

A WORLD HELD IN DOMINION

by *Howard S. Hampton*

The world is held in dominion. It is held in dominion by many things, including sin. But in recent years Western Europe, the North American continent, Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa, and parts of Asia have become held in the vice of a new *-ism*: Christian Reconstructionism, also known as Theonomism. Many people think that these two new *-ism* words are synonymous terms which describe the same phenomena. This is not the case. The term “Theonomism” means “God’s law” or legal system. The term “Christian Reconstruction” is a term which has been coined to describe a movement that began in the late fifties, and has as its main aim of reforming and restoring a resurgent political form of Calvinism. Christian Reconstruction included Theonomism as part of its basic teaching; but the reverse was not the case. One can be a Theonomist without being a Christian Reconstructionist; but one cannot be a Christian Reconstructionist without being a Theonomist.

In 1959 Rousas J. Rushdoony published his first book, *By What Standard*. With this work, Rushdoony fired the first shot in his major theological battle to establish what he later came to grandly call “Christian Reconstructionism”. With later works, Rushdoony provided both his movement, and the religious right in both the United States and Western Europe, with the intellectual and theological justification for the Christian school movement that has swept across America, and has been quietly sweeping across Australia during the seventies, eighties, nineties and into the twenty-first century. In the middle seventies, a serious effort was made to gather the American churches of Christ into the welcoming arms of the reconstructionist movement. While these# overtures were overwhelmingly rejected, many of the *foci* of ideological concern were taken on board. As a consequence, terms like humanism and creation science are bandied about, without any understanding of the theological baggage that comes with the terms.

What is Christian Reconstructionism?

Christian reconstructionism is the name given to a movement which has arisen since the mid 1960s in the United States, and which now draws growing support throughout the West from people of the reformed persuasion on the one hand, and charismatic persuasion on the other. Reconstructionists believe that Christian people have been given a mandate by God to bring the world, with all its social and political institutions, under the authority of God's law, including the entire Mosaic civil code. By this activity, as well as by the Gospel, Christians are to secure dominion over the world, and thus establish the kingdom of God on earth in readiness for the return of Christ.

Many American reconstructionists want to see the government of the United States following and enforcing all the laws of the Old Testament, right down to the implementation of Old Testament economic policy. To accomplish this in the United States would, provide a demonstration of godly government to the world. Other nations would then speedily imitate the United States, and so the social-political dominion of the people of God over all the earth would eventually come to pass.

Reconstructionists teach that the great commission of Christ to his disciples goes beyond the work of evangelism. In their view it includes this quest for the social-political dominion of the world; the persuading of all nations to submit to the rule of Israel's ancient laws. Dominion is a much used term among reconstructionists, and it means exactly what it says that Christians are to seek dominion over all human society during this present kingdom age. Consequently reconstructionist teaching is commonly called dominion theology.

Another term which crops up quite often in the reconstructionist vocabulary is "theonomy". This literally means "God's law". But it has been popularised by reconstructionists to describe their particular view of God's law, namely, that all Old Testament law—including the punishments for disobedience—continue to be binding on all of society today.

Yet another term which peppers the books and magazines of reconstructionists is the more familiar word, theocracy. In their use of this word reconstructionists refer to a "Christian Civil" government which enforces the moral, social and economic laws of the Old Testament.

Such a government at present nowhere exists, but reconstructionists are sure that it will, just as soon as evangelical Christians can be persuaded that they have lost sight of God's commission to seek dominion over the social and political institutions of their nations.

Readers may by now have realised that the people most likely to adopt reconstructionist ideas are those that hold postmillennial eschatological views. Postmillennialists believe that Christ's kingdom on earth—the church—will grow so mighty in size, strength and influence, that the world will become totally Christianised before the return of the Lord.

Some amillennialists and premillennialists expect a final apostasy at the end of the age, when evil men shall wax worse and worse. This obviously stands in complete contrast to the reconstructionist vision of a world under the dominion of an all-powerful and triumphant church.

