

# **THE DEBATE OVER CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION**

**Gary DeMar**

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**To Dr. Steven F. Hotze**

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## FOREWORD

by Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen

The recent “debate” over Christian Reconstruction has been going on for over ten years now. The debate in contemporary Christian circles could actually be pushed back to the early 1970s, with the publication or general recognition of certain probing theological works by R. J. Rushdoony. (Of course, to the extent that Reconstructionist theology is true to God’s Word, the debate has been carried on throughout redemptive history, since the time of the fall!) The active and open criticism of Reconstructionist distinctives as such, however, surfaced about a year following the publication of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977) – and ironically, surfaced within the context of that theological tradition which has given historical impetus to the Reconstructionist perspective: the circles of Presbyterian and Puritan conviction. The school of thought, however, which most conspicuously and naturally stands opposed to Reconstructionist theology is dispensationalism.

Reconstructionism contradicts the dispensationalist view of the Old Testament (which emphasizes discontinuity with Old Testament ethics) as well as the dispensationalist view of the millennium (which emphasizes discontinuity with the present church age). Therefore, dispensationalism most clearly and diametrically opposes Reconstructionist distinctive. The first public debate between a Reconstructionist and a dispensationalist took place at the annual Evangelical Theological Society meeting, held in Toronto in 1981.<sup>1</sup>

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1. “The Bahnsen-Feinberg Debate.” Available from Covenant Tape Ministry, Box 4134, Reno, Nevada 89510, tape #00340.

This was an important and insightful interchange between two trained theologians. But I believe that the debate held seven years later, which is the subject of this book, may prove to be more significant, both because the issues are self-consciously becoming more clear today and because of the broader audience and appeal of the most recent debate.

Of the many pastors and teachers who are publishing materials written from a “Reconstructionist” perspective today, our finest author is, in my opinion, Gary DeMar. His books and articles are clearly written, soundly researched, and politely expressed. For these reasons Mr. DeMar’s publications have proven to be the most helpful summaries of Reconstructionist thought we can offer to those willing to learn about the position. He pursues cogent theological polemics, rather than creative innovations and imaginative interpretations; accordingly, he has gained a reputation for reliability. He expresses himself in a well-tempered fashion, which has brought him a reputation as a Christian gentleman.

Therefore, those wishing to study “Christian Reconstruction” seriously and carefully are advised to read this and other works by Gary DeMar. This particular book, *The Debate over Christian Reconstruction*, arises from a specific interchange with certain critics of Reconstruction (Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice) at a public debate April 14, 1988. Previous to this occasion, Mr. DeMar (along with Peter Leithart) had already replied to, and interacted extensively with, critic Dave Hunt in the book, *The Reduction of Christianity*. That book is perhaps the best presentation of the transformational world-and-life-view known as “Christian Reconstruction” which has been published to date, and it would do the careful reader well to study it along with (maybe, before) the present work.

It is evident that Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice did not do so adequately prior to their public debate with Gary DeMar and Gary North. This lapse severely crippled any effort on their part to set forth a serious or accurate critique of Christian Reconstruction — which is disappointing, of course, for anyone who wished to see the theological issues competently engaged in the debate. Hunt and Ice did not address the integrated theological perspec-

tive (the total worldview) of Christian Reconstruction, but targeted only one element of it: its victorious millennial eschatology. This one *faux pas* alone precluded their winning the debate because the question being debated was whether Christian Reconstruction is a “deviant theology,” and millennial eschatology has never in the history of the evangelical Christian church been made a creedal point of orthodoxy which defines heresy or apostasy. All Christians of good will who profess “the holy catholic [universal] church” (the Apostles’ Creed) recognize that others who hold millennial interpretations different from their own are nevertheless their Christian brothers and sisters in the Lord. They may be mistaken, but to accuse them of “deviant” theology is an altogether different – and very serious – charge. Hunt and Ice were incapable (perhaps unqualified) to substantiate such a grave charge. Heresy-hunters bear a heavy responsibility for theological proficiency, and (like all Christian teachers) will come under greater judgment for their inaccuracies (James 3:1).

