

THE CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Reconstruction Movement, also referred to as “Dominion Theology” and/or “Theonomy,” is rooted in a postmillennial view of Covenant Theology. Most of the main leaders in the Christian Reconstruction Movement come from the covenant-oriented Presbyterian Reformed tradition.¹ Its development can be traced back to R. J. Rushdoony who was a Reformed theologian and political activist. Rushdoony believed that God calls on all Christians to “take dominion” over all spheres of human life. He founded the Chalcedon Foundation in 1965 which was a small Christian think tank that promoted his theocratic vision of a world. Many leaders among the covenant-oriented, postmillennial Pentecostal Charismatics,² have been closely identified with the Christian reconstruction movement. Since 1965, the Christian Reconstruction Movement has been on the rise until it has deeply influenced many others who may not identify themselves with the movement though they propagate some of its teaching.³

The Christian Reconstruction Movement is sound in many basic doctrinal matters such as the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, and the resurrection of Christ. The problem is with those features which distinguish this movement.⁴ This paper attempts to clarify problematic areas of doctrine within the Christian Reconstruction Movement.

1. NONLITERAL HERMENEUTIC

Christian Reconstruction Movement — Most Christian Reconstruction Movement teachers use a nonliteral, “preterist” hermeneutic believing “that most of all Bible prophecy has already been fulfilled in Christ and the ongoing expansion of His Kingdom.” Christ’s coming (in Matthew 24) was “in some sense in connection with the fall of Jerusalem at 70 A.D... Christ’s Kingdom is here now. Paradise has been restored in Christ (spiritually speaking). We live in the garden of Eden now (if we are in Christ)... Christ has conquered all His enemies and has given us the Kingdom.”⁵ “The Bible does not tell of any future plan for Israel as a special nation.”⁶ “In destroying Israel, Christ transferred the blessing of

¹ These scholarly leaders include R. J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North, David Chilton, Gary DeMar, George Grant and Kenneth Gentry.

² It is quite prevalent among the Manifest Sons of God or Latter Rain Charismatics, “positive-confession” teachers, the Vineyard and Signs and Wonders movement, the “Restoration” movement and the “Kingdom Now” people.

³ These would include Francis and Franky Schaeffer, Pat Robertson, D. James Kennedy, and groups like the Mayflower Institute, that are pushing for a return to an American government more like the “Biblical Republic” attempted by the Puritan founders of the USA. Other groups that have been influenced by the Christian Reconstruction Movement include the Coalition On Revival, the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, the home-school movement, the World Christian movement and modern missions.

⁴ Three notes: 1) Some Christian Reconstruction Movement features included in this paper would be held by most Covenant Reformed people. 2) Christian Reconstruction Movement followers differ considerably among themselves on many of the details, most of which are not discussed in this paper. 3) Christian Reconstruction Movement positions in this paper are mostly stated in brief quotes from writers identified with the movement.

⁵ From “What is the Preterist View?” G.O.A.L. Reference Library, See <http://www.melvig.org/mel/preterism.html>

⁶ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: An Eschatology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Reconstruction Press, 1985), 224.

the Kingdom from Israel to the new people, the church.”⁷ “The present age is... the kingdom age, promised in the OT prophecies. The Church is spiritual Israel... Christ is currently ruling and reigning in the affairs of men from heaven... “⁸ “The Book of Revelation is not about the Second Coming of Christ. It is about the destruction of Israel and Christ’s victory over His enemies...”⁹

Dispensational Interpretation — Traditional Dispensationalists accept a more literal,¹⁰ “futurist” hermeneutic and interpret hundreds of biblical verses as referring to future events such as Israel’s complete restoration, the Tribulation, the 2nd Coming and the Millennial Kingdom. By taking numerous biblical prophecies¹¹ literally, rather than figuratively, dispensationalists understand that both the Church and national Israel are distinct entities with distinct futures in God’s plan.

2. POSTMILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY

Christian Reconstruction Movement — “A Christian Reconstructionist is a Postmillennialist. He believes Christ will return to earth only after the Holy Spirit has empowered the church to advance Christ’s kingdom in time and history. He has faith that God’s purposes to bring all nations, though not every individual, in subjection to Christ cannot fail... He does not believe the kingdom will advance quickly or painlessly... But he believes the faith will triumph.”¹² “The gospel... shall convert the vast majority of the world to Christ and bring widespread obedience to His kingdom rule.”¹³ “As the gospel progresses throughout the world it will win, and win, and win, until all kingdoms become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.”¹⁴ Some would express it this way: The Kingdom is “established *definitively* in the finished work of Christ,... (and) *progressively* throughout history until it is established *finally* on the Last Day.”¹⁵

Dispensational Eschatology — At His first coming, Christ was rejected by Israel as their King. But, after the 7-year tribulation period, He shall return with His saints to set up His glorious, Millennial Kingdom and literally fulfill all those unfulfilled prophecies having to do with that event. His Second Coming will thus be Premillennial.¹⁶ Although Jesus Christ is the believer’s Savior, Lord and King, He has not yet returned to the earth for this purpose

⁷ Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1988), 218. [Referred to as Replacement Theology]

⁸ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “Searching Scripture,” *The Counsel of Chalcedon*, March 1982, 15.

⁹ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 43.

¹⁰ By “literal” is meant interpreting God’s Word contextually in the normal, historical, grammatical sense of language usage.

¹¹ Deut. 30:3-10; Isa. 1:26; 2:1-4; 9:7; 10:20-22; Jer. 23:3-8; 30:3-17; 31:31-37; 33:14-16; Zech. 12:10; Mt. 19:28; Rom. 9:26.

¹² Rev. Andrew Sandlin (VP of CF); “The Creed of Christian Reconstruction,” (The Chalcedon Foundation, 1999). <http://www.chalcedon.edu/creed.html>

¹³ Greg Bahnsen, “The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism, 68.

¹⁴ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 192.

¹⁵ Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1988), 49.

¹⁶ See the Biblical Resource paper on The Second Coming of Christ.

of reigning over His Kingdom with His saints.

3. THE DOMINION MANDATE

Christian Reconstruction Movement — “A Christian Reconstructionist is a Dominionist. He takes seriously the Bible’s command to the godly to take dominion in the earth.”¹⁷ “Christianity is destined to take over all the kingdoms of the earth. God has given His people a ‘covenant grant’ to take possession and exercise dominion over His creation.”¹⁸ “The cultural mandate is thus the obligation of covenant man to subdue the earth and to exercise dominion over it under God (Gen. 1:26-28) ... All enemies of Christ in this fallen world must be conquered.”¹⁹ “God’s assignment to man to exercise dominion across the face of the earth is still in force... God is in charge, waiting for His people to challenge the rulers of the earth and take the steering wheel from them... The battle for the earth is still going on.”²⁰

The Biblical Mandate — The concept of “dominion” in Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalms 8:6-8 has to do with mankind’s rule over the earth and all its animal life and other resources. All mankind has a stewardship responsibility for ruling over the resources God has graciously given us. During the Millennium, Christ with His saints will exercise dominion over men and nations. But the time for such dominion is not during this present Church age (Matt. 20:25-28).

4. THE GREAT COMMISSION AND EVANGELISM

Christian Reconstruction Movement — The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 to the Church “does not end with simply witnessing to the nations. Christ’s command is that we disciple the nations — all the nations. The kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of Christ. They are to be discipled, made obedient to the faith. This means that every aspect of life throughout the world is to be brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ: families, individuals, business, science, agriculture, the arts, law, education, economics, psychology, philosophy, and every other sphere of human activity.”²¹ “He did NOT tell us to go out and ‘make SOME disciples of all the nations’ ... but rather He said to ‘make ALL NATIONS disciples’ which is quite another thing!”²² “We have been given the responsibility of converting the entire world... He (God) has committed to us the gospel of the kingdom, and commissioned us to take over the world.”²³ “Our evangelism must include sociology as well as salvation; it must include reform and redemption, culture and conversion, a new social order as well as a new birth, a revolution as well as a regeneration. Any other kind of evangelism is shortsighted and woefully impotent. Any other kind of evangelism fails to live up to the high call of the Great Commission.”²⁴

¹⁷ Rev. Andrew Sandlin, “The Creed of Christian Reconstruction.”

¹⁸ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 462.

¹⁹ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), 724.

²⁰ Gary North, *Liberating Planet Earth*, (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 23-24.

²¹ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 213.

²² Raymond P. Joseph, “Kingdom Victory: The Historical Aspect,” *The Counsel of Chalcedon*, August 1982, 22.

²³ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 213, 219.

²⁴ George Grant, *Bringing in the Sheaves* (Atlanta: American Vision Press, 1985), 70 (150).