Certainly all the founders of reconstructionism are convinced postmillennialists. Charismatics who embrace reconstructionism are not so easily classified. Some are postmillennial; but many, strange as it may seem, are postmillennial-premillennial, amalgamating some of the most important teachings of both in a strange embrace. They believe in both schemes at once, taking the view that the world will almost be entirely won for Christ, and so will be under the dominion of the church, before His return. Then, at His return, Christ will usher in the millennial glory. The original Presbyterian postmillennial reconstructionists and the charismatic new recruits have this in common, in that they abominate the doom-laden premillennialism of others. They want an entirely victorious scenario for the end times: a victory both in terms of numbers converted, and in political supremacy also.

Many charismatics in the United Kingdom—including many of the house churches—hold to this kind of theology. They reject any picture of spiritual decline and moral depravity prevailing in the final stage of this present age, adopting the picture of a mighty world-wide revival and restoration. Even now this restoration is underway. After nineteen hundred years of marking time or edging forward at a snail's pace, the kingdom of God is now back on the march, heading into an era of spectacular evangelism and social and political dominion. This kingdom of God is, to their view, chiefly composed of charismatic groups, and it will conquer the world for Christ, swallowing up the remnants of traditional evangelicalism as it does so.

Numerous American charismatics use the language of reconstructionism freely. Dominion theology and kingdom theology are also familiar terms. They also associate openly with the Presbyterian reconstructionists. The latter—for all their staid reformed credentials—have gleefully encouraged every alliance. They have decided that they need the charismatics. At least for the present.

It is, incidentally, important to remember that when disaffected charismatics find their way into non-charismatic churches, they often carry with them their triumphalist dominion theology of the last days. Many have learned to depend on the rhapsodic celebration of restoration and dominion now, to bolster and sustain their faith. The non-charismatic churches to which they go will have to teach them a more biblical view of the last things, without the aid of artificial stimulants.

Many charismatic groups which are not directly identified with reconstructionism approve much of the teaching. American televangelist, Pat Robertson, who attempted to run for the president of the United States, is an example of a leading charismatic who has very strong reconstructionist sympathies, while technically remaining outside the camp.

Reconstructionists, then, see it as the duty of Christians to bring about a restored paradise on earth (their own term) before the coming of Christ. It will be a republic patterned on the ideal framework for a society given to ancient Israel before the arrival of the monarchy. The nations of the world must be persuaded, step by step, to adopt the Mosaic law-code, and to reconstruct government so that the functions of the state are strictly limited to the administration of law and order and the maintenance of national defences—until reconstructionism has advanced to the point where war is banished.

As the result of reconstruction, governments would have no welfare responsibilities. These would fall to the churches and the voluntary goodwill of the public. Democracy would be abolished as anti-biblical, and the civil power would enforce the laws of Moses using precisely the same punishments as those laid down for ancient Israel. The death sentence would apply to murder, the striking or cursing of parents, unchastity, homosexuality, rape, apostasy, idolatry, unfulfilled prophesying, disobedience of a court order, and a host of other offences. As far as

reconstructionist author Dr. Greg Bahnsen is concerned, even Sabbath-breaking is to be included in the long list of offences which should be punished by death. According to some writers, Presbyterianism would be enforced and Jewish garments would be worn, with no mixing of fibres permitted in cloth.

Before the reader loses patience and considers such ideas to be the irrelevant notions of cranks and crackpots, we must warn that this movement appears to have enormous appeal for many very able and serious people, and a wide variety of religious persuasions. We must therefore review its claims.

The Founding Authors

The best-known name among the founders of reconstructionism is that of Dr. Rousas J. Rushdoony, an American Presbyterian minister and scholar of reformed convictions, now the elder statesman of the movement. In 1965 he formed an organisation, known as the Chalcedon Foundation, to propound his ideas. This foundation is still in existence and continues to publish *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, its widely circulated literary organ. Over the years, Rushdoony moved gradually to the position of advocating a social-political mandate for God's people, and the continuing binding force of all the Old Testament law for every nation. He published his huge work *The Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973, with a second volume following a few years later. This treatise probably marks the beginning of the reconstructionist movement as a political movement. In his book, *God's Plan for Victory*, Dr. Rushdoony affirms that one's view on the return of Christ is critical to reconstructionism. He speaks of America as having sixty million Christians, and wishes that all these could be converted to postmillennialism. "These, rather than merely preaching the Gospel to snatch brands from the burning, they would be among those preparing to conquer the world and assert the 'Crown Rights of King Jesus'." Nothing less than global dominion for the church is in Dr. Rushdoony's view. Most of his 30 books are devoted to the advocacy of some aspect of reconstructionism.