Even more, as the present book demonstrates, Hunt and Ice left themselves open to ready refutation on the particular points of eschatology they addressed, from the exegesis of Matthew 24 to the biblical concepts of victory and dominion. Their historical claims were equally flimsy. The reader can explore this general observation for himself. I wish to point out but one particular and conspicuous defect in the argumentation of the Reconstructionist critics and comment upon it: their penchant for misrepresentation of what they were called upon to criticize. It is especially because of this (and not simply the academic shortcomings) that we must judge, ethically, that critics Hunt and Ice lost the debate. Repeatedly we encounter allegations and critical assumptions about Reconstructionist eschatology which are misleading, false portrayals of it — for instance, the suggestion that a preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse is essential to it, or that it is an innovation from theological liberalism which claims no Biblical support, or that it has affinity with the positive confession movement or Manifest Sons of God, or that it promotes dominion “over people” (tyranny?), or that it does not allow Christ to rule over His earthly kingdom, etc.

None of this is even remotely accurate. And that fact is highly significant if we are sensitive to Biblical ethics.

Of course, this is not the first time by any means that Reconstructionist thought has suffered abuse from those who have not responsibly studied the issues or bothered to be fair in how they depict its distinctive. The faulty scholarship has been witnessed over and over again, from minor points to thundering accusations. Ten years ago at a faculty forum on theonomic ethics at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Mississippi), one professor publicly criticized the author of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* for the scholarly shortcoming of failing to interact with Delling's treatment (in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*) of "fulfill" from Matthew 5:17, only to be informed to his embarrassment that Delling's treatment was rehearsed and rebutted on page 64 of the book he was criticizing! This may seem a minor point, and relative to others it is.

In that same year, Evangel Presbytery (of the Presbyterian Church in America) publicly declared that ministerial candidates holding a theonomic view were unacceptable to the church. More remarkable than this harsh judgment, however, was the fact that it was *after* the decision to promulgate it that the presbytery determined to appoint a committee to study the matter! A year later the study committee recommended a reversal of the previous judgment, acknowledging that it "was taken without proper study and deliberation." The committee's report said: We admit that many of our minds were made up before we began this study. . . . The vast majority of us . . . had never seen, much less read a copy of the book [*Theonomy in Christian Ethics*]."

In 1978 Aiken Taylor, as editor of the *Presbyterian Journal*, wrote in criticism of the theonomic (or Reconstructionist) position that it was contrary to the Westminster Confession of Faith, 'even as others had hastily declared that it was not part of mainstream Reformed theological thinking. Such claims were readily refuted by

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2. Aiken Taylor, "Theonomy Revisited," *The Presbyterian Journal* (December 6, 1978); Taylor, "Theonomy and Christian Behavior," *The Presbyterian Journal* (September 13, 1978).

historical research, however.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a severe critic of theonomic ethics, Meredith Kline, subsequently conceded that the theonomic outlook was indeed the position of the Westminster Standards.<sup>4</sup> This concession did not deter Kline, however, from railing against the theonomic view as “a delusive and grotesque perversion of the teaching of Scripture .” Yet in the very place where this thundering condemnation is found, Kline adduced not one exegetical argument against the position, *but* there were no less than fifty places in the book he was criticizing which stood contrary to his representations of the theonomic position!<sup>5</sup> In a circulated but unpublished paper written against theonomic ethics in 1980, Paul Fowler falsely alleged that the position allows nothing unique about Israel’s civil order, and then arrogantly insisted that his characterization could not be mistaken — even though it directly flew in the face of numerous things taught in the book he was criticizing.<sup>6</sup> Critics like Robert Strong,<sup>7</sup> Gary Long,<sup>8</sup> Walter Chantry<sup>9</sup> and others have used epithets like “Judaizing” or “legalism” of the position, when over and over again Reconstructionists have shown as clearly as anyone could expect that they are committed to salvation by God’s grace alone. In a feature article in *Christianity Today*, Rodney Clapp made the outlandish mistake of pitting Reconstructionist political theory against democratic procedures, a portrayal which runs counter to everything in the Presbyterian and Puritan historical background for the position !<sup>10</sup> Examples

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3. See, for instance, Gary North, ed., *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Symposium on Puritanism and Law, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter 1978-79).

