

The Faculty Discussion of Theonomy

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

On Monday afternoon, July 17, 1978, the faculty [Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS] met with me to discuss my book, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. The book had been criticized previously by some faculty members, but now everyone was to have read the book and come together for a scholarly discussion of the issues raised in it. At least one representative from each department brought prepared, written criticisms or critical questions with him. I was to answer them extemporaneously. However, the faculty would not allow me to tape-record the meeting, even upon the condition that the tape would not be audited by anyone except upon faculty approval. The critical questioning and my answers are rehearsed below. Because the chairman continued to limit my replies (which seemed inappropriate to me, given the meeting was called to hear my reactions and evaluate my stand) I was forced to omit relevant material from time to time. Where I have supplied such below, it is marked with an asterik*. The criticisms are numbered below [FACULTY], with my answers indented [BAHNSEN]. Occasionally, when a question or topic was repeated by another faculty member, I have combined them into one entry in the list below.

FACULTY:

1. You have not abided by the basic hermeneutical rules, for you attempt to establish the meaning of plhrow in Matthew 5:17 on the basis of English dictionaries, rather than by checking Greek synonyms.

BAHNSEN:

The bottom of page 66 explains that the English authorities are consulted in order to find the dynamic equivalent of the contrasting pair of words in the Greek text. The meaning of the Greek word is surely not found in the English dictionaries. But to translate properly and preserve the original contrast in Matthew 5:17 between kataluw and plhrow, one must have an adequate grasp of both the original *and* the language into which the translation is made. The suggested meaning for plhrow is substantiated on independent grounds.

FACULTY:

2. Investigation of the Hebrew word for "confirm, establish" in the Old Testament, and consultation of its equivalent in the LXX, shows that the Greek word to be expected in Matthew 5:17 would be isthui (or related forms).

BAHNSEN:

The goal of exegeting Matthew 5:17 was not to establish the Hebrew and LXX equivalents, but to understand the text as given (in terms of its own context). The reason why Jesus used the more connotive word "fulfill" (in the sense of ratifying, confirming) instead of the mundane *isthui* is explained on pages 64, 71-72 of the book. Christ not only confirmed the law, but He restored it to the full measure of its meaning over against Pharisaical perversions.

FACULTY:

3. It was a crucial oversight on your part to omit checking Kittel's *Wordbook* and the argument set forth by Delling about *plhrow* in Matthew 5:17.

BAHNSEN:

Delling's argument from Kittel is rehearsed and rebutted on page 64 of the book.

FACULTY:

4. In looking at the meaning of *plhrow* in the New Testament you go to many verses elsewhere, but you do not consult the many references in the remainder of Matthew's gospel.

BAHNSEN:

The point of investigating usage elsewhere in the New Testament was to demonstrate that the word takes the sense of "confirm" in the Koine of the period. This sense is perfectly consistent with the other uses of the word in Matthew as well, although the full sense is broader than legal confirmation (the specific sense in 5:17).

FACULTY:

5. The emphasis in Matthew 5:17 is upon the "I have come..." - upon Jesus.

BAHNSEN:

This is readily granted, but it does not affect the argument. The point is that Jesus Has come with no intention of abrogating the law. The emphasis upon His person and advent surely does not falsify what He says about the status of the law in relation to His coming.

It should be noted here, given the discussion of "fulfill" in Matthew 5:17, that the theological argument of my book in no way depends upon the specifying sense of "confirm" that I have suggested. The relevant point is that Jesus denies that His coming abrogates the Old Testament law in any detail. That premise is foundational to my argument - whatever you think *prhrow* specifically means. It cannot take the sense of abrogating the law, or else the verse becomes self-contradictory.

FACULTY:

6. You are wrong to say that *genhtai* in Matthew 5:18 cannot be translated as "fulfill" (page 78), given the pattern of fulfillment in Matthew's gospel. Moreover, due to your imposed theological system, you put the word in the past tense.

