

Session to Session

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Laws and Wonders

by William H. Smith

One of the more curious connections on the current ecclesiastical scene is the affinity between the theonomic and charismatic movements. The connection strikes one as strange because the two movements have their roots in different theological traditions. The theonomic movement, without doubt, has its roots in the Reformed theology of both the Puritan and Dutch traditions. On the other hand, the charismatic movement, to the extent that it does have historical roots, has more in common with Wesleyan Arminianism than with Calvinism.

Consider this charismatic writer, who sounds almost like a postmillennial Reformed theologian reflecting on the cultural mandate:

In Genesis 1 our commission is to fill the earth, subdue the earth, rule the earth. I believe God is still waiting for us to complete that commission. God wants us to get a vision of the whole earth being filled with the glory of God and the gospel of the kingdom preached to the ends of the earth. We are to bring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. (Bob Weiner, "Maranatha Ministries," *Charisma*, May 1982)

The connection is made even more clear in an interview given by R. J. Rushdoony to Michael D. Philbeck and published in *The Counsel of Chalcedon* in October 1983. Dr. Rushdoony says, "A very large segment of the charismatic movement is becoming Reformed, theonomic, and post-millennial."

Several years ago I was inclined to see the connection between the two movements as political. Politics makes strange bedfellows indeed, and the two movements do have many political concerns in common. As Rushdoony observed in the 1983 interview, "Indeed I would have to say that the battle against state controls is being led by charismatics, and also by Independent Baptists."

However, I am now convinced that what makes the two movements open to one another is the similarity of their approach to Scripture. Both charismatics and theonomists have a radical principle of unity which fails to distinguish any historical uniqueness in the various epochs of redemptive history. Theonomy brings forward into the new covenant age the same relation of Church and State that existed under the Mosaic covenant. For instance, theonomists hold that a

nation today may be in the same covenant relationship to God as was Israel in the Old Testament, and that it is the duty of the "godly state" to suppress heresy and false religion. Theonomists also believe that the judicial laws which God gave to Israel are binding and applicable "in exhaustive detail" to the nations of the world today. On the other hand charismatic theology brings forward into the present age all the manifestations of the Spirit which were characteristic of the apostolic age, such as tongues, healing, and prophecy. This approach to Scripture is self-conscious on the part of

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Operation Rescue and the Bible (Part 2)

by Joseph A. Pipa

Proponents of Operation Rescue ask, "What about Psalm 82? Aren't we commanded to deliver the needy, the weak, to rescue the helpless?" Yes, but we may not yank scripture out of its context and ignore the significance of its audience. From verse one, we learn that this Psalm is addressed to the magistrates in the covenant land. God takes a stand in his own congregation, and he judges in the midst of the rulers. God is speaking here particularly to the elders and the judges of Israel. He rebukes them for injustice. He calls them to fulfill their God-given responsibility, which is not to show partiality to the wicked but rather to vindicate the weak, to do justice to the afflicted, and rescue the needy. In a general way this applies to all Christians according to our sphere of activity and responsibility. But the particular commandment to deliver and rescue is directed to the civil magistrates. It is *their* responsibility.

In our land the judges and lawmakers are responsible for the murdered babies and apart from repentance and faith, they, like Macbeth's wife, will never be able to wash the blood of the innocent babes from their hands.

Moreover, God calls upon government officials to protect the weak and rescue the needy. Why shouldn't local civil magistrates say "no" to the Supreme Court? This is a point the pro-life movement has missed. Here is a place where action should be taken. We should seek to elect officials in city, county, and state government who are willing to thumb their noses at Washington, D.C., and outlaw abortion. They have the prerogative to do this because God has called upon them as magistrates to protect the innocent. We, however, as

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the theonomist. It is less a self-conscious theological conviction and more an approach growing out of experience on the part of the charismatic. Both have a "collapsed" sense of redemptive history. The theonomist, convinced that the judicial laws apply today and that those who reject this position have "dispensationalist tendencies" must ask, "On what ground do I hold that the charismatic phenomena of the New Testament do not continue today?" The charismatic, persuaded that the charismatic phenomena of the New Testament are present today, must be open when the theonomist suggests he consider the continuing validity of Old Testament judicial law as the pattern for establishing "godly dominion" among the nations today. Rushdoony acknowledges this mutual openness. The question was asked:

Do you think that the "life" which the charismatic movement has given to the faith, and now the openness to biblical law among them, will lead to a reevaluation among the Reformed of their traditional view of certain of the spiritual gifts, namely the traditional Reformed view that all tongues-speaking which is proper ceased with the apostolic age?