4. Meredith Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Fall 1978), pp. 172-189.

5. See Greg L. Bahnsen, “M. G. Kline on Theonomic Politics,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Symposium on Puritanism and Society, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Winter 1979-80), pp. 195-221.

6. Paul Fowler, “God’s Law Free from Legalism” (unpublished paper, 1980).

7. “Theonomy: Expanded Observations” (privately distributed, 1978).

8. Gary D. Long, *Biblical Law and Ethics: Absolute and Covenantal* (Rochester, NY: Backus Book Publishers, 1981).

9. Waker J. Chantry, *God’s Righteous Kingdom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980).

10. Rodney Clapp, “Democracy as Heresy,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (February 20, 1987), pp. 17-23.

could go on and on. <sup>11</sup>

Over the last decade I have witnessed more slurs and misrepresentations of Reconstructionist thought than I have the heart or ability to count, and I am thinking here only of the remarks made by Christians in positions of leadership: elders, pastors, instructors, writers — those who bear the “greater accountability” since they lead Christ’s sheep as teachers. This has forced me as an educated believer to stand back and look more generally at what is transpiring in the Christian community as a whole with respect to its scholarly integrity. And I am heart broken. It is difficult enough for us to gain a hearing in the unbelieving world because of its hostility to the Lord Jesus Christ and its preconception of the lowly intelligence of His followers. The difficulty is magnified many times over when believers offer public, obvious evidence of their inability to treat each other’s opinions with careful accuracy. Our “scholarship” is justly ridiculed by those who have been educated in institutions which have no commitment to Christ or His Word, but who have the ethical integrity to demand as a prerequisite to acceptable scholarship that a student represent his opponent fairly before proceeding to criticize or refute him. To use a Pauline expression, “even the Gentiles” know better than to permit imprecision and erroneous portrayals in a serious intellectual discussion. Yet Christians (I include all of us) often seem to care little for that minimal standard of scholarly respectability. How, then, can we be taken seriously? How can we take ourselves seriously?

That holy and inspired Word of God, to which all of us swear allegiance as followers of Christ (whether Presbyterians or Baptists or charismatic or dispensationalists or Reconstructionists or whatever), is *profitable* to us “for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). From it we should learn not to speak carelessly: “See a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Proverbs 29:20). We should learn to speak cautiously about others (e.g., Matthew 5:22; Psalm

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11. See the Preface to the expanded edition of my *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, [1977] 1984).

116:11; James 3:5-18), not wresting people's words or reviling them (Psalm 50:20; 56:5; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10). We should interpret them in the best light afforded by the facts (cf. Acts 24:8), rather than with evil suspicion (1 Timothy 6:4). "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile" (1 Peter 3:10).

God's Word directs us to study a matter before we presume to speak critically regarding it: "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is a folly and shame to him" (Proverbs 18:13). Scripture teaches us to avoid slander, if we would dwell with Jehovah (Psalm 15:3). We must then be scrupulous to speak the truth about others, even those we would criticize. "A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow" (Proverbs 25: 18). When we witness against our neighbors "without a cause," we become guilty of "deceiving" with our lips (Proverbs 24: 28). The exhortation of Paul is inescapably clear: "Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth each one with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25). All of this is an extended commentary on the fundamental command of God's law: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20: 16) — reiterated by Christ (Matthew 19:18), who indicts us further by showing that false witness comes from the heart and defiles us (Matthew 15:19-20).

When we engage in theological debate with each other as fellow believers, then, it is ethically imperative that we honor our common Lord (who is the Truth, John 14:6) by being cautious to speak the truth about each other's positions. We are "members" together of the body of Christ.

