



DOMINION THEOLOGY

Its origin, development and place in Christian thinking



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“Whatever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand - in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art, and science - he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of God. He is employed in the service of his God. He has strictly to obey his God. And above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God.”

Abraham Kuyper, 1837-1920

“*Fides quaerens intellectum*” (“Faith seeking understanding”)

St Anselm, 1033-1109

Preface

This book is a slightly modified version of my 2016 Master of Arts (Studies in Philosophy and Religion) dissertation which obtained a Distinction at the University of Bangor in North Wales. As such it is an academic work, but I hope that it is accessible enough so that anyone with an interest in this subject can engage with it effectively in these pages.

My supervisor for the dissertation said that it would be “an absolute tragedy” if it was to remain gathering dust on the library shelves and encouraged me to publish it. That has remained frustratingly out of reach until now, but I am pleased I have been able to revisit it and prepare it for publication. It examines “dominion theology” (sometimes known as “Reconstructionism”, “Kingdom Now” or Dominionism) from its roots in eschatological thinking regarding the triumph of Christ throughout the world, through the Reformation and into the late modern period. Particular attention is then paid to the sociological, political and theological upheavals of the 19th and 20th century, the rise of secular humanism and the work of one man, R.J. Rushdoony in creating a coherent Christian critique and developing an alternative Christian philosophy of sphere sovereignty. It examines the development of the movement from his work, its expansion, how it was critiqued, the strength of these critiques and finally suggests the current status and what the future of the movement may be.

In retrospect, I can now see that the principle purpose of the work was to establish the orthodoxy of the position in response to its persistent portrayal as an extreme, fanatical form of Christianity both from outside and within Christianity. In contrast to this position, I believed and still believe Dominion theology is the most coherent form of Christian cultural thinking and I commend careful consideration by

the reader of what is written here. It represents a measured and critically thought through response to those who for whatever reason, be it fear, genuine ignorance, misunderstanding or maliciousness, have sought to misrepresent the position.

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Soli Deo Gloria.

Michael Macneil, Newcastle Upon Tyne, March 2019.

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

In this chapter I introduce dominion theology and explain why I believe it constitutes a distinct concept rather than as merely an addendum to the study of fundamentalism or evangelicalism. I assert the claim to orthodoxy of Dominionists by locating them in evangelicalism and then sketch the distinctives of dominion theology. I then outline the methodological assumptions and approaches of this book. I finish with a description of hypotheses examined within the book and a brief outline of how the chapters attempt to address them.

1.2 Locating Dominion Theology

The subject of this book is “dominion theology” – its development and contemporary expression with a view to prognosticating its future within Christianity. To the layperson the term “dominion theology”, rather like the term “fundamentalism” has acquired a pejorative sense and the designation has become so vague that there is often a struggle to understand what is actually meant. However, one *does* understand that like the term “fundamentalist” it is associated with a fanatical and extreme interpretation of orthodox Christian beliefs. Indeed, the militancy associated with “dominionists” often result in a conflation with the fundamentalists by political liberals¹ and liberal theological critics². In my view this is not a useful designation unless it is carefully qualified. As the movement grew and exerted its influence,

¹ Joel Pelletier, “The Movement”, <http://www.americanfundamentalists.com/movement.html>, 17/03/2016

² No author specified, “The Righteous Revolution – Could there be a theocracy in America’s future?”, <http://prosocs.tripod.com/riterev.html>, PRO-S.O.C.S, 1996

many fundamentalist, evangelical and Pentecostal leaders were most notable in their failure to credit the Dominionist movement³ or in their open hostility⁴ to it.

1.3 The relationship to Evangelicalism

In contrast to this generalising position, a key presupposition of this book is that dominionism, like fundamentalism, is only correctly understood when considered within the context of a distinct and orthodox grouping within conservative evangelicalism⁵. I propose they are representative of distinct hermeneutical traditions⁶ within evangelicalism resulting from a very specific historical context and a distinct set of philosophical and theological ideas.

I wish to emphasise this principle here as there have at times been an intense polemic between dominion theologians and the more traditional evangelicals where the orthodoxy of dominionism is questioned or denied⁷. In return, Dominionists have accused the Fundamentalists of a rank “dereliction of duty”, of servile “subordinationism” and it is *they*, rather than Fundamentalists, that represent a return to the truly biblical Christianity⁸.

³ For example in Jerry Falwell, Ed Dobson, Ed Hindson, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (New York: Doubleday, 1981). None of the authors mentions Reconstructionism despite that it was empirically the Reconstructionist program that had been adopted (e.g. political vision pp.186ff, Millennialism p71ff).

⁴ Michael J. McVicar, *Christian Reconstruction – R J Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p15

⁵ Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), p13n

⁶ “It is what is nowadays called a hermeneutic -- that is, a way of reading the whole Bible that is itself part of the overall interpretation of the Bible that it undergirds”, J.I. Packer in ‘An Introduction to Covenant Theology’, Kindle Edition (Fig Books: 2012), loc. 22

⁷ Rodney Clapp, “Democracy as Heresy” in *Christianity Today*, Feb 20, 1987 ; Hal Lindsay, *Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1990), p282.

⁸ For example, see Rousas Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Postmillennialism*, Kindle edition (Vallecito: Chalcedon, 1997), loc. 175-213.

It is easy for this polemic to eclipse the important fact that the arguments between the parties are sometimes ideological arguments about Christian praxis resulting from a distinct interpretation of scripture rather than more fundamental theological ones about the status of scripture itself. It is within this theological framework that I assert that dominion theology *does* belong to orthodox evangelical reformed theology because it is understood in its broadest sense as having the following characteristics:

- a. Christianity for whom the scriptures rather than church tradition or papal sanction have the “ultimate authority in matters of spirituality, doctrine and ethics”⁹;
- b. Christianity which “confines and submits [itself] completely to the teaching of the Bible”¹⁰;
- c. Christianity which submits to the “fundamental and inalienable authority of scripture”¹¹.

1.4 The Importance of Dominion Theology

One fundamentalist opponent of the dominion theology movement twenty-five years ago had described it as “one of the fastest growing movements amongst evangelicals today”¹². This use of the designator *evangelical* and not fundamentalist was in fact an admission that dominion theology was exerting far more influence within modern Christianity than would a fringe radical group and was clearly appealing to mainstream theological conservatives. Thus, it is necessary to carefully

⁹ Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), p22

¹⁰ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p42

¹¹ McGrath (1996), p23

¹² Hal Lindsey in H.Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology – Blessing or Curse: An Analysis of Christian Reconstructionism* (Portland, Multnomah: 1988), jacket review.

consider both the theology of dominionism and how it came to exert this influence and appeal.

1.5 The approach of this book

The approach of this book stands in contrast to the general historical, sociological or psychological approaches that are characteristic of recent studies of what humanism has described as religious fundamentalism¹³. These have typically employed a “historical-reductionist” critical approach¹⁴ based on the thesis that the “fundamentalism” (of which dominionism would be a genus) is in fact a “trans-religious, trans-national and trans-cultural”¹⁵ phenomenon based on shared *ideological* assumptions and anti-modern worldviews irrespective of their particularist expression¹⁶. Typically, they may also assign a correlative psychological category¹⁷ specifically applicable to the fundamentalists in question. Thus, the description is entirely naturalistic and it neatly and completely sidesteps any theological dimension of the phenomenon. For such thinkers, “dominionisms” should be made a general political, sociological or psychological category to generate analytical models in this naturalistic way¹⁸.

In my view, the consequence of this reductionism and humanistic presuppositional approach is that there is an obfuscation and dilution of the salient

¹³ Almond, G.A., Appleby, R.S. & Sivan, E., *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

¹⁴ Michael Macneil (2011), *Critically assess the view that Fundamentalism is a revolt against modern secular society* (Bangor University, unpublished), p1. A link to this document is included as an appendix to the book.

¹⁵ Macneil (2011), pp.1-2.

¹⁶ Almond, G.A., Appleby, R.S. & Sivan, E. (2003), *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.9-14.

¹⁷ James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2nd edition 2nd impression (London: SCM Press, 1984), p.xi. ff. Barr gave more attention to the psychological argument in this preface to his 2nd edition.

¹⁸ The presuppositions of this method of thinking are forcefully critiqued by Plantinga (2012).

conceptual distinctives¹⁹. The resulting pseudo-scientific sociological or political analysis based upon these humanistic working assumptions can only ever neatly reclassify the entire movement as a “reaction to modernism”²⁰, an expression of the “American political Right”, the alt-Right or another “conservative” movement²¹. Such an approach, I have previously argued²² is rather like describing the symbol of the Tyne Bridge to Geordies in terms of the number of nuts and bolts and the amount of metal it contains. This is accurate but irrelevant and whilst empirical profiling is useful and necessary, it is also in many philosophical and theological contexts, as Wittgenstein made clear, an approach that gives us no cogent epistemological or semantic benefit, “No fact (experience) justifies [dominion theology] and none can overturn it.”²³

Thus, my approach will be (without ignoring the insights of the humanistic mode of analysis when appropriate) to keep a focus on the distinctively *Christian* thinking and the progression of that thinking within the *Christian* tradition. I believe this is a prerequisite to understanding correctly *Christian* dominion theology. However, a qualification to this principle should be made. It must be recognised that as history proceeds the very success of a movement may mean the adoption of aspects of their program by other conservative elements and even cooperation or common

¹⁹ D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *What is an evangelical?* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), pp.22-26.

²⁰ Lawrence, B., ‘From fundamentalism to fundamentalisms: a religious ideology in multiple forms’, *Religion, Modernity and Post Modernity*, Heelas, P., Martin, D. & Morris, P. (Eds), (New York: Wiley, 1998), pp88-101.

²¹ McVicar (2015), pp.9-12; K. Yurica, “The Despoiling of America: How George Bush Became the Head of the New American Dominionist Church/State”, Feb 2004, <http://www.yuricareport.com/Dominionism/>, 30/01/2016

²² Michael Macneil, “Creating a holistic context as a basis for a defensible understanding of the categories of religion and state” (2015), paper presented at Aberdeen university “Rethinking Boundaries” conference, September 2015, supporting Powerpoint slide 2. A link to this document is included as an appendix to the book.

²³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Revised edition, G.H. von Wright (Ed.)(Oxford, Blackwell: 1998), p50e

cause with non-Christian elements as seen in the *Christian Manifesto* of Francis Schaeffer and the *Moral Majority* of Jerry Falwell²⁴. These will most certainly have sociological, political and even psychological dimensions which are useful and even necessary to consider in properly comprehending the movement. This will most certainly be the case where these “secular” appropriations have exerted a reverse influence on the praxis of parent theological movement. This is particularly true when a Christian organisation enters the political arena and seeks self-conscious redefinition²⁵. This book recognises these phenomena where appropriate.

1.6 Summary

I have asserted that dominion theology is a legitimate and distinct theological category. In this sense, it is worthy of study in terms of itself and warrants a coherent analysis to benefit those within and those apart from the movement. Many within the movement are unaware of the history and theology of the movement. Many apart from the movement simply collapse it into the fundamentalist category. I have asserted that my approach centres on a theological analysis but is also historical, sociological, philosophical or spiritual where necessary and of course, where my expertise permits. The following statements are tested within the book:

- Dominion theology cannot be understood apart from the historical situation or sociological context and movements that helped shape it;
- The emergence and dominance of secularism, scientific humanism and scientism²⁶ were major factors in the development of dominion theology;

²⁴ C Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change The World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008), pp.12-18.; McVicar (2015), pp.212-213.

²⁵ C Peter Wagner, *On Earth as it is in heaven – answer God's call to change the world* (Ventura: Regal, 2012), p7

²⁶ One interpretation of scientism is the belief that believes that the only questions worth asking are those to which science can give an answer.

The following major question is asked by the book:

- Does dominion theology continue to exist as a coherent movement or have its ideas been absorbed into the wider Christian movement?

1.7 Chapter Outlines

1.7.1 Chapter Two: The main divisions of Eschatology and their relation to Dominion Theology

Dominion theology is rooted in a specific eschatological understanding. This chapter gives an overview of the main divisions of eschatology (premillennialism, amillennialism and postmillennialism) and identifies their relationship to dominion theology.

1.7.2 Chapter Three: The Precursors of Modern Dominion Theology

The context for the emergence of modern dominion theology is the cultural revolutions of the 19th and 20th centuries. The chapter thus focusses on the identification of the cultural issues that caused modern dominion theology to emerge as a distinct category during the 1960s²⁷.

1.7.3 Chapter Four: The Emergence of Modern Dominion Theology

This is really the story of the work of one man, Rousas Rushdoony. His philosophy and theology are considered in depth and it is demonstrated how it became a coherent theological programme that envisaged an entire reconstruction of society on a Christian basis. It examines how he rejected the social gospel movement, how he developed a critique of the modern state and developed Christian epistemological self-consciousness from the apologetic theology and Christian philosophy of

²⁷ Gary North, "Cutting Edge or Lunatic Fringe?" in *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (Vallecito: Chalcedon), Jan-Feb 1978, p1

Kuyperian Cornelius Van Til. It finishes with how he applies biblical law as the basis of societal reformation and reconstruction.

1.7.4 Chapter Five: The Dominionist Movement

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how the dominionist movement developed its program to the point of international recognition and presence within a diverse range of Christian practice. It examines how Rushdoony's Reconstructionist movement developed and the emphases which emerged within different streams of the movement as it grew. It then examines how the ideas of the movement became influential more generally within Christianity.

1.7.5 Chapter Six: Critiques and their evaluation

I examine first the core of the criticisms of dominionism, the responses of dominion theology to these criticisms and evaluate their relative cogency.

1.7.6 Conclusion

I consider the degree that the statements and question posed in the Summary above have been answered. I also offer some suggestions for further study.

2 The Three Main Divisions of Eschatology

2.1 Overview and Scope

In this chapter eschatology is defined and the three main divisions of eschatology are outlined. It is not intended in this chapter to give a thorough review of the variations of eschatology within each broad category as they are vexed and nuanced but to identify some high level philosophical and theological distinctives for each division which are relevant to the closing discussion of the chapter and the analytical theme of the thesis. The conceptual principle assumed in the chapter is that each viewpoint implies a particular philosophy of history governing the significance of the text of scripture for the final destination of creation but also how the church should exist on Earth. By understanding this dynamic, it is made clear as to why dominion theology is associated with a particular eschatological view.

2.2 Definition

Eschatology from the Koine¹ Greek *eschaton* is the doctrine of the “last things” or “last days”. Eschatological discourse has centred on the one thousand years (“the Millennium”) referred to six times in Revelation 20. However, this is subject to a hermeneutical caveat - what the millennium is and when it occurs or whether it is realised in the present age is a function of the eschatological view.

There are three basic divisions of eschatological thinking: premillennial, amillennial and postmillennial. For the premillennial and postmillennial viewpoints, the Millennium is normally viewed as a definite historical event that will occur at

¹ This is the name given to the composite Greek dialect associated with the conquest of Alexander the Great. As his army was drawn from throughout the Greek provinces, the nuances of the provincial languages tended to get lost in the name of military efficiency and the language became more explicit.

some point in the future². In contrast, the amillennial view posits that it has already been “realised”³ in a mystical or symbolic way fully in the present church age, as the growing presence of eternity in the present⁴ or pertains only to the saints in heaven. This millennial concept shapes the arguments regarding the significance and role of the church in the present with respect to the world and it is appropriate to examine these arguments more closely.

2.3 Amillennialism

Amillennialism is the largest of the eschatological groupings⁵. Various forms of amillennialism have enjoyed a continuing and serious presence up to and including the contemporary period⁶. The Western Church adopted Augustinian amillennialism⁷ and subsequently Reformed denominations were institutionally amillennial at their foundation, varying little from the Augustinian position⁸. Luther, Calvin and Melancthon were traditionally thought of as amillennialists⁹.

² John F Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), p4

³ The term “realised eschatology” is associated with the work of CH Dodd who first published his ideas in *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Welwyn: James Nisbet and Company, 1935). Additional comments on this term are found in his revised 1961 edition, especially p.viii, p.164.

⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, ‘The Problem of Eschatology(A)’ in *History and Eschatology – The Gifford Lectures 1955* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), pp38-55

⁵ Roger Price, *The Millennial Issue* (Chichester: Chichester Christian Fellowship, 1978), supporting poster STS 7-10

⁶ Notable modern amillennialists have been bishop Christopher Wordsworth (b1807), Abraham Kuyper (b.1837), Louis Berkhof (b1873), Albert Schweitzer (b.1875), C.H. Dodd (b1884), William Hendriksen (b.1900), and Malcolm Smith (b.1940). Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* (1932 and 1949) was highly influential within modern Calvinism. A snapshot of this continuing influence can be found in this review of a digitisation of his work, <https://www.logos.com/product/5084/louis-berkhof-collection>; William Hendriksen’s *Israel and the Bible (1968)* is considered the “classic representation of replacement theology” (Barry Horner, http://web.archive.org/web/20150308234357/http://futureisraelministries.org/files/william_hendriksen.pdf, 11/11/2015); Malcolm is still living, his website is <http://unconditionallovefellowship.com/>

⁷ Walvoord (1959), pp.49-54

⁸ Walvoord (1959), p.55.

⁹ Calvin was historically thought of as amillennial (Price, 1979) but has also been cited as foundational for postmillennialists (Greg L Bahnsen, ‘John Calvin and Postmillennialism’, <http://postmillennialism.com/john-calvin-and-postmillennialism/>, 21/11/2015).

2.3.1 The Allegorical Method

Amillennialism in all its forms is founded on an allegorical view of scripture. Philo (30BCE-40CE) was first to develop the foundational allegorical hermeneutic and Origen (185CE-254CE) was the first Church father to apply it to eschatology in preference to Jewish premillennialism. This permitted his Hellenization of the biblical texts to reflect the primarily Hellenic context of the church after 100CE. It permitted the spiritualisation of potentially problematic prophetic passages regarding the future deliverance of Israel or the progress of the people of God as applicable to the Church only.

Amillennialism allegorises the Church as the Kingdom of God and the Church become the putative heirs to the promises made to Israel within the Hebrew Scriptures. Israel has passed from the purposes of God and the reformation in the 20th century of a state called Israel was of no prophetic significance. The church in this dispensation of the Kingdom has inherited all the blessings of Abraham:

“15 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that matters is a new creation! 16 And all who will behave in accordance with this rule, peace and mercy be on them, and on the *Israel of God*.” (Gal. 6:15-16, NET, emphasis added)

2.3.2 Classical Amillennialism

In the classical amillennial system, the final judgment and eternity is viewed to begin with the Second Coming of Christ (the *Parousia*). Importantly it is not preceded by a literal thousand year earthly reign of the Jewish Messiah but the Church age is viewed as symbolically represented by the millennial concept. For Augustine and the Latin Church that followed him, this *numerus perfectus* was a period of time in

which there is a symbolic perfection of God's law (10 x 10 x 10)¹⁰ with the unfolding of the Kingdom government of God in the Church Age¹¹. Christ's reign is expressed through the Church in the progression of *historia sacra* (sacred history)¹² in which "radical regeneration takes place"¹³. It is with his *City of God*¹⁴ (c412) that the view received its fullest expression. Augustinian amillennialism envisaged increasing glory within the church ("the City of God") set against the increasing wickedness in the world but viewed the church as ultimately victorious.