Rushdoony answered:

I think there is going to be some kind of reevaluation; just as there is change underway on the charismatic side, so there will be on the Reformed side. Let me add that one of the things which has led to the change on the charismatic side has been that the changing charismatics are logical to their position. They are saying that, "We cannot accept dispensationalism. If we are pre-millennialists and dispensationalists, then we have to say that the charismatic movement is impossible because it belongs to an age that is past."

When they came to the position the ones who did realized that they could not say that the law was dead either! When they came to that position they poured into the theonomic movement. . . .

Now, in a sense, the Reformed movement has become dispensational because it has said biblical law is dead, and the gifts of the spirit are dead. As a result they've wound up dead, to a great degree! They don't have the power that the Reformed faith once had. . . .

The power is no longer upon the Reformed faith. They have become dispensational.

Rushdoony acknowledges that the movements are pulled together by a common approach to Scripture. Both reject the alleged "dispensationalist tendencies" of those whom Rushdoony characterizes as the "traditionalists" among the Reformed. This "dispensationalism" of the traditional Reformed approach causes it to reject the continuance of the charismatic phenomena and the continuance of the Old Testament church-state relation and of the binding nature of the judicial laws upon modern states. Theonomists and charismatics share common ground here in opposition to the traditional Reformed approach to Scripture.

Theonomists and charismatics alike tend toward triumphalism. The charismatic emphasis is more upon the personal

while the theonomic emphasis is more upon the social. The charismatic expects personal triumph over sin and such effects as sickness and poverty through God's (sometimes miraculous) intervention. The theonomist expects social triumph over sin and its curse by establishment of godly rule and the application of the Old Testament judicial code to society. The charismatic tends to emphasize faith:

"Name it and claim it!" The theonomist tends to emphasize obedience: "Obey and be blessed." They have somewhat different approaches to triumph but both pull back into the present age (at least in principle) blessings which are promised for the age to come. For theonomists as well as charismatics everything is "already" and nothing is "not yet."

Their shared triumphalist approach to the present age also establishes a connection which makes them open to each other's distinctive emphases. Why not *join* faith and obedience so that faithful obedience and obedient faith become the key to triumph? Why not combine godly rule *and* miraculous intervention as the way to the enjoyment of the fulness of blessing? After all, miracle and law, faith and obedience, personal-social righteousness and prosperity are joined in Old Testament Israel's triumphs.

Several observations are in order. First, Reformed-covenantal theology of the nontheonomic sort is not, as Rushdoony supposes, "dispensational." Dispensationalism emphasizes the *discontinuity* of God's dealings with His people in the history of redemption while the Reformed-covenantal approach emphasizes the *continuity*. The covenantal approach rejects both the radical continuity principle of the theonomist and the radical discontinuity principle of the dispensationalist. A covenantal approach affirms the essential unity of God's successive dealings with His people while recognizing that certain aspects of God's dealings in one era of redemption may be distinctive to that era. For instance, the Reformed-covenantal approach, in contrast with dispensationalism, affirms the essential continuity of Israel and the Church. Yet it also acknowledges that one of the distinctive characteristics of the Old Testament epoch is that the people of God took the form of a covenant nation possessing a supernaturally revealed national law code. In the New Testament era, however, the people of God take the form of the Church, a spiritual kingdom scattered among the nations, with Church and State as distinct institutions.

A covenantal approach, also, in contrast with dispensationalism, affirms the Church as the final form of the people of God in this age. However, in contrast to charismatic theology, Reformed theology holds that there were certain offices (prophets, apostles) and gifts (prophecy, miracles) which were unique to the apostolic era during which God was establishing the new form of the people of God and completing the revelation which is consummated in Jesus Christ.