BAHNSEN:

The meaning of this word is irrelevant to my argument. However, what I have said is reflected in numerous commentaries. * *genhtai* is an extremely common and colorless Greek verb; to infuse it here with theological overtones calls for extensive evidence that has not been offered. The past tense is simply to give a smoother reading, along with other commentators; it has nothing whatsoever to do with my theological system - much less with an imposed one.

FACULTY:

7. You say that *panta* has no antecedent (page 80), but the antecedent is *iota en*. This affects the interpretation of the passage.

BAHNSEN:

I will have to recheck the Greek since it is not before me now. *The antecedent would, according to your suggestion, not simply be *iota en*, but also *h mia keraia* (viz. "one iota or one horn"). However, the latter is feminine, and both terms are singular. Since *panta* is neuter and plural, there is an obvious disagreement in number and gender to overcome. Moreover, one cannot break the parallelism (syntactic and semantic) between "until heaven and earth pass away" and "until all things come to pass" without come conjunction relating the separate phrases to each other - which is quite absent in the Greek text altogether. The point remains that no detail of the law will be invalidated until the end of the world.

FACULTY:

8. There is a difference between the earlier (O.T. phase) period of Jesus' ministry and the later period when Jesus has completed the work of redemption. The statement in Matthew 5 would still be the Old Testament, earlier period - thus somewhat altered later on.

BAHNSEN:

*There is no textual evidence of this. Jesus said that the "law and prophets" were until John (the Baptist); obviously He saw His ministry completed as part of the New Testament order (cf. Luke 4 and Isa. 61). Further, in Matthew 5 he covers the entire interadvental age, from His coming (v. 17) to His coming again (when heaven and earth pass away, v. 18). So His resurrection, ascension, etc. have not affected the validity of the law of God.

FACULTY:

9. You see a historical basis for the ceremonial laws which affects the way in which they are followed today (fulfilled in Christ finally). Why could not the same be said of the case laws?

BAHNSEN:

That is what I say. The case laws are given in terms of the culture of Israel in that historical period. We are not bound to reenact the ancient culture of Israel (e.g., axheads, oxen, railings on roofs) but to observe the moral principles which are taught in terms of these historical examples. The accomplishment of redemption changes the way in which we observe the ceremonial law, and the change of culture and times alters the specific way in which we observe the case laws. The "cases" are different, but the same moral principles apply.

FACULTY:

10. The case law might be viewed as implementing and protecting the religious and moral core of the law. Jesus would be concerned to defend the value of the moral law, but not the case law tradition (in the same sense as oral tradition).

BAHNSEN:

The difficulty here is that Jesus and Paul both appealed authoritatively to the case laws of the written Old Testament, without apology or any indication that this was an exception to the general rule. The case law is upheld in the New Testament; e.g., Paul cites the Old Testament in saying "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox as he treads" - he takes the principle about Old Testament oxen and applies it to New Testament Christian ministers.

FACULTY:

11. But Paul said that the church did not have to pay him after all; so the law was not binding.

BAHNSEN:

Paul's foregoing of his pay as an act of charity would have been baseless and meaningless if the church did not legally owe it to him in the first place. The law established their obligation, and then Paul willingly gave way from his rights.

FACULTY:

12. The Sabbath is a good test case for any doctrine of God's law in the New Testament.

BAHNSEN:

I agree. Nobody has written a thoroughly convincing study of this tough question. My approach calls for distinguishing moral and ceremonial aspects of the Old Testament Sabbath legislation. I would like to tackle this issue sometime and work it through. *Theonomy* says very little about it. *I think any Reformed treatment will in some way need to parallel distinctions I have utilized in my book.

FACULTY:

13. In Matthew 5:17 you equate "prophets" with legal stipulations; yet the rest of Matthew's gospel shows Christ embodying the prophecy of the Old Testament, where the point is obviously not the ratifying of the law.

BAHNSEN:

In the Sermon on the Mount Christ is expositing the law and our moral obligation, not fulfilling explicit prophecy - as most commentators observe. His reference to "law and prophets" is a reference to the entire Old Testament canon, not legislation and predictive prophecy *per se*; it is the law found *throughout* the Old Testament that He confirms. Prophecy is not the topic of concern in Matthew 5, although it certainly is elsewhere in Matthew's gospel. Context is determinative.