Augustine showed an astute awareness of previous "date setting" for the return of Christ in the early church (particularly amongst the chialists (primitive premillennialists)) and stated, that, in principle, the Church age is of indefinite duration:

"The sixth is now passing, and cannot be measured by any number of generations, as it has been said, "It is not for you to know the times, which the Father hath put in His own power.""¹⁵

However, it is also clear that he did expect the return of Christ before 1000CE, perhaps as early as 650CE¹⁶ and it is this "failure" of his predictions is believed by some 20th century commentators to have led to the changes of modern amillennialism, "it is the failure of amillennialism...to meet the fact of history"¹⁷.

¹⁰ Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God – A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p168. O'Daly speculates that 10 is the number of the law.

¹¹ Van Ort (2012), p5

¹² Van Ort (2012), p3

¹³ Van Ort (2012), p4

¹⁴ Date of composition is given as 412 - 426/7 in Van Ort, J., 2012, 'The end is now: Augustine on History and Eschatology' in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 68(1), Art. #1188, 7 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1188>

¹⁵ Augustine (2013), loc. 23756 [1699]

¹⁶ Walvoord (1959) alleges 650, 1000 and 1044

¹⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), p384

2.3.3 Modern Amillennialism

The 19th and 20th centuries were times of transition and change for amillennialism.

As indicated above, it is often proposed that it was the perceived failure of Augustinianism that precipitated the changes. I believe this is only a half of a half-truth and that the pressure for change came from a wider cultural crisis in late modernity which is examined more specifically in the next chapter. For now, it is sufficient to say that for theologians there was a crisis of orthodox faith generally and a crisis of confidence in the power of humankind to reform itself.

Faced with this challenge, amillennialism generally became increasingly pietistic and pessimistic regarding modern culture. Though some like Masselink and Hamilton¹⁸ remained exponents of the traditional Calvinistic view of increasing victory within the church, by the end of the 19th century, Düsterdieck¹⁹ and Kliefoth²⁰ had spiritualised the millennium as a “heavenly reality” to accommodate the perceived negative track of history. Warfield also incorporated this idea as part of his eschatology. It was a solution that allowed the Earth to atrophy yet maintained a glorious end for the saint, “a state of blessedness of the saints in heaven”²¹.

2.3.4 Liberal amillennialism

Liberal amillennialism, in general, is known for its secularisation of the biblical texts such that the resurrection, the Second Advent are not considered actual events but

¹⁸ William Masselink, *Why a thousand years?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953(1930)); Floyd E Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955(1942))

¹⁹ Friedrich Hermann Christian Düsterdieck, *Kritisch exegetisches Handbuch über die Offenbarung Johannis* (Commentary on the Apocalypse of John)(Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1859)

²⁰ Theodore Kliefoth, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (The Revelation of John)(Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1874)

²¹ John F Walvoord, ‘The Millennium Issue in Modern Theology’ in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Dallas Theological Seminary, Vol. 106 (1948), p.430.

spiritual pictures to be realised within the life of the Church or by individuals alone.

It, like conservative amillennialism, had both theologically optimistic and pessimistic forms:

- a. The 'social gospel' movement of Rauschenbuch²² was a positive, optimistic view with the emphasis on the Church as salt and light within "the world". Here "the world" is taken to mean the social structures and socio-political processes. Salvation and kingdom-building was the salvation of society through both church and state rather than the individual. The socialistic emphasis of the model led to its discrediting as socialism became totalitarian.
- b. Dodd, Schweitzer and Bultmann to various degrees represented the "liberal historicist" school. They maintained in varying emphases and senses a "realised" eschatology of the timeless and eternal manifested in the current age in space and time rather than in any future age.²³ Historicism waned with the twentieth century.
- c. Niebuhr, though arguably post-liberal or neo-orthodox in his general approach to Christianity, was a major exponent of the liberal method of secularisation of the biblical narrative and possessed a post-liberal pessimistic view of human progress²⁴. This became the dominant mode of thinking for the post-liberal theologian.

²² Walter Rauschenbush, *A Theology for the social gospel* (Yale: Yale Press, 1917) and *The Social Principles of Jesus* (New York: Woman's Press, 1917)

²³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition (London: SCM Press, 2000), pp478-487; Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology – The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1962(1957)), pp138-155; C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Welwyn: James Nisbet and Sons, 1961), pp163-169

²⁴ *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vol. (1941–43). This is effectively a post-liberal synthesis of Reformation and Renaissance ideas.

Thus, in brief, a cultural pessimism, particularly regarding the present age and an extended theological piety had become the *de facto* amillennial position in both its conservative and liberal forms during the 20th century.

2.4 Premillennialism

2.4.1 Premillennialism as apostolic

Premillennialism was, according to the compendium of Peters²⁵ (which cites a consensus of historical work), the exclusive position (though in a primitive form known as “chialism”) of both Judaism and the Early Church fathers for the first 250 years of the Church²⁶. This is because the early believers as predominantly Jewish adopted the Jewish eschatology with some Christian reinterpretation. Jewish eschatology understood the coming of the Messiah as both the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and the glorious coming of the King with power and glory, vanquishing Israel’s enemies, a restoration of the Davidic kingdom and the establishment of his earthly reign throughout all the world²⁷. This was also clearly the expectation of Jesus’ early disciples:

So when they had gathered together, they began to ask him, "Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"⁷ He told them, "You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. (Acts 1:6-7, NET)

²⁵ G.N.H. Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom Vol 1* (Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), pp482-483. The volumes are now published by Kregel publishers and are included with the Logos Bible Software.

²⁶ Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, John, James, Matthew, Aristio and John the Presbyter (all these named as such by ancient historian Papias). In the period 100 - 200AD the list includes Clement of Rome, Barnabus, Ignatius, Polycarp and Papias (both disciples of John). In the period 200 - 300AD are Pothinus, Justin Martyr, Melito, Tatian, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Apollinaris. See Pentecost (1958), pp373-380

²⁷ See for example Isaiah 2: 1-5.

Christian premillennialism interpreted Jesus' first advent as the suffering servant. For classical premillennialism His second advent was to be as triumphant king and judge in contrast to his "meek and lowly" first advent.

2.4.2 The Decline of Premillennialism

Premillennialism waned with the accommodation of Constantine²⁸ which fundamentally changed the way the church related to the Roman Empire as it effectively became the state religion. It was virtually absent from the Church from the 6th century to the early 19th century. This was because it was not part of the Reformation tradition which generally followed the Augustinian position. Calvin dismissed premillennialism with his famous words, "this fiction is too puerile to need or to deserve refutation."²⁹

2.4.3 Dispensationalism

However, premillennialism re-emerged in the 1820s in a modern radically distinctive³⁰ form with Irving and Darby which became known as Dispensationalism. Irving divided the age of the Church into distinctive ages as reflected in the first three chapters of revelation. The final age, which Irving considered the Church had entered, was the Laodicean or "luke-warm" era in which the Church apostatised³¹. Darby developed Irving and formalised the rapture doctrine³². This is at once the most controversial and cherished doctrine of dispensationalism:

²⁸ David F. Wright, "The Edict of Milan" in *Christianity Today*, Issue 28, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-28/313-edict-of-milan.html>, 19/03/2016

²⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Beveridge, Kindle Edition (Fig Books: 2012 (1539), loc. 20132

³⁰ Loraine Boettner, *Postmillennialism*, Kindle Edition (Amazon EU: 2011), loc.67. This is an abridged form of his print book 'The Millennium' (Phillipsburg: PRP, 2012 (1958)).

³¹ Dave MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville: Millennium III, 2000), p.74

³² MacPherson (2000), pp.124ff.

“the idea of a mass Rapture is considered by many to be the most preposterous belief held by Christians. At the same time, it is the Blessed Hope of many Christians today”³³

Popular dispensationalist narrative of the 20th century became progressively dominated with the imminence of the rapture captured by Hal Lindsay’s best sellers³⁴ during the 1970s and the 1980s.

The second distinctive feature is the church as a parenthesis of history between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel 9:27 which was considered an interlude between the histories of Israel. Dispensationalism is known for its support of the current state of Israel as fulfilment of biblical prophecy and a pessimistic belief in the increasing lawlessness of the age until the sudden appearance of Christ to rescue the chosen remnant who have not apostatised or succumbed to the Antichrist’s kingdom. The dispensationalist view was popularised in the Scofield Reference bibles of 1909 and 1917 where it has since enjoyed substantial support within Fundamentalist scholarship during the 20th century. Indeed, for early fundamentalists, it was considered a test of orthodoxy³⁵. From there its support was maintained in various post-fundamentalist movements such as Pentecostalism and the Word of Faith movements.

2.4.4 Premillennial hermeneutics

The premillennial approach to scripture and interpretation was one of its most cohering and distinctive features. Premillennial dispensationalism employed a “plain

³³ Chuck Missler, *The Rapture*, Kindle edition (Coeur d’Alene: Koinonia House, 2014), loc.28

³⁴ *The Late Great Planet Earth, The 1980s – Countdown to Armageddon* and *The Rapture*. See bibliography.

³⁵ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism – Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp.198-200.

meaning”, “grammatical-historical method” which strongly emphasised a “literal” textual hermeneutic³⁶. The overwhelming logic and self-confidence of premillennialism enjoyed by dispensationalists up until the late 1980s was summarised by Price, “most independent Bible scholars are premillennial [dispensationalists]...80% of Bible prophecy has been fulfilled literally. It is illogical to view that the remaining 20% be allegorised and is not fulfilled literally”³⁷. .

2.4.5 Dispensationalism as heterodox

Yet, it should be clear that this form of the dispensationalist view bears little resemblance to classical premillennialism which emphasised the corporate eschatology of the victorious messianic king even though there was conflict and apostasy before His appearing³⁸. In effect, the Second Advent is seen as a rescue from the kingdom of the Antichrist rather than a triumphant return³⁹. It is extremely culturally pessimistic, and its rapture escapism has been the source of criticism from within classical premillennialism⁴⁰. Though successfully evangelical, it has been profoundly challenged⁴¹ as a clearly modern and previously unknown innovation in the history of the church⁴².

³⁶ Walvoord (1959), pp.129ff. Here Walvoord admits the necessity of permitting fundamentally symbolic language in the apocalyptic genre. Some premillennialists reject this, insisting on a strict literalism.

³⁷ Roger Price, “Premillennialism” (Chichester: Chichester Christian Fellowship, 1979), audio recording

³⁸ Rousas Rushdoony, “Postmillennialism I and II”, Chalcedon, audio recordings

³⁹ The IHOP Church holds uniquely that it is the church that orchestrates the tribulation via a worldwide prayer movement and so remains closest to this victorious coming of the King Jesus after the pattern of the classical premillennialists.

⁴⁰ Greg L Bahnsen & Kenneth L. Gentry, *House Divided – The Break-up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler: ICE, 1989), p365-366, p365n

⁴¹ Gary North, “Editor’s Preface” in Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided - The Break-up of Dispensational Theology*, pp.ix-p.lii

⁴² See appendix B, “The Late Jesus”

2.5 Postmillennialism

2.5.1 The scholarly rejection of Postmillennialism

Part of the problem with accurately assessing postmillennialism is its misrepresentation within the pietistic and pessimistic eschatologies so prevalent in the first half of the 20th century. Rushdoony describes the problem thus:

“Although postmillennialism has a long history as a major, and perhaps a central, interpretation, it is summarily read out of court by many on non-Biblical grounds”⁴³

The underlying cultural reasons for this malaise I engage in the next chapter, but I give special attention to the theology of the view here. My purpose is to describe how postmillennialism has been conceived and then to reveal what I think *really* characterises the view so that it becomes useful for the closing discussion of the chapter.

2.5.2 Postmillennialism as modified amillennialism

For proponents of this view, postmillennialism was generated from the problem posed for medieval amillennialists by the failure of Augustinianism. For neo-Augustinians the problem of cultural decay is solved by reimagining Augustine’s dualism. The cycle of falling away is matched by a greater cycle of revival. There is increasing victory in the church. Eventually the City of God prevails throughout the whole earth. So for example, Walvoord asserts that for the most literal of the postmillennialists, “[they differ] only from the amillennial concept [of the millennium] *in the idea of growing triumph and final victory before the Second Advent*”⁴⁴.

Similarly, the influential amillennial systematic theologian Berkhof identified a group of scholars in the Netherlands during the 16th and 17th century that he considered the

⁴³ R.J. Rushdoony, ‘Introduction’ in *An Eschatology of Victory*, J. Marcellus Kik (Phillipsburg, P&R Publishing, 1971), pp.vii.-ix.

⁴⁴ Walvoord (1959), p25, emphasis added.

first to be postmillennial on the basis of their envisaging of an eventual earthly triumph of the church in a far future⁴⁵.

It must also be noted in opposition to this that the converse is also posited by both Walvoord and Riddlebarger⁴⁶. That is, postmillennialism reverts to amillennialism under the weight of cultural decay. For Riddlebarger it is seen as an innovation from postmillennialism within the old Princeton school. She then identifies Warfield as the transitional figure representing its reversion into amillennialism by his supernaturalising of the glorious state of the saints to simply a heavenly, rather than earthly reality.

2.5.3 Postmillennialism as heterodox and a product of philosophical modernism

For proponents of this view, the radical optimism that is said to characterise postmillennialism is viewed as rooted in the Enlightenment view of the inevitability of progress and the modern confidence of Man to evolve and solve his own problems. So, for example, Price gives only a two hundred year window for its history and suggests Daniel Whitby as the founder⁴⁷. Similarly, Walvoord identifies Whitby as the Unitarian founder and enumerates Snowden and Brown as embracing the evolutionism of 19th century science with their view of inevitable human progress⁴⁸. Both Price and Walvoord argue that the tendency of postmillennialism is towards

⁴⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996(1929)), p716

⁴⁶ Kim Riddlebarger, "Princeton and the Millenium – A Study of American Postmillennialism", <http://www.mountainretreat.org.net/eschatology.html>, 17/11/2015; Walvoord (1959), p36

⁴⁷ Roger Price, *the Millennial Issue – The Three Views* (Chichester: Chichester Christian Fellowship, 1979), audio recording.

⁴⁸ Walvoord (1959), pp28-32.

liberalism and Price asserts that the postmillennialist sentiment is the precursor of both fascist and communist conceptions of a golden age.

2.5.4 Assessing these views

To be theologically responsible, the question to be answered is whether the salient features of postmillennialism are seen throughout the history of the church or whether it was simply, as suggested in the models above, generated by theological pressures and responses to the *Zeitgeist* of the middle and late modern age. The latter as outlined in the previous sections are clearly a far weaker theological position to defend postmillennialism from than the former position. However, I believe the analyses presented above are weak and inconclusive, we can safely conclude postmillennialism has a solid, continuous presence in the great theologians of the church. Let us consider the weakness of these arguments and the refutations in detail.

Firstly, Whitby was a Unitarian and his liberal postmillennialism which converged easily with liberal amillennialism was a reflection of a general cultural optimism rather than one arrived at through theological reconstruction⁴⁹. The clear distinction between the two is exemplified succinctly by Boettner:

“This [authentic postmillennialist] view is...to be distinguished from that optimistic but false view of human betterment and progress held by Modernists and Liberals which teaches that the Kingdom of God on earth will be achieved through a natural process by which mankind will be improved and social institutions will be reformed and brought to a higher level of culture and efficiency. This latter view presents a spurious or pseudo Postmillennialism, and regards the Kingdom of God

⁴⁹ Walvoord (1959), pp22-23.

as the product of natural laws in an evolutionary process, whereas orthodox Postmillennialism regards the Kingdom of God as the product of the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in connection with the preaching of the Gospel.”⁵⁰

The failure to be granular in the treatment of postmillennial thought is surely sufficient to justify that so-called liberal postmillennialism is radically different from theologically conservative postmillennialism and cannot be applied as an effective argument in rapidly dismissing postmillennialism. Similarly, Berkhof’s total silence regarding the development of 19th century and pre-WWI postmillennialism cannot give one confidence in his argument. This is particularly the case as this period had been described as the previous height of its popularity by Walvoord and Price.

Secondly, the general support for the thesis that the failure of Augustinianism generated postmillennialism seems very weak to me for the following reasons:

- I. There seems little evidence of an immediate reaction to the failure of Augustinian expectations. To assert that Joachim of Floris (b.1132) was postmillennial seems to be another example of improper use of the designation. His eschatology was radically heterodox⁵¹ and is viewed by some postmillennialists as radical dispensationalist⁵² because of his conception of the ages of the Father (Law), Son and Spirit (grace)⁵³.
- II. Although a “post-Reformation” movement⁵⁴ is also suggested, history seems to show that the Reformation thinkers were content to adopt the view that they

⁵⁰ Boettner (2011), loc 74

⁵¹ *Expositio in Apocalipsim* (Frankfurt Am Main: Minerva, 1964(c1196))

⁵² R J Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory - The Meaning of Postmillennialism*, Kindle edition (Vallecito: Chalcedon, 1997), loc.119

⁵³ Adrian Anderson, <http://www.rudolfsteinerstudies.com/free-ebooks/Joachim%20of%20Fiore.pdf> , 11/12/2015, p2

⁵⁴ Pentecost (1948),

could resume the building of the Kingdom now that a correct foundation had been restored. Luther believed that the progress of the gospel was inevitable once the proper ministration had been restored which of course is well documented as the origin of his polemic in the failure to convert the Jews⁵⁵.

Lastly, Riddlebarger's view of Warfield's position is at first appearance stronger in proposing postmillennialism was simply an aberration of amillennialism. Her assertion must be accepted that though Warfield considered himself a postmillennialist, he certainly spiritualised postmillennial concepts allowing some of his immediate heirs to move straightforwardly to an amillennialist position⁵⁶. However, she neglects to mention that Warfield was also an important personality within the developing fundamentalist movement⁵⁷. His putative heirs in the fundamentalist movement were dispensationalist premillennialists and yet in no sense would it be asserted that his eschatology collapsed into premillennialism other than he maintained the concept of an earthly reign of the saints as well as a spiritual state, as would premillennialists. If we accept amillennialism and premillennialism as useful categories and yet theological facts within a continuum of belief, we need to recognise postmillennialism as a similarly useful category.

