

DOMINION THEOLOGY

DOMINION THEOLOGY — RECOVERING OUR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

BY

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[A]Dedication

To Pastors Rodney and Adonica of the River Church, Tampa Bay, who continue to stand without apology. If it was not for discovering that “Green Desk,” things might be very different today.

[EPI]“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, from the Inaugural Rectoral Address at the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam, 20 October 1880. [/EPI]

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[A]Preface

If I was to describe this book in a sentence, it would be “a manifesto for Christians who want to come out of the political closet and join the wider public square of broad cultural discourse.” A particularly obnoxious feature of late 19th century and 20th century conservative Christian thought has been the cyclical obsession with the “Rapture,” and this has extended into our present milieu. The “Rapture” will indeed be a glorious event but as the posited Rapture dates come and go, the obsession with it ends up discrediting Christian thought more generally as intellectually shallow and escapist. For example, yet another viral hoax was perpetrated this year as a pastor announced Jesus had appeared to him and informed him of the date of the Church’s departure.¹

Obedient congregations quit their jobs, accompany ministers to the woods and mountaintops to wait for their catching away; but now you have the disgruntled, distressed, and disillusioned posting to YouTube and renouncing Christianity. Other ministers have set the date only for it to pass and to excuse their failure by claiming it was because of their prayer and fasting that judgment was delayed and the Rapture deferred.² Others have allegedly had the audacity to charge a “rapture fee” to their congregants to guarantee their place in heaven.³ Similarly, the “*Left Behind*” media series primarily targeting the American evangelical market had amassed 41 million in sales at its midpoint by 2001 (it continued to 2007) and the creators were still milking the franchise in 2018; there was seemingly no limit to the appetite for the “coward’s way out”⁴ of exit the Tribulation on the first Rapture train to glory.

One of my now elderly mentors expressed my feelings about this perfectly when she said that “theologies of imminent return” emerge as a reaction in conservative Christian circles whenever radical Christians begin to assert themselves in the wider culture, and militate against building a coherent Christian theology of involvement. Scripture commands we are to “*occupy until I come*” (Luke 19:13, KJV) and, as I expound in the book, the definition of the Greek word “occupy” is best understood as a call to build and shape *all* the dimensions of culture, the Arts and the Sciences, the political and the social.

For my part, it was very frustrating that it had been nearly a decade that this book had lain fallow on my personal website where it was (and is still) in its original thesis form, but I am very pleased that now has been the time to revisit and overhaul the work for publication in this revised form. There were some strong reasons for making this happen. Firstly, with the untimely assassination of Charlie Kirk, there has been a muscular response, especially amongst those of college age, against the attempt to sideline and discriminate on the basis of their Christianity, and to push them out of the public discourse; those young Christians are now making their presence felt both intellectually, politically, and socially. This revival of the interest in the intersection between Christianity and the spheres of culture, makes the availability of this work pertinent and appropriate. These recent events underline why Christianity is so desperately needed in the public square, not as the King of the Catholic

¹ The pastor at fault this time was South African pastor Joshua Mhlakela, who has since publicly repented and stated he will never talk about the Rapture again; that is to his credit.

² This was the infamous claim by Nigerian Pastor Metuh who claimed the day of the rapture would be April 25, 2024.

³ In Ekiti State, Pastor Ade Abraham of Christ High Commission made headlines after instructing his congregation to relocate to a camp where they were told to “wait for the Rapture.” It was alleged he asked followers to pay a ₦310,000 rapture fee to guarantee their spot in heaven.

⁴ This is a phrase I attribute to one of the most well-known and controversial of the British charismatic leaders of the 1980s and 1990s Gerald Coates, who led a 1000-member strong church (extremely large for the UK) and 100-satellite churches nationwide at the height of his movement in 1997. He was one of the proponents of a charismatic form of dominion theology, ‘*Kingdom Now*’ which we encounter later in the book.

hegemony but as the Prophet, Priest, and Intercessor of Protestantism. That is, we are not, as is the frequent accusation against the dominionist, of seeking to impose a “theocracy.”

Secondly, and this disturbed me most profoundly, many Christians after leaving their political closets tentatively in the 1980s and 1990s crying “dominion” had retreated back to its safety by the turn of the new millennium, and more particularly so in the wake of the Trump phenomenon this century. I was personally involved in an influential, cutting-edge “prophetic” fellowship who energetically prophesied us all back into the closet because of the foul-mouthed Trump and his course tweets, ignoring that he had also, like no President since Abraham Lincoln, opened the Whitehouse to the *evangelical* Christian world. Such was my visceral reaction to this that I wrote the best part of 45000 words in a month as a reaction to it and received the “left foot of fellowship” for my trouble.⁵

Thirdly, as a wider issue of Christian political ethics, it was a perceived dogma of the Enlightenment, oft repeated in political science classes and the hallowed halls of government, that the “religious” belongs to the sphere of the private, and should not intrude into the realm of the public, where an indifferent pluralism was considered the binding norm; indeed, with more than a hint of irony, it was considered *sacrilegious* for the private to intrude into the public. For, in my view, this “secularism” in the public square functions as would a religious commitment, and further, its adherents are known for their fundamentalism, seeking to delegitimize those who would oppose them and to exclude all ‘religious’ distinctives that would challenge their orthodoxy. That is, in effect, we have a choice of two oppositional religious points of view for the public square, secularism *or* Christianity, and it is appropriate we choose the true religion and not a counterfeit.

Consequently, the book aims to fill in the knowledge gap for the nascent malcontents amongst the ranks of those Christians exiting their closets and a fresh anointing for those who retreated back, but who found the closets were not as comfortable as they remembered them: no longer is it possible for Christians to live as that tolerated oddity on the fringes of civilized society, for now full compliance to the political masters with their digital IDs and their CBDCs, is being demanded on the pain of excommunication from civic society.⁶ It provides some theological and philosophical underpinnings to the legitimacy of the perspective endorsing full participation in every aspect of culture, including the social and the political, and can thus be considered a work in the best apologetic traditions of Christianity.⁷

⁵ Macneil, *Politics*. Explaining my colorful idiom, Paul and Barnabas received the “right hand of fellowship” from the Jerusalem elders in Gal 2:9 for the recognition of their ministry. My censuring was in the early days of COVID, and there was lots of discussion amongst Christian leaders in response to pressure from the politicians of Romans 13 and accepting government mandates; I found myself at odds with almost all my elders. A search on my blog (<https://planetmacneil.org/blog>) for ‘COVID’ will yield how strongly I felt over this issue at that time, particularly the removal of our political and social rights. With the passing of the years and new, unrepentant publications on these issues from those same elders, I believe I was totally justified at the time in “obeying God not men” (Acts 4:19), and my views have not changed regarding their capitulation at that time. I do not bear any personal animus towards them and would happily worship with them, but we certainly differ when it comes to cultural philosophy.

⁶ One particularly vivid account was from a personal friend who works in China. During the pandemic, their tower block had the main entry doors welded shut; when they had run out of pooled food they began shouting from their balconies for help; a police drone then came and photographed them, with some receiving automatic fines to their bank accounts for “anti-social behavior.” This is the technocratic utopia being advocated by some of the most influential tech billionaires in the West; Larry Ellison has recently argued that the potential for 100% surveillance being offered by AI systems will ensure peaceful compliance to all laws, for we would “all be on our best behavior,” and thus complete societal peace. Ellison should be commended for his technological achievements as the founder of Oracle, and his current support of the IDF, but this aspect of his political vision I feel constrained to challenge.

⁷ By “apologetic” we do not mean, as in modern English usage, saying “sorry for being a Christian,” but rather the discipline of philosophical apologetics where we defend the faith from its detractors and opponents. More technically, the Greek word used by the apostles Peter and Paul, is ἀπολογία (*apologia*), quoting the Gingrich

More specifically, the book examines “dominion theology” as a feature of Reformation thought, which had incorporated the late-Augustinian thinking of the patristic period. The Reformers frequently wrestled with what was the correct eschatological thinking regarding the triumph of Christ throughout the world.⁸ We then move through the “modern period”⁹ where Christianity wrestled with the tensions between evangelism and wider social action, where we see the modern revivalism and fundamentalism essentially rejecting social action as a distraction, conservative Arminian Christianity essentially ghettoizing itself for half a century.¹⁰ However, in opposition to these obscurantist and fundamentalist movements, there was a separate stream within the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper that addressed the challenge of philosophical modernism and modernity very differently. With J Gresham Machen’s separation from Princeton and the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929, things began to change with a distinct theology of Christian involvement emerging from Machen’s life and work, he frequently addressed Congress in the 1930s arguing for the preeminence of biblical principles in opposition to the socialism of the great societal and economic reforms that were being enacted under the auspices of the New Deal. Machen, I argue, is the historical precursor to what became modern dominion theology.

lexicon: defense; as a legal technical term, a speech in defense of oneself *reply*, *verbal defense* (2Tim 4:16); BDAG (the academic reference work for the Greek of this period) emphasizes this is a *speech* in defense, it is reasoned, rather than inspirational or preached. Similarly, Socrates made his *apologia* before the elders at Athens, it was a *positive* statement as to why he considered himself innocent of the charges levelled against him.

⁸ At first it might seem a breathtaking, sectarian move to leapfrog the entire Catholic period in moving from Augustine to the Reformation with little comment on the thousand years between them, particularly when there were some fine “Catholic” scholars. However, some consider Calvin to have “merely” expressed the “theology of Augustine in systematic form.” That is, the Reformation was a re-engagement with the primitive Christian foundations in their unadulterated form before their “infection” with first Plato and then Aristotle (where Aquinas, though brilliant as he was, might be considered a baptized Aristotle). Whilst the argument to do it justice would need to be far more nuanced than this, even in this course form it still has substantial force and truth in it, for the brutal and tyrannical nature of some periods of the Catholic hegemony, and their violent opposition to protestant thought, is not something we need argue about, it is a matter of historical record.

⁹ By the “modern period” we do not mean our contemporary period but that which is argued to have begun with the Renaissance, the earliest dates being given as around 1250 with Italian figures like the painter Giotto and the writer Dante Alighieri. It was characterized by an increasing preeminence being given to the role of reason and the rejection of ecclesiastical authority, especially that of the papal dynasties. However, the Renaissance was in fact spread over many centuries and had both Christian and violently anti-religious movements within it; the Reformation shared the basic Renaissance position in rejecting traditional papal authority and was an integral expression of it. Similarly, it was not until the early 17th century that Descartes is considered the first of the “modern” philosophers, and the “Jewish Renaissance” did not occur in the parochial Russian Jewish communities until the mid-19th century. There are also considered to be separate movements of the French and German Renaissance, and as a matter of disambiguating the terminology, the “Enlightenment” is better considered that period of the later Renaissance where the focus on reason, science, and individual liberty increased. Many history books argue that the Enlightenment chronologically followed the Renaissance, this is a gross oversimplification, they were different aspects of the same intellectual movement that asserted the right of men to think outside of ecclesiastical authority, free of the fear of sanction. Whilst the secular Enlightenment might cry “autonomy” in rejection of all religious metanarratives as a way of life, the Christian Enlightenment argued for the right of each individual to directly approach God without the need of a priestly mediator, the essence of a protestant perspective.

¹⁰ As we shall see, modern revivalism is often associated with Charles Finney, and he is held up at the archetype and hero of the movement. However, Finney argued for and executed an aggressive presence in all the spheres of culture, most notably the political and the educational, serving as the first president of Wheaton College. He actively encouraged his followers to engage in political fights and to obtain political office as can be read in his autobiography (which is public domain). Although he rejected the constraints that Calvinism had imposed on the ministers of the colonies which he had viewed as the cause of their failures to maintain a Christian culture, his cultural philosophy was far closer to that of orthodox presbyterian J Gresham Machen, the founder of the Calvinist Westminster Theological seminary than the modern revivalists and fundamentalists who followed in his wake.

However, it was to be after the Second World War, in the sociological, political, and theological upheavals of the period that in the work of one man, R.J. Rushdoony, a coherent Christian critique emerged and his subsequent development of a sociological program of reform from it which properly qualifies for the designation “dominion theology.” He was applying the seminal thought of Westminster’s first professor of apologetics Cornelius Van Til who had himself been influenced by Kuyper’s philosophy of “sphere sovereignty.”¹¹ Kuyper, an enormous and underappreciated intellect of the second part of the 19th century, had offered a searching critique of *modernism* whilst embracing the tools of *modernity*, and had argued for distinct modal spheres of human culture, in which the church had an ethical regulatory role but to which it was not to dictate or censor.¹² This concept was itself a recapitulation and modernization of the Reformation emphasis on the legitimacy of and the equal value between the different “vocations” of human culture in opposition to the strict division between the religious and the secular, the priesthood and the laity, with its belief in the pre-eminence of the former. This tyrannizing over culture and the separation of laity and priesthood had been the cornerstone of the domination of culture by the Roman Catholic hegemony for almost a thousand years, with the absolute authority of the papacy in matters of cultural and scientific disputes.

Following Rushdoony’s seminal work, the period of the 1970s and the 1980s was one of increasing political involvement of Christians in the political realm, particularly in the US. Conservative Christians had been particularly motivated by the Roe vs Wade case that had “found” a constitutional right to abortion. President Jimmy Carter was the first to bring his faith to the fore and to make it a political issue in the 1977 presidential campaign. Subsequently, both Ronald Reagan and George Bush both made their faith commitment a feature of their campaigns, and even Barak Obama made capital from his time in a liberal Chicago church and equivocated on gay marriage that he might get the black evangelical vote in 2008. The charismatic revival of the period suddenly saw dominion theology becoming a feature of influential leaders within the movement who were seeking an alternative to the traditional evangelical rejection of social action as being a feature of the liberal “social gospel.” We examine these related but distinct streams of dominion theology far from the Reformed roots of the movement. We finish with an exposition of a Christian political philosophy for the contemporary period.

Importantly, the book extends and develops substantially the content of a thesis upon which it is based, partly because of the passage of time and improvements in my own understanding, but chiefly because the thesis was subject to a strict word limit of 20000 words. That provided little opportunity to develop the argument beyond the narrow principal theme of establishing the orthodoxy of the position in response to its persistent portrayal as an extreme, fanatical form of Christianity both from outside and within Christendom.¹³ I

¹¹ Van Til remained for over fifty years in that position.

¹² I consider his remarkable cultural and political achievements in Macneil, *Abraham Kuyper* where I also offer an explanation as to why he is a figure that has been generally ignored outside the parochial boundaries of the Reformed world. Kuyper advocated for ‘modernity’ in the sense of embracing the scientific and technological advances of the period, founding the Free University of Amsterdam, two broadsheet papers, a political party, and serving as Primeminister of the Netherlands between 1901 to 1905. As a result, he was at his most impatient with the religious conservatives suspicious of the innovations of the age.

¹³ This book is an updated version of my Master of Arts (Studies in Philosophy and Religion) dissertation which obtained a Distinction at the University of Bangor in North Wales in 2016. The Masters was a “taught Masters,” in effect asking you to write 60000 words. Forty thousand of those were four coursework essays, leaving but 20000 for a dissertation which would have seemed enormous to me when I was studying for my Bachelors, but was woefully inadequate when there was so much to say!

My supervisor for the dissertation, now Emeritus Professor Eryl Davies, 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 post my doctoral studies and the successful

believe it provided and still provides an emphatic and coherent answer to that important historical question but this constraint on its content was reflected in a question posed by an academic pastoral reviewer at the time who had made the comment, “*so what are you going to do now you have established this orthodoxy, what practical use is it?*”¹⁴ The additional material represents the broad contours of an answer to that question, and the book subsequently differs most substantively from the original thesis by: [NL 1–3]

1. Adding in what might be called the sociological and political application of the position by outlining what I call a “philosophy of Christian involvement.”¹⁵
2. Updating the content to include recent literature, developments, and innovations both from within the Christian community and more generally in the wider Western political culture.
3. Where my thought and understanding have matured, particularly on those philosophical issues covered in depth within my doctoral studies (and I can better express what I was sometimes struggling to express in the thesis), I have added new material, rewritten sentences or paragraphs or added an explanatory footnote as directions to my further discussions of the issues in question. [/NL 1–3]

Finally, 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. It is very much a sister volume to my doctoral work and in this updated form, it is every bit as intellectually rigorous. It will provide substantive apologetic material for the believer seeking an intellectual defense of their faith beyond the pop-apologetics and cowardly dispensationalist eschatologies of our time.

[B] How to Read This Book

This book has some advanced passages, arguments, and discussions in places for the most demanding of readers. Sometimes the language is philosophical or theological, and it is important to not get stuck or bogged down if you are new to the subject or want a more general overview. There is no need to understand everything you read first time through and there is no need to read the book from cover to cover if you are using it like a textbook or a reference manual – look at the contents, look at the indices, and read what you want to or need to, remembering you can always come back later if you want to dig deeper. There are lots of moving parts in Dominion Theology and parts like the relationship to eschatology, the key historical figures, or the application in the modern political context, can stand and be read on their own, being self-contained areas of study.

Dr Michael Macneil, October 26th, 2025.

publication of a book based on those studies (Macneil, *Foundations of Philosophy*), I am pleased I have been able to revisit, update and prepare it for publication, receiving further encouragement and assistance from Professor Davies and the current Head of the School, Professor Lucy Huskinson, to do so.

¹⁴ The questioner was the principal of a Pentecostal Bible college in Hungary, so I considered it worthy of consideration.

¹⁵ Stated most fully in Macneil, “Politics.”

[A]Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Dr David Sullivan (ret.) of Bangor University, North Wales, who was a masterful philosophical mentor during my Master's level coursework. Thanks should also go to the current Head of the Department, Professor Lucy Huskinson and the former Head, now retired, Emeritus Professor Davies for being willing to support this book proposal.

Professor Davies once gave me 30% for an essay that I thought was great and we had quite a few in-class conflicts when I thought I knew more than he did and was a higher quality Christian than he was; that taught me the valuable lessons of: (i) always read the recommended sources of your professor, and (ii) remember that being a legend in your own mind is an ever-present danger of the human condition.

A special thank you for the forbearance of my wife Sayuri as I pursue these writing projects, her love, support, and literary recommendations for how to improve my Emotional Intelligence Quotient from its previous 'unsatisfactory' rating six months after getting married, have been invaluable over the last decade. Thanks should also to all at Wipf & Stock publishers for help in bringing this book to life.

Finally, my greatest debt will always be to my Lord and Savior, whose arrest of me on a Friday evening in 2006 whilst having curry, beer and watching TV, is the ultimate cause as to why this book was written.

[A]Abbreviations

AOG—Assemblies of God

BDAG—Bauer Debrunner Arndt Gingrich: *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament & Other Early Christian Literature*

CCC/CCFC—Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU in the US)

CMF—Covenant Media Foundation

CR—Critical Realism

CVT—Cornelius Van Til

FV—Federal Vision

GPC/GPA—Glasgow Prophetic Center/Glasgow Prophetic Alliance

JTB—Justified True Belief

NGO—Non-Governmental Organization

OM—Operation Mobilization

OPC—Orthodox Presbyterian Church

RC—Roman Catholic

RE—Reformed Epistemology

RV—Reasonable Verisimilitude

SM—Spiritual Mobilization

TA—Transcendental Argument

TAG—Transcendental Argument for God

UN—United Nations

WEA—Worker’s Educational Association

WMC—Working Men’s Club

WHO—World Health Organization

WTS—Westminster Theological Seminary

YWAM—Youth with A Mission

[A]Introduction

[B]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.

[B]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, and to demonstrate an application of it in political practice. 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 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 liberals and liberal theological critics.¹ In my view this is not a useful designation unless it is carefully qualified because even as the movement grew and exerted its influence, many fundamentalist, evangelical, and Pentecostal leaders were most notable in their failure to credit the Dominionist movement or in their open hostility to it.²

¹ For example, Pelletier, “The Movement” and PRO-S.O.C.S, “The Righteous Revolution” respectively.

² For example, in Falwell et al, *Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. None of the authors mentions Reconstructionism despite it being empirically the Reconstructionist program that they had adopted (e.g. political vision, 186; Millennialism, 71); McVicar, *Christian Reconstruction*, 15.

[B]The relationship to Evangelicalism

In contrast to this generalizing proposition, 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 evangelicalism.³ I propose they are representative of distinct hermeneutical traditions within evangelicalism resulting from a very specific historical context and a distinct set of philosophical and theological ideas.⁴

I wish to emphasize 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 denied.⁵ 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 Christianity.⁶

That is, it is easy for this polemic to eclipse the important fact that the arguments between the parties are more accurately described as *ideological* arguments about Christian *praxis* resulting from a distinct interpretation of scripture rather than more fundamental theological ones about the status of scripture itself. Indeed, some pivotal figures to the dominionist movement were also recognized as significant within fundamentalist circles and were often misidentified as fundamentalists, owing to the shared commitment to the inerrancy and infallibility of the scriptures.⁷ Hence, it is within this understanding and theological framework that I assert that dominion theology *does* belong to orthodox

³ Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview*, 13 n. 1.

⁴ “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.” Packer, “An Introduction to Covenant Theology,” loc. 22.

⁵ Clapp, “Democracy as Heresy” in *Christianity Today*. Lindsay, *Road to Holocaust*, 282.

⁶ For example, Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, 175–213.

⁷ Perhaps the most famous example of this conflation of categories was in Barr’s *Fundamentalism* where he wants to argue that Machen and Warfield were “fundamentalists.” In reality, Machen and Warfield were orthodox Presbyterians with beliefs highly divergent from premillennialism and Arminianism, distinguishing features of the early fundamentalists. Probably more than any other book, this critique of ‘fundamentalism’ was highly influential because of Barr’s reputation as a biblical scholar, but it suffered from some serious misunderstandings and failures to distinguish between the various forms of conservative evangelicalism.

Reformed, evangelical theology because it is understood in its broadest sense as having the following characteristics: [LL a–c]

- a. Christianity for whom the scriptures rather than church tradition or papal sanction have the “ultimate authority in matters of spirituality, doctrine and ethics.”⁸
 - b. Christianity which “confines and submits [itself] completely to the teaching of the Bible.”⁹
 - c. Christianity which submits to the “fundamental and inalienable authority of scripture.”¹⁰
- [/LL a–c]

Where it is distinctively different from other forms of conservative evangelicalism, is in its view of Christianity’s place in the wider culture and the discussions of the public square. Dominion theology is not content for the evangelical Christian faith to be a “deeply private matter” but argues its voice is legitimately applicable to the problems of the public domain and that its intellectual coherence warrants that it should be heard there. It is this *practical* context in which dominion theology sees and position itself that I believe explains the controversy surrounding the movement.

[B]The Importance of Dominion Theology

So, for example, in 1988, one fundamentalist opponent of the youthful dominion theology movement described it as “one of the fastest growing movements amongst evangelicals today.”¹¹ This use of the designator *evangelical* and not fundamentalist was in fact an admission of the theological orthodoxy of the movement and that it was exerting far more influence within modern Christianity than would a fringe radical group; it was clearly

⁸ McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 22.

⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* 42.

¹⁰ McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 23.

¹¹ House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, backmatter.

appealing to *mainstream* theological conservatives. Thus, it is necessary to carefully consider both the theology of Dominionism and how it came to exert this influence and appeal.

[B]The Approach of this Book

In light of our argument above, the approach of this book necessarily stands in contrast to the general historical, sociological, or psychological approaches that are characteristic of recent studies of what humanism has described as religious fundamentalism or religious studies.¹² These have typically employed a “historical-reductionist” critical approach based on the thesis that “fundamentalism” (of which Dominionism would be a *genus*) is in fact a “trans-religious, trans-national and trans-cultural” phenomenon based on shared *ideological* assumptions and anti-modern worldviews irrespective of their particularist expression.¹³ Typically, they may also assign a correlative psychological category specifically applicable to the fundamentalists in question.¹⁴ Thus, the description is entirely naturalistic, and it neatly and completely sidesteps any theological dimension of the phenomenon.¹⁵ For such thinkers, “Dominionism” should be made a general political, sociological or psychological category to generate analytical models in this naturalistic way.¹⁶

In my view, the consequence of this reductionism and humanistic presuppositional approach is that there is an obfuscation and dilution of the salient conceptual distinctives.¹⁷ The resulting pseudo-scientific sociological or political analysis based upon these humanistic

¹² Almond et al., *Strong Religion*. This was a particularly interesting book written in the wake of the decade long Fundamentalism project at the University of Chicago, especially significant as the authors had established the project. The project was an enormous analysis of fundamentalism working on the assumption there was a unifying conceptual basis for the category, a set of characteristics that all religious ‘fundamentalisms’ shared. In fact, it is arguable it established precisely the *opposite*, and this book should have been written before the project ever started as the thesis to be tested by the project.

¹³ Macneil, *Fundamentalism is a revolt*, 1–2; Almond et al., *Strong Religion*, 9–14.

¹⁴ Barr, *Fundamentalism*, xi. Barr gave more attention to the psychological argument in this preface to his 2nd edition.