Second, we should observe that this Reformed-covenantal approach to Scripture is the stance of the *Constitution* of the P.C.A. In contrast with the charismatic insistence on the

continuance of revelation and the revelatory gifts in the Church in the present age, the *Constitution* holds that the Scriptures are "most necessary,"

those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased. (*Confession of Faith* 1:1)

The *Constitution* also asserts that the Scriptures are a completely sufficient revelation of God's will to the Church and therefore, to the Scriptures,

nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or the traditions of men. (*Confession of Faith* 1:6)

The *Book of Church Order* affirms this approach explicitly:

Under the New Testament, our Lord at first collected His people out of different nations, and united them to the household of faith by the ministry of extraordinary officers who received extraordinary gifts of the Spirit and who were agents by whom God completed His revelation to His church. Such officers and gifts related to new revelation have no successors since God completed His revelation at the conclusion of the Apostolic Age. (*Book of Church Order* 7:1)

In contrast with the theonomic approach which leads to affirming the continuing binding nature of the judicial laws, the *Constitution* teaches the uniqueness of and limited duration of Israel's polity:

To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require. (*Confession of Faith* 19:4)

In contrast with the theonomic contention that the civil magistrate in this age should suppress heresy and false religion, the *Constitution* establishes a different role for the government in the New Testament age.

It is the duty of the civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such effectual manner that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance. (*Confession of Faith* 23:3)

In contrast with the theonomic approach which leads to the position that there is a divinely revealed form of the State given in the Old Testament polity, the *Constitution* affirms:

The constitution of the Church derives from divine revelation; the constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events. The Church has no right to construct or modify a government for the State, and the State has no right to frame a creed or polity for the Church. (*Book of Church Order* 3:4)

Third, the theonomic and charismatic theologies share the same fundamental Bible-reading mistake, and the same mistaken understanding of the present age. That is not to

say that most theonomists will become charismatics or that most charismatics will become theonomists. I do not foresee the day when the charismatic movement, as a whole, will finally reject its Wesleyan-Arminian roots and embrace Reformed theology of the theonomic sort. Nor do I foresee a day when the majority of theonomists embrace charismatic theology including the continuance of revelation and the sign gifts. I would be surprised, though not shocked, to see the two movements merge. But we should not fail to recognize that both movements have an approach to the interpretation and application of the Bible which is at odds with historic Reformed theology.

The way of truth and spiritual health for Reformed Christians is to do two things: (1) to affirm the unity of the biblical revelation while not denying the unique aspect of the Old Covenant and apostolic epochs; and (2) to affirm the present reality and influence of the Kingdom of God while holding that God's Kingdom will not fully come until the King returns in glory.

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private citizens have not been called to become vigilantes by taking upon ourselves the function of the civil magistrate.

Well, what about Proverbs 24? Again we have a very clear command to deliver from destruction and slaughter. In the first place, note that a duty and not a method is being commanded. This Proverb does not suggest the methodology of the deliverance and the rescue, but merely that there exists a duty in this respect. In other words, it does not advocate the methodology of physical rescuing, but simply says that there is a responsibility.

Second, note the parallel with Psalm 82. Like Psalm 82 this Proverb seems to be addressed to rulers. More than likely this section in Proverbs is addressed to the King's son that he might rule well. Thus, it has a peculiar reference to the civil magistrate. As private citizens each of us has a duty to take whatever recourse is *lawfully* ours, using means that do not violate God's clear laws. We are to proclaim God's truth, and to sound the warnings. But we are not commanded to exercise a physical rescue operation.

Operation Rescue people object at this point. "What if you saw a murder being committed as you gazed through a front window of a house? Would you not have the right to trespass, to break into that house and deliver the person that is being murdered?" Of course, the answer is "yes." We recognize that it is legitimate to trespass in order directly to stop a murder. But let us be clear. Their analogy is not sound. Operation Rescue does not save the murder victim, although that is sometimes a by-product of the procedure. Operation Rescue will deter some women. Since they have to wait, perhaps some will reconsider. But it is not a direct intervention to stop the murderer in his act of murder. To

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be consistent with this analogy proponents of Operation Rescue would be compelled to enter the abortuary and forcibly restrain the physician, killing him if necessary. Obviously, the proponents of this system do not advocate t level of resistance.

A clearer analogy would be if the state were legally but immorally putting people to death for treason because they were Christians. Does the Bible tell us to organize civil disobedience in order to stop the killings? No! It's murder but

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we don't have the biblical warrant to break into jail and kill the guards in order to rescue them. The Bible tells us to identify with them, to visit them, and to disobey the government—if it tells us to deny our faith. However, it does not tell us to rescue them by force.

But aren't some children being saved? In my opinion it is impossible to tell if any more children are being saved this way than would be saved by sidewalk counselling. But, even if there are, let us understand that God's word teaches that the ends *do not* justify the means. God is sovereign and expects us to operate on the basis of his law.

In the next issue of *Session to Session*, I will consider the appeals by Randall Terry and others to the biblical passages on blood guiltiness.

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