2.5.5 Postmillennialism on its own terms

The counter-arguments presented above are not contended to be definitive. They are simply posited to demonstrate that the original arguments are not sufficient to

⁵⁵ Martin Luther, 'The Efficacy of the Gospel' and 'Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans' in *The Martin Luther Collection* (Waxkeep, Kindle Edition: nd); H.J Hillerbrand, 'Martin Luther and the Jews' in *Jews and Christians – Exploring the Past, Present and Future*, James H. Charlesworth (ed) (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p147

⁵⁶ Riddlebarger (1996), p21

⁵⁷ James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2nd Edition (London, SCM, 1984(1981)), pp262-263

dismiss postmillennialism in the arbitrary manner it has been dismissed.

Postmillennialism is at least *possible* to posit as a distinct analytic category.

However, it is now expedient to advance the positive argument in and of itself to establish the strong case for postmillennialism as a distinct theological category. Yet my argument is also that this category is also one of analytic theology. The categories themselves do not imply an ontological exclusivity but reflect contemporary regroupings of individual eschatological thoughts.

At the most basic level, postmillennialism is the chronologically opposite position to premillennialism. It believes in the return of Christ *after* the millennial period. The millennial period is that in which the church has established the fullness of the kingdom on Earth considering the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28 as literally fulfilled. Disciples have been made of all nations in their entirety. Jesus then returns and is welcomed to take His place in the kingdom on earth, with the final judgment at that point and eternity beginning. There is no concept of a remnant or a rapture, for:

“The LORD owns the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live in it.” (Psalm 24:1, NET)

“²⁴ For there will be universal submission to the LORD's sovereignty, just as the waters completely cover the sea.” (Isa 11:9, NET)

Gentry summarises the postmillennial view in this way, “[Postmillennialism is] the view that Christ will return to the earth after the Spirit-blessed Gospel has had overwhelming success in bringing the world to the adoption of Christianity.”⁵⁸ My basic belief is that the evidence supports the view that the distinct and authentic

⁵⁸ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler: ICE, 1992), p79

contemporary postmillennial position reasserts the primitive triumphalism of both the early premillennialists and augments it with the Kingdom building spirit of the amillennialist Reformers. It is recapturing a radical optimism, engagement with the world to convert and reclaim it rather than retreat or separation from it. It is, in this important sense, part of the apostolic vision of the church at its foundation to “go into the world and make *disciples* of all nations”. Discipling is taken to mean a distinctive “Christian culture”⁵⁹:

“If we believe that the main and final goal of the Christian life is heaven, or the salvation of our souls, we will be indifferent to history and the world around us... The goal is God’s Kingdom, His purpose for humanity and the world”⁶⁰

Although allegory and spiritualisation are widely applied in postmillennial hermeneutics in contrast to the early period of the church, the task or responsibility of the church in Matthew 28 is probably taken in the most literal manner by the postmillennialists.

It is a much stronger hermeneutic than simply a general parallel progress of history of world and a church eventually triumphant as might be seen in Augustinian theology. Augustine was dualistic and this important philosophical distinction I believe classifies his theology as part of amillennialism⁶¹. Postmillennialism is a presuppositional position of victory in every realm, not just the ‘City of God’ as in Augustine. It uses the perceived triumph of Christ as a present reality within the life of the church on Earth, not deferred to heaven or considered as a spiritual picture as

⁵⁹ Cope (2015), loc.359

⁶⁰ R J Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory - The Meaning of Postmillennialism*, Kindle edition (Vallecito: Chalcedon, 1997), loc.36-39.

⁶¹ Boetner (2011), loc 162.

we see in Augustinianism. The Church is not the ark of the Catholic Church, the chosen remnant of the Protestant premillennialists or the mystical kingdom of the saints in heaven of modern amillennialists:

“If I believe that Christ will soon rapture me from this evil world, this will have a practical effect on my life very different from a belief that I shall see the world get worse and worse, and live through a fearful tribulation. Again, if I believe that the world will see the progressive triumph of Christ’s people until the whole world is Christian and a glorious material and spiritual era unfolds, I shall be motivated very much differently from either a premillennial or an amillennial believer.”⁶²

Rather it is the entirety of human culture that is to be redeemed and converted by Christian action in every sphere, not just the church:

“[It] is also an error to make the church central to God’s plan and purpose... and therefore [see] the church as the sphere of victory. This led to a very high doctrine of the church, both in Rome and Protestantism. If our hope for the futures of man and Christ’s world is only in the church, then we will stress the church as man’s hope. The church will be over-stressed because it is man’s only hope. Neither the state, the Christian family, nor the school, nor any other institution offers hope and none are seen as therefore central or important”⁶³

Postmillennialism argues for the complete and total victory of Christ in the current world:

“postmillennialism is the eschatology of victory...The notion of defeat does not go well with the fact of an omnipotent God and a conquering Christ. [Postmillennialism] takes with total seriousness and a totality of meaning the validity of Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work

⁶² Rushdoony (1997), loc.72-77.

⁶³ Rushdoony (1997), loc.44

together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”⁶⁴

It rejects in its entirety the apocalyptic dualism of Hellenistic Western Christianity:

“there is an Implicit Manichaeism in premillennialism and in amillennialism. The material world is surrendered to Satan, and the spiritual world is reserved to God.”⁶⁵

Postmillennialism, in common with amillennialism on this point, rejects the biblical literalism of premillennialism as inapplicable to prophecy as a matter of interpretative principle:

“[I]t must be noted that premillennialism violates one of the most basic principles of sound biblical hermeneutics...The fact that so many other scriptures are interpreted to fit in with a particular [literal] understanding of Revelation 20 indicates that far too much weight is being placed on a single text⁶⁶ [and] requires the book as a whole be interpreted futuristically...The truth or falsity of amillennialism or postmillennialism does not [require] the futuristic approach.”⁶⁷

Postmillennialists generally favour a partial-preterist view of the Book of Revelation and of prophecy in general. It should be noted that preterism is not strictly limited to postmillennialism but is rather a general view of prophecy. The full preterist view holds that “Tribulation occurs in our distant past in the first century”⁶⁸ and the millennium has already past. The former is accepted but the latter is rejected by postmillennialists. Postmillennialists view prophecy as progressively fulfilled or

⁶⁴ Rushdoony (1997), loc.58-60.

⁶⁵ Rushdoony (1997), loc. 204ff

⁶⁶ See also Boetner (2011), loc.95

⁶⁷ Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism - An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg: PR Publishing, 1999), pp.176-177

⁶⁸ Thomas Ice & Kenneth L. Gentry Jr, *The Great Tribulation – Past or Future, Two Evangelicals debate the question* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), p11

prefigured in previous ages⁶⁹ and generally favour covenant theology which posits a single continuing intratrinitarian covenant of redemption that structures history from the creation mandate of Adam to eternity⁷⁰. However, postmillennialists agree with the preterists that a literalistic approach to prophecy is naïve and immature, “literalism leads to absurdity in Revelation”⁷¹.

Thus, postmillennialists are hostile to any form of dispensationalism that divides history up into distinct ages in which God deals with Man according to a distinct set of principles in each:

“Dispensationalism limits the Bible and its relevance; it wrongly divides the word of truth. It denies the wholeness of Scripture, and the fact that God does not change, nor does His law, nor His plan of salvation, change from age to age.”⁷²

Postmillennialism also takes issue with the amillennial view about the nature of the interadvental period. It objects to both forms of contemporary amillennialism that either internalises the “kingdom” as a spiritual entity or limits it to the heavenly state of saints in heaven:

“Scripture makes it abundantly clear that this earth...is a part of the kingdom. Christ’s messianic authority and reign extend over *all* of heaven and earth...Every nation on earth is presently under the dominion of Christ...Amillennialism fails to deal with these scriptural truths satisfactorily...[It] fails to deal with the many passages that tell us about the progressive growth of the messianic kingdom...that grows to fill the whole earth”⁷³

⁶⁹ R J Rushdoony, ‘History I’ in *Postmillennialism in American History* (Vallecito: Chalcedon, 2007), audio recording

⁷⁰ Mathison (1999), pp.13-19

⁷¹ Ice and Gentry Jr (199), p.173.

⁷² Rushdoony (1997), loc.119.

⁷³ Mathison (1999), p180

Postmillennialists who adopt the Calvinistic Reformation position tend to emphasise Christian humanism rather than supernaturalism:

“We don’t have God-ordained prophets any more. Jesus Christ was the final prophet, priest and king...Yet all men have a prophetic task...[the] successful proclamation of the word [into] every sphere of life.”⁷⁴

2.6 Eschatology and Dominionism

The purpose of this section is to focus the previous explanations and to establish which of the eschatological viewpoints has served as the historical antecedent to the dominion theology in the 20th century. It is only necessary to briefly examine the attitude of the modern form of each eschatological position to the concept of societal reconstruction within the 20th century for it to become obvious which viewpoint was the historical antecedent to the modern form of dominion theology which began to emerge during the 1960s.

2.6.1 Premillennialism

In the previous section it was seen that dispensationalist premillennialism viewed the closure of the age in apostasy and the time of the antichrist. This historical pessimism was seen most strongly in the early fundamentalists of the 1920s who effectively withdrew from social engagement in American public life after the intellectual humiliation of the Scopes “evolution” trial⁷⁵. Their radical dispensationalism created a “holy remnant” mentality that they were the holy faithful at the end of the age that would be raptured away. Culture was considered apostate, the only hope was revivalism to save as many souls as possible before the

⁷⁴ Gary North, “The Importance of the 700 club”, http://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/docs/a_pdfs/newslet/bet/8202.pdf, 02/12/2015

⁷⁵ Barr (1984), p349, endnote chapter 4, number 6.

imminent coming of the Lord⁷⁶. Social action was considered a distraction from the real task of evangelism and the social gospel of Rauschenbusch as liberal-modernist apostasy⁷⁷. Thus, during the 1950s, the premillennial dispensationalist and prominent radio preacher Rev J. Vernon McGee declared “You don’t polish brass on a sinking ship”⁷⁸. The implication was clear – civilisation was sinking so social action was meaningless, the Christian should be concerned with revivalism alone. Thus, it should be obvious at this point that 20th century dispensational premillennialism⁷⁹ would be philosophically opposed to dominion theology and would consider it theologically heretical.

2.6.2 Amillennialism

Amillennialism with its emphasis on the Kingdom hermeneutic and its adoption by the Reformation Churches might be considered more amenable to a reformist viewpoint. However, during the 20th century, the failure of classical messianic liberalism and the cultural pessimism regarding the possibility of human progress meant the direct heirs of Princeton moved from postmillennialism to emphasising the pietistic aspect of Warfield’s transitional eschatology⁸⁰. This perceived cultural decay and lawlessness of the century favoured the view of the “other worldliness” of the kingdom and the escape to the inner life of a believer, a pietistic rumination on the “kingdom” of the saints in heaven. During the 1930s, the pietistic emphasis gained almost complete ascendancy in modern amillennialism. Rushdoony characterised modern amillennialism thus:

⁷⁶ Marsden (1988), pp.5-8

⁷⁷ Marsden (1988), p71

⁷⁸ Quoted in Rushdoony (1997), loc.175

⁷⁹ Marsden (1988), p7 makes the interesting point of how social action was not always excluded from classic premillennialism. The dispensationalism of the fundamentalists is perhaps one of the key differences between conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism.

⁸⁰ Kim Riddlebarger, “Princeton and the Millenium – A Study of American Postmillennialism”, <http://www.mountainretreatorg.net/eschatology.html>, 17/11/2015

“In reality, amillennialism holds that the major area of growth and power is in Satan’s Kingdom, because the world is seen as progressively falling away to Satan, the church’s trials and tribulations increasing, and the end of the world finding the church lonely and sorely beset. There is no such thing as a millennium or a triumph of Christ and His Kingdom in history. The role of the saints is at best to grin and bear it, and more likely to be victims and martyrs. The world will go from bad to worse...The Christian must retreat from the world of action in the realization that there is no hope for this world, no world-wide victory of Christ’s cause, nor world peace and righteousness ...The material world is surrendered to Satan and the spiritual world is reserved to God.”⁸¹

Hence, it should also be clear that though amillennialists may have once spoken the language of modern dominion theology with its emphasis on kingdom-building in the present Church age, it has retreated into mysticism and pietism. Its new emphasis is the kingdom within and among *believers*.

2.6.3 Postmillennialism

Thus, by default, it would appear that we must look to postmillennialism as the true historical antecedent to dominion theology and it is possible to establish without question that the burden of evidence supports this view. I proposed that once it was distilled down to what it represents in theological terms, it is the recapturing of the primitive triumphalism of both the early premillennialists and the Kingdom building spirit of the amillennialist Reformers. This has been elaborated during its revival in the second part of the 20th century in the work of Rousas Rushdoony. Rushdoony, considered the father of the modern dominionist movement, has an obvious postmillennial eschatology. He summarises the interpretation of postmillennialism as

⁸¹ Rushdoony (1997), loc.164, 202.

the call to fulfil the creation mandate of Genesis by redeeming the nations and institutions of the world:

“[P]ostmillennialism...sees salvation as victory and health in time and eternity, it sees therefore a responsibility of the man of God for the whole of life...People out of every tongue, tribe, and nation shall be converted, and the word of God shall prevail and rule in every part of the earth. There is therefore a necessity for [social and political] action, and an assurance of victory”⁸²

2.7 Summary

So, in summary, we noted that postmillennialism had been dismissed as simplistic, naïve, mystical and guilty of ignoring the realities of history because of its radical optimism⁸³. I then asserted that those many critiques miss the salient point that postmillennialism is recovering the triumphal emphasis of the both the classical forms of amillennialism and premillennialism. Hence it is possible to understand why Rushdoony and Mathison, both scathing critics of premillennial Dispensationalism, can illustrate that the early historical creeds, including those of the classical premillennialists, viewed a triumphant king coming in glory and not on a rescue mission to the remnant⁸⁴. Similarly, it is possible for Bahnsen to argue extensively for John Calvin holding a postmillennial, rather than the amillennial view commonly ascribed to him, citing recent scholarly research that emphasises his reforming role both within the civic culture and within theology was based upon a conviction of Christian progress and victory within history⁸⁵. Mathison is similarly emphatic in this

⁸² Rushdoony (1997), loc.219.

⁸³ Mathison (1999), p.xi.; Walvoord (1959), pp34-36; R.J. Rushdoony, *Postmillennialism* (Vallecito, Chalcedon), audio recording

⁸⁴ Mathison (1999), pp245-248; R.J. Rushdoony, *Postmillennialism*

⁸⁵ Greg Bahnsen, “The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism” in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. III, No. 2, Winter, 1976-77, Covenant Media Foundation (Web archive), repaginated MS-Word version (double-spaced), p.32/96

unwavering belief in the Christian triumph in history, “Today’s newspaper is then [not] an excuse for anxiety or apathy.”⁸⁶ Finally and most rigorously, it is possible for Rushdoony to argue that the modern dispensational premillennialists and modern amillennialists have actually succumbed to the principle of reason as the arbiter of all things and have adopted the philosophical position from the Enlightenment rather than one rooted in a Christian philosophy of history⁸⁷.

Thus, my key argument in concluding this chapter is that postmillennialism in its conservative form retains a vision of Christian victory as its central hermeneutic. The concept of Christian victory is not a modern aberration peculiar to postmillennialism but had historical expression in premillennialism and amillennialism. However, it is the absolute opposite intellectual position to both in their modern forms, premillennial pessimism and amillennial mysticism. Though it is conceptually distinct from dominion theology, it finds natural expression through the militant language of dominion theology because of the *practical implications* of the viewpoint. The next chapter examines how the humanistic component of the cultural equation emerged before considering in the following chapter how it combined with the postmillennial viewpoint to mark the emergence of dominionism.

3 The Precursors of Dominion Theology

3.1 Theology, Philosophy and Culture

I was emphatic in the introduction regarding the importance of a cross-disciplinary approach to properly understanding the context and emergence of dominion

⁸⁶ Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism – An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1999),

⁸⁷ R.J. Rushdoony, ‘Introduction’ in *An Eschatology of Victory*, J. Marcellus Kik (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1971), pp.vii.-ix.

theology. It is a frequent fallacy of evangelical theologians to pay insufficient attention to the *Zeitgeist* of their situation in time and give an ahistorical account of the Church in time, sometimes ingeniously described as “prophetically energized interpretation of historical facts”¹. Divine Providence becomes a means by which one sidesteps their culture whereas I have previously argued theology is strongly associated with, influenced by and influences the intellectual and cultural milieu.²

However, it is also an error of the late modern period with its mythological evolutionary scientism³ to desire to reinterpret the entire past in terms of the present with nothing but the “autonomous mind of man”⁴. Such a position is sustained only by an irrational confidence in the absolute rationality of reason:

“But what if reason or rationality itself rests on belief? Then it would be the case that the opposition between reason and belief was a false one, and that every situation of contest should be recharacterized as a quarrel between two sets of belief with no possibility of recourse to a mode of deliberation that was not itself an extension of belief.”⁵

The post-modernists of the 1960s and 1970s recognised this implicit circularity of confidence in reason and balked at this as epistemological totalitarianism.

However, there developed within this counter-view a preference for the functional

¹ C Peter Wagner in Bill Hamon, *Eternal Church* (Shippensburg: Destiny: 2003(1981)), p.12. Though this book has much to commend it, it has a single sentence on Reconstructionism, hardly an adequate assessment of a major realignment in theology of the Church.

² Michael Macneil, *Has the importance of the concepts of biblical inerrancy and infallibility changed for evangelical Christians today when compared to the end of the 19th Century? If so, why?* (See Appendix A)

³ Mark Rushdoony, ‘Foreword’, *The Mythology of Science*, R.J. Rushdoony (Vallecito: Ross House, 2001(1967)), pp.1-4

⁴ Rousas Rushdoony, *Van Til and the Limits of Reason*, Kindle edition (Vallecito: Chalcedon/Ross House, 2013(1960)), loc.88.

⁵ Stanley Fish, *There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech: And It’s a Good Thing Too* (Oxford University Press, New York: 1994), p135 in R.J.Rushdoony, *Van Til and the Limits of Reason*, Kindle edition (Ross House, Vallecito: 2013), loc. 1245-1246.

absolute of the “conditioning by the moment”⁶, a despairing negativity that life just happens, and we are powerless in any real sense to understand and shape the world⁷.

Of course, this is the reciprocal form of the very same truth fallacy⁸. To deny any truth is stated as an absolute truth and functions as an effective axiom of the postmodernist framework⁹. Both the modernists and postmodernists are remarkably myopic in this respect with regard to their presuppositions and it is for this reason that this chapter opens with a philosophical overview of the 19th and 20th centuries to properly provide the historical context and intellectual diagnosis of the era. The argument I am making in this chapter is that only by thoroughly analysing the impact of the changes, tensions and contradictions on the metanarratives of the Western culture does the inevitability of a Christian counter culture emerge.