¹⁵ Once when attending a conference discussion, the leader corrected me by insisting the word “spiritual” be replaced with “religious”; otherwise we were not having a “scientific discussion” but a theological one.

¹⁶ The presuppositions of this method of thinking are forcefully critiqued by Plantinga (2011).

¹⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *What is an evangelical?* 22–26.

working assumptions can only ever neatly reclassify the entire movement as a “reaction to modernism,” an expression of the “American political Right,” the alt-Right, “Christian Nationalism,” or another “conservative” movement.¹⁸ Such an approach, I have previously argued 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.¹⁹ I argued there that 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.*”²⁰

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, some elucidation to this principle should be made. The Christian tradition is broad and frequently at odds with itself; traditional Catholicism and orthodox Protestantism proceed on an entirely different epistemological basis. Orthodox Catholicism considers the natural law theology of Aquinas as normative. Protestantism took its direction from Augustinianism, that denied such a natural theology was possible. We are arguing from the Augustinian presumption.²¹

Nevertheless, movements *do* exist at specific times in specific cultures, and it must be recognized that as history proceeds, the very success of a movement may mean the adoption and modification of aspects of their program by other conservative elements as seen in the

¹⁸ Lawrence, ‘From fundamentalism to fundamentalisms,’ 88–101; McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 9–12; Yurica, “The Despoiling of America.”

¹⁹ Macneil, “Creating a holistic context,” supporting PowerPoint slide 2. A “Geordie” is national slang for an inhabitant of Newcastle Upon Tyne in North-East England, a city close to the Scottish border. It derives from the time when the people of Newcastle remained loyal to the English King George when the Scots attacked the city. Even though they eventually succumbed to the Scots attack, King George recognized their loyalty and resistance.

²⁰ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 50e.

²¹ I consider these issues in more details in my *Foundations*.

Christian Manifesto of Francis Schaeffer and the *Moral Majority* of Jerry Falwell.²² There were sociological, political, and even psychological dimensions to these movements which are useful and even necessary to consider in properly comprehending them. Movements are more than ideologies, even if ideology gives a movement its basic character; the culture of the nation, international priorities, influences, and constraints will all affect the working out of a movement.

This will most certainly be the case where “secular” appropriations have exerted a reverse influence on the praxis of parent theological movements and have even resulted in cooperation between or common cause with some non-Christian elements. History has shown that when a Christian organization enters the political arena, it often seeks self-conscious redefinition.²³ Dominion theology has been particularly sensitive to cultural factors; Christians around the world have responded dramatically differently to the advocacy for a more muscular presence for Christians in the public square. Thus, this book recognizes these variables and is arguing for a practical, yet coherent and philosophical conception of dominionism, alongside establishing its theological orthodoxy.

[B]Summary

I have asserted that dominion theology is a legitimate and distinct theological category. In this sense, I argued 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 collapsed it into the fundamentalist category. I have asserted that my approach centers on a theological analysis and is philosophically Augustinian. We also

²² Wagner, *Dominion!* 212–13.

²³ Wagner, *On Earth as it is in heaven*, 7.

observed that there are historical, sociological, philosophical, and spiritual variables to consider in our analysis.

In summary, we argue for the following two propositions and answer the following two questions: **[BL 1–4]**

- 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 scientism were major cultural factors in the development of dominion theology.²⁴
- Does dominion theology continue to exist as a coherent movement or have its ideas been absorbed into the wider Christian movement?
- How are we to apply Dominion Theology to our lived Christian experience within our sociopolitical environment? **[/BL 1–4]**

[B]Chapter Outlines

[C]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.

[C]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

²⁴ One interpretation of scientism is the belief that the only questions *worth* asking are those to which science *can* give an answer.

the cultural issues that caused modern dominion theology to emerge as a distinct category during the 1960s.²⁵

[C]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 sociological program 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 how he argued for Christian “epistemological self-consciousness” from the apologetic theology and Christian philosophy of Kuyprian Cornelius Van Til. It finishes with how he applied biblical law as the basis of societal reformation and reconstruction.

[C]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 various 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.

[C]Chapter Six: Critiques and Their Evaluation

Critics often accuse dominionists of “worldliness” because of the focus on the reformation of culture, and of misunderstanding the relationship of the Old Testament Law to the New Testament dispensation in arguing for theonomy. I examine these core criticisms of

²⁵ North, “Cutting Edge,” 1.

Dominionism, the responses of dominion theology to these criticisms, and evaluate their relative cogency.

[C]Chapter Seven: The Philosophy of Christian Involvement

Revivalism and Fundamentalism denuded modern Christian thought and culture of the rationale for active participation in the wider culture and most specifically in the political realm. This is where we examine how Dominion Theology should be applied in the cultural and political context of our present age and lived Christian experience.

[C]Conclusion

I consider the degree that the statements and questions posed above have been answered, by considering the current state and future prognosis of dominion theology.

[A]The Three Main Divisions of Eschatology

[B]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 rather it is to identify some high level philosophical and theological distinctives for each division which are relevant to the closing discussion of the chapter and the wider analytical theme of the book. 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 becomes clear as to why dominion theology has been predicated upon and historically associated with particular eschatological views.

[B]Definition

Eschatology from the *Koine* Greek *eschaton* is the doctrine of the “last things” or “last days.”¹ Eschatological discourse has centered on the one thousand years (“the Millennium”) referred to six times in Revelation 20. However, this is immediately subject to a hermeneutical caveat—*what* the millennium is and *when* it occurs or even *whether* it is realized in the present age is a *function* of the eschatological view. In this respect, there are three basic divisions of eschatological thinking: *premillennial*, *amillennial*, and *postmillennial*. For the premillennial and postmillennial viewpoints, the Millennium is

¹ “Koine” or “common Greek” is the name given to the composite Greek dialect associated first 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.

normally viewed as a definite historical event that will occur at some point in the future.² In contrast, the amillennial view posits either that: **[LL a–c]**

- a. It has already been “realized”³ in a mystical or symbolic way fully in the present church age.
- b. It is the growing presence of eternity in the present.⁴
- c. It pertains only to the saints in heaven. **[/LL a–c]**

Thus, the 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 perspectives more closely.

[B]Amillennialism

Amillennialism is the largest of the eschatological groupings.⁵ Various forms of amillennialism have enjoyed a continuing and serious presence up to and including the contemporary period, becoming firmly established in the 3rd century AD but with earlier pre-Christian historical precursors that we discuss shortly.⁶ The Western Catholic Church adopted Augustinian amillennialism and subsequently Reformed denominations were institutionally amillennial at their foundation, varying little from the Augustinian position as they sought to return to Augustinianism more generally in their understanding of the Christian church.⁷ That is, Luther, Calvin, and Melancthon were traditionally thought of as

² Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 4.

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

⁴ Bultmann, ‘Problem of Eschatology(A),’ 38–55.

⁵ Price, *Millennial Issue*, 7–10.

⁶ Notable modern amillennialists have been bishop Christopher Wordsworth (b. 1807), Abraham Kuyper (b. 1837), Louis Berkhof (b. 1873), Albert Schweitzer (b. 1875), C.H. Dodd (b. 1884), William Hendriksen (b. 1900), and Malcolm Smith (b.1940). Berkhof’s amillennial *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 digitization 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” (Horner, *Reformed Eschatology*, 4); Malcolm is still living, his website is <https://unconditionallovefellowship.com/>.

⁷ Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 49–55.

amillennialist; Price noting an apparent oddness that the Reformers jettisoned almost everything of Catholicism except its eschatological perspective.⁸ However, this is readily mitigated in that the Catholic church had largely departed from Augustine to Aquinas' appropriation of Aristotle but had *retained* Augustine's eschatology; the Reformers sought to return to Augustine more *generally* and purge the scholastic incorporation of Aristotle.

[C]The Allegorical Method

Amillennialism in all its forms is founded on an allegorical view of scripture. Philo (30 BC – 40 AD) was first to develop the foundational allegorical hermeneutic and Origen (185 AD – 254 AD) 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 100 AD.⁹ It permitted the spiritualization 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*.

That is, amillennialism allegorizes the Church as the Kingdom of God and *the Church has become the putative heirs to the promises made to Israel* within the Hebrew Scriptures. The physical nation of Israel and the ethnic Jews have passed *entirely* from the purposes of God; the reformation in the 20th century of a political nation-state called Israel was of *no* prophetic significance. The church, in this dispensation of the Kingdom, has inherited all the blessings of Abraham. Price, in discussing this view, offered this scripture as the “proof text”:

[EXT]“For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that matters is a new creation! And all who will behave in

⁸ Calvin was historically thought of as amillennial (Price, *The Millennial Issue*) but has also been cited as foundational for postmillennialists (Bahnsen, *John Calvin*.) As noted shortly, some view the amillennial position as derived from the postmillennial position, with the millennium pushed into the distant future.

⁹ The first one hundred years of the church saw it move from a predominantly ethnically Jewish composition to a predominantly Gentile (non-Jewish) composition. This track is already seen in the narrative of the Book of Acts, when Paul and Barnabas declare “they go now to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). The cultural separation from Judaism was accelerated when Nero understood this was not just another Jewish sect, and removed the protection afforded to ‘official’ religions (of which Judaism was one) from the new “Christians.”

accordance with this rule, peace and mercy be on them, and on the *Israel of God*.” (Gal. 6:15–16, NET; emphasis added.)¹⁰ [/EXT]

With such a long history, there have been variations and important developments within amillennialism which we consider now, but they all share this basic identification of “Israel” with the church; that is, a “replacement theology.”

[C]Classical Amillennialism

In the classical amillennial system, the final judgment and eternity is viewed to begin with the Second Coming of Christ (the *Parousia*).¹¹ Importantly it is not preceded by a literal thousand-year earthly reign of the Jewish Messiah, but the Church age is viewed as symbolized by the millennial concept. For Augustine and the early Latin Church that followed him, this *numerus perfectus* was a symbolic, indefinite period of time in which there is a perfection of God’s law (10 x 10 x 10), with the unfolding of the Kingdom government of God in the Church Age.¹² Christ’s reign is expressed through the Church in the progression of *historia sacra* (sacred history) in which “radical regeneration takes place.”¹³ It is with his *City of God* (c. 412) that the view received its fullest expression.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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

¹⁰ Price, *The Millennial Issue*.

¹¹ *Parousia* is a direct borrowing from the original Greek word, with the literal meaning of “being present” in the sense of “arrival,” and used in Christian theology for the return of Christ.

¹² O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 168. O’Daly speculates that 10 is the number of the law.

¹³ Van Ort, *The End is Now*, 3–5.

¹⁴ Date of composition is given as 412–426/7 in Van Ort.

¹⁵ It is this eventual triumph of the Church which connects it with postmillennialism in the mind of some commentators, and why some see it fundamentally as a degeneration from the postmillennial position in response to a collapse in cultural optimism and humanity’s ability to reform itself. The reciprocal view is also held, that some view postmillennialism as modified amillennialism; we consider the reasons for both positions in the subsequent discussion of postmillennialism.

[EXT]“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.’”¹⁶ [/EXT]

However, it is also clear that he *did* expect the return of Christ *before* 1000 AD, perhaps as early as 650 AD¹⁷ and it is this “failure” of his predictions that is believed by some 20th century commentators to have led to the changes within modern amillennialism, “*it is the failure of amillennialism . . . to meet the facts of history.*”¹⁸

[C]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 half of a half-truth, for the Reformation had reaffirmed the essentials of the Augustinian view despite these “failures,” it was rather 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 Western theologians there was a crisis of orthodox faith *generally* in response to Darwinism and a crisis of confidence in the power of humankind to reform itself as political liberalism collapsed in response to the outbreak of major conflicts amongst the “civilized” Europeans.

Faced with this challenge, amillennialism generally became increasingly pietistic and pessimistic regarding modern culture. Though some like Masselink and Hamilton remained exponents of the traditional Calvinistic view of increasing victory within the church, by the end of the 19th century, Düsterdieck and Kliefoth had spiritualized the millennium as a “heavenly reality” to accommodate the perceived negative track of history.¹⁹ Warfield also

¹⁶ Augustine, *Complete Works*, loc. 23756 [1699].

¹⁷ Walvoord (1959) alleges 650, 1000 and 1044 in the iterations of post-Augustinian thought.

¹⁸ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 384.

¹⁹ Masselink, *Why a thousand years?* Hamilton, *Millennial Faith*; Düsterdieck, *Kritisch exegetisches Handbuch*; Kliefoth, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*.

incorporated this idea of the triumph of the Church as a *heavenly* event into his eschatology.²⁰

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

[C]Liberal Amillennialism

Liberal amillennialism, in general, is known for its secularization of the biblical texts such that the resurrection and the Second Advent are not considered *actual* events but *spiritual pictures* to be realized within the life of the Church or by individuals alone. It, like conservative amillennialism, had both theologically optimistic and pessimistic forms:[LL a-c]

- a. The ‘social gospel’ movement of Rauschenbusch was a positive, optimistic view with the emphasis on the Church as salt and light within “the world.”²² 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 the practice of socialism in the 20th century communist states became totalitarian.²³
- b. Dodd, Schweitzer, and Bultmann to various degrees represented the “liberal historicist” school. They maintained in varying emphases and senses a “realized” eschatology of the

²⁰ Warfield was often understood as having a postmillennial orientation in his theology which emphasized the triumph of Christianity in history, which is why some consider amillennialism as a degraded form of postmillennialism, spiritualizing events traditionally viewed by the postmillennialists as realized on Earth. We examine this in more detail shortly.

²¹ Walvoord, ‘The Millennium Issue,’ 430.

²² Walter Rauschenbush, *A Theology for the social gospel* and *The Social Principles of Jesus*. Both published in 1917.

²³ Rauschenbusch in his early work enthusiastically endorses and defends a communist version of socialism, with private property viewed as a “transitional phase” of human organization. In his later work this was far more muted, but it remains a fact of history that many subsequent advocates of the social gospel were socialists politically. It is also notable that he remained relatively orthodox in his view of the redemptive work of Christ and the need for personal salvation, in stark contrast to some of his successors that viewed “sin” as societal against the individual.

timeless and eternal manifested in the current age in space and time rather than in any future age.²⁴ This historicism waned with the twentieth century.²⁵

- c. Niebuhr, though arguably neo-orthodox in his general approach to Christianity, was a major exponent of the liberal method of secularization of the biblical narrative and possessed a pessimistic view of human progress.²⁶ This pessimism became the dominant mode of thinking for the post-liberal theologian. [LL a-c]

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.

[B]Premillennialism

[C]Premillennialism as Apostolic

Premillennialism was, according to the compendium of Peters (which cites a consensus of historical work), the exclusive position (though in a primitive form known as “chiliasm”²⁷) of both Judaism and the Early Church fathers for the first 250 years of the Church.²⁸ This is because the early believers as predominantly Jewish adopted the Jewish eschatology with some Christian reinterpretation. Jewish eschatology held, in an uneasy tension, the ideas of the coming Messiah as *both* the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and the

²⁴ Schweitzer, *Historical Jesus*, 478–87; Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 138–55; Dodd, *Parables*, 163–69.

²⁵ “Historicism” more generally was the view that there were deterministic “laws” that governed the course of history. History was moving towards an inevitable consummation. This view of history was associated most vividly with the “left wing,” revolutionary Hegelians, and was highly influential on Marx and his successors who believed the destination of history was the communist utopia. As communism failed and philosophical positivism came to dominate mid-20th century science and thought, the historicist theses with their metaphysical underpinnings were viewed as fundamentally flawed and “nonsensical.” See Macneil, *Foundations*, 62–67.

²⁶ Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny*. This is a post-liberal synthesis of Reformation and Renaissance ideas.

²⁷ Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, 482–83. *Chiliasm* is Latin for “one thousand.” The Latin word “mille” also means one thousand, hence the term “millennium” in modern parlance. The central belief of the chiliasts was a belief in a period of a thousand years known as the millennium. In contrast, modern premillennialism as a system of theology, is far more comprehensive but chiliasts are still considered as representative of early premillennialism.

²⁸ Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, John, James, Matthew, Aristio, and John the Presbyter (all these named as such by ancient historian Papias). In the period 100–200 AD the list includes Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Ignatius, Polycarp and Papias (both disciples of John). In the period 200–300 AD, Pothinus, Justin Martyr, Melito, Tatian, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Apollinaris. See Pentecost (1958), 373–80.

glorious coming of the King with power and glory.²⁹ Which view prevailed at a particular point in history was very much subject to the conditions in the nation; during times of great prosperity and military strength, the conqueror was preferred, during occupation and subjugation, the suffering servant was thought to symbolize the nation, but there was still the hope that the deliverer would arise. This conquering Messiah vanquished Israel's enemies, oversaw a restoration of the Davidic kingdom, and the establishment of his earthly reign throughout all the world.³⁰ This was also clearly the expectation of Jesus' early disciples:

[EXT]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) [/EXT]

So Christian premillennialism interpreted Jesus' first advent as the suffering servant and for classical premillennialism, His second advent was to be as triumphant king and judge in contrast to his "meek and lowly" first advent. This represented a distinct solution to the tension present in the Jewish eschatology and became the apostolic position, viewing the struggle of the church against the Empire as an extension of the "sufferings of Christ" but on the path to final victory.

[C]The Decline of Premillennialism

Premillennialism waned with the "accommodation of Constantine" (313 AD) which fundamentally changed the way the church related to the Roman Empire as it effectively became the favored, state religion.³¹ The rationale of suffering and the Roman emperor as the Antichrist beast of Revelation underpinning the premillennial eschatological formulation collapsed, with the result it was virtually absent from the Church from the 6th century to the

²⁹ Price, *Premillennialism* argued that the tension was so strong that sometimes there was a split into two different events, or perhaps a Jewish and a Gentile messiah.

³⁰ See for example, Isaiah 2: 1–5.

³¹ Wright, "The Edict of Milan," 313.

early 19th century. It was also one of the few areas of thought not revised as part of the Reformation tradition which had generally followed the amillennial Augustinian position, with Calvin dismissing premillennialism with the few, curt words, “*this fiction is too puerile to need or to deserve refutation.*”³² Similarly, Luther had also explicitly rejected the “triumphalism” associated with the proto-postmillennialism of some medieval scholars, that foresaw a radical Christianization of the Earth, viewing it as a “trick of the devil.” This firmly cementing amillennialism as the orthodox Reformed position.³³

[C]Dispensationalism

However, premillennialism re-emerged in the 1820s in a modern and radically distinctive form with Irving and Darby which became known as Dispensationalism.³⁴ 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 “lukewarm” era in which the Church apostatized.³⁵ Darby developed Irving and formalized the Rapture doctrine;³⁶ this is at once the most controversial and cherished doctrine of dispensationalism:

[EXT] “[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 . . . ”³⁷[/EXT]

Popular dispensationalist narrative of the 20th century became progressively dominated with the imminence of the rapture captured by Hal Lindsay’s best sellers during the 1970s and the 1980s.³⁸

³² Calvin, *Institutes*, loc. 20132.

³³ Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202) was the most important example of what is argued by some such as Price as the precursor for modern postmillennialism. We discuss this in more detail shortly.

³⁴ Boettner, *Postmillennialism*, loc.67.

³⁵ MacPherson, *Rapture Plot*, 74.

³⁶ MacPherson, *Rapture Plot*, 124.

³⁷ Missler, *The Rapture*, loc. 28.

³⁸ These are listed in the Bibliography.

The second distinctive feature of Dispensationalism 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.³⁹ 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 apostatized or succumbed to the Antichrist's kingdom. The dispensationalist view was popularized 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 orthodoxy.⁴⁰ From there its support was maintained in various movements influenced by fundamentalism such as the main Pentecostal denominations and the later Word of Faith movement.⁴¹ The later charismatic and "House" churches, originating within the mainline protestant and catholic denominations, tended to remain amillennial.⁴²

³⁹ Dispensationalists argue that the book of Revelation reflects this structure *literally* and *sequentially*—the first three chapters are the church age, followed by the rapture event of 4:1 ("come up here"), the resumption of the history of Israel paused in Daniel (the period of the Antichrist being the "70th week"), a second coming in Revelation 19 and Final Judgment in Revelation 20. As we note immediately below, its most attractive, cohering, and distinctive feature is the straightforward mapping to scriptural events.

⁴⁰ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 198–200.

⁴¹ The early history of Pentecostalism is slightly contested, within many marking the beginning of the movement with the Azusa street outpouring of 1906-9 out of which many of the large Pentecostal denominations mark as their beginning. However, some Holiness churches had added the "third blessing" of speaking in tongues, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), was founded in 1897, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC), was founded in 1898. The earliest Pentecostals were known as "Holiness Pentecostals" because of their connection with the Holiness movement.

The Word of Faith movement was most immediately associated with the ministry of Kenneth E Hagin who effectively founded the movement with the establishment of Rhema Bible Training center in 1963. Though Rhema continues today with multinational campuses, many would consider Kenneth Copeland Ministries (founded 1967) as the "second wave" of the Word of Faith movement though Copeland himself maintains strong, personal connections with the Rhema movement. However, importantly, the designation is not really denominational in the traditional governmental sense but rather reflects a networked association of autonomous organizations.

This lack of central authority has been both the strength and weakness of the movement, with some of the most egregious scandals originating in its ranks but not proving fatal for the movement, owing to this loose, voluntary model. It should be emphasized this model of decentralized organization is not confined to just religious organizations in the modern world but is now found widely in business and political contexts.

⁴² On occasions, the issue of the status of the modern State of Israel was an explosive controversy within these movements with some influential magazines strongly arguing against the premillennial view and dismissing the need for support for the modern Jews of the state of Israel. Price, an influential member of the British House church movement, discussed this at length in his *Premillennialism* series arguing that the shuttering of these publications was a direct result of their refusal to support the modern state of Israel.

[C]Premillennial Hermeneutics

The premillennial approach to scripture and interpretation was one of its most attractive, cohering and distinctive features. Premillennial dispensationalism employed a “plain meaning”, “grammatical-historical method” which strongly emphasized a “literal” textual hermeneutic.⁴³ The overwhelming logic and self-confidence of premillennialism enjoyed by dispensationalists up until the late 1980s was summarized by Price:

[EXT] “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 allegorized and is not fulfilled literally.”⁴⁴ [/EXT]

[C]Dispensationalism as Heterodox

Yet, it should be clear that this form of the dispensationalist view bears little resemblance to classical premillennialism which emphasized the corporate eschatology of the victorious messianic king even though there was conflict and apostasy before His appearing.⁴⁵ In effect, the Second Advent is seen as a rescue from the kingdom of the Antichrist rather than a triumphant return.⁴⁶ It is extremely culturally pessimistic, and its rapture escapism has been the source of criticism from within those who prefer a classical

It is of note that the issue is once again extremely politically sensitive amongst the Christian Right because of the War in Gaza, with a clear separation between those that support Israel and those who do not. Having listened to many discussions on this subject, it is evident that even if the scriptural injunctions to “bless the Jews” are acknowledged, they seem to be sidestepped, either by:

- a. Citing replacement theology which, as we have already seen, recasts the Church as Israel, thus granting no significance to a political state in the Middle East now known as Israel.
- b. Separating the support for the government of the modern secular state of “Israel” from the support for the Jewish people.

I examine the Israel-Gaza war in detail here: <https://planetmacneil.org/blog/hamas-vs-israel-understanding-the-conflict/>.

⁴³ Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 129. Here Walvoord admits the necessity of permitting fundamentally symbolic language in the apocalyptic genre. Some other premillennialists such as Price reject this, insisting on a strict literalism.

⁴⁴ Price, “Premillennialism,” audio recording.

⁴⁵ Rushdoony, “Postmillennialism I and II,” audio recordings.

⁴⁶ 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. Although now “disgraced” because of historical sexual abuse allegations, the founder Mike Bickle spent an enormous amount of time in the Book of Revelation and in expounding it.

premillennialism.⁴⁷ Though successful and well established within the modern evangelical movement, it has been profoundly challenged as a clearly modern and previously unknown innovation in the history of the church.⁴⁸

[B]Postmillennialism

[C]The Scholarly Rejection of Postmillennialism

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

[EXT] “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”⁴⁹ [/EXT]

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* characterizes the view so that it becomes useful for the closing discussion of the chapter.

[C]Postmillennialism as Modified Amillennialism

For proponents of this view, postmillennialism was generated from the problem posed for medieval amillennialists by the perceived failure of Augustinian eschatology. As we saw, 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*

⁴⁷ Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 365–66.

⁴⁸ North, *House Divided*, ix–lii. See also Appendix B, “The Late Jesus.”

⁴⁹ Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, vii–ix.

triumph and final victory before the Second Advent.”⁵⁰ 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 first to be postmillennial on the basis of their envisaging of an eventual *earthly* triumph of the church in a far future.⁵¹

It must also be noted in opposition to this that the converse is also posited by both Walvoord and Riddlebarger.⁵² That is, postmillennialism reverts to amillennialism under the weight of cultural decay. For Riddlebarger it is seen as an innovation from the historical postmillennialism within the old Princeton school. She then identifies Warfield as the transitional figure representing its reversion into amillennialism by his supernaturalization of the glorious state of the saints to simply a heavenly, rather than earthly reality. This seems the more plausible view, particularly with the parallel decay of a triumphant classical premillennialism into culturally pessimistic dispensationalism.