The Biblical Great Commission — Jesus commissioned His followers to disciple and baptize individuals, not nations. Through the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is “calling out” from the nations those who make up the Bride of Christ or the Church.²⁵ Since the coming of the Holy Spirit, believers have authority, not to have dominion over other people, but to bear witness to all people worldwide (Acts 1:8). The responsibility of believers in the Church in this dispensation is not to Christianize or convert the world (through dominion over men and institutions) but to evangelize the world (through propagation of the Gospel). Believers have the responsibility to baptize and disciple those who place faith in Christ²⁶ with the goal of spiritual multiplication (Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 2:2). Care must be taken not to be sidetracked by Christian Reconstruction Movement mission motivation. The believer’s mission is church-planting, not “kingdom-building.”²⁷

5. THEONOMY AND THE MOSAIC LAW

Christian Reconstruction Movement — “A Christian Reconstructionist is a Theonomist. Theonomy means ‘God’s law.’ A Christian Reconstructionist believes God’s law is found in the Bible. It has not been abolished as a standard of righteousness.”²⁸ “What the Church needs to point to is real answers for society... We must view the law given to Moses and the prophets as the revealed will of God for men of all ages. Our culture needs Christian reconstruction, but we can only supply it if we look to God and His Law-Word as God’s eternal will for man and his culture.”²⁹ “The New Testament teaches us that — unless exceptions are revealed elsewhere — every Old Testament commandment is binding, even as the standard of justice for all magistrates (Rom. 13:1-4), including every recompense stipulated for civil offenses in the law of Moses (Heb. 2:2)”³⁰ Man “grows in grace as he grows in law-keeping, for the law is the way of sanctification.”³¹

The Mosaic Law Biblically Defined — All “biblical law” is not the same. Dispensational distinctions must be recognized between God’s rule of law in different economies based on different covenants. Only those parties to a given covenant were under obligation to obey the specific requirements of that covenant. God gave perpetual laws, including “moral laws,” written in their hearts through conscience, to all mankind and nations through His Covenant with Noah.³² Because Abraham obeyed and kept God’s laws,³³ he was given

²⁵ The “Ecclesia” is “the ones called-out” from this “present evil world.”

²⁶Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8.

²⁷ Ralph D. Winter, the director of the U. S. Center for World Missions, typifies a misguided view of missions which is colored by the Christian Reconstruction Movement. He wrote: “Indeed, missions is essentially the restoration of God’s kingdom and rule and power on this earth. It involves the reestablishment of His glory, of His honor, of His control of things... We must realize that stopping evil wherever it is found is part of that mission.” (Ralph D. Winter, “Reflections on World Missions,” *Mission Frontiers*, May 18, 1998).

²⁸ Rev. Andrew Sandlin, “The Creed of Christian Reconstruction.”

²⁹ R. J. Rushdoony, “Against Much Praying,” *Chalcedon Report*, November 1987, 15.

³⁰ Greg Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, (Tyler TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 68.

³¹ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 3-4, 12.

³² This was a renewal of His Covenant with Adam. (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:14-19; 8:20-9:17).

³³ Gen. 26:5. The Abrahamic Covenant was a typical “Royal Grant” treaty where certain blessings are promised and given unconditionally as a reward for obedience. The sign of the Covenant was male circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14).

unique promises expressed in the Abrahamic Covenant.³⁴ At Sinai, through Moses, God made a covenant³⁵ with the nation of Israel nation, a covenant which included numerous laws only given to Israel and no other nation.³⁶ Neither Gentiles nor the Church has ever been obligated to live in obedience to the law of Moses either as a rule of life or as a means for godly living and progressive sanctification. The temporary Mosaic law for Israel has been terminated.³⁷ Believers are not under law³⁸ but under grace as a rule of life.

6. RECONSTRUCTIONISM

Christian Reconstruction Movement — “The Christian Reconstructionist believes the earth and all its fullness is the Lord’s: that every area dominated by sin must be ‘reconstructed’ in terms of the Bible. This includes, first, the individual; second, the family; third the church; and fourth, the wider society, including the state. The Christian Reconstructionist therefore believes fervently in Christian civilization.”³⁹ Matthew 5:13-16 “is nothing less than a mandate for the complete social transformation of the entire world... The center of Christian reconstruction is the church... Our goal is world dominion under Christ’s Lordship, a ‘world takeover’ if you will; but our strategy begins with reformation, reconstruction of the church. From that will flow social and political reconstruction...”⁴⁰

A Biblical View of Reconstructionism — Obviously, there is a need in the world for spiritual, social and political reconstruction. And this need for reconstruction will only increase with time. Nevertheless, the world will continue to deteriorate. This is true because “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:19 NIV) who is “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). For this reason, “evil men shall become worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13) until “all the world” of unbelievers shall worship the dragon and the beast who blasphemes God (Rev. 13). It is therefore no wonder that believers have been promised the hatred and persecution of the world⁴¹ during this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). And this is why believers are admonished to live “righteously, and godly, in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12-13). The “reconstruction” needed will surely happen, but not until Christ Himself comes again to establish His glorious millennial Kingdom.