3.2 The Rise and Fall of Science

The early decades of the 20th century were marked by the analytic philosophy of Moore and Russell which was rigorously empiricist as the basis for knowledge¹⁰ and dismissive of any “higher way of knowing”¹¹ by religious experience. Russell went on to be a key personality within the Vienna Circle during the 1930s and in the

⁶ Rushdoony (2013), loc. 91.

⁷ Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth – the intellectual coherence of evangelicalism* (Apollos, Leicester: 1997(1996)), pp.163-200

⁸ Rushdoony (2013), loc. 1005 – 1050; Stanley Fish, *There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech: And It’s a Good Thing Too* (Oxford University Press, New York: 1994), pp.135-136.

⁹ Ron Rhodes, “Absolute Truth in an age of uncertainty” in *Strategic Perspectives 2011* (Koininia Institute), audio recording

¹⁰ Russell’s basic philosophical text which served as a primer for a generation of philosophy students is *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Cosimo, 2007[1912]). Moore was famous for his defence of “common sense”, Moore, G. E. 1925: “A Defense of Common Sense” in J. H. Muirhead ed., *Contemporary British Philosophy*, London: Allen and Unwin, 193-223. Reprinted in Moore 1959, 126-148, and Moore 1993, 106-33.

¹¹ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1991(1946)), p789

development of the anti-metaphysical tenor of positivism which downgraded religious experience as non-cognitive nonsense¹² and asserted that:

“questions of fact can only be decided by the empirical methods of science...questions that can be decided without appeal to experience are either mathematical or linguistic”¹³.

This became known as the “verification principle” and exerted a huge influence on theologians, philosophers, psychologists and sociologists during the twenty years after the second world war until it was forcefully demonstrated that positivism itself was a “thorough going metaphysics [denying] all metaphysics”¹⁴. Positivism was effectively discredited by the early 1960s being progressively replaced with the non-positivistic analytic atheism in the philosophy of Flew¹⁵ and Mackie¹⁶. However, by the end of the twentieth century it was to degenerate into philosophical and “scientific” naturalism¹⁷ recovering the working premise of positivism that the concept of God was incoherent and irrelevant in understanding the Universe in the latter half of the 20th century. In its most aggressive form of “New Atheism” it has been labelled “strong scientism”, the belief that science provides the “*only...source of knowledge of the world*”¹⁸.

¹² A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd edition (New York, Dover: 1952), pp.56-58.

¹³ Bertrand Russell, “Logical Positivism” in *Bertrand Russell: Logic and Knowledge, Essays 1901-1950*, Robert Charles Marsh (Ed.) (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd), p367

¹⁴ Rushdoony (2013), loc.111

¹⁵ Flew’s *Theology and Falsification* is generally thought (and in Flew’s own words in Flew (2007), p. xv-xv) to mark the rebirth of analytic atheism and also, paradoxically, analytic theism by pioneering a post positivist manner of speaking about God.

¹⁶ J.L. Mackie, “Evil and omnipotence” in *Mind*, v64 n254 (19550401): 200-212. This was considered a rebuttal of the staple ‘free will defence’ of the theist for the existence of evil that remains part of the atheist toolkit though probably now successfully refuted by Plantinga. See Macneil, *Examine why Augustine and Plantinga both considered the problem of evil as a primary challenge to the rationality of Christian belief. Does Plantinga’s Free Will Defence constitute an effective development of the arguments presented by Augustine?* (Unpublished, Bangor University: 2015). A link to this document is included in Appendix 1.

¹⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *Science, Religion and Naturalism – Where the conflict really lies* (New York, OUP: 2011), p. ix

¹⁸ James E. Taylor, “The New Atheists” in *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/n-atheis/>, 05/04/2016, emphasis added.

3.3 The Collapse of the Liberal World order

Disillusionment following the Balkan wars of 1912/13 and then World War I in 1914 in Europe precipitated the collapse of classical liberal optimism and utopianism making Nietzschean “will to power”¹⁹ the obvious new narrative. The core belief was that totalitarianism was a natural and efficient means of delivering a new humanist world order free of bourgeois sentimentalism²⁰. The universalising ideologies of Nazism and Communism came together in a pact during the 1930s precipitating the Holocaust as rite of passage. Their central modern premise was a complete belief in the power of reason to “create an ordered world in which the unpredictability and chaos of [irrationality] would give way to paradise”²¹. It is a paradoxical fact that though the Allies went to war with Germany, Lord Keynes agreed with the Nazi critique of Western economics and adopted it as fundamental to his economic thought.²²

3.4 The New Humanist World Order

It is not accidental that Roosevelt’s willingness to cede Eastern Europe to a friendly Soviet Union indicated the strength of his implicit support of its humanism²³. An uncomfortable, barely remembered fact is that Soviet dissidents post-second world war experienced mass deportations from the West to Russia after the Yalta

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*,. Versuch einer Umwerthung aller Werthe (Studien und Fragmente, Nachgelassene Werke), ed. by Ernst Horneffer, August Horneffer and "Peter Gast", with a foreword by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, publ. C. G. Naumann, 1901. Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche bridged the divide between Nietzsche and Nazism by assembling this work from fragments of Nietzsche’s unpublished work.

²⁰ McGrath (1997), pp.182-183

²¹ McGrath (1997), p.182.

²² Quoted in Rousas Rushdoony, *Money, Inflation and Morality* (Vallecito, Chalcedon), audio recording

²³ Professor Robert Dallek,

http://ww2history.com/experts/Robert_Dallek/Roosevelt_s_relationship_Stalin, accessed 17/10/2015

agreement regardless of their personal wishes and more Russians died at the hands of Stalin because of this agreement than were ever killed by the Nazis²⁴.

With such a common unity of purpose to create a New World Order, it is no longer a bare economic fact that American loans to the Eastern bloc communist regimes during the Cold War are evidence for many dissidents that “*America was the greatest ally to the Soviet Union*”²⁵. Rushdoony was able to describe at book length why “*Washington is as humanistic as Moscow*”²⁶. Western capitalism lost its Christian humanitarian roots of creating and sustaining wealthy cultures and by 1947 it became simply a means of generating as much profit as possible, the Western dream became one of unprincipled and unbridled materialism²⁷. Humanism became entrenched in both the Western and communist blocs.

3.5 Late Modern Christian Thought

Theology was in a state of flux as it wrestled with theological liberalism during the 19th century. Far from being detached from the culture around it, conservative Protestantism generated fundamentalism characterised by one commentator as “*modernists swimming against the tide*”²⁸. The rise of an alleged scientific “rationalism” and the metanarrative of Darwinism in the West²⁹ during this period

²⁴ Nicholas Bethell, *The Last Secret: The Delivery to Stalin of Over Two Million Russians by Britain and the United States* (Basic Books, New York: 1974). Nicholas Bethell is better known as Baron Lord Bethell and was a hereditary peer in the British House of Lords until his death in 2007. See also R J Rushdoony, *Christian Reconstruction-6* (Chalcedon, Vallecito: ND), audio recording.

²⁵ Rousas Rushdoony, *The Death of the Old Humanist Order* (Vallecito, Chalcedon), audio recording

²⁶ Rousas Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State*, Kindle edition (Vallecito, Chalcedon: 1986), loc 1430

²⁷ Landa Cope, *OTT Business Seminar No. – Business and Economics* (Template Institute, 2011), audio recording.

²⁸ Lawrence, B., *Defenders of God: The fundamentalist revolt against the modern age* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990), p27

²⁹ “Coping with Darwin” in Rushdoony

precipitated the crumbling of past religious certainties³⁰. The choice was clear, embrace the new scientific world order or retreat into existentialism³¹.

Barthianism resembled the latter, fundamentalism was the “scientific” response of conservative Christianity. It was rigorously methodical and rational with, in Warfield, a ring-fenced doctrine of inspiration³² that was beyond refutation, being based on an impeccable modern logical position bereft of any substantive appeal to religious experience. It was about doctrinal purity and demanded, like the political movements, rigorous and uncompromising commitment to the normative creed.

However, ultimately, the effort was unsuccessful as modernism collapsed into totalitarianism and the *Fundamentals*³³ of 1917 became the final statement of conservative academic theology within the mainstream universities before leaving the harlot Babylon to her inevitable judgement. There followed cultural ghettoization and intellectual withdrawal of the dispensationalist fundamentalist movement proper³⁴ from social and intellectual action for approximately the period of 1920-1970³⁵. If there was an Evangelical vision for culture as a whole it was simply to facilitate the preaching of the gospel by any means necessary before the imminent return of the Lord. Rushdoony describes this place of Christian history thus:

³⁰ Greg. L. Bahnsen, “The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism”, *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. III, No. 2, Winter, 1976-77, Covenant Media Foundation, 800/553-3938, opening 5 paragraphs. This article is available in archived form on <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pt031.htm>

³¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1958), pp.35-44 for an exemplar of this view.

³² Warfield, B.B., “Inspiration” in *Writings of BB Warfield Volume 2*, Philip, J.C., Cherian, S.C. (Eds.), Kindle edition (Philip Communications: 2013)

³³ ‘The Fundamentals – A Testimony to the Truth’, R.A. Torrey, C. Dixon (eds.) (Baker Books reprint, Grand Rapids: 2008 (1917)).

³⁴ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh: 1992), p49

³⁵ John Stott, *Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society*, Vol I (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan: 1985), p13

“Scripture is stripped of its total message and reduced to a soul-saving manual. Matters of law respecting crime, the use of the land, money, weights, property, diet, civil government, and all things else are set aside to concentrate on soul-saving only. If now Christian schools are started by some of these groups, too often their essential purpose is to further soul-saving”³⁶

3.6 The Rise and collapse of Postmodernism

So, in summary we see that within the political culture generally, the story of the early 20th century for the West was an emphatic rejection of the religious narrative and a radical embrace of humanism and modernism in various forms as the century progressed. Yet with the arrival of Nazism and Communism it was clear that modernism was having its own crisis by pursuing its universalising presuppositions to their inevitable and logical conclusion in the Holocaust.

The radical intellectual flight from reason in reaction to these failed promises of modernism gave rise to post-modernism in the post-War period. It first manifested in the rebellion and optimistic cultural spontaneity of the economic boom of the 1960s but rapidly descended into a sharp cynicism that was distinctive of the recession that followed in the West during the 1970s. Lyotard, considered the seminal thinker of post-modernism, surrendered all hope on principle but wanted us to stay hopeful nevertheless, “it must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented”³⁷.

³⁶ Rousas Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Postmillennialism*, Kindle edition (Vallecito: Chalcedon, 1997), loc.185

³⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). Trans. of *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p81

With Lyotard, pluralism and relativism thus entered the cultural mainstream and the denial of the possibility of objective truth became the working hypothesis of the academy. Yet as Lyotard prophetically foresaw there was a desire for the terror of the modern illusion to return³⁸ and the counter reaction of modernism as postmodernists prophesied of its demise was swift. It was a particular totalising and caustic counter-reaction of modernism to its alleged demise dispensing with the nicety of reasoned discourse to be replaced with relentless polemic and mockery of one's opponents exemplified by the New Atheist polemic against any and all religion.

3.7 Autophagia

Thus, the state of human civilisation as the new millennium approached was characterised by “autophagic capitalism” and the bloody Marxist wreckage of the “rotting offal of modernity”³⁹. This absolute descent of civilisation and the dispensationalisation of Christian thought demanded a response. The emergence of Rushdoony's Reconstructionism in this period was the movement in which discontent turned to action. It is to his role in the Reconstructionist movement and its formative nature for dominion theology that the next section proceeds.

³⁸ Lyotard (1984), pp.81-82

³⁹ McVicar (2015), p230

4 The Emergence of Modern Dominion Theology

4.1 Rushdoony and the proto-conservative movement

It is at once the crisis within humanism and the collapse of evangelical Christian cultural philosophy that is the moral imperative for the dominion theology movement first seen in the critique and works of Rousas Rushdoony. An insider charting the development of the dominion theology movement was to write:

“In 1962, there was no Christian Reconstruction movement. There was not even an outline of it. Over the next decade Rushdoony developed the fundamental theological and sociological principles of what later was to become a movement.”¹

The political context to Rushdoony’s early work was in the coalescing of diverse political and big-business reactions into a proto-conservative movement in post-second world war America as a response to the rise of American Statism during Roosevelt’s New Deal era (c.1933). This had asserted the central federal authority against the individual states and fundamentally changed the relationship of the American citizen to the State².

This major development of the American statism accelerated during the so-called “Warren Court”³ period of 1953-1969. Federal and judicial power was increased dramatically over the elected legislatures at State level:

“To many people, the idea of judicial **deference to the elected branches** lost much of its theoretical appeal in the 1950s and 1960s”⁴
(emphasis added)

¹ Gary North & Gary Demar, *Christian Reconstructon – What It Is, What It Isn’t* (ICE, Tyler: 1991), pxiii

² <http://www.history.com/topics/new-deal>, accessed 12th Jan 2016

³ After the chief Justice of the American Supreme Court, Earl Warren.

⁴ Cass R. Sunstein, "Justice Breyer's Democratic Pragmatism" (University of Chicago, John M. Olin Program in Law and Economics Working Paper No. 267, 2005), pp.3-4.

In other words, the will of the community expressed through its representatives was set aside for ideological reasons. The enormous moral imperative of the statist movement that lent it apparent legitimacy was the racial conflict within the Southern states enabling a legitimisation of aggressive centrist and federalist imposition on the individual legislatures who had resisted normalisation of race relations. The actions were frequently sponsored or initiated by radical “progressive” lawyers of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)⁵ who rose in ascendancy through the equality and race struggles of this period. The philosophical base of the ACLU was that of its first patron, John Dewey (d.1952), an advocate of “intelligent social control or social action...as a requirement of positive liberty or individuality, in modern industrial conditions”⁶.

This was thinly disguised socialist elitism⁷, a call for the enlightened social progressives to radical state action to address social problems at the federal level, rather than with individual community initiatives which had been peculiar to the American way. The radical leftism of the federalists and the anti-Christian rhetoric of the ACLU was viewed by Rushdoony as evidence of their desire to marginalise Christians and a non-Constitutional attack on First Amendment rights⁸.

⁵ Such was the perceived hostility to Christianity of this organisation that the initials ACLU even today are known in some conservative American Christian communities to stand for *Anti-Christ Lawyers Union*.

⁶ Matthew Festenstein,, "Dewey's Political Philosophy" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/dewey-political>, accessed 23/01/2016

⁷ Chuck Missler, *The American Predicament* (Koinonia Institute: 2012), audio recording. This may now be unavailable but updated versions are available from <http://resources.khouse.org/> particularly the ‘Strategic Perspectives’ series.

⁸ The First Amendment of the American constitution is perceived to guarantee religious liberty and to prohibit State interference in the practice of religion, see https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment for a detailed but accessible summary.

In this sense he had common cause with the proto-conservative movement that began to coalesce after the Second World War around a pro-capitalist, libertarian agenda against the federalists. He initially worked during the 1950s with emerging voices of conservatism such as *Spiritual Mobilization* publishing articles in their journal *Faith and Freedom*. *SM* warned that statism with its bureaucracy and social action usurped the “Christian principle [duty] of love [to your neighbour]” and:

“replaced it with the collectivist principle of compulsion...clergy and laity needed to focus on the spiritual causes of poverty rather than on the social and political programs advocated by secular social reformers...and the...advocates of the Social Gospel”⁹.

Fundamentally, these were organisations set on building a “big tent” conservative caucus around “traditional” Judeo-Christian values, individual liberty under a constitutional order and anticommunism¹⁰. It was the first attempt at a Christian response to the moral energy and socialism of the social gospel movement, juxta positioning it against individual liberty and a positive vision of capitalism as a legitimate means of building a Christian social order.

4.2 Rushdoony and the Social Gospel

The conservative movement as it emerged directed a sustained polemic at the Social Gospel movement. Yet from the perspective of a vision for the entire transformation of society in Christian terms (which, as we shall see, gradually became distinctive of Rushdoony’s program) it might be argued that there was substantial idiomatic and ‘common cause’ between both movements to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. Rushdoony early in his career apparently had left-leaning

⁹ Toy, *Spiritual Mobilisation*, p80 n9; Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism*, p271

¹⁰ McVicar (2015), p48

views¹¹ and for these reasons, it is necessary to identify what is in fact the fundamental distinction between these movements despite starting from this similar idiomatic base.

Walter Rauschenbusch was the father of the Social Gospel movement and had come “face to face with oppressive poverty”¹² during his pastorate in New York (1886-1897). He argued for a theology with the intention of reshaping Christian belief and praxis such that “a clear-eyed and continuous reconstruction of society”¹³ might take place. On that basis, his emphasis on a Kingdom gospel that was relevant to every sphere of life is shared with Rushdoony. However, Rauschenbusch, taking his philosophical presuppositions from Dewey, saw the State and Church inextricably linked in a symbiotic relationship for the wider salvation of society. Rauschenbusch even followed Hegel and assigned a divine quality to the State, “The State is the outer court of the moral law; within stands the sanctuary of the Spirit”¹⁴. He explicitly embraced socialism believing it represented the inevitable evolutionary track of human progress:

“Here enters socialism...Private ownership is not a higher stage of social organization which has finally and forever superseded communism, but an intermediate and necessary stage of social evolution between two forms of communism.”¹⁵

This is where there is a radical divergence with Rushdoony who writes to address this embrace of socialism directly:

¹¹ McVicar (2015), p.23

¹² John W. Stott, *Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society* (Fleming H. Revell, Old Tappan: 1985(1984)), p25

¹³ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century*, Kindle Centennial Edition, (Harper-Collins eBooks, 2007(1907)), loc. 2986

¹⁴ Rauschenbusch (2007), loc. 5418

¹⁵ Rauschenbusch (2007), loc. 5678, 5850.

“It is customary among ecclesiastical socialists to deny there is biblical warrant for private property...Scripture...places property in the hands of the family, not the state. It gives property to man an aspect of his dominion, as part of his godly subduing of the earth¹⁶.

The movement Rauschenbusch spawned did not maintain the Christian nuances that were clearly in his work and became aggressively concerned with “social action” in the form of using the apparatus of the State pre-emptively. It was thus straightforward for an alliance to develop between political liberals and the social gospel movement on an operational level and this was reason enough for Rushdoony to reject it.

4.3 Rushdoony and Anti-Statism

For the social gospel movement, the State became the primary *means* of institutional and social change, for Rushdoony its legitimate sphere was a narrow judicial one ensuring the just interpretation and application of God’s law¹⁷. To Rushdoony, the State only legitimately exists as the agency and not the source of law:

“For a state to claim total jurisdiction as the modern state does, is to claim to be as God, to be the total governor of man and the world. Instead of limited law and limited jurisdiction [over] welfare, education, worship, the family, business and farming, capital and labour...the modern antichristian state claims jurisdiction from cradle to grave, from womb to tomb”¹⁸

For Rushdoony, sociological reality was separated into distinct spheres or domains each of which had clearly defined boundaries and jurisdictions:

¹⁶ R J Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg: 1973), pp.450-451.

