

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO STUDY THEONOMY

Esteemed Fathers and Brethren:

Your committee to study Theonomy met three times during the Classis year: Sept. 6-7, 1984 at Menno, SD, Jan. 16-17, and March 11-12 at Sutton, NE. Having given a partial report at the 74th Annual Session of the Eureka Classis, the following is now presented as a final report.

In the partial report given last year an outline was presented as the course the committee planned to follow.

- I. To arrive at a consensus on what Theonomy is.
- II. To debate the distinctive issues of Theonomy.
- III. To make a statement as to what Biblical theonomy is.
- IV. To state what theonomic positions are questionable or unbiblical.

The committee now has completed parts I and II of the outline and presents a number of affirmations, denials, and rejections to fulfill the intention of parts III and IV.

The committee is making 2 recommendations for Classis.

- I. To arrive at a consensus on what Theonomy is.
 - A. Every detail of the law of God is valid for today.
 1. The term Theonomy is a Greek word which literally means God's law. The term has been used by diverse schools of thought to denote different conceptions of the law of God.
 2. In Reformed circles in recent years the term theonomy has been used to designate a distinctive school of thought in regard to the application of the law of God.
 3. It is the view of Reformed Theonomy that Christ and His apostles taught that the law in exhaustive detail has abiding validity for this age between His two advents. They appeal to such texts as Matt. 4:4; 5:17-19; Matt. 18:15 (cf Duet. 19:15); Mk. 7:10; 10:19; Luke 11:42; John 8:7 (cf Deut. 17:7); John 10:35; Acts 23:5; Rom. 1:32; 3:31; 8:14; I Cor. 9:8,9; II Tim. 3:16,17; James 4:11,12.
 4. The "law of God", according to this view, includes every aspect of the Mosaic economy - the moral law (decatalogue), the so-called judicial or case laws and the ceremonial laws. This is inferred from Matt. 5:18 where Christ speaks of every jot and tittle of the law having binding effect.
 5. The ceremonial or restorative laws, while also having abiding validity, are completed in their application in the finished work of Christ: John 1:29,36; 19:30; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 2:14,15; Col. 2:16,17; Hebrews 7-10.

6. The moral law, in the general principles of the decalogue and in particular applications of these principles in the judicial (case) laws, are permanently abiding in exhaustive detail in society where and when applicable, according to particular cultural circumstances: Matt: 5:17-19; Acts 25:11; I Cor. 9:8; 14:34.
- B. All judicial laws are binding on us today.
1. It is emphasized in theonomy that the judicial laws of the O.T. are particular applications of the unchanging moral law. For example, the seventh commandment (thou shalt not commit adultery) is interpreted to forbid sexual sins such as incest (Deut. 27:20,23) and homosexuality (Lev. 20:13, I Tim. 1:10); and the eighth commandment (thou shalt not steal) is interpreted to mean forbidding the defrauding of workers of their pay (Deut. 24:14,15) and even of oxen of their food (Deut. 25:4 (cf I Tim. 5:17,18).
 2. Though the judicial or case laws are binding on us today as to their moral force, they are also to be seen within the context of a particular cultural setting which may not always be applicable in other cultural situations (cf. Deut. 22:18; 25:4 etc.). In other words, the theonomists insist that we today, living as Christians under the New Covenant, are required to keep the underlying principle or the "general equity" of the judicial laws of God though the details may change.
- C. The magistrate is responsible to obey and enforce the O. T. law today (including the penal prescriptions).
1. God's law has a binding political use for the civil state in all ages and places because Christ is the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5); therefore, all magistrates of the state owe Him obedience to His law and as ministers of God are obligated to enforce it: Psa. 2; 22:28; 33:12; 72; 110:1-3; Rom. 1:32; 13:1-6; I Cor. 15:24-26; Eph. 2:20-23; I Tim. 1:8-10; Heb. 1:8,9,13; 2:2,8; Rev. 11:15; 15:3,4; contra II Thess. 2:3, 7,8; Rev. 12:17; 13:5-7.
 2. God intended that His law, including the case law applications, be the model and standard for all nations: Deut. 4:6-8; Lev. 18:24:27; 24:22; Psa. 18:43-50; 47:9; 119:46; Prov. 8:15,16; 14:34; 16:10,12; 28:4,5; 29:4,14,18; Extra 7:21-26; Isa. 2:1-3; 42:4; 51:4-8; Exk. 28:16,18; Amos 1:1-2:3; Matt. 5:17-19; 28:18-20; Rom. 1:32.
 3. The penal sanctions of the Old Testament law are also to be enforced today; though the method of enforcing capital punishment, for example, may vary according to cultural and societal practice: Deut. 17:5-7 and John 8:7 with Rom. 1:32 and 13:4.