FACULTY:

14. I am not at all sure what you mean by "law" throughout the book; it includes so many things (e.g., goals, rules, guidance, blessing, punishments). Definition of terms is lacking (cf. M. Hill's review), so that the ceremonial law can be "confirmed," and yet not literally observed today. Yet you shudder at Hodge using the same distinction in another regard.

BAHNSEN:

"Law" is simply a divine imperative. There is nothing esoteric about my basic conception' it is whatever God tells us to do. Hill's review simply says that some linguistic token which separates the laws which are confirmed yet not outwardly observed from those which are confirmed and followed is necessary (i.e., he suggests "subjective observance" and "objective observance" as I recall). I do not think a technical vocabulary is necessary, but there is nothing to prevent it. The important thing is that our exposition is understood by the reader, and Hill obviously understood what I meant. *Hodge offered no such distinction with respect to the civil laws of the Old Testament, as far as I can tell in reading him.

FACULTY:

15. What do you mean by "latent antinomianism: and who does it apply to?"

BAHNSEN:

The phrase is used technically, not emotively. According to page 309 of the book, it applies to all who rationalize away God's obligations in our lives. More specifically, I clearly say on pages 308-310 (even using italicized words here) that a latent antinomian is one who endorses the law of God in general, and *then without clear scriptural warrant or exegesis* looks to himself to determine the extent of his obligation. Thus not everyone who disagrees with my thesis is a latent antinomian; for instance, John Murray was surely not one, for he offered exegetical arguments for his conclusion that some laws are not to be followed today. I disagree with his arguments, but respect his theological method. Others disagree on the basis of something other than biblical teaching; latently, that is antinomianism.

FACULTY:

16. Your use of Scripture is abhorrent. Your use of *sola scriptura* disturbs me, giving the impression that the Bible is to be isolated from general revelation. Your interpretations are based on a static, linear view of Scripture. Your approach is biblicistic and proof-texting. You obscure the discontinuity between the testaments and have no historical understanding of biblical theology. You give the impression that we can live by scriptural revelation (e.g., criticizing Kline). [At least four times faculty members said the book was biblicistic and proof-texting in its method.]

BAHNSEN:

Such criticism calls for specifics before it could possibly be answered. In what *way(s)* am I static and biblicistic? What does such a charge even mean? *No concrete evidence of such things has been given whatsoever; these are, as they stand, simply emotive charges without specification or proof. I do affirm *sola scriptura* as authoritative in theology (*and special revelation does govern our approach to general revelation, not vice versa), and I do believe in proof-texting in theology. We are obligated to show where and how our teaching in the church comes specifically from God's written word. Of course we cannot use texts out of contexts, but nobody has shown that I am in the habit of doing so. All biblically-oriented Christians and theologians would want to say as much. I do not criticize Kline for going to general revelation (the Hittite treaties, etc.), but for doing so excessively and making extrascriptural outlooks determinative in interpreting the Bible. Others have made similar criticisms (e.g., Palmer Robertson).

FACULTY:

17. You use a linguistic-analytical system and impose it on the Bible, even though you criticize Kline for going to general revelation.

BAHNSEN:

I do not criticize Kline for going to general revelation. I believe that general revelation is clear and authoritative today also - but it cannot be abused (e.g., Kline's excessive use of extrascriptural material to interpret Scripture) and appealed to against the clear teaching of the Bible. I do not use a linguistic-analytical *system*, for there is no such thing. Further, the method of linguistic analysis is not pervasively used in the book - as any secular philosopher would testify. The book is exegetical and theological; analysis is merely a tool in the service of these ends.

FACULTY:

18. I do not see your system as socially adequate. The Puritans made a mess of things in society.

BAHNSEN:

Well, we disagree on our evaluation of the Puritans, even though I do not agree with everything they did (*see the appendix in the book on John Cotton). *Every law-code in this country traces back historically to the Puritan codes which drew heavily on the Old Testament law. Most of the blessed elements of our current social-political system are the fruits of our Puritan heritage.