Theological correction, of course, must be given where necessary; there is no disputing that. However, before presuming to correct one another, we must give the intellectual and personal effort necessary to portraying each other's views correctly. Only then are we ethically qualified to offer a critique. Only then will our critiques bring theological health and unity to the Christian community. If we refuse to speak accurately of each other, we have settled for uncharitable prejudices and party-spirit, and a

watching world has little reason to take seriously our claims to being born again with hearts enabled to love each other as God intends.

Over the last decade we have seen some extremely strong words of condemnation uttered about Reconstructionist theology. Those condemnatory words, however, have repeatedly proven to be tied to gross misrepresentations of the Reconstructionist perspective. When those counterfeit portrayals are laid aside, the cautious student will find that not one substantial line of refutation or criticism has been established against the *fundamental distinctives* of Reconstructionism — a transformational worldview embracing theonomic ethics, postmillennial eschatology, and presuppositional apologetics. These theological underpinnings can be shown to be sound and reliable.

That should not be taken to mean that Reconstructionist *writers* (i. e., those who subscribe to the theological distinctive listed here) can be defended regarding every particular aspect of their own personal theological method or regarding every doctrinal conclusion they have ever drawn. There is continuing need for correction and reform at particular points, and Reconstructionism is not above hearing constructive criticism. This has become evident in recent assessments of particular Reconstructionist writers for their hermeneutical excesses and for their harsh or uncharitable way of speaking. (I have particular examples in mind, but they need not be mentioned here.) It is a mark of spiritual health and wisdom that such examinations of our flaws are issued and heeded. Such criticisms do not, however, belie the underlying strength of the Reconstructionist perspective.

The claim made by Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice that the Reconstructionist position is “a deviant theology” simply inaugurated one more rotation of the polemical cycle which we have witnessed over the last ten years: High rhetoric and harsh criticism met and thoroughly undermined by sober research and theological analysis which shows how critics of Reconstructionist theology have not produced a clear Scriptural refutation, have been led into positions which stand contrary to well-established Biblical teaching,

or end up in ambiguity or self-contradiction regarding their own worldview and ethic.

We are grateful to Gary DeMar for one more turn of this wheel. May his fine *Debate over Christian Reconstruction* lead further students of the Scripture to consider the challenge, the cogency, and the benefit of the Reconstructionist worldview.

## INTRODUCTION

*Controversy for controversy's sake is sin, but controversy for truth's sake is biblical and vital to the church.*<sup>1</sup>

The debate over Christian Reconstruction held in Dallas, Texas, on April 14, 1988, between Tommy Ice and Dave Hunt (representing dispensational premillennialism) and Gary North and Gary DeMar (representing Christian Reconstruction) was historic. This public debate pitted dispensational premillennialist, representing a recent school of biblical interpretation, against Christian Reconstructionists, fully in the tradition of the historic Protestant faith.

Who won? You must decide.

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1. Walter Martin, noted cult expert and author of *Kingdom of the Cults*, quoted in *Christian Research Journal* (May 1988), p. 3.

2. For evaluations and critiques of dispensationalism see the following books: Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 109-181; Robert G. Clouse, ed. *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977); Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church: An Examination of the Claim of Dispensationalists that the Christian Church is a Mystery Parenthesis which Interrupts the Fulfillment to Israel of the Kingdom Prophecies of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945); Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academie Books, 1987); Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, [1960] 1977); John H. Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982); William E. Cox, *Why I Left Scofieldism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.); *An Examination of Dispensationalism* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963). For a critique of dispensationalism by two former dispensationalists who attended Dallas Theological Seminary, see Curtis I. Crenshaw and Grover E. Gunn, III, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* (Memphis, TN: Footstool Publications, 1985).

The debate question was: Is Christian Reconstruction a deviant theology? As *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction* will show, the basic tenets of Christian Reconstruction are thoroughly orthodox. The April 14th debate did nothing to change the long-standing and authoritative opinions of other studies on Christian Reconstruction.