Greg Bahnsen is another author who is well-known in the United Kingdom—probably on account of his book, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View*, than for his reconstructionist views.

Having studied theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, and philosophy elsewhere, he has held appointments both as a seminary lecture and a pastor. He greatly advanced reconstructionist ideas through a book entitled *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. In this 650-page work, Dr. Bahnsen made the novel claim that, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus said that He had come to confirm the law; and went on to mount a peculiar and untenable exegesis of the word translated fulfil in Matthew 5:17. Arguing the Sabbatarian line: that Christ came to *fulfil* rather than *destroy* the law.

By this approach Dr. Bahnsen was able to teach that the Saviour commanded the Christian church to uphold the entire Old Testament Mosaical law-code to the letter. The only exception being what he calls the ceremonial rites, a clear allusion to the Seventh Day Adventist doctrine. Every subsequent command or commission of Christ to His disciples is seen to include this basic duty of promoting throughout the world the enforcement of all the laws of God, including the entire structure of the Hebrew social system. “The great commission of the Lord is therefore regarded as a reiteration of what reconstructionists call the dominion mandate. This is the command of Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion...”

The third significant name among the founding fathers of reconstructionism is that of the reverend economist Dr. Gary North, a former editor of Rushdoony’s magazine, *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*. Dr. North—who in accordance with precedence, brandishes his Ph.D. as a sword—has now written more than 35 books; among them “Christian” critiques of secular economic trends, Christian investment advice, and titles which promote reconstructionism. Gary North’s style is energetic, colourful, and at times hard-hitting, and his writing style have been sharply criticised by some of his own camp in the United States, for its abrasive tone. He has issued a steady stream of some 35 books written by himself, and others under a variety of imprints, including Spurgeon Press, Geneva Ministries, the Institute of Christian Economics and Reconstruction Press; and he publishes a string of newsletters, each catering to the particular needs and concerns of his various constituencies. All of these publishers are based at Tyler, in the obscure American state of Texas, where Dr. North lives and works, and celebrates the latest

prophetic failures of the premillennialists. It is Gary North who enthusiastically advocates biblical stoning, as the divinely instituted and mandated method of execution for all wrongdoers; not least on account of its cheapness. Perhaps he should remember that stoning was the only punishment for misrepresenting the teachings of the Scriptures.

In describing his own books, Dr. North summarises his views for us: Concerning *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, he says his book: "...is specifically an economic commentary.... What does the Bible have to say about economic theory? Does it teach the free market, or socialism, or a mixture...or something completely different? *The Dominion Covenant* answers these questions by setting forth the biblical foundation of economics. It offers the basis of a total reconstruction of economic theory and practice...practical guidelines by which Christians are to reconstruct civilisation."

In promoting his book *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction*, Gary North writes: "Jesus said, 'occupy till I come'. But if Christians don't control the territory, they can't occupy it. They get tossed out into cultural 'outer darkness', which is just exactly what the secular humanists have done to Christians in the twentieth century: in education, in the arts, in entertainment, in politics...Today the humanists are occupying...If Christians adopt a vision of victory and a programme of Christian reconstruction, we will see the beginning of a new era on earth: the kingdom of God manifested in every area of life. When Christ returns, Christians will be occupying, not hiding in the shadows...This book shows where to begin."

These three prominent founder-figures have been joined in recent years by a virtual army of seemingly able minds and active pens. It must be said that some of the literary output of reconstructionists would meet with strong approval and agreement from all people bearing the name of Christian. Herein, however, lies the danger. Dr. Greg Bahnsen's book, *By This Standard*, is a case in point. In the first 200 pages of the 372-page book he presents, for the most part, a well-argued Reformist presentation of the abiding character of the Old Testament "moral" law. Taken as a refutation of the most primitive kind of dispensationalism, and also of anti-Calvinistic antinomianism, these pages ably present the essential arguments. Most reformed readers would

strongly agree with most of this material. But then, from page 201, Dr. Bahnsen takes leave of his senses and most orthodox evangelicalism, and not the least, his own Reformist traditions. The foundation he lays, in the first portion of the book, does not even remotely support the views which he subsequently proceeds to unfold.

