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Letter: **“Comment on Chantry’s Review of Rushdoony,”**  
**From Greg L. Bahnsen**

In a book review appearing in issue 175 [April, 1978] your associate editor, Walter Chantry, associates my name with ‘the viewpoint of a growing coalition’ and their ‘distinctive doctrines.’ He asserts that my book *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* [Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1977] ‘has added to the growing number of volumes supporting this new force among Reformed Christians.’ He identifies this coalition and force as the Chalcedon Foundation, goes on to associate its viewpoint and doctrines with one writer for the Foundation, and then associates this perspective with the distinctive doctrines of one booklet of this one writer.

Through this loose series of associations and fallacious transitions he comes to attribute or give the impression of attributing certain teachings and attitudes to me. These direct and tacit attributions are quite inaccurate and unfair to my theological viewpoint. Please allow me briefly to correct the mis-impressions.

I do *not* hold to a new version of postmillennialism wherein the world is radically changed through social action rather than evangelistic revival, a version calling for the imposition of law on nations which have not come to faith by God’s grace [*Theonomy*, pp. 191ff, 257, 422, 427, 278, 486, 489, also chapters 4 and 7].

I do *not* think of the cultural mandate as having an importance above that of the Great Commission, *nor* do I have a concept of the Kingdom which minimizes the role of the church [*Theonomy*, pp. 33-34, 35-36, 177-181, 199-203, 521ff., 546, also chapter 20 and pages cited in previous paragraph].

I do *not* support any form of ‘new legalism’ which misconstrues the distinction between Old and New Covenants [*Theonomy*, chapters 3, 4, 8, 9, 13, and pp. 218ff., 491].

I do *not* hold that the dietary requirements of the Old Testament must be practiced today [*Theonomy*, pp. 209-210, 228].

I do *not* see the economic, civil, and penal commandments of God in the Old Testament as extraneous additions to ‘the moral law’ which binds all men in its fundamental principles [*Theonomy*, passim, but especially chapters 2, 16-23, and appendix 2].

I do *not* present a point of view which is somehow radically new or surprising to those of us who have great esteem for the Puritans [*Theonomy*, appendix 3, also chapter 1 and the use of Reformed theologians throughout].

Mr. Chantry may not like what is distinctive about my book in the long run, but I am unhappy that he has given a misleading portrayal of its viewpoint. The views and styles of Mr. Rushdoony and myself are sufficiently different that I will be content to answer simply for myself. But I would like to suggest that Mr. Rushdoony has not been given a very sympathetic reading and understanding by Mr. Chantry either. I am sure that this is only a temporary lapse; I am usually quite edified by Mr. Chantry's literature. Thank you for the opportunity to express myself in your pages and set the record somewhat straight.

[To the above letter Walter J. Chantry replies:

*It was poor of me to treat Greg Bahnsen's Theonomy in Christian Ethics in such an offhand way during my review of Mr. Rushdoony's booklet. Mr. Bahnsen's work is important in its own right and deserves independent attention. My apology, too, if I gave the impression that he and Mr. Rushdoony agrees at all points.*

*Nonetheless, I am afraid that Mr. Bahnsen's work is seriously adrift in the waters of the legalism to which I referred. By 'legalism' I do not denote any teaching that a man may be justified before God by keeping the law. Mr. Bahnsen has made himself abundantly clear in opposing such a position. Yet his work does bind on the conscience of believers details of O.T. theocratic law which Scripture and the mainstream of Reformed theology have regarded as set aside in the New Covenant. Promoting fastidious attention to the letter of a law never intended for Christians deserves the label 'legalism'.*

*Also in keeping with the Chalcedon emphasis, Theonomy finds within the Great Commission an obligation for social reconstruction among unbelievers! Perhaps the following quotes will lead many to read Theonomy for themselves:*

*'The Older Testamental law was declared to have exhaustive validity under the New Covenant by the covenant mediator, our Lord.' p. 89.*

*'Every bit of the law remains binding in the gospel age.' p. 74.*

*'The New Testament consistently supports the Christian's obligation to God's law as expressed in the stipulations of the Older Testament, both inside and outside the decalogue.' p. 264.*

*'Lament antinomianism expresses itself in different ways. Sometimes it comes in the form of multiplying distinctions and qualifications which are not enumerated in God's word. Some people (e.g., Charles Hodge) try to draw a line between "moral" and "civil" laws . . . Yet Scripture recognizes no such demarcation.'* p. 310.

*'Magistrates in the era of the New Testament are under obligation to those commands in the book of the Law which apply to civil affairs and social penology'* p. 317.

*'Knowing that God's standard of righteousness (which includes temporal, social relations) is as immutable as the character of God Himself, we should conclude that crimes which warrant capital punishment in the Older Testament continue to deserve the death penalty today.'* p. 422.

*'The civil magistrate is obligated to follow the penal sanctions of God's law, for those sanctions are neither arbitrary nor temporary.'* p. 470.

*'Believers . . . must exhort governmental officials to enforce God's righteous law by imposing divinely prescribed punishments upon violators of God's law . . . It is quite clear that if the Christian is not exhorting others to obey the law of God and promoting such obedience in every way he can, then he is not fulfilling the great commission delivered to him by His Lord and Saviour . . . "Teaching them to keep everything I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19) . . . the church is assured of victory on these terms.'* p. 476-478].