Let's look at four independent studies on the orthodoxy of Christian Reconstruction and the narrower topic of biblical law, which is one of Christian Reconstruction's major distinctive.

### The Presbyterian Church in America

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America<sup>3</sup> made the following recommendations on the issue of theonomy (biblical law), a basic tenet of Christian Reconstruction:

1. That since the term "theonomy" in its simplest definition means "God's Law," the General Assembly affirms the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 19, and the *Larger Catechism*, Questions 93-150, as a broad but adequate definition of theonomy.

2. That no further study of the subject of theonomy be undertaken at the General Assembly level at this time, but that individual Christians, sessions, and presbyteries having particular interest be encouraged to study the subject in a spirit of love, kindness, and patience.

3. That the General Assembly affirm that no particular view of the application of the judicial law for today should be made a basis for orthodoxy or excluded as heresy.

4. That the General Assembly encourage pastors and sessions to instruct their people in the Law of God and its application in a manner consistent with our confessional standards.<sup>4</sup>

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3. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was created in 1973 as a conservative Presbyterian alternative to the liberal mainline Presbyterian churches. In the past 15 years, the PCA has grown from 240 congregations and 40,000 members to 1046 churches and 160,000 members. In short, the PCA is not a radical fringe denomination. These statistics are drawn from Frank Trexler's June 13, 1988, Religious News Service report on the 1988 PCA General Assembly.

4. "Report on Theonomy," Minutes of the Seventh General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1979, p. 195.

### A Reformed Presbyterian Critic

Meredith Kline, a Presbyterian critic of Christian Reconstruction, states that theonomic ethics “is in fact a revival of certain teachings contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith — at least in the Confession’s original formulations.”<sup>5</sup> The men who drafted the Westminster Confession of Faith (1643-48) held that the moral standards of the laws outside the Ten Commandments (what are typically called “case laws” since the Ten Commandments are a “summary” of the whole law) were still binding in the New Testament age. This is obvious from the proof texts in the Larger Catechism’s exposition of the sins and duties covered by the Ten Commandments. The Westminster Confession and Catechisms are the historic doctrinal standards of Reformed Christians around the world.

### Christian Research Institute

A paper prepared by Robert M. Bowman, Jr., of Walter Martin’s Christian Research Institute, had this to say about Christian Reconstruction:

“Reconstructionism” is a Christian movement which has arisen in the past decade or so from within the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition within Protestant Christianity. As such, it is thoroughly orthodox on all of the essential teachings of the Bible, including the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, salvation by grace through faith, etc. Considered as a whole, the movement is neither cultic nor heretical nor aberrational.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Meredith G. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *The Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Fall, 1978), p. 174. Greg L. Bahnsen, in a reply to Kline’s critique of his *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, tells us that the “American revision pertained only to a subsection of the chapter on the civil magistrate, aiming to reinforce disestablishment and the rejection of Erastianism (see *Theonomy*, pp. 527-537) 541-543). There was no revision of the declaration about the law of God or its use in catechisms (i.e., the strictly theonomic elements of the Confessional Standards).” Bahnsen, “M. G. Kline on Theonomic Politics: An Evaluation of His Reply,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Puritanism and Society*, ed. Gary North, Vol. VI, No. 2 (Winter 1979-80), p. 201.

6. Robert M. Bowman, Jr., “Reconstructionism,” Christian Research Institute (P.O. Box 500, San Juan Capistrano, California 92693), p. 1.

## Christian Research Journal

Mr. Bowman makes a more detailed assessment of Christian Reconstruction in the Winter/Spring 1988 issue of the *Christian Research Journal*, entitled "The New Puritanism: A Preliminary Assessment of Reconstructionism."