[C]Postmillennialism as Heterodox and a Product of Philosophical Modernism

For proponents of this view, the radical optimism that is said to characterize postmillennialism is viewed as rooted in the Enlightenment view of the inevitability of progress and the “Early 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 founder.⁵³ 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 progress.⁵⁴ Both Price and Walvoord argue that the tendency of postmillennialism is towards theological liberalism and Price asserts that the

⁵⁰ Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 25.

⁵¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 716.

⁵² Riddlebarger, *Princeton and the Millenium*, 36.

⁵³ Price, *The Millennial Issue*, audio recordings.

⁵⁴ Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 28–32.

postmillennialist sentiment is the precursor of both fascist and communist conceptions of a golden age.

[C]Assessing Postmillennialism

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 is clearly a far weaker theological position than the former position. However, I believe the criticisms presented above are weak and inconclusive, we can safely assert that 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 not an orthodox Christian in any respect but was first a Unitarian and his liberal postmillennialism, which converged easily with liberal amillennialism, reflected a general cultural optimism rather than a view arrived at through theological analysis and reconstruction.⁵⁵ The clear distinction between the two is exemplified succinctly by Boettner:

[EXT] “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 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.”⁵⁶[EXT]

⁵⁵ Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 22–23.

⁵⁶ Boettner, *Postmillennialism*, loc. 74.

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 for the following reasons: [NL 1-2]

1. 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 heterodox and is viewed by some postmillennialists as radically dispensationalist because of his conception of the ages of the Father (Law), Son, and Spirit (grace).⁵⁷
2. Although suggested as a "post-Reformation" movement, history seems to show that the Reformation thinkers were content to adopt the view that they could resume the building of the Kingdom *as envisaged by Augustine* now that a correct foundation had been restored.⁵⁸ Both Luther and Calvin 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 Jews.⁵⁹ [/NL 1-2]

However, Riddlebarger's view of Warfield's position is at first appearance stronger in proposing postmillennialism was simply an aberration of amillennialism. Her assertion is accurate that though Warfield considered himself a postmillennialist, he certainly

⁵⁷ Joachim of Floris, *Expositio in Apocalipsim*; Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, loc. 119; Anderson, <http://www.rudolfsteinerstudies.com/free-ebooks/Joachim%20of%20Fiore.pdf>, 2.

⁵⁸ Pentecost (1948), *Things to Come*, 26–33.

⁵⁹ Luther, 'The Efficacy of the Gospel' and 'Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans.'

spiritualized postmillennial concepts allowing some of his immediate heirs to move straightforwardly to an amillennial position.⁶⁰ However, she neglects to mention that Warfield was *also* important to the developing fundamentalist movement and, in contrast, his putative heirs in that movement were dispensationalist premillennialists.⁶¹ Thus, it would be contradictory to assert that his eschatology inevitably collapsed into amillennialism or was an aberration of premillennialism. Rather, it appears that with postmillennialism we are dealing with a *distinctive* category, and it is to the analysis of this category that we now turn.

[C]Postmillennialism on its Own Terms

The counterarguments presented above are not considered to be definitive. They are simply posited to demonstrate that the original arguments were not sufficient to 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:

⁶⁰ Riddlebarger, *Princeton and the Millenium*, 21.

⁶¹ Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 262–63.

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

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

Gentry summarizes the postmillennial view in this way:

[EXT] “[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.”⁶² [/EXT]

I would concur with Gentry here, but I would add that the evidence supports the view that the distinct and authentic 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 the recapturing of a common radical optimism, an 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”:

[EXT] “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.”⁶³ [/EXT]

Although allegory and spiritualization are widely applied in postmillennial hermeneutics in contrast to the early period of the church which we have already seen was premillennial in outlook, the task or responsibility of the church in Matthew 28 is probably taken in the most literal and emphatic manner by the modern postmillennialists in contrast to

⁶² Gentry, *Dominion*, 79

⁶³ Cope, *God and Political Justice*, loc. 359; Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, loc. 36–39.

the cultural pessimism and cynicism of dispensationalism and modern amillennialism. 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 predominantly amillennial.⁶⁴ 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 we saw in some of the modern Augustinians such as Warfield. The Church is not the ark of the Catholic Church, the chosen remnant of the Protestant dispensationalists or the mystical kingdom of the saints in heaven of modern amillennialists:

[EXT] “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.”⁶⁵ [/EXT]

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:

[EXT] “[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,

⁶⁴ Boettner, *Postmillennialism*, loc. 162. Augustine in his younger days had been attracted to Manichaeism, which was highly dualistic and emphasized the polarities of good and evil, spirit and flesh.

⁶⁵ Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, loc. 72–77.

nor any other institution offers hope, and none are seen as therefore central or important.”⁶⁶ [/EXT]

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

[EXT] “[P]ostmillennialism 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 together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”⁶⁷ [/EXT]

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

[EXT] “[T]here is an Implicit Manichaeism in premillennialism and in amillennialism. The material world is surrendered to Satan, and the spiritual world is reserved to God.”⁶⁸ [/EXT]

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

[EXT] “[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 text⁶⁹ [and] requires the book as a whole be interpreted futuristically . . . The truth or falsity of amillennialism or postmillennialism does not [require] the futuristic approach.”⁷⁰ [/EXT]

Postmillennialists generally favor 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

⁶⁶ Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, loc. 44.

⁶⁷ Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, loc. 58–60.

⁶⁸ Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, loc. 204.

⁶⁹ See also Boettner, *Postmillennialism*, loc. 95.

⁷⁰ Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 176–77.

“The Tribulation” of Revelation occurred in our distant past in the first century and the millennium has already passed.⁷¹ The former is accepted but the latter is rejected by postmillennialists. Postmillennialists view prophecy as progressively fulfilled or prefigured in previous ages⁷² and generally favor covenant theology which posits a single continuing intratrinitarian covenant of redemption that structures history from the creation mandate of Adam to eternity.⁷³ However, postmillennialists agree with the preterists that a literalistic approach to prophecy is naïve and immature, “literalism leads to absurdity in Revelation.”⁷⁴

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:

[EXT] “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.”⁷⁵ [/EXT]

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 internalizes the “kingdom” as a spiritual entity or limits it to the heavenly state of saints in heaven:

[EXT] “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

⁷¹ Ice & Gentry, *The Great Tribulation*, 11.

⁷² Rushdoony, “History I,” audio recording.

⁷³ Mathison, *Dispensationalism*, 13–19.

⁷⁴ Ice & Gentry, *The Great Tribulation*, 173.

⁷⁵ Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, loc. 119.

of the messianic kingdom . . . that grows to fill the whole earth.”⁷⁶ (Emphasis added in first instance) [/EXT]

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

[EXT] “We don’t have God-ordained prophets anymore. 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.”⁷⁷ [/EXT]

[B]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.

[C]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” trial.⁷⁸ 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.

⁷⁶ Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 180.

⁷⁷ Gary North, “The Importance of the 700 club”, http://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/docs/a_pdfs/newslet/bet/8202.pdf.

⁷⁸ Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 349 n. 6.

Culture was considered apostate; the only hope was revivalism to save as many souls as possible before the imminent coming of the Lord.⁷⁹ Social action was considered a distraction from the real task of evangelism and the social gospel of Rauschenbusch as liberal-modernist apostasy.⁸⁰ 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.”⁸¹ The implication was clear—civilization was sinking so social action was meaningless—the Christian should be concerned with revivalism alone.⁸² Thus, it should be obvious at this point that 20th century dispensational premillennialism would be philosophically opposed to dominion theology and would consider it theologically heretical.

[C]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 emphasizing the pietistic aspect of Warfield’s transitional eschatology.⁸³ This perceived cultural decay and lawlessness of the century favored 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 characterized modern amillennialism thus:

⁷⁹ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 5–8.

⁸⁰ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 71.

⁸¹ Quoted in Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, loc. 175.

⁸² Marsden *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 7. This 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. It should also be noted that some dispensationalists do combine their revivalism with social action and political involvement, it is arguable that one of the biggest changes in the last decade since I first wrote the dissertation this book is based on has been an increasing sense of social responsibility amongst many believers of different traditions. We consider both issues further in a later section.

⁸³ Riddlebarger, “Princeton and the Millenium.”

[EXT] “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.”⁸⁴ [/EXT]

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*.

[C]Postmillennialism

Thus, by default, 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 in an earlier section that 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 summarizes the interpretation of postmillennialism as the call to fulfil the creation mandate of Genesis by redeeming the nations and institutions of the world:

⁸⁴ Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, loc. 164, 202.

[EXT] “[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.”⁸⁵ [/EXT]

[B]Summary and Concluding Remarks

We began this chapter by considering the definition and history of the three main eschatological views: premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. We noted that postmillennialism had been dismissed as simplistic, naïve, mystical, and guilty of ignoring the realities of history because of its radical optimism.⁸⁶ I then asserted that those many critiques miss the salient point that postmillennialism is recovering the triumphal emphasis of 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 remnant.⁸⁷

Consequently, it was 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 emphasizes his reforming role both within the civic culture and within theology was based upon a conviction of Christian progress and victory within history.⁸⁸ Mathison was similarly emphatic in this unwavering belief in the Christian triumph

⁸⁵ Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, loc. 219.

⁸⁶ Mathison, *Dispensationalism*, xi.; Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 34–36; Rushdoony, *Postmillennialism*, audio.

⁸⁷ Mathison, *Dispensationalism*, 245–48; Rushdoony, *Postmillennialism*, audio.

⁸⁸ Bahnsen, “Postmillennialism,” 32–96. It should be noted that Luther explicitly emphasized the wider salvific effects of the gospel on the culture, but rejected (according to Price, *The Three Views*) the postmillennial vision of the total triumph of the church.

in history, “Today’s newspaper is then [not] an excuse for anxiety or apathy.”⁸⁹ Finally, and we shall see most rigorously, it was possible for Rushdoony to argue that the modern dispensational premillennialists and modern amillennialists have succumbed to the principle of reason as the arbiter of all things, adopting the philosophical position from the Enlightenment rather than one rooted in a Christian philosophy of history.⁹⁰

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 dispensationalism and amillennial mysticism. Though postmillennialism 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.

⁸⁹ Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, xii.

⁹⁰ Rushdoony, ‘Introduction’ in *An Eschatology of Victory*, vii–ix.

[A]The Precursors of Dominion Theology

[B]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 theology. It is a frequent fallacy of evangelical theologians to pay insufficient attention to the *Zeitgeist* of their situation in time and to 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, influenced, 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:

[EXT] “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 [/EXT]

The post-modernists of the 1960s and 1970s recognized this implicit circularity of confidence in reason and baulked at this as epistemological totalitarianism.⁶ Thus, there

¹ Wagner in Hamon, *Eternal Church*, 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 Macneil, *Scripture and the Post-Darwinian Controversy*.

³ Rushdoony, *The Mythology of Science*, 1–4.

⁴ Rushdoony, *The Limits of Reason*, loc. 88.

⁵ Fish, *Free Speech*, 135.

⁶ Although “postmodernism” had been used in other contexts before (especially in schools of Art which Lyotard claimed go all the way back to Duchamp in 1912, who posited that a *painter* need not make a *painting* to be an *artist*), philosophical postmodernism was brought into focus and mainstream Anglo-American academia (it was already well-established in the ‘Continental’ academies) with the 1984 publication of the English translation of

developed within this counterview a preference for the functional absolute of the “conditioning by the moment,”⁷ but which all too readily decayed into a despairing negativity that life just happens, and we are powerless in any real sense to understand and shape the world.⁸

Of course, the supreme irony for the postmodernist is that implicit within their view is the reciprocal form of the very same truth fallacy they were seeking to escape from.⁹ To deny any concept of truth is stated as an absolute truth and functions as an effective axiom of their postmodernist framework.¹⁰ 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 analyzing the impact of the changes, tensions and contradictions on the metanarratives of the Western culture does the inevitability of a Christian counterculture of Dominion Theology emerge.

Lyotard’s *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979). At around the same time as Lyotard published in French, Rorty’s *Mirror* (1979) was published as a repudiation of modern philosophy; Rorty became one of the most forceful and iconoclastic advocates of postmodernism, relativism, and pragmatism and in many ways *was* (liked and loathed in equal measures) the public face of the movement.

It was paradoxically a coercive influence on scholarship during the 1990s (work in the humanities, and to a significant degree the sciences, was assessed for its sensitivity to postmodernity and postmodernism), it is now much more referred to in a respectful way for us to recognize “*the limitations of our modern premises*.” There is still plenty of postmodernism in culture at large, but it is philosophically incoherent (with some postmodernists revelling in that it is precisely that), its limitations now well exegeted especially by those whose disciplines it criticised so severely; for examples, see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 327–48; Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, 279–310.

Further, Blackburn, *Truth* is perhaps one of the most far-reaching critiques of the postmodern view. His critique even reaching as far as a footnote in Rorty’s own work, who I would argue was the patron saint of postmodern *philosophers*; I accept with Blackburn that Nietzsche being the patron saint of postmodernism in culture more *generally*.

⁷ Rushdoony, *The Limits of Reason*, loc. 91.

⁸ McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 163–200.

⁹ Rushdoony, *The Limits of Reason*, loc. 1005–1050; Fish, *Free Speech*, 135–36.

¹⁰ Rhodes, “Absolute Truth,” audio.

[B]The Rise and Fall of Science

The early decades of the 20th century in the Western academy were marked, perhaps defined, by the analytic philosophy of Moore and Russell which was rigorously empiricist as a theory of knowledge¹¹ and equally as dismissive of any “higher way of knowing”¹² by religious experience. Russell went on to be a key personality within the Vienna Circle during the 1930s and in the development of the anti-metaphysical tenor of its logical positivism¹³ which downgraded religious experience as non-cognitive nonsense.¹⁴ The Circle had issued a manifesto entitled (when translated into English) “the Scientific view of the world.”¹⁵ Science was to be elevated to *scientism*, and it was the application of the principles of logical positivism which would solve *all* the problems of humanity by liberating it from its bondage caused by the metaphysical pollution of culture. So, Russell was to assert in his apologetic:

[EXT] “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.”¹⁶ [/EXT]

This was a form of what became known as the “verification principle,” that a proposition in any sphere of culture (not just religion and science) was meaningful *if and only if* it was capable of empirical testing. This was a cathartic, intoxicating, and radical principle which from the mid-1930s for the next two decades exerted a huge influence across the humanities and the sciences; any proposition or theory that failed this test was jettisoned as

¹¹ Russell’s basic philosophical text which served as a primer for a generation of philosophy students is *The Problems of Philosophy*. Moore was famous for his rigorous analytic method and his *Defense of Common Sense*. He had an entire issue of the *Philosophy* journal published in his honor at his death; it was his rigorous *method* rather than his conclusions that had generated such admiration.

¹² Russell, *Western Philosophy*, 789.

¹³ It is important to distinguish *logical* positivism from the “paleopositivism” of Auguste Comte a century earlier but both forms of positivism emphatically rejected metaphysics and elevated science to scientism (‘the only questions that are legitimate and are worth asking are those that science can answer.’)

¹⁴ Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 56–58.

¹⁵ Stadler and Uebel, *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*, 75–116. This is the English translation of the original Carnap, et al. *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung — Der Wiener Kreis* (tr. The Scientific View of the World – the Vienna Circle.)

¹⁶ Russell, “Logical Positivism,” 367.

“non-sense.” Any talk of theological and spiritual matters obviously failed this criterion, an empirical test for God or for God’s action in the world was precluded by the very concept of God and the positivist summary of religious thought was it makes “no sense” to talk about a being called God or of God acting in the world. However, the principle also caught the theories of the softer social sciences and the speculative or mathematical sciences; the purge was on, and it was real, but that was the price to pay to enter into the new age where science was to reign.

Yet, its thousand year reign was abridged to but twenty years as it was forcefully demonstrated by Quine, one of the movement’s own philosophers, that the principle itself was self-defeating; it had exempted the principle from the criteria asserted by the principle: we cannot go into nature and find a “verification principle” so on that basis it makes *no sense* to talk about a verification *principle*.¹⁷ In fact, and this became a general realization amongst many of the critics, *any* rational principle was problematic on this basis, and attempts to relax or reformulate the *verification* principle to admit the nuances of analytic thought were seen to either exclude too much or too little, voiding its efficacy as a methodological basis for science. In other words, positivism *itself* was exposed as a “thorough going metaphysics [denying] all metaphysics.”¹⁸

It must be emphasized that Quine had from *within* empiricism offered this comprehensive rebuttal of logical positivism, he had demonstrated that the verification principle required working outside of the empiricist framework; it was a brutal self-contradiction, a metaphysical dogma.¹⁹ Quine’s essay really marked the end of the

¹⁷ Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism.” This is generally considered to be one of the most influential papers published in the 20th century and is still mandatory reading for philosophy of science students, and in my experience, those of many other disciplines.

¹⁸ Rushdoony, *The Limits of Reason*, loc. 111.

¹⁹ Quine was mentored by and collaborated with Rudolf Carnap, one of the most influential of the logical positivists. Quine’s influence was itself enormous in the post-positivist era, with his development of scientific naturalism and epistemological holism; he remained an empiricist, but a sophisticated one. See Macneil, *Foundations*, where there is substantial attention given to Quine in numerous discussions.

movement and the “tyranny of empiricism”; even though Quine himself remained a sophisticated empiricist, he argued that no theory could reach the level of sufficient attestation that it could be considered “true” in an objective sense, but as long as it was useful in solving problems or explaining the world, the theory might be maintained.²⁰ This was a radical departure from the mythology surrounding science as the sole source of truth.

In short, there was a plurality of possible theories of nature, each might be considered “empirically adequate” in describing phenomena, none could be asserted ahead of time as being the “true” account. Equally importantly, other philosophers of science contemporary to Quine such as Kuhn further undermined the claim that *only* the *scientific* was synonymous with the *rational*. Kuhn had shown that science operated within a specific cultural context, was non-linear,²¹ and had unavoidable subjective dimensions; it was not *the* truth but merely represented milestones on the way to a better understanding of the world.²²

That is, something of the “tyranny of science”²³ was arrested during this era, with many of the softer sciences and the humanities liberating themselves from the physicalism of

²⁰ Though a point more suited for the philosophical discussions of my *Foundations*, Quine was arguing for something distinct from pragmatism though you might argue the practical implications are similar in some respects, he was rather arguing that no one need *ever* relinquish their theory, they could always “reinterpret” any fact or new data to fit in with the framework of their theory, or modify their theory in some way to accommodate anomalies and new facts. This absolutely destroys any claim that scientific theories give you *objective* accounts or truths about nature, or that one theory is implicitly better than another on a purely *rational* basis; the theory is always tested against the world.

²¹ By this it is meant that many traditional accounts of science had (and still do) present scientists as building on one another’s work, e.g., Einstein built on Newton, who himself had said “if I have seen further than other men, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.” What was so radical in Kuhn was that he asserted that Einsteinian physics had *usurped* Newtonian physics, and Copernicus had *usurped* Ptolemy, replacing the previous theory with an entirely new *paradigm*, frequently contradictory and unrelated to what went before it; it was a *revolution* of thought, not an *evolution*. Kuhn fully expected Einsteinian physics to be usurped by another *revolution* within the scientific community.

²² Kuhn’s *Scientific Revolutions* is another example of required reading for the philosopher of science and its basic thesis has been adopted by many outside of the discipline of science to protect their discipline from the tyrannising instincts of the academic scientists. It is somewhat ironic that Kuhn’s lasting legacy has been felt outside of science in the Humanities, as subsequent philosophers of science highlighted the ambiguity, the implicit relativism, and the imprecision of his language in the *Revolutions*. However, it was cogent and persuasive enough to have been seen as broadly applicable to the other disciplines in defending them against the charges of irrationality in their rejection of the primacy of a “scientific” methodology for the grounding of their discipline. See my *Foundations* for a broader discussion of Kuhn.

²³ A term most immediately associated with another highly influential and controversial philosopher of science, Paul Feyerabend. It was a theme he returned to repeatedly during his colorful career, stated first in his *Against Method*, and in his last publication (a composite of a lecture series) the *Tyranny of Science*, before dying

positivism and the scientific naturalism which was replacing it. It seemed the argument had reduced to a far more restrained and measured discourse regarding philosophical and “scientific” naturalism, arguing that any concept of God is unnecessary and irrelevant in understanding or describing the natural operation of the Universe in the latter half of the 20th century; science was in fact “neutral” on metaphysical questions, it was beyond the *competency* of science to answer those questions.²⁴

Yet those questions were still asked elsewhere in the academy and one of the dominant critiques of religious thought originated immediately after the positivist era in the non-positivistic analytic atheism in the philosophy of Flew²⁵ and Mackie.²⁶ Flew and Mackie were not so much “scientific” in their critique but were evidentialist and *rational* in their intellectual approach, arguing that the beliefs of theists and Christians specifically, were *irrational* (both had argued this on the basis of the argument from evil, that the existence of a good, omnipotent God was logically incompatible with the presence of evil in the world, a position first argued by Epicurus in around 300 BC and emphatically restated by Hume in his *Natural Religion*.)

Their work was immediately attractive to the subsequent *philosophical* naturalism, so that even if *scientific* naturalism *could* be neutral, it was seldom true in practice by virtue of the prejudices of the practitioners, and they quickly began incorporating these critiques as part of the continuing assault on the plausibility of the God hypothesis. As religious groups

prematurely of a brain tumor. Few assaulted the elevated mythology of science in our culture so directly and described the dangers of unfettered scientism as Feyerabend, and he too is required reading for philosophers of science.

²⁴ Plantinga, *Science, Religion and Naturalism*, ix.

²⁵ Flew’s *Theology and Falsification* is generally thought (and in his own words in the retrospective, *There Is a God*, ixv–xv) to mark the rebirth of analytic atheism and, paradoxically, analytic theism by pioneering a post-positivist manner of speaking about God.

²⁶ Mackie, “Evil and omnipotence,” 200–212. This was considered a rebuttal of the staple ‘free will defense’ of the theist for the existence of evil; the issue that remains part of the atheist critique of Christian thought especially, though most philosophers would consider now Mackie’s rebuttal itself successfully rebutted by Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga in his *God, Free Will and Evil*. See also Macneil, *Augustine and Plantinga*.

began asserting their rights to be heard in the public square during the 1970s and 1980s, culture generally never tired of pitting the enlightened practice of “science” against the bigotry of the religious fundamentalist.²⁷ It was not long before the duel with philosophical and scientific naturalism was given crude expression in “New Atheism,”²⁸ it was a “strong scientism,” the belief that science provides the “*only* . . . source of knowledge of the world, or alternatively, that the *only* questions *worth* asking were those that science *could* answer.”²⁹ For all intents and purposes the academy and its apologists had reverted to the working premise of positivism that the concept of God was irrational and incoherent.

However, such dogmatism struggled for credibility in the postmodern world, few now find such scientism persuasive or compelling and New Atheism is already considered a historical movement, barely making it a decade in the public consciousness. Most philosophers now admit sources of knowledge outside of the constraints of scientific naturalism. Indeed, Plantinga demonstrated forcefully that the premises of *philosophical* naturalism do not even support *theoretically* a comprehensive science, but mitigate against it, as “Darwin’s doubt” had first given expression to the thought: “if our reasoning, hence our science, is but a natural process, why should I believe the conclusions of my reasoning any more than that of the reasonings of a monkey?” Or put another way, the boundaries of nature ensure we can never get outside of nature to establish an abstract science explaining nature.³⁰

²⁷ Professor James Barr published his *Fundamentalism* in 1977, with a substantive revision in 1982. This was perhaps the defining critique of the era, being freely quoted in many subsequent publications critical of “conservative evangelicalism” both academic and popular. Despite his substantial reputation, his analysis in this work was flawed in important places, and he failed to distinguish fundamentalists from other conservative evangelicals (considering the terms synonymous) as we were careful to do at the beginning of our discussion in this book. See also: Macneil, *Fundamentals and Fundamentalism*.

²⁸ Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens, affectionately known as the “Four Horsemen of the [Atheist] apocalypse.” New Atheism was known for its supreme confidence in its views, and its derisive dismissal of all who disagreed with them, even if their opponents too were arguing on an atheological basis about different models of evolutionary theory. See Macneil, *Foundations*, §3.3.5.

²⁹ Taylor, “The New Atheists.”

³⁰ For a much fuller discussion of these philosophical issues surrounding science, see Macneil, *Foundations*, §3.3.7.