4. This theonomic position holds that though in the case of O. T. Israel the church and the state included the same people (though the "sojourner" was not strictly a member of the church) there were separate church and state functions: the rule of the king and the rule of the priesthood. The function of the state, to administer the justice of God's law, is basically the same today as it was for O.T. Israel: II Chron. 19:11; 26:16-20; Prov. 14:34; 16:12; Acts 25:11; Rom. 12:19-13:6; Heb. 2:2.

STATEMENTS OF REJECTIONS

1. Theonomy does not teach that man can save himself by obedience to the law.
2. Theonomy does not teach that the law is a substitute for the work of the Holy Spirit.
3. Theonomy does not teach that the Mosaic economy is reinstated in the New Covenant.
4. Theonomy does not teach that the socio-political ethics is the primary message of the Church.
5. Theonomy does not teach that any state in the N.T. age be equated with O.T. state of Israel.
6. Theonomy does not teach that the state has the duty to evangelize or to do the work of the Church.
7. Theonomy does not teach that the Church or individual Christians should foment rebellion by the use of violence against anti-christian legal structures.
8. Theonomy does not teach that any particular denomination should be established as a state Church.
9. Theonomy does not teach that Post-millennialism and Theonomy need to be accepted in tandem nor rejected in pair.
10. Theonomy does not teach reconstructionism or survivalism which leads to a violation of the law of brotherly love.

- II. Some hermeneutical principles for consideration in critiquing the theonomic position outlined in I.
- A. The specific judicial and ceremonial applications of the Pentateuch were intended for the Mosaic administration of the covenant and for that historic situation, except such as the general equity of them requires. Mark 2:18-22; I Cor. 5:1-5; Gal. 3:17-29; 4:1,5-10,21; Heb. 8:13.
 - B. Moral righteousness is the underlying principle of the Pentateuch, and the 10 commandments are the summary of that principle, and love is the sum of the ten commandments. Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 13:8-9; Gal. 5:14.
 - C. The sum of the 10 commandments which Christ teaches in Matt. 22 is binding upon the Christian today, and is directed by the 10 commandments and the underlying moral righteousness in the Pentateuch, but the specific judicial and ceremonial applications are not binding in exhaustive detail. Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 3:31; 8:1,2(cf7:7); Eph. 2:14-16.
 1. Each administration of the covenant is an unfolding and clarification of the preceding one. However, the New Covenant is distinct in that all preceding administrations were type and shadow based upon the person and work of Jesus Christ, but in the New Covenant reality has come. Heb. 1:1-13:25.
 2. In the New Covenant Christ's purpose is not to administer the law of Moses but Himself to us. Matt. 26:26-29; Lk. 22:20; Jn. 1:17; I Cor. 11:25. The covenant is a personal relationship in which God gives Himself to His people ratified with Christ's blood in His death on the cross. II Cor. 3:1-11; 4:5; Gal. 2:20; 3:23-29.
 3. There is an externalization of the law in the Mosaic covenant. In the New Covenant the law is written on the heart. Jer. 31; II Cor. 3; Gal. 3-4. We live in the new age of the Spirit and an age of spiritual obedience to God. Acts 2; 10:2; Rom. 6:14; 8:1-4; II Cor. 3:1ff; Gal. 6:15-16; W.C.F. 16, 1-3. We are all anointed by the Spirit for a new life in the covenant. Jer. 31:34; I Pet. 2:5,9; I Jn. 2:26-27.
 4. Old Testament Israel was a picture of the church of the New Covenant. The theocracy of the Lord continues. Matt. 21:42ff; I Pet. 2:5-9(cfDt. 14:2). The Church is the New Covenant people of God. Acts 15; I Cor. 5:9-6:11. The "new" covenant Church is the "new" Israel. Matt. 16:17ff; Lk. 12:32; Gal. 3:7; 6:15-16; Eph. 2:11-22; I Pet. 2:5,9.

5. The Old Covenant administration to the Jewish nation, as such, does not exist today. Jesus abrogated food laws and with it the distinction of Jews and Gentiles in the New Covenant Church. The specific status of Israel and her laws are set aside. Matt. 7:19; Acts 10,15; Rom. 14:15; I Cor. 10:27; Gal. 2:14. Israel as a nation cannot be reproduced today. Acts 2, 7, 10, & 15.
6. The form of the kingdom has changed from Old to New. Jer. 31; Matt. 11:13; Gal. 3:17-19; Eph. 2:11-13; 3:6; Rom. 2:17-24.
7. The Old Covenant interweaves ceremonial and judicial laws. Since the New Testament has abrogated the so-called ceremonial laws, the so-called judicial laws are assumed abrogated with them. Heb. 8:13; 10:1-10.

D. New Testament use of the law.

1. The emphasis in the New Testament is on the ethical life of the church rather than on the piety of society as a whole. Matt. 18:15-20; I Cor. 5:12-13.
2. The ethic of the law written in our hearts brings freedom (in Christ) so that the Old Testament case laws, as all of Scripture, are used for instruction in righteousness which are applicable in forming the Christian ethic for today. Jer. 31; Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11; II Cor. 3; II Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 8.

III. Statements of affirmation concerning the law (biblical theonomy).

1. That the law is holy and just and good. It is the revelation of God's will for men. Man was never without a law-word from God. Rom. 7:12; I Tim. 1:8.
2. That the law is for all mankind. It is for the lawless and disobedient and for God's redeemed people. Rom. 2:14-15; I Tim. 1:9; Ex. 19,20.
3. That the bible in its entirety is applicable in some way to the New Testament Christian.
4. That any responsibility to the moral law must include all 10 commandments.
5. That the Mosaic legislation was distinctive of the Old Covenant as a means for Israel to express covenant faithfulness and as preparatory (schoolmaster) to bring us to Christ. Ex. 19:5-6; Gal. 3:24.

6. That God gave the law in the Old Covenant because He had first established a covenantal love-life giving relationship with His people. Ex. 19. This same use of law is carried over in the New Covenant.
7. That the coming of the Messiah brought the Mosaic economy to a close ushering in the kingdom of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Christ fulfilled the law. The Ten Words are the rule of life and means for God's people to show their thankfulness (Rom. 13:8-10), as well as the standard of righteousness for all. Jn. 1:17; Rom. 2:14,15; 6:14; 10:4.
8. That whatever has not been principally changed in the New Testament still stands in force from the Old.
9. That the Old Covenant shadows are no longer binding on us nor to be fulfilled in the outward way in which they were in the Old Covenant because the reality has come in Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:1). They are now to be observed in Jesus Christ, our Savior. Christ is the reality which was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. Christ has now brought a better covenant through his life and death.
10. That there is progression in revelation, and that the Bible is to be read in a redemptive historical fashion.
11. That only God has the right to make alterations in His law. The New Testament, and Jesus in particular, determines our understanding and interpreting the Old Testament law for what is required of us today.
12. That because the significance of the land of Canaan as the land of inheritance has passed away with the establishment of the kingdom of God, which that land of promise foreshadowed, we no longer have to keep Old Covenant laws which were concerned with the land of Palestine (for instance, the division of land into family portions, or the locations of the cities of refuge, or the levirate institution). All of these find changed application today.
13. That the New Covenant is the age of the Spirit. The law is now written on the heart. Love is the motive for obedience. Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:25-28; Jn. 14:15,23; Heb. 8; I Jn. 5:3.
14. That the New Covenant surpasses the Old Covenant in GLORY (II Cor. 3:7-11), POWER (Romans 8:4), MOTIVATION (Heb. 8:6-10), FINALITY (Heb. 9:24-28), and REALITY (Heb. 10:1).
15. That the Old Covenant was relative to the New Covenant an administration of condemnation and death, whereas the New Covenant is an administration of righteousness and life. II. Cor. 3:7-11.

16. That the outpouring of the Holy Spirit radically changed the way in which the child of God responds in love to God's law without changing the law itself. Heb. 10:16.
17. That the standard of love is the law of God (Jn. 14:15,23) not subjectivism or situationism. The Holy Spirit in the heart operates and motivates in accord with the law of God.
18. That law and love are not antithetical to one another (Jn. 14:6, 15,23; Matt. 22:37-40). Love is defined by law.
19. That the New Covenant form of God's people is the Church of Jesus Christ. National Israel has been replaced by the international Church as the true Israel of God. There is no covenant nation today like Old Testament Israel. The Mosaic economy is no longer binding on Church or nation. II Cor. 3:11; Gal. 3:7,29.
20. That the Old Testament laws are binding in terms of their principles and not in terms of their illustration. It is the principle or the truth which is taught by the figurative and illustrative character of many biblical commandments that continues to bind all men, and not the cultural particulars which are mentioned.
21. That the outward use of the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have been laid aside thus affecting the way in which the redemptive provisions, rituals, and symbols of separation are confirmed and observed today (for instance, the sacraments).
22. That the provisions concerning the land of Palestine have now been superseded by the realized kingdom of Christ.
23. That the matters of the political administration in the Old Testament, and the special instructions for particular occasions are not standing laws and standing requirements for God's people in all ages (for instance, positive laws given for warfare in the Old Testament or holy wars against the Canaanites, as if God's people must be fighting the Amorites). Those were specific instructions given in a specific setting. They were not standing laws in Israel, even for the Jews to observe throughout their generations. Thus they are not to be continued today.
24. That under the Old Covenant order Israel was constituted as a nation and was adopted as the people of God. But under the New Covenant the people of God are an international body of people comprised of those who have faith in Christ.
25. That the magistrate as a minister of God is to honor those who do good and to execute wrath on those who do evil. That government is most just which honors God and His Word. Final justice, however, will be adjudicated at the day of judgment when the Lord will reward His faithful servants and punish the wicked with eternal punishment. Rom. 13; I Pet. 2:13,14.