Dr. Bahnsen picks up the first use of God's law recognised by the Reformers in Geneva, which was its political use. He believes, in common with the Swiss Reformers, that the civil magistrate must enforce the law of God; and rebukes evangelicals for ignoring this function of God's law. However, most evangelicals are quite certain that God's moral law is authoritative over all society, and that governments should make laws which reflect God's standards. In this belief, countless Christians have protested to the governments about lax laws on such matters as abortion and homosexuality. The argument is focussed on whether the entire Old Testament law-code is intended to be imposed by Christians on unregenerate society. Is this what the Reformers meant when they said that the first use of the law was a political use? Bahnsen says "Yes". But the answer is, "Of course not!"

The Crucial Error

The essence of reconstructionism is stated by Dr. Greg Bahnsen in these words: "Repeatedly the New Testament authors assume the standard of the law in their ethical themes and make application of the law in their moral judgements. Every Scripture, every point, every word, and indeed every letter of the Old Testament law is upheld in the New Testament. Therefore, it would seem obvious that the socio-political aspects of the Old Testament law would retain their validity today that they are authoritative for civil magistrates of all ages and cultures."

It should be obvious that this is an extremely careless statement, because every detail of the Old Testament law-code is certainly not upheld in the New Testament as an ongoing standard either for the church or the world. The punishments of the Old Testament are not reiterated and prescribed anywhere in the New. In John 8:1-11, for example, the Lord Jesus Christ does not want the woman taken in adultery to be put to death by stoning. Likewise Paul does not advocate stoning for the Corinthian sinner (I Corinthians 5:3-5 and 12-13). In this case the guilty man is

expelled from the church. This, Paul tells us, put him under the direct judgement of God. The church administered some of the punishment—withholding membership and fellowship—but the Lord did the rest, for them that are without God judgeth. It is worth noting that if reconstructionists had their way, a similar offender today would be executed in accordance with Leviticus 20:11, in which case he would not have the opportunity to come, over time, to repentance, and consequently the church would never be able to forgive him in obedience to II Corinthians 2:6-8.

Nowhere in either Acts or the epistles is there any reference whatsoever to a number of the “diverse laws and ordinances” of Moses. It is quite wrong to say that every letter of the Old Testament law is upheld in the New Testament.

Where, for example, is there in the New Testament any reference to the battlement law of Deuteronomy 22:8, or the prohibition of mixed seeds (verse 9), or the prohibition of different sorts of thread such as wool and linen being mixed (verse 11)? Where in the New Testament is the law upheld which banned illegitimate children from the congregation of the Lord even to the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:2)? Where do we find the law enforcing marriage after promiscuous sex upheld and prescribed for the ongoing nations of the world (Exodus 22:16), or the law against joining public demonstrations (Exodus 23:2), or that against the sale of land (Leviticus 25:23)?

Where do we find in the New Testament the death sentence upheld for a rebellious son, a homosexual person, or a medium (Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Leviticus 20:13)? The sweeping claims of reconstructionists simply cannot be substantiated. Indeed, it is made quite clear in the Old Testament that some laws applied only to the Jewish nation. In Deuteronomy 23:3-4, for example, it is expressly stated that the Ammonites and Moabites were banned from the congregation because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam...to curse thee. Here it is made clear that this rule had exclusive relevance to the Jews, and only then for a given period of about 250 years. It is simply not true, therefore to say that every portion of law is permanently binding into

the Christian age, and upheld as such in the New Testament. The reconstructionist notion of the nature of the Mosaic law is easily demolished by similar observations.

The Limited Scope of the diverse Laws

We now advance four reasons why the diverse laws of the Israelites—and the punishments—are entirely unsuitable for the purposes of world government, as claimed by reconstructionists.

First, the diverse laws of Moses are unsuitable for post-Jewish world government because they were specifically given to regulate and to bless a small, agricultural and religious community, equipped with minimal governing and law-enforcing bureaucracy. Many of these laws were clearly designed exclusively for the Children of Israel to whom they were addressed, throughout the period that their special relationship with the Eternal lasted. It is therefore unnatural and forced to elevate these regulations to the status of laws designed for all nations in every age of the world.

An obvious example of an exclusively Hebrew law is that which forbids the charging of interest to members of the Children of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:19). Examples of very parochial laws, relevant only to an ancient, agricultural nation, are those which require the land to lie fallow every seventh year, and permit people to eat their fill while in their neighbour's vineyard or field (Exodus 23:10-11; Deuteronomy 23: 24-25).