Instead, epistemological pluralism and holism now stand in stark contrast to the crudeness of New Atheism. Most philosophers are far more cautious regarding the scope of our problems which science *might* have the competence to solve, and for the purposes of our argument here, it was certainly no longer “unscientific” or “irrational” to hold to the Christian worldview.³¹ Modern naturalistic science destroys itself as a system or purveyor of knowledge and reduces to logical nonsense. It is of little surprise that cultural confidence in science had collapsed to a large degree by the middle of the 1990s.³²

[B] 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, being replaced by the Nietzschean “will to power”³³ as the replacement metanarrative in the cultural powerhouse of Europe, the German republic. Even though Germany had been defeated in WWI and the settlement after had deliberately disadvantaged Germany, it radicalized its intelligentsia and enabled the rise of the National Socialists who then dramatically rebuilt the nation, economically and politically. It is a paradoxical fact that though the Allies went to war again with Germany, Lord Keynes agreed with the Nazi critique of Western economics and adopted it as fundamental to his economic thought.³⁴

³¹ However, much more would need to be said as to why the Christian worldview is the *only* fully rational worldview rather than just a competitor in the postmodern marketplace. This argument was the subject of my doctoral studies and is developed in my *Foundations*.

³² In the era of television advertising, certain domestic appliance adverts removed the “scientists” with their white laboratory coats, because of the public suspicion over science. The COVID pandemic was also another example of what happens when science gets tyrannical and out of control, see Macneil, *Great COVID Caper*.

³³ Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*. Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche bridged the divide between Nietzsche and Nazism by assembling this work from fragments of Nietzsche’s unpublished work. It should be noted that many Nietzschean scholars object to this association of Nietzsche with Nazism, citing his sister’s “Nazification” of his work, but is undeniable that Nietzsche had a willing audience amongst the Nazis and the fascist movements, including Hitler and Mussolini. Kuyper was to write after the close of WWI, “*the rising sun to the up-and-coming generation of Germany . . . today everything revolves around Nietzsche*.” (Kuyper, *The Blurring of the Boundaries*, 366.)

³⁴ Quoted in Rushdoony, *Money, Inflation and Morality*, audio.

The core belief was that totalitarianism was a natural and efficient means of delivering a new humanist world order free of bourgeois sentimentalism.³⁵ The universalizing 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.”³⁶

[B]The New Humanist World Order

In this context, 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 humanism.³⁷ An uncomfortable, barely remembered fact is that Soviet dissidents post-second world war experienced mass deportations from the West to Russia after the Yalta 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 Nazis.³⁸

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*

³⁵ The pervasive influence of Darwinism here should not be underestimated, both biologically (in the eugenics movement, that still had strong, open support in the 1960s as a foundational ideology to the Family Planning movement), in historicism (in Marxism), and here, socio-politically. Some indeed saw the working out of evolutionary processes with almost a metaphysical or religious pretheoretical commitment to Darwin, with one of the greatest evolutionists of the modern era, Stephen Gould writing in his *Structure* (2002) “*it is a metaphysical commitment we make.*” This means, as he expounded in his theory of *Punctuated Equilibria* (2007), “*that the evidence for evolution is that there is no evidence.*” This was in response to the embarrassment, that he describes, that the fossil record with all its large gaps, does *not* support a view of a *gradual* change of species. He used the Marxist concept of “revolution,” that the jumps in the record were periods of rapid change, followed by quiet periods of no change – hence the gaps in the fossil record. As I noted in my *Foundations*, §3.3.5, this is a master class in sophistry, and the bitter feud between Dawkins, Gould and their disciples continues to this day despite Gould passing in 2002. Thus, my conclusion expressed there, evolutionism is a metaphysical dogma in its *entirety*, despite its cosmetic dressing in scientific clothes.

³⁶ McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 182–83.

³⁷ Dallek, *Roosevelt’s Relationship [sic] Stalin*, para. 1.

³⁸ Bethell, *The Last Secret*. 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: Rushdoony, *Christian Reconstruction*, audio.

Union.”³⁹ Rushdoony was able to describe at book length why “*Washington is as humanistic as Moscow*.”⁴⁰ Western capitalism had 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 materialism.⁴¹ Humanism became entrenched in both the Western and communist blocs, and it was inevitable that a reaction within Christian thought was to emerge.

[B]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, one section of conservative Protestantism generated “Fundamentalism”⁴² characterized by one commentator as “*modernists swimming against the tide*.”⁴³ The rise of an alleged scientific “rationalism” and the metanarrative of Darwinism in the West during this period had precipitated the crumbling of past religious certainties.⁴⁴ The choice was clear, embrace the new scientific world order or retreat into allegorizing scripture and existentialism in an attempt to hold onto faith despite the “overwhelming” scientific evidence against it.⁴⁵

Barthianism resembled the latter, fundamentalism was the “scientific” response of conservative Christianity. It was rigorously methodical and rational with, in Warfield,⁴⁶ a

³⁹ Rushdoony, *Humanist Order*, audio.

⁴⁰ Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State*, loc. 1430.

⁴¹ Cope, *Business and Economics*, audio.

⁴² It is perhaps more accurate to argue that academic Protestantism generated a scholarly response to theological liberalism in what became the 4-volume set edited by Torrey (1917), but which had been published in various journals previously. This was eponymously named “The Fundamentals,” but this does *not* seem to be the origin of the term “fundamentalist” which was rather coined by newspaper columnists around the same time and referred to a particular style of populist, non-academic evangelist. I examine the issue of fundamentalism in my *Scripture and the Post-Darwinian Controversy*.

⁴³ Lawrence, *Defenders of God*, 27.

⁴⁴ Bahnsen, “Postmillennialism,” para. 1–5.

⁴⁵ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 35–44.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that Warfield (contra Barr) was *not* a fundamentalist himself, but an orthodox, conservative presbyterian of Princeton Theological Seminary. However, his defense of the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture, became formative for the fundamentalist position. Additionally, the commonsense realism so influential in the Princeton epistemology, meant it was very sensitive to the imperative of having a scientific respectability for the apologetic, see Macneil, *Foundations*, §3.5.4–3.5.6.

ring-fenced doctrine of inspiration that was beyond refutation, being based on an impeccable modern logical position bereft of any substantive appeal to religious experience.⁴⁷ 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*⁴⁸ 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 proper from social and intellectual action for approximately the period of 1920–1970.⁴⁹ The Reformed seminaries did not fare much better with the split of Machen from Princeton over its embrace of theological liberalism and then the subsequent splits from Machen over even finer points of doctrine, leading to a fragmentation of Presbyterianism in the US; and it was again to be the 1970s before Rushdoony was to offer his reformer's vision. Politically and culturally, secular humanism and its stepsister the “social gospel” movement were having it mostly its own way, and 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:

[EXT] “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.”⁵⁰ [/EXT]

⁴⁷ Warfield, “Inspiration” in *Writings Vol 2*.

⁴⁸ Torrey et al. *The Fundamentals*.

⁴⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* 49; Stott, *Involvement*, 13.

⁵⁰ Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, loc. 185.

[B]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 own secularizing and universalizing 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.”⁵¹

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 return and the counter reaction of modernism as postmodernists prophesied of its demise was swift.⁵² It was a particular totalizing and caustic counter-reaction of modernism to its alleged demise, dispensing with the nicety of reasoned discourse, to be replaced with, as we have previously seen, a relentless polemic and mockery of one’s opponents exemplified by the New Atheist polemic against *any*, and *all*, religion.

⁵¹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81.

⁵² Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81–82.

[B]Autophagia

Thus, the state of human civilization as the new millennium approached was characterized by “autophagic capitalism” and the bloody Marxist wreckage of the “rotting offal of modernity.”⁵³ This absolute descent of secular civilization into two world wars and multiple further conflicts, and the correlative pessimistic and cynical turn of evangelical Christian eschatological thought, demanded a response. The emergence of Rushdoony’s Reconstructionism in this period was the movement in which intellectual and social 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.

⁵³ McVicar (2015), 230

[A]The Emergence of Modern Dominion Theology

[B]Rushdoony and the Proto-Conservative Movement

It was at once the crisis within humanism and the collapse of evangelical Christian cultural philosophy that provided 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:

[EXT] “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 [/EXT]

The political context of Rushdoony’s early work was the coalescing of diverse political and big-business reactions into a proto-conservative movement in post-second world war America; it was 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 State.² This development of the American statism had subsequently accelerated greatly during the so-called “Warren Court”³ period of 1953–1969. Federal and judicial power was increased dramatically over the elected legislature at State level:

[EXT] “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) [/EXT]

In other words, the will of the community being expressed through its representatives was set aside for ideological reasons being prioritized by the federal government agencies.

¹ North & Demar, *Christian Reconstruction*, xiii.

² <http://www.history.com/topics/new-deal>

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

⁴ Sunstein, “Justice Breyer's Democratic Pragmatism,” 3–4.

The enormous moral imperative of the statist movement that lent it apparent legitimacy was the racial conflict within the Southern states that enabled the legitimization of aggressive centrist and federalist imposition on the individual legislatures who had resisted normalization 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 motivation 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 elitism, 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.⁷ The radical leftism of the federalists and the anti-Christian rhetoric of the ACLU was viewed by Rushdoony as evidence of their desire to marginalize Christians and an unconstitutional attack on First Amendment rights.⁸

For these reasons, Rushdoony had made 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 neighbor]” and:

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

⁶ Festenstein, “Dewey’s Political Philosophy.”

⁷ Missler, *The American Predicament*, audio. This may now be unavailable but updated versions are available from <https://resources.khouse.org/>, specifically 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.

[EXT]“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 [/EXT]

Fundamentally, these were organizations set on building a “big tent” conservative caucus around “traditional” Judeo-Christian values: individual liberty under a constitutional order and anticommunism.¹⁰ It was the first attempt at a Christian response to the moral energy borne out of the New Deal era and the 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.

[B]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 views 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.¹¹

Walter Rauschenbusch was the father of the Social Gospel movement and had come “face to face with oppressive poverty” during his pastorate in New York (1886–1897).¹² He argued for a theology with the intention of reshaping Christian belief and praxis such that “a

⁹ Toy, *Spiritual Mobilisation*, 80 n. 9; Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism*, 271.

¹⁰ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 48.

¹¹ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 23.

¹² Stott, *Involvement*, 25.

clear-eyed and continuous reconstruction of society” might take place.¹³ 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,¹⁴ saw the State and Church inextricably linked in a symbiotic relationship for the wider salvation of society.¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ He explicitly embraced socialism believing it represented the inevitable evolutionary track of human progress:

[EXT] “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.”¹⁷ [/EXT]

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

[EXT] “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 earth.”¹⁸ [/EXT]

¹³ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, loc. 2986.

¹⁴ It should be noted though that Dewey’s relationship to Christianity is an interesting one, he grew up in an evangelical home and worked for a decade (1884–94) under the auspices of the church in Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan Christian Association, attempting to wrestle with the social and political challenges within a Christian framework. By the turn of the century, he had departed, literally and figuratively from the Church becoming probably, within the US, the most influential humanist and intellect of the first half of the 20th century, known for his philosophical pragmatism, instrumentalism, theory of education, political activism, and being the first patron of the ACLU. Many consider his pragmatism as defining the overall tenor of American culture; though I would say many of the great industrialists within the West generally were operationally pragmatic, if not philosophically so. I discuss the wide-ranging influence of Dewey in *Foundations*, §2.6.6.

¹⁵ Of course, it might be argued that the Eusebian theology emerging from the 4th century merging of church and State after the accommodation of Constantine would be the historical and philosophical precursor of such a view. It was periodically attractive to Christian theologians until the State asserted its supremacy over the Church.

¹⁶ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, loc. 5418.

¹⁷ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, loc. 5678, 5850.

¹⁸ Rushdoony, *Institutes*, 450–451.

For Rushdoony, it was the family, rather than the church or the state that represented the fundamental organism of society, and where the authority and prerogative for change must come.

This difference became all the more evident as the movement which Rauschenbusch spawned did not maintain the Christian nuances and commitment to some degree of Christian orthodoxy that were clearly in his work and it became aggressively concerned with “social action” in the form of using the apparatus of the State pre-emptively.¹⁹ 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.

[B]Rushdoony and Anti-Statism

Thus, for the social gospel movement, the State became the primary *means* of institutional and social change, for Rushdoony the legitimate sphere was a narrow judicial one ensuring the just interpretation and application of God’s law.²⁰ To Rushdoony, the State only legitimately exists as the agency and not the source of law:

[EXT] “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 labor . . . the modern antichristian state claims jurisdiction from cradle to grave, from womb to tomb.”²¹ [/EXT]

¹⁹ He attempted a systematic exposition of his views in *A Theology for the social gospel*. Even considering the chapter titles, they would stand in stark contrast to a modern social gospel defense which would recast frameworks for “salvation” and “sin” from personal to societal contexts. The dedication in that work was to Augustus Hopkins Strong an influential Baptist theologian who was struggling to evolve Baptist theology in the light of Darwinism, whilst attempting to defend orthodox doctrines such as the virgin birth. As I have noted elsewhere, the bloody experience of the Russian revolution had an arresting effect, at least for a period, for those advocating for communism as societal salvation.

²⁰ Rushdoony, *Institutes*, 1–14.

²¹ Rushdoony, *Institutes*, 34.

For Rushdoony, taking philosophical inspiration from Kuyper's concept of "sphere sovereignty,"²² sociological reality was separated into distinct spheres or domains each of which had clearly defined boundaries and jurisdictions:

[EXT] "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."²³ [/EXT]

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."²⁴ He concluded that nothing short of a "broad Christian *communal* program" was required to facilitate the spiritual redemption and regeneration of the Indian peoples and the culture of the entire reservation.²⁵ 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 agency among

²² Kuyper, *Sphere Sovereignty*, 461–490.

²³ Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State*, 137.

²⁴ Rushdoony, "Noncompetitive Life" in *Faith and Freedom*, Vol I, no. 6. *Faith and Freedom* are archived at the Mises institute.

²⁵ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 1. Emphasis added.

many.”²⁶ 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 submitted to God:

[EXT] “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*”²⁷ [EXT]

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 a federal “abortion on demand” precedent in the 1973 Roe vs. Wade judgment.²⁸ He described modern Christianity’s relationship to the State as merely *tolerated* on the fringes of society with no significance for public life.

²⁶ Rushdoony, *Institutes*, 34.

²⁷ Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State*, loc. 141.

²⁸ 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. The justices “found” within the Constitution such principles through exotic and elaborate reasoning. Such judicial overreach and subverting of the anti-centralism of the Constitution, was a strong factor in Rushdoony’s hostility to federal action. In recent years, the first term of Trump’s administration was notable in the first reversal of such a “federal” decision, reversing the decision and delegating abortion as an issue for State level jurisdiction, denying any such right could be inferred federally from the Constitution.

Also significant in this respect is that in June 2024, although during the Biden era, “Trump’s” Supreme Court of the US also dismantled “Chevron Deference,” a foundational doctrine since 1984 which asserted the government agency’s *primacy* in interpreting “ambiguous” statutes, which had effectively given enormous powers of coercion to federal government agencies over State legislatures, often exploiting where Congress had crafted “deliberately ambiguous” language, see <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-happens-if-supreme-court-ends-chevron-deference>. The author of this piece was defending chevron deference in the interest of “government efficiency,” whereas Conservatives such as Rushdoony were always intensely hostile to it.

Churches were quiet and subservient that they might not lose their tax-exempt status granted to them at the behest of the state.²⁹ The separation of church and state was no longer interpreted in the Founder's terms of ensuring the church was free from political interference but rather as the state's grant to the church:

[EXT] "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."³⁰ [/EXT]

[B]The "Broad Social Program" and the Split with Mainline Conservatism

Although Rushdoony made a fundamental contribution post-war to the emerging conservative consensus, he was soon criticizing it for its lack of coherent philosophical vision.³¹ Its ethos was only *generally* Christian. In contrast, Rushdoony was to assert that a Christian people must attain "[Christian] epistemological self-consciousness."³² In other words, a comprehensive, distinctly Christian way of understanding, constructing and *living* in the world.³³ 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 clarity of vision caught the attention of some wealthy patrons and in the period 1957–1962 he developed his distinctive program.

²⁹ In response to criticism and political opposition from Christians, Senator (soon to become President) Johnson surreptitiously inserted a clause within a much larger bill that made it an offense for 501(c)(3) organizations from participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office at the pain of losing their tax exempt status. As a commentator noted, no one realized the clause was there until Johnson used it against his Christian opponents, but it proved a very effective *psychological* barrier to Church participation in the political realm. However, much like the later alleged "ban on prayer in schools," Christians for decades surrendered more than was necessary, a church *could* still be involved it would just pay tax and probably just needed the service of a competent accountant to minimize their liability, much as prayer and bible study could *still* occur in schools on a *voluntary* basis; the legislation was misrepresented for decades by humanist groups as having far stronger prohibitions than were legally present.

³⁰ Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State*, loc 219.

³¹ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 63–76.

³² McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 87.

³³ This was the locus of my doctoral studies and the book based upon them, *Foundations*.

Such was the cogency of his formulation that he was hired as the effective leader of a major conservative organization known as the Volker Fund (which became the Centre for American Studies in 1961) and attempted to move the entire organization to his explicit Christian program. However, amidst battles with non-Christian and more moderate Christians on staff he was fired by the new patron in September 1963. Though he had strong individual supporters within CAS, the consensus amongst staff regarding his program was that:

[EXT] “His entire . . . project . . . was a . . . religious exclusive [Calvinist] form of conservatism . . . It would be ‘catastrophic for big tent conservatism and [its] pro-business agenda.’”³⁴ [/EXT]

Thus, the consequence of Rushdoony’s uncompromising, distinctively Christian theological approach was his effective excommunication from the mainline conservative political and Christian organizations. 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.

[B]Epistemological Self-Consciousness³⁵

[C]The State as a Religious Institution

We have seen that for Rushdoony, anti-statism was fundamental to the sociological aspect of his program. 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”³⁶ of humanism and Christianity that provides us with the hermeneutic key to the philosophical underpinnings of Rushdoony’s

³⁴ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 72–78.

³⁵ What I sketched in outline in some subsequent sections regarding the philosophical underpinnings, I developed in detail during my doctoral studies which formed the basis of my *Foundations*.

³⁶ Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State*, loc 241.

Dominionism. The distinctiveness and strength of his program was that it was a coherent philosophical and theological program which he had described as “epistemological self-consciousness.”³⁷ 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.

[C]Van Tilianism

The basis of Rushdoony’s “epistemological self-consciousness” is Van Tilian apologetics. Van Til (1895–1987) became the first professor of apologetics at Machen’s breakaway Westminster Theological Seminary and is generally accepted to have originated a distinctive apologetic method during his career.³⁸ 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” and was concerned with the “facts” of apologetics, i.e., the unaided reason of a man or woman should be able to evaluate “evidences” for God’s operation in the world and by the *shared, common* human rational process be convinced by argumentation to a place of belief, vis-a-vis the “theistic proofs.”³⁹ Such an approach was based on a natural theology, suggesting a *common [intellectual] 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 [uninterpreted] facts.”⁴⁰

³⁷ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 87.

³⁸ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 3. Van Til remained in-post for almost fifty years, though emeritus in 1972, he still taught until 1979.

³⁹ For example, see ‘On Method’ in Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, ch.1. The treatment of “theology as a science” suggests presuppositions based upon Enlightenment humanist thought rather than Reformation thought. McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 163–200 engages in a lengthy analysis of the domination of Enlightenment thought within the old Princeton.

⁴⁰ Rushdoony, *Van Til*, loc. 234. As a matter of cross-reference, we were discussing earlier how philosophers of science were similarly rejecting “brute” facts and theories while Van Til was formulating his apologetic. He was arguing, like Quine, that “factuality” was intricately involved in your view of nature. He used a very different vocabulary (being from an idealist milieu) but had come to similar conclusions as the post-positivist philosophers of science. Van Til was not given sufficient credit in this regard as to how fine a philosopher he was (contra William Lane Craig), in addition to a theologian, and a Christian. I discuss this in much more detail in my *Foundations*.

Van Til followed Kuyper by uncovering the assumptions and fallaciousness 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 one stream of Reformation-thought that an *unregenerate* reason was fundamentally faulty.⁴¹ Luther had written in reply to Erasmus, “Lady Reason . . . a whore of sophistry . . . her babblings are folly and absurdity.”⁴² Though Calvin differed from Luther in assigning a greater significance to logic and philosophy (and thus reason), the Reformation principle of a rejection of the natural theology of Aquinas was similarly maintained and strengthened in Calvin: the *impossibility* of the reason of fallen humankind to reach God.⁴³ It was always the sovereign act of God which revealed himself to humankind, and apologetic philosophy was subject to scriptural theology.

Kuyper had interpreted the Reformation position to assert that there was a fundamental “antithesis between belief and unbelief.”⁴⁴ Knowledge and logic in their very form are structured differently, there is in principle no “common ground” possible for argumentation between the believer and unbeliever.⁴⁵ Van Til was seen to assent to Kuyper’s basic epistemological proposition expressing it thus:

⁴¹ The key qualifier here is *unregenerate*. Both Luther and Calvin *argued* and *reasoned* that the Catholic church was degenerate and had ceased to be faithful to the scriptures and the apostolic tradition. It was the persuasiveness and cogency of their reasoning that brought many to their side.

⁴² Luther, “De servo arbitrio [The Bondage of the Will]” (para 125, Latin) quoted in Smith, *Dialogues Between Faith and Reason*, 35.

⁴³ Holder, ‘John Calvin’, para 7–19.

⁴⁴ Edgar, “Introduction” in Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2.

⁴⁵ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 62. However, he permitted a conversation, the apologetic task, to communicate and create this self-conscious awareness. This important and subtle nuance, which I consider further in my *Foundations*, is that although in *principle* we develop two separate sciences which would seem to suggest no common ground exists (as was argued by Kuyper), in *practice*, the non-believer imports in a Christian conception of the world which permits a conversation to be had because of the inconsistency within the unbeliever’s worldview. The apologetic task then becomes this task of bringing the unbeliever to that place of realization, of “epistemological self-consciousness.” His view of scripture and natural revelation as at once “perspicuous” and “meaningless without one another” at once legitimizes philosophy and science but at the same time constrains it.

Van Til’s criticism was also directed at Barth and neo-orthodoxy. He exposed neo-orthodoxy’s inability to argue coherently for an objective Christian conception of knowledge for it placed the Christian conversion in a subjective, existential “crisis experience.” As Edgar commented in his introduction to Van Til’s *Christian Apologetics*, this is no safer an epistemological basis to build an apologetic strategy than what it intends to replace because of the import of the Kantian separation between realms, which is traditionally

[EXT] “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”⁴⁶ [/EXT]

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

[EXT] “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.”⁴⁷ [/EXT]

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 Plato) but as to something which has its origin in and dwells in the creature of God:

[EXT] “[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.”⁴⁸ [/EXT]

What is “fatal” for the apologetic task for Van Til is asserting 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.”⁴⁹ In other words, if the

understood as denying the faculty of reason entry into the realm of faith, thus denying the possibility of any objective proof for the existence of God and severely limits what of faith might be articulated using reason. Kant did attempt an exploration of this issue in his *Religion*, a work notable for an insight into Kant’s undoubted spirituality, and its infrequent mentions in Kantian scholarship.

⁴⁶ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 62.

⁴⁷ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 19–20.

⁴⁸ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 33.

⁴⁹ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 33.

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, at best, claims of warrant, probable truth, or of reasonable verisimilitude.⁵⁰ The best the Christian could hope for is an admission from non-Christians that there is sufficient warrant for their belief.⁵¹

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 willful obedience. Humanity's very constitution and desire to dominion is there because it is there within us as 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, to a greater or lesser degree, chooses to embrace the leadings of God's will within itself according to God's purpose, grace, and choosing. The will of God is established through the agency of the human will, but "it is the ultimate will or plan of the self-determinate God that gives determinate character to anything that is done by the human

⁵⁰ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, xi.

⁵¹ Indeed, Alvin Plantinga's entire philosophical project might be to establish the "justification, rationality, and warrant for Christian belief," Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, xi. He is firmly within, what is, arguably, an *Aristotelian* externalist, epistemological model, Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, x. His unique contribution to Reformed 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, *Analytic Theist*, 296–315) 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.