26. That the state is to be subservient to God's authority, direction, commandments, word. The civil magistrate is to administer justice and equity according to the 10 Commandments and principles of God's Word (Rom. 13; Matt. 28:18ff). He is to enforce the "general equity" of God's law. WCF 19:4.
27. That both Church and state have authority to "execute" sinners. The Church can exclude from the kingdom the unbelieving and ungodly by the power of the keys in excommunication. The state does not bear the sword in vain but has the power to put to death those guilty of capital crimes. Capital crimes are those based on "life for a life." Matt. 18; Rom. 13.
28. Any application of Old Testament penal sanctions must give recognition to the progression of revelation in the New Covenant.
29. That the state wields the sword for punishment but the Church wields the sword of the Spirit. The state is to punish by retribution and restitution. The Church can restore by the preaching of the Gospel and church discipline.
30. That unlike Old Testament Israel we do not defend the kingdom of God with the sword. Jn. 18:11; II Cor. 10:4.
31. That Christians should work for civil and legal structures based on the Word of God. Christ is King in every sphere. Scripture is the revealed will of God for every sphere.
32. The the Christian ethic (personal and social) is based on the Word of God. The Christian lives under the structure of the New Testament economy in the age of the Spirit and therefore enjoys the freedom of the Christian man. The Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God is instructive to the Christian for his personal piety and the establishment of a Christian society.
33. That the separation that God symbolized between Israel and the Gentile nations---eating only clean meat, keeping dietary regulations, not mixing seed or fibers---is no longer kept as it was in the Old Testament. And yet we are to be separate (II Cor 6:17-18). The Church and the world are still to be separate even as Jew and Gentile were separated in the Old Covenant.

IV. Unbiblical and unacceptable statements and positions.

A. Statements of denial.

1. That we no longer have to live righteous lives.
2. That the standard of righteousness is now different.

3. That living in the New Age of the Spirit changes or lessens our moral obligations of covenant living.
 4. That there can be keeping of law without love and love without keeping of law.
 5. That the goal of Christ is the mechanical keeping of the law.
 6. That there is a radical Dispensational discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. (ie. Scofield Dispensationalism)
 7. That the laws of God are binding on us in the exhaustive detail of the Old Covenant. (Rather God Himself has made changes as He unfolded His revelation in progressive fashion moving from the childhood stage of the Old Covenant to the maturity of the New Covenant and the age of Pentecost and the indwelling Spirit.) Gal. 3:23-25; 5:22-25.
 8. That it is a simple or an obvious matter to discern the necessary distinctions with respect to the Old Testament law or to find the proper application of those commandments to our situations today.
 9. That the laws and penal sanctions of the Mosaic economy were somehow bad or evil or foolish. (Rather God's laws are always good and right in every historical situation.) Rom. 7:7,12.
 10. That the magistrate, by the law or the sword, has the power to compel sinners to confess Christ or to live Christian lives.
 11. That the state has authority to regulate religious worship or religious organizations beyond creating a climate favorable ~~to propagate~~ the truth. *for the propagation of*
 12. That the Church and Christians should foment rebellion against humanistic legal structures unless they are directly required to disobey God.
- B. Statements of rejections as given under I (Theonomy) that are positions unacceptable to the RCUS.
1. That man can save himself or contribute to his salvation by obedience to the law.
 2. That the law of God is a dynamic of sanctification.
 3. That Christians should seek to reinstitute the Mosaic economy in the New Covenant age. *t/*
 4. That the socio-political ethics is the primary message of the Church.

5. That any state in the New Testament age be equated with the Old Testament state of Israel.
6. That the state has the duty to evangelize or to do the work of the Church.
7. That the Church or individual Christians should foment rebellion by the use of violence against anti-christian legal structures, eg. forms of survivalism.
8. That any particular denomination should be established as a state Church.
- ~~9. That Post-millennialism and Theonomy need to be accepted in tandem or rejected in pair.~~

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. We recommend that Classis adopt the affirmations, denials, and rejections stated in this report as being in accord with Reformed orthodoxy and the Heidelberg catechism with regard to the subject of theonomy.
2. That a copy of the report and action of Classis be sent to the stated clerk of the Presbytery of Dakotas, O.P.C. with a note of appreciation for the help contributed by Presbytery members David King and Steve Doe.

and Internal Relations Committee

Respectfully submitted,

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