In a related article in the same issue of *Christian Research Journal*, Bowman writes that "it is unfortunate that almost every critique of K[ingdom] T[heology] has treated K[ingdom] T[heology] and Reconstruction as two strands of the same teaching. While there is some overlap of terminology, ideas, and activities, the two movements are largely distinct." Kingdom Theology is an easy target.<sup>8</sup> The critics of Christian Reconstruction have purposely linked Kingdom Theology with Christian Reconstruction, because by condemning one, the other sinks in its wake.<sup>9</sup> As you will notice in the debate, Dave Hunt still refuses to make clear distinctions between Kingdom Theology and Christian Reconstruction.<sup>10</sup>

In a brief footnote to his article on Christian Reconstruction, Bowman offers the following:

Christian Research Institute and Walter Martin, the publisher of this journal, view Reconstructionism as an orthodox though very controversial movement. The primary purpose of this article is to explain the reasons for this position. Beyond this basic discernment of the movement's relationship to orthodoxy, CRI takes no official position. However, it seemed appropriate to

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7. Robert M. Bowman, Jr., with Craig S. Hawkins and Dan R. Schlesinger, "The Gospel According to Paulk: A Critique of 'Kingdom Theology,'" *Christian Research Journal* (Winter/Spring 1988), p. 14. You can order the *CRJ* from Christian Research Institute, P.O. Box 500, San Juan Capistrano, California 92693.

8. The authors of "The Gospel According to Paulk" write that "In Part II of this article we will set out in detail the theology of Earl Paulk with extensive documentation, leaving no doubt concerning the nature of Paulk's doctrine. We shall then offer a biblical critique of K[ingdom] T[heology] as found in the representative writings of Bishop Paulk" (p. 14).

9. Dave Hunt tried to do this on Peter Waldron's "Contact America" show, but to no avail. See Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press/Atlanta, GA: American Vision, 1988), p. 20.

10. For these distinctions, see *ibid.*, pp. xiv (note 5), 24-37, 76-83, 166, 335-36.

the editors that in this article some further observations and comments be made concerning Reconstructionism's most distinctive beliefs. Therefore, the opinions expressed herein as to the soundness or acceptability of these beliefs are the author's and should not be attributed to C RI or Walter Martin. <sup>11</sup>

Bowman takes the reader through three of the distinctive of Christian Reconstruction: Presuppositionalism, Theonomy, and Postmillennialism. None of these is described as heretical. As Peter Leithart and I have shown in *The Reduction of Christianity*, all three positions have been held throughout church history by some of the most highly respected biblical theologians. <sup>12</sup> This assessment alone sets Bowman's article apart from every other analysis I have seen on Christian Reconstruction. While the author does not always agree with reconstructionists, he does offer a fair and accurate analysis of each distinctive. Mr. Bowman and the *Christian Research Journal* should be commended on an excellent research job. They have done the church a great service, and their work should be held up as a model for all of those who believe they have something to say about "aberrational theologies ." Before you go on the attack, make sure you *do your homework!*

Mr. Bowman ends his article with this "Challenge":

Reconstructionism is an orthodox though highly controversial movement. Much of what they say is open to serious question. Whether Christians agree with their answers or not, however, the Reconstructionists are certainly asking the right questions. What is the proper relationship between church and state? Is a Christian culture possible? If a culture were to be converted to faith in Christ, how would their institutions change? What would be the basis of such a culture's laws? Does the Bible have the answers to society's problems, and if so, what are those answers? If Reconstructionism does nothing else than to force the church to reexamine these questions and deepens its understanding of these issues, it will have served the church well. <sup>13</sup>

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11. Robert M. Bowman, "The New Puritanism," *Christian Research Journal* (Winter/Spring 1988), p. 23.

12. DeMar and Leithart, *Reduction of Christianity*, pp. 30-42, 229-70.

13. Bowman, "The New Puritanism," p. 27.

This book will show that Christian Reconstruction is far from a deviant theology. Tommy Ice and Dave Hunt want to view all of theology in terms of a dispensational premillennial theological system, a system that is beginning to disintegrate as a viable method of understanding the Bible. This brings us to the next point.

