

Letter: Theonomy

By Greg L. Bahnsen

Editor:

Thank you for opening the pages of *New Horizons* to an exchange over theonomic ethics. It would be mere convenient (and politically correct) to avoid the tough and thorny questions in theology, but the OPC has never been known for that. Thank you for your cordiality (and that of most of your letter writers, too).

Mention was nowhere made in your pages that the theonomic position is more fully explained in my *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977) or *By What Standard?* (1985). Replies to critics of the view are offered in *No Other Standard* (1991).

In my humble opinion, none of the letters written in criticism of theonomy, as far as I can see raises points which were not already anticipated or answered in these earlier works. Those who are interested in more thorough discussion will hopefully look into these and other works (on both sides).

Conspicuous by its absence in the negative letters was any *exegetical explanation* of how “all” of the Mosaic statutes defined wisdom and civil justice for the peoples around Israel (Deut. 4:5-8) or how “not the least commandment” was abrogated by Christ (Matt. 5:19). Nor did any critic tell us just what the moral standard for the state is today, if not the relevant directives of God’s law.

Many inconsistencies or fallacies cropped up in the negative letters. (One long one identified in Hebrews a “much more than” line of reasoning, only to confuse it with the logic of replacement – “no longer this.”)

Those stressing OT Israel’s theocratic uniqueness proved too much – that *all* of the commandments, not simply the civil applications were only for that era. It’s unclear how those who say the Mosaic law defined justice only for Israel avoid cultural relativism. It’s unclear how those who say eternal punishments replace OT temporal penalties avoid concluding that there are *no* legitimate state penalties for crime today.

The last thing we want is everybody arbitrarily picking and choosing what parts of the OT law they want to keep or set aside. I think Dr. Van Til's guidance was sound: "There is no alternative but that of theonomy and autonomy."