

# What is Christian Reconstruction: is it a blueprint for the future of church & culture?

by David Orton

<http://lifemessenger.org/christian-reconstruction/>

*Coventry Cathedral, November 14, 1940*

The Christian Reconstruction movement emerged in the USA during the 1960's-80's, exercising influence primarily across the Reformed Calvinistic streams of Protestant evangelicalism, but also significant sectors of the Charismatic movement. Through the writings of Rousas Rushdoony, Gary North, and Greg Bahnsen, among others, it was a strategic influence in the rise of the conservative Christian voice in politics and Christian education, countering the increase of secular humanism's statist claims. Its impact in American politics was significant and with a global reach.

Nonetheless, while the prime movers were influential figures, it was never a centrally controlled movement. Catalysed by the post-war social foment of moral relativism, intellectual schizophrenia, and theological liberalism, it was rather a spontaneous explosion of belief in the supernatural God of the Bible who is sovereign over the totality of human existence and who has a plan for the prosperity of the planet. It advanced the belief that the Gospel not only redeems individuals but also whole cultures. It provided an intellectually coherent worldview for both conservatives and counterculturals committed to the quest for a transformed world. And, moreover, it provided the blueprints for the reconstruction of a new global Christian civilisation.

This writer was exposed to the teachings of the movement in the late 1970's through an association with [W. J. Ern Baxter](#) who had developed a relationship with [Rousas Rushdoony](#). Consequently, through publishing and various strategic conferences during the 1980's there was cross-pollination of Reconstruction emphasises with the Shepherding and Charismatic movements.

As with all reforming movements, Reconstruction was accompanied by theological controversy as various camps within the Reformed stream of evangelicalism resisted it. The movement provoked the question of the applicability of Israel's moral and civil law to contemporary society.

Nonetheless, as this writer has weighed the situation of the Western church and larger culture the more he was persuaded that Reconstruction had answers. But, like many, still had reservations around the death penalty, approach to the law, and the potential for a religious tyranny. So, while their writings had been appreciated from the late 1970's through 80's, he'd not drilled down to a full understanding of their whole theological project. So, that's where we've been for the last several years.

The result is that questions were answered and concerns allayed. We have come away with a far fuller appreciation of that project and an absolute conviction that they were on track and that it provides the best hope for the church and the world, for reasons that will be explained.

## Reconstruction & Covenant Theology

*First, covenant theology* provides the Bible's own hermeneutic. That there is essentially only one covenant but with various administrations, reflects the unity of God and the fact of progressive revelation; God is not conflicted within himself—he has one will, one mind, and one purpose, and so the various covenants progressively reveal God's purpose from Adam to Christ. There is no conflict between Moses and Christ. As Galatians 3 & 4 teaches, Abraham (promise) was not in conflict with Moses (law), in fact the law, Paul explains, was an "addition" to Abraham; thus Gospel (Abraham) and Law (Moses) are not conflicted.

Moreover, the covenant provides the constitution for the kingdom, especially as seen in the 5-fold covenant structure as discovered by Meredith Kline but then fleshed out by Ray Sutton in "That You May Prosper" and also utilised by David Chilton in "Days of Vengeance". Every covenant has both *stipulations* (commands) and *sanctions* (consequences). This means God's covenant with man always has commands/laws (ethics). This is crucial for our understanding of the relationship of Law and Gospel. The Gospel to the Gentiles (nations) contains God's laws, i.e. laws not only for the Christian personally, but also for the church and society (as taught by Calvin, Westminster Confession, & Luther).

The law-word of Christ the King rules over the totality of human existence: regenerate and unregenerate. The Kingdom of God (God's sovereignty) destroys all forms of dualism (separation and/or hierarchy of spirit & matter, secular & sacred)—the whole of life is holy unto the Lord, including the civil state and its laws.

Suggested reading:

Jl Packer, *An Introduction to Covenant Theology*; O Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*; R Campbell, *Israel & the New Covenant*; Gundry, *Five Views on Law & Gospel* (Bahnsen chapters); R Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*.

### Reconstruction & Eschatology

*Second*, an **eschatology of victory** (postmillennialism) provides the most hermeneutically sound approach to end things. It supplies a kingdom philosophy of history, Psa 110 being the key, with the Kingdom of God inaugurated in the ascension of Christ, progressively increasing in history until all his enemies are subdued.

Integral to this is understanding prophecy preteristically (fulfilled), i.e. the Olivet discourse and prophecy of Mtt 24 was fulfilled in the Fall of Jerusalem (AD 70), signaling the end of the Old Covenant era (not the end of the world) and the beginning of the New Covenant era with Christ's *ecclesia* as the Israel of God in which there is neither Jew nor Greek. Rather than futuristic prophecy's expectation of cataclysm, judgements, defeat, and apostasy as the anti-climax of history, we now have a climax for history in the victory of the Kingdom of God, fulfilling the Dominion Mandate (Gen 1:26-28) in obedience to the Great Commission (Mtt 28:18-20) to disciple nations (cultures) teaching them all that Christ **commanded** (thus **Law & Gospel**)—a transformed world.

This provides a philosophy of history (motivation) that promotes the preaching/teaching of the Gospel and cultural reconstruction (dominion/cultural mandate).

While a postmillennial eschatology is the most coherent view, it is not mandatory for holding a theonomic and reconstructionist view.

Suggested reading:

M Kik, *Eschatology of Victory*; K Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion* (magisterial: the most comprehensive biblical explication of Postmillennialism available); *The Beast of Revelation*; RJ Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*; *The Biblical Philosophy of History*; I Murray, *The Puritan Hope*; D Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion*; *The Great Tribulation*; *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*.