### Dispensationalism: A Deviant Theology?

In light of a preponderance of evidence to the contrary, why did Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice (who formulated the debate topic) label Christian Reconstruction a “deviant theology”? The answer is: From the perspective of their brand of dispensational premillennial theology, Christian Reconstruction *is* deviant. This, then, is the counter question: Is their brand of dispensational premillennialism deviant? The lively debate raised the possibility that it might be, and this book considers it in more formal biblical and historical terms.

*The Debate over Christian Reconstruction* interacts with the comments of two of dispensationalism’s most ardent supporters in an attempt to answer the question of who holds the deviant position. Of course, this was not the original purpose of the debate or this book. Keep in mind the charges made by Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice and the implications for the church today. They want you to believe that the Christian Reconstruction perspective is deviant in light of the following definition:

Christian Reconstructionists believe that God’s law— which Paul called holy, just, and good (Remans 7:14) — applies to every area of life and that God will sovereignly win the victory over His enemies *before* Jesus returns to deliver the kingdom to His Father.

Their assessment of these fundamental Christian doctrines would exclude many Christians from the orthodox faith, since history is filled with outstanding men who have believed that God’s law does apply in today’s world (witness the Westminster Confession of Faith) and that postmillennialism is the correct biblical position on eschatology. Simply put, Tommy Ice and Dave Hunt are attempting to make their own views the standard for orthodoxy.

### The Limitations of Debates

Debates are frustrating. There is never an opportunity to answer all the points raised by the opposition. Nearly anything can be said by the person who gets to make the final statement because the opposition cannot respond. The last word is usually remembered. This is why some of the most outlandish, irrelevant, and insupportable charges were made by Tommy Ice and Dave Hunt against Christian Reconstruction at the summary point in the debate: There was no opportunity to answer their misrepresentations.

Moreover, there was no occasion to question the remarks made by the opposing side. The format of the debate — four participants instead of two — made cross-examination impossible. Both sides felt the frustration.

*The Debate over Christian Reconstruction* is an attempt to answer what could not be answered during the debate. Not every point will be discussed, but only those issues where we believe an answer is needed. The footnotes will offer additional information that will help you study the issues further. Again, you must decide based on what Scripture says (Acts 17:11)..

One last point needs to be made before the critique begins. Peter Leithart and I wrote *The Reduction of Christianity*, an extensive evaluation of the literature that has come out against Christian Reconstruction, to put the issue of eschatology into biblical and historical perspective. Please note that during the debate, Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice did not interact with the book. They continued to misrepresent the Reconstructionists' position in spite of the detailed work of *Reduction*.

### How to Read This Book

*The Debate over Christian Reconstruction* is divided into two parts. Chapters one through ten are a brief and popular apologetic for Christian Reconstruction. For those of you who find detailed argumentation hard going, these chapters will give you the essence of Christian Reconstruction.

Chapters eleven through seventeen follow the debate as it was presented on April 14, 1988, in Dallas, Texas. I suggest that you

listen to the tapes <sup>14</sup> and then read my evaluation and critique. The chapters are clearly marked as to the topics they cover. Chapter eleven is an expanded and footnoted version of my presentation at the debate, representing the Christian Reconstruction position. It serves as an overview of the Reconstructionist position. Chapters twelve through fifteen follow the presentations of Tommy Ice and Dave Hunt in sequence. Chapter sixteen analyzes the answers given by Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice to a series of questions from the audience. Chapter seventeen evaluates the concluding remarks of Dave Hunt and Tommy Ice.

There are three appendixes. Appendix A, "The Abomination of Desolation: An Alternative Interpretation," is an attempt to make better sense out of the relationship between Daniel 9:24-27, Matthew 24:15, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Appendix B answers two questions. First, what have postmillennialists said about the future of Israel? Second, how do Reconstructionists answer the charges made by some that Christian Reconstruction is "anti-semitic"? Appendix C is a letter from a Jewish Christian pastor who also is a Christian Reconstructionist.