We have already referred to one exclusively Jewish law banning Ammonites and Moabites, but what about the stern prohibition of the sale of land (Leviticus 25:23)? Here was another law which applied uniquely to that covenant nation. Their land to belonged entirely to God, and they were only tenants. Incidentally, this one law neatly demolishes all the economic theories of reconstructionists, which rely very heavily on the pre-eminence of private ownership of property. They say that the eighth commandment implies that the private ownership of property should be the supreme principle should be the supreme principle of all economic life. In this they overlook Leviticus 25, and I Chronicles 29:15, where David prays according to his clear understanding of the law “For we are sojourners before Thee, and tenants, as all our fathers were” (NASB).

Another law which proves the exclusively Jewish nature of many of the sundry laws is the severe restriction on horses and chariots, couple with the requirement to proceed to battle even when hopelessly outnumber and out-equipped (Deuteronomy 17:16 and 20:1-4). This is given on account of their special status as the Children of Israel. “[F]or the Lord your God is he that goeth with, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”

Even the hygiene law governing the disposal of human waste is expressed in terms of Jewish exclusivity: “For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp...therefore shall they camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee” (Deuteronomy 23:14). In citing a few examples we have not touched upon non-ceremonial religious obligations, such as the laws requiring the harvest first fruits and first-born sons to be offered to the Lord (Exodus 22:29-30), which were clearly laws suited only to a worshipping people. There are many proofs of the fact that the sundry judicial laws were framed for that particular covenant nation, and for no other people.

Secondly, the Mosaic laws of ancient Israel included a purpose which was unique to that community, namely, the maintenance of the greatest possible degree of purity in the camp of a very special people. They were a chosen people, privileged by God to be a holy community to represent His name before the world. They were appointed to show forth His glories, to receive His Word, and ultimately to receive the Messiah. They were not like any other nation or people. To preserve a standard of godliness not practicable or feasible among nations generally, the sundry laws and their punishments were appended to the basic code of moral law.

Reconstructionists clearly miss the obvious point when they fail to note that *only* Israel received this detailed form of law via the intermediary, Moses. As the psalmist exclaimed, “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgements unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any [other] nation: and as for his judgements, they have not known them” (Psalm 147:19-20). There is no nation-state in the world today which is chosen by God, and subject to specially rigorous laws and punishments in order to maintain the greatest possible purity. It staggers the imagination to think of how many hundreds of millions of people would perish by

the death sentence, if the laws of Israel were to ever be applied as criminal law throughout the world. The Great Commission would be rendered a dead letter.

The Scriptures do not teach that the punishments attached to the Mosaic laws were God's and permanently appointed punishments for the crimes mentioned. They were simply the punishments which God chose for the children of Israel at that time. We must not forget that full justice is meted out to sinners on the day of judgement, and any punishments prescribed on earth can never fully fit the crime. Nowhere in the New Testament is there the slightest hint of an ancient Israelite punishment being applied in the church. The punishments of the Mosaic code were quite clearly designed to keep that particular community as pure as possible in view of its special calling.

Thirdly, the Mosaic laws are not suitable as the basis of general law international because many were framed primarily to teach a principle. The particular act to be performed was often a prescribed chiefly because it conveyed a religious lesson to the people. The obvious and oft-quoted example is the law "Though shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deuteronomy 25:4). Paul shows the real purpose of this law when he applies it to the support of preachers and evangelists in I Corinthians 9:9-10: "Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written..." The ancient Israelites kept that particular law, and, as they did so, they learned a vital principle "that the labourer is worthy of his hire". God taught them the principle at its very lowest level of application so that they would say to themselves, "If we must have regard for the oxen, how much more must we take care to provide for our servants, and how much more still those who minister spiritual things."

Our examples of sundry laws which taught an underlying principle are to be seen in the command to place a balustrade around the flat roof of a house; the command not to sow different varieties of seed in a field; the command not to cross-breed cattle; and the command not to make garments of mixed materials (Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 22). Taken at a literal level, these commands do not show the mind of God with regard to roof design, clothing, etc. In the case of the mixing laws the people were taught the importance of separation, and that things of entire different moral or spiritual character should not be mingled together. The lessons being taught

were, for example, “do not try to serve God and mammon”, and at the same time do not mix the worship of Jehovah with idolatry.