FACULTY:

19. The book ignores the progressive character of revelation and does not take into consideration the redemptive-historical question. It does not understand biblical theology and obscures the discontinuity between testaments.

BAHNSEN:

*Again, these sweeping charges are offered without any specification, clarification, or substantiation from my book. The biblical-theological question of discontinuity and redemptive history is addressed throughout the book; it informs the questions raised and answered. Indeed, at least three chapters are given explicitly to the redemptive-historical issue: chapters 6, 8, 9. The book clearly states the anticipation/realization differences between covenants; it condemns those who follow shadows (OT) rather than the Savior (NT). It evidences throughout a sensitivity to the progress of revelation and redemption. Thus these criticisms are mistakenly put. I do not ignore biblical theology; I simply come to different conclusions with it than the critic. But the critic has offered no specific evidence to fault my biblical-theological work and conclusions. Not one concrete criticism. The difference between the testaments is hardly obscured; not one reader of the books has ever shown clear, definable, specific oversights of discontinuity recognized by the Reformed churches.

FACULTY:

20. There is a danger in resting a whole ethical system upon one single text.

BAHNSEN:

My ethical system is not dependent upon Matthew 5:17-19 exclusively. The same premise of the law's exhaustive validity today can be, and is, argued on other theological and exegetical grounds (e.g., chapters 5-8, 11-12). Indeed, the argument of the book can be sustained without appeal to Matthew at all, much less to one passage in Matthew.

FACULTY:

21. Not one single commentator would agree with your interpretation of Matthew 5. And elsewhere when the book cites authorities, it cites those who do not agree with the position of the book.

BAHNSEN:

*The interpretation offered of Matthew 5 has many supporters who agree with what I identify as the *thrust* of Jesus' teaching, as chapter 2 evidences by citing extensively (here the exact translation of plhrow is irrelevant). I do not quote other authors except to the degree that they agree with the *specific premise* being set forth *at the time*. They are not cited as supporting every detail or conclusion of my thesis. Thus what scholarly injustice has been done? The example offered (Calvin and Vos on pp. 56-57) illustrates this. I do not cite them as supporting the overall thesis, but the limited point being made in the context - as rereading the pages involved shows. Whether such authors have been consistent with the premises on which we agree or not, is another question altogether.

FACULTY:

22. The book is guilty of a crusading spirit (even though not intended by the author). It speaks of those who teach slackening of even the least commandment as least in the kingdom, and it says we are to have hot indignation toward those who break the law. We are not to tolerate disobedience, but rebuke it. How can this position live at peace with those who stand against it in the Reformed tradition?

BAHNSEN:

*See pp. 84-85, 475-478. There it becomes evident that these remarks are quotations from the Bible and exposition thereof. One cannot apologize for the statements of Scripture or cut them out of the Bible because they might step on some toes. John Murray makes precisely these same points in his *Principles of Conduct* (e.g., pp. 151-154), and yet he is not charged with a "crusading" spirit. We who disagree of the extent of the law's validity and application can still agree that disobedience is not to be tolerated, even though the set of commands to be obeyed is larger and smaller. The issue of the law's extent is not a personal one, but an exegetical one. For instance, while disagreeing with Murray's arguments, I have not the slightest disrespect for the man and his stature as a theologian. In my book I say that "I *aim* to demonstrate" something (xiii), and that "I am defending *what I take to be* the biblical position" respecting ethics. The reader is clearly alerted to the *apologetical* tone of the book (xv, p. 36), and throughout I take up objections and other points of view (e.g., ch. 2-4, 14-22), thereby indicating that I have much to demonstrate and overcome. I "intend" to counter dilemmas and "hope" to be successful (p. 32). The clear statement of p. xiv is: "the present study leaves a great deal to be explored and discussed in Christian ethics, as well as extensive room for disagreement...." Moreover, I encourage the reader to examine the treatise with "Bible in hand" so that my thoughts can be better evaluated against the word of God (xv). I recognize that some elements of the book are in this day uncommon and perhaps startling (xvi). An apology (defense) of them is necessary. This is hardly the spirit of an intolerant crusader. If those on the faculty missed this modest attitude and confused apologetical defense for intolerant crusading, then it must be equally recognized that nobody *outside* of the faculty has to my knowledge taken the same offense to the spirit of the book. *Indeed, John Frame wrote in the *Presbyterian Journal*: "This book performs a great service. It takes the whole controversy out of the 'shouting' stage and presents solid arguments which must be soberly discussed."