In updating this footnote after my doctoral work, I would now qualify further the assertion of a dependence on Aristotle given above, a careful reading of the reference to Plantinga's own words confirms this. It does not give Plantinga sufficient credit in his contribution to a distinctively Christian epistemology. It is true, that here he acknowledges the cogency of Quine's criticism of modal logic (which Plantinga was defending) as in some way relying on Aristotelian essences. However, that is rather different than what I have suggested here that his epistemology has a fundamental *dependence* on Aristotle, it is rather that he shares with Aristotle an *externalist* emphasis. He is far more directly dependent on Reid, but even then, he refined and fortified Reid to the degree he was recognized by his peers as making a major, original contribution to epistemology. Indeed, in part, my doctoral work explored the congruence of and differences between their philosophical approaches, asserting there is far more in common than is generally appreciated between Van Til and Plantinga, with both seeking an *explicitly Christian* epistemology, which happily I *do* mention above.

will.”⁵² Thus, for Van Til, dominion theology is the only theology possible because God’s first intention for the created humanity was dominion:

[EXT] “[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”⁵³
[/EXT]

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

[B]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 applies Van Til by insisting that societal reformation must be theonomical (Gk., *Theo* (God) + *nomos* (law)), derived from the law of God as revealed in scripture and not subject to the premises and prejudices of law derived from the autonomous (Gk. *autos* (self) + *nomos* (law)) reasonings of the human will.⁵⁴ So, Rushdoony developed Van Til’s apologetic in a very important way, and the novel character of this development is captured by North:

⁵² Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 36. This is a supremely Reformed apologetic, where God works *through* the agency of human free will. As I write in my *Foundations*, human will *is* free but never *independent* of its creator, God can always invade the will of his creature for his purposes; the Arminian position would argue that it can be wholly independent. The logical problem of the Arminian position was made clear by Van Til, if salvation was but a *possibility* and dependent on the will of men, all men *could* have chosen to reject the salvation of God, forever separating God from creation, an untenable position. However, the Arminian position *is* the one maintained by most evangelical Christians outside of the orthodox Reformed churches; the question really becomes, do *we* choose God, or does God *choose* us? I believe the latter, however uncomfortable that is.

⁵³ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 36. Amplification (marked n) was Edgar’s editorial note.

⁵⁴ We will examine in the next chapter that there was a sustained conflict within the orthodox Reformed seminaries over whether Van Til was a “theonomist” in the sense Rushdoony and Bahnsen began to use the term in its sociological sense, which is captured by Bahnsen in the ‘response to his critics’ that appeared in the revised edition of his *Theonomy*. However, Van Til *was* explicitly theonomical as an issue of theological principle, the only choice for men was *theonomy* or *autonomy*.

[EXT] “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.”⁵⁵ [/EXT]

Rushdoony 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, as we see in our analysis above, 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:

[EXT] “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 civilization 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.”⁵⁶ [/EXT]

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

[EXT] “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**

We will also see that Bahnsen and Van Til were extremely close, with Van Til indicating it was his desire that Bahnsen should replace him at his retirement and stated that Bahnsen had most clearly understood his position and thus was well placed to develop its social and political implications. Van Til’s wishes were not honored and Bahnsen’s time in academia was short, becoming an independent scholar and debater after a brief period at RTS, terminated prematurely over the controversy surrounding his *Theonomy*. Van Til also responded positively to Rushdoony in a festschrift written in his honor at retirement (*Jerusalem and Athens*, 348); Rushdoony was the earliest interpreter of Van Til to apply his work, (*By What Standard*, 1959).

⁵⁵ North and DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction*, xi–xii.

⁵⁶ Rushdoony, *Institutes*, 2, 5.

avenue of human thought, we end with the destruction of Christian theology and the deterioration of Christian life.”⁵⁷ (Emphasis added.) [/EXT]

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:

[EXT] “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.”⁵⁸ [/EXT]

That is, there are not separate dispensations of “law” and “grace” 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. Anyone who reads the Pentateuch will be struck with how many times the phrase “I am the LORD” appears after the giving of a statute or a commandment; this is not inviting a debate but is a declaration. It follows any *Christian* sociological order must necessarily be based upon the principles, and sometimes the details, of God’s law where they are not peculiar to the cultural situation of ancient Israel.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Rushdoony, *By What Standard*, 203.

⁵⁸ Rushdoony, *Institutes*, 3.

⁵⁹ This is the moderate theonomical position argued by Cope in both her *Old Testament Template* and her *God and Political Justice*. This would also appear to be the New Testament position, as the apostles did not expect the Gentiles to be bound by Jewish custom; a clear distinction in Christian scripture was made between the timeless moral content of the Law and the specific cultural applications of it. One of the most important qualifications Christians have to apply is that we do not live in a theocracy where the Lord rules over us directly. We would do well to pay attention to the principles, details and practice of the Law within our governments, but this needs to be argued for by our Christian political organizations that consent might be gained, rather than an imposition by a religious hegemony.

Nevertheless, it is *crucial* to recognize that for Rushdoony this is not a reversion to *legalism*, he is not claiming a man is *saved* by keeping the law. Rushdoony is rather emphasizing the sanctifying work of the law *after* the redemptive work of grace:

[EXT] “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) . . . ”⁶⁰ [/EXT]

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

[EXT] “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.”⁶¹ [/EXT]

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

⁶⁰ Rushdoony, *Institutes*,3.

⁶¹ Rushdoony, *Institutes*,3–4.

[A]The Dominionist Movement

[B]Overview

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

[B]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 recognized as "brilliant students," and both had studied under Van Til at Westminster Seminary.¹ They worked closely with Rushdoony and developed the platform which became known as "reconstructionism," and propagated his ideas into the mainstream of evangelical consciousness.

[C]Greg Bahnsen and Theonomy

Van Til had wanted Bahnsen to replace him when he retired from Westminster and Bahnsen had lectured for Van Til during a period of illness; 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 mandate. For Rushdoony, a failure to keep the law renders the

¹ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 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, *Theonomy*.) 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.

church impotent because it denies God's holiness and separates humanity from God's power.³ Bahnsen developed Reconstructionism from Rushdoony's base in great detail.

His thesis centered 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:

[EXT] "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) [/EXT]

The ethics for the Christian remain the same as for the old covenant believer, but how God enables us to keep the ethical law have changed, it is by the grace through Jesus Christ writing the law on our hearts:

[EXT] "... '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 [/EXT]

Fierce reaction to Bahnsen ensued from within the liberal, evangelical,⁸ and perhaps most surprisingly, from his own Reformed circles.⁹ There was a concerted campaign 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

³ Rushdoony, 'Foreword' in Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, vii–ix.

⁴ Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, 39–88.

⁵ Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, xv.

⁶ Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, 127.

⁷ Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, 46.

⁸ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 163.

⁹ Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, xiv.

¹⁰ North, *Theonomy*, xiii–xiv.

the controversy surrounding his theonomical views within the faculty led to the termination of his tenure.¹¹ He was not again to hold tenure in a major academic institution despite his brilliance and recognition as a skillful debater within mainstream academia.¹²

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* which he began as the means to distribute his written and recorded materials.¹³

[C]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 Calvinism and effectively dilutes, if not denies, classical Calvinism.¹⁴ Bahnsen's son indicated he believed his father would be sympathetic to *FV* whereas other past students have argued forcefully to the contrary.¹⁵ 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 theonomical viewpoint:

[EXT] "The strict Theonomists . . . say that [we] must implement the Mosaic law as it stands. The more moderate Christian Reconstructionists have said

¹¹ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 160.

¹² Stein and Bahnsen, "Does God Exist?", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anGAazNCfdY>

¹³ Website: <https://www.cmfnow.com/>. It is notable that most of this material is now available free of charge.

¹⁴ Bahnsen, 'Auburn Avenue Controversy,' 433.

¹⁵ Otis, *Danger In the Camp*, 431–51.

that the Bible as a whole, including the Mosaic law wisely applied in line with New Covenant principles, should be the guide.”¹⁶ [/EXT]

However, there are far more controversial aspects to the *FV* position, with even its most enthusiastic proponents recognizing it as a “paradigm shift” away from classical Calvinism, and into a more legalistic framework.¹⁷

[C]Gary North and the Tyler Reconstructionists

Gary North was first hired to edit the scholarly journal of Rushdoony’s Chalcedon foundation and published his seminal *Introduction to Christian Economics* in 1973.¹⁸ North excelled at developing economic theory becoming known as “the economist of the Reconstruction movement” and distilled Rushdoony’s dense narrative into practical tools.¹⁹ He presented these through a mixture of popular, polemical and scholarly publications targeted at the seminary, conservative political activist groups²⁰ and the layperson.²¹ His Institute for Christian Economics (ICE) was primarily responsible for the vast literary output of the Reconstructionist movement during the 1980s and 1990s.²²

His intention was for a relentless polemic and scholarly rebuttal of the movement’s critics within academia²³ and the development of practical programs and strategies to promote the Reconstructionist agenda at a grassroots political level.²⁴ He effectively founded a separate, political, militant, and publishing wing of the Reconstruction movement²⁵ based

¹⁶ Jordan, “A Theocratic Critique of Theonomy”, para. 1. As noted earlier, Cope argues for this more moderate position, and convincingly so. The real issue between the positions was the status of the penal sanctions, especially those mandating public execution. The strict theonomists argued for a literal application, an obviously controversial position.

¹⁷ This was discussed at length by Otis in *Danger in the Camp*.

¹⁸ North and DeMar, xiii. North passed away in 2022, aged 80. His website <https://www.garynorth.com/> is still active and maintained by some associates. It is an excellent resource for getting access to primary source material regarding Reconstructionism, he graciously replied to me when I found a dead link to his “free materials” when I was writing the thesis upon which this book is based.

¹⁹ Clarkson, ‘Christian Reconstructionism,’ entire issue.

²⁰ North et al, *Christian Resistance and Tactics of Christian Resistance*.

²¹ North, *Backward Christian Soldiers*, 190.

²² North, *Theonomy – An Informed Response*, xvi.

²³ North, *Christian Reconstruction*, xvii.

²⁴ He had come to this conclusion after interning for Senator Ron Paul. He viewed the inertia of national politics so large, that change could only come from the grassroots.

²⁵ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 182–87.

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 to the success of his strategies, his increasing reputation within Reconstructionism, and the growth of Reconstructionism’s influence on the wider evangelical consciousness.²⁶

[C]Schism and Reformation

During the early years of Tyler, North was still editing the Chalcedon journal, but he was to split ideologically with Rushdoony over the means for societal reformation and broke acrimoniously with him over a mix of personal and theological issues in 1981.²⁷ 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 model which became known as the “Tyler theology.”²⁸ However, the Tyler church and school had both unraveled by the end of the 1980s, being described by one important former member as an example of “Reconstructionist Ecclesiolatry.”²⁹

The Tyler men eventually left to their own projects and think-tanks, with Reconstructionism becoming an effective blend of Tyler, Bahnsen, and Chalcedon. Though much is made of the excesses of Tyler³⁰ and the break with Chalcedon,³¹ North and the other Reconstructionists were still to reference Rushdoony through their own works. Their tributes

²⁶ North was far more polyvalent than Rushdoony when it came to engaging with the evangelical Christian world outside of Presbyterianism, going so far as to be involved with charismatics and Pentecostals. Rushdoony had been extremely critical of charismatic Christianity when he had written his *Institutes* but later joined North ministering to these groups as the influence of Reconstructionism grew.

²⁷ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 192–4.

²⁸ Rushdoony, “Christian Reconstruction as a movement,” 9.

²⁹ Chilton, “Ecclesiastical Megalomania,” para 5.

³⁰ 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 at <https://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/sidefrm2.htm>.

³¹ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 220–21; Ice and House, *Blessing or Curse?* 18–19, 351–2.

to him at his passing in 2001 are testament to the intellectual and personal debt to him.³²

Thus, in the contemporary context, alongside second-generation Reconstructionist Gary DeMar's stewardship of the *American Vision*³³ foundation and the 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 the case for a period in the early 1990s.³⁴

[B]The Diversification of the movement

[C] “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 polarized 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 recognized that elements of Reconstructionism were being incorporated into revised fundamentalist, charismatic, and Pentecostal ideologies far from Reconstruction's Reformed roots:

[EXT] “[The] growing alliance between charismatics and Reconstructionists has disturbed Reformed Presbyterians almost as much as it has 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 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.”³⁵ **[/EXT]**

³² Rushdoony et al, “A Tribute to RJ Rushdoony.”

³³ <https://americanvision.org/> .

³⁴ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 221.

³⁵ North, “Reconstructionist Renewal,” newsletter.

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 its stinging criticism of charismatic Christianity. Both recognized a shift in the political and theological consciousness of evangelical Christians:

[EXT] “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 . . . ”³⁶[/EXT]

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 theonomical or Reconstructionist thinking.”³⁷

[C]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 movements³⁸ were the Schaeffers.³⁹

Francis Schaeffer, the elder Schaeffer, was one of the important US cultural figures of the

³⁶ North, *Unholy Spirits*, 12.

³⁷ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 201.

³⁸ Fallwell et al., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, 186–223.

³⁹ A succinct presentation is given by Edgar in <https://wm.wts.edu/magazine-articles/francis-schaeffer-and-his-global-influence>. As both Edgar and Bahnsen note, Schaeffer’s skill was to “translate every important theological concept into the vernacular” rather than in the academic rigor of his work; he did not write for the academy, but for the lay people. *L’Abri* was founded by him and his wife in 1955 as an experiment in communal living for the philosophical and religious pilgrims of the era, sitting now somewhere between informal colleges and Christian communities. There are still 11 sites around the world, <https://labri.org/>.

1960s and 1970s, and even more so for the modern evangelicals; he had also studied under Van Til in the 1930s, and had clearly taken some inspiration from him.⁴⁰ 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 1973.⁴¹

The younger Schaeffer, Franky, was a filmmaker and took his father’s words and turned them into films⁴² which reached a large audience and helped galvanize 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, as we have previously documented, 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 was brought into contact with Rushdoony’s works, quoted them in his work and recommended Rushdoony’s Chalcedon foundation to his evangelical audience.⁴³

[C]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

⁴⁰ However, Schaeffer never publicly acknowledged this, perhaps aware of the political and sectarian implications of doing so, though he was acknowledged by many important members of the Reconstructionist movement as doing “yeoman’s service” for the cause (North, *Christian Reconstruction*, xiii). As Bahnsen critiques in his *Presuppositional Apologetics*, 241–60, Schaeffer’s presuppositionalism was also qualitatively distinct from Van Til, owing far more to evidentialism than Van Tillianism.

⁴¹ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 173.

⁴² 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 politicized evangelicals.

⁴³ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 173–76. Franky suffered an existential crisis in the 1990s and retreated from his evangelical conservatism, offering public repentance for his previous radicalism. He tells his story in numerous works as seen on his Amazon author pages, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/stores/author/B000AP9HNQ>. “*To millions of evangelical Christians, the Schaeffer name is royal, and Frank is the reluctant, wayward, traitorous prince. His crime is not financial profligacy, like some pastors’ sons, but turning his back on Christian conservatives.*”—New York Times.

around 1906, had emphasized spiritual experience, the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, and was apocryphally related to the “enthusiasm” of the Welsh revival of 1904–5.⁴⁴

Pentecostalism fundamentally changed the spiritual dynamics of a section of the Protestant church and became the putative heirs of 18th century Arminian revivalism, emphasizing 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 Hagin⁴⁵ and the emergence of the “House Church” and Charismatic⁴⁶ movements in both Britain, America and Western Europe during the 1970s and 80s. 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 America⁴⁷ and the mega-churches of Africa and Asia.⁴⁸

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. However, by the mid-1970s, key leaders within the movements such as C Peter Wagner, Loren Cunningham, and Landa Cope began to reflect on this wider cultural irrelevance and the political impotence of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

⁴⁴ Joyner, *The Power to change the world*, loc 47; Johnson and Joyner, *Azusa Now Livestream*, 04.09.2016.

⁴⁵ The relation between Kenneth Hagin and the denominational Pentecostal movements was a tense one, though many American Pentecostals had worked with Hagin in his early days. As a “new wineskin,” Hagin eventually founded Rhema Bible College, which is the strongest, independent, international Bible college today. Hagin also heavily influenced a wing of the emerging prophetic movement of Bill Hamon. He was also foundational to ministries such as Kenneth Copeland Ministries and the River Church under Dr Rodney Howard Browne.

⁴⁶ Hamon. *The Eternal Church*, 239–61.

⁴⁷ Martin, “From pre- to postmodernity,” 107.

⁴⁸ Reinhardt Boonke, *Extra Impact newsletter*, Feb 2008.

For example, in a documentary study related by Cope⁴⁹ it was found that in the most “Christianized”⁵⁰ city of the United States (Dallas, Texas) there was found to be no improvement in drug addiction or homelessness, and divorce was at equivalent or greater rates than non-Christian communities. What provoked Cope more than anything else was that when the local spiritual leaders of the community had been challenged, they held that none of this was their concern for they were “spiritual leaders.”⁵¹ Thus, the paradox seen by Wagner, Cope, Cunningham, and others like them 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” mandate.⁵² However, Wagner had explicitly adopted the language of “dominion theology” and was clearly influenced directly by Reconstructionism, though he attempted to distance himself explicitly from the theocratic elements of the Tyler theology.⁵³ In fact, the perceived similarity to Reconstructionism was so obvious that Wagner himself testifies, “Some wanted me ousted from Christendom – immediately!”⁵⁴ In reaction, it is arguable that he softened his view and rebranded his ministry to a degree in mitigation to the hostility aimed at him, but he remained clear that:

[EXT] “[The] 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

⁴⁹ Cope, *Old Testament Template*, 21–23.

⁵⁰ Where “Christianized” was defined as evangelical, and attendance was mid-week as well as Sunday to distinguish it from traditional and formal attendance.

⁵¹ Cope, *Old Testament Template*, 23.

⁵² McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 200.

⁵³ Wagner, *Dominion!* 12–17.

⁵⁴ Wagner, *On Earth*, 7.

[element] underlying the sincere opposition by some to Dominionism.”⁵⁵

[/EXT]

Wagner is also important because of his links with John Wimber of the “Power Evangelism” movement, perhaps the most famous of the 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 Wimber suspended the church from the Vineyard association which provoked the corresponding response from the Arnotts of withdrawing themselves from the Vineyard covering completely, establishing a fully independent prototype Church for the Fifth Wave. Key members of this movement signed on to a “Reformer’s pledge”⁵⁶ which was a conciliatory articulation of Wagner’s “dominionist” position in response to the criticism that had been levelled at it from within the charismatic and Home-church movements.

[B]Summary

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

⁵⁵ Wagner, *On Earth*, 8.

⁵⁶ Wagner et al., *The Reformer’s Pledge*.

distancing themselves from “extremism” by never publicly acknowledging the Reconstructionist influence.⁵⁷

That is, 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 (Reconstructionist, post-millennialists, Dominionist, theonomist, “Kingdom Now”, Business as a Mission, Discipling Nations, New Apostolic Age, Christian Nationalism, and some fellow-travelers within the Hamonite prophetic movement) as *species*. The days of evangelical movements as being politically neutral and considering it “unimportant” were largely ended during this period.⁵⁸ The next chapter examines the ferocious critique of Dominionism and explains why many preferred to distance themselves, publicly at least, from Rushdoony’s Reconstructionism.

⁵⁷ “Never” may be too strong an adjective here, but only marginally so. A full-length book by a charismatic leader (Hamon, *The Eternal Church*) purporting to be a modern history of the church gave Reconstructionism a single sentence; another book by a group of charismatic leaders on the imperative for societal reform (Wagner, *Reformer’s Pledge*) gave a single obfuscated reference to the movement.

⁵⁸ Though I argue in my *Politics* that a dangerous reaction to partisan political involvement amongst believers is to slip back into a sophisticated, spiritualized, politically agnostic indifference that is of equivalent, if not, greater danger because of its reasoned basis. In particular, many British evangelicals find US Christian support for Trump, or right-wing conservatism generally, unacceptable. This, as I argue in my *Politics*, reflects the European addiction to socialism, which permeates the big government models of Europe.

[A]The Critiques of Dominion Theology

[B]Overview

Dominion theology was always controversial and Bahnsen suffered a sustained attack over his *Theonomy* from its publication date in 1977; the dispute over the work eventually led to his ‘dismissal’ from RTS.¹ However, that was more of an issue of Reformed theology and localized in that movement. It was attacked in a far more broad and systematic manner from 1987 to 1990 both from within lay Christianity and from within multid denominational seminaries. As McVicar demonstrates, these later attacks formed the basis of a critical narrative that was used in virtually every subsequent attack on Reconstructionism and dominion theology.² These attacked Dominionism in two main ways: [LL a-b]

- a. It’s optimistic eschatology.
- b. It’s Theonomy. [/LL a-b]

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

[B]Eschatological Criticism

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

¹ Reformed Theological Seminary, Mississippi. Technically, Bahnsen was not dismissed, his contract was just not renewed – RTS at the time employed everyone on single year contracts; but it was exceptionally unusual to be terminated outside of misconduct. Bahnsen had even been an associate professor there as a postgraduate student studying for a PhD from 1976; he graduated PhD in 1978 and was ‘dismissed’ in 1979. His academic record was exceptional, and he was a gifted teacher; there was clearly deeper reasons. His own, initially private and extensive account of what happened is found here: <https://store.americanvision.org/products/greg-bahnsen-what-really-happened-at-reformed-theological-seminary-rtss> .

² McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 203–205.

are attacked because they are or sound like postmillennialists. House and Ice in criticizing Reconstructionism make the blanket statement, “one cannot be a Reconstructionist and a premillennialist.”³ Similarly, Hal Lindsey, author of the most populist eschatological works of the 1970s and 1980s wrote:

[EXT] “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’ . . . ”⁴ (Emphasis added)

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

[EXT] “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 . . . ”⁵[/EXT]

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: [LL a-c]

- a. The viewpoint is “not apostolic” thus implicitly invalid for the Christian loyal to the historic faith.
- b. Whitby-ism (after Daniel Whitby, the “founder” of postmillennialism) was philosophically humanistic, liberal, and non-Christian.
- c. It is based on a subjective, figurative interpretation of prophecy.⁶ [/LL a-c]

A famous and radical rejection of Dominionism based on points (a) and (b) was found in Dave Hunt’s triplet *Whatever Happened to Heaven, The Seduction of Christianity*, and

³ House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 7.

⁴ Lindsay, *Late Great Planet Earth*, 164–65.

⁵ Lindsay, *Road to Holocaust*, 25.

⁶ Walvoord, *Millennium Issue*, 23.

Beyond Seduction. Hunt's thesis was that the dominion movement was adopting "worldly" aims of personal success using "carnal" methods of positive confession and self-fulfillment. These, he posited, 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 for Hunt was to be considered exclusively 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 (which is evangelism), and is ultimately a demonic seduction to engage in culture with a view to transformation:

[EXT] "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 [/EXT]

Hunt epitomized the mainstream evangelical theological reaction to Dominionism. Modern evangelicalism in the 1980s was becoming increasingly dispensationalist in its commitments, and the "Rapture" was a popular, publicly prominent article of faith, with many expecting the grand departure of the church in 1988.⁹ This increasingly dominant stream of evangelicalism had inherited an instinctive suspicion of social programs and political involvement from the early fundamentalists, who had historically viewed it as a "distraction" from the work of evangelism. McVicar summarizes this view as representative of the belief that Dominionism was a "hubristic . . . attempt to Christianize a chronically un-Christianizable world."¹⁰ More sophisticated critiques employing the same basic ideas were

⁷ Hunt, *Beyond Seduction*, 262. A similar thought has been restated recently in Stark, *Prophets*.

⁸ Hunt, *Seduction*, 224.

⁹ This was based on a specific interpretation of Mat 24:32–34. The "fig tree" is taken to symbolize the nation of Israel. The "becomes tender and puts out leaves" is the reformation of the nation, which occurred in 1948. A "generation" in Israel was 40 years, so the generation that sees the reformation of the state of Israel was the Rapture generation. Impeccable and full of prophetic insight, but catastrophically incorrect.

¹⁰ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 206.

presented to the neo-evangelical¹¹ academy and laity by a broad coalition of liberal and moderate evangelicals:

[EXT] “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 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.”¹² [/EXT]

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

[B]Theonomical Criticisms

[C]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.”¹³ Coverage within both the secular and Christian press became sensationalist 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 teenagers.¹⁴ Much was made of Bahnsen’s view that every “jot and tittle” of the Law was binding for the New Testament believer to the extent he formally responded to it on multiple occasions.¹⁵

¹¹ The distinction between “neo-evangelical” and “post-evangelical” is examined in Appendix A.

¹² Colson, “The Power Illusion,” 34.

¹³ North and DeMar, *Reconstruction*, xiii.

¹⁴ Yurica, “The Despoiling of America,” blog post; Longman, “God’s Law,” 41, 44; House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 63–64.

¹⁵ House and Ice, *Dominion*, 20, 103. 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 criticize Gary North of “logical fallacy” (Bahnsen, “Another Look at Chilton’s Days of Vengeance”) without a ferocious response from North.

Within the American context, there had been the suspicion that theonomical 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 articulated by charismatics who had otherwise adopted large portions of Reconstructionism’s program.¹⁶ Theonomists were thus portrayed as anti-democratic and anti-American rather than just defective on issues of theological principle.¹⁷ 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

It was argued that ‘Theonomists’ were un-evangelical because of their emphasis on law, political, and civic engagement rather than “saving souls.” This sounded very like a recapitulation of Hunt’s criticism, and the criticism of House & Ice. In other words, *this* was the *central* objection to the Reconstructionist position. The pressure from mainstream neo-evangelicalism was such that Pat Robertson denied any formal links with the movement during his presidential bid of 1998 despite having hosted Rushdoony and North numerous times during the 1980s on his flagship *700 Club*.