¹⁷ R J Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg: 1973), pp.1-14

¹⁸ R J Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg: 1973), p34

“The church, in terms of Scripture, has no jurisdiction and control over other institutions and spheres of life except a “spiritual” one, i.e., the proclamation and application of God’s word and authority to every realm...the church must declare that every sphere of life must be under the rule of God’s word and under the authority of Christ the King”¹⁹

The church was *to declare* the authority of God in every realm but *not* to govern directly. Rushdoony viewed the reformation of society in the “social service” of one another within the redeemed members of a reformed community of empowered “trustee families” aside from the state.

This sociological approach was based on his experience during the 1940s when still in his twenties as a missionary on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation. To Rushdoony, government intervention and “welfare” with its creation of dependency on Indian Reservations had “destroyed Native American Culture”²⁰. He concluded that nothing short of a “broad Christian *communal* program”²¹ was required to facilitate the spiritual redemption and regeneration of the Indian peoples and the culture of the entire reservation. This was to start with Indians on the School Board but was to embrace every facet of life on the reservation as they took responsibility for themselves. In other words, even at this early stage of his ministry he had concluded that a complete *Christian* reconstruction of society was necessary.

Thus, importantly, Rushdoony did not possess a high view of the church behaving as the papal state had in Roman Catholicism but saw the church as “one

¹⁹ R J Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State*, Kindle edition (Chalcedon, Vallecito: 1986), loc. 137

²⁰ R J Rushdoony, “Noncompetitive Life” in *Faith and Freedom*, Vol I, no.6, (San Jacinto: June 1950). Faith and Freedom is archived at the Mises institute.

²¹ R J Rushdoony to Emil Schwaub in McVicar (2015), p1, emphasis added.

agency among many”²². Each sphere was to be directed by the church to the law of God as revealed in the commandments of scripture regarding that sphere. Each sphere would interpret and develop its own case law from the principles of the Mosaic prescriptive law. Only in that sense would a man’s life be authentically Christian and the society as a whole submitted to God:

“a man must be a Christian in church, home, school, state, vocation, and all of life. In going from one sphere to another, a man does not move from the realm of Christ, to that of Mammon, Baal, Molech, or any other “god.” Similarly, neither the school, state, nor any other order of life can exempt itself from *the catholic or universal sway of God’s rule and law*”²³

This position was in radical contrast to how he viewed the total ineffectiveness of the church in dealing with the political, social and religious climate of the 20th century. In the decades of mass evangelism that had seen the number of American Christians more than double to the place they were a numerical majority in the country, their influence within society had virtually disappeared. This was evidenced by the unrestrained humanism seen in the stream of Supreme Court rulings culminating in the removal of prayer from public schools in 1962 and the *de facto* establishment of “abortion on demand” in the 1973 Roe vs. Wade judgment²⁴. He described modern Christianity’s relationship to the State as merely *tolerated* on the fringes of society with no significance for public life. Churches were quiet and subservient that they might not lose their tax-exempt status granted to them at the behest of the state. The separation of church and state was no longer interpreted in

²² Rushdoony (1973), p34

²³ Rushdoony (1986), loc. 141

²⁴ It is important to understand that the US Congress had never passed legislation regarding the right to abortion. It was established in this judicial fashion through the courts as was also the “banning” of prayer in schools. Such judicial overreach and subverting of the anti-centralism of the Constitution, was a strong factor in Rushdoony’s hostility to federal action.

the Founder's terms of ensuring the church is free from political interference but rather as the state's grant to the church:

“Religious liberty is...replaced by religious toleration...Religious liberty has meant, historically, the freedom...from state control and jurisdiction...Religious toleration has meant that the state claims the right to govern and control...to declare which...church has the right to exist. Religious toleration places the power in the hands of the State.”²⁵

4.4 The “Broad Social Programme” and the split with mainline Conservatism

Although Rushdoony made a fundamental contribution at this time to the emerging conservative consensus, he was soon criticising it for its lack of coherent philosophical vision²⁶. Its ethos was only *generally* Christian. In contrast, Rushdoony was to assert that a Christian people must attain “[Christian] epistemological self-consciousness”²⁷. In other words, a comprehensive and distinctly Christian way of constructing the world. This obviously went far beyond the simple libertarian vision of being able to live a life free from state interference in community and business affairs. This caught the attention of some wealthy patrons and in the period 1957-1962 he developed his distinctive programme.

Such was the cogency of his formulation that he was hired as the effective leader of a major conservative organisation known as the Volker Fund (which became the Centre for American Studies in 1961) and attempted to move the entire organisation to his explicit Christian programme. However, amidst battles with non-Christian and more moderate Christians on staff he was fired by the new patron in

²⁵ Rushdoony (1986), loc 219

²⁶ McVicar (2015), pp.63-76

²⁷ McVicar (2015), p87

September 1963. Though he had strong individual supporters within CAS, the consensus amongst staff regarding his programme was that:

‘his entire...project...was a...religious exclusive [Calvinist] form of conservatism...It would be “catastrophic for big tent conservatism and [its] pro-business agenda”²⁸.

Thus, the consequence of Rushdoony’s uncompromising, distinctively Christian theological approach was excommunication from the mainline conservative political and Christian organisations. It was to be about 20 years before mainline conservatism paid attention again to Rushdoony as the Reconstructionist movement he built forced itself to prominence and it is to the philosophical foundations of his distinctive movement that we now turn.

4.5 Epistemological self-consciousness

4.5.1 The State as a religious institution

We have seen that for Rushdoony, anti-statism was fundamental to the sociological aspect of his programme. Yet this distinguished him little from libertarians and many conservatives. It is the particular claim, that the state is a *religious* institution and the battle between church and state is between “rival religions”²⁹ of humanism and Christianity that provides us with the hermeneutic key to the philosophical underpinnings of Rushdoony’s dominionism. The distinctiveness and strength of his programme was that it was a coherent philosophical and theological program which he had described as “epistemological self-consciousness”³⁰. To understand this term is, in my opinion, to understand authentic dominion theology and it is to an analysis of this concept that we must now turn.

²⁸ Quoted in McVicar (2015), pp.72-78.

²⁹ Rushdoony (1986), loc 241

³⁰ McVicar (2015), p87

4.5.2 Van Tilianism

The basis of Rushdoony's "epistemological self-consciousness" is Van Tilian apologetics. Van Til (1895-1987) became professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary and is generally accepted to have originated a distinctive apologetic method during his career³¹. Van Til broke with the evidentialism and rationalism of Enlightenment apologetics that had come to be identified with Protestant orthodoxy, even within the conservative schools. Traditionally, evidentialism and rationalism had come to treat theology as a "science"³² and was concerned with the "facts" of apologetics, e.g. the unaided reason of a man or woman should be able to evaluate "evidences" for God's operation in the world and the shared human rational process be convinced by argumentation to a place of belief, vis-a-vis the "theistic proofs". Such an approach was based on a natural theology, suggesting a common ground was available to believers and unbelievers. In other words, facts could be considered "objective reality" which are equally available between men and between men and God, their meaning is in themselves, they are "brute facts"³³.

Van Til followed Kuyper by uncovering the assumptions and fallibility of this reasoning which had at its heart the presumption of an objective and detached human reason capable of a complete and unbiased evaluation of the facts of the world. Kuyper had reasserted the position of Reformation thought generally that reason was fundamentally faulty. Luther had written in reply to Erasmus, "Lady

³¹ William Edgar, "Introduction" in Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd edition (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing: 2011), p3ff

³² For example, see Chapter 1 'On Method' in Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, first published 1845. The treatment of "theology as a science" suggests presuppositions based upon Enlightenment humanist thought rather than Reformation thought. Alister McGrath (2007) engages in a lengthy analysis of the domination of Enlightenment thought within the old Princeton.

³³ R J Rushdoony, *Van Til and the Limits of Reason*, Kindle edition (Vallecito: Chalcedon, 2013 (1960)), loc.234

Reason...a whore of sophistry...her babblings are folly and absurdity”³⁴. Though Calvin differed from Luther in assigning a significant role to logic and philosophy (and thus reason), the Reformation principle remained in Calvin the impossibility of the reason of fallen humankind to reach God³⁵. It was always the sovereignty of God which revealed God to humankind. Philosophy was subject to scriptural theology.

Kuyper interpreted the Reformation position to assert there was a fundamental “antithesis between belief and unbelief”³⁶. Knowledge and logic in their very form are structured differently, there is no common ground possible for argumentation between the believer and unbeliever^{37,38}. Van Til developed this principle:

“There are two and only two classes of men...There are covenant keepers and covenant breakers. In all of men’s activities, in their philosophic and scientific enterprises as well as in their worship, men are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers”³⁹

So, for Van Til, natural and theological “facts” both have no meaning in or of themselves and only become truth when interpreted in terms of the framework of the covenant of God with the world:

³⁴ Martin Luther, “De servo arbitrio [The Bondage of the Will]” (para 125, Latin) quoted in John H. Smith, *Dialogues Between Faith and Reason – The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p35

³⁵ R. Ward Holder, ‘John Calvin’, Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/calvin/>, 16/02/2016

³⁶ William Edgar, “Introduction” in Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd edition (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing: 2011), p2

³⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd Edition (Phillipsburg, P & R Publishing: 2011), p62. However, he permitted a conversation, the apologetic task, to communicate and create this self-conscious awareness. His view of scripture and natural revelation as at once “perspicuous” and “meaningless without one another” is an important nuance in his thought, that at once legitimises philosophy and science but at the same time constrains it.

³⁸ Van Til’s criticism was also directed at Barth and neo-orthodoxy. He exposed neo-orthodoxy’s inability to argue coherently for Christian knowledge for it placed the Christian conversion in an existential “crisis experience”. As Edgar commented in his introduction to Van Til (2011), this is no safer epistemological basis to build an apologetic strategy than what it intends to replace.

³⁹ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd Edition (Phillipsburg, P & R Publishing: 2011), p62

“The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything...either directly or by implication...It gives us a philosophy of history as well as history... [T]here is nothing in this universe on which human beings can have full and true information unless they take the Bible into account... [I]f one goes only to the laboratory...one will not have a full or even true interpretation.”⁴⁰

Thus, Van Til does not locate truth as an abstract concept that exists in a realm above both God and humankind to which each is equally bound as in Hellenic western philosophy (after Aristotle) but as to something which has its origin in and dwells in the creature of God:

“[If it is assumed] that God and man stand in exactly the same sort of relation to the law of contradiction...it is assumed [to think truly that] both must think in accordance with that law as an abstraction from the nature of either [God or Man]...The consequences are...fatal.”⁴¹

What is “fatal” to Van Til is asserting is that if you admit the principle that “truth” is somehow abstracted into its own realm apart from God, “the basic principle of the non-Christian conception of truth cannot be challenged”⁴². In other words, if the Christian accepts the concept that truth is apart from God rather than something God has as part of his ontology, there can be no discovery of final objective truth but rather claims of warrant, probable truth or of reasonable verisimilitude⁴³. The best the Christian could hope for is an admission from non-Christians that there is sufficient warrant for their belief⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ Van Til (2011), pp.19-20

⁴¹ Van Til (2011), p.33

⁴² Van Til (2011), p.33

⁴³ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.xi.

⁴⁴ Indeed, Alvin Plantinga’s entire philosophical project might be to establish the “justification, rationality, and warrant for Christian belief”, Plantinga (2000), p.xi firmly within, what is, ultimately, an Aristotelian epistemological model, Plantinga (1993), p.x. His unique contribution to Reformed

Van Til refuses to accept this principle and is aiming to demonstrate we can most certainly know what truth is because truth is resident in God and is revealed to us via the means of His self-revelation in scripture and in a revelation of our own selves to ourselves through our wilful obedience. Humanity's very constitution and desire to dominion is there because it is a "law", in the sense of a principle of correct and innate operation, i.e. in accordance with its design. God has placed His law in the human will and the human personality chooses to embrace the leadings of God's will within itself. If humanity cooperates then the will of God is established through the agency of the human will, "it is the ultimate will or plan of the self-determinate God that gives determinate character to anything that is done by the human will"⁴⁵. For Van Til, dominion theology is the only theology possible because God's first intention for the created humanity was dominion:

"[T]he will of man...depends for what it is ultimately upon a creative and sustaining act of God... [M]an is bound to act, God has set his program [what we should want]. God gave this program by way of self-conscious communication at the beginning of history. Man's *summum bonum* (the supreme good, from which all others are derived) was set before him...He was to subdue the earth and bring out its latent powers to the glory of God"⁴⁶

Here we arrive at the principle which was to form the foundation of Rushdoony's dominion theology.

Epistemology suggests a far more nuanced and sophisticated view but his own words cited here of a debt to Aristotle show he is approaching the problem very differently than Van Til. However, Plantinga has also outlined an appeal for *Christian* philosophy in his seminal 'Advice to Christian Philosophers' (reprinted in Sennett (ed.), 1998) and his concept of 'Christian self-confidence' in that address suggests there must nevertheless be an epistemic independence which suggests a point of contact with Van Tillianism.

⁴⁵ Van Til (2011), p.36

⁴⁶ Van Til (2011), p.36. Amplification (marked n) was Edgar's editorial note.

4.6 Rushdoony and Theonomy

At this point it should be clear as to why Rushdoony seeking a *theological* basis for any reformation of society insisted on a Van Tilian epistemology. He follows Van Til in that societal reformation must be derivative to the will of God as revealed in scripture (Theonomy) and not subject to the premises and prejudices of autonomous human will. However, Rushdoony developed Van Til's apologetic in a very important way and the novel character of this development is captured by North:

“Van Til was analogous to a demolitions expert. He placed explosive charges at the bottom of every modern edifice [and] detonated them. But he left no blueprints for the reconstruction of society...This was not good enough for Rushdoony...he concluded that the source of the missing blueprints is Old Testament law.”⁴⁷

Rushdoony's extended Van Til's philosophical Theonomy into the sociological realm. He posited government of the self and society by God's law in contrast to autonomy which is government of the self and society by the judgments of human reason alone. Theonomy to Rushdoony is in the interpretation and application of biblical law and he seeded the “Reconstructionist” movement with it as the first modern dominion theology movement:

“It is a modern heresy that holds that the law of God has no meaning nor any binding force for man today...To attempt to understand Western civilisation apart from the impact of biblical law within it and upon it is to seek a fictitious history and to reject [biblical law]...the historic power and vitality of the West has been in Biblical faith and law”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Gary North & Gary DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction – What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler: ICE, 1991), p.xi-xii

⁴⁸ Rousas Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), pp.2, 5

“Reconstructionist” reflects the purpose to reconstruct every sphere of society according to God’s law:

“What is our standard; by what standards shall we approach the problems of philosophy and the problems of everyday life? If we begin with anything other than the ontological Trinity, with the sovereignty of God as **intellectually applied and systematically delineated in every aspect and avenue of human thought**, we end with the destruction of Christian theology and the deterioration of Christian life”⁴⁹ (emphasis added)

He sees no discontinuity or contradiction between law as expressed in the Mosaic Law and the law of Christ for the believer in the church era. They are part of the same theological concept of divine law:

“Man as covenant-breaker is in “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7) and is subject to “the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2), whereas the believer is under “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ” (Rom 8:2). The law is one law, the law of God.”⁵⁰

They are not dispensational separated elements but a coherent continuity which can be directly and explicitly applied. Rushdoony’s *Institutes* presents the thesis that the Ten Commandments are the statutory aspects of the Law and that the detail of the law found in the books provides a source of case law to illustrate the principles of interpretation and thus the basis of civil governance in any era. It is conceived as an explicit template for every sphere and aspect of human existence.

⁴⁹ Rousas Rushdoony, *By What Standard* (Fairfax: Thoburn Press, 1974(1959)), p.203

⁵⁰ Rousas Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), p.3

It is crucial to recognise that for Rushdoony this is not a reversion to *legalism*, he is not claiming a man is saved by keeping the law. Rushdoony is emphasising the sanctifying work of the law after the redemptive work:

“Christ’s atoning work was to restore man to a position of covenant-keeping instead of covenant-breaking, to enable man to keep the law by freeing man ‘from the law of sin and death’...The law has a position of centrality...in man’s sanctification (in that he grows in grace as he grows in law-keeping, for the law is the way of sanctification)”⁵¹

The promulgation of biblical law in terms of the dominion mandate is thus the fulfilment of the original intent of God:

“The purpose of Christ’s coming was in terms of this same creation mandate...Christ died to make atonement for their sins...The redeemed are recalled to the original purpose of man to exercise dominion under God...to ‘fulfil the righteousness of the law’ (Rom 8:4). The law remains central to God’s purpose.”⁵²

How Rushdoony developed this concept and how he transformed evangelical politics and inspired activism is the subject of the next chapter.

⁵¹ Rushdoony (1973), p.3

⁵² Rushdoony (1973), pp.3-4

5 The Dominionist Movement

5.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the major thinkers within the dominionist movement and how the collective intellectual force caused a paradigm shift within conservative evangelical Christianity. This represented perhaps the greatest reorientation of the conservative church in its history.

5.2 Reconstructionism

Three appendices to Rushdoony's *Institutes* were written by Gary North. North was supported by Rushdoony through doctoral studies and eventually hired to work at Rushdoony's Chalcedon foundation. With North came Greg Bahnsen. Both men were recognised as "brilliant students"¹ and both had studied under Van Til at Westminster Seminary. They worked closely with Rushdoony and developed the platform which became known as "reconstructionism" and propagated his ideas into the mainstream of evangelical consciousness.

5.2.1 Greg Bahnsen and Theonomy

Van Til had wanted Bahnsen to replace him when he retired from Westminster; such was his confidence in the student. Bahnsen comprehended the full implications of Van Til's apologetic and developed it rigorously. His first major statement was in the publication of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*². It is especially significant that Rushdoony wrote the foreword to the book and put it in the context of the dominion

¹ McVicar (2015), pp.151, 157

² Rushdoony's introduction to the first edition was written in October 1971. The publication was delayed until 1977 owing to "factors beyond Bahnsen's control" (North, 1991). With the later split in the Reconstructionist movement, some asserted that it was Bahnsen, rather than Rushdoony that first asserted Theonomy (Rushdoony's *Institutes* were not published until 1973). However, the fact Rushdoony was invited to write the foreword by Bahnsen suggests he was inspired by Rushdoony's development of Van Til.

mandate. For Rushdoony, a failure to keep the law renders the church impotent³ because it denies God's holiness and separates humanity from God's power.