We are taught by Paul that everything which happened to the Israelites “happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (I Corinthians 10:11). Ultimately, God designed all the Mosaic laws, not only to teach the Israelites, but also to teach believers in the Gospel age.

Fourthly, the diverse laws of Israel were not suitable for the practical regulation of secular nations because they included in their scope a message or sermon from God. They were partly intended to be a standard of righteousness unattainable by sinful human beings, in order to discourage and dismay their pride and self confidence. Let us not forget that these sundry laws were given as part of a package which, if perfectly observed by the people as a whole, would have secured the rewards of righteousness for their nation—but this proved utterly impossible. The law—including the so-called ceremonial and the sundry laws—was designed to drive the Jews to the message of grace, which was linked alongside it. Many sundry laws, taken individually were most reasonable and observable, but taken as a whole they demanded a standard of behaviour far above the capability of unregenerate people.

Paul had in mind the entire law, including the ceremonial and sundry laws, when he said Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ...But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24-25). Reconstructionists fail to grasp that the ancient law could never be a practical ideal for all nations, but only a daunting reminder of the unattainable heights of justification by works.

This is clear from Leviticus 18:4-5, which is given in the context of the sundry laws: Ye shall do my judgements, and keep mind ordinances...which if a man do, he shall live in them [i.e.: a man while live if he does them]. This is quoted by Paul in Romans 10:5 The man which doeth those things shall live by them.

It is important to note that God Himself, exercising the prerogative of mercy, did not enforce either immediately or rigorously the prescribed punishments of the ancient law. Special and terrible punishments which would be directly administered by God were announced in

Leviticus 26:14-41 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68. God, however, made allowances for the sinfulness of the people throughout their history, and constantly delayed and deferred the punishment of destruction which had been announced at Sinai for their disobedience.

In Ezekiel 20:11 and 13-14 the prophet makes this very same point: “I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgements, which if a man do, he shall even live in them....But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness...and they despised my judgements...then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought [acted] for my name’s sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen.... Then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name’s sake...”

Here we see reflected again the mercy of God in postponing judgement to the final day, rather than instantly imposing the penalties of which they had been warned. In Nehemiah 9:21-31 the forbearance of God over many years is again recorded. Why did the Lord so often withhold due punishment, and show mercy? Because His conduct towards them in the Law Age was a message, teaching them that mercy and pardon flow freely from the heart of Almighty God, and that salvation is by grace alone and not by works. Reconstructionist writers entirely fail to see the message element in the laws of the Jews, and in the oft-suspended divine punishment. The civil law-code of Israel, therefore, was partly a sermon or message about the impossibility of justification by works, rather than a practical civil code for all the nations of the world.

Reference has already been made to the doctrinal position of the Westminster and Baptist Confessions. What better than to conclude this chapter with some of their proof texts, confirming the passing of the literal provisions of the sundry laws of the national covenant established through Moses.

The passing of this national law-system at the coming of Christ is anticipated in Genesis 49:10 where God gave a prophetic word to Jacob: The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. The passing of the national law-systems is confirmed by Paul in Ephesians 2:5, when he speaks of its removal at the inauguration of the multinational church of Christ: Having

abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make himself of twain one new man, so making peace. What ordinances did Paul have in mind? Which laws were abolished? Without doubt he refers to both the ceremonial laws and the so-called sundry laws of Exodus 21-23 and elsewhere.

The Greek word in Ephesians 2:15, which is translated “abolished”, literally means: having brought down to inactivity, or having made utterly useless, idle or void. Paul would never have said this about the moral law expressed in the ten commandments. Indeed he says the opposite when he has in mind only the moral aspects of the law. In Romans 3:31, he declares: Do we then made void [the same Greek verb as above] the law through faith? God forbid. However, when he has in mind the Jewish law-code in its entirety, including ceremonial and sundry laws, he unhesitatingly speaks of it being reduced to inactivity, or being made void.

The Word of God is therefore clear in its teaching that the sundry laws, along with the ceremonial laws, are now abolished or void in the form that they were given to the Jews of old. The principles which underlie them live on for the Lord’s people. But as far as literal obedience is concerned, they are rendered inactive, and no longer in force for the Lord’s people, they are certainly not intended to serve as the civil and criminal code for the secular world.