FACULTY:

23. This is an entirely new point of view which has no support in the history of theology outside the minor exception of the New England Puritans. This view of the judicial law is out of accord with church confessions, commentaries on the Westminster Confession, and the statements of notable theologians [a sheet of quotations distributed]. So *Theonomy* is out of accord with the Reformed consensus.

BAHNSEN:

The Westminster Confession - just like many of the quotations distributed - says that the "general equity" of the judicial law is "required" today. This means that the moral *principle* illustrated and applied in the case of the Old Testament is binding, while the *particular* historical application is not binding as such today. (For example, we may not need to put up railings around our roofs

today, but we are responsible to place a fence around our backyard swimming pool - in both instances to protect human life.) That the Westminster divines held this view of the case laws (judicial law of Moses) is more than clear from the direct statements they made elsewhere, as well as the vocabulary and writings of the Puritans of that period. That the Westminster divines held that the moral principles of the laws outside the Decalogue (*which they called the "summary" of our moral duty, not the full extent of its content) were still binding in the New Testament age is obvious from their proof-texting of the Larger Catechism in the exposition of the sins and duties covered by the Ten Commandments. Therefore, *Theonomy* is not a stranger to reformed theology. It is a basic point of view held by many reformed writers in the past, whether or not it has continued in popularity. Those who appeal to the "Reformed tradition" here are usually not aware of how they have to *gerrymander* that tradition to make their point. Moreover, many of those who have written about the judicial law in the past leave much to be desired in their theological exposition. For instance, Peck is cited in this sheet that was distributed. Yet Peck is easily faulted for logical inconsistencies, absence of exegetical support for his premises, inadequate moral evaluations (e.g., polygamy was tolerated in the Old Testament because it is not evil per se, and because of the uncivilized status of the people - even though he elsewhere says that the judicial law demands too high a standard of holiness for other historical nations), and arbitrariness (as a Southern theologian, he said that the judicial laws expired - with the exception of those about slavery). Further, we must note that even if the New England Puritans were the only ones who endorsed the civil ethic of *Theonomy* (e.g., John Cotton), they can hardly be considered a *minor* exception. Their impact and importance are tremendous in terms of historical influence. Finally, not only can other Reformed theologians of the past be cited in support of the basic approach of *Theonomy*, but this question is really quite irrelevant to the theological work and argument of my book. Jesus indicted the Pharisees for honoring their traditions, only thereby to make void the word of God. In the end my task as a moral theologian is to be true to *God's written word*. That is where the argument must center and be decided, *not* in church history.

FACULTY:

24. Kuyper traced the use of the theocratic penalties of Israel in the modern day to the Roman Catholic church, and to the inquisition. [Paper on Kuyper's views distributed.]

BAHNSEN:

If that is meant as a criticism of *Theonomy*, it must be pointed out that it commits the logical fallacy known as the genetic fallacy. The fact that something was endorsed by the Roman Catholics says nothing about its validity (e.g., for all I know, Roman Catholics of the period agreed with God's law that it is wrong to trip blind men and curse deaf men). More importantly, we must remember that the Roman church did not separate church and state in a proper way, as I would. Therefore, what Kuyper was criticizing was not *my* thesis at all. The version of "theocracy" I propound is not Romanist.

FACULTY:

25. No, Kuyper was writing against those in his own Reformed church in Holland who held your views.

BAHNSEN:

Well then, that at least establishes that my view has not been confined to the minor exception of the New England Puritans.