Bahnsen developed Reconstructionism from Rushdoony's base in great detail.

His thesis centred on an exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20⁴ and asserts that the Old Testament law was not abrogated in any theological or ethical sense by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The law was to be kept "every jot and tittle"⁵ but, as with Rushdoony, it is important to understand that Bahnsen was not asserting legalism:

"The law does *not* save a man, but it *does* show him *why* he needs to be saved and *how* he is to walk after he is saved. Because God's moral nature, his holiness, is revealed in the law, the law accuses and convicts its reader of sin."⁶ (Emphasis original)

The ethics of the Christian remain the same, the means by which God enables us to keep it have changed, it is by the grace through Jesus Christ writing the law on our hearts:

"'fulfilment' in [Mat 5 v17] [is] not any sort of euphemism for "relaxation" or "invalidation"...far from being different from the first covenant, the ethical stipulations of that new covenant would be the same as the original law; God says He will write the law on His people's hearts, not change the law"⁷

Fierce reaction to Bahnsen ensued from within the liberal, evangelical⁸ and perhaps most surprisingly, from his own Reformed circles⁹. There was a concerted campaign

³ Rousas Rushdoony, 'Foreword' in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, extended edition with response to critics (Phillipsburg: PRC, 1984(1977)), pp.vii-ix.

⁴ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg: PRC, 1984(1977)), pp.39-88

⁵ Bahnsen (1984), p.xv.

⁶ Bahnsen (1984), p.127

⁷ Bahnsen (1984), p.46

⁸ McVicar (2015), p163

⁹ Bahnsen (1984), p.xivn

against his ordination¹⁰ in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and after completing his doctorate, he only managed a brief controversial tenure at Reformed Theological seminary (RTS) where the controversy surrounding his view within the faculty led to the termination of his tenure¹¹. He was not again to hold tenure in a major academic institution despite his brilliance and recognition as a skilful debater within mainstream academia¹².

Yet during this brief period he inspired a group of students including Keith Gentry, Gary DeMar, James B. Jordan and David Chilton who became the next generation of Reconstructionist thinker's developing work on eschatology (Gentry and Chilton), pastoral theology (Jordan) and political theory (DeMar). Between them they authored over 67 books which were to force Christian Reconstructionism to the forefront of the evangelical consciousness. Bahnsen's legacy is still strongly represented by the output of the *Covenant Media Foundation*¹³ which he began as a way to distribute his written and recorded materials.

5.2.2 Greg Bahnsen and "Federal Vision"

After the premature death of Bahnsen, his CMF became influential in the propagation of the "Federal Vision" theology which is viewed as a paradigm shift within classical Calvinism¹⁴ and effectively dilutes, if not denies, classical Calvinism. Bahnsen's son indicated he believed his father would be sympathetic to *FV* whereas

¹⁰ North (1991), pp.xiii - xiv

¹¹ McVicar (2015), p160

¹² "Does God Exist?", Dr. Gordon Stein (Atheist) vs Dr Greg Bahnsen (Jesus follower), 1985 University of California public debate, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anGAazNCfdY>, accessed 29/03/2016

¹³ <http://www.cmfnow.com/>

¹⁴ David Bahnsen, 'Greg Bahnsen and the Auburn Avenue Controversy' in Otis (2005), p433

other past students have argued forcefully to the contrary¹⁵. Nevertheless, with James Jordan, a former pastor of Tyler's Reconstructionist Westminster Presbyterian Church firmly in the *FV* camp (see below), *FV* is sometimes viewed as a distinctive development of Reconstructionism having a more moderate theological viewpoint:

“The strict Theonomists...say that [we] must implement the Mosaic law as it stands. The more moderate Christian Reconstructionists have said that the Bible as a whole, including the Mosaic law wisely applied in line with New Covenant principles, should be the guide.”¹⁶

5.2.3 Gary North and the Tyler Reconstructionists

Gary North was first hired to edit the scholarly journal of Rushdoony's Chalcedon foundation¹⁷ and published his seminal *Introduction to Christian Economics* in 1973. North excelled at developing economic theory becoming known as “the economist of the Reconstruction movement”¹⁸ and distilled Rushdoony's dense narrative into practical tools. He presented these through a mixture of popular, polemical and scholarly publications targeted at the seminary, conservative political activist groups¹⁹ and the layperson²⁰. His Institute for Christian Economics (ICE) was primarily responsible for the vast literary output of the Reconstructionist movement during the 1980s and 1990s²¹. His intention was for a relentless polemic and

¹⁵ John M. Otis, *Danger In the Camp* (Unknown: Triumphant Publishing, 2005), pp.431-451

¹⁶ James B. Jordan, “A Theocratic Critique of Theonomy”, <http://www.wordmp3.com/product-group.aspx?id=322>, 07/03/2016

¹⁷ North (1991), p.xiii

¹⁸ Frederick Clarkson, ‘Christian Reconstructionism’ in *The Public Eye Magazine*, Vol.8, No.1, (Somerville: Political Research Associates: 1994), entire issue. Available online at <http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v08n1/chrisre1.html>. Note this is NOT the British satirical *Public Eye* magazine but an American research journal.

¹⁹ Gary North et al, *The Theology of Christian Resistance* (Tyler: Geneva Divinity School, 1983); Gary North et al, *Tactics of Christian Resistance* (Tyler: Geneva Divinity School, 1983). Both are available at <http://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/>.

²⁰ Gary North, *Backward Christian Soldiers – An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler: ICE, 1986(1984)), pp.190ff

²¹ Gary North, ‘Editor's Preface’ in *Theonomy – An Informed Response* (Tyler: ICE, 1991), p.xvi.

scholarly rebuttal of the movement's critics within academia²² and the development of practical programs and strategies to promote the Reconstructionist agenda at a grassroots political level. He effectively founded a separate, political, militant and publishing wing of the Reconstruction movement²³ based in Tyler Texas which also had an associated "prototype" Reconstructionist church and a divinity school. This functioned in a similar but more aggressive fashion to Rushdoony's Chalcedon foundation. He was a guest numerous times on Pat Robertson's CBN network's 700 club during the 1980s which was testimony for the success of his strategies, his increasing reputation within Reconstructionism and the growth of Reconstructionism's influence on the wider evangelical consciousness.

5.2.4 Schism and Reformation

Though during the early years of Tyler North was still editing the Chalcedon journal, he was to split ideologically with Rushdoony over the means for societal reformation and broke acrimoniously over a mix of personal and theological issues in 1981²⁴.

North was fired by Rushdoony who at the same time also fired his fellow Tyler men Ray Sutton and James Jordan who were on the Chalcedon staff. Sutton and Jordan had developed a radical ecclesiology as the means for societal transformation in opposition to Rushdoony's familial model²⁵ which became known as the "Tyler theology". However, the Tyler church and school had both unravelled by the end of the 1980s being described by one important former member as an example of "Reconstructionist Ecclesiolatry"²⁶. The Tyler men eventually left to their own projects and think-tanks with Reconstructionism becoming an effective blend of

²² North (1991), p.xvii.

²³ McVicar (2015), pp.182-187

²⁴ McVicar (2015), pp.192-194

²⁵ Rousas Rushdoony, "Christian Reconstruction as a movement" in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (Vallecito: Chalcedon, 1996), Vol. XIV, no. 1, p9

²⁶ David Chilton, "Ecclesiastical Megalomania",

http://www.preteristarchive.com/Modern/1992_chilton_tyler.html , 07/03/2016

Tyler, Bahnsen and Chalcedon. Though much is made of the excesses of Tyler²⁷ and the break with Chalcedon²⁸, North and the other Reconstructionists were still to reference Rushdoony through their own works. Their tributes to him at his passing in 2001 are testament to the intellectual and personal debt to him²⁹. Thus, in the contemporary context, alongside second-generation Reconstructionist Gary DeMar's stewardship of the *American Vision*³⁰ foundation and the Federal Vision emphasis of post-Bahnsen *CMF*, the three arenas of Reconstructionist thought might be now better thought of as complimentary rather than in an adversarial mode of relation as was suggested to be the case for a period in the early 1990s³¹.

5.3 The Diversification of the movement

5.3.1 “The Enemy of my Enemy is my friend”

An aspect of North's earlier thought which brings us into the contemporary period of dominion theology was his recognition and willingness to engage with what he felt was a major “convergence” between Protestant theologies that had been implacably polarised and hostile to one another. As both Tyler and Chalcedon pushed into the mainstream ideology of the New Right and began to heavily influence a new generation of Christian activists, both he and Rushdoony recognised that elements of Reconstructionism were being incorporated into revised fundamentalist, charismatic and Pentecostal ideologies far from Reconstruction's Reformed roots:

“[The] growing alliance between charismatics and Reconstructionists has disturbed Reformed Presbyterians almost as much as it has

²⁷ With the coming and passing of the financial apocalypse predicted by North with Y2K, the more extreme survivalist rhetoric and Tyler extremism was quietly buried as he closed the ICE in 2001 though all its publications remain accessible at no cost through a section of his website.

²⁸ McVicar (2015), pp.220-221; Ice & House (1988), pp.18-19, pp.351-2

²⁹ Various, “A Tribute to RJ Rushdoony”, web archive of “Faith for All Life” (Feb. 2001), <http://chalcedon.edu/faith-for-all-of-life/a-tribute-to-r-j-rushdoony/>, 08/03/2016

³⁰ <https://americanvision.org/>

³¹ McVicar (2015), p.221

disturbed premillennial dispensationalists. It has led to accusations of heresy against both groups from all sides: pietistic Pentecostalism, pietistic Scofieldism, and pietistic Presbyterianism. The critics worry about the fact that the Pentecostalism's infantry is at last being armed with Reconstructionism's field artillery. They should be worried. This represents one of the most fundamental realignments In U.S. Protestant church history."³²

Both North and Rushdoony addressed charismatic conferences and seminars, developed personal contacts and friendships with charismatics which would have been thought impossible when Rushdoony first wrote the *Institutes* with stinging criticism of charismatic Christianity. Both recognised a shift in the political and theological consciousness of evangelical Christians:

"Younger charismatics and most of the independent Christian day schools are headed toward biblical law and away from the social and political policies of inaction that have been common in traditional, pietistic, dispensational circles since 1925. They are picketing against abortion clinics (legalized in 1973 by the U. S. Supreme Court, but not by God's Supreme Court). They are adopting ethics religion and abandoning the older escapist religion. The key word in this shift of perspective is "dominion." The secondary word is "resistance." Resistance to what? Secular humanism and its legal arm, the Federal government..."³³

There is little argument with North on this point. By the end of the 1980s, Rushdoony had estimated "20 million Christians [in the US] ascribed to some aspect of theonomic or Reconstructionist thinking"³⁴.

³² Gary North, "Reconstructionist Renewal and Charismatic Renewal" in *Christian Reconstruction* – Vol XII, No.3, May/June 1988, newsletter.

³³ Gary North, *Unholy Spirits* (Tyler: ICE, 1994(1988)), p12ff

³⁴ Rushdoony quoted in McVicar (2015), p201

5.3.2 The Fundamentalist dimension

Reconstructionism's movement into the mainstream was due to its influence on key fundamentalist and evangelical leaders. One of the hugely significant bridges between the previously hostile Reformed Reconstruction movement and what can be loosely called the "fundamentalist" and "broad-church" conservative movements³⁵ were the Schaeffers. Francis Schaeffer, the elder Schaeffer, was also one of the most philosophical, erudite and thorough of the modern evangelicals, having studied under Van Til in the 1930s. He is credited more than any other evangelical leader during the 1970s with rallying conservative Christian opinion in response to the "abortion on demand" ruling in the Roe vs Wade ruling in 1973³⁶.

The younger Schaeffer, Franky, was a filmmaker and took his father's words and turned them into films³⁷ which reached a large audience and helped galvanise anti-abortion opinion. However, Franky also wrote highly polemical works encouraging legal activism and worked with John Whitehead at the Rutherford institute. Whitehead had been influenced and personally mentored by Rushdoony into legal activism and advocacy as a conservative version of the ACLU. The focus was on defending religious liberty, the right to home-schooling and preserving space for religious expression within the public sphere which had been under siege owing to the barely disguised radical socialism of the ACLU and the legacy of the liberal Warren Court Supreme Court period during the 1950s and 1960s. Franky Schaeffer in particular was brought into contact with Rushdoony's works, quoted them in his

³⁵ Jerry Fallwell, Ed Dobson & Ed Hindson, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), pp.186-223

³⁶ McVicar (2015), p.173

³⁷ The anti-abortion "*Whatever Happened To The Human Race*" adaptation of the elder Schaeffer's book of the same name was particularly influential in generating activism amongst newly politicised evangelicals.

work and recommended Rushdoony's Chalcedon foundation to his evangelical audience³⁸.

5.3.3 The Pentecostal Movements

However, what was more startling was the influence Reconstructionism began to exert on Pentecostalism. The 20th century Pentecostal movement had started in Azusa Street around 1906 and had emphasised spiritual experience, the supernatural gifts of the Spirit and was apocryphally related to the "enthusiasm" of the Welsh revival of 1904-5³⁹. It fundamentally changed the spiritual dynamics of a section of the Protestant church and became the putative heirs of 18th century Arminian revivalism, emphasising individual choice and salvation.

This revivalism saw the emergence during the 1950s of the healing revivals and the foundation of Oral Roberts University, in the 1960s the Word of Faith movement under Kenneth Hagin and the emergence of the "House Church" and Charismatic⁴⁰ movements in both Britain, America and Western Europe during the late 1960s. It was also a time of a new wave of mission movements such as Campus Crusade for Christ (CCF) and Youth with a Mission (YWAM). It continued to mutate and develop during the 1980s with the "Kingdom Now" movement and with the birth of the distinctive neo-Pentecostalism of Central and South America⁴¹ and the mega-churches of Africa and Asia⁴².

³⁸ McVicar (2015), pp.173-176

³⁹ Rick Joyner, *The Power to change the world: the Welsh and Azusa Street Revivals*, eBook edition (Fort Mill, Morning Star Publications: 2010(2006)), loc 47;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZK2DkDKejcs&feature=youtu.be>, accessed 14/04/2016

⁴⁰ Dr Bill Hamon. *The Eternal Church: A Prophetic Look at the Church – Her History, Restoration and Destiny*, 2nd edition (Shippenburg, Destiny Image: 2003 (1981)), pp.239-261, p241.

⁴¹ Martin, B., 'From pre- to postmodernity in Latin America: the case of Pentecostalism' in *Religion, Modernity and Post Modernity*, Heelas, P., Martin, D. & Morris, P. (Eds), 1998, p107.

⁴² Reinhardt Boonke, *Extra Impact newsletter (February 2008)*.

Historical Pentecostalism had shared the theological emphasis of the modern revivalist movement which was inherited from the classical fundamentalists and their antipathy to social action which meant that though many millions had “come into the Kingdom” there was frequently little evidence of national change or influence of the new churches. By the mid-1970s, key leaders within the movements such as C Peter Wagner, Loren Cunningham and Landa Cope began to reflect on the cultural irrelevance and impotence of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

For example, in a documentary study related by Cope⁴³ it was found that in the most “Christianised”⁴⁴ city of the United States (Dallas, Texas) there was found to be no improvement in drug addiction or homelessness, divorce was at equivalent or greater rates than non-Christian communities and the spiritual leaders of the community held that none of this was their concern for they were “spiritual leaders”⁴⁵. Thus, the paradox seen by these leaders was that the Western church was numerically *stronger* than it had ever been, but its *influence* politically and economically was *smaller* than it had ever been.

As a response, by the mid-1970s, they began to embrace Rushdoony’s ideas of a “cultural mandate” in a slightly softened and repackaged form as the “seven mountains” mandate⁴⁶. Wagner explicitly adopted “dominion theology” and was clearly influenced directly by Reconstructionism though he attempted to distance

⁴³ Cope (2011), pp.21-23

⁴⁴ Where “Christianised” was defined as evangelical and attendance was mid-week as well as Sunday to distinguish it from traditional and formal attendance.

⁴⁵ Cope (2011), p23

⁴⁶ McVicar (2012), p200

himself from theocratic elements of the Tyler theology⁴⁷. In fact, the perceived similarity to Reconstructionism was so obvious that Wagner himself testifies, “Some wanted me ousted from Christendom – immediately!”⁴⁸ Though he qualified his view and rebranded his ministry to a degree in mitigation to the reaction he received, he was clear that:

“[his] underlying premise is that God wills his people here on earth [to] take dominion of the society in which we live, promoting the values, blessings and prosperity of His Kingdom...fear is...the principal driving [element] underlying the sincere opposition by some to dominionism”⁴⁹.

Wagner is also important because of his links with John Wimber of the “Power Evangelism” movement, perhaps the most famous of Charismatic leaders during the 1980s and the first part of the 1990s. This in turn is important because Wimber is the spiritual father of what might be termed the contemporary “fifth wave” churches. These are churches which trace their genesis and inspiration to the 1994 “outpouring” at what was then the Toronto Airport Vineyard church with the Arnotts as leaders. This movement attracted a notoriety of such a degree that John Wimber suspended the church from the Vineyard association with the corresponding response from the Arnotts that they withdrew from Vineyard completely establishing a fully independent prototype Church for the Fifth Wave.

The view of the Gospel as being relevant and necessary in every sphere of human life is the motivation and *modus operandi* and unifying principle of the diverse conceptions of “dominion theology” now found within this broad and theologically

⁴⁷ C Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom action can change the world* (Grand Rapids, Chosen: 2008), pp.12-17

⁴⁸ C Peter Wagner, *On Earth as it is in Heaven* (Ventura: Regal, 2012), p.7

⁴⁹ Wagner (2012), p.8

diverse network. Rushdoony's ideas influenced key leaders within all these movements whom although they did not share his Calvinism, they imported his ideas whilst, like Wagner, distancing themselves from his "extremism" by never publicly acknowledging his influence.

5.4 Summary

Dominion theology was seeded by Rushdoony, grew rapidly from its Reformed roots and became established within mainstream evangelicalism, including the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. The controversy surrounding Rushdoony and his ideas meant he basically went unacknowledged by those he inspired as they absorbed and morphed dominionism. Dominionism might now be better described as a *genus* and the associated terms of Reconstructionist, post-millennialists, dominionist, theonomist, "Kingdom Now", Business as a Mission, Discipling Nations, New Apostolic Age, Schools of the Prophets as particular *species*. The next chapter examines the ferocious critique of Dominionism and explains why many preferred to distance themselves, publicly at least, from Rushdoony's Reconstructionism.

6 The Critiques of Dominion Theology

6.1 Overview

Dominion theology was always controversial but was attacked systematically from 1987 to 1990 both within lay Christianity and within the seminary. As McVicar (2012) demonstrates, these attacks formed the basis of a critical narrative that was used in virtually every subsequent attack on Reconstructionism and dominion theology¹.