Bahnsen’s second edition of *Theonomy* appeared in 1984, seven years after the first edition; he added a lengthy second preface as a response to his critics, xi–xxxiii. He was to publish much longer rebuttals as *By This Standard* (1985) and as *No Other Standard* (1991); the latter dealt more directly with the critics, the former was more of a lay summary of the academic *Theonomy*; however, in the Foreword to the former, he mentions the latter, so there was a considerable delay in publication probably because of the drama surrounding his work and his struggles with his denomination.

His *magnum opus* was his *Van Til’s Apologetic*, an extensive commentary on and readings from Van Til which was completed shortly before his untimely death in 1995; it appeared in 1998. A further posthumous work *Presuppositional Apologetics* was in proofing when he passed and remained ‘lost’ for over thirty years, only being rediscovered when his office was cleared some sixteen years after his death. This was published in 2008 and was a development of chapters X and XI of the multi-authored work *Foundations of Christian Scholarship* of 1976.

As these essays were written at the beginning of the controversy over his work and Bahnsen worked on them as he went through the various controversies and emerged out the other side, the final editor of the manuscript viewed it as Bahnsen’s most important work, the systematic interpretation of Van Til he had sought to bring out in the *Apologetic* (*Presuppositional Apologetics*, vii.) On this point, Van Til considered Bahnsen to be the best representative of his position, and he was certainly the most rigorous philosophical and theological defender of the Reconstructionist positions.

¹⁶ Wagner, *On Earth*, 11–16.

¹⁷ McVicar, *Rushdoony*, 202–205.

¹⁸ Clapp, “Democracy as Heresy.” Graham was still actively involved in the magazine at this point, and this condemnation would have appeared authoritative to many evangelicals unsure about the movement.

[C]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 taught.¹⁹ It was 10 years in the making and was thus intended and expected to be a theologically rigorous and authoritative critique of Dominionism. We will evaluate this assertion in the section below when 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 expressed with the Hunt-like appeal to piety “[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:

[EXT] “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

[/EXT]

[B]Assessing the criticisms

[C]Eschatological criticisms

We noted first that House and Ice in criticizing Reconstructionism made the blanket statement, “one cannot be a Reconstructionist and a premillennialist.”²¹ This, on the face of it, is a categorical statement that was even theologically implausible when it was written, for we have already argued classical premillennialism was triumphant in its eschatology; and many modern premillennialists within the Word of Faith and Pentecostal movements believe in social reform and do hold the two positions in an *operational* sense. The most we need concede is that the theology may seem muddled and unintuitive to those like Walvoord and

¹⁹ Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy*, 10.

²⁰ Clair Davis, “A Challenge to Theonomy,” 398–99.

²¹ House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 7.

Pentecost in critiquing it from a premillennial perspective. This is reversible logic though; the reciprocal view has also been expressed: there have been plenty of Reconstructionists like Bahnsen and Gentry who have argued it is “schizophrenic” to claim to be Reconstructionist and yet to try to cling to a premillennial dispensationalism.²²

Both sides of the argument then, apparently converge in agreement that either inflection of the argument might be considered incoherent, but this is mitigated because the primary *theological* problem is the *dispensationalist* element, rather than the premillennial aspect. Indeed, other premillennialists have explicitly argued that premillennialism and reconstructionism are not fundamentally at odds with each other.²³ That is, for clarity, what should have been said was that “one cannot be a Reconstructionist *and* a modern dispensationalist” which, as we have seen, has as one of its central distinctives an intensely pessimistic and cynical perspective regarding culture generally. Modern amillennialism might also be a better fit in this same category, with its pessimistic cultural indifference, as might some modern “prophetic” viewpoints that argue for agnosticism to sociopolitical conditions.²⁴ Thus, in summary, the eschatological arguments are very weak and do not prove what they claim, it is perfectly permissible to be a premillennialist and a reconstructionist. Indeed, with the extension of Dominionism into the wider evangelical consciousness, it might be argued this is now the more *common* position amongst the Pentecostals and Word of Faith denominations.

Next, we considered Lindsay as a very popular writer of the 1970s and 1980s, and the *ad hominem* assault of his that no “self-respecting” scholar would be postmillennial. It is tempting to assert that this can be simply dismissed as an ignorant insult; there are plenty of “self-respecting” scholars who are postmillennial. These scholars, and I count myself

²² Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*.

²³ Schnittger, “Christian Reconstruction.”

²⁴ Stark, *Prophets, Politics & Nations*. A critical response to this perspective was the basis of my *Politics*.

amongst them, feel that the overall arc of scripture pushes in an optimistic and victorious consummation of the church prior to the return of the Lord as King, even if the premillennial thesis has biblical literalism on its side. Indeed, it could readily be argued that Lindsay's apocalyptic prognostications of Rapture and Nuclear Armageddon through the 1970s and 1980s, all of which failed, render his scholarship as of insufficient quality that no "self-respecting" scholar would consider it worthy of serious attention, unless it was yet another case study in the sociological and psychological pathology surrounding the Rapture and Armageddon.

However, his claim that it lends itself to antisemitism and a Jewish Holocaust, requires further examination because of the seriousness of the charge. First, on Lindsay's own admission, he was merely picking up on the speculative appendix to House and Ice²⁵ (who he quoted 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 antisemitism and the Holocaust. Firstly, this has some enormous leaps of logic, and it is hardly defensible that the "historical root" of antisemitism is essentially related to replacement theology. Secondly, Sloyan, as a Jewish intellectual and writer for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, establishes definitively that the roots of *modern* antisemitism are ethnic and racial animosity to the Jews, the religious component growing weaker with the passing of the centuries.²⁶

Anti-Jewish hatred has often centered around the perceived *economic* advantage of the Jews that served as the template for the broader antisemitism. Hitler assaulted the Jews because he felt in doing so, he would protect the racial, social, and economic integrity of the German republic, any religious element was subsidiary and only useful as providing some

²⁵ House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 397.

²⁶ Sloyan, *Christian Persecution*.

kind of moral compensation for the atrocity.²⁷ However, and more importantly, we now have the benefit of a gap of 35-years to test Lindsay's thesis that Reconstruction leads to 'holocaust' and antisemitism; it has simply been shown in the years subsequent his positing of this thesis, as with his other eschatological theses considered above, to have been historically *incorrect*.

Whilst there are undoubtedly those who are Dominionists which Lindsay presents as anti-Semitic in language, it seems equally true there are those who he does not mention such as Schlissel who are Dominionists, Jewish, and have added an additional element to Reconstructionist theology that recognizes the importance of prophetic Israel.²⁸ In summary, Lindsay's attack was novel and ambitious but logically tenuous and seems clearly without theological rigor:

[EXT] "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 antisemitic?"²⁹ [/EXT]

Of more substance were the academic critiques of Walvoord. The main assertion of Walvoord was that postmillennialism "cannot attain a system of theology." However, though argued at length by Walvoord, it has been demonstrated that it can not be sustained on careful examination, and Walvoord's methodology became questionable under critique. Bahnsen

²⁷ The popularity of the fictional 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' (1903), alleging that there was a worldwide Jewish conspiracy to control the world, was not limited to Russia where it first appeared but was popularized by some European and US industrialists (such as Henry Ford, whose 'assembly line' was inspirational for Hitler), thus lending it credibility, despite it being quickly discredited as a forgery.

²⁸ Schlissel, "Reconstructionism," 56–61.

²⁹ Schlissel, "Reconstructionism," 59.

characterized Walvoord's process as "newspaper exegesis" employing an abandonment of Reformed principles of exegesis to accommodate the "signs of the times."³⁰ He returns with interest Walvoord's dismissive theological criticism:

[EXT] "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 that Christ has not yet returned disproves the Bible's teaching that such an event shall take place!"³¹[/EXT]

Bahnsen then argued further at great length that there was a "prima facie" case to recognize postmillennialism consistently within the history of the Church. Similarly, Bahnsen, Gentry and Rushdoony, all made the case that it is just *historically* disingenuous to present postmillennialism as the modern aberration when dispensationalism most certainly has a history and theology that can be traced back *no earlier* than 1820–1830.³² Most importantly, it becomes evident that the major error of Walvoord, in seeking to ensure the cogency of his critique, is that he seems to assume a seamless transition into dispensationalism from classical premillennialism which is emphatically *not* the case, as we argued in an earlier chapter. Further, Gentry has also mounted a substantive theological and exegetical defense of postmillennialism.³³ Likewise, Bahnsen and Gentry have individual and joint works where they emphasized the novel character of dispensational thought and the poor quality of scholarship as characteristic of the modern dispensational premillennialism.

³⁰ Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, 7, 96.

³¹ Bahnsen, "Postmillennialism," 10.

³² Bahnsen, "Postmillennialism," 7; MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot*, viii.

³³ Gentry, *He Shall Dominion*.

Taken together, this body of work has certainly met the challenge of Walvoord to present a “system of theology.”

Bahnsen is even more specific on this last point by highlighting important figures within the dispensationalist movement (Newton, Zahn, Darby) had views that implicitly advocated such an abdication of social responsibility, because it was an inevitable conclusion from their logic of an apostate ‘Laodicean’ dispensation to which the Church had now entered. This became explicit with the first wave of fundamentalists denouncing it as a “distraction” from evangelism. The schism with classical premillennialism is obvious at that point. There were even contemporary classical premillennialists such as Schnittger who claimed that dispensationalism had produced a deadly malaise within the arena of social and political action.³⁴ Schnittger, a premillennialist, but also self-confessedly a reconstructionist (and thus a living, breathing contradiction for some of Reconstruction’s critics), 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.³⁵

He elegantly makes the point that whilst he can judge the “postmils” as wanting in their allegorical use of prophecy, this does not invalidate the theological verity of their overall focus of the victory in Jesus, and the increasing glory manifesting within the Church as history progresses.³⁶ This focus, as we have also previously demonstrated, was the classical premillennialist view also.³⁷ Thus an answer is also provided here to neo-evangelicalism’s view that historical optimism or triumphalism reflects an import of non-

³⁴ Schnittger, *Christian Reconstruction*, 9–10.

³⁵ Schnittger, *Christian Reconstruction*. This was originally a radio program pamphlet intended for a self-study group.

³⁶ Schnittger, *Christian Reconstruction*, 6. Recent work by “postmils” such as Gentry and Mathison is of a much higher exegetical quality.

³⁷ Schnittger, *Christian Reconstruction*, 13.

Christian psychological ideas into the church. It was rather an expression of the Reformation that reestablished the principles of vocational domains and an ever-increasing glory within the Church. In the light of this overall pattern of reasoning, the bankruptcy of the dispensationalist position is seen at its worst, as we consider that the neo-evangelical analysis of Hunt 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 honor God's law.³⁸

However, some further academic criticism is worthy of further attention. We must recognize the validity of Riddlebarger's qualification that there are issues of nomenclature which postmillennialists tend to minimize in order to claim many who may be more historically judged to have been amillennialists.³⁹ The obvious cases of questionable appropriation here are Augustine and the early reformers, Luther and Calvin.⁴⁰ This tendency is clearly seen in Bahnsen's essay, the work of Kik⁴¹ and that of Boettner.⁴² However, taking a step back, the debatable ascriptions can furnish further proof for *our* argument rather than detracting from it. The argument *we* have made is that there was a shift in thinking for both premillennialists and amillennialists away from their historical positions emphasizing victory to culturally pessimistic and spiritually pietistic ones. Riddlebarger has correctly identified this change, but it does not defeat the central concept that the victorious mode of thinking now associated with postmillennialism had historical precedent within the history of the Church.

³⁸ It is of note that Hunt wrote a number of works directly attacking Calvin as a "tyrant," and that Calvinism misrepresented God, principally *What Love Is This?* He had modern Dominionism in mind as he wrote them; indeed, according to the backmatter, it was *why* he wrote it.

³⁹ Riddlebarger, "Princeton and the Millenium." <http://www.mountainretreat.org.net/eschatology.html> .

⁴⁰ It might seem strange to assert that the early Reformers were his putative heirs with a gap of around a 1000 years between them, but as Pawson in his *Seminars* (audio) notes, Calvin might "merely" have been conceived of "writing down the theology of Augustine in a systematic manner." I consider the relation more fully in *Epistemological Self-Consciousness*, 10–12.

⁴¹ Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 3–15.

⁴² Boettner, *Postmillennialism*, loc. 162.

We consider next the neo-evangelical Colson's attack on the Dominionists, which was a stream well represented both within the academy and the popular Christian press. Colson had a rhetorical pattern like that of Hunt, a fellow neo-evangelical, who we have mentioned earlier in the discussion. It 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 Pentecostals were initially persuaded by Jimmy Swaggart's concurrent accusation of Reconstructionism as "liberation theology in disguise."⁴³ Similarly, as we noted, Colson's appeal to the pluralism of Kuyper was novel and pointed knowing the influence of Kuyper on Rushdoony; as was his important and correct distinction between the role of the private and the governmental.

However, contra Colson, Rushdoony *had* clearly distinguished between Kuyper's theological and political legacies. He had also very clearly understood the distinction, like Lloyd-George after him, of the role of private Christian citizen and the Christian in government. Far from being a modern crusader eager to impose a theocracy, Rushdoony was family-centric and believed in a State small and focused solely on its primary tasks of providing a mechanism of justice, and of securing the borders of the nation. He viewed families and communities accountable to God before the State or the Church. Where Rushdoony was critical of modern Western democracies it was because of their humanism rather than democracy *per se*.

⁴³Swaggart'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 realizing he was a postmillennial Reconstructionist. Robert Tilton's charismatic television ministry networked by deliberate act thousands of charismatic ministers with the 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 (see North, *Unholy Spirits*, 392).

Similarly, Rushdoony elsewhere had argued for a Christian basis for American history and his sociological model was not an ecclesiocratic one. This was not the revival of either a Catholic or Protestant hegemony. Rather this is a full participation in the processes of governance and the progress of the humanities and the sciences. For both Rushdoony and Lloyd-George, the Christian did not cease to be a Christian because he was in government, but his Christianity had to inform his very practice within government. This is why Kuyper, at the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam⁴⁴ which he had founded, famously exploded the myth of the “secular” and the “religious,” declaring “there is not an inch of creation over which the Lord Jesus Christ does not declare ‘Mine.’” Most pointedly, the focus of the University right from the beginning was not just on “theological” studies, but on scientific and technological ones as well, reflecting Kuyper’s philosophy of “sphere sovereignty.”⁴⁵

Similarly, Lloyd-George had argued vigorously through the 1960s for Christians who were both experts in their domains *and* scripturally literate, it was the duty and task of the Christian professional association to work out how their Christianity should affect the working of their profession.⁴⁶ 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 of the world 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 necessity, they have adopted aggressive political activism and the rhetoric of victory and societal change.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ A very brief but informative history is found on the university website at: <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/history>.

⁴⁵ This is clearly explicated in his *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898) and an essay in Bratt’s *Centennial Reader*, “Sphere Sovereignty.”

⁴⁶ Lloyd-George, *Commentary on Romans 13*.

⁴⁷ North, *Unholy Spirits*, 388–89.

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 marginalized 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 culture.⁴⁸ This “New Wine” Dominionism may lack the coherence and abrasiveness of a Rushdoony or North, preferring a “compassionate Reformers” mantle but it is now the new normal for the reformer or activist, be they evangelical, charismatic or Pentecostal. Thus, for the neo-evangelicals, their attack was ultimately based on straw-man arguments.

[C]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 a philosophical dogmatism, with the critics appealing instead to a pluralistic epistemology derived from natural law. For Bahnsen, it was almost trivial to dismiss the first part of this charge. *Legalism* is the saving by works but Theonomy is seen as the *means* of the ministration of grace for sanctification:

[EXT] “[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.”⁴⁹ [/EXT]

That is, 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 *was*.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Birch-Machin, *Speakers of Life*, 16; Coates, *Kingdom Now!* 18.

⁴⁹ Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, loc. 200.

⁵⁰ Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, xx–xxvii.

Both Bahnsen and Rushdoony had anticipate this mode of criticism and thoroughly refuted it in advance.⁵¹

The second part of the criticism was also swiftly dealt with. It is important to recognize 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:

[EXT] "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?"⁵² [/EXT]

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

[EXT] "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."⁵³ (Emphasis added.) [/EXT]

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 recognized 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 realm⁵⁴ using Rushdoony's framework.⁵⁵ This he elaborated in the preface to his second edition of *Theonomy* stating that when he spoke of the "jot and the

⁵¹ Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 89, 297, 499.

⁵² Machen, "The Importance of Christian Scholarship," 91.

⁵³ McDade, "The Problem with Christian Reconstruction", 2.

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ North, *Theonomy*, 17.

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.”⁵⁶ 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.”⁵⁷

An autonomous realm of Humankind is antithetical to the Reformed faith. Thus, Theonomy, understood philosophically is the theological, logical, and temporal continuity between *all* scripture and *all* human life. That is, if someone consistently follows the logic of scripture, the same conclusions about the implications of the Law for Christian ethics can be arrived at by those not sharing the denominational Reformed heritage. Thus, Cope, one of the founders of YWAM stated it thus:

[EXT] “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 . . . ”⁵⁸[/EXT]

⁵⁶ Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, xiv–xv.

⁵⁷ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 127.

⁵⁸ Cope, *God and Political Justice*, loc. 306, 484, 1190, 1199.

[B]Summary

In summary then, we must concur with North that Westminster's attempts at refutation were simply the "worst writing"⁵⁹ by 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 the political and social implications of their own historical Reformed heritage restated with logical clarity by their institutional founder and their first professor of apologetics, and worked out in detail sociologically by *their* finest students of a generation.⁶⁰ It is a historical fact that none of critiques of dominion theology proved fatal for the movement. Theologically and rhetorically, the Reconstructionists had anticipated the criticisms and answered them quickly and forcibly in print. The academic response to Westminster's "critique" was of a far more rigorous and researched quality as evidenced by the editors' extended rebuttal and exposure of the former's poor academic quality.⁶¹

However, that was not to say that the decade and a half of ferocious criticism had no consequences. Bahnsen was never to teach within a Reformed seminary after his dismissal, becoming an independent scholar and starting his own study center. After his premature death, some new colleges and seminaries did attempt to continue his legacy, and some of his most notable students are working today in Reformed contexts derived from those new institutions. The most noticeable more general negative effects of the level of publicity generated by the criticisms were for some to disassociate from what were considered the most "extreme" of Reconstructionist views with leaders such as the elder Schaeffer and Fallwell failing to give the Reconstructionists any credit for the platform built on their foundation. Thus, it accentuated the differences between Reformed and the evangelical dominion theologies of say Wagner with the latter clearly attempting to publicly distance themselves

⁵⁹ North, *Theonomy*, 11.

⁶⁰ North, *Theonomy*, 321–322.

⁶¹ North, *Theonomy – An Informed Response*.

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 by the critics.

Finally, 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. Thus, consequently, in the contemporary milieu, it is rare for the term “Reconstructionism” to be used, but its ideas and programs are very much alive.

From a theological perspective, each of the criticisms considered above appear to reduce to a variation on the classic fundamentalist position that somehow political involvement will “contaminate” the gospel message and Christians should avoid such involvement for that reason. Stated in that fashion, it should be clear that such a position is *prima facie* unacceptable and unscriptural, believers are called to be salt and light, and to “occupy [do business] till [Jesus] comes.” It is also true that virtually no major Christian thinkers in history have maintained that position and others such as Machen and Finney have argued passionately against it; the withdrawal of the Fundamentalist movement from the wider culture was an aberration in Christian history.

It should again be accepted that society cannot be changed or improved without political engagement and representation of the Christian view in the organs of power and at all the different levels of governance, from school, local community, county, state, and parliament. It is to how the Christian should engage that we now turn with the help of the most distinguished British intellectual evangelical of the post-WWII period, Dr Martin Lloyd Jones (d. 1981), recognized as one of the finest expositional preachers ever. We develop our political philosophy with his assistance in the next chapter, and we demonstrate the scriptural basis for our involvement.

[A]Applying Dominion Theology - The Philosophy of Christian Involvement¹

[B]Overview and Prerequisites

In the previous chapters, we have explored the history and development of Dominion Theology, establishing its pedigree and its orthodoxy. The aim of this chapter is to build a case for a revival of the position that champions the active political and wider cultural involvement by those who hold to Dominion Theology, attempting to prove not just the divine prerogative of our involvement, but what the governing principles of our involvement should be. Thus, we examine what is the locus of the practical problem for Christians: the role and interpretation of Romans 13. We have already learnt that arguments as epistemologically self-conscious² Christians *must* be done on a scriptural basis at *every* step:

[EXT] “[Christian Philosophy] must always be based on an accurate interpretation of the teaching of the Scriptures. For some . . . there is a danger they may derive their knowledge more from [secular, unbelieving] philosophy than from a careful study of the Scriptures. They tend to extract just a certain number of great principles from the Bible and from there on they more or less forget the Bible and work the application out for themselves . . . True theology should always be based upon a careful and accurate exegesis and exposition and understanding of the Scriptures . . . we do not derive any theological principle from one scriptural statement only.”³ [/EXT]

Thus, we are in complete agreement with the *sense*⁴ of what Lloyd-Jones asserts, disputes of praxis need to be resolved by exegeting the objective text of scripture rather than just

¹ This is a modified version of material found in both my *Politics* and *Foundations*.

² What is meant by this term is worked out in my *Foundations*. In brief, the term implies we have a coherent Christian worldview where our metaphysics (our conception of the real), theory of knowledge (epistemology), and ethics (how we should then live) are logically consistent with each other.

³ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 16–17.

⁴ Whilst Lloyd-Jones maintains a strong distinction between philosophy and theology which I have argued against in my *Foundations*, he does so in a way we can clearly understand with a clear rhetorical sense. As Calvin tells us, our aim is a *philosophy* constructed from scripture, whilst most describe his works as works of theology. In the *Institutes* Calvin frequently uses the Latin and French equivalent words for “philosophy” in both positive and negative senses, drawing a similar distinction as Lloyd-Jones does in rhetorical passages, often prefixing it with “profane.” The Latin root of “profane” explicitly carried the sense of “outside or before [pro-]

preferring one version of subjectivity over another and then tagging on a few scriptures we used to validate our argument otherwise constructed from outside of scripture.

This is the governing principle for the simple reason that these matters at hand are needing to be settled because they are serious enough and are recognized as not matters just of preference, where we would accept individual Christian freedom and liberty, admitting a range of positions.⁵ Rather, we are assuming that the questions before us are of the type that can, to a large degree, be settled. The issues are foundational where we should be able to arrive at what is the scriptural position that is arguably binding in its essentials on all believers. They are not trivial issues of individual conscience (though we will recognize the important place of conscience) but admit of both philosophical and theological reflection and study.

[B]The Imperative for a Political Ethic

[C]Is Political Involvement Legitimate?

A question that could be in some minds and which concerned me greatly a few years ago as I became frustrated with what I considered insipid evangelical theology regarding our political and cultural positions, and indeed, what provoked me into an in-depth study of Dominion Theology, is whether it is right for Christians to be involved *at all* in the wider cultural or political processes. Are we not rather to be engaged in loading up the “[Noah’s] Ark of the Church” before we are removed either by the Rapture or the Second Coming? A famous radio preacher during the 1940s put it this way “*you do not polish brass on a sinking*

the temple [-phane],” of heretical and godless thought. He clearly talks about “*constructing a Christian philosophy*” (*Institutes*, loc. 550) close to the head of the work. This is the sense in which my *Foundations* argued that philosophy should be conceived of. Thus, I have no problem with the contextual interchange of the words “theology” or “philosophy,” and it is a practice I shall follow occasionally in this chapter.

⁵ This is discussed in magisterial fashion in Lloyd-Jones, *Exposition of Chapter 14*. See also 1 Cor 1:12; Rom 14, 1–23. His multi-volume commentary on Romans was one of the most notable achievements of 20th century Christian scholarship. A website that preserves his legacy is found at <https://www.mljtrust.org/>.

ship”;⁶ he has largely spoken for the subsequent generations of Fundamentalists and evangelicals.

Thankfully, I believe we have already established the answer in the previous chapters but if you have come to this chapter directly, it is straightforward to answer this question *biblically* (though I do recommend a reading of our study) as the apostle Paul had to write very early on in the life of the church to prevent people leaving their employment to wait for the coming of the Lord,⁷ despite that the Second Coming was considered imminent even by himself.⁸ For even while having this eschatological conviction, he at times insisted both that believer’s should work and on his political and civil rights as a Roman citizen.⁹ He had no problem addressing Agrippa in a political context and eventually appealing to Caesar to prevent his undoubted martyrdom at the hands of the Jews.¹⁰ That is, we do not cease to have rights, a political relationship with, and a responsibility to and for our nation because we have joined the kingdom of God. Lloyd-Jones summarized it this way, “*our citizenship is in heaven does not mean we do not stop being citizens [on earth] in contrast to various movements within the church. Thus, we should [remain] involved in politics.*”¹¹

What we mean is this, the biggest problems in some “Christian” countries during the 20th century which have had almost continual revival for fifty to sixty years is the prevalence of economic, social, and moral corruption in their societies. In some countries of Central and South Africa now which now have over 90% Christian populations, they are known for their

⁶ Quoted in Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, loc. 175.