### A Word to Dispensationalists

*The Debate over Christian Reconstruction* was not originally conceived to be a critique of dispensationalism. Since Tommy Ice and Dave Hunt made *their brand* of dispensationalism an issue in the debate, it became necessary to evaluate the basic tenets of their system, as well as traditional dispensationalism, in order to make sense out of their critique of Christian Reconstruction. This debate, therefore, cannot be understood without first understanding dispensationalism. I do not assume that those who read this book understand dispensationalism. This is why I present the dispensational position along with my evaluation.

The debate over Christian Reconstruction is certainly not new. The issues have been debated for centuries. More recently the de-

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14. You can order a *set* of tapes from American Vision, P.O. Box 720515, Atlanta, Georgia 30328 or Dominion Press, 7112 Bums Street, Ft. Worth, Texas 76118. See the order form in the back of this book,

bate has been renewed within traditional Reformed circles.<sup>15</sup> The debate will not end with this book, and the debate should not end here. Much more work needs to be done.

At this point, a further word needs to be said about dispensationalism. First, Tommy Ice is not a standard dispensationalist. He has been strongly influenced by Confessional Reformed theology, as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Reformed Baptist thought. He says that he is a Calvinist as well as a presuppositionalist.<sup>16</sup> At various times, Ice has called himself a Reconstructionist.<sup>17</sup> His own philosophy, therefore, is a mixture of a number of theological traditions.

Second, Dave Hunt is not a standard dispensationalist. His view of the millennium is shared by few if any standard dispensationalists. Also, Hunt is in the more popular dispensational school of thought whose most well-known spokesman is Hal Lindsey. To my knowledge, Lindsey's views have never been popular at Dallas Theological Seminary. His books are rarely quoted by dispensational scholars.<sup>18</sup>

Dallas Theological Seminary was founded by Presbyterians (e.g., Lewis Sperry Chafer) and Episcopalians (e.g., Griffith Thomas), not by Plymouth Brethren. The seminary was setup to be a more moderate articulation of dispensational belief and to keep dispensationalism within the orthodox tradition.

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15. Gary Scott Smith, ed., *The Bible and Civil Government* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989). This book is a compilation of position and response papers representing four Reformed views on how the Bible applies to civil government: Theonomy (Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen), Christian America (Dr. Harold O. J. Brown), Principled Pluralism (Dr. Gordon J. Spykman), and National Confession (Dr. William Edgar).

16. For definitions see DeMar and Leithart, *Reduction of Christianity*, pp. 30-37.

17. Many Christian Reconstructionists came out of the dispensational camp. Gary North describes his "exodus" in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on the Millennium*, Vol. HI, No..2 (Winter 1976-77), pp. 3-4. Some of the most vocal critics of dispensationalism are now Reconstructionists: Curtis I. Crenshaw and Grover E. Gunn, III, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* (Memphis, TN: Footstool Publications, 1985).

18. For an evaluation of dispensationalism today, see Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (enl. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 204-44.

In the course of this book it will not always be possible to make the necessary distinctions between traditional and non-traditional dispensationalists. <sup>19</sup> I have tried, however, to separate traditional dispensational beliefs from the more hybrid dispensational views of Tomm y Ice and Dave Hunt. At the same time, in spite of some of these differences in style and belief, there is a community of people who share a belief in the pretribulational rapture and in an Israel-Church separation. Because of this, there is really no other word to use for them than “dispensationalists .” In arguing against dispensationalism in general, and Hunt and Ice in particular, I am aware that these two men do not always speak for standard dispensationalism.

Finally, a critique of a theological system is not an evaluation of the character of those people who hold to that system. Dispensationalists have honored God and His Word for decades when many mainline churches were apostatizing. Dispensationalists have been vigorous in evangelism and missions. Not all dispensationalists have said ‘we don’t polish brass on a sinking ship.’ Christian Reconstructionists respect this.

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I would like to thank Grover E. Gunn III, Kenneth Gentry, Curtis I. Crenshaw, James B. Jordan, and Peter J. Leithart for their valuable contributions to this work. The conclusions and assessments, however, are mine alone.

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19. For an elaboration of these distinctions, see James B. Jordan, “Christian Zionism and Messianic Judaism,” in *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1986), pp. 175-86.