These attacked dominionism in two main ways:

- a. On the basis of its optimistic eschatology;
- b. On the basis of its Theonomy.

This chapter considers these in turn and evaluates whether these criticisms have proved to be intellectually successful.

6.2 Eschatology

Dominionists of the Reformed tradition, such as Rushdoony and North were exclusively postmillennial. Most modern dominionists with a few exceptions are postmillennial or maintain an “operational” eschatology that approximates to postmillennialism. As described in chapter two, postmillennialism has historically been the most controversial of the eschatological groupings, so it is of little surprise that dominionists are attacked because they are or sound like postmillennialists. House and Ice in criticising Reconstructionism make the blanket statement, “one cannot be a Reconstructionist and a premillennialist”². Hal Lindsey, author of the most populist eschatological work of the 1970s wrote:

¹ McVicar (2015), pp.203-205

² H. Wayne House & Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1988), p7

“There used to be a group called “postmillennialists”...World War I greatly disheartened this group and World War II virtually wiped out this viewpoint. No self-respecting scholar...today...is a “postmillennialist””³

Lindsay attacks dominion theology at book length by directly associating its prophetic viewpoint with the rise of the Holocaust:

“I believe we are witnessing a growing revival of the same false interpretation of prophecy that in the past led to such tragedy for so many centuries by a movement that calls itself either Reconstructionism, Dominionism and/or Kingdom Now”⁴

On his own admission, he was picking up on the speculative appendix to House and Ice⁵ (who he quotes often) that the allegorical and symbolic prophetic viewpoint lends itself to a reduction in the importance of Israel as a nation and this in turn has been the historical root of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

Walvoord in a more scholarly fashion cites the following central objections, “Postmillennialism in itself does not have the principle or method to attain a system of theology.” He then enumerates his reasoning:

- a. The viewpoint is “not apostolic” thus implicitly invalid for the Christian loyal to the historic faith;
- b. Whitbyism (after Daniel Whitby, the “founder” of postmillennialism) was philosophically humanistic, liberal and non-Christian;
- c. It is based on a subjective, figurative interpretation of prophecy⁶.

³ Hal Lindsay with C.C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977(1970), pp.164-165

⁴ Hal Lindsay, *The Road To Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1989), p.25

⁵ House & Ice (1988), Appendix B, pp.397ff.

⁶ Walvoord (1959), p23

A famous and radical rejection of dominionism on the basis of points (a) and (b) was found in Dave Hunt's triplet *Whatever Happened to Heaven, The Seduction of Christianity and Beyond Seduction*. Hunt's thesis was that the dominion movement was adopting "worldly" aims of personal success and "carnal" methods of positive confession and self-fulfilment. These were concepts borrowed from sociology and psychology, foreign to the classical pietism and the way of victory through suffering, "They misunderstand true victory...Jesus conquers sin, death, and hell by allowing His enemies to kill Him"⁷. The kingdom to Hunt was to be considered part of a new heaven and a new earth. On this basis it is a misdirection of Christian energy, a distraction from the true mission of the Church and is finally a demonic seduction, to engage in culture with a view to transformation:

"Although the kingdom begins in the hearts of all who obey Christ as King, the outward manifestation of this kingdom will not come in its fullness until God has destroyed this present universe and created a new one into which sin will never enter"⁸

Hunt epitomised an evangelical and dispensationalist theological reaction to dominionism. McVicar (2015) describes this view as representative of the belief that dominionism was a "hubristic...attempt to Christianize a chronically un-Christianizable world"⁹. More sophisticated critiques employing the same idea were presented to the neo-evangelical academy and laity by a broad coalition of liberal and moderate evangelicals:

"At the turn of the century...Abraham Kuyper, was elected prime minister of the Netherlands. His opponents voiced fears of theocratic oppression. Instead his administration was a model of tolerance and public pluralism...that the legitimate rights of all be fully represented...If

⁷ Dave Hunt, *Beyond Seduction* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1987), p262

⁸ Dave Hunt, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1985), p.224

⁹ McVicar (2015), p.206ff.

Christians today understood this distinction between the role of the private Christian citizen and the Christian in government, they might sound less like medieval crusaders”¹⁰

As Rushdoony had appealed directly to Kuyper for his philosophical and theological inspiration, this was a pointed attack.

6.3 Theonomy

6.3.1 Neo-evangelicals and Theonomy

The Reconstructionist belief in the continuing role of the Old Testament Law as normative for the Christian provoked what North described as an “ecclesiastical war against biblical law”¹¹. Coverage within both the secular and Christian press became sensationalist¹² with even the more scholarly attempts at rebuttal sometimes reverting to evocative images of Theonomists advocating capital punishment for homosexuals, adultery, the insane and rebellious teenagers¹³. Much was made of Bahnsen’s view¹⁴ that every “jot and tittle” of the Law was binding for the New Testament believer to the extent he formally responded to it¹⁵.

¹⁰ Charles Colson, ‘The Power Illusion’, in *Power Religion – The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church*, Michael Scott Horton (Ed.) (Chicago: Moody Press: 1992), p.34

¹¹ North & DeMar (1991), p.xiii.

¹² K. Yurica, “The Despoiling of America: How George Bush Became the Head of the New American Dominionist Church/State”, Feb 2004, <http://www.yuricareport.com/Dominionism/>, 30/01/2016

¹³ Temper Longman III, ‘God’s Law and Mosaic Punishments Today’ in *Theonomy – A Reformed Critique*, William S. Barker & W. Robert Godfrey (Eds.) (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990), pp. 41, 44; House & Ice (1988), pp.63-64

¹⁴ House & Ice, p.20, pp.103ff. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, the theonomical thesis originated with Rushdoony but Bahnsen was the foremost exegete of it. Though the Tyler split initially affected the relationship between the two men, Bahnsen was later to consolidate his relationship with Chalcedon and Rushdoony. He was one of the few within the movement to have the standing to criticise Gary North of “logical fallacy” (Bahnsen’s review of Chilton’s commentary on revelation, “Another Look at Chilton’s Days of Vengeance”, Journey 3:2, *Covenant Media Foundation*, March-April, 1988) without a ferocious response from North.

¹⁵ Greg L Bahnsen, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ in *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg: PRC, 1984(1977)), p.xv.

Within the American context, there had been the suspicion that theological beliefs were incompatible with constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. This idea had a powerful emotive imagery for the *American* evangelical. The “democracy works” idiom was even developed by charismatics whom had otherwise adopted large portions of Reconstructionism’s programme¹⁶. Theonomists were thus anti-democratic and anti-American rather than just defective on issues of theological principle¹⁷. It boiled over when Billy Graham’s *Christianity Today* ran a cover story of an “extended exposé” on Reconstructionism which labelled Rushdoony as a “heretic”¹⁸. Theonomists were un-evangelical because of their emphasis on law, political and civil engagement rather than “saving souls”. The pressure from mainstream neo-evangelicalism was such that Pat Robertson denied any formal links with the movement during his presidential bid despite having hosted Rushdoony and North numerous times during the 1980s on his flagship *700 Club*.

6.3.2 Westminster Seminary and Theonomy

The single major attempt at a concerted academic response from within the same theological family as Reconstructionism to Theonomy was attempted by Westminster Theological Seminary where Van Til himself had taught¹⁹. It was 10 years in the making and was thus meant to be a theologically rigorous and authoritative critique of dominionism. I address this assertion in the section below where I consider the response of the Dominionists to the book but if the book can be said to have a coherent theological thrust, it is firstly expressed with the Hunt-like appeal to piety

¹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as it is in Heaven* (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2012), pp.11-16

¹⁷ McVicar (2015), pp.202-205

¹⁸ Rodney Clapp, ‘Democracy as Heresy’ in *Christianity Today*, Feb. 20,1987

¹⁹ William S. Barker & W. Robert Godfrey, ‘Preface’ in *Theonomy – A Reformed Critique*, William S. Barker & W. Robert Godfrey (Eds.) (Grand Rapids: Acadamie, 1990), pp.10

“[the] authority of the people of God is the authority of weakness” which was developed in the final chapter of the book into an appeal to the Theonomists to a doctrinal and political pluralism:

“such [a mix of religion and politics] warn evangelicals interested in a biblical view of society to give care to safeguard the formal principle of the Reformation. Do not mix the Gospel with an overly precise, potentially extra-biblical application of the Law...confusing revelation with tradition.”²⁰

6.4 Assessing the criticisms

6.4.1 Eschatological criticisms assessed

The first assertion of Walvoord that postmillennialism “cannot attain a system of theology” cannot be sustained. Bahnsen argued at great length that there was a “prima facie” case to recognise postmillennialism consistently within the history of the Church. He emphasised the novel character of dispensational thought and the poor quality of scholarship as characteristic of the modern dispensational premillennialism. He characterised Walvoord’s process as “newspaper exegesis” employing an abandonment of Reformed principles of exegesis to accommodate the “signs of the times”²¹. He returns with interest Walvoord’s dismissive criticism:

“By means of such newspaper exegesis, one could just as well discount the return of Christ in glory, saying “where is the promise of his coming?” (cf. II Peter 3:1-4). This *reductio ad absurdum* must be reckoned with. The fact that an era of gospel prosperity and world peace has not yet arrived would no more disprove the Bible’s teaching that such an era shall be realized (in the power of God’s spirit and the faithfulness of Christ’s church to its great commission) than the fact

²⁰ D. Clair Davis, ‘A Challenge to Theonomy’ in *Theonomy – A Reformed Critique*, William S. Barker & W. Robert Godfrey (Eds.) (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990), pp.398-399

²¹ Bahnsen (1977), p7/96

that Christ has not yet returned disproves the Bible's teaching that such an event shall take place!"²²

He, as Rushdoony, makes the case that it is just historically disingenuous to present postmillennialism as the modern aberration when dispensationalism most certainly has a definite history and theology that can be traced back no earlier than 1820-1830²³. Walvoord seems to assume a seamless transition into dispensationalism from classical premillennialism which is emphatically not the case. Classical premillennialists such as Schnittger claim that dispensationalism produces a deadly malaise within the arena of social and political action²⁴. Bahnsen is even more specific on this point by highlighting specific names (Newton, Zahn, Darby) and their views that advocated such an abdication of social responsibility as a deliberate policy.

Interestingly Schnittger also in a few short pages unconsciously exposes and refutes not only House, Ice's, Lindsay's and Hunt's dispensationalism but also undermines neo-evangelicalism's central attack that there is something inherently "unbiblical" or "unevangelical" about Reconstructionism or dominionism generally. Schnittger elegantly makes the point that whilst he can judge the "postmils" as wanting in their allegorical use of prophecy²⁵ this does not invalidate the theological verity of their focus of victory in Jesus and the increasing glory manifesting within the

²² Greg Bahnsen, "The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism", *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. III, No. 2, Winter, 1976-77, Covenant Media Foundation, p10/96 (repaginated MS-Word version)

²³ Greg Bahnsen, "The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism", *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Vol. III, No. 2, Winter, 1976-77, Covenant Media Foundation, p7/96 (repaginated MS-Word version); Dave MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville: Millenium III Publishers, 2000(1994)), p.viii

²⁴ David Schnittger, *Christian Reconstruction – From a Pretribulational Perspective* (Oklahoma City: Southwest Radio Church, 1986), Pamphlet B541, pp.9-10

²⁵ Schnittger (1986), p.6ff.; Recent work by postmils such as Gentry (2009) and Mathison (1999) is of a much higher exegetical quality.

Church as history progresses as this was the classical premillennialist view also²⁶. Thus, he answers neo-evangelicalism's view that historical optimism or triumphalism reflects an import of non-Christian psychological ideas into the church. The Reformation established the principle of vocational domains and an ever-increasing glory within the Church. The bankruptcy of the dispensationalist position worsens when we consider the analysis of Hunt whose view effectively places the Reformers in the place of deception for the Reformers proposed a duty and obligation upon Christians to build the kingdom and establish secular authorities which honour God's law.

However, we must recognise the validity of Riddlebarger's qualification that there are issues of nomenclature which postmillennialists tend to minimise in order to claim many whom may be more historically judged to have been amillennialists²⁷. This tendency is clearly seen in Bahnsen's essay, the work of Kik²⁸ and that of Boettner²⁹. The obvious cases of questionable appropriation here are Augustine and the early reformers, Luther and Calvin. However, the debatable ascription actually furnishes proof for my argument rather than detract from it in any way. The argument I have made is that there was a shift in thinking for both premillennialists and amillennialists away from their historical positions emphasising victory to culturally pessimistic and spiritually pietistic ones. Riddlebarger has correctly identified a correlative of this change but it does not defeat the concept that the victorious mode

²⁶ Schnittger (1986), p.13

²⁷ Kim Riddlebarger, "Princeton and the Millenium – A Study of American Postmillennialism", <http://www.mountainretreat.org.net/eschatology.html>, 17/11/2015

²⁸ J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg: PRC, 1971), pp.3-15.

²⁹ Loraine Boettner, *Postmillennialism* (Kindle edition, Amazon: 2011), loc.162

of thinking now associated with postmillennialism does not have historical precedent within the history of the Church.

Moving now to consider Lindsay's thesis of Reconstruction leading to holocaust and anti-Semitism, it has simply been shown in the years subsequent to his positing the thesis to be historically inaccurate. Whilst there are undoubtedly those who are dominionist which Lindsay presents as anti-Semitic in language, it seems equally true there are those who he does not mention such as Steve Schlissel who are dominionist, Jewish and have added an additional element to "Federal Vision" Reconstructionist theology that recognises the importance of prophetic Israel³⁰. Lindsay's attack was novel and ambitious but logically tenuous and through the eyes of Schlissel seems clearly without theological rigour:

"Dispensationalists believe that the Jewish people have a title to the land that transcends virtually any other consideration...The reconstructionist, on the other hand, makes a distinction. He believes that the Jewish people may exercise the title [to the land] only when they comply with the condition of repentance and faith. He has nothing against Jews living in "eretz yisrael" per se, but he recognizes that the far more significant question is Israel's faith...If one's heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel agrees with the inspired Apostle's as recorded in Romans 10, can he thereby be called anti-semitic?"³¹

Considering next the neo-evangelical attack on the Dominionists which had wanted to consolidate the impression within mainstream traditional evangelicalism of Reconstructionism as extreme and undemocratic. This clearly had traction amongst the target readership of *Christianity Today* and the evangelicals, charismatics and

³⁰ Steve M. Schlissel, 'To Those Who Wonder If Reconstructionism Is Anti-Semitic' in *The Legacy of Hatred Continues – A Response to Hal Lindsey's The Road to Holocaust* (Tyler: ICE, 1989), pp.56-61

³¹ Schlissel (1989), p.59

Pentecostals initially persuaded by Jimmy Swaggart's accusation of "liberation theology in disguise"³². Colson's appeal to the pluralism of Kuyper was novel and pointed knowing the influence of Kuyper on Rushdoony.

However, Rushdoony had clearly distinguished between Kuyper's theological and political legacies. He had also identified "inconsistencies" with Kuyper and had never accepted his views in their entirety, only the "assured direction" of the Kuyperian school³³. Rushdoony was critical of modern Western democracies because of their humanism rather than democracy *per se*. Rushdoony elsewhere had argued for a Christian basis for American history and his theocratic model was not an ecclesiocratic one, he also viewed families and communities accountable to God rather than to the State. For the neo-evangelicals, their attack was ultimately based on straw-man arguments.

It might also be said that history has simply overturned the central charge of neo-evangelicals against dominionism of "heresy" because of their emphasis on social and political action. In most of the "new" churches within areas where there has been little or no representative government, the Church has had to address social and political issues as much as they have had to address spiritual ones. By

³²Swaggart's condemnation of Reconstructionism seemed anachronistic even as he made it as his fellow charismatic and Pentecostal ministers were actively embracing dominionism. He himself had even inadvertently recommended Gary DeMar's work before realising he was a postmillennial Reconstructionist. Robert Tilton's charismatic television network networked by deliberate act thousands of charismatic ministers with Reconstructionists through conferences and satellite technology with North's and Rushdoony's work finding its way into Oral Roberts University Law School and Fallwell's Liberty University (North (1994), p.392).

³³ Rousas Rushdoony, *Van Til and the Limits of Reason* (Vallecito, Chalcedon/Ross House(2013(1960)), loc.165

necessity, they have adopted the aggressive political activism and the rhetoric of victory and societal change³⁴.

It can even be argued that the reconfiguration of the evangelical movement because of the influence of dominionism has meant that neo-evangelicalism itself has tended to have become marginalised as the primary Christian voice within the explosive growth experienced by these non-denominational churches. The rapidly growing neo-Pentecostal movement and the “Fifth Wave” post-modern experiential churches are informed by a dominion theology that asserts sphere sovereignty and seeks to transform and reform every aspect of culture³⁵. This “New Wine” dominionism may lack the coherence and abrasiveness of a Rushdoony or North, preferring a “compassionate Reformers”³⁶ mantle but it is now the new normal for the reformer or activist, be they evangelical, charismatic or Pentecostal.

6.4.2 Theonomical criticisms assessed

Of much greater significance theologically was the response to Theonomy. The central force of the criticisms examined previously was that Theonomy represents a reversion to pre-Christian legalism and the critics appealed instead for an effectively pluralistic epistemology derived from natural law. For Bahnsen, it was almost trivial to dismiss the first part of this charge. He adeptly dealt with all the criticisms levelled at him with the simple assertion that the criticisms of him were normally substantial misunderstandings of what Theonomy actually was³⁷. Both Bahnsen and

³⁴ Gary North, *Unholy Spirits* (Tyler: ICE, 1994(1988)), pp.388-389

³⁵ Mark Birch-Machin, *Speakers of Life – How To Live an Everyday Prophetic Lifestyle* (Maidstone: River Publishing, 2015), p.16 (Point 2); Gerald Coates, *Kingdom Now!* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1993), p.18

³⁶ C. Peter Wagner et al, *The Reformer’s Pledge*, Ché Ahn (ed.)(Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2010), p.12

³⁷ Bahnsen (1984), p.xx-p.xxvii

Rushdoony anticipate this criticism and thoroughly refuted it in advance³⁸. *Legalism* is the saving by works but Theonomy is seen as the *means* of the ministration of grace for sanctification:

“[They] fail to see the relevance of God’s law as the way of sanctification and as the law of men and nations. They do not recognize God’s law as God’s plan...for godly authority and rule in every area of life. This anti-law attitude guarantees impotence and defeat to all churches who hold it.”³⁹

The second part of the criticism is also swiftly dealt with. It is important to recognise that Theonomy was the orthodox Reformed position held by both Luther and Calvin. Paradoxically for the writers of Westminster’s critique of Theonomy, the founder of Westminster had also asserted a theonomical pretext for his belief in societal reformation:

“It is perfectly clear what is wrong. The law of God has been torn up...and the inevitable result [what is wrong with the world] is appearing with ever greater clearness. When will the law be rediscovered?”⁴⁰

It seems the critics were chronically ill-informed or had deliberately chosen to ignore their own denominational catechisms and the epistemological foundation of the seminary. The critique offered was anything but coherent based on a fuzzy natural-law epistemology as McDate also observes:

³⁸ Bahnsen (1984), pp.89ff; pp.297ff; pp.499ff.

