

Book Review

Paul C. McGlasson, *No! A Theological Response to Christian Reconstructionism*.
Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012. ix + 134 pgs.

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The strange case of Christian Reconstructionism (CR) has been examined in terms of its history and social contexts—especially political campaigns and home schooling. Paul McGlasson has chosen instead to approach the phenomenon as a set of ideas. For readers in search of a concise, objective, but critical account of CR as an ideology, this book fills the bill.

This type of account is needed because CR ideology has grown beyond the confines of its own community to infiltrate the discourse of even the most unsuspecting who, though not formal adherents, find pieces of it convincing. With this in mind, the author insists on his intention to be descriptive while contending that CR stands far beyond orthodoxy's pale, as represented by the consensus on core issues shared across Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox lines.

The book examines four foundational features of CR, beginning with epistemological dualism. Reconstructionists separate their ideology from culture so as to create an unbridgeable gap. There is no conversation between Christians and “the world,” figured in humanism. Drawing on Reformed theologian Cornelius Van Til's *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* as an example, McGlasson shows how Van Til's brand of apologetics allows no neutral ground or common language acting as a bridge between Christianity and humanism. To

the contrary, non-Christian discourse is simply deemed “nonsense.”

The second locus is the CR contention that Mosaic law is the only legitimate legal program for any nation in the world. All others are falsely predicated on humanism. Citing here R. J. Rushdoony's *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, McGlasson describes how Rushdoony believes that Mosaic law is divided into principles and cases that are to be taken directly from the pages of scripture to modern courts of law. For instance, adulterers, homosexuals, and rebellious children are all to be swiftly executed (preferably by stoning). McGlasson shows how Rushdoony must knock down the interpretive consensus shared across Christianity, figured in a whole series of formidable opponents to this view such as Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, all of whom joined Paul in teaching that the law was fulfilled in Christ. Furthermore, these and other theologians have allowed that civil law developed differently from mosaic law and was worthy of Christian obedience. All of these Rushdoony dismisses as “antinomians,” by which he means they make a distinction between ancient Israelite jurisprudence and the subsequent developments and legal traditions that naturally developed in their respective nation states. Never mind that “antinomian” was a term coined by Luther to combat those who would absent the law from Christian life!

For the third matter, that of Christian culture, McGlasson summarizes Francis Schaffer's *A*

Christian Manifesto. McGlasson notes that while Schaffer was not a self-avowed Christian Reconstructionist, he was a student of Van Til and promoted the “Christian worldview” notion so integral to CR. First propounded by Abraham Kuyper, Schaffer described “Christian worldview” as a totalizing discourse in which Christianity affords sole access to the truth about every area of human knowledge: art, literature, politics, science, etc. Again, the only other alternative is humanism, which is locked in deadly combat with the Christian “worldview.” The cause of this culture war Schaffer lays at the feet of immigration, a diluting force for what he understands to be the salutary effects of “Christian democracy.” To him immigrants are, by and large, “non-Christian or insufficiently Christian.” The result, according to Schaffer, is government legislation that contradicts biblical law. At such point Christians, armed with Truth and having exhausted all measures of civil disobedience, should be prepared to take up arms against their government in a holy war. Such Christians should take courage from their colonial forebears who battled a secularizing British tyranny, says Schaffer, ignoring the fact that England had a state church from which colonists wished freedom. This and other inconvenient facts of history seldom stand in the way of the arguments made by CR advocates, as McGlasson makes clear in successive examples.

The fourth and final hallmark of CR is the gift of Christian dominion, believed to have been given to Adam (Gen. 1:26), as though God had handed over creation to human beings. Humanity, not God, is given dominion over everything! Those among humanity who know the reconstructivist truth have a *carte blanche* to take over the governance of their nations—and the whole world, eventually—by virtue of this Adamic covenant which McGlasson shows

to rest on dubious exegesis at best. This piece of the ideology requires a postmillennialism, in which CR folks take the lead in destroying humanism and constructing the kingdom of God on earth. McGlasson points out the irony that this postmillennialism derives its structure from its late nineteenth century Protestant liberal predecessor, while reinvesting it with the agenda of “evangelism through law,” or the “plowing up” of current governments and their replacement with “biblical law.” Government in this new dominion will be very small. The poor will be left to fend for themselves or be cared for by families and churches. There will be no public schools. Government’s main job will be to carry out sentences assigned to crimes in the mosaic law.

Having laid out these four areas thoroughly, chapters 5-8 offer rebuttals based on sound scriptural exegesis, ecumenical consensus, the rule of faith referred to by church fathers, and, where necessary, plain logic. By such means McGlasson counters CR with the sturdy reasoning of, for instance, the Reformation’s distinction between law and gospel (trespassed by CR), whereby Christ, not the mosaic law, is at scripture’s heart. Jesus’ mandate was to spread the gospel, not the law. Where CR trades on an unbridgeable, Gnostic-like distinction between Christianity and humanism, McGlasson shows the New Testament’s proclamation of a dividing line not *among* people, but between sinful humanity and Christ on his cross, condemning all so that all might receive mercy. Furthermore, such a dividing line does not exist as an either/or between truth on the one hand and human culture on the other. McGlasson refers to Paul’s tensile, dialectical relationship between faith and culture, where culture does not offer a channel to God, but is not worthless, either (cf. Philippians 4:8). Moreover, the author

challenges CR's "worldview" ideology with a compelling argument using Job and his "comforters" as an illustration. Namely, Job's friends relied on religious pretense in answering Job's plight, while God's whirlwind speech to Job destroyed such pretensions, and with them, all human presumptions to smugly hold the key to all truth. Faith is, finally, not a "worldview," but a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Where CR identifies its program with "building" the kingdom of God, McGlasson points out scripture's insistence that the kingdom can only be received as a gift, never given to humanity as a set of blueprints over which they exercise control.

Readers in search of an even-handed treatment of CR must read McGlasson. His rebuttals, which he is careful to reserve for the second half of the book, are compelling. These rebuttals also suggest that, while CR may continue to have appeal in some political circles, it has already collapsed under the unsustainable weight of its own claims and goals.