⁷ 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The injunction “*if one does not work, one does not eat*” was made in the eschatological context within these letters.

⁸ 1 Cor 7, 26 ff.

⁹ Acts 22:25; Acts 16:37.

¹⁰ Paul was certainly prepared to die for the gospel (and he did) but seems to have had a much bigger problem with suffering rank injustice at the hands of those that considered themselves just and civilized (Acts 25:16). Additionally, like Jesus, he took the greatest exception to hypocrisy, particularly the religious hypocrisy (Acts 23:3) of “*the Jews*.” Like the Johannine use of the term, “*the Jews*” here refers to the Jewish authorities which were an unhealthy political-religious hybrid, and it is not used as an ethnic slur. The authorities were the chief adversaries of both Jesus and Paul in their ministries.

¹¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Exposition of Chapter 13*, 17.

mass poverty, corruption, and a lack of basic infrastructure despite being some of the richest countries in terms of their natural resources. However, far more dramatically and with much more polemical force for our purposes here, Cope vividly describes how the most “Christianized” city in the US (the most “Christianized” nation in the world) failed to show any difference in many of the basic social indices that would make it a “good” place to live in direct contradiction to the regenerating narrative of conversion preached by the evangelical churches.¹²

That is, this demonstrates a total failure of 20th century “revivalism” to reform societies because it failed to reform the political and social dimensions of their culture.¹³ Our political philosophy is a “fake” gospel if it does not change the social and political character of the nations in which it is applied. Without such a political philosophy, we are just surrendering cultural real estate to secularism and humanism, failing in our primary objective of “*discipling all nations.*”¹⁴ Thus, what is argued in this chapter is a rejection in principle of any withdrawal from the marketplace as advocated in some Christian convocations in lieu of reflections on the Trump era and the building of the case for an informed, increased involvement and commitment to see reform in the political realm.¹⁵

[C]One Further Possibility - Political Neutrality

It must be recognized that there has been a flurry of thought, scholarly and otherwise, in Christian circles on this issue triggered by the “Trump Problem.”¹⁶ In one relatively recent convocation on political theology in which I was an invited participant, the discussion proper

¹² Cope, *Old Testament Template*, 21–27.

¹³ “Revivalism” in the modern sense is a term most associated with the ministry of Charles Finney (1792–1875). However, he was extremely active in the political, educational, and wider cultural spheres, see my *Foundations* for a discussion of Finney and there were other pivotal figures within post-Reformation Christianity who were socially and politically active. They did not limit themselves to “*spiritual matters*” as was to become the habit of some of their imitators in the evangelical and Fundamentalist movements of the 19th / 20th century, most of whom believed any such engagement was a “distraction” from the real task of saving souls.

¹⁴ Matt 28:19–20 (NAS).

¹⁵ Brown, *Evangelicals at the Crossroads*. Brown distills the issues down exceptionally well here, he has an earned doctorate (and it shows), as well as a substantial standing in the evangelical world.

¹⁶ For my extended use of this term, see Macneil, *Politics*, Appendix A.

began by presenting an argument based on cultural relativism, the thrust of which was that our reading of scripture is never neutral but colored by our cultural glasses. The application of this was then that politically, we had been unable to see that we had fallen in love with democracy and our way of doing things to the degree we had entered an inappropriate “*syncretism*” of our understanding of scripture with the understanding of the political arena.¹⁷ Consequently, we had incorrectly formed alliances or loyalties with particular politicians or parties.¹⁸ Our closeness to particular ideologies had meant we were no longer capable of understanding God’s perspective and articulating a Christian political philosophy.¹⁹ The rest of the discussion was to present a “corrected” political theology that would restore to us this function. In brief, the principal feature of the position being advocated was a type of political agnosticism and detachment from the workings of the political world.²⁰ That is, God is indifferent to our political systems, and we should be too other than to trust He puts in the leaders *He* wants to fulfil His Kingdom purposes.²¹

Now, despite its initial plausibility and sophistication as an argument, we must always remember that philosophically *any* argument based on asserting relativism and insurmountable cultural prejudice must *exempt itself* from its own analysis to have anything coherent to say because otherwise, it too becomes just another culturally conditioned narrative, nothing more than a possibility in the sea of competing possibilities; as the meme goes, the argument “*all judgments are relative*” is rightly footnoted “*except this one.*” The

¹⁷ In Macneil, *Politics*, I discuss how the argument was made that democracy or republicanism is no more God-ordained than say, despotism or some other form of totalitarianism. Even the Nazis could be commended for “*keeping order*” if the alternative was violent anarchy. We *might* be prepared to countenance the last proposition, but we should remember the Nazis were voted *in*, but then they made very sure they could not get voted *out*.

¹⁸ In this case, “Trump.”

¹⁹ In this case, the ideologies were Republicanism and/or political conservatism.

²⁰ The fullest statement of this argument is found in Stark, *Prophets, Politics and Nations*.

²¹ This “Kingdom” language might seem a strange idiom to those outside of modern charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity. In brief, Jesus = King, dom = His domain, which includes the church but also his providential rule as “*King of kings, Lord of lords*” (Dan 2:37; Rev. 19:16, (NAS)) which is explicitly dealing with the civil and political authorities.

very fact I am asserting we are suffering from cultural prejudice and zero objectivity in reading scripture is asserting that I can stand outside of that prejudice and culture to make that assertion. If that is the case, then I have just refuted my own argument which is my point about relativism above, the presenter proceeding to give us a political theology on their own analysis will be just as full of inescapable presuppositions and cultural prejudice; granted, they might be different ones but present, nevertheless. Thus, I believe such an argument (the details of which I examined in far more detail here²²), is an illegitimate and a retrograde step; the church has never improved any society by withdrawing from it but only when it was fully engaged in it.

[C]The Lack of a Shared Cultural Reference

The principal requirement for a Christian Self-Consciousness results now because of the collapse of a previously shared value base of Judeo-Christian origin in our wider culture, even if it was grudgingly maintained.²³ Indeed, at the present time, the very *negation* of those standards is considered praiseworthy and righteous.²⁴ Similarly, recent history has witnessed some watersheds in Christian culture that mandate a re-examination of Christian political philosophy. First, the polarizing influence of the Trump presidency demonstrated the antithetical and incoherent positions that were held by Christians regarding his first term as president. Second, the political tyranny of the COVID-era policies and the almost

²² Macneil, *Politics*, § 2.

²³ I would say it arguably existed through to the mid-1980s, perhaps to the end of the Thatcher era in the UK (which itself finally petered out after a long, slow decline in 1990.) The “*sexual revolution*” that began in the second half of the 1980s on the Left (when I was a member of various far-Left groups and witnessed it firsthand) legitimized (culturally, at least) cultural ideologies with violently anti-Christian premises, which were a wedge to evict the ghost of Christianity from the public square. However, even during the subsequent Blair era in the UK (both Labor leaders John Smith and Tony Blair were active members of the Christian Socialist Movement), certain moral matters were “banned” (unofficially) from journalist’s questions despite being newly “fashionable” for the radical (or liberal) Left. A journalist who referred directly to the homosexuality of certain Cabinet members would no longer be “invited” to briefings. The US situation is more complex in regard of “shared values,” but it should be noted that Barack Obama publicly defended marriage was for heterosexuals as late as 2008 to get the black evangelical vote.

²⁴ See for example, my blog, *Censorship—The New Normal*; Troughton, *Cancelling Christians*. [Online] Available at: <https://thecritic.co.uk/cancelling-christianity/>

universal capitulation of the churches to what we will argue was the illegitimate use of authority by the national and international governments.

[C]The Importance of Our History

A shocking discovery for many is that this is not the first time in Christian history that this subject has taken on an elevated importance:

[EXT] “One of the most foolish aspects of modern life is the tendency to assume that all that has happened in the past is quite irrelevant and unimportant and that nobody knew anything until this present generation came.”²⁵ [/EXT]

Thus, this means a good look at Christian history to understand the different views of the Christian understanding of and involvement in the political process. We would all benefit from a good history lesson and learn from our past, and we should see that the material of the previous chapters also serves this purpose well. We are not called to make an idol of the past or to canonize tradition, and we are called to “*forget those things [the excrement of religion] behind us,*”²⁶ but that is something very different from ignoring the lessons of our history.

[B]Basic Principles

[C]Are We Called to Defend Truth?

Another strong statement made during the convocation was that as a matter of principle, “*we are not called to defend truth but relationships.*” This takes some unpacking to counter its undoubted intuitive appeal and surface profundity; it has the distinctively pragmatic and postmodern flavor—we are to value the subjective relations and operations rather than being concerned about grasping that elusive nettle of “truth” and “being right.”²⁷ Certainly, we can all accept that truth might be progressive for us and as we support a

²⁵ DMLJ, *Romans 13*, 135.

²⁶ Paul refers to “*dung*” in his famous “*forgetting the past and pressing to the future*” passage of Philippians 3 which contextually, dealt with his previous life in Judaism. The word he specifically uses in 3:8 was what we would call a “swear word,” it was only used in vulgar conversation.

²⁷ One of the philosopher Rorty’s famous quips was “*take care of freedom and truth will take care of itself.*”

pluralistic form of life, we do not need total agreement amongst ourselves to value each other's views and perspectives. In that respect, we can "defend" our relationships from unnecessary angst, particularly from those outside our immediate community. However, in the name of epistemological self-consciousness, I am constrained to immediately question the proposition that we are not called primarily to defend "truth" in preference to "relationships," even more so when the leader of our religion claimed the title of "The Truth."²⁸

In addition, as with many things postmodern it is difficult to locate precisely what is meant by "relationships" here, but our early fathers of the faith really had to work hard in sorting out our basic theology amid both internal schism and external philosophy. Perhaps more compelling from a pure exegetical perspective, our New Testament pattern demonstrates a radical stand for "Truth" in the ministries of Jesus and Paul, and explosive confrontations to wit. Thus, despite being a painful and sometimes explosive process, the results of say the Council of Chalcedon or the Council of Nicaea are still with us. This is even more the case with the forensic logic of Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, and Calvin in challenging papal dogma with scriptural precedent that began the Reformation. The strength that came from taking a position and then defending it was of benefit to not just the Church but the entire social and economic order. The Reformation broke the hold of Aristotelian metaphysics and made possible the scientific revolution.²⁹ In this sense, Christian political self-consciousness and a commitment to dominion theology is a recovery of what has been lost, rather than some radically novel innovation.

In summary then, although there are matters of subjective preference over which we do not divide there is solid, objective ground on which most evangelical Christians should

²⁸ John 14:6 (NET): Jesus replied, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"

²⁹ The lack of progress in science was a notable feature of the medieval period until the Reformation, despite major advances in other areas of culture (progress in medicine was perhaps the exception). This issue is examined comprehensively in Butler, *Philosophy*.

stand if they are thinking clearly. The testimony of scripture for us *is* normative, we are called to be intelligently “dogmatic” in the face of challenge. If we are not defending truth, then apologetics is redundant, and our faith is arbitrary. Furthermore, in my *Foundations* I have argued that Christianity is *objectively* defensible and presentable in such a way the unbeliever *understands* the challenge intellectually that is given to them. Only the spirit of God *saves* people, but Peter addresses us that we should be ready to give an *apologia*. An *apologia* is not simply a testimony, but a *reasoned* defense of our faith; a defense by which we defend the truth by making a positive statement of our positions.³⁰ Thus, this must also include a defense of a set of political principles.

[C]On Earth as it is in Heaven

Hence, as issues of philosophy, theology, and methodology, we should be promoting political involvement of believers at every level of the political state to restrain the evil direction in which our political states are going.³¹ We might formally agree that under *certain* sets of circumstances, partnership with politics *is* a form of idolatry, for it *is* God that raises up those He chooses and casts down others and who are we to question God?³² However, that does *not* mean that partnership with politics is *always* idolatry or that we should *always* accept powerlessness rather than influence if we are not to make immediate nonsense of “*making disciples of all nations*” and the “*kingdom coming on Earth as it is in heaven*.”³³ Again, this would seem self-evident that the kingdom does not come independent of the political realm, you cannot have kingdom standards in social and political matters

³⁰ ἀπολογία: (apologia) defense; as a legal technical term, a speech in defense of oneself *reply, verbal defense* (2Tim 4:16); BDAG emphasizes this is a *speech* in defense, it is a reasoned, rather than inspirational or preached.

³¹ This position, I believe, represents an orthodox Christian perspective. Granted, some might see our moral condition as the most enlightened or advanced that it has ever been and that our governments served with distinction in keeping us safe during COVID whilst simultaneously respecting law, life, and liberty.

³² Dan 4:17 (NET); Rom 9:17 (NAS). See also Romans 9. In my view, the chapters 9, 10, and 11 of Romans contain some of the most complex and challenging logic of the Christian scriptures.

³³ Mat 28,18–20; Mat 6:10 (NAS).

without those who can understand and implement them in positions of power and influence.³⁴

In other words, the argument needs to be had not only about the legitimacy of certain principles but also in the details of working them out.

[C]The Domains of Study

Thus, we require a strong, positive statement of Scriptural principles. There is a lot of theological and philosophical complexity in such an important subject, so it requires us to cover a lot of philosophical ground by considering at a most basic level what the bible tells us: [LL a-b]

- a. About the relationship of ourselves as *individual* members of the body of Christ (the church) to the political state.
- b. Of the relationship of the *institution* of The Church to the *institution* of the political state.³⁵ [LL a-b]

When we get those basics right, we can establish the necessary principles to both answer the questions and evaluate to what degree what was presented to us is scriptural, complete, and defensible. The evaluation is only ever against scripture and scripture alone.³⁶

[C]Our Civic Responsibility

As our previous chapters demonstrated, for those of us who are children of the Reformers, the sacred-secular distinction *should* be an untenable dichotomy that we should not accept, because it is certainly not a biblical one—there is *no* secular for the believer. If we do not argue on such a basis, we have already surrendered the ground to the secular-humanist opponents of Christianity. Our position should be rather at its *foundation* a

³⁴ Some mystical iterations of Christian belief might dare to assert this as I touch on in *Dominion*. This is normally rooted in a controlling catastrophic pessimism regarding the human condition. In certain Gnostic heresies this might also be the case, imported into this view was the Platonic conception of the inferiority, even the evil character of the physical.

³⁵ We are all members of the body of Christ, what Luther called the “*priesthood of all believers*.” However, this is conceptually and practically distinct from those who work full time *in* The Church as a ministerial calling. We tend to be very loose in our use of the term “church,” see Cope, *Old Testament Template*, 103–12.

³⁶ Care should be taken here not to misinterpret this as to say any source of theology outside scripture is illegitimate, otherwise all the philosopher or theologian could do was to copy out scripture. It is rather that the rooting and grounding of our philosophy is in scripture and hermeneutically in scripture as a whole.

distinctively *Christian* one perhaps captured perfectly by Abraham Kuyper in an 1880 speech as he opened the university which he had founded:

[EXT] “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”³⁷ [/EXT]

For Kuyper, there was no sacred or secular; *all* was sacred:

[EXT] “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.”³⁸ [/EXT]

This emphasis is also found in J Gresham Machen who like Kuyper, was concerned with the whole of culture and the transformational power of the gospel. Machen was the founder of Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929 after the split with Princeton caused by the removal of the commitment to orthodox Christian theology as a requirement for ministers to graduate from the Seminary. He was a passionate believer in the reformation of *all* culture by ensuring there could be Christian education at all levels rather than a centralized, State-controlled education.³⁹ This was his first-hand response to the noted anti-intellectualism, obscurantism, and narrow evangelistic focus of the emerging Fundamentalist movement of the time. Unlike the Fundamentalists, Machen had not just defended scripture, but the *entire* Christian worldview, against Liberalism and was concerned with the regeneration of *all* of culture.⁴⁰

³⁷ Kuyper, “*Sphere Sovereignty*,” 488.

³⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 45.

³⁹ Machen, *Education*. This was a collection of his speeches and essays, as well as an account of the founding principles of Westminster.

⁴⁰ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 1–13. This introductory section is invaluable reading as a restatement of a Christian conception of culture and immediately engages with the necessity of warfare in the cultural realm and specifically with socialistic political philosophies. It must be remembered Machen had witnessed the

That is, despite this nominal thematic agreement with Fundamentalism regarding the status of scripture, Machen was really the precursor of the modern Dominion Theology movement whose central theological distinctive, as we have demonstrated in the previous chapters, was the entire reformation of culture.⁴¹ It is a theological position that has no reticence in taking political positions based on his understanding of the *implications* of scripture. Machen was aggressive in his statement of the need to battle in the realm of intellectual ideas, believing correctly, that it was ideas which would come to dominate the political direction of a nation:

[EXT] “We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.”⁴² [/EXT]

Thus, through some noted professors of WTS such as Cornelius Van Til and a second generation of students such as Greg Bahnsen (both of whom should be familiar names from earlier in this work), his cultural philosophy became foundational for the Presbyterian Dominion Theology movement that emerged into public view in the early 1970s with Rushdoony’s *Institutes of Biblical Law*.⁴³ Within five years, by the time Rushdoony

Russian revolution a mere five years to publishing this work and was contemporary to the greatest intellectuals of America like John Dewey who were laying the foundations of the “Progressive” movement which was to incubate American socialism. It is arguable that the baby has *just* been born, it is only in the Trump era that American politicians in the *mainstream* Democratic Party and in the *mainstream* media, were happy to campaign under the banner of “socialism,” despite Marxism, in the guise of “critical theory,” having been well established in the academy since the 1960s.

His ‘Christianity and Culture’ address, which is the first part of this collection, was originally entitled ‘*The Scientific Preparation of the Minister*’ and was delivered on Sep.20, 1912 at the opening of the 101st session of Princeton Theological Seminary. This at once shows how basic in his thinking was his concern to engage and transform *all* of culture and how this eventually motivated him to break with Princeton and found Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

⁴¹ When Machen founded WTS, his first professor of Apologetics (who was to remain over 40 years in that post) was Cornelius Van Til. As we have argued throughout the book, Rousas Rushdoony (who had written the earliest summary of Van Til, *By What Standard?*) was the man most responsible for developing the perspective in a sociological direction which became known as “dominion theology” or “Christian Reconstructionism.”

⁴² Machen, *Christianity, Culture, and Liberalism*, 6.

⁴³ Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*.

sponsored the publication of Bahnsen's *Theonomy*,⁴⁴ it had begun to assert itself strongly as a controversial school of Reformed theology. However, as we noted previously, it is only controversial to those who have forgotten that theonomy was central to the Reformed position and was the dominant influence in the Puritan confessions.⁴⁵ The intellectual climate of Christian thought had become so dominated by the import of the *autonomous* mindset of non-Christian philosophy that it ceased to be authentically Christian. Our work is, in many ways, a restatement of these principles in our modern context.

[C]The Theonomic Imperative

That is, as we have previously discussed, in vanilla Reformed social theory, theonomy (the “Law of God”) is contrasted with “autonomy” (being the law to myself). Cope captures something for us that must be fundamental to our political philosophy:

[EXT] “The law given to Moses [is] to disciple the newly free nation of Israel. God begins to speak for himself and gives *clear, concise, and very specific* instruction for how to achieve justice in a community.”⁴⁶ (Emphasis added.)

[/EXT]

We will all stand before the judgment seats of both the Father and the Son to give account, judged by the moral and social principles of this same Law. Though we may have cultural idiosyncrasies, and we may need to probe beneath the application to find the principle, God's Word is not rendered null and void by our culture. Again, Cope clarifies this for us whilst fully admitting our responsibility for establishing the application of the Law in our culture:

[EXT] “Remember that the truths of the Bible are told primarily in story form. We study the history and the context, but we will never be in the same circumstances as Moses and Israel, so their application will not necessarily work for us. The *principles*, however, are God's truth and are applicable in

⁴⁴ Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*.

⁴⁵ It was rather the position, arguably of Augustine and given its systematic expression by Calvin. It was developed by his successor Beza, by Bullinger, our own John Knox and then the Puritan movement of the 1640s, from which modern Reformed theology owes most.

⁴⁶ Cope, *God and Political Justice*, loc. 231

new and dynamic ways in any age, any set of circumstances in any nation.”⁴⁷

(Emphasis added.) [/EXT]

Importantly, with the postmodern apologist in mind, those “*new and dynamic ways*” do not extend to contradicting the explicit outworking of those principles in the nation of Israel that are given, as the Apostle Paul tells us, “*for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training.*”⁴⁸

Now, and this is my main philosophical point, you cannot be “*corrected or reproofed*” in just any type of fashion for it to be non-arbitrary and to be in accordance with proper standards of justice, there must be *objective* standards of correction or reproof. It can only be *just* if it applies equally to all in morally equivalent circumstances.⁴⁹ It is God who defines the “morally significant” components of our reasoning through His Law—polygamy becomes no more acceptable to us, even if it is culturally normal for us. To argue otherwise, is simply the Christian form of cultural relativism and needs to be dismissed as such.

To take a much more politically significant specific example, we can consider the social gospel movement, even the more “evangelical” version of it associated with evangelicals such as Ron Sider. It is often stated by apologists for that movement that God “*told us ‘Not to steal’*” but “*did not define ‘stealing’ for us.*” This is an outright fallacy, we have chapter upon chapter within Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and the restatement in Deuteronomy, that establishes the principle of private property, your right to it, and that stealing is the illegitimate violation of those property rights. It further gives a penal code and

⁴⁷ Cope, *Old Testament Template*, 62

⁴⁸ 2 Tim 3:16, (NAS).

⁴⁹ Even Sartre, the great existentialist philosopher famous for exhorting one should never act in “bad faith” by submitting to the will of others rather than deciding for yourself, accepted this piece of moral reasoning. He framed it in terms of a man having to choose between fighting in the Spanish civil war and taking care of his sick mother. *Whatever he chose, he would choose for all men.* The emphasis is on the “all” here; it is a misnomer to think existentialism *necessarily* equates with a lack of binding or universal ethics. One of Plantinga’s earliest papers (1958) discusses *Existentialism and Ethics*.

authorizes the punishment of thieves; but equally, not all theft is treated as criminal, there are extenuating circumstances, but *all* theft is defined as sin and retribution is *always* made.⁵⁰

As Cope argues, they are “dynamic” in the sense we do not talk about boundary markers and oxen when we talk about property rights, but the principles will apply to our cars and tax systems. This is not to deny that there are not places of ambiguity or of great challenge as to how we are to understand and apply God’s Word, but it becomes very clear whether our cultural practices measure up to His Law or not in many cases because of the fruit that they bear.

[B]Theocracy or Representative Government

Some vocal critics of Dominion Theology argued it was urging the creation of a theocracy, where society is subject to the direct rule of the Creator.⁵¹ However, such a view is a puerile distortion of the position and scripture itself mandates a theocracy *only* for the nation of Israel.⁵² It is of note that even for the ancient Israelites, within such a theocratic society, the LORD instructed them to choose the wise amongst them to “govern themselves” with the Law giving clear instructions for representative government and what we would call “checks and balances”:

[EXT] “you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them *as* leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the

⁵⁰ That is, there is a civic sanction associated with it. One example in scripture is associated with the stealing of a small amount of fruit; restitution is made but there is no further punishment. In other cases, there is a fine, compensation and restitution. It is an oft neglected feature of the Law code in the Hebrew scriptures that it encourages intelligent discrimination of the nature of a misdemeanor or a crime.

⁵¹ “*The Righteous Revolution—Could there be a theocracy in America’s future?*”, <http://prosocs.tripod.com/riterev.html>.

⁵² On a practical note, we would do well to seek such a society, but it would be introduced based on consensus, not imposition. It is of note that George Washington, the first American president, made the proclamation “you will be our God and we will be your people” with the consensus of the Congress.

people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge.”⁵³ [/EXT]

This, of course, is the *precise* reason why the American Founders adopted the model of representative government they did.⁵⁴ This stratification of government recognizes that in practical terms, this side of omniscience, there are limits to what statecraft can accomplish. Politics is not messianic, or Jesus would have perhaps started a political party or conquered the Roman Empire.⁵⁵ We must make a clear distinction between what an individual Christian as a member of the state can do and what the church *as an institution* can do. The *individual* Christian can be a politician, and the church should be clear in its statement of principles over a political matter:

[EXT] “[T]he church keeps to the realm of principles and not detailed programs. She does not, as it were, enter into the arena either through preaching politics, or by sitting in the House of Lords...

[T]he business of the individual members of the church to work out these principles, *in detail*, for every aspect of life. Christians must not confine their Christianity to their own personal lives and piety and their own acts of worship. Christianity takes up the whole person. If men and women really believe the gospel, it must govern the whole of their outlook and thinking.”⁵⁶ (Emphasis added.) [/EXT]

There are thus some principles of involvement emerging here, not for theocracy but for participation and representative government: [NL 1-2]

1. The *Church* is not to be involved in the details of a political program but is to teach principles.

⁵³ Exodus 18:21–22 (NAU).