³⁴ This Covenant is unilateral and unconditional, based on God’s “I wills” (Gen. 12:2-3; 13:14-16; 15:18; 17:1-19; 22:15-18).

³⁵ Ex. 9:5-8. This Mosaic Covenant was a typical “Suzerain-vassal” treaty involving conditional blessings for obedience and cursing for disobedience. The Sabbath was a sign of the Covenant (Ex. 31:12-17) between God and Israel.

³⁶ Deut. 4:5-8; 5:2-3; 33:4; Ps. 147:19-20; Acts 7:53; Eph. 2:11-13; Rom. 2:14; 3:2; 9:4-5.

³⁷ 2 Cor. 3:11; Gal. 3:19-25; 4:9; 5:1; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:14-17; Heb. 7:11-19; 8:13; 10:9.

³⁸ Gal. 3:23-25; 4:21ff; 5:18; Rom. 6:14; The biblical position is not antinomian. But the Bible teaches clearly that the Church is neither under the law of Moses nor “law” as a principle. The believer’s responsibility is to live in obedience to God’s universal “moral laws” which have never changed, to recognize the law of love (Jn. 14:21; 1 Jn. 3:23,24; 4:7-12; Rom. 13:8-10) and to gladly be accountable to the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). There are also some 800+ imperatives in the New Testament, and many, if not most, are addressed to believers in the Church.

³⁹ Rev. Andrew Sandlin, “The Creed of Christian Reconstruction.”

⁴⁰ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 12, 213.

⁴¹ Jn. 15:18-20; 16:33; 17:14-16; Matt. 24:9; 2 Tim. 3:12.

Believers should be encouraged, as lights in a dark world, to stand for the Truth wherever God places them. Christians are IN the world. God has left believers here for a purpose. Christians relate with other people, including the ungodly with a desire to influence them to trust in the Savior and live to please and serve Him. Christians do this in the context of various social and political functions in which God has given them some involvement. But reconstructionism is neither the focus nor goal of the earthly efforts of believers in the Church. The believer's real citizenship is in Heaven. Believers are not OF the world. Believers are only a minority of pilgrims who are strangers, just passing through and increasingly feeling less at home here as affections are set on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:2).

CONCLUSION

Beliefs regarding these issues in hermeneutics, eschatology, dominion, evangelism, theonomy, and reconstructionism can make an enormous difference in a believer's Christian life. Christian reconstruction movement's nonliteral hermeneutic leads to eschatological confusion, especially regarding Israel's future restoration and the believer's "blessed hope" of the imminent rapture of the Church. Any theonomic commitment to the Mosaic law imposes on all people a "yoke of bondage" (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1) which no Jewish person could bear, and which only served a temporary economy for the nation of Israel "till the seed should come" (Gal. 3:19). The Christian reconstruction movement's view of the dominion mandate and the great commission lays an impossible burden on the Church to reconstruct the world, a monumental task which can and will only be accomplished by the Lord Jesus Himself.

The goals of the Christian Reconstruction Movement put such a high priority on sociopolitical activism that actual time for evangelizing the lost is diminished. Christian reconstruction movement's "optimism" is only a dream that will never be realized during Church history. The Church is not to be discouraged as worldly cultures continue in their downward spiral of moral corruption and violence which will climax during the 7 years of tribulation. At the world's worst hour Jesus Christ, the victorious conquering King of Kings will come to rescue and restore the nation of Israel and demonstrate His sovereign power by crushing all the forces of Satan. Satan will be bound, and Christ will begin His righteous 1000-year reign. Then, the reconstruction needed will gloriously take place to the glory of God!

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

BOOKS

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- Albert J. Dager, *Vengeance Is Ours: The Church in Dominion*, (Redmond, WA: Sword, 1990).
- Wayne House, and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse, an Analysis of Christian Reconstructionism*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1988).
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