³⁹ Rushdoony (1997), loc. 200.

⁴⁰ J Gresham Machen, “The Importance of Christian Scholarship” quoted in Greg Bahnsen, “Westminster Seminary on Pluralism” in *Theonomy – An Informed Response*, Gary North (Ed.) (Tyler: ICE, 1991), p.91

“Van Til was no pioneer in the field of ethics, he was *simply restating* the Reformed Faith of the Heidelberg Catechism...and the Westminster Larger Catechism”⁴¹ (emphasis added)

Bahnsen, in contrast, had understood the implications of Van Til’s philosophy and the logical outworkings of Westminster’s founding principles. This is evidenced by the fact that Van Til had recognised him as his most able student and had wanted him to succeed him at Westminster. Bahnsen simply extended logically Van Til’s restatement of the Reformed hermeneutic to the civil realm⁴² using Rushdoony’s framework⁴³.

This he elaborated in the preface to his second edition of *Theonomy* that when he spoke of the “jot and the tittle” of the Law he was not “requiring observance of ancient cultural details” but was applying the primary Reformed exegetical procedure that it is the underlying principles of the Law which “has abiding ethical validity”⁴⁴. This sense of “jot and tittle” is the Van Tillian axiom that every sphere and aspect of humanity’s existence is subject to the Law and jurisdiction of God as His creation, “all the facts of nature and of history are what they are, do what they do, and undergo what they undergo, in accord with the one comprehensive counsel of God”⁴⁵. An autonomous realm of Humankind is antithetical to the Reformed faith. Thus, *Theonomy*, correctly understood is the theological, logical and temporal continuity between *all* scripture and *all* of human life. Cope states it thus:

⁴¹ Paul McDade, “The Problem with Christian Reconstruction”, <http://www.calvinjones.com/3spheres/articles/ProblemReconstruction.pdf>, 03/04/2016

⁴² It is thus significant that Rushdoony wrote the preface to Bahnsen’s *Theonomy* in 1971 though it never appeared until 1977. There was clearly an on-going conversation between them.

⁴³ Gary North, “Editor’s Introduction to Part I” in North (Ed.)(1991), p.17.

⁴⁴ Bahnsen (1984), pp.xiv-p.xv

⁴⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, William Edgar (Ed.)(Phillipsburg: PRC, 2003), p.127

“In Matthew 5 Jesus makes it clear that the entire Old Testament is the foundation for his message and his actions...We do not reinterpret the Old Testament with the New, nor the New with the Old, but rather see them as a four-thousand-year line of thought that God is building...In other words, greatness in the kingdom of God is being able to marry and live both Old and New Testament values. The Old Testament emphasizes nations and how we live together as a community here on earth, and the New Testament emphasizes the individual, salvation, and reaching the lost for a future in heaven. These must be married to see God and his kingdom clearly...There is only one place to go in order to understand the specific definitions God gave to these terms. We must go to the law of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament. In Scripture, God has given us a set of values by which to measure and correct our own personal and cultural definitions of reality...”⁴⁶

In summary then, we must concur with both North that Westminster’s attempts at refutation were simply the “worst writing”⁴⁷ of most any of the seminary staff who contributed to the book and with McDate in asserting that it simply showed they were not prepared to engage seriously with their own historical Reformed heritage restated with logical clarity by their institutional founder and their first professor of apologetics⁴⁸.

6.5 Summary

None of critiques of dominion theology proved fatal for the movement. Rhetorically, the Reconstructionists had anticipated the criticisms and answered quickly and forcibly in print. The response to Westminster’s “critique” was of a far more rigorous and researched quality as evidenced by the editors’ extended rebuttal and exposure

⁴⁶ Landa Cope, *God and Political Justice: A Study of Civil Governance from Genesis to Revelation (The Biblical Template)*, Kindle edition (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2015), loc.484,1199, 306, 1190

⁴⁷ Gary North, “Editor’s Introduction” in North (Ed.)(1991), p.11

⁴⁸ Gary North, “Editor’s Conclusion” in North (Ed.)(1991), pp.321-322.

of its poor academic quality. The most noticeable negative effect of the level of publicity generated by the criticisms was for some to disassociate from what were considered the most “extreme” of Rushdoony’s views and leaders such as the elder Schaeffer and Fallwell failing to give him any credit for the platform built on his foundation. It also accentuated the differences between Reformed and the evangelical dominion theologies of say Wagner with the latter clearly attempting to publicly distance themselves from the more controversial theonomical language such as “theocracy” or “ecclesiocracy” and to adopt a softer idiom even if these terms were being commonly misrepresented and misunderstood. Indeed, to the frustration of many critics, the controversy had the side-effect of raising the awareness of mainstream evangelicalism to dominionism and disseminating its ideas even more widely as “softer” versions more acceptable to the evangelical community developed.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Dominion Theology – the arrival

In this book we have travelled from ancient to modern eschatology, through the secularisation of Western culture during the 19th and 20th century and demonstrated that the rise of modern dominion theology could be directly correlated with the situation in time and place of Christian thought. Thus, returning to the questions I posed in the summary in the introduction, I believe we can affirm with reasonable verisimilitude the two statements I wanted to test.

Dominion theology has indeed been shown to have emerged from a postmillennial eschatological perspective in a distinctive sociological context with a definite philosophical heritage of presuppositional, orthodox Reformed theology. It was developed in a novel and penetrating fashion by Rushdoony into a modern reform movement that allowed evangelicals to emerge from the intellectual marginalisation in the wake of secular humanism's takeover of culture during the 19th and 20th century.

7.2 The Future

The answer to my question regarding the current status and future of dominion theology is more complex and subjective but I believe some informed judgments are possible. Firstly, the evidence of the presence of dominion theology as an operational, if not doctrinal, form in most growing sections of the Church is established beyond doubt. Dominionism is part of the language toolkit of friend and foe alike. Yet it must be said that there are clear and substantive differences between Reconstructionism with its roots in the Reformed communion, the

Wagnerian New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), charismatic “Kingdom Now” and Word of Faith “dominionisms”. Let us consider the key characteristics of each identified in the book to help with clarifying my final position.

In general terms, the Reconstructionist movement provided the clearest and most intellectually coherent philosophical and theological basis for dominionism in the work of intellectual figures such as Rousas Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen and Gary North. These are now labelled “Theonomists” because the distinctive feature of this brand of dominionism is the belief that God’s law, not natural law provides the epistemological basis for all knowledge and therefore all life should be predicated and informed by God’s law as revealed to us in the scriptures. Faith necessarily embraces every sphere of culture and every aspect of the individual’s relational and personal life. There is no realm of autonomous human existence. The Bible is considered a coherent whole, not dispensationalised into ages where the Law is abrogated but where the law is of continuous significance as a vehicle of sanctification and a guide to ethical conduct.

Dominionists like “Kingdom Now” or “Word of Faith” which have a fundamentalist, Pentecostal or charismatic heritage are generally far less epistemologically self-conscious and tend to favour evidentialist apologetics with its implicit confidence in natural law and reason to convince and convict. They often favour a “covenant neutral”¹ epistemology where grace means truth is to be found in the redeemed and non-redeemed communities. The Bible ceases to be a document

¹ Westminster theological seminary has been much criticised by Reconstructionists for moving in this direction away from a presuppositionalist position.

of continuous revelation applicable in all ages and at all times but is to be viewed in a dispensational sense. Ethics are essentially antinomian, emphasis is on the relational aspects of faith (God as my “Dad”, pastors as “fathers”, pastor’s wives as “mothers”, together we are “God’s family”) and “grace” is considered to have an antithetical relationship to law, “free from all external rules, but inwardly prompted and enabled by the Spirit of truth”².

I believe there is then a third position which forms a spectrum between these two poles. These are those who emphasise the Hebrew Scriptures as a resource for principles to be applied in our current situation in time but who argue against the validity of the civil case law of the Hebrew Scriptures as a basis for current civil law as might be argued for by strict Theonomists. The epistemology has a tendency to be far more situational and postmodern with an emphasis on the ethical quality of the narrative in the scriptures where we can “create with God”³ rather than seeing the scriptures as a doctrinal sourcebook.

Thus, in final conclusion, I would assert that it is not possible to claim that dominion theology is a single theology any longer but is rather a collection of theologies with an idiomatic similarity and with varying degrees of semantic cross-pollination. It is my personal view that if dominion theology is not to degenerate into what one elder of the faith has described as “militant ignorance”⁴, it needs to

² Gerald Coates, *Not Under Law* (London: Good Reading Limited, 1975), p.58

³ Cope (2015), loc. 4427. Landa establishes the substance of her book on a theological basis with a thoroughly philosophically modern premise. I sense a change in emphasis to a more post-modern view as she attempts to demonstrate in later chapters how the apostles “interpreted” the law for their new situation.

⁴ Landa Cope speaking at the “Kingdom Solutions” conference hosted by Glasgow Prophetic centre, 19th September 2014. Audio recording is available from GPC.

rediscover its philosophical and theological basis in the Reformation tradition and have a renewed confidence in God's law. A dominion theology that lacks a coherent political and social program with preference given to "governing in the heavenlies" is naïve and immature. This is perhaps best expressed in my aphorism, "the believer who does not vote, understands nothing substantive about dominion".

7.3 Suggestions for Further Study

Any good thesis probably poses more questions than it asks, "If someone thinks he knows something, he does not yet know to the degree that he needs to know." (1Co 8:2, NET). I felt this book by necessity had to be multidisciplinary, but this has necessarily required it to omit or abridge its treatment of important concepts. I believe the following themes encountered to a greater or lesser degree deserve further study:

- The Reconstructionist legacy is enormous. Rousas Rushdoony and Gary North published a remarkable quantity of literature and spawned second and third generation foundations that have developed the programme. A careful consideration of the development of this thought within their and subsequent work is of particular cogency to the future of the movement.
- The presuppositionalist apologetic position is perhaps the least understood and the least defended position within the evangelical arena. The evangelical mindset has become dominated by the Enlightenment concept of reason as the neutral arbiter of all things and natural law as the epistemological principle. A careful reconsideration of Reformation thought, through Kuyper, Van Til and Rushdoony is required for the generation of an authentic *Christian* philosophy.
- Dominionism within the post-charismatic and "Fifth Wave" churches. These churches have typically been the weakest intellectually by deliberate intent,

emphasising the experiential aspects of faith rather than theological ones. However, Wagner's⁵ NAR represents a significant intellectual contribution to an epistemology of religious belief as well as a theology of history that is clearly post-Reformed but not unorthodox. It certainly deserves careful study as a distinctive theology of dominion.

⁵ Wagner has multiple degrees from a variety of reputable institutions (rather than honorary doctorates or doctorates from non-accredited colleges which are a little too common and paraded with too little humility by some of the evangelical community) and is clearly a significant thinker.

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Appendix A – Supporting Materials

All essays or publications referred to within the text can be read online at my personal website, <https://planetmacneil.org> and, sometimes in a more readily downloadable format, on my Researchgate area:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michael_Macneil2.

Appendix B – The Late Jesus

This is a recent article I have written for a Christian publication.

(I include this addendum as a testimony as to the perils of literalism and to illumine what I believe the late Greg Bahnsen called the “newspaper exegesis” of Dispensationalism. I mean to show that the “Rapture” doctrine of Dispensationalism is such an extreme and counter-logical position that it is truly remarkable that it is still seriously believed amongst evangelicals despite vast amounts of evidence to the contrary.)

Firstly, it must be admitted that there are and have been some fine scholars (Walvoord, Chafer, Pentecost) who have defended Dispensationalism as an innovation of premillennialism. It cannot be denied the system has provided some genuine prophetic insights and scarcely a radical preacher will not accuse the current church of “Laodicean luke-warmedness”, a concept birthed in Dispensationalism. However, on the contrary, there are also fine scholars (Gentry, Mathison) who have objected on an exegetical basis, historians (Macpherson) that have thoroughly repudiated it as an orthodox development of premillennialism reclassifying it as a mystical, unorthodox innovation and missionologists like Cope that have repudiated it on a theological level. The latter is what I am interested here first and then the favourite “blessed hope” of the Dispensationalists, the “Rapture” doctrine. I include some references at the end for the other categories if you are interested.

Landa Cope, one of the founders of YWAM in the 1970s with Loren Cunningham, asserts (Cope, 2011/2015) that “theologies of imminent return” have repeatedly emerged as the church began to take on its social and political Kingdom

building role and have led to its premature termination and surrender of culture to the secular humanists with disastrous consequences for culture as a whole. She views Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* as "the one for our generation" as the evangelical church began to emerge in the 1970s from over 50 years of self-imposed cultural ghettoism to asserting itself again in the cultural sphere. She continues Peter and Paul expected return in their lifetimes and every Christian generation since has had those who adopted a similar position. In her words, we must build the kingdom and not worry about the return for Jesus told us not to, just to "occupy until he comes"¹ and be ready to give an account of our works (Luke 19:13-27). In my words, it should not distract us from exercising dominion and subduing the Earth to God's law. To bastardise Vernon McGee's dispensationalist quip "you don't polish brass on a sinking ship", I say "let us get an army of marine maintenance men and women if it helps the ship stay seaworthy".

Now the second issue I would like to consider is the illogical nature of the favourite doctrine of classical Dispensationalism, "the Rapture". The valley of decision for the Rapture was 1988 and its final burial, if there had been any lingering doubts, should have been 2007. The two dates featured prominently in the Dispensationalist's calendar for sound prophetic reasoning. 1948 was the foundation of the state of Israel, 'the budding of the fig tree' (Matt 24: 32-34) and 40 years is a generation of Israel. Edgar C Whisenant allegedly sold 6 million copies of "88 Reasons why the rapture is in 1988"² basing his logic on detailed mathematical calculations and prophetic principles (this is still available on Amazon) and his failure did not discourage him from predicting 1989, 1990 and 1991. For some, it could be delayed until 2007 for 1967 was the first time that Jerusalem was in the hands of the Jews for two thousand years, clearly a prophetic marker of some kind for anyone with true prophetic discernment (obviously). However, these passed as did the

¹ The KJV uses this phrase, most modern translations would say "do business"; the verb literally refers to the business of trading and making money. The KJV translators were perhaps trying to capture the wider context of the passage where it is talking about a King and his subjects, "occupy till I come" is a military idiom referring to a King leaving his occupying force to rule in his absence. In this instance, I think the KJV translators made a good call.

² This is available from <https://ia801303.us.archive.org/19/items/ReasonsWhyTheRaptureWillBeIn1988PDF/14080011-88-Reasons-Why-The-Rapture-Will-Be-in-1988.pdf>

apocalypses predicted by the pagan astrologers with the unusual and rare alignment of all nine planets at around the same time.

I have in my collection recordings from the late 1980s of otherwise rational and sane preachers I would happily recommend thoroughly convinced the rapture was days away and audiences shrieking in ecstasy. One friend of mine believed a minor earthquake that occurred in North Wales in 1990 was the “trumpet call” in Revelation – he sold his profitable and successful business and waited to be caught up! His sad spiritual story since, despite his enormous intelligence is a lesson for any believer. Yet, he simply with a greater degree of conviction believed and acted on a lot of the traditional teaching in British Pentecostalism that I too had received and been sincerely taught.

However, Dispensationalism and its predilection for predictions and “signs of the times” has somehow survived. In the last few years, planetary convergences, comets and consecutive “blood moons” on Passover/Jubilees that have not occurred for millennia have all been posited as signs of the End and our imminent removal by otherwise sane and competent ministries. Unless I missed something, nothing of note has happened, except the sale of lots of DVDs and MP3s of their “prophetic packages for (mis-)understanding the End Times” – but I hasten to add, I could have missed whatever was supposed to have happened. There has always been a tendency amongst dispensationalists to “special revelation” (Macpherson (2000), pp.55ff) and prophetic insight concealed from the rest of the “Moabite evangelicals” (MacPherson (2000), p.85).

Remarkably there are still able scholars committed to the view who are able to maintain a critical view of the failures of their forerunners as “rapturists” or suffering from “rapture mania”. One such able scholar is Chuck Missler (2014), who I thoroughly recommend on every subject. However, it is notable in his latest work there is no mention of the ‘budding fig tree’ as the reformation of Israel. According to his latest position, the marker for the 40 years and the last generation is the rapture itself. In other words, he has foreclosed the issue of trying to predict the date in any specific way though he was still comfortable predicting it was “possible within the next 12 months” though that was during the otherwise excellent *2011 Strategic*

Perspectives conference. He separates previously dispensationalist harmonised “end time” passages between Luke and Matthew into pre and post tribulation events, posits specific psalms as additional sequences of prophetic events that have previously been “missed” (Psalm 89 – see his “Perilous Times” and “Planet in Jeopardy” series) and separates pre and post restoration events. This increasing granularity in dealing with the text to extend the prophetic timeframe is befitting to the resilience of the position against all the odds after 1988.

Notwithstanding this attempted academic reorientation of Dispensationalism, there is still a huge appetite for Rapturist psychological escapism bred by it if the “Left Behind” series is anything to go by. I contend there is clearly something seriously amiss with such an attitude of a Christian with regards to their educational, social and political responsibility. It is about as far from the Reformation call of Luther and Calvin to redeem society and establish godly secular states as one could get and these teachings should now be in disrepute. I believe it is a sign of maturity in the believer to take their place as heavenly ambassador in an earthly kingdom by fully engaging with their social responsibility and not retreating into mysticism even when dressed up as the fashionable prophetic lingo “God’s government in the heavenlies” or “we are God’s government in session this evening”. Let us think clearly and build the kingdom on Earth and within our vocations without distraction or condemnation that we are being “worldly”.

(References are omitted as they are included in the Bibliography)

About the Author

Michael Macneil MSc BSc (Hons) BD (Hons) MA MCSD has worked as a schoolteacher teaching Science and a little RE, ran his own IT-contracting business for 10-years during the noughties, worked designing engineering software for a specialist Engineering company and now works for a major international ministry in web development. He is married with a Japanese wife and is studying part-time for a PhD in Philosophy; his particular interest is in the theory of knowledge (epistemology) and Christian socio-political philosophy. When he is not studying, he enjoys writing, making music and contemplating nature. His personal website is <https://planetmacneil.org> which incorporates a blog at <https://planetmacneil.org/blog> and you can find his academic research at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michael_Macneil2 and social comment on <https://medium.com/@mmacneill123> .