FACULTY:

26. J. B. Shearer wrote that a "theocracy" requires some medium of communication between God and the people - e.g., a prophet. If you believe in a closed canon (no continuing revelation today), how can you aim to establish a theocracy?

BAHNSEN:

On pp. 427-432 of my book I explain that there are numerous versions of what is meant by the word "theocracy" (*Shearer's is discussed on p. 431). If someone means by "theocracy" that there must be some continuing revelation then we do *not* aim to establish a theocracy (in the given sense). However, that is not morally relevant to the continuing validity of God's written law. Israel was obliged to honor and obey the law of God, whether or not a prophet was currently available and speaking. Likewise, even with the cessation of revelation today, we can be required to honor the written law of God. The word "theocracy" has not argumentative bearing on the question.

FACULTY:

27. Give your response to the following specific laws of the Old Testament and how they could be observed today.

BAHNSEN:

I will be glad to do so. However, please remember that the thesis of *Theonomy* is not dependent upon the specific exegesis and understanding of each law of the Old Testament - as I say on p. xiv. *Theonomy* argues for the general thesis of the law's validity, not for any particular understanding of the particulars of the Old Testament commandments. Indeed, I say that there is presently plenty of room for disagreement on such questions. So do not let my answers here affect your evaluation of the argument for general validity of the law and our accountability for understanding and obeying it.

FACULTY:

- A. Israel was to destroy all the heathen places of worship occupying the land.

BAHNSEN:

This was not a standing law, but a positive law to Israel on that occasion. It does not justify our destroying pagan temples in the United States. However, Israel was to prohibit the external following of heathen religions - just as the Westminster Larger Catechism tells us at the second commandment that the sins forbidden include "tolerating of a false religion." *Every government must forbid certain religions (e.g., Satan worship and child sacrifice, refusal to administer medical aid with Jehovah's Witnesses or Christian Science practitioners). Today many elements of the

Christian religion are violated by the government; in a Christian state, heathen religions would be likewise jeopardized.

FACULTY:

- B. Deuteronomy 17 shows that the high court in Israel had the presence of Levites. So apparently there was no separation of church and state after all.

BAHNSEN:

This objection is answered on pp. 403ff. In the book. Not all Levites were priests in the temple. Others were experts in the law - like teachers today. Such Levites were in the court for the obvious purpose of helping it to understand the written requirements of God in a particular case. This was not church interference in the authority of the state.

FACULTY:

- C. Can an obedient nation today really expect to experience the blessings promised to Israel (cf. P. 445)?

BAHNSEN:

Yes. The law of Moses is upheld as a *model* to the nations in Deuteronomy. Proverbs promises that righteousness exalts a nation.

FACULTY:

- D. What about the law governing determination of virginity by the "tokens of virginity." How can the punishment of a guilty bride be reconciled with the New Testament teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation?

BAHNSEN:

I have seen many interpretations of this passage, but I am still unsure of its exact meaning. However, as Van Til has taught us, there should be no external judges of God's word (such as tradition, culture, our personal feelings on what is reasonable, etc.). Unless there are internal indications in the Bible that this law is not binding today, then we should not stand back and judge it according to our own feelings and tradition. If God commands it, then so be it. The question is not whether I like it, but whether God requires it. Whatever this law requires, it does not need to be "reconciled" with the New Testament doctrine of forgiveness (*as though the wrathful God of the Old Testament had been superseded by the loving God of the New Testament). The Old Testament was replete with the teaching of forgiveness, love, reconciliation, etc. If the law as consistent with such Old Testament teaching (*which obviously it was), then it is likewise consistent with the New Testament teaching on the same subject.

FACULTY:

E. Why were homosexuals punished in the Old Testament, but not lesbians?

BAHNSEN:

I do not believe that such was the case. The law is couched in language applying to the male form of this perversion, but it equally applied to females. (*This literary characteristic is typical of many Old Testament laws.)

