

Christian Reconstructionism

The work of a small group of scholars in the 1960s and 1970s created Christian Reconstructionism. It evolved from a strain of conservative Presbyterianism teaching that the laws of the Old Testament are the foundation for building the Kingdom of God on Earth. Reconstructionists call on conservatives to be Christians first and to build a church-based political machine where civil government exists to implement God's Law. In other words, Christians need to "reconstruct" society in the image of the Old Testament. Many Reconstructionists believe America is a "Christian Nation," and that they are the modern-day versions of the Founding Fathers.

Reconstructionists believe that Christians, of the right kind, are God's new chosen people. They are commanded to do what Adam and Eve failed to—create the society that God requires. Reconstructionists blame Jews for failing to live up to their covenant with God, resulting in Jews no longer being God's chosen people.

R.J. Rushdoony detailed Reconstructionist theology in his 1973 tome *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. It was an 800-page explanation of the Ten Commandments and how they should be applied today. The tract made him the recognized founder of the Christian Reconstruction movement. *The Institutes* declared that fundamentalist Christians needed to take control of government and impose strict biblical law.

A main contribution made by Rushdoony was his promotion of a pre-Enlightenment and medieval view of a God-centered world. Rushdoony de-emphasized humanity's ability to reason independently of God. He argued that all human knowledge was invalid unless it was rooted in the Bible. For Rushdoony, any thought that does not begin with God and the Bible is rebellion. Therefore, thinking becomes strictly a religious activity.

Rushdoony wrote, "All law is religious in nature, and every non-Biblical law-order represents an anti-Christian religion." According to Old Testament biblical law, the death penalty would be used against "practicing homosexuals," adulterers, blasphemers, murderers, and heretics. The method of death would be burning at the stake, stoning, hanging, or by the sword. "The law that requires the death penalty for homosexual acts effectively drives the perversion of homosexuality underground, back into the closet," wrote Reconstructionist Gary DeMar, who also added, "If we argue that abortion is murder, then we must call for the death penalty."

While it may have started with right-wing Presbyterians, Christian Reconstructionism isn't confined to one single denomination. It networks through magazines, think tanks, conferences, and publishing houses, all the while trying to keep a low profile and staying away from public scrutiny. As Frederick Clarkson wrote, "Reconstructionists are aware that such ideas must be discreetly infused into their target constituency. The vague claim that God and Jesus want Christians to govern society is certainly more appealing than the bloodthirsty notion of 'vengeance,' or the overthrow of constitutional government."

In a "reconstructed" society, women would be relegated to the home. People not holding the "proper" Christian views would be denied citizenship. In fact, Reconstructionist Gary North believes that the U.S. Constitution should be used to limit citizenship to the "correct" type of Christian. He thinks Americans should deny the vote to "those who hold religious or ideological views that would threaten the very foundations of Christian Civilizations."

The impact of Christian Reconstructionism can be seen throughout today's society. It is "a factor behind the increased violence in the anti-abortion movement, the nastiest of attacks on gays and lesbians, and the new wave of battles over alleged secular humanist influence in the public schools," wrote Chip Berlet.

Sources: Southern Poverty Law Center, Frederick Clarkson's *Eternal Hostility*, Chip Berlet's *Eyes Right*, Sara Diamond's *Roads to Dominion*, Michael McVicar's "The Libertarian Theocrats: The Long, Strange History of R.J. Rushdoony and Christian Reconstructionism," and R.J. Rushdoony's *The Institute of Biblical Law*.