### Reconstruction & Theonomy

*Third*, **Theonomy and Reconstruction** (properly understood) is the logical next step from **Van Til's 2-fold contribution**: the transcendental apologetic (presuppositionalism) and antithesis. While their project was necessarily grounded in classical Calvinism and covenant theology, it was Van Til that provided the engine for the vehicle.

Grounded in God's absolute sovereignty, his emphasis on the antithesis between *Autonomy* (self law) v *Theonomy* (God's law) was groundbreaking. This is the nub of humankind's fall in the Garden (Gen 3). Instead of humbling himself under God's verbal communication (command), man instead presumptuously stood in judgement over it, determining for himself its truthfulness weighing two hypotheses (God's communication v Satan's lie), consequently choosing Satan's lie.

Man thus supplants God and becomes a would-be god, determining his own reality by "divine" fiat: it's true because I say so (i.e. arbitrary argumentation). Thus the supposed neutrality of autonomous *Reason* replaces divine *Revelation* for man's epistemological source: "...and they became futile in their thinking ... Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:21-22). This antithesis then demonstrates the source of humanistic law as arbitrary, irrational, and anti-God. It consequently plays out in man's social relationships and thus into society and ultimately the laws of the civil state: the current case in point, Same-Sex Marriage.

The original antithesis of the Garden reiterates in all humanistic societies: Babylon, Classical Antiquity, and Renaissance-

Enlightenment Humanism through into the 21st Century. It is the battle of the early Christians between Christ and Caesar—between the sovereignty (ultimacy) of the state versus the sovereignty of Christ as the King of kings. Law (as the expression of sovereignty) is integral to this continuing battle.

Suggested reading:

G Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (the seminal book); *By This Standard*; *Van Til's Apologetic* (for the serious student); *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (various authors: refutation of accusations & arguments against); G North & G DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction: What it is, What it isn't*; RJ Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*; *Sovereignty*; *The Foundations of Social Order*.

Now, how do these things play out?

*First*, the prime movers of Reconstruction were unanimously clear that social change comes through *regeneration not revolution*. It was never salvation through politics. The preaching of the Gospel (in all its fullness) and evangelism remain foundational.

*Second*, therefore, Theonomy (the rule of God's law) is not enforced through a top down political order. God's government begins in the *individual*, flowing through to the *family*, to the *church*, and finally to the *state*. These four are the covenantal spheres that constitute God's plan for a "pluralistic" society where government is not held by any one institution. There is a principle of kingdom increase and progression of *internal integrity leading to external integration* of each sphere (individual > family > church > state), ensuring that when it comes to the state there is not a violent takeover.

Each of these spheres is sovereign under God. If one presides over another, a tyranny results (e.g. an individual within the family can tyrannise it, or vice versa; a family over a church, or vice versa; and the church over the state, or vice versa). Thus, Theonomy is not an *ecclesiocracy*, the rule of the church or its clerics over the state.

*Third*, the death penalty (and the whole biblical penology, including restitution) will only be introduced because of a regenerated society that cries out for true justice (postmillennial eschatology guarantees this: Isa 2:2-4); although this does not demand a majority, but merely a *critical mass* for social change to occur.

Enforcing *full* biblical law on a rebellious anarchic society will not work. This is not to say that the church should not teach biblical justice and righteousness (i.e. the Gospel). Nor is it to deny the role of the law in curbing sin (1 Tim 1:8-11). The *church's role is educative*, but with the surety that ultimately *the Word will do the Work!* (Mtt 28:18-20; 1 Ths 2:13). We have numerous precedents in history—the original evangelisation and Christianisation of Europe for one!

Applying the full equity of biblical law and justice in the contemporary situation will always demand the engagement of the whole church as the "interpretive community", great sensitivity to the contemporary context, and great wisdom from the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, the *state's role is punitive*, judicially enforcing God's justice on the wrongdoer (Rom 13:1-7).

Concluding Thoughts

The reconstruction of culture presupposes the reformation of the church. How can a divided and apostate church ever attract the imprimatur of God? And how, in its present condition, will it fulfill its destiny of world transformation?

Unless church reformation is combined with cultural reconstruction, our attempts to speak into the culture will be void and vacuous, a clanging cymbal, lacking spiritual authority and authenticity. Jesus prayed,

*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

John 17:21.

Clearly, the most evangelistic and prophetic action that we can take is to pursue the relational and spiritual unity of Christ's body, the church. And this will demand that we *maintain* the unity of the Spirit until we *attain* the unity of the faith (Eph 4:3,

13). Our unity in "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) – that is, the apostolic body of truth – will only be attained through intimacy with the One who is the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, and who has promised to lead us into all truth (Jn 15:26; 16:13).

For this to occur we must hold in balanced tension the Word and the Spirit. Overemphasis either way is sadly reflected in the historic divide between the *Evangelical/Reformed* movement and the *Pentecostal/Charismatic* movement. The marriage of charismatic experience (Holy Spirit) and historic orthodoxy (Word) is foundational to the movement of God in history, and thus, strategic for the completion of God's 'earth-purpose'.

This will demand repentance for our idolatrous values and belief systems—our pride, our tribalism, and the false theologies that divide us.

Today is the day of salvation!

Let us humble ourselves under God's mighty hand that in due time he will exalt us to the corporate destiny of Christ's body in the earth.

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Print friendly pdf: [What is Christian Reconstruction?](#)

For a statement of church reformation: [A Statement Concerning the City Church](#)

Several of the books listed are available for free in pdf format on [Gary North's website](#).

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