FACULTY:

F. How can one possibly think that the levirate marriage should be kept today?

BAHNSEN:

I don't know. I do not believe that it is an abidingly valid institution. The law regarding it was given to insure a family's inheritance in the promised land. Since that land was typological of the coming kingdom of Christ (of which we have the inheritance down-payment already, with the Holy Spirit in our hearts), the laws regarding inheritance in Palestine expired with the land's significance (that is, in the New Testament).

FACULTY:

G. Deuteronomy 13 calls for the annihilation of an entire town for apostasy. Yet it was never applied in Israel. How can it be binding today?

BAHNSEN:

The fact that it was never obeyed in Israel says nothing whatsoever as to the moral *obligation* Israel had to obey it. The details of its current day application are not clear to me; again, this is something calling for study (*not *a priori* dismissal).

FACULTY:

28. Why do you use the phrase "older" covenant throughout the book?

BAHNSEN:

Simply to stress the unity of the one covenant of grace. There is no special or esoteric significance. I could as well speak of "old covenant."

FACULTY:

29. There is probably a hermeneutical difference that explains why the entire Reformed consensus is against you.

BAHNSEN:

Well, the entire Reformed consensus (if there is such a thing) is not against me (see above). But I do not believe that there is any overt difference between my hermeneutical principles and those of the general reformed church. *Not one specific instance, illustration, or substantiation has been offered. Without evidence of such an alleged difference, there is nothing to give answer to. Basic Reformed hermeneutics drives me to my conclusions, unless it can be shown otherwise. What rules or procedures do we not share? What is the evidence that I have not followed basic hermeneutical rules that all Reformed men endorse? We do not differ in the rules (*unless someone is asking for a change in the rules of the game late in the ninth inning, when the game does not appear to be going in their favor). We differ in the conclusions to which those rules and the text of Scripture drive us.

FACULTY:

30. You argue that the ceremonial laws are confirmed, and yet not literally followed today. Why couldn't the same argument be offered for not following the penal sanctions today? It seems to me to be an oversight on your part not to take that possibility into account.

BAHNSEN:

That argument is explicitly posed and then answered in my book, pp. 449ff. Speaking of the penal sanctions, the subhead on the page reads, "Parallel to the Ceremonial Law?"

FACULTY:

31. The old Testament calls for bringing those who commit capital crimes to the civil magistrate when we know of their offenses. How would that apply today? Can you illustrate what your position would have been like in the New Testament?

BAHNSEN:

A current application would be the guilt of those people who (as in New York City a few years ago) witnessed violent crimes on the street outside their windows, but would not become involved. They should have responded to the "hue and cry" and assisted in the apprehension of the criminal, having him brought before the bar of justice.

Since I believe that the apostle Paul held the views I set forth, I think we can take him as an example of how this thesis would be followed in the New Testament. It is important to see how Paul separated the church and state in his treatment of law-breakers. In the Corinthian church Paul spoke of forgiven criminals worshipping and being received; this should guide the outlook of today's pastor in ecclesiastical relations. However, when Paul addressed the question of the civil magistrate (e.g., "and avenger of wrath against evildoers," the "minister of God" or a "man of lawlessness") and capital punishment ("if I have done any of these things of which I am accused, I refuse not to die"), he strongly endorsed the civil use of God's law to deter crime and promote social righteousness. The church is a ministry of mercy to sinners, while the state is a minister of social justice.

FACULTY:

32. Since Paul persecuted Christians prior to his conversion (e.g., the execution of Stephen), but did not persecute Jews after it, did not his conversion affect his attitude toward capital punishment?

BAHNSEN:

His conversion certainly brought him to see that the Christians were not legally executed according to the Old Testament law, and indeed that he had misconstrued the law's proper use in such a matter of religious diversity (matters of the heart) in a pagan society (where the community was not committed to the law of God, as in Corinth, etc.). He came to see the guilt of his *unlawful use* of the law. But I do not believe that he changed his attitude toward the law of God and its righteous demands.

FACULTY:

33. Your way of doing theology in *Theonomy* suggest that it is very individualistic, having no place in the church.

BAHNSEN:

The place of the covenant community in ethics is stressed in my course.