⁵⁴ This story is vividly told in Barton & Barton *American Story* which is notable for its use and enumeration of primary sources. The scholarly standard for early American religious thought is Noll, *America’s God*.

⁵⁵ One stream of Jewish messianic thought had precisely this expectation, one which was evident even in his disciples (Acts 1:6). There was great disillusionment with Jesus for his political “weakness”; after welcoming him into Jerusalem, they were happy to shout “crucify him” a week later.

⁵⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, 159.

2. The *individual* Christian is at liberty to be involved to whatever depth is necessary to ensure that the “powers that be” are “influenced in the right direction. It is their duty to do this, and they must not abdicate from their responsibility.”⁵⁷ [/NL 1-2]

So, in summary, we can accept with Lloyd-Jones and with Cope that a “perfect” society is not possible on Earth but that does not mean we cannot have the expectation of a *better* one more in line with the principles of the kingdom this side of any return of the Lord; we can accept that a complete reformation is only possible with the personal presence of Jesus, yet it *is* possible for us to be His government now because that is what *He* tells us in the “Great Commission”:

[EXT]Then Jesus came up and said to them, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* Therefore [you] go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to obey* everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Emphasis added.)
[/EXT]

The major imperative verb here is the *making disciples* rather than the teaching or the baptizing; the discipling or *Christianizing* of our society, the reformation, salting, or whatever word we want to use, is what is commanded and expected.⁵⁸

[B]Understanding Romans 13

[C]Overview

Few passages of scripture have created as much controversy as Romans 13 owing to the chronic lack of understanding of it in the modern Christian consciousness despite there

⁵⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Roman 13*, 159.

⁵⁸ The NET Bible exegetical note is informative here: “‘Go . . . baptize . . . teach’ are participles modifying the imperative verb ‘make disciples.’ According to *ExSyn** 645 the first participle (πορευθέντες, *poreuthentes*, ‘Go’) fits the typical structural pattern for the attendant circumstance participle (aorist participle preceding aorist main verb, with the mood of the main verb usually imperative or indicative) and thus picks up the mood (imperative in this case) from the main verb (μαθητεύσατε, *matheteusate*, ‘make disciples’).” *Here they are referring to Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*.

being substantive studies available. So, for example, during the COVID lockdowns, an uncritical use of the passage was made to justify the unconditional surrender of religious freedom and civil liberty by most Christian leaders. Unfortunately, this demonstrates complete ignorance of the passage and demonizes all those over the centuries who found within the scriptures a mandate for social reform, civil disobedience, and political revolution. It would indeed be perverse to rebuke a Luther, the abolitionist movement on both sides of the Atlantic, the American Independence movement or the Apartheid activists within the South African church for a refusal to submit to the governing authorities.⁵⁹

However, Romans 13 does require interpretation and contextualization to counter what some have argued is the plain sense of the text. That said, it is not my intention to do a verse-by-verse exegesis as this has been authoritatively and competently completed by Lloyd-Jones, taking him 162 pages which we cannot afford here.⁶⁰ That said, I incorporate most of his arguments in the following section and modify them as necessary with my own revisions as we draw conclusions from our present context.

The early Christians needed the apostolic input of Romans 13, 1 Tim 2 and in 1 Peter 2 because the believers needed to know how to respond to pagan rulers who were often extremely hostile to the point of persecution and execution.⁶¹ We will only consider Romans 13 extensively in this section because it is the locus of most discussion amongst believers regarding the relationship of the individual Christian to the State and of the institution of the Church to the State. 1 Peter 2 is very much a recapitulation of the Pauline teaching; we know Peter clearly took direction from Paul and considered his works scriptural (2 Pe 3:15) and we only mention it here in passing as this is a good reason to highlight this specific feature of

⁵⁹ In the dying days of apartheid, it was common for government ministers to quote Romans 13 to the dissident church centered around Archbishop Tutu.

⁶⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans—Exposition of Chapter 13*, 1–162.

⁶¹ I deal with this passage more fully in, <https://planetmacneil.org/blog/should-i-obey-my-government-civil-disobedience-in-the-covid-era/>.

Peter's view. 1 Tim 2 has the primary subject of intercession for those in authority that the social conditions of effective evangelism might be possible and will not be considered further here other than to emphasize such intercession was expected and *mandated* by Paul to *create* those conditions. We are not to hide in our Christian ghettos watching the reign of the Antichrist and waiting for the Rapture.

[C]The Context of Romans 13

It must be remembered that this section does not exist in isolation from the sections around it. This is important because some commentators seem to think it is an intrusion or clumsy insertion of thought. Yet this is a new subsection in the section that began with chapter 12—the *application* of the doctrine laid down in the first eight chapters.⁶² The great emphasis of chapter 12 is that of “*living peaceably with other people.*” Chapter 13 is thus perfectly in position, “[*Government enables us*] to live peaceably with one another, to maintain order, to avoid disorder.”⁶³ The “*vengeance of God*” mentioned in 12 would then arguably be part of the function of the State and its laws. So, the first great conclusion we can draw from Romans 13 is the legitimacy of the State *in principle* as against those who reject all the institutions of men as fallen and illegitimate.⁶⁴ God has instituted it that the conditions of social peace might exist for the benefit of all:

[EXT] “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--² for kings and all those in authority, that

⁶² Chapters 9, 10, and 11 form a self-contained pericope on the problem of the Jews and their relationship to the gospel. There are still important principles in these passages, but the chapters are strongly focused on the Jews.

⁶³ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, 2.

⁶⁴ This was one of Calvin's strongest criticisms of the Anabaptist post-Reformation movement (sometimes called the ‘Radical Reformation’) which became progressively to reject all forms of human authority. The seeds of messianic Nazism and Communism are sometimes argued to have originated in their theology which justified violence against all non-believers (where the non-believer was widely conceived)—they were celebrated by the DDR (particularly Thomas Müntzer) in the 20th century for the attempt to create a commune in Munster in 1534. However, the experience of the brutal suppression of Munster moderated their politics such that the Amish, Mennonites, even Quakers and Baptists all lay claim to some kind of heritage from the Anabaptists. In an important sense, all these groups *were* social radicals but became committed to a *demonstration* rather than an *imposition* of Christianity. See Verduin, *Reformers* for a historical review from within the Reformed community but with sufficient chronological distance to present a well-balanced view.

we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior.”⁶⁵ [/EXT]

However, and I believe this is where many formulations regarding our rights, relationships and responsibilities are at their weakest, is that based on this foundational principle, it then becomes much too easy to give the State much *too much* authority over the church and the individual believer, to the degree that all the believer is entitled to is a weak, passive resistance, or martyrdom. In contrast, we will find as we work through the chapter that there is a justification for a Christian taking part in a revolution to overthrow a corrupt government.

[C]Obedience and Submission are Different Concepts

So, let us consider the first verse of Romans 13:

[EXT] “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God and those that exist are appointed by God.

Therefore whoever resists the authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.” [/EXT]

Thus, it is straightforward to understand why many teach *unconditional* obedience to the State. This is reinforced by some commentators who note that the term translated “be subject” was originally a military term meaning “to rank under” but this is one of those occasions where we need to understand the semantics of the word have moved far beyond its original meaning as witnessed in the Greek literature of that era of what the Bible is an integral part. By overstressing the etymology, extremely severe interpretations of this passage that would admit no conditions for civil disobedience have arisen. In contrast, as Lloyd-Jones explains, there are three other Greek words in common use during that period would convey far more strongly the concept of “obedience” if that was what Paul had wanted to communicate. We must understand that “be subject to” does *not* simply mean “be

⁶⁵ 1 Tim 2:1 (NAS).

obedient to” though the Greek verb in the middle voice was sometimes used with this meaning.⁶⁶

Thus, continuing our analysis, *subjection* implies a *reasoned* choice. For example, Eph. 5:21 states “*submitting* yourselves one to another in the fear of God” and it should also be clear that in this case there is clearly a logical difference between subjection and obedience. Both parties cannot simultaneously *obey* one another if a difference arises but they can respectfully resolve their differences by having a mental posture or attitude of *submission*. To not recognize this is to make this and other examples of the usage of the word logically contradictory.⁶⁷ Thus, Lloyd-Jones argues the context demands “*making room for*” or “*preferring out of respect*” as appropriate renderings.

[C]The Boundaries of Christian Resistance

Now, we must argue, that a minister of the State demands unconditional respect and subjection only with regards to an *appropriate* execution of their office and the ruler *must* behave in an honorable and just manner before the people because that is the terms of their ordination before God, “*He means the powers that are governing [well] and maintaining law and order.*”⁶⁸ This is also why the book of Acts provides the narratives for us of the conflict between the early church and the “authorities” that we might know there is no *unconditional* ethical mandate to obey our governing authorities.⁶⁹ Thus, it is pointedly *not* proven that

⁶⁶ To emphasize our main point here regarding the semantics of the word, BDAG the academic “standard” reference work for the Greek language of this period, does not offer the meaning “obey,” listing only the passive and active voice. Vine’s Expository dictionary (another standard work) lists “obey” as a possible but minor inflection in the passive or middle voice, noting the military origin of the word. The Strong’s number is 5293 and Strong lists “obey” as a possibility for the middle voice. Pertinently, the “middle” voice (often reflexive in nuance) was dying out during this period of the Greek language adding to the improbability this was the sense intended.

⁶⁷ Col 3 :18 ; 1Pe 3:1, 5.

⁶⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, 23.

⁶⁹ Some might object that it was the religious authorities they came into conflict with, but Roman history does tell us that the Romans were shrewd enough to allow a degree of autonomy to their colonies in the sense they could keep their own civil law if they recognized the supreme jurisdiction of Rome. In the Donatist controversy in the early church of North Africa, this was as simple as throwing some incense on the fire once a year. We can glean this from the gospels and Acts where the governors would rather, that the Jews “*judge according to their law*” (Acts 18:15; Acts 24:6) than get involved in such civil disputes. It was why Pilate was just plain

every occupant of the office “*has been ordained by God*” and thus we are not morally obligated to immediately obey them if they are *not* governing well. It is the *office* and not the person that is ordained by God. Particularly, we need to ask what we are to do with rulers who abuse their position or are tyrannical. We need only think of Nero using burning Christians coated in tar to light his feasts or of a Hitler orchestrating the Holocaust.

This can be made clearer by an analogy. If our nation was attacked or was in imminent danger of being attacked, most of us would consider it perfectly just to sign up to fight if we were asked to, in addition to whatever diplomatic response there might be. We might even end up fighting for our nation and killing people of another nation to preserve our freedom. We would consider this “self-defense,” and it seems a concept well-founded in the Hebrew scripture. There was no scriptural mandate for a standing Army in Israel but there were certainly borders, there were arrangements made for tribes to join with one another for national defense, and for the settling of disputes militarily if diplomacy failed.⁷⁰ The nation was instructed to live peaceably with its neighbors and to respect their territory but they were to be equally vigorous in defending their own property and territory.⁷¹

Thus, we should at least be able to ask the question, if those that attack us just happen to be members of our *own* nation and those in authority over us, should we not too have a right to self-defense? The logic of the Second Amendment of the American Constitution was based on just that type of reasoning. The colonists and settlers had come from nations all over the Old World where the monarchs and priests systematically oppressed the people and, in some eras, the people were systematically tortured and killed in the most brutal and public fashion often at the behest of the papal hegemony that employed the surrogate army of the

reluctant to get involved in the trial of Jesus and when he was forced to be involved, he refused to judge as justice demanded but rather in accord with what he perceived as public opinion.

⁷⁰ Deut. 20:10ff.; Josh 4:12; Num 32:6–25.

⁷¹ We leave aside the issue of the initial conquest of Canaan which was a judicial decision by the LORD himself owing to the violence, corruption, immorality, and witchcraft that characterized the Canaanite tribes.

Holy Roman Emperor.⁷² They came in search of religious freedom and political liberty. This is why Lloyd-Jones, who was something of an expert on the Puritanism of the early colonists, was able to write:

[EXT] “Surely, as Christians, we are entitled to argue that if a state, a king, an emperor, a governor, a dictator or anybody else becomes tyrannical, then this state is violating the law of its own being and constitution as laid down in Romans 13:2.”⁷³[/EXT]

That is, the State was instituted, as 1Tim 2:2 states, to ensure “*we may lead a peaceful (tranquil) and quiet life in all godliness and dignity*” (NET). Thus, he continues:

[EXT] “The moment . . . the State turns itself into a master and into a tyrant, it is disobeying the Law of God that brought it into being and it must itself be punished; and the form the punishment takes is that the government is *thrown out* and replaced by one that is prepared to abide by the teaching of Romans 13:1-7”⁷⁴ (Emphasis added.) [/EXT]

This statement begs the question, “*what does ‘thrown out’ mean?*” Are we permitted to fight, with arms (as the American founders felt it necessary to mandate) to evict a tyrannical government? We have already seen the inadequacy of the unconditional submission position, and we can see that our options are much greater than simply passive resistance, but just what *are* the limits of our resistance.

[C]Christians can be Revolutionaries

The “*just war*” is defined as an extension of the duty of a magistrate to “*restrain evil*” and it is exactly this moral imperative to “*restrain evil*” that allows “[*a Christian*] to

⁷² The “Holy Roman Emperor” was a title bequeathed by the Pope on one of the monarchs of Europe once the Papacy had established its domination (c. 600AD). This then made that monarch’s military resources available to the Pope for dealing with “heresy” in any nation rebelling against his authority. The monarchs were normally feuding with one another as well as trying to weaken the authority of the Pope over their nations. This was why some of the Monarchs were sympathetic to the proto reformers such as Knox, Wycliffe, and Huss who vigorously asserted the political autonomy of nations and the superiority of the civil authorities over the Church within the national boundaries.

⁷³ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, 46; Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans*.

⁷⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, 46.

take part in a rebellion to change your government.”⁷⁵ Whether that evil is internal or external to a nation, it is not an option for us to ignore it. However, such an action is the “last resort” as is going to war; but as it was necessary to go to war against a Hitler, a Mussolini, or a Stalin, for the purposes of restraining their evil, so it is necessary to resist the evil of our own leaders.

Indeed, this is not unusual in the history of the protestant church and was a feature of the movement around puritan Oliver Cromwell (the English Civil War) that spawned egalitarian groups such as the Levelers and the Diggers who prefigured many of the policies which became associated with the later labor and trade union movements.⁷⁶ Christians were

⁷⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, 69.

⁷⁶ The history around these groups and their relationship to Cromwell is contested history and all did not go well, but there was a strong element of novel, egalitarian Christian political thinking in all these groups. This was foundational to the later Trade Union movement. The English Civil war was actually three conflicts between 1642–51, the final conflict of 1650–51 was probably the most significant event that was a catalyst for the Puritan migration to the New World, as it marked the period of the betrayal and brutal suppression of King Charles II who had fought Cromwell with the support of the Scots Presbyterians on the promise of spreading Scots’ Presbyterian influence through the realm in preference to the English puritan republicans supporting Cromwell. Owing to the historic alliance of Scotland with France against England, the “moderate” Scots Presbyterian party had chosen a political alliance with Charles (who had exiled to France) over a spiritual one with Cromwell.

The Scots were deceived in this matter, considering the English republic a bigger threat to Scotland as a nation than the compromising Charles II who had clear Catholic sympathies, even seeking assistance from the Pope to get him back into power after Cromwell had executed his father (Charles I) and established the protectorate. They took what they believed was a political shortcut to the propagation of Presbyterianism throughout the realm by the royal patronage of Charles in return for their support. Charles had initially been crowned King of Scotland as an act of defiance against the new English republic under Cromwell but was quickly defeated by Cromwell and went into exile until the Restoration of the monarchy following Cromwell’s death. Scotland had been incorporated into the English protectorate under Cromwell, so the desire to reassert political independence was a strong stream in Scots’ thinking amongst the political leaders.

Furthermore, the alliance of the Scots with Charles was a paradoxical alliance as the Scots’ Presbyterians and English puritans were of a common spiritual ancestry, both stood against the Catholic hegemony, were reformers of nominal state Protestantism, and should have been unified against Charles and with Cromwell in common cause to create a new British republic, much like the United States was to become. Like his father (and most of the other European monarchs who were intriguing against one another, as well as against the Pope who was constantly looking to reassert his authority throughout Europe through alliances with the local potentates) Charles II lied, and after his victory and the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, brutally suppressed both his Scots Presbyterian supporters and the English Puritans, exhuming Cromwell’s body from Westminster Abbey, beheading it, and placing his severed head on a spike (where it remained for 25-years) as a sign of the new regime’s triumph.

The failure of the strategy of compromise for Scots’ Presbyterianism to maintain independence from England was completed when the Scots parliament was dissolved on May 1, 1707, following the Act of Union, which created the Kingdom of Great Britain. Though I am critical of Stark’s Prophets, one emphasis of her thinking is to avoid the unholy political alliances in preference to the purposes of God; a principle that should be considered carefully and might well apply in this scenario but which I have also argued can too easily lead to an indifferent agnosticism regarding fighting for just political government.

very active in these movements and the Workers Educational Association (WEA), a Christian wing of the Working Men's Club movement (that was founded to promote literacy amongst working people) still exists in the UK today in accord with its original mission, whilst the WMCs are rather tatty, low-end social clubs.

Now, it is also important to recognize that there are degrees of resistance between non-resistance and a full-blown rebellion that we can exercise. We start with dialogue and our elected representatives, but we cannot allow ourselves to be neutered when our representatives cease to represent us. We can protest, we can boycott, and we can take collective action both as individuals and as collections of congregations to try and ensure social or political change; though with congregational action there are specific issues which we do need to consider if we are not to confuse the individual and church institutional positions in relation to government.

However, in cases where oppressive government tyranny is directed at entire congregations, e.g., in the banning of public worship (as happened during COVID), the congregation should be able to respond collectively.

To complete his iniquity, Charles later entered secret treaty with Catholic Louis XIV of France gaining subsidy in return for publicly converting to Catholicism (reopening the door for papal subjugation of the entire realm); but he only finally converted to Catholicism on his deathbed when there was no political risk of conflict with parliament. He had obviously only indicated support for Presbyterianism as a means to his desired end: his restoration to the throne and the restoration of the monarchy. To this point, the British monarchy and its hegemony have remained ever since, with only the post-WWII settlement and the subsequent loss of the Empire seeing a reduction in the political influence they exerted behind the scenes despite the alleged ascendancy of parliament. Even now, any bills passed in the British Parliament still need "Royal Assent" before they pass into law; often thought of as merely a formality, it was only a few years ago that senior figures of the British establishment and Army argued that such Assent be withheld if Jeremy Corbyn had come to power in 2019. British democracy has only ever dangled by a thread, quickly washed away should the people dare to speak too loudly.

However, taking the long view, the ascension of the US as the premier Christian nation with its republicanism, traditions of religious freedom and tolerance (after Roger Williams, a reformer of puritanism), in preference to the European nations with their state churches, has its roots in this period as the Puritans struggled to reform English and Scottish Protestantism, many of them later became key voices in the Puritan colonies. Nevertheless, it pains me to think, as a Scot, that the Scots betrayed the protestant cause for Britain and probably the rest of Europe, but our betrayal did lead to the foundation of the American republic and its vision of a free people under God, we can rest in this marvelous example of divine providence that we see in the foundation of that new republic of the United States.

Now, I hope it is understood that I am not asserting we are *immediately* revolutionaries, it is just we need to understand we *can* be in the extreme. We can agree as Lloyd-Jones puts it “*Christians should always be the best citizens in the country*” and “*good and peaceable*”⁷⁷ in their basic attitudes. We have an ethical obligation to be the best citizens we can be *and* to be the most cooperative with the authorities over us as we can morally be. Even Stalin began to lessen the persecution of Christians because of the reputation for them being the best workers.⁷⁸

Christians, by default, *are* on the side of law and order because they understand that sin has produced lawlessness among men and that lawlessness needs the sword of the State to restrain it; this is also why Paul makes the statement it is an “*issue of conscience*” (v5) that we submit and even to *pay taxes* to ensure the smooth operation of the State. However, Lloyd-Jones strongly and immediately qualifies this general orientation to the State after establishing it as a basic principle with this statement:

[EXT] “[T]here is a limit beyond which it [the submission to the State and its enactments] is not true. It is quite clear in the scriptures that *if the State should ever come between me and my relationship to God*, then I *must* not obey it.”⁷⁹ (Emphasis added.) [/EXT]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this limit was undeniably violated throughout Europe as congregations were prohibited from congregational worship and our almost universal failure to resist has cost us enormous space in the public sphere. Where there was or is substantive resistance, as was the case with the River Church in Tampa, Florida and in some of the other US states where governors rejected federal mandates, the contrast could not be

⁷⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, 51.

⁷⁸ This is a well-known paradox, even in today’s Russia, where specific Christian ministries have access to and favor with the highest levels of the Russian government (I personally know of two) because of their reputation for honor and ethical conduct. Similarly, in some Islamic countries, Christians have access to TV-stations because they are honorable and pay their bills on time.

⁷⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 13*, 52.

greater—they had full liberty to meet for worship, and citizens can trade freely with one another rather than lose their businesses and become reliant on federal welfare.⁸⁰

[B]Summary and Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have sketched how we apply the basic principles of dominion theology to our political philosophy, specifically we established the principle of involvement and that it should be an involvement that is not passive or neutral. We asserted that it is an anomalous distinctive of 20th century evangelicalism to separate from wider political and cultural involvement. The Reformed Church has had a history of political involvement since the days of Luther and Calvin, through to modern figures such as Machen and the father of the modern evangelical revivalists, Charles Finney.

We noted that for as long as there has been a Christian church, there has been political opposition to it as witnessed in the biblical narratives of Acts in which there are recorded accounts of conflict. We also rejected that the correct Christian position was one of agnosticism to the political environment, 1Tim 2 implies prayer for a social environment conducive to the preaching of the gospel which is correlative to a pluralistic political context. We then dealt specifically with the contemporary, difficult issue of Romans 13 noting that because the biblical narratives record conflicts with the authorities for us, a simple, surface reading of Romans 13 that demands unconditional obedience to the governing authorities is insufficient. In this regard, we considered in some detail the account of Romans 13 provided by the finest evangelical expositor of the 20th century, Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones. He drew the

⁸⁰ In the years since, there has been a move of millions of people from the repressive states into the states that did not lock down. The lockdowns were demonstrated to have been completely ineffective; there was no difference in outcomes from the strictest lockdowns in cities like New York to the least locked down cities in Florida. The utter hypocrisy during the pandemic of public officials who had locked down their cities was seen as they were caught at the same time holidaying in Florida that was the first to remove any restrictions. This is the perfect example of “authorities” that needed to be ejected from office at the first opportunity.

distinction between “honor,” “submission” and “obedience” in considering the original Greek syntax and semantics of the passage.

His central posit was that a State invalidates itself when it behaves in a tyrannical manner and when it intrudes into matters over which it has no jurisdiction, particularly in matters of religious practice and liberty. Only when the State is the minister of God to bring order and punish moral evil, is obedience to the State required. We found that Lloyd-Jones even argued for revolutionary activity by believers was permissible as the act of ejecting an immoral or tyrannical State that had delegitimized itself. He argued further that the individual Christian is perfectly at liberty to be involved to any degree in political activity but the domain of the institution of the church was separate to the political institutions, its role was to be the moral guardian that would speak into these institutions rather than to be directly involved in the institutions of government, e.g., bishops sitting in the House of Lords.

We broadly agreed with his position but noted that he was writing during a time when the Judeo-Christian position was broadly accepted in all major political parties. Our qualification was that this is no longer the case, and the Church needed to expose the morally degenerate nature of “secular” politics and to support those parties which support ethical positions more in line with the gospel. This implied a greater level of involvement of the institution of the church in political life and its explicit support of parties or policies. We maintain with Lloyd-George that the Church as an institution was not to argue for a theocracy which was reserved for Ancient Israel alone, but it was to argue for a theonomical political position, seeing the principles of jurisprudence and government as immutable principles. God, in His Law, not only provides us with Commandments as top-level principles but works out the application in detail in the succeeding narratives.

In general, then, we were to defend Truth rather than to cede to postmodern subjectivity or cultural relativism, noting that the Reformation and Councils of the Church established

these as prerequisites for culture. A strong view of Truth also ushered in the scientific revolution. We concluded that we cannot have kingdom standards in social and political matters without those who can understand and implement them in positions of power and influence. In other words, the argument needs to be had not only about the legitimacy of certain principles but also in the details of working them out.⁸¹

⁸¹ There is far more to be said on the details of this involvement, see Macneil, *Politics*.

[A]Conclusion

[B]Dominion Theology – Its History

In this book we have travelled from ancient to modern eschatology, through the secularization 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, Christian sociological reform movement that allowed evangelicals to emerge from the intellectual marginalization in the wake of secular humanism's takeover of culture during the 19th and 20th century. We then applied Dominion theology to outline a philosