faith; that consensus defines its gods; that consensus defines its culture. Culture is simply religion externalized; it is the logical outworking in any society of its faith and beliefs. A culture's god may be a pagan idol, the God of the scriptures, or simply democracy and equality. Whoever or whatever they are, they will define and control the culture of that society as long as they are worshipped and believed in. When they are no longer believed in society collapses and the end is usually fairly ugly. When the gods of a civilization fade out in a gotterdammerung the end can be cataclysmic. History gives us many examples.

A classic example is Cortez in Mexico.

By the time of Cortez in the sixteenth century the Aztecs had come to dominate the tribes of central Mexico. They had a blood drenched culture of tyranny, prolific human sacrifice, and a god-king named Montezuma. They ruled an area whose population was already counted in the tens of millions. Their city, in its extent, splendor, and architecture, rivaled ancient Rome. Yet Cortez with only a few hundred men was able to conquer the Aztecs and take over Mexico. Why did Mexico fall so easily and so catastrophically into the hands of the Spanish. It collapsed because with the advent of the Spaniards the ideological foundations, the theological underpinnings, of its society ceased to exist. A former god-king named Quetzalcoatl had disappeared about five centuries before. Legend had it that he would return some day to reclaim his throne and his kingdom and that he would return as a white, bearded man. Then before Cortez' appearance a series of omens and portents had terrorized the superstitious population into believing the end of the world, or at least the end of their world and society, was at hand. And to accentuate the effect of these prophecies Montezuma was now on the throne. His brother had been raised a warrior and groomed to be emperor while he had been raised as a priest, steeped in the superstitions, magic, and ritual omens of the Aztec religion. But his brother had died in battle and Montezuma had reluctantly ascended to the throne. One of his nobles, a few years before, had relayed a prophecy that they were soon to be ruled by strangers. Montezuma had scoffed but when the prophecy was put to a ritual test the noble won and Montezuma was stunned. When the crisis of the Spanish invasion came Montezuma reacted to it as a religious instead of a military problem. He was paralyzed. The legends were coming to pass. Quetzalcoatl had returned. The omens were being fulfilled. The strangers destined to rule had arrived. Quetzalcoatl had been a benign god who had not required human sacrifices. The devotees of the more bloodthirsty gods had driven him into exile. So Montezuma stepped up the human sacrifices in a vain bid to overcome the problem. All he did was alienate the subject peoples of the empire who were compelled to provide the offerings. History does not support the fallacy that the theology of the man

in the "White House" doesn't matter! The people too were paralyzed. They had always believed that without a constant round of propitiation, including human sacrifices, to appease the gods, the sun would not rise, the crops would not grow, etc. They lived in terror of what the gods would do if they were somehow offended. The dethronement of their gods spelled chaos and doom. It was indeed twilight for the gods of Mexico and all the Spaniards had to do was pick up the pieces. Mexico literally fell into their hands. Such was the gotterdammerung of Aztec society. And such is any gotterdammerung when a society self-destructs due to its own internal weaknesses and is replaced by a new order.

CHAPTER THREE

WAR ON THE GODS OF EGYPT

The Old Testament scriptures contain several accounts of a society in the death throes of a gotterdammerung. The Book of Exodus recounts one such incident, the story of the liberation of the Children of Israel from slavery and bondage in Egypt and the destruction of their oppressors. But there is much more here than simply the story of one nation's liberation. There is much more here than simply the cry of Moses to Pharaoh, "*Let my people go*". The God of Israel is declaring war on the gods of Egypt. As Paul states it a millennium and a half later, "*For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth'*" (Romans 9:17 NKJV). It was not enough to merely liberate his people. God wanted to demonstrate the impotence of the gods of Egypt. God orchestrated an incredible gotterdammerung, a true twilight, of the pretended gods of Egypt. He did this in a series of ten plagues. Each plague was specifically designed to discredit and destroy a particular one of the gods of Egypt. It took a lot of plagues not only because Egypt was slow to learn the lesson, but also because they were a polytheistic society. There were a lot of gods to destroy!

The first plague was to turn the Nile River into blood. The Nile was the source of the fertility of the land. Much of the land was a desert, but the Nile valley was a rich and fertile oasis. Every year as the Nile flooded it irrigated the land and deposited rich alluvial silt. But now it had been turned into blood, it had been turned from a source of life into a source of death. The Nile became a curse to them as in the second plague the river brought forth countless frogs to torment the land. That which had been an object of worship became an object of loathing. That which had been conceived as a source of blessing became a curse to them. This idol had definitely fallen.

The third plague was a plague of lice. The priests of Egypt had to be ceremonially clean. They were dressed in clean white linen. A plague of lice would not only be a disease ridden curse for the general population, but it rendered every priest in Egypt unclean and unfit to exercise his office. This plague brought all the religious rituals of this polytheistic culture to a halt. The worship of all these false gods was rendered impossible by this one plague. The fourth plague was one of flies. The neighboring Phoenicians had a deity named BaalZebub (Beelzebub) which means Lord of the Flies. The worship of this deity was designed to protect the people from swarms of these disease-carrying pests. The polytheistic Egyptians had adopted this neighboring deity into their pantheon. This plague, from which the Israelites in Goshen were exempt, demonstrated both the impotence of this false god and the power of the God of Israel. It confirmed both his power to inflict this plague on others and to deliver his own people from it. When the children of Israel left Egypt and fell back to idolatry at Mount Sinai, they worshipped a golden calf. Later Israel, the Northern Kingdom, worshipped golden calves set up in Dan and Bethel. This was a reversion into Egyptian idolatry, which worshipped bulls and male calves. In the fifth plague all the cattle were smitten with a loathsome, contagious, and deadly epidemic. Rather than objects of worship they had become repulsive and abominable creatures whose weakness was apparent to all.

And so went the war of the God of Israel on the gods of Egypt. In the ninth plague as the land was enveloped in a round the clock impenetrable darkness the ultimate of their gods, the sun god, was smitten helpless and extinguished. Pharaoh, their god-like ruler had decreed that all the male children

of the Israelites should die. But Moses, and countless others through the work of the Hebrew midwives, were spared. In the tenth plague God decrees the same fate on all the firstborn males of Egypt of man and beast. And this time the sentence is effective as mourning and grief clothes the land from the peasant's hovel to the royal palace. And finally Pharaoh himself, their god incarnate, dies under the waters of the Red Sea and his army is destroyed to the last man in that watery grave. The gods of Egypt in their entirety lie prostrate before the power and might of the God of Israel.

This was truly a gotterdammerung. As Pharaoh's counselors told him, "*...Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?*" (Exodus 10:7). Historians tell us that the dynasty fell and Egypt was taken over by a foreign dynasty, the Hyksos, the shepherd kings. Biblical scholars have identified these as the Amalekites. A nomadic tribe of desert raiders takes over the most advanced civilization of the day. A primitive clan of desert warriors seizes control of the superpower of the age. Such are the effects of a gotterdammerung! Such are the judgments of a holy and a jealous God on a nation's idolatries.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHY RECONSTRUCTION

The reader may be wondering what all of the above has to do with the Christian Reconstruction movement. It has a lot to do with it, as we shall see. Reconstruction implies that things need to be reconstructed. It implies that things have fallen apart. It implies that society needs to be reconstructed from top to bottom. It implies that society cannot be polished up or somewhat reformed, but that it needs to be entirely rebuilt from scratch. What it really implies is that our current society is headed for a total collapse, a collapse that may be catastrophic. Why is this thought to be so? To answer that we need to look at the history of what we call Western Civilization.

Current Western Civilization is what arose upon the collapse of medieval society especially medieval Christianity. There were a number of movements whose combined force had the effect of sweeping the old order away. These movements included, but were not limited to, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. We will examine each of these in turn briefly.

Medieval Christianity had lost its ability to be a secure ideological foundation for Western civilization. It had so corrupted itself with superstition and idolatry that it had lost the respect of thinking men. The church was so infected with greed and immorality that it no longer exerted the moral force required to lead society. The main issue was not would it continue on indefinitely, but rather, what would replace it. There were murmurings of reform, but the first movement to challenge the old order was the Renaissance. Renaissance means rebirth, but unfortunately this movement did not herald a rebirth of true and scriptural Christianity. It was instead a rebirth of paganism. Men turned not to a purer form of the gospel and teachings of Christ, but back to the teachings of pagan philosophers. The Renaissance was mainly a cultural movement. It dealt in art, painting, sculpture, literature etc. and these were based on the classical arts of ancient Greece and Rome. And of course with the literature came the philosophy and wisdom of the ancient world. It may not have adopted the gods and the idols of the ancients, but it was one with them in art and philosophy. This was a new paganism and a direct challenge to Medieval Christianity.

The next movement to confront the existing order was the Great Protestant Reformation. This movement also rejected medieval Christianity, but it rejected it as an impure and corrupted form of the faith. It sought to return to the faith of Christ and the Apostles. The cry of the Reformation was "Sola scriptura", the scriptures and the scriptures alone. Medieval Christianity would be radically reformed and restructured and the only standard would be the Bible, the word of God. It confronted a corrupt church and a superstitious people and called them back to the word of God and to the pure and simple gospel of Jesus Christ. When the church reacted to this call for reform with violence, threats, and excommunications, the Reformers left the Roman Catholic Church and founded new communions based on their understanding of the scriptures. The response was phenomenal. The Reformation took hold in almost all the countries of Europe. In some, like France, Spain, and Poland, only massive force, extensive persecution, and thorough inquisition extinguished it. In others such as Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, England and Scotland it could not be quenched and gained the ascendancy. In these nations the old order including the old faith had been irrevocably overthrown. And true to form this was a long, violent, and bloody process. For three decades during the Thirty Years War Europe was wracked with marauding armies, massacres, death, famine, rapine, and pestilence. In the Netherlands the struggle against Spain and the Inquisition was equally long

and bloody and was therefore known as the Eighty Years War.

The final movement that significantly contributed to the dissolution of the old order was the Enlightenment, and it was also the last in chronological order. Unlike the Renaissance the Enlightenment was more ideological than cultural, more interested in philosophy than the arts. It was therefore far more theological and political. The basic philosophy of the Enlightenment was humanist; that is, it had its faith in man and not in God. It taught that man was inherently good and that man aided only by reason and natural law could bring to pass indefinite progress. Progress that would result in the curing of all past ills, the achievement of a utopian order, the establishment of perpetual peace, and ultimately the construction of a perfect society. As such it was a messianic faith that would introduce the new millennium, but man would be his own messiah. If the old order had called men to walk by the light of the church, and the Reformation had called men to walk in the light of scripture; the Enlightenment called men to walk in the light of human reason. The prophets of this new faith were the "philosophes", such men as Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, and Descartes in France, Hume and Locke in England, and Kant in Germany. Some of these men, like the American Thomas Jefferson, who were not openly atheists, were Deists. Deists believed that a creator god probably existed, but he was no more than a watchmaker who had created the world and now left it to run by itself. This scheme of things excluded concepts of divine providence, the need of divine grace, and any need of salvation. It makes Christianity obsolete and prayer an absurd exercise in futility. The Enlightenment philosophers believed all they had to do was learn the natural laws by which the world operated and apply them to the issues of the day and they could run this world like a Swiss watch and eliminate all problems. Salvation by science, not Christian theology, was the order of the day.

Now these three movements together have created the modern Western world. But obviously they are not compatible with each other. In fact there is constant tension between them in Western society. This is more evident in some nations than others. In France where the Enlightenment was strong and the Reformation was crushed this is less the case. However in the United States, where a population that was largely the product of the Reformation overshadowed the Enlightenment ideals of some of the founding fathers, this tension is very real. In short there is schizophrenia, an ideological instability, in Western society. Now a house divided against itself cannot stand and sooner or later these tensions, like the seismic pressures between tectonic plates, must be resolved. When they are the results can be as cataclysmic as an earthquake. The current cultural wars in the United States over a host of social issues are merely the consequences of this ideological rift. And of course both sides appeal to the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, quotations from their favorite founding fathers, and any other historical evidence in favor of their side of the rift. George Washington can be viewed as either a devout Episcopalian or as a member of the Masonic Lodge, an Enlightenment institution. The fact that he appears to have been both only underscores the problem.

Now the Christian Reconstructionists, as I understand them, correctly believe that sooner or later this will precipitate a crisis in Western society in general and in American society in particular. They perceive that this is the post-Christian era and that Enlightenment "theology" rules the day. They know that this humanistic trust in the innate goodness of man and in the perfectibility of society will become just another failed idol. And when such a society fails, when it collapses in ruin and crisis, and its ideology is thoroughly discredited, they believe that there will be an opportunity for reconstruction. They are preparing to ensure that it will be Christian Reconstruction. What such Reconstruction means and whether it is even realistic is what we will be examining in the pages of this book.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEONOMISTS

Christian Reconstructionists are also known as "Theonomists". The terms have different meanings but are generally applied to the same group of people. To fully understand them we need to understand both terms and why they are applied to them. Theonomists are people who believe in theonomy. Theonomy comes from the Greek (theo = god and nomos = law) and means God's law. Therefore theonomists are people who believe in God's law. All Christians should be theonomists. Any Calvinist believing in the sovereignty of God over all areas of life is a theonomist. But Theonomist with a capital "T"; Theonomist as a proper noun, refers to the same group of people we have already identified as Christian Reconstructionists. Why are they called "Theonomists"?

People are theonomists as opposed to being antinomians. This is another Greek word (anti = against and nomos = law) meaning against the law. Antinomianism is a perennial problem in Christian theology. While the Apostle Paul says, "*Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*" (Romans 7:12) the antinomians say that the law is bad. And while Christ said, "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:17-19), the antinomians say that law has passed away.

The antinomians' rejection of the law is fueled by various arguments. One is by positing a false dichotomy between faith and law. They infer that faith and law are mutually exclusive. They teach that if we are to walk by faith we have to reject walking by the law. But the Apostle Paul puts the lie to such errors when he teaches, "*Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law*" (Romans 3:31). It is because Christians believe in the law that they are Christians. It is because they acknowledge the Biblical definition of sin "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law*" (1 John 3:4), it is because they believe in the reality of the law, that they see their need of salvation. They seek to attain heaven because they believe in hell, they exercise faith in Christ because they believe that by the law they are condemned. They note that the very gospel they believe in, the very gospel that they trust in for their salvation is based on both faith and law. They note that Christ lived a perfect sinless life on their behalf, completely fulfilling the requirements of the law and that this perfect righteousness is attributed to them when they are justified by faith. They note that though the law says "*the wages of sin is death*" and "*the soul that sinneth it shall die*", that Christ died in their place fulfilling the law and the requirements of divine justice. They note that that at Golgotha, at the events that are at the very heart of the gospel, the law was being fulfilled even as divine grace was working out the salvation of God's elect. They rejoice not that the law has been destroyed or set aside but that all its requirements have been met for them through the finished work and once and for all atonement of Jesus the Christ. For them there is no dichotomy between grace and law, but a marvelous union of the two, that has worked out their salvation.

The second argument that is a favorite of antinomians is to accuse all theonomists of being legalists. They define a legalist as one who believes we have to keep the law. But this is an absurdity. Do they

really believe that Christians don't have to keep the law? Are they really saying that Christians can commit murder, adultery, and theft? The real definition of a legalist is someone who believes that by their personal keeping of God's law they can merit salvation. The Pharisees were legalists. The Pharisee in the temple who scorned to even look at the repentant publican and who thanked God that he was so good, as he recounted his keeping of the law in the tiniest minutia, is a good example. The rich young ruler who claimed that he had kept the law from his youth up was probably a legalist. To all such Paul warns, "*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified*" (Galatians 2:16). It is not that Christians are exempt from keeping the law but only that they are not to trust in their own works, their own righteousness, their own keeping of the law as a basis for their salvation. As Isaiah phrased it centuries before Paul, "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6). Isaiah taught that our righteousness, our fulfilling of the law, rather than being the basis for our salvation is in God's eyes an unclean thing, a filthy rag. Paul defined legalists as those who sought salvation by the law apart from faith. He explained why Israel had failed to obtain the perfect righteousness of God, saying "*Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone*" (Romans 9:32).

A third argument is a dispensational one. It states that Christians are under grace and not under law. This is but a corollary of the initial argument, the pretended dichotomy between grace and law. It may have some truth if correctly defined. If you take the term "law" as a synonym for the Sinaitic Covenant, as it is sometimes used, the statement makes a valid point. But, when it is used to infer, that being under grace, we are exempt from keeping God's standards of conduct for our lives, it is patently false. Again as Paul puts it, "*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid*" (Romans 6:14-15). Sin is the transgression of the law and if its dominion over our lives is to be broken we have to start conforming to God's law. But to use grace as a cloak for sin comes under the stern rebuke of the Apostle.

Now antinomianism is a problem in many churches. Professing Christians love to hear the gospel. They love to hear that God loves them. They love to hear that their sins are forgiven. They love to hear that they are God's children, the sheep of his pasture. But they are frequently far more sensitive when the subject turns to their sin. To be called to a holy life, to be called to righteous living is a less popular. To be required to change their lifestyle and conform to God's law stirs resistance within their hearts. And to have their specific sins pointed out and condemned can make men furious. Yet the scriptures declare, "*...it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy*" (1 Peter 1:16), and warn us that we are to, "*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*" (Hebrews 12:14).

Now all Christians should be theonomists. They should uphold the law of God. They should strive to keep the law and plead for grace to be kept from sin. And the "Theonomists" are correct when they point this out. They are doing the church a service when they oppose the deadly errors of antinomianism. But if all sound Christians are theonomists what sets them apart from those known as "Theonomists". And why are the latter called "Theonomists" if they share this doctrine with other Christians? The answer is in the degree to which they desire to apply the laws of God to men in our day. They are called "Theonomists" because their view of the applicability of the laws of God to this generation is more extreme than any other. We will examine this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LAW OF GOD

What do we mean when we say that Christians are required to walk in the law of God? What do we mean when we say that Christians are to walk according to God's law, not as a way of salvation, but having been redeemed, as a new way of life? It all comes down to what we mean by the law of God. And that may not be as simple as men may think. As David stated it, "*I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad*" (Psalm 119:96). David is saying that all human things come short and fail, but that the law of God is perfect, full, and comprehensive covering all of life. But not only is the law of God so extensive that it covers all issues of life, but there are multiple aspects to and divisions of God's law. And it is the applicability to our generation of the various aspects and divisions of the law that is the issue before us. It is this issue that separates Christians, not only between theonomists and antinomians, but also between theonomists and "Theonomists". For while antinomians believe that they are not under God's law at all, "Theonomists" believe that we are under most if not all aspects and divisions of the law. To sort this out and understand this issue we need to examine the divisions of the laws of God as revealed in the scriptures.

The laws of God as revealed in scripture can basically be divided into three categories. The first of these is the moral law. This is the law that is written in men's hearts. This is the law which our consciences bear witness to on a daily basis. This is the law that is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments. This is the law that defines our relationship to God and to our neighbor. The first four commandments, the first table, of this law, teach us how to love God and the last six commandments, the second table of this law, teaches us how to love our fellow man. This law was the law that Adam and Eve were subject to in the Garden of Eden, the law that God gave to Moses for the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai, and is the law that Christians are still under today. At no time in history has there been liberty to worship other gods, to practice idolatry, to blaspheme the true God, or to desecrate his sabbaths. Neither at any time has it been lawful for men to commit murder, adultery, theft, or perjury etc. This is the permanent moral law of God that is an expression of his eternal, unchanging, holy nature. When Christians say that we are to walk in God's law and keep his commandments, this is the law that is generally in view.

The second main division of the law is that body of law that is generally termed the ceremonial law. This is another large body of laws that God gave to Israel at Sinai. These laws include all the laws of the sacrifices that were to be offered at the tabernacle and later at the temple. These laws also included all the laws that regulated the priesthood and the order of Levites. These laws included all the regulations with respect to who was ceremonially unclean and how this ceremonial uncleanness could be removed. And these laws also included all the dietary laws that were obligatory upon Old Testament Israel. Many of the ordinances that typified Christ and prefigured his coming and his atoning death were part of these laws. It is this body of law that is generally in mind, or at least should be, when Christians say they are no longer under the law.

Finally the third extensive body of Biblical law is the judicial laws that God gave to Israel at Mount Sinai. These laws span everything from rules of evidence for judicial proceedings to prescribing the appropriate punishments for specific infractions of the law. Laws with respect to the tenure of the land and the release of debts would be in this category as would be the laws that regulated servitude

and polygamy. Laws dealing with adultery and the trial of jealousy, as well as those dealing with crimes such as incest, witchcraft, and blasphemy would be included among these laws.

Now the issue before us is which of these bodies of laws are applicable to Christians today, or are all of them? The standard answer, the answer of the Westminster Confession of Faith is worth quoting in this regard. It states, "*Besides this law, commonly called Moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a Church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the New Testament. To them, also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require. The moral law does forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God, the Creator, who gave it. Neither does Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation*" (Chapter 19, Sections 3-5, Emphasis mine). This is the historic position of the Reformed faith on this matter and its position is clear. It states that the moral law remains permanently binding on all Christians for all time. It then states that the ceremonial law has been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ and is no longer in force in our day. It also states that the judicial law is no longer binding in our day either. So far it seems very clear but then it adds one qualification. The judicial law in general is no longer obligatory upon Christians except *as "the general equity thereof may require."* What does this mean? What it means is simply that the judicial laws of Israel contained some general principles of justice that ought to be followed by all peoples.

There is another aspect to considering the judicial laws of Old Testament Israel. There is more than the division between laws that did or did not have general equity applicable to all societies. There is also a division between those laws that were peculiar to Israel and those that could be applied to other nations. The judicial laws of Israel allowed for an ultimate appeal to God himself. In Moses' day this was done through Moses who took the appeal directly to God as he did in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. Later in the theocracy, after the death of Moses, this appeal was made by the High Priest using the breastplate with the "Urim and the Thummin". When Saul the King apostatized and was rejected of the Lord the Lord would no longer accept his appeals via the Urim and the Thummin. Now obviously other nations did not have a High Priest with this means of judicial appeal directly to God and these laws could not possibly apply to them. Similarly the laws with respect to manslaughter were unique to Israel. In Israel the law allowed the nearest male relative, the avenger of blood, to personally avenge the victim. And the killer was allowed to flee to one of six appointed cities of refuge. There he or she would be safe until the death of the High Priest when they could return to their own city in peace. Now the office of avenger of blood is no more. It was typical of Christ who has fulfilled it and is the Avenger of God's elect. Neither are there any divinely appointed cities of refuge, nor is it possible anymore to await for the death of a non-existent human High Priest. These and many other judicial laws peculiar to the theocracy are no longer applicable to any nations.

Now it is with the applicability of the laws that God gave to Israel that most Christians part company with the Theonomists. Theonomists may disagree somewhat among themselves but in general their application of the judicial laws of Israel are more extensive than is normally accepted. Their willingness to conform to even sections of the ceremonial law sets them apart even further from mainstream Christianity on this subject. For example some Theonomists have accepted the application of the dietary laws of Moses to contemporary society even though they are clearly part of the ceremonial law. Many of them have adopted a rather extensive ecclesiastical calendar to mimic

the ecclesiastical calendar of Israel and conform even further to the pattern of the ceremonial law. In doing so they have adopted Lent, Easter, Christmas, and other so called Christian festivals although they are admittedly of pagan origin. And they almost all call for the exact application today of the specific penalties called for by the judicial laws of Israel. In all these issues they are setting themselves apart and it is for these reasons that they are called Theonomists with a capital "T".

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEOCRACY

Theocracy is another one of those Greek words that we have been examining. It means God's rule or rule by God (Theo = God and kratin = rule) and is similar to other words of Greek origin in our vocabulary such as aristocracy (rule by a few) and democracy (rule by the people) etc. A theocracy is therefore a nation that is ruled by God. Now of course all nations are ruled by God. As even that proud monarch Nebuchadnezzar was humbled to declare, "*...and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand*" (Daniel 4:34-35). God is sovereign over all the nations of the world and he directs their affairs according to his holy will and eternal purpose. God indeed rules over all the nations of the world.

If this is true of all nations, than why are some nations singled out and called a theocracy? What makes them different is that they are ruled directly by God. God is not only the God of that society, but he is also its highest civil ruler. This was the case in Israel. Jahweh¹ was not only the God of Israel, Israel's only God in an age of polytheistic societies, but Jahweh was also the King of Israel. The modern day equivalent would be to have Jesus Christ be the President of the United States. Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity would be our God, but the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, would be our King. Since the God of Israel is the only true God, and since the only time that He has condescended to be the head of a civil commonwealth, was in the Old Testament Hebrew nation, This makes Israel the only real theocracy of all time. The kings of Israel were actually only prime ministers serving as the Lord's anointed. They were chosen by the people according to the constitution of the nation, which required them to elect the king that God had chosen for them. God's choice was made manifest by the anointing of a prophet of God, such as by Samuel who originally anointed Saul, the first king, and later anointed David to be his successor. God was personally the highest judicial officer of the land and the most difficult cases were brought before him for a verdict. This was done by means of an inspired prophet or through the High Priest using the Urim and the Thummin. There was never anything like this since the days that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden where they walked with God and communed with him on a daily basis. And there has certainly been nothing like that ever since. Israel was a theocracy and Israel was unique. However, in spite of that fact there have been many attempts to imitate the Old Testament Hebrew Commonwealth and set up another theocracy.

Now one of the unique things about a theocracy is that there can be no religious liberty. In a theocracy religious heresies constitute political crimes. This is because of the very nature of a theocracy. In a theocracy, idolatry, the worship of another god, becomes treason against the God-King of that society and merits the death penalty. Similarly blasphemy against the God-King constitutes rebellion and is also punished by death. In a theocracy the civil order is constitutionally committed to submission to the God-King and to his law. Any departure from that is a political crime

¹ The correct Old Testament name for the God of Israel generally mistransliterated as Jehovah.

and is punished accordingly. That is why the godly and faithful kings of Israel used the sword of the civil magistrate to root out idolatry and to suppress blasphemy against their true King, Jahweh.

Now all Christians believe in "theocracy" in general, that is they believe in God's rule over the nations. But they believe that God exercises that rule through his providential dealings with men, through his judgments and his blessings as the Moral Governor of the Universe. They do not believe in "Theocracy", that is, they do not believe that God currently is, or even that God currently should be, the highest civil magistrate of their respective nations. But most Christian Reconstructionists believe that the theocracy that God established over Israel under the terms of the Sinaitic Covenant is normative for all men and for all nations for all time. They may not state this explicitly, but, when they constantly buttress their arguments by appealing to the terms of the Sinaitic Covenant, they are really saying that they believe that it continues to apply to us today. Reconstructionism can therefore be viewed as another attempt to institute a theocracy similar to Old Testament Israel.

CHAPTER EIGHT

COVENANT THEOLOGY

We have noticed the tendency of Reconstructionists toward theocracy. We have noted their proclivity to adhere to the Sinaitic Covenant. Why is this wrong? In order to determine that we need to review a little covenant theology.

The history of redemption, the unfolding in time of God's eternal plan of salvation, consists of a series of gracious covenants. We will review them chronologically, in the order in which they were instituted by God. The first one is the Covenant of Works.

Covenant Of Works.

This is the covenant that God made with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was a covenant based on their personal obedience. In it the Lord promised to be a God and a Father to them, providing all things needful for them and maintaining them in paradise as long as they perfectly obeyed his commandments. But, this is also the covenant that told our first parents, "*in the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die.*" This is the covenant that says that "*the soul that sinneth it shall die*" and that is still true. It says that "*the wages of sin is death*" and that is still true as well. By the terms of this covenant all the wicked will be judged at the last day before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. The books will be opened and everyone will be judged according to their works. Because all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, all men are condemned by this covenant and are in need of a Savior. The good news is that there is a Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a perfect and sinless life and fulfilled the covenant of works for us. Those who are united to him by faith share in that perfect righteousness. Even as their sins are imputed to him, so his righteousness is imputed to them, and they are justified before God. Christ has redeemed his people by fulfilling the requirements of the covenant of works for them in their stead. God is a holy God of purer eyes than to behold evil and he will never relax the terms of this covenant. This covenant remains in force and, as long as it does, men have no hope outside of Jesus Christ.

The Noahic Covenant

The next covenant that we will examine is the covenant that God made with Noah. This is the covenant that God sealed by the sign of the rainbow in the heavens. In it God covenanted that there would never again be another universal judgment, another end of all flesh, at least not by water, and at least not until the end of the age. One of the promises of this covenant is that the heavenly bodies whose motions define day and night and determine the seasons will remain in steady orbits until the end of the age. "*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*" Genesis 8:22

The scriptures use this covenant as a demonstration of God's covenant faithfulness and as a standard to judge his faithfulness in keeping other promises.

"My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah." (Psalm 89:34-37)

In this Psalm the demonstrated faithfulness of God's keeping the Noahic Covenant is set forth as a standard by God himself of how he will keep his Covenant with David. Even as God has all these centuries since Noah maintained the ordinances of heaven and the regularity of the seasons that they control, as promised in his covenant with Noah, so will God keep his promises to David that his seed, Jesus Christ, will sit on his throne forever.

"And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me." (Jeremiah 33:19-22)

In these passages God's covenant faithfulness in keeping the Noahic Covenant is again set forth as a the standard by which men can judge how God will keep his other covenant commitments. It shows that he will keep his promises to his people Israel and to his servant David. We will see later how these promises are fulfilled in the New Covenant. To the prophets at least there is no notion of God abrogating this covenant. It will stand till the very end of the age just as God promised Noah. It was made with Noah and all his posterity and therefore continues to this day for we are all descended from Noah and his three sons.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The next covenant that we will examine is the Abrahamic Covenant. This is the covenant that God made with Abraham and his posterity where he promised salvation based upon justification by faith. In it he also promised that a Messiah would someday come, out of Abraham's seed, who would deliver his people from sin. This Messiah would not only be a blessing to Abraham's posterity but to all the nations of the earth. A study of the Abrahamic Covenant brings us to the same conclusion with respect to its validity unto this day.

"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect... For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:14-29)

In this passage Paul clearly sets forth the great truth that the Galatian Christians are under the Abrahamic Covenant. That covenant, which Paul terms the "promise", is still in effect and the passing of the Sinaitic Covenant made 400 years later has not annulled this one. Through Jesus Christ, who specifically is identified as the promised seed of Abraham, the blessings of this covenant have come upon the Gentiles: has come upon all who have the faith of Abraham and are thus are united to Christ.

And here again God himself explicitly declares that this is an everlasting covenant. *"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."* (Genesis 17:7-8)

As we have seen, the basis of this covenant is justification by faith. Everyone of God's elect that is justified by faith through Jesus Christ is received as a child of God by the terms of this covenant.

The Davidic Covenant

Let us now examine the Davidic Covenant. This is the covenant where God promises that he will establish David's seed forever and maintain his throne to all generations. There were no conditions to this covenant and God explicitly said he would judge iniquity in David sons, but never take his covenant faithfulness from him. The author of Psalm 89, as we have seen above, in a time when it seemed to some that God's covenant faithfulness had failed, restates his conviction that God will keep his covenant with David. And in due time this came to pass when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary.

"And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:31-33)

The Apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, and preaching to the multitude on Pentecost declares that God had faithfully fulfilled his covenant with David in raising Jesus Christ from the dead to sit on the throne of his father David forevermore. *"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."* (Acts 2:29-31)

This covenant also is obviously still in force and will remain so for all eternity as long as Jesus Christ rules over his people in the eternal Kingdom of God.

The New Covenant

We are all under the New Covenant and redeemed by the blood of the New Covenant, shed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The salvation promised in the Abrahamic Covenant is achieved by the New Covenant. Not by the mediatorship of Moses, not by the Levitical priesthood, nor the blood of calves and bulls are we redeemed, but only by the Lord Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb, our High Priest and the only Mediator between God and man. If this covenant has failed and passed away then we are without hope and of all men most miserable. It is that new covenant of which God himself said, *"... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people"* (Jeremiah 31:33). This is that new covenant wherein God fulfils the promise to Abraham of justification by faith. This is the covenant whereby we are adopted as children of God, and made heirs with Christ of that eternal kingdom that shall have no end. This covenant shall stand as long as the hosts of the redeemed praise God in that heavenly kingdom throughout a

future eternity.

The Sinaitic Covenant

The Sinaitic Covenant is the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai. It was a conditional covenant that promised them God's blessings and tenure in the Promised Land based upon national obedience to God's laws. This covenant also threatened them with God's judgments and eviction from the land of promise for persistent national disobedience. This covenant was therefore a two-edged sword that ultimately cut both ways as both Israel, the Northern Kingdom, and Judah apostatized and fell under its curse, and went into captivity. Being founded not on God's unqualified promises, but being conditioned on their national obedience, it had no sure foundation and therefore was at best temporary. God faithfully kept his covenant with Israel, but Israel did not keep covenant with Him.

Ultimately the Sinaitic Covenant was abrogated by God himself. It passed away forever. The ceremonial law that it contained was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, but it could not save us. Being conditioned upon human faithfulness to the covenant, and obedience to all the Mosaic legislation, it was as Paul says, *"weak through the flesh"* (Romans 8:3). And as the author of the Hebrews expresses it *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:4). This covenant has been replaced by an unconditional and effectual one and is therefore no longer in force. The ultimate sin of the national rejection of the Messiah sealed the fate of this covenant as prophesied centuries before by Zechariah. *"And I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples. So it was broken on that day. Thus the poor of the flock, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the LORD. Then I said to them, 'If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.' So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'; that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter."* (Zechariah 11:10-13)

This shows us that the Sinaitic is the lone exception. It alone has been abrogated and set aside. It alone has passed away and is no longer of force.

Now, here does this leave us? What it teaches us is that all the covenants with the exception of the Sinaitic are still in force. They are one grand whole. Together they progressively reveal God's gracious plan of redemption. The Covenant of Works shows us our natural state before God and demonstrates our need of a Savior. The Noahic Covenant pledges God's forbearance with his creation guaranteeing that he will restrain his judgments and ensure the continuity of his creation until the Messiah has come and all the elect have all been called out and redeemed. The Abrahamic Covenant renews the promise, given to our first parents when they sinned, of a future Messiah, and establishes the principle of justification by faith as the basis of the promised salvation. The Abrahamic Covenant promised that there would be a redeemed multitude as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sand on the seashore. And even as that covenant promised to provide the people that would form the future Messianic Kingdom, so the Davidic Covenant promised the eternal Messianic King, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, who would rule over that kingdom forever and ever. And finally the New Covenant provided the sacrifice that would atone for our sins and make our salvation a reality and promised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would change our hearts and make us fit for that heavenly kingdom. These covenants are all of one piece; they are continuous, one flowing logically into the other. The exception of course is the Sinaitic Covenant,

which doesn't fit into this scheme at all, having been set aside and replaced by the New Covenant, according to the prophecies of Jeremiah.

Now we can say in conclusion that there are several errors that can be made as one reviews these covenants. One is to see them all as disjointed and having no connection. Another is to see them as having all passed away except for the New Covenant. These errors produce what is generally termed dispensationalism. But the error that we are focusing on is the error of failing to see that the Sinaitic Covenant has passed away. This is the error that leads to Theocracy and Theonomy. This is the error of many of the Christian Reconstructionists.

CHAPTER NINE

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

What is religious liberty? When it comes to the issue of freedom of conscience, there are only three positions. They are persecution to compel religious uniformity, toleration where a limited departure from religious uniformity is allowed, and full religious liberty where all faiths have the same status before the civil law. But what of faiths that practice human sacrifice or ritual prostitution as many of Israel's neighbors did? Are those religions to be allowed also? And if not, what do we mean by religious liberty? The Biblical definition of religious liberty is simple. God gave all men the moral law, summed up in the Ten Commandments, as a guide to their actions by which they will be held accountable at the last day. But the moral law came divided into two tables. The first table defines our relationship to God and the second table our relationship to our fellow man. Christ taught, "*...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*" (Matthew 22:37-40). Christ said of the moral law that it teaches us how to love God in the first table and how to love our fellow man in the second table. Now it is from this division of the law into two tables that we obtain our definition of religious liberty. In a society where the civil government enforces both tables of the law, a society where the civil magistrates regulate our relationship with God, there is no religious liberty. And conversely in a society where the civil magistrates enforce only the second table of the law there is religious liberty.¹

Now from all this one thing should be clearly evident and that is, that under Christian Reconstructionism, there would be no religious liberty. Their understanding of the applicability of the law of God to our society goes far beyond the moral law and definitely includes the civil enforcement of both tables of the law. In fact some Christian Reconstructionists have even denied that the moral law is divided into two tables. They postulate that the two tables that Moses carried down from the Mount Sinai both had the entire ten commandments written on them. They believe that since this was a covenant between God and Israel there were two copies of this covenant one for each party. This of course precludes any conception of the civil government being restricted to the enforcement of the second table. Under Christian Reconstructionism there will be no religious liberty.

Another reason that there would logically be no religious liberty under Christian Reconstructionism is their position with respect to the Sinaitic Covenant. As we have noted rather than accepting its passing away, they consistently argue from the terms of that covenant in defense of many of their principles. More than any others they seem to believe that the terms of that covenant are still normative for our age. Now that covenant established a theocracy and that covenant did not establish religious liberty. In fact, it is the only one of the divine covenants whose terms are inconsistent with religious liberty. And as we have noted it is the only one of the divine covenants that has passed away. The only religious liberty that the Reconstructionists would be likely to allow is that degree of religious liberty allowed by the Sinaitic Covenant. That covenant did allow for some limited

¹ For a full study of the issues of religious liberty and a scriptural defense of religious liberty under the New Covenant see Louis F. DeBoer, *Lord of the Conscience*, 1999, American Presbyterian Press, 1459 Boston Neck Road, Saunderstown, RI 02874.

religious liberty. While there was absolutely no religious liberty for the Israelites who were members of the covenant community there was a measure of religious liberty allowed to non-Israelites of other faiths who were sojourning in the land. Such persons were allowed liberty of conscience with respect to their private beliefs. That is, there was no inquisition as to what they personally believed. They could privately not only believe according to their own faith and religion, but they could also privately worship in accordance with that faith. What they were not allowed to do was to make any public expression of that faith. Any public blasphemy against the God of Israel or any public idolatry and worship of other gods was still punishable by death for Israelite and non-Israelite alike. And that is probably the best that we could expect under any Reconstructionist government.

What have the Reconstructionists themselves said on the subject? One thing that they have made clear is that the minimum requirement for any public religion will be faith in the Trinitarian God of the scriptures. That means that all non-Trinitarian faiths, not only Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism etc., but also all non-Trinitarian "Christian" cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons etc. would be suppressed by the government. Similarly they have made it clear that Trinitarian oaths would be required of all citizens seeking to hold any public office whatsoever. However in practice it would probably work out even more strictly. The enforcement of the first table of the law would inevitably produce an approved church, with an approved worship and liturgy, and approved doctrinal standards. The exclusion of all others would lead to the suppression of all unapproved public worship. Ultimately they would likely construct a Christian society per their understanding of the scriptures and all dissenting Christians would be limited to only private expression of their personal beliefs. A booklet like this would only be able to be written and to be published anonymously. This may not be advocated or even admitted at times like this when all Christians are allies in the struggle against secular humanism, but once in power it would be a logical outworking of their basic principles.

A brief examination of the first table of the law will indicate what a Reconstructionist government is likely to do in the area of religion.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me." This commandment forbids idolatry by dealing with who we worship. As we have seen this would require that the only public expression of faith would have to be in the Trinitarian God of the scriptures, the God of Israel.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." This commandment forbids idolatry by dealing with how we worship. We are to worship God in an approved manner according to the scriptures and not by means of images or any other means of human invention. As Calvinists have always believed this requires a church to have a Directory of Worship to instruct and regulate the church in the public worship of God according to the scriptures. Currently different Reformed and Presbyterian churches have their own Directories of Worship according to their understanding of the scriptural requirements. However, if this is to be enforced by the civil magistrate, the government can only enforce one. Historically this has always meant a loss of religious liberty.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless

that taketh his name in vain." This law forbids the abuse and desecration of God's holy name. All cursing, vain oaths, and blasphemies, involving that great and holy name would become punishable by the civil magistrate. If the judicial laws and penalties of the Sinaitic Covenant were to be applied as the Reconstructionists advocate, then these sins would be punishable by death.

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work". This commandment requires much more than merely a cessation of labor. It requires a day of rest and worship and a holy meditating on the things of God and on his word. It requires the public and private worship of God. As the Westminster Confession of faith states it, the only work allowed would be works of necessity and mercy. Now a cessation from unnecessary work on the Lord's Day is one thing. But the enforcement of private worship is an impossibility, which no government can enforce. However the public worship of God is another matter. Reconstructionists are likely to return to the model of Calvin's Geneva, where it was required of all citizens to attend approved church services each Lord's Day. This has the destructive effect of filling the church with vain professors and hypocrites and opposes the idea of a gathered church ideally composed of the elect of God gathered out from among the children of the world and separated unto a holy life. It would destroy the distinction between the visible church and the world.

If religious liberty is a scriptural requirement under the New Covenant (Testament), then it would be a casualty in any Reconstructionist state.

CHAPTER TEN

WORSHIP

Should the Reconstructionists someday impose their view of worship on society what type of worship is it likely to be? It is likely to be considerably different than we might imagine, for although the Reconstructionists come mainly from the ranks of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, they do not share their tradition of worship. The Reformed Christians on the continent of Europe, the Scotch Presbyterians, and the English Puritans all shared the same doctrine of worship. And the watchword for that worship was simplicity. They had left the Church of Rome whose worship was a convoluted maze of rituals. They had left a Church that justified its modes of worship by the traditions of the Church and the pronouncements of the Pope. They had risked their lives to separate from a Church whose worship they considered to be steeped in relics of paganism and idolatry. Since the main purpose of the Church of God is to collectively and publicly worship God, they were determined to correct this.

Heeding the commands of Christ who had warned, "*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matthew 15:9), they determined to strip away everything of human origin in the worship of God, which was not authorized by the scriptures. The razor that they used to accomplish this has come to be known as the "*regulative principle of worship*". It basically states that "*whatever is not commanded is forbidden.*" They were determined to purify the worship of Christ's Church until nothing was left except that which He, as the only and sovereign Head of the Church, had himself commanded. The worship that they established was, therefore, very Spartan in its simplicity. It consisted of the reading of God's word, the preaching and public exposition of that word, the singing of psalms, public prayer, and the administration of the sacraments. The seven sacraments of the Church of Rome were stripped down to only two, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. A host of rituals, as well as fancy vestments, candles, holy water, holy smoke, etc. were rejected and cast aside.

Now this process started in the sixteenth century and was completed by the middle of the seventeenth century. And although there have been some departures from this model by Reformed Protestants over the years and some accretions to this simple order of worship, it fundamentally still remains a very simple worship to this day. And this brings it into stark contrast with the worship that is being advocated by many of the Christian Reconstructionists.

We have already noted the proclivity of the Reconstructionists to cling to more of the Sinaitic Covenant and the Old Testament law than is generally accepted. Now this greater conformity to Old Testament Israel is also reflected in their doctrine of worship. Under the ceremonial law the worship of Israel was considerably ritualistic. The service of the tabernacle and later the temple abounded in ceremonies and rituals. Historically the worship of Israel has been regarded as being divided into two aspects. The one was the worship conducted in the temple under the ceremonial law and the other was the worship conducted on the weekly sabbaths in the local synagogue. The former has generally been regarded as having passed away with the death of Christ, and the worship of the New Testament Church is seen as a continuation of the latter. After all, in the local synagogues believers met for prayer, the reading and exposition of the scriptures, and the singing of psalms, much the same as contemporary Christians do today. In contrast to that many of the Reconstructionists have an affinity

for the more ritualistic worship of the Old Covenant. In their doctrine of worship they are more Episcopalian than Reformed. Ecclesiastical robes, candles, holy water, and an elaborate liturgy are advocated, and practiced, by many of them. They reject the ceremonial law and especially its sacrificial aspects as having been fulfilled in Christ. Yet they seek to develop a model of New Testament worship that emulates the pattern, if not the specifics, of Old Testament worship. A good example of this is the matter of an ecclesiastical calendar. Israel had an extensive calendar of church feasts and they believe that we should have one also. The feasts may be different, but an ecclesiastical calendar is a necessity. And many of them have adopted a calendar of extra-scriptural feasts such as Lent, Good Friday, Christmas, and Easter, etc. in order to conform to the Old Testament model. Under the regulative principle of worship these had all been condemned as being unauthorized by the scriptures and as having been of pagan origin.

One of the most contentious issues of worship introduced by the Christian Reconstructionists, however, is the practice of paedocommunion. Historically Reformed Christians have baptized their children shortly after birth to seal them as members of the covenant community and of the visible church. However they were not admitted to the Lord's Table until they professed their faith in the atoning work of Christ and could perform the scriptural requirements of self-examination and repentance before partaking. But again, seeking to emulate Old Testament Israel, the Reconstructionists insist that their children be admitted to the Lord's Supper as soon as they are old enough to masticate the elements. This is highly controversial, not only because the exact practice of Israel with respect to the Passover observance is debatable, but because there is no precedent for this in the Christian Church. It is one thing to be Episcopalian in worship. It may not be Reformed, but it does represent a historic branch of Christianity. Paedocommunion however is a radical innovation that can only be controversial and divisive.

Obviously Reconstructionists are not uniform on these issues. They differ among themselves on many issues including worship. I am only showing what the views of some are and what the tendencies of the system of thought are. Systematic theology is a science. One's views in one area have a definite impact on one's views in another area. If the system of doctrine is to have a logical consistency, this is inevitable. And what is being set forth here is the type of worship that has been and is likely to be developed as a result of Reconstructionist thought. And this is the system of worship that a Reconstructionist government would be likely to impose on a society that it had come to govern.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatology is another of those Greek words that we keep running into. It refers to the study of future things. In Christian theology eschatology is the study of prophecy as it refers not only to the eternal estate but also to the future of the church. In Reformed theology there are three basic eschatological positions. Their names are all derived from their position with respect to the millennium. In the Old Testament many of the Hebrew prophets prophesied of a messianic age, an age of peace and prosperity, an age when war and evil would be banished, when the curse of sin would be lifted, and the world would be filled with righteousness. This would be the time when men would beat their swords into plowshares, when the lion will lay down with the lamb, and when the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. This golden age is referred to as the millennium. Men's eschatological positions are defined with respect to their millennial beliefs. First we have the amillennialists. Amillennium means no millennium and these people do not believe in any literal millennium on this earth. For them the millennial rule of Christ is spiritualized into Christ's rule in men's hearts (or for some the intermediate state of the righteous dead in heaven) and the future they mainly look forward to is an eternity in heaven. The next group is the historic premillennialists. They believe in a real millennium that will literally be fulfilled on this earth. They are called premillennialists because they believe that Christ will return before (i.e. pre) the millennium. They believe that Christ will personally rule on this earth during the millennium, indeed that it is Christ's presence and His rule that will usher in this golden age. They believe that it will be the Messianic age because the Messiah will have come, not like the first time as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world, but a second time as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, to rule the world in righteousness. The third group is the Postmillennialists. They also believe in a literal millennium that will be fulfilled on this earth. However unlike the Premillennialists they believe that Christ will return after (i.e. post) the millennium. They believe that the Church will prevail in this world. They believe that the preaching of the gospel will convert the nations and that this will usher in a golden age prior to the return of Christ. These are the three eschatological positions that have historically divided Reformed Christianity.

Now it should be clear from all this that the Reconstructionists must of necessity be Postmillennialists. Amillennialists and Premillennialists believe that the world will progressively decline before the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ. They believe as Paul stated it to Timothy, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived*" (2 Timothy 3:12-13). They believe that at the end of the age the church will be characterized by apostasy, unbelief, and the spirit of Anti-Christ. As Paul warned the Thessalonians, "*Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). They believe that great tribulation and persecution of the church will mark the end of the age, before the return of Christ. As Christ warned his Apostles, "*And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? ...For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be... Immediately after the tribulation*

of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven" (Matthew 24:3,21,29-30). Now Postmillennialists have a much rosier view of the end of the age. They believe that these prophecies of apostasy and tribulation have already been fulfilled long ago in the past. Specifically they believe that the great tribulation spoken of by Christ was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. For this reason Postmillennialism is a "sine qua non" of the Christian Reconstructionists. It is absolutely essential to their system of thought. After all if the world is going to degenerate and end in apostasy and persecution there will not be much scope for Christian Reconstruction. But if the church is going to conquer the world, convert the peoples of the earth, and discipline the nations, then there will be great scope for Christian Reconstructionism. Then it will be no ivory tower exercise, but a practical reality to reconstruct a new world order based on the scriptures.

Now I hasten to add that there are many Postmillennialists who are not Christian Reconstructionists and that there is nothing wrong per se with being a Postmillennialist. It is an accepted position within the bounds of Reformed Christianity. The point I am making is that it is such a necessary part of their theology that the Reconstructionists are quite militant about their Postmillennial eschatology. They call theirs an "*eschatology of victory*" and condemn all others as defeatists who are retreating from the world as they await the end. Actually all Christians have an eschatology of victory. They all believe that Christ has won the victory over sin and death and hell and that it is only a matter of time before this victory is consummated on earth and in heaven. The differences between them are how they define victory. While for some it may be the success of Christian Reconstructionism, in subduing the world under Biblical law, to others it is the return of Christ and his rule that is the hoped for victory. For them victory is the return of Christ which Paul calls the "Blessed hope" of the church! This is their hope and not some program of Christian Reconstruction. But the real issue is the militant optimism of the Reconstructionists. It is this militant optimism that sets them apart. And the question that must be asked is this kind of optimism either scriptural or realistic?

An example of the kind of unrealistic optimism that I am talking about occurred earlier in this century. A Postmillennial Presbyterian named Lorraine Boettner wrote a book entitled "The Millennium". In this book he reviewed all three positions, but basically defended the Postmillennial position. In support of his position he presented arguments that the world was getting better. The evidence he offered was the American foreign aid program that shared our prosperity with all nations, the public school system that offered free education to all children, and the American welfare system that saw to it that everyone had the basic necessities of life provided for. His book was written in 1957 when the disastrous results of these socialistic and secular programs were not yet evident. Now it is exactly this kind of misguided optimism that is sometimes exhibited by the Reconstructionists today. Recently a leading Reconstructionist advocated a program for taking over the United States, that is seizing control of its culture. He proposed a three legged movement. One leg would be the Presbyterian theologians and thinkers who would be the brains of the movement (Only Reconstructionists need apply of course). The second leg of the movement would be the fundamental, independent Baptists with their system of private Christian schools. The third leg would be the Charismatics with their television programs, cable channels, and satellite communication systems. With the Reconstructionist world view being taught to a generation of Christian young people and propagated over the air waves, while the world continued to degenerate and the public schools fell apart, he could see victory in sight. Of course the whole scheme was absurd. It reminded me of a plan in the last century to evangelize and convert the nation of France in a few months. Thousands of trained evangelists would flood France and reach every soul with the

gospel in a matter of weeks. France would become a Christian nation virtually overnight. Such optimism is totally unrealistic. We cannot presume upon the grace of God. God is still sovereign in salvation. We cannot decree that a majority of any generation at any time in any nation are elect according to eternal counsel and determinate decrees of the Almighty. All we can do is faithfully witness to Jesus Christ, preach the gospel, and see what God will do with it. God still decides whether the proclamation of his word is a savor of life unto life or a savor of death unto death. And for Presbyterians to forget that is unthinkable!

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE EXAMPLE OF NAZI GERMANY

Reconstructionists are optimistic that when the going gets rough, that when societies established on the faulty premises of secular humanism begin to disintegrate, it will represent a great opportunity for them. Is such optimism justified? Is there scriptural support for such optimism? Is there historical evidence in favor of such a supposition? The answer to both these questions has to be no. The granddaddy of all gotterdammerungs has to be the actual end of the world. As plague after plague rains down, reminiscent of, but far exceeding the destruction of Egypt in Moses' day, what will be the reaction of men? Will it cause them to repent? Will they turn to Christianity for the answers in that day? The scriptures indicate not.

"And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts" (Revelation 9:20-21).

"And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds" (Revelation 16:8-11).

Even when Christ himself appears to judge the living and the dead, they will not repent nor turn from their wicked ways.

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17).

Whatever one's eschatology and wherever chronologically one places these texts, the scriptures give little support for such unbridled optimism, and neither does history furnish grounds for such confidence. A recent example is the case of Nazi Germany, which underwent a national gotterdammerung of sorts as she collapsed in a state of destruction and military defeat at the end of the last world war.

Nazi Germany was a religious society. They had a messiah, a messianic leader, named Adolph Hitler. Like Moses he would lead Germany out of the slavery imposed by the Versailles Treaty into the new world order where Germany would dominate the world. Their messianic kingdom had a name, the Third Reich, and Hitler promised that it would last a thousand years. This was a religious statement, a prophecy of a millennial kingdom, a millennial kingdom without Christ. A millennial kingdom based on the life and labors, the vision and prophecies, the teachings and ideology of their messiah,

Adolph Hitler.

The false prophets of old had led Israel to destruction; they had brought on God's judgments and ultimately captivity and national extinction. Similarly this false prophet led Germany to ruin, chaos, defeat, subjugation, and decades of national division that has only recently been healed. They had believed in him, but their god had failed. Right to the end many of the German people continued to hope, their faith in Hitler unwavering. They believed that somehow he would pull it off, that he would come up with a super weapon that would change the tide of war at the last moment. Many believed that he was deliberately letting the Allied armies into Germany, that he was leading them into a trap and that he would destroy the invaders at the last moment. Such was the religious faith of the German people in their pretended messiah. Religious faith, even when it is no more than vain delusion, dies hard.

Like most false faiths it had the seeds of its own destruction within itself. It was based upon evolution and its logical corollary, "*the survival of the fittest*". If evolution is true then man is merely an animal and subject only to the law of the jungle. And in that jungle only the strong survive. Evolution weeds out the weak and preserves the strong. Hitler espoused that the German race by "*natural selection*" was the strongest, and therefore, nature's instrument to subjugate and destroy the weak. The old and the sick, the infirm and the ill do not survive in nature and neither should they in the Third Reich. "*Useless mouths*" Hitler called them as Nazi doctors inaugurated a national program of euthanasia. Those on the lower end of the evolutionary ladder were not even fit to be used as slaves; they were subhumans that had to be exterminated. Thus with religious zeal and murderous fanaticism his followers set up the system of death camps that exterminated an estimated six million Jews and two million Gypsies. Such was the faith of Nazi Germany. It was a faith that they followed to their ruin and that Hitler practiced faithfully until the very bitter end. When his armies faltered at Stalingrad, he refused to let them retreat. If they really were racial supermen, they would prevail and, if not, they deserved to die, and hundreds of thousands of them perished there. When the famed Afrika Korps under Field Marshall Rommel, after performing heroically, was finally faced with inevitable defeat Hitler wrote them off and abandoned a quarter of a million men. When Germany itself was at the point of ultimate defeat, he turned on the German people. They had let him down. They had not lived up to their calling as racial supermen. They were weak and deserved to die. And with brutal consistency he determined to destroy Germany. All roads and bridges, telephone exchanges and power plants, factories and warehouses were to be destroyed. All crops, food supplies, livestock, fuel, and stored goods were to be destroyed. The nation was to be destroyed, its population starved, and its people returned to a state of primitive barbarism; the self-imposed *gotterdammerung* of a failed faith.

And there were additional ways that the Nazi faith was destructive of itself. When the German armies first arrived in the Ukraine, they were met with flowers and hailed as liberators. The USSR was a dark dictatorship whose subject peoples were ripe for revolt. But as the Wehrmacht moved on, behind them came the S.S., the Gestapo, and the Einsatzgruppen. Their brutal treatment of these "slavic subhumans" turned a potential revolt into the "Great Patriotic War" in defense of the USSR. It turned it into a war in which this "inferior" race drove the "master race" from the gates of Moscow and Leningrad to the gates of Berlin and beyond. A war that was lost as critical troops, supplies, and transport, were on a priority basis, used in the implementation of the "final solution". A "solution" that consumed war resources even as it destroyed millions of potential workers for the undermanned war industries. These requirements of the Nazi faith were alone sufficient to ensure their defeat.

And there is more. The scriptures warn us not to "...put our trust in princes". But Germany watched without protest as Hitler destroyed all the forms of constitutional government and made himself the absolute ruler and head of state. Hitler then went on and made himself the supreme military commander personally micro-managing the war. Having an incompetent W.W.I corporal overrule trained officers and experienced generals led to one military debacle after another. But there could be no retreat from this madness for the Nazi faith ultimately boiled down to faith in Hitler. This also contributed greatly to the defeat of the Nazis and the destruction of Germany.

And finally we now have to look and say what is the answer to all this? Is Christian Reconstruction the answer? Will a reorganization of German society in terms of Biblical law solve their problems? The answer is not that simple. Germany's problems remain. The German people still believe in evolution. Therefore they still believe that man is an evolved animal and that there is no such thing as an ultimate moral code. Therefore there is a sense in which we can say that Hitler has really prevailed. The foundation of his "theology" remains in place. And on that foundation other humanists are building and the edifice is frighteningly similar. Nazi Germany was the first nation of "Western Christian Civilization" to reject the sixth commandment and its respect for life created in the image of God and to introduce abortion and euthanasia. And now abortion and euthanasia are well established practices in Germany and other nations of the West. The other logical conclusions of evolution that the Nazis so ruthlessly applied are dormant for the moment. They are still too frightening to this generation to adopt them for their own. But the foundation for their resurrection exists.

Ultimately there can be no Christian nation, nor a program of Christian Reconstruction to produce such a nation, unless there is a Christian population. Unless God pours out of his Spirit upon the hearts of the people, unless they are changed by the power of God, unless their hearts are opened to receive his word, it is all in vain. Whether it is a reconstruction along Theonomist lines, or just the Geneva of Calvin's day, or the commonwealth of Cromwellian England, it requires a foundation. And that foundation can be nothing less than a people that believe the word of God, are willing to submit to it, and be ruled according to it. And that is the work of the Spirit of God. God can use the witness of a faithful church in furtherance of that end but men by themselves can not bring such a result to pass. All the witness in the world may only harden men's hearts as the hearts of Pharaoh and his counselors were hardened in the days of Moses. As Paul stated it, "*For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth*" (Romans 9:17-18). Without a proper foundation all schemes of Christian Reconstruction are no more than building castles in the air. Any genuine Christian reconstruction of a society must be a grass roots movement from the bottom up. It cannot be imposed from the top down. The foundations must be laid first. And the foundations can only be laid by the Spirit of God. To presume otherwise is gross Arminianism.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE REFORMATION

Medieval society was falling apart. Feudalism was no longer working. A growing nationalism had broken the power of the nobility and concentrated it in a national government represented by the monarch. A growing and prospering middle class had moved to the towns and had thus escaped the confines and toils of the feudal system. The church had lost the respect and allegiance of the middle class. The upper classes had long ago ceased to believe in the church, seeing it only as part of the power structure with which they had to deal. Only the lower classes, steeped in ignorance and superstition, continued to follow a corrupt and idolatrous church. At this point in time God chose to pour out of his Spirit and bring to pass what we call the Great Protestant Reformation. This Reformation dramatically changed Europe, indeed the whole world. Even as the Roman world had been totally changed by Apostolic Christianity, so was Medieval Europe completely changed by a new outburst of Biblical Christianity. Although it dramatically changed European society, I hesitate to call this a program of Christian reconstruction. It was never consciously a program to reconstruct society. What it consistently was, and what it persistently strove for, was to reform the church and everything else was simply collateral consequences.

Now it is important to recognize that neither the transformation of the Roman or of the Medieval world by Christianity was a result of a concerted and conscious program of Christian reconstruction. The Apostle Paul, who can properly be credited as being the founder of what is loosely called "Western Christian Civilization", himself said, *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Paul did not approach the Roman world with a program of "Christian reconstruction", but with a gospel of deliverance from sin, and death, and hell, through the shed blood of Jesus the Christ. The fact that the establishment of that faith ultimately transformed society should leave us even more convicted of Paul's methodology. He didn't come with "*excellency of speech*": He didn't come with sophisticated models of what society should be: He didn't come advocating detailed programs of societal reform: He simply came preaching Christ. Roman society could certainly have used some radical reform based on Biblical law, but that was not the Apostle's mission. Take his attitude toward slavery as an example. He instructed his converts to be content with their lot, whether slave or free, and to use their station in life to serve God where he had placed them. He sent the runaway slave Onesimus back to his owner Philemon. The laws of Israel had not abolished, but merely regulated the institution of slavery, yet Paul made no attempt to institute these laws even for Christian slave owners. When Paul converted the Roman Governor of Cyprus, he made no attempt to follow this up by instructing his highly placed convert in a program of Christian reconstruction. He merely continued with his missionary journey, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's program was to lay the foundation first. If culture really is just religion externalized, then the fruits of that faith will logically follow. Do the advocates of detailed programs of Christian reconstruction in our day, in a post-Christian America, have the cart before the horse?

In this regard it is perhaps appropriate to study the wisdom of godly men who rose to great power in pagan societies. The examples of Joseph in Egypt, of Daniel in Babylon, and of Mordecai in Persia, come to mind. None of these men attempted to impose a program of Christian reconstruction on the

societies that they governed. All of them rose to the position of the de facto ruler of their respective empire under an autocrat who left the administration of his kingdom to them. And the scriptures do not condemn any of them for leaving these kingdoms essentially as they found them. What all of these men did is to personally witness to the power and greatness of the God of Israel. Some of them like Daniel converted their masters to the true faith as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar. Some of them used their power to deliver the people of God, as when Joseph delivered his family from the famine, and Mordecai saved his people from destruction. But why did none of these do more? And why do the scriptures not demand more of them than what they did? It is because these were pagan societies. Their cultures, deficient as they were when measured by the standard of scripture, were what these peoples deserved. Their national faith dictated that they should be ruled by autocrats, with little respect for either human life or freedoms. And none of the above heroes of the faith were foolish enough to attempt to build castles in the sky without proper foundations. Societies can only be transformed from the bottom up. Christian societies can only be built one soul at a time, one conversion at a time. Real change in a society can only happen one family at a time as that family experiences God's grace and comes under his word and his law. Daniel did not let his power go to his head with dreams of constructing the kingdom of God in Babylon. His hope was expressed in his prophecies of another kingdom, an eternal kingdom, a kingdom that would rule the entire earth in righteousness for a future eternity.

And this is what we see when we study the history of the Reformation. The very beginning of the Reformation in England was with Wycliffe and the heart of Wycliffe's work was the translation of the Holy Scriptures from the Latin into English, the language of the people. The genesis of the Protestant Reformation in Europe was with Erasmus's publication of the Greek New Testament. The Reformers came not with schemes of social reform but with the Bible. And by God's grace the people responded to the pure word of God. The Reformers came with the gospel and their message was soteriological. Luther precipitated the Reformation in Germany over the issue of how are men saved as he decried indulgences and preached instead Jesus Christ and salvation by faith. The heart of Calvinism is still summed up today in the famous five points of Calvinist soteriology that defend salvation by the sovereign and free grace of God. Both Luther and Knox accepted the feudalistic order of their respective countries and sought the support of their governments in furthering the gospel. For Knox it was not the civil state of Scotland that he sought to reform. For him the issue was soteriological, it was the gospel versus the mass. Even as Christ refused to be made a king by the Jews of his day so did these reformers refuse to become involved in kingmaking. Christ at his first advent came as the Lamb of God to deal with issues of sin and salvation and the reformers walked in his footsteps.

This is not to say that the Christian faith has no implications for the civil order. Neither is it to say that the Protestant Reformation did not have a great influence on the social and political landscape of Europe. The point is merely that neither the Apostles nor the Reformers came with such a program. They changed the world by converting souls one heart at a time and these souls became the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They did it by reforming the church of Jesus Christ, which is the ground and the pillar of the truth. Reformation starts with the individual, then the family, then the church, and finally the civil order. Again Reconstructionists with their great emphasis on reforming the civil order seem to have the cart before the horse.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RECONSTRUCTIONISM - THE ISSUES

Reconstructionist thought and studies raise many issues. Most of these logically have to do with how society should be organized. They have to do with the civil order. They have to do with those issues that are related to the judicial laws of Israel. I will review a few of them here. Many of these issues are of interest to all Christians. Many of these are areas that many other Christians have wrestled with and sought scriptural answers for. Many of these studies are therefore helpful and of interest to all Christians.

Biblical Functions of Government:

What are the proper functions of government? This is an issue that conservatives with their views of limited government and liberals with their view of the messianic state have long debated. However Christians do not accept their theories of government being a social contract. We believe that civil government is an institution ordained of God. And therefore all should agree with the "Theonomists" that the place to look for the proper functions of government is in the scriptures. The best definitions of what government is, and what its proper functions are, are found in Paul's exposition of the subject in Romans chapter thirteen. Paul teaches that although the people may choose their magistrates, that they are actually ministers of God, who providentially raises them up. And their function, as God's ministers, is to punish certain sins and promote public righteousness. Government is basically God's earthly ministry of justice. The civil magistrate has the power of the sword to punish domestic criminals (the police power) and international criminals who would invade us from without (the army etc.). So far most Christians would agree. Most Christians would concede that this is far from a prescription for the socialist messianic state. The issue then becomes is this all that the state can do, or are there other functions proper to state as ordained by God? Theonomists would generally strip it down to just that and anything else clearly justified by the civil laws of Israel. They note for instance that building codes to support public safety can be justified by the law that requires a railing around the rooftop patios of Israelite homes, etc. Most Christians currently see no problem with the state operating certain necessary public utilities such as a road system, air traffic control system, etc. or even public sewer and water systems. Theonomists are more likely to oppose these and seek their privatization. And what of FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Administration that deals with the consequences of floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes etc. Is this just another socialist welfare program, far removed from the exercise of justice, or a proper application of the sixth commandment to protect life and property? And so the debate goes on. But it is a healthy debate, a useful debate. And the Theonomists have contributed much to this debate with their study of the Old Testament Hebrew Commonwealth. So whether one agrees or not with the exact application of the judicial laws of Israel to contemporary society there is much to be gained from studying their writings and entering into the discussion. And that is the only way that the Westminster position can be maintained. After all, how else can one seek to determine which of these judicial laws have general equity that applies today?

Biblical Taxation:

Everybody hates taxes. And the saying goes that they are as inevitable as death. So this is always a fruitful and interesting subject. Currently western nations have basically three main forms of taxation besides of course innumerable fees etc. They are the sales tax, the property tax, and the income tax.

Theonomists point out that Israel had only one, the poll tax. It was the same for everybody because they were paying for the administration of justice and justice should be equal for all. Theonomists argue against the property tax on the basis of the incident of Naboth's vineyard. Property rights in Israel were nearly inviolable and no matter what, the property was restored to the family every Jubilee. The applicability of the land tenure laws of Israel to us may be debatable, but the principle is extremely appealing. It would truly make a man's home his castle and not subject to confiscation for taxes. Its elimination would be simple since it is used chiefly to support the public school system. Once that is abolished and education is privatized, this tax could be easily eliminated. Many Theonomists also oppose the income tax. This is based on Psalm 24, "*The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein*" (Psalm 24:1). If the earth and its increase belong to the Lord, then he alone can tax it and that tax is the tithe. These Theonomists see the income tax as competing with God's tax the tithe and therefore as an attempt to rob God. Other Theonomists see the income tax as legitimate since it supports the civil magistrates who are God's ministers. But they limit it to ten percent. They visualize a dual tithe, a civil tithe to the government and an ecclesiastical tithe to the church, both set at ten percent. Either way all Theonomists and most Christians would agree that the current income tax is unscriptural for two reasons. One is that it is excessive and confiscatory. And secondly its purpose is not to raise revenue to finance legitimate functions of government, but to redistribute the wealth according to a complex system of social engineering enforced with a 17,000 page tax code. The question becomes what should the income tax be replaced with. Our founding fathers financed government chiefly with import duties. This is the reason we didn't have an income tax until 1916. Taxing foreign corporations for the privilege of selling in the American market seems infinitely better than suffering under the current tax code. However most Theonomists are militantly in favor of free trade and reject the historical solution to this problem. Again this is a very interesting study, but unfortunately currently only an academic exercise. Until Americans give up their love affair with the god of big government they will have to continue sacrificing to it.

Penal Policy:

America's prisons are overflowing. Prison construction is proceeding at a record pace. Is this the answer? The Theonomists say no. They note that Israel had no prisons. They note that the judicial laws of Israel never provided for prison sentences. Yet it is the most common form of judicial punishment in our society. Are we more enlightened or are there principles in the judicial laws that we could learn a lot from? The Theonomists believe so and their arguments are compelling. How did Israel deal with crime? Simply and swiftly! Israel had basically two types of punishments for crime. For violent crime; to deal with persons who were a threat to society there was the death penalty. We have already noted the theocratic use of the death penalty in Israel for idolatry, blasphemy, witchcraft, sabbath breaking etc. But capital punishment was also widely applied to other serious crimes. Specifically it was applied to violent crime. Violent criminals who were a threat to society were executed. This would include murderers, rapists, child-molesters etc. Other criminals, such as adulterers, homosexuals, and prostitutes, who were non-violent, but were subversive of the social order were also put to death. The second category of punishment was mandatory restitution to the victim. This was applied in most cases of what we would call non-violent or white-collar crime such as theft and fraud etc. And unlike today where civil judgments are frequently ignored the restitution was made. The punishment for refusal to obey the court decrees, the punishment for contempt of court, was death!

Theonomists have also pointed out that prison sentences historically were much shorter. We had jails not penitentiaries. They were used to hold dangerous criminals before trial and to incarcerate

convicted felons for periods far shorter than life without parole. The switch to long prison terms and state penitentiaries where such terms were served came with the doctrine of evolution. Evolutionary theory taught that man responded to his environment. It was thought that the origin of the criminal mind was not in original sin but in a bad childhood environment. Prisons were strictly penal institutions to mete out justice to the wicked. Penitentiaries however were thought of as correctional institutions where the convict would be in a controlled environment where he would be rehabilitated and returned to society. Theonomists pointed out that government is a ministry of justice. It is the church that exercises a ministry of grace so that men might be regenerated, brought to repentance, and become new creatures in Christ. It is the church not the state that deals with the issue of changing hearts and breaking the power of sin in men's lives.

Now it ought to be obvious to all that there is much merit in these discussions. It also ought to be obvious that Old Testament Israel under such laws was a safer and more just society than then we have under our current criminal-justice system. Christians may dispute to what degree we ought to conform to the Old Testament model, but there should be little debate about the direction that we ought to be moving in. In all this the Theonomists have certainly done us a service. Let us hope that the exercise will be more than just academic.

The above are only a few of the current social issues that have been dealt with by Theonomist thinkers. Obviously there are many more such as the welfare system, free enterprise, Social Security, the public school system, etc. It is also important to note that many of these issues have been studied by other Calvinists and scriptural positions deduced. But because of their position, the Theonomists have probably been the most thorough in pursuing such issues. It is in this area that the contributions of our Theonomist-Reconstructionist brethren are most evident and ought to be most appreciated.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE PERSONALITIES

This is the chapter that I hesitate to write. Dealing with a movement that is loosely defined and doing so fairly and honestly is difficult enough but at least it is an objective exercise. However dealing with personalities is almost inescapably subjective. Nonetheless a book such as this seems inadequate without at least a brief review of the major personalities of the movement. Since this is a fairly recent movement that has developed over the last few decades, this will be a fairly brief review.

Some have argued that the movement started with the publication in 1962 of *"The World Under God's Law"* by the Rev. T. Robert Ingram, a conservative Episcopalian. However the undisputed granddaddy of the movement is Rev. Rousas John Rushdoony and it was the publication of his magnum opus, *"The Institutes of Biblical Law"* in 1973 that really launched the movement and gave it definition. *"The Institutes"* is an excellent work and probably represents the most thorough and detailed exposition of the Ten Commandments available. It is also the most practical, being the most thorough in applying the principles of the moral law to contemporary society. One does not need to be a "Theonomist" to value this work, and the few differences (i.e. He acknowledges that the dietary laws have expired as religious requirements, but insists that they should be observed for health reasons) one may unearth as one studies this work will be far outweighed by the mass of good scholarship and sound theology that it contains. As Rushdoony's thought has developed, it has taken on a more decided "Theonomist" character and differences and difficulties with his position will become more pronounced. However all of his earlier writings are excellent and I highly recommend them. Some of my favorites have been the following. I list them in chronological order as they were published. *"The Mythology of Science"* published in 1967, dealing with science and evolutionary thought. *"The Messianic Character of American Education"* published in 1968, dealing with the American philosophy of salvation through education. This is also a good historical study of the development of public education, the system of private and religious based education that it replaced, and demonstrates why the public schools are the sacred cow of American liberalism. *"The Biblical Philosophy of History"* published in 1969, is a great development of the historic Calvinist theme of God's sovereignty over the nations and His control of history. In *"By What Standard"* published in 1971, Rushdoony argues for the supremacy of scripture and defends the apologetics of Cornelius VanTil. Whether one agrees with VanTil or Gordon Clark or whether one can even consistently understand the differences between the two, this book is still interesting and valuable reading.

Another leading Theonomist was Greg L. Bahnsen. Unlike Rushdoony who is still active (Editorial Note: Rushdoony passed away in February of 2001), Bahnsen has been deceased for years. His massive work *"Theonomy in Christian Ethics"* published in 1977 furthered the work of the *"Institutes"* in calling for the comprehensive application of Old Testament law to contemporary society. In his work, *"Homosexuality, A Biblical View"* he clearly and convincingly shows that homosexuality is a sin, a civil crime, and was worthy of death both under the Sinaitic Covenant and today.

Another leading "Theonomist" is Rushdoony's son-in-law, Dr. Gary North. North wrote the appendices to the *"Institutes"* and has authored dozens of books on his own. North has many strings to his bow. He is a very successful entrepreneur, editing an investment newsletter. He is the founder

of ICE, the Institute for Christian Economics. North was the editor of several volumes of "*Christianity and Civilization*", symposiums of essays, particularly on Christian resistance to tyranny. He was also the General Editor of the "*Biblical Blueprint Series*". This was a series of books by various authors on Biblical principles of government, money and banking, education, economics, political action, etc. This series laid out a "Reconstructionist" vision for rebuilding America. A distinctive of North's thinking is his emphasis on "Dominion theology". Like all the Reconstructionists he is a militant postmillennialist and he exhorts Christians to gain dominion over their culture, over their nations, and over the world, by the application of God's law. One of his more controversial books is "*Political Polytheism*" which is an attack on the United States Constitution and the founding fathers. In his view the Constitutional convention in Philadelphia in 1789 was a conspiracy to substitute a humanist-Masonic government for scriptural civil government and that the American people essentially bought a pig in a poke.

Unfortunately in his writings, North constantly frames the issue as a battle between his brand of "Theonomy" and secular humanism. He does not seem to recognize the legitimacy of the debate between Theonomist and non-Theonomist Calvinists about how to apply God's word and God's law to our society and what to replace the secular humanist socialist welfare state with. This is unfortunate because this is the debate that is sorely needed to bring about some consensus and unity among conservative Calvinists. If controversy brings truth, then this debate is a necessity.

Finally, in the interest of brevity, I will mention only one more of several that might be worthy of being listed, and that is Pastor George Grant. Grant has written quite a number of books, but is best known for his writings on Christian charity. These writings contain critiques of the modern welfare state. Grant proposes to solve the issues of poverty by Christian charity. This is to be done not on a personal basis, but chiefly to be coordinated by the local church. In essence Grant substitutes ecclesiastical welfare for statist welfare. He has the church operating food banks, homeless shelters, job referral services etc. His view is, if the welfare state is a mess, the church can do it better. his view of a reconstructed America the church can largely eliminate poverty, homelessness, and hunger. Grant is so mesmerized by his "Reconstructionist vision" that he is willing to abandon traditionally ecclesiology and prostitute the church to being just another welfare organization dedicated to meeting the worldly needs of unbelievers.¹

These are the chief personalities of this movement and to them must be attributed both any good fruit and any bad fruit that it may have born. It is their literature that has defined the movement and their leadership that has built it into a force in conservative Calvinist circles. And it is their writings that must be studied if one is to gain an accurate understanding of the movement's beliefs and principles.

¹ For a thorough critique of what passes for Christian charity today and a specific refutation of George Grant's position on Christian charity see the author's forthcoming book, "*The Devil's Advocate, A Critique of Contemporary Christian Charity*".

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CONCLUSION

Christian Reconstructionism is based on theonomy. It is based on the study and application of the law of God. But the law has one great shortcoming; it cannot make anyone righteous. It can show us what we should do but it cannot enable us to do it. Israel had the law but they could not keep it. The Sinaitic Covenant provided Israel with God's law but not with the grace to keep it. Listen to what Paul states in the New Testament, speaking of himself, an inspired Apostle, a regenerated person, filled with the Spirit of God. He says, "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do*" (Romans 7:18-19). The law by itself can never establish a righteous society. All it can do is provide a standard to show us how far we are falling short, how far we are off the mark. Man's problem is sin and the law is on the other side, not delivering us from sin, but convicting us of it. Again to quote the Apostle Paul, "*The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law*" (1 Corinthians 15:56). Law is insufficient. What we need is grace. What we need is to be justified by the atoning work of Jesus Christ. What we need is to be regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God. And therefore Paul himself continues, going on to say, "*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Law alone cannot construct a Christian society. Christian Reconstruction based on theonomy is a one legged stool that cannot stand. The impotence of law is already clearly demonstrated in our society. We have more laws than ever. State and federal legislatures work all year long attempting in vain to solve the nation's problems by churning out new laws. The futility of this approach is evident by the current status of the war on drugs. Even as we continue to implement new laws and bring to bear more enforcement, compliance is down and drug use remains rampant. Drunk driving is another national ill that has hardly responded to tougher legislation and increased enforcement. Those who put their trust in law will discover that the repeal of "*Roe versus Wade*" will likely have little affect on the national abortion holocaust. The fact is that a wholesale reformation of the nation's laws to bring them into conformity with Biblical standards will not produce a Christian society. It will not produce a righteous or a godly people.

A Christian society requires a Christian population. All the laws in the world cannot construct a Christian society out of an unregenerate population. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear! Certainly right now Christian reconstruction is an impossibility. I doubt that there are enough genuine, serious Christians in the nation to staff all the local, state, and federal governments. And if there were, the worldly masses would never submit to being ruled by them. The only way they could rule the nation would be by some kind of Christian dictatorship, reminiscent of Cromwell and the major-generals. And that by itself would be contrary to Biblical law. The Old Testament Hebrew commonwealth after all was a representative republic.¹ Cromwell sought to impose Biblical law and Biblical liberty by the sword and that exercise failed. The English people wanted neither. They

¹ No I am not contradicting myself. While Old Testament civil law may not be binding there is much we can learn from it. Our founding fathers believed so too. A number of years ago the author published, "*The Hebrew Republic*" by E. C. Wines, which shows all the parallels between the Hebrew Republic and the American Republic. It is currently available from The Plymouth Rock Foundation retitled as "*Roots Of The Republic*".

loved their sin too much. As Christ himself taught, "*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*" (John 8:32-34).

Now I am sure that our Reconstructionist brethren would agree with all the above. Yet the tendency, the thrust, of the entire system is towards the reconstruction of society by Biblical law. But the law can only condemn. It will be vindicated at the last day when the books are opened and all men stand before the judgment throne of Jesus Christ. And meanwhile the Kingdom of God is being built by grace, one soul at a time, as God calls out his elect. The elect, the redeemed, the saints will inherit the kingdom. "*The meek shall inherit the earth*". The recipients of grace will live and reign with Christ forevermore, but the wicked will be turned into hell. We are to think God's thoughts after him. We are to follow his example. We should be laboring to build his kingdom by calling out his elect. We should be laboring to bring one person, one family, and one congregation at a time under his dominion and into subjection to his law. This is an exercise in grace and not in legal reconstruction. By God's grace and calling may we all labor together to that end. After all, the only kingdom that is going to last is the one that He is building. Amen!

POSTSCRIPT:

Since the above manuscript was first written back in 1999 a number of additional issues have surfaced with respect to the tendencies of “Reconstructionists.” Because of their emphasis on the law they seem to have a proclivity of becoming legalists with an ability to parse the law as the ancient Pharisees did. This has made them suspect in areas of basic morality. I have attended “Reconstructionist” events where the alcohol really flowed, smoking was rampant, even among the young people, and profanity was used by conference speakers. Such practices are not the exception, but the norm, and are militantly defended. Sometimes immodesty in women’s dress is approved by again parsing the law a special way. These tendencies have alienated many conservative Calvinists, who have a serious respect for God’s law, from involvement in the Theonomist movement.

Finally, in recent times there has been a shocking and disturbing challenge in conservative Presbyterian and Reformed circles with respect to the traditional Reformation understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. When these concerns first surfaced at Westminster Seminary and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with the case of Professor Norman Shepherd², many Theonomists were openly supporting Shepherd. And as that controversy continues, today the attack on justification by faith alone is being spearheaded by some prominent Theonomists (i.e. Douglas Wilson, Peter Leithart, James Jordan, etc. To study this issue more comprehensively see the literature of the Trinity Foundation, particularly the following books; *The Current Justification Controversy* by O. Palmer Robertson; *A Companion to the Current Justification Controversy* by John Robbins, and *Reformed Is Not Enough* by John Robbins. See also *The Auburn Avenue Theology* by Brian Schwertley.) Their emphasis on the law seems to be leading them back to Rome as they openly espouse a doctrine of justification by faith and works, and a mechanical view of the efficacy of the sacraments. It seems that if Christian Reconstruction is where you are at, the historical model of the Roman catholic Church and its impact on Christendom has a powerful attraction³. Combined with their adoption of Episcopalian worship, which by itself is a significant step back to Rome, it is a disturbing trend that augurs ill for the future of the movement. Again, while many of the most prominent Theonomists are caught up in these heresies, there are also good and godly men who hold to Theonomy, but are untainted by these soul destroying errors. An example is the RPCUS (Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States) Covenant Presbytery, led by Dr. Joseph Morecraft. They have been outspoken in their rejection of these neo-legalist heresies. However, mainstream Theonomy has, theologically speaking, gone over the cliff. Unlike twenty years ago, I can no longer consider them sound Calvinists and brethren in the faith. They have apostatized from Biblical Christianity, and having made shipwreck of their faith, need to repent and reform

² See Appendix 1, Review of *The Call of Grace* by Norman Shepherd.

³ See Appendix 2, Review of *Against Christianity* by Peter Leithart.

Appendix 1

The Call of Grace

Norman Shepherd

Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.

Reviewed by Louis F. DeBoer

The Shepherd controversy has been with us now for almost three decades. There has been plenty of time for the dust to settle. When this controversy first erupted in the 1970's many did not take it seriously. It was widely reputed that Shepherd was orthodox, but merely careless in his theological expressions, and that he was causing confusion with his ill advised use of terms. That was the official position of Westminster Seminary and faculty, that persistently refused to condemn Shepherds opinions. Well we have been waiting for many years for the smoke to clear, for the dust to settle, and for Shepherd to clarify his terms. Well the smoke has long since cleared and there is definitely fire. The publication of this book in 2000 did much to contribute to that. Not that Shepherd has clarified his terms, for his writings are as vague and disingenuous as always. It is more, that after three decades, this vagueness is seen as deliberate and part of a smokescreen to maintain a semblance of orthodoxy while promoting a heretical soteriology. A careful reading of this book will make that conclusion inescapable.

The Federal Vision or the Auburn Avenue Theology, that has developed out of Shepherds redefinitions of terms such as faith and covenant, etc., has certain defining characteristics. There is a rejection of the Covenant of Works and a resultant elimination of the distinction between law and gospel. The Scriptures that speak of obtaining life through personal obedience, normally attributed to the Covenant of Works, are conflated into the "Covenant of Grace." The salvation offered through the "Covenant of Grace" therefore now includes a requirement of personal obedience for salvation. Faith is redefined to include works and is termed *covenant faithfulness*, *faithful obedience*, or *an active obedient faith*, etc. Salvation is now seen to be by faith and works, with the latter being defined as included in the former, to maintain the dubious claim that one still believes in justification by faith alone. The sacraments are reinterpreted and baptism is seen as the means by which one enters the covenant and personal obedience is seen as the means by which one remains in the covenant. This medieval and Romish soteriology is presented as a new and improved development of the old soteriology, the faith of the Great Protestant Reformation. We will see how clearly Shepherd's ideas have paved the way for and pioneered these developments.

Shepherd wastes little time in this book in getting right to the meat of the issue. In Part 1, *Covenant Light on the Way of Salvation*, Section 1, *The Abrahamic Covenant*, he clearly shows his hand.

The terms of the covenant are clearly annunciated in Genesis 17:1-2. They declare, "*And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and*

thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." The condition is to walk before the Lord and be perfect. Abraham was not perfect. He was a sinner. How could he come into covenant with a holy God? The answer has traditionally found in Genesis 15:5-6. *"And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."* Abraham was justified by faith. And being declared righteous, being justified, he could come into covenant relationship with God. The Abrahamic Covenant is seen as being founded on justification by faith and not on Abraham's own righteousness or his own works. This is the Apostle's Paul argument in both the epistle to the Romans and to the Galatians. The Abrahamic Covenant is therefore generally considered to be an unconditional covenant. This is not because there are no conditions, but because the conditions are all met by the merits of the finished work of Jesus Christ. God himself provides the required righteousness through his Son and thus guarantees the fulfillment of the covenant.

Shepherd manages to turn all this on its head. He sees the Abrahamic Covenant as a conditional covenant that depends on Abraham's personal obedience, Abraham's own covenant faithfulness. He argues repeatedly that the covenant was fulfilled because Abraham obeyed God. He states...

What is significant is that walking before the Lord blamelessly is connected with confirmation of the covenant. The covenant with its promises is confirmed to Abraham, who demonstrates covenant faith and loyalty. He fulfils the obligations of the covenant (The Call of Grace, p. 16).

The promises are renewed and will be fulfilled because Abraham trusted in God and walked in righteousness according to the word of the Lord. (The Call of Grace, p. 17).

Shepherd does get around to admitting that the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant is ultimately made possible by through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But even there he radically departs from orthodoxy as he states...

But just as Jesus was faithful in order to guarantee the blessing, so his followers must be faithful in order to inherit the blessing (The Call of Grace, p. 19).

Ultimately, in Shepherd's view the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham depend on our obedience, our covenant faithfulness. How this can be so if Christ has guaranteed the promises of the covenant he fails to explain. What is guaranteed and to whom if it all remains conditioned on our obedience? The traditional view that Christ has guaranteed all this for the elect is totally absent. Shepherd's "gospel" is the bad news that the promise that God will be our God and we his people depends on our personal covenantal faithfulness and obedience.

Having established the place of works in our salvation Shepherd now has to deal with the issue of salvation by grace versus merit. Having postulated the necessity of good works to inherit the covenanted blessings Shepherd now seeks to avoid the charge of salvation by human merit. He reviews Roman Catholic theology and their view of merit as expressed in the Council of Trent and condemns it as a religion of merit. However, in his zeal to avoid the charge he goes to an extreme that actually destroys the historic Protestant understanding of the gospel. He states...

On one level Rome's doctrine of salvation requires that place be given to human merit...But on a deeper level what must be challenged in the Roman Catholic doctrine is the very idea of merit itself. God does not, and never did, relate to his people on the basis of a works/merit principle (The Call of Grace, p. 60).

In spite of all the heat and passion Shepherd seeks to demonstrate in his opposition to Romish soteriology, this is mostly smoke, for he is actually attacking the Protestant position while setting forth a soteriology that is suspiciously like Rome's. The difference between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant understanding of God's salvation does not lie in whether or not God relates to his people on the basis of a works/merit principle. In fact both agree that he does. The difference lies in whose merit is the basis for our salvation. Rome says that our own merit, plus some accrued merit from the saints, and the grace of the church are the basis of one's salvation. Protestantism says that the merits of the finished work of Christ is the basis for our salvation. God demands perfect obedience and on that basis only awards eternal life. This is the principle of the Covenant of Works; this is a works/merit principle. And the perfect righteousness, the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, credited to our account when we are justified in God's sight, is the basis for our salvation. When Shepherd denies in principle any merit as the foundation of our salvation, he is subverting the very foundation of the historic gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is crucial, and I have to believe that a trained theologian like Shepherd is well aware of it. His "gospel" is all too similar to that of Rome, so he passionately attacks Rome and then injects a principle that is absolutely deadly to the historic Protestant gospel. He loudly declaims that we have to reject all merit. He denies that the works, or working faith, or covenant faithfulness, that he states is necessary for our salvation, has any merit. However, his saying so does not make it so. If it is necessary, if it is the indispensable condition for inheriting the covenant blessings, then how is not by merit? If Abraham gained the fulfillment of the covenant promises by his covenant faithfulness and covenantal obedience then how is that not by merit? If Israel gained entrance to the promised land, as Shepherd insists, by their covenant faithfulness and covenantal obedience, how is that then not by merit? Shepherd has a lot of explaining to do, but you will look in vain for the answers in this book. Shepherd is just being disingenuous and his attack on merit is no so much an attack on Rome as it is on the Protestant gospel of the Reformation.

The fourth chapter of Romans contains Paul's great defense of justification by faith, particularly as it applied to Abraham. Having concluded in Romans one through three that all are under God's condemnation as guilty sinners and that there are no righteous men, Jew or Gentile, Paul then takes up the case of Abraham.

¹What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? ²For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. ³For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Paul states that Abraham was not justified by his own works but by faith.

⁴Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

Paul goes on to say that if Abraham was justified by his own works it is not by grace, but by merit. Abraham has earned his justification and God owes it to him. This is in direct contrast to Shepherd's assertion that we have to completely deny any principle of merit in divine dealings with men.

⁵But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. ⁶Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, ⁷Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Paul reasserts the principle of justification by faith and quotes David as teaching this doctrine in

the Psalms. Then he gets back to Abraham's case.

⁹Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. ¹¹And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: ¹²And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

Paul now argues that Abraham was justified by his faith before he was ever circumcised. Remember that in Genesis 15 God declares Abraham justified by faith and in Genesis 17 God makes his covenant with Abraham and required circumcision. Abraham had to be justified before a holy God could enter into covenant with him. The terms of the covenant as spelled out in Genesis 17:1 required that. This is of course a death knell to the view of Shepherds followers that maintain that baptism, the New Covenant equivalent of circumcision, is what makes us Christians. Abraham was justified and became a child a God, a Christian if you will, while he was yet uncircumcised.

Now what does Shepherd say about all this? How does he interpret the salvation granted to Abraham under the Abrahamic Covenant? How does he deal with this great passage on justification by faith as experienced by Abraham? Speaking of the Abrahamic Covenant and its privileges he says...

At the same time, privileges entail responsibility. Abraham had to keep covenant with the Lord, as did his descendants to whom the promises were also made. The preeminent covenant keeper is Jesus Christ...As the covenant is kept, according to the pattern of Jesus Christ, the promises of the covenant are fulfilled (The Call of Grace, p. 75).

Note the radical difference between Paul and Shepherd regarding Abraham's inheriting the promises of the covenant and being justified before God. Shepherd says that Abraham, as well as his descendants have to personally keep the covenant, and as they do he says the promises of the covenant are fulfilled. In Shepherd's view the promises are contingent upon personal obedience to the covenant. Their salvation, their becoming the people of God, as promised by the covenant is dependant upon their own righteousness. No longer is it by a righteousness received by faith. It is now definitely by works, our own works. And what of Jesus Christ? What of the doctrine that he has kept the terms of the covenant for us, and on our behalf? And what of the belief that Christ by his perfect fulfilling of the covenant has purchased our redemption? That is entirely missing. Instead Shepherd reduces Christ to merely an example. As we keep the covenant according to the example of Jesus Christ we inherit the promises. This is the theology of liberalism. This is the theology of the National Council of Churches. This is the theology that reduces Jesus Christ to a great moral example and says that we, by imitating his example can find acceptance with God and be saved. This is a theology of salvation by works. And what of Romans 4? Here is what Shepherd has to say about that great passage that expounds the very heart of the gospel, justification by faith.

For Abraham, the sign of both covenant privilege and covenant responsibility was circumcision. Paul calls circumcision " a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith" (Rom 4:11). The righteousness of faith is the obedience of faith (Rom 1:5; 16:26), and is therefore simultaneously covenant privilege and responsibility (The Call of Grace, p. 76).

This is astounding! Shepherd has the nerve to go right to Paul's great chapter of justification by

faith, where Paul explicitly condemns the notion of salvation by works, and to make it say the exact opposite. He redefines the righteousness received by faith, as actually being a righteousness achieved by "*the obedience of faith*." Faith has become works and justification by faith has become justification by our own works of obedience. The righteousness that saves is no longer the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to the believer and received by faith. It is now the filthy rags of one's own righteousness as one attempts to emulate the covenant keeping example of Christ. This is indeed another gospel. Another gospel that will leave its deluded followers on the last day with the awful words of Christ ringing in their ears, "*I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*"

A quick read of this book produced six pages of notes. I have only covered one page of notes thus far. However, this is a review, not a comprehensive rebuttal. For that I recommend you read Brian Schwertley's forthcoming book the [Auburn Avenue Theology](#), that systematically refutes Shepherd and his followers. There are many other significant errors in this book including a call for Arminian evangelism. This is only logical for if salvation is not by sovereign grace, but by works, then the truth of Arminianism has already been granted. After all, Arminianism is a doctrine of salvation by works, the work of believing by one's own spiritual power, apart from the irresistible grace of God.

Finally, we have to address why Shepherd's views have gained so much traction in even professedly Reformed churches. Shepherd has advanced his views under the aegis of opposing antinomianism. Shepherd maintains that the historic Reformed understanding of salvation by grace and justification by faith alone leaves us open to the ravages of antinomianism. He characterizes that as having to accept the position that if one believes the gospel and is justified by faith alone, then no matter how wickedly he lives and how he perseveres in a sinful lifestyle, he must be accepted as a redeemed person. But that is a straw man. No one, certainly no Reformed theologian has ever taught that.

The Reformed faith has never denied the necessity of good works. However, it has consistently, and vehemently, denied that good works are a ground of our justification and our acceptance by God. What it has maintained is that good works are the fruit of our salvation. A redeemed person serves God out of gratitude, not in a vain attempt to earn one's salvation. A regenerate person produces good works because as Christ said, the tree is known by its fruits and a good tree will produce good fruit. One point we can agree on with Shepherd is that a true living faith produces good works. The crucial distinction is that good works as the fruit of true faith is radically different from teaching that that faith includes works, that faith and works are all the same. Reformed Christians are not antinomians. If you do not produce spiritual fruit, if you do not produce good works, you probably do not possess true justifying faith and are still in an unregenerate state. Even the thief on the cross produced fruit after his conversion and rebuked the other thief's blasphemies and witnessed to the truth of Jesus Christ. The tree is known by its fruits. God does not justify people in a vacuum. There is an unbreakable connection between regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, and sanctification, etc. This is the golden chain of Romans 8:29-30. Our sanctification, our good works are the necessary evidence of our salvation. Unlike our regeneration and our justification, which are invisible to the human eye, our sanctification, our good works, are observable, and hence Christ says that we will be known by our fruits. They form part of that credible profession of faith that is necessary for adults to receive baptism and become members of the church of Jesus Christ.

Shepherd ignores all this, and under the pretense of opposing antinomianism he has thoroughly corrupted the gospel and destroyed the Reformed faith. He is a false teacher. He is a heretic. Those who read this book need to be warned. Those who follow his teachings do so at the peril of their eternal souls.

APPENDIX 2

AGAINST CHRISTIANITY

Peter Leithart

Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho

Reviewed by Louis F. DeBoer

Against Christianity is the title of this book. That is rather provocative to say the least. What does Leithart mean by “Christianity”? Well, it seems pretty clear that what he means by “Christianity” is what the typical conservative evangelical Protestant Christian believes today. And since he lumps everyone together, including the Reformed, he means what you and I believe. We believe “Christianity” and he does not. He is against “Christianity.” And he is against a lot more. There are five chapters to this book. The first four chapter titles start with the word *Against*. Leithart is not only against “Christianity,” but he is against theology, against sacraments, and against ethics. Is there anything that he is for? Yes, he is also for some things. Among other things he is for, he likes Constantine, for his fifth chapter is titled *For Constantine*.

The basic thesis of the first chapter, *Against Christianity* is that “Christianity” is an unbiblical compromise with the modern world. His rejection of “Christianity” is total and complete. He takes no prisoners. His is a scorched earth policy. Of “Christianity” he says the following...

The Bible never mentions Christianity. It does not preach Christianity, nor does it encourage us to preach Christianity... Christianity...is the invention of biblical scholars, theologians, and politicians...but Christianity is gnostic; and the Church firmly rejected gnosticism from her earliest days.⁴

Christianity is the heresy of heresies, the underlying cause of the weakness, lethargy, sickness, and failure of the modern church.⁵

Christianity is biblical religion disemboweled and emasculated by (voluntary) intellectualization and/or privatization.⁶

Christianity is institutionalized worldliness.⁷

Whew! He certainly has a burr under his saddle. What exactly is Leithart’s problem with “Christianity”? Leithart views “Christianity” as an ideology, as a system of doctrines, as a set of

⁴ Leithart, *Against Christianity*, p. 13. This may be on page 13, but these are actually the opening words of the book. Leithart is getting right to the point.

⁵ Ibid, p. 13.

⁶ Ibid, p. 17

⁷ Ibid, p. 17

beliefs. This he categorically rejects. What does he want to replace “Christianity” with? What is his concept of the essence of Biblical teaching? What does he think Christ and the Apostles were seeking to establish if not “Christianity”? What does he think the “good news” is that the Bible proclaims? Well, he states it as follows...

The gospel is the announcement of the Father’s formation, through his Son and the Spirit, of a new city—the city of God.⁸

This is the gospel according to Leithart. In fact he scarcely mentions the issue of salvation throughout the book. The historic gospel and Reformed soteriology are conspicuous only by their absence in his polemic against “Christianity.” He believes that the Church should be a *polis*, the Greek term for a city-state. He believes that the gospel is preeminently political. He believes that Christ and the Apostles were founding a rival *polis*, a rival city-state to compete with and overthrow the Roman State. Since “Christianity” does not see that as its prime mission, as the reason for its existence, “Christianity” is apostate, “Christianity” is heretical. What Leithart wants in short is the destruction of “Christianity” and the establishment of a new Christendom. He wants a Christian state and he believes that the Church ought to be that state. He repeatedly states that the Church is to be a *polis*. He dismisses the notion that the Bible teaches a religion that can be contrasted with and viewed as something that is in competition with Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, etc. Instead he states,

The Church’s competitors are nation-states and international political bodies like the United Nations.⁹

The gospel is the announcement that God has organized a new Israel, a new *polis*, the Body of Christ, and that the King has been installed in heaven, at the right hand of the Father; thus the gospel is politics.¹⁰

Leithart’s critique of “Christianity” is not entirely without merit. The low esteem in which the institution of the Church is held by many Christians and the individualism that has led to the privatization of religion is a genuine issue. Similarly, any reductionism of Biblical faith to simply an intellectual exercise that constructs a set of doctrines is a legitimate concern. This explains, though it does not justify, his extreme condemnation of “Christianity” as an exercise in intellectualism and privatization and why he considers it gnostic. However, his solution is a stunning one. Scrap “Christianity” and return to Christendom. We will examine the implications of that proposal as we proceed.

Leithart continues his diatribe against “Christianity” by a polemic against theology. He starts off with a parallel complaint as in the last chapter, saying...

The Bible never mentions theology. It does not preach theology, nor does it encourage us to preach theology. Paul did not preach theology, nor did any of the other Apostles...Theology is the invention of biblical scholars, theologians, and politicians...Theology is gnostic; and the Church firmly rejected gnosticism from her earliest days¹¹

⁸ Ibid, p. 16

⁹ Ibid, p. 34

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 40

¹¹ Ibid, p. 43

Again, one has to wonder what he is up to. Theology is the term for knowledge of God. What can be wrong with that? Why is Leithart against that? Nonetheless, the essence of Leithart's complaint seems to be that he is against just that, that is he is against a knowledge based religion. He is opposed to a doctrinal religion. He thinks that although it would be radically different in content, Biblical religion should consist of the same materials as say the typical pagan religions of the ancient world. To him a real religion consists of a common culture, of stories and myths, of rituals. A real religion is public, held in common by all, it is a *polis*, a city, a political entity. We could take the Norse religion of pagan Scandinavia as an example. They had a common culture that was defined by their religion. Their religion consisted of a pantheon of deities and myriads of stories and myths about these gods, their actions and their attributes. They had a calendar of religious festivals and a defined set of religious rituals that characterized participation in their religion. And all this was public and was engaged in by all the citizens of the *polis*. This was not an intellectual religion. The Vikings never wrote any systematic theologies. This was not a privatized religion. The whole body politic participated in this religion and to fail to do so was treason to the *polis*. This is Leithart's model. This is what he believes religion ought to be. This is what he wants a "Christian" version of. He wants a revived Christendom. This is the heart of his complaint against theology.

Leithart goes on to fulminate against sacraments and ethics as well in the next two chapters. Sacraments are condemned because they are too closely identified with the word. They have been reduced to appendages of the word, illustrations of the word, symbols of the truths of the word. He wants rituals. He wants powerful, mystical rituals, real rituals, that have potent religious influence and bind the participants by common religious rites. One has the feeling that he would love the Romish mass, especially as it was celebrated historically. The Roman Catholic mass was a grand ritual. With great pomp and show the people attended this ritual and were mesmerized. For a faithful Catholic this was the very essence of his religion. No word here to reduce it to something the understanding could deal with. No. Just raw participation in a grand spectacle conducted in Latin, the language of priests and scholars, which the laity were unlearned in. Here was a religion where Leithart's precious rituals have found their proper place of dominance. Small wonder that Leithart condemns "Christianity" as a compromise with modernity and dates the modern world from the year 1500 A.D. Before that we had Christendom. Before that we had medieval Catholicism. Before that we had real rituals. We had baptism with holy water that actually washed away sins. We had the ritual of the mass that created the actual body and blood of Christ by the miracle of transubstantiation and sacrificed them for an actual atonement for the participants' sins. Great stuff if you want rituals. Leithart has his date, a pre-Reformation date, exactly right.

Additionally, whatever his issue is with ethics, it is somewhat more obtuse than his other polemics. After stating that living well, that is living ethically, is only possible in a Christian *polis*, he defines ethics as follows...

Modern ethics...is an effort to speak to issues of right and wrong without mentioning God, or at least without mentioning any specific god. Ethics, in other words operates completely within the confinements of liberal order, which attempts to cleanse the public realm (including the realm of ethical debate) of particular theological claims. Ethics is an effort to find a language for obligation without reference to Jesus.¹²

¹² Ibid, 100

Of course all this seems somewhat ridiculous. After all Christ lived a perfect and sinless life without being in a Christian *polis*. He lived in an apostate Jewish state, under the domination of a pagan state, Rome. And who is Leithart arguing against here anyway? His book is entitled *Against Christianity*, but who is he actually against? A frequent question that comes up as one reads his book is “Who believes what he is carping against?” I know of no Christians who hold the above view of ethics. I certainly know of no Reformed Christians who believe such a definition of ethics. As far as I can tell that is a definition generally held by secular humanists. That there are plenty of them in the liberal churches, I agree. But that is precisely the issue. Is Leithart being honest here? Is he practicing some kind of intellectual sleight of hand? In this book he openly opposes the Great Protestant Reformation. It is part of the post 1500 A.D. modern world. It is part of “Christianity.” It is part of what he is against. However, much of what he complains about in his polemic against “Christianity” is not true of those whom he is opposing. Some of it, like his definition of ethics, is only true of liberal, National Council type churches. Some of it is true of broad evangelicalism. Some of it may be true of some Reformed churches. However, he conveniently leaves this all very vague, and lumps everyone together, as if by raising these valid criticisms of “Christianity” he has established his case.¹³ When he is espousing his solution, a return to medievalism and Christendom, of course the Reformation, current Reformed churches, and most evangelicals would be against him. However, this is not true of many of his criticisms about contemporary society and Christianity, which many of those he opposes probably share. This is disingenuous at best, because by failing to make these distinctions he is setting up a straw man, and creating a situation for the reader that only presents two alternatives, his revived Christendom or the current mess that “Christianity” is in. Is this intellectually honest? Does anyone think for a moment that the Reformers would countenance what passes for evangelical Christianity today for a moment? There are other alternatives to what is, but Leithart does not recognize them. This is a great weakness in the book. He simply does not make his case against the Reformation. It is all based on his criticism of contemporary “Christianity.”

And let’s get back to the issue of theology. Does the Bible support theology or just tell stories and myths and leaves it at that? When Christ in the Sermon on the Mount expounds the laws of Moses, isn’t that theology? Isn’t that doctrine? Isn’t that propositional truth derived from the Scripture? It certainly isn’t stories and myths. And what of when Paul in his letter to the Romans expounds on the meaning of the stories of Abraham and draws from them doctrinal conclusions? Specifically he draws from it the doctrine of justification by faith. Isn’t that theology? And incidentally, that is a doctrine that Leithart rejects.¹⁴ Is that why he is against theology?

¹³ A case in point is when Leithart says, “*Ask the average Christian about the relationship between “church” and “salvation,” and you are likely to get one of two answers: either (if the Christian is a rather old-fashioned Roman catholic) that the Church is the reservoir of salvation, to which one must repair to receive grace; or (if the Christian is a rather common sort of evangelical) that salvation occurs apart from the Church, though it is a help along the way*” (pp. 31-32). First of all he totally ignores the Reformed position on this issue as stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith which says, “*The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before, under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation*” (Chapter 25, Section II). Perhaps Leithart is reluctant to quote this because like his mentor Douglas Wilson he probably doesn’t like the Confession’s distinction between the visible and invisible church. Note that he considers Roman Catholics Christians in this quote, another difference with the authors of the Confession. These statements of the Confession are inimical to his idea of a revived Christendom so they are ignored, but it is simply dishonest to lump the Reformed in with the evangelicals and their despising of the place of the church in the economy of salvation.

¹⁴ Leithart, along with Douglas Wilson and the movement in Moscow, Idaho rejects the Reformed faith and holds to the heretical Auburn Avenue theology which believes in justification by faith and works. He frequently quotes N. T. Wright

Leithart likes myths and stories. He states that this is what all the other religions had that dominated a culture and formed a city state. That makes one think that he must love the parables of our Lord. But why did Christ tell parables? Did he do it because he thought like Leithart that this is what real religions are made of? Did he do it so that we could have nice little stories that could be told and retold and provide the cloth of a common culture? Or did he do it to teach truth? And if the latter, why did he not just teach the truth of the parable directly? The Scriptures gives us the answer. The parable was designed to convey the truth without revealing it to the profane. As Christ put it,

¹⁰And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? ¹¹He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. ¹²For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. ¹³Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. ¹⁴And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: ¹⁵For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. ¹⁶But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. ¹⁸Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. (Matthew 13:10-18)

Christ then went on to expound the parable of the sower to his disciples. The faithful were to be instructed in the meaning of the parables. We are to be instructed in the meanings of Christ's parables. Isn't that theology? The purpose was not to have nice cultural stories and common myths to bind us together in a common *polis*. The purpose was to teach doctrine, to inculcate propositional truth. That is, the purpose was theological.

Why does Leithart hate theology? Is it because as the saying goes, "service unites and doctrine divides"? He wants a united Christendom. We have already noted that Leithart considers traditional Roman Catholics to be Christians. Theology would divide Protestants and Catholics. Theology would fracture his hopes of a new Christendom. In his resurrected Christendom we could all read and retell the stories and myths of the Bible. We could all enjoy them and let them form our common culture. Until we get theological with these stories as Paul did when he separated from first century Judaism over, among other things, the doctrine of justification by faith as taught in the story of Abraham, we could have unity. We could have the unity of little children being taught the Bible stories in Sunday School. There would be no theological conclusions to mar the unity and divide the flock.

Leithart constantly holds up the model of pagan religions as the pattern for how we should form a Biblical religion. Let's examine the nature of those pagan religions that he wants to use as a pattern. Did they have real unity? What was the ancient *polis* really like? First of all, the pagans had myriads of ways of relating to their cultural myths and stories. They had different temples and orders of

in this book, a leading proponent of the New Perspective on Paul which denies that Paul taught the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, and claims that we have misunderstood Paul.

priests, and cults dedicated to a specific god abounded. Not only was paganism pluralistic in the extreme, it was syncretistic. That is, it accepted a plurality of gods into its pantheon and as part of the culture. They accepted as part of the *polis*, cults dedicated to any of these deities. For example, the pagan philosophers on Mars Hill were part of the culture, part of the Athenian *polis*, but they could accept another god in their pantheon. They were open to a story about the “unknown god.” The reality is that the unity Leithart craves is a sham. The pluralism he despises is the essence of the system he lusts after. It is interesting that Leithart gives the year 1500 A. D. as the date from which to mark the modern era. He wants pre 1500. He likes the medieval world that existed before 1500 A. D. He likes Christendom before the Reformation spoiled it all and split the “Christian” consensus that had ruled the West for a thousand years. He likes what we had before the Reformers introduced Biblical theology and sundered his “Christian” *polis* with their theological conclusions.

Leithart has great faith in the power of rituals to create unity. He says, speaking of the Lord’s Supper, which he sees as one of his key rituals “*We are what we eat...We are together how and what we eat together. But we don’t eat together. Is it any wonder that we are not together?*”¹⁵ Angered at the resistance of “Christianity to paedocommunion he retorts, “*Opposition to the communion of children is pagan...it is an attempt to return to Egypt.*”¹⁶ To Leithart it does not matter that we are one in the Spirit, or one in faith and doctrine, as much as that we are one in our rituals. That will give us true unity. Those who would limit the unifying power of his rituals by rejecting paedocommunion are pagans. It is fine in his estimation for Christians to sit down at the Lord’s table with Catholics, with their pagan pantheon of deities, their pagan holy days, and their pagan idolatrous worship, but those who reject that are in his eyes the pagans. The Reformation and all of “Christianity” is pagan in his judgment. This radical form of ecumenism, this road back to Rome, is the basis of his revived Christendom. Here is no waiting for the Lord to call and convert, to regenerate and sanctify himself a people. Leithart can cobble together the necessary multitudes together to form the kingdom, if he can simply impose the unity of this ecumenism.

The key issue here is that 1500 A. D. is pre-Reformation. It was the Reformation that launched “Christianity” and theology, the Christianity and theology that Leithart is seeking to overthrow. Leithart hates the fracturing of Christendom by the truth. Leithart hates the fracturing of Christendom by theology, by the theological conclusions drawn from the Scriptures that he wants left in world of stories and myths. He wants a culture of stories, myths and rituals. And what has the Reformation done to his rituals? It has defined them. After the Reformation there was no more going to a mystical mass, in Latin to boot, and mysteriously communing in Christ. The Reformation insisted on the union of word and sacrament. The Reformation insisted that the sacraments be defined and understood, and preached to the understanding before they were observed. Is this another reason that Leithart hates theology?—because it has defined his mystical rituals and given them theological meaning?

Leithart’s pre-modern era is also pre-Counter reformation. It is pre-Trent when Rome polished up her theology and stated what she believed in opposition to the Protestants. Is Leithart against the Counter Reformation as well? Does he oppose Trent for reasons far different than most Protestants? Is he longing for a pre-Trent Rome? Is he longing for the time when the requirements for being a good Catholic were less...well, theological? Does he long for when as long as one was a member of the Church of Rome, when as long as one submitted to the Pope, when as long as one went to mass, and prayed to the Romish pantheon of deities and saints, one was an accepted citizen of Christendom and

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 92-93

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 93

theology wasn't very important? Is clearly defined theological truth incompatible with his idea of a revived Christendom?

And what about the Reformation that he bypasses on his journey back to medieval Romanism and sees as part of the problem? Leithart complains that "*Christianity is biblical religion disemboweled and emasculated,*" and then goes on to attack the Reformation. One has to wonder what is in his mind. Can anyone read Daubigne's histories of the Reformation and not be thrilled? Can anyone read Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic* and not be stirred? The epic battles of faith that were fought, the heroic resistance to evil, and the relentless struggles for civil and religious liberty, did these represent an emasculated and disemboweled Christianity? Did Wycliffe, Tyndale, Huss, Jerome, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Farel, Knox and company represent an emasculated and disemboweled "Christianity"? The thought is absurd. Leithart likes a politicized gospel, but he is strangely silent about the impact of Calvinism on politics. Has he forgotten Zisca, the Taborite leader of the Hussites in Bohemia, who fought Pope and Emperor to a standstill? And nowhere does he mention Duplessis-Mornay, the Huguenot leader, advisor to Henri Quatre, and the author of *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, the great Calvinist polemic against tyranny. Nowhere does he mention William the Silent the Father of the Dutch Republic, one of the great Calvinist republics in history. Nowhere does he mention Oliver Cromwell, who overthrew the civil and religious tyranny of the Stuart dynasty and established a Puritan Calvinist commonwealth. Is he blind to the political force that Calvinism has been in history? Or are these simply inconvenient facts on his road back to medieval Christendom? One wonders. What one can conclude is that since none of these reestablished the Christendom that he yearns for, they do not pass muster and are not worthy of mention.

Incidentally, Leithart has very few quotes from Scripture in this book. He has many quotes from sociologists and associated scholars, many secular, or liberal, ruminating about the nature of modern society and culture. He is constantly analyzing ancient pagan cultures. He sees them as providing the model. In his view what is needful is to have a Christian replacement for these cultures. Their view of society, culture, and what constitutes the *polis*, the city state, is what he seems to admire. To him what the "gospel" is all about is to establish a Christian version of the ancient *polis*, the ancient city state. For Leithart the "gospel" is essentially political. It establishes a rival kingdom that displaces the reigning culture and overthrows the reigning kingdom.

All this is a radical rejection of the traditional Reformed faith. It constitutes a radical rejection of the heritage of the Great Protestant Reformation. One has to ask, "What is driving this agenda?" What would possess a man who had a background in the Reformed faith, who once was a Calvinist, to go a-whoring after a Romish medieval Christendom? I believe the answer lies in Leithart's eschatology. Leithart holds to a certain strain of theonomic postmillennialism. Now by contrast, and in the interest of full disclosure, I hold to historic premillennialism, the undoubted faith of the Jewish church, the apostolic church, and the early Christian church. Although we may define it somewhat differently, we both look forward to the kingdom of God. For me that is very simple. The kingdom comes when the King returns. The kingdom is established at the coming of Jesus Christ, when he returns to establish his kingdom, lift the curse, and rule forever with his saints in a new earth in which dwells righteousness. At that time the meek will inherit the earth and all the millennial promises of the blessings that will come in Messiah's day will be fulfilled. For me there is no mystery as to what will constitute the kingdom or when it will be established. Now postmillennialists believe that the kingdom will be established before the coming of Christ as the preaching of the gospel gradually conquers the nations and brings them under the law of Christ. They are looking for the kingdom to appear in the here and now. And therein lies the rub. Now I do not want to appear to be painting with

too broad a brush here so I will try to be specific. I know many good and godly men of the Reformed faith who are postmillennialists. Nonetheless, certain strains of postmillennialism can be very problematical. Leithart's strain of theonomic postmillennialism is in my estimation heretical.

There is something very seductive in the very nature of postmillennialism. Since the kingdom is established in the here and now it becomes very tempting to try to make it all happen. It becomes, to some, almost irresistible, not to wait on God's timing, not to wait on the indispensable work of the Holy Spirit, but to attempt to make it happen by human means. Generally, this results in attempts to establish the kingdom by politics, social action, etc. Theological liberals in the PCUSA, having long departed from a Biblical faith, used an apostate form of postmillennialism to launch a social gospel that would usher in the kingdom by means of social action. A kingdom of peace and justice would be established by restructuring society along socialist lines. In this they emulated the Sadducees, who having given up on the supernatural, and having no patience to await the coming of a messiah, reduced laboring for the kingdom to an exercise in power politics. It is not hard for postmillennialists to be infected by this tendency. Even such a good man as Lorraine Boettner, in his book, *The Millennium*, argued that the existence of free public education, the American welfare system, foreign aid, etc. were all signs that the world was improving and that the postmillennial dream was slowly being realized. Needless to say, his folly is now clearly manifest. It is reminiscent of Gary North's ridiculous proposal of two decades ago. He proposed that with the intellectual contribution of the Presbyterians (only theologians need apply of course), the private school system of the independent fundamentalists, and the television communication empires of the Charismatics a coalition could be forged that would take over the nation and bring to pass their postmillennial dreams. It is truly amazing to what absurdities some postmillennialists will resort to in a vain effort to make their "kingdom" happen, rather than waiting on the Lord.

All such above noted aberrations of postmillennialism come from falling into the error of Lot and in failing to have the faith of Abraham. God made a series of promises to Abraham as part of the Abrahamic Covenant. These promises included a promise of the land of Canaan, a promise of a coming Messianic King, and a promise of a people as numerous as the stars of the heavens. A land, a king, and a people, are, of course, the three indispensable ingredients for a kingdom. Well, the king was two thousand years in the future, and the people would take many generations, but Abraham had already been called into the land of promise. Therefore, it was primarily with respect to the land that there was any opportunity to try to make the kingdom happen. And an issue with respect to possession of the land soon came up. There was strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and those of his nephew Lot. It is most instructive to compare the way these two men reacted in that situation. Lot did not have the patience to wait on the Lord. He did not have the faith that God would in his own timing bring to pass the promise of the inheritance of the land. He wanted to seize the land now. So he chose the well watered plain of Jordan, the choicest section of the land, and pitched his tent towards Sodom. And as the Scripture records it, "*But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly*" (Genesis 13:13).

By contrast Abraham had the faith to patiently await God's good time when God would give him and his seed the land. In the meantime he was content to be a pilgrim and a stranger on this earth and wait on the Lord. Lot, in his selfishness and impatience, attempted to seize the best part of the land immediately. God blessed Abraham. The last we see of Lot he is in a remote cave, committing incest with his daughters in a state of intoxication, and is homeless and penniless. This should be a lesson for, and a warning to, the present inhabitants of the Land of Canaan who have seized the land in unbelief rather than waiting on the Lord. It should also be a warning to any postmillennialists like

Leithart who are pitching their tent towards Romanism. They will meet a fate like unto that of Lot's.

Abraham never received the land in his lifetime. The Scriptures clearly testify to that...

And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee ...And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. (Acts 7:2-3,5)

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God...These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (Hebrews 11:8-10,13)

Abraham was promised the land personally, but he never received as much as a square foot of it! There are significant theological conclusions that stem from that fact. In our Lord's day there was division among the Jews over the doctrine of the resurrection. The Pharisees, who held to the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, did so on the basis of the fact before us. God had promised the land to Abraham and therefore he must receive it. If Abraham didn't receive it in this life he will therefore have to receive it in the life to come, in the resurrection. Paul, himself raised a Pharisee, seems to allude to this in the Hebrews passage. Abraham himself apparently didn't expect to inherit the land in this life, but in the kingdom that he could see by faith, as "*he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*" All those who would seek to establish the kingdom today regardless of the compromises involved ought to consider the example of Abraham, in whose name thy pretend to act!

Leithart is justly grieved by the fractured state of the visible church and the radical individualism that infects its members. But his solution is worse than the disease. He lusts for the unity of Christendom. However, as we have already noted, that that is a sham unity. It is the unity of the tower of Babel. It is the unity of the United Nations. It is the unity of the World Council of Churches. The pluralism he despises is an inevitable part of this dispensation. If he were to have his revived Christendom reestablished it wouldn't last. It would cry out for a new Reformation. And as soon as the first Huss, Luther, or Calvin appeared on the scene, his cherished unity would evaporate and pluralism would again be the status quo, even if he was willing to behave like Rome and seek to extirpate it in blood. That is the nature of this age, which is a time for calling the elect out of the world, for redeeming the people who will populate the kingdom. That is why Christ gave us the parable of the wheat and the tares. And that is why we are forbidden to attempt to pull up the tares. Until God in his time establishes the kingdom, pluralism will be the order of day, whether we like it or not. But Leithart can't wait. He wants the kingdom now. So he is prepared to make his Faustian bargain with the devil. He is prepared to return to Rome to have his kingdom now. He is prepared to pitch his tent towards Sodom.

This is the incredible dream of an apostate form of theonomic postmillennialism. It is a return to the Christendom of the middle ages. Like their theology it is medieval. Like Lot they want to

possess the land here and now. They want the kingdom now. They are not willing to wait on the Lord and his time. They think they can cobble together a revived Christendom by returning to Rome. As the Apostle Peter put it two millennia ago, “*But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire*” (2 Peter 2:22). Let us depart from such wickedness and resist such apostasy and walk in the faith of Abraham, as we await the Lord to bring to pass the glorious Kingdom of his Son.