The Church Not to Run the World

Reconstructionist writers all scorn the attitude of traditional evangelicals who see the church as being distinct and separate from the world, and who seek no authority over the affairs of the world. These writers should take careful note of the words of Paul in I Corinthians 5:12-13: For what have I do judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. God is especially concerned with His people. He will not give His kingdom to the world nor will He give the world to His kingdom to the world nor God is the church, small as it may sometimes appear, not the world. The Lord said: Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

The world is, of course, under the moral law and the judgement of God, but it is not the work of God’s people to administer the law. God has ordained civil magistrates, and put it into

the hearts of human beings to desire and to accept their rule. Romans 13:1-7 is Paul's great statement of the state's responsibility to administer justice, and also on the Christian's responsibility to obey, and also to pay the taxes demanded. In I Peter 2:13-14 we are similarly exhorted to obey the laws of the state (without chafing, or desiring to replace them with the laws of Moses): "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well."

It is interesting to note that the Mosaic law (held up by reconstructionists as the perfect model for world government) had no taxation, only freewill offerings. Taxes for general purposes came in with Solomon's twelve taxation districts, his value added tax on trading caravans, and the imposition of compulsory unpaid labour for the crown. The Saviour—our perfect example and pattern—paid the tax required by the secular state (in Matthew 17:24-27), and the apostle Paul commanded the payment of taxes. Neither attempted to do what Dr. Bahnsen insists is our Christian duty to persuade the secular to adopt and enforce the Mosaic code of criminal and civil law. The New Testament churches mount no political campaigns for social or political dominion. Paul whose example is normative for us to imitate commanded obedience to the secular state even though he lived and moved in morally decadent and largely pagan territories.

The Lord Jesus Christ made it abundantly clear in His great prayer of John 17 that we are not of this world. He taught His disciples in John 15:18-21 that the world would hate and persecute them. Through the Book of Revelation we are shown the constant antagonism of this godless world to the true church of the Saviour. Where is the secular dominion of which the reconstructionists speak?

Reconstructionism is proving to be powerfully captivating to numbers of Christians, and also highly damaging to their New Testament perspective. Where it takes roots it seems to upstage evangelism and preoccupy its devotees with endless discussion of social, economic, educational and political theories. In many cases it leads in a subtle way to rampant worldliness.

(After all, if Christians are commissioned to take dominion over the arts, and so on, they had better start by participating in them and enjoying them.)

Where Christians have previously attempted to construct even a very limited Christian society their efforts have been sadly frustrated. Whether the sought-after society was Genevan, American-Puritan, Kuperian or simply the latter-day efforts of the American Moral Majority, the fruit has always either been negligible or short-lived. None of these campaigns envisaged anything more than a limited, regional Christian community, but even so, success eluded them. It is now said that all the enthusiasm, power and dollars of the Moral Majority failed to secure one single significant piece of moral legislation in the United States.

None of this, however dampens the ambition or optimism of reconstructionists. Their programme is infinitely more bold and far-reaching than anything considered before, and their confidence is seemingly boundless.

Reconstructionism has already won admirers in the United Kingdom, which is perhaps not surprising with so much reformed romanticism about. Friends who experience little immediate blessing, but who rest entirely on a hoped-for revival, seem to be especially vulnerable to a movement which promises the earth, as well as heavenly blessings in the future. (To some, social dominion has become almost the due payment of a debt; fair compensation for enduring a long day of small things.) Where practical, zealous evangelism had been abandoned, leading to loss of blessing, and frustration, triumphalistic heresies such as reconstructionism offer a new significance and standing to enfeebled Christians. The trouble is that the goal it holds out is both fleshly and delusory. And the cost of attempting this foolish goal is a lifetime's labouring for the wind. May the Lord's servants remain wholly dedicated to the work of the Gospel, and avoid being drawn into an unbiblical and unhealthy interest in the social reconstruction of a doomed world.

The stark fact remains that the dominion of the world, massive aim as it is, is nowhere on the agenda of the New Testament for the servants of Christ. The apostle Paul's words must surely stand as the final sentence on the matter: "No man that warreth entangleth himself with

the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (II Timothy 2:4).