FACULTY:

34. Your sweeping generalizations about modern theologians in chapter 1 is unfair to them (e.g., Bonhoeffer's famous statement; neo-orthodoxy said to reduce "Thus saith the Lord" to "It seems to me").

BAHNSEN:

We obviously differ in our interpretation and evaluation of these modern theologians. My book only takes them up by way of introduction and example; it is not a treatise on modern theology. But what I say there can be fully defended, I believe. Bonhoeffer's secularization is evident in the quote, and neo-orthodoxy does in fact remove from us any identifiable word of God in history.

FACULTY:

35. Are some laws more important than others?

BAHNSEN:

Yes. Luke 11:42 speaks of the "weightier matters" of the law.

FACULTY:

36. Is there more than one kind of "theonomy"?

BAHNSEN:

Yes. There are many doctrines pertaining to God's law today.

FACULTY:

37. Can you name a Reformed theologian who is not pro-nomian?

BAHNSEN:

To the extent that a theologian opposes the law of God he is departing from a Reformed distinctive. Therefore by definition there could be no Reformed theologian who was not in some sense pro-nomian. However, clearly some claim the title of "reformed" today who are working toward the weakening of our obligation to God's law.

FACULTY:

38. In its emphasis on every jot and tittle of the law, and its endorsement of the Jewish civil code, *Theonomy* represents a new legalism and Judaizing.

BAHNSEN:

Attention to detail is required by our Lord Himself. *Because God loves us in such a specific and detailed way, He lays down laws for many detailed areas of our lives; because we love Him, we attempt to follow all His blessed law. *This is not Judaizing (see chapters 4, 10 and appendix 1), but the grateful response of the redeemed to their Creator and Savior. In *Principles of Conduct*, John Murray says: "Too often the person imbued with meticulous concern for the ordinances of God and conscientious regard for the minutiae of God's commandments is judged as a legalist, while the person who is not bothered by the details is judged to be the practical person who exemplifies the liberty of the gospel. Here [Matt. 5:19] Jesus is reminding us of the same great truth which he declares elsewhere: 'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much, and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much' (Luke 16:10). The criterion of our standing in the kingdom of God and of reward in the age to come is nothing else than meticulous observance of the commandments of God in the observance on the part of others" (p. 154). *Murray also says that anyone who is uncomfortable with detailed attention to every specific of God's law is not at home with the teaching of Jesus. Legalism is combated by *Theonomy* in chapter 3 and throughout (see index). Attention to detail is required by the Savior (Luke 11:42); it is *not* legalism.

FACULTY:

39. *Theonomy* minimizes love in the New Testament.

BAHNSEN:

This is a sweeping accusation without specification or substantiation from the book. The subject of law and love is discussed many times in the book (*see index). The book insists on observing the Lord's command to love God and neighbor. In my course I also stress that love brings about the positive application of what is forbidden in the law; for instance, the law forbids taking innocent human life, but love requires that we go in the other direction and do all we can to promote

the life, health, and well-being of our neighbors. *Theonomy* in no way minimizes the necessity of love in Christian ethics; love is the fulfilling of the law Jesus said. *Unless some evidence can be given to define and prove this charge, it is simply baseless and rests on a misunderstanding of the biblical teaching regarding love and law. Old Testament law ought not to be opposed to New Testament love. After all, the love commandments of the New Testament are actually quotations from the Old Testament!

FACULTY:

40. *Theonomy* does not interpret the Old Testament by the New Testament, the law by the gospel, or the obscure by the clear.

BAHNSEN:

This charge can hardly hold up in the face of the fact that the thesis of *Theonomy* is drawn from an exegesis of Matthew 5:17-19, where the Savior in the New Testament interprets for us His standing to the law of the Old Testament. It is precisely so that the gospel will interpret the law that I go to that explicit passage. *This charge is simply a misrepresentation of the book and fails to take into account its pervasive manner of argumentation throughout. The New Testament is always allowed the final word in interpreting the standing of the Old Testament law (see, e.g., chapters 2-12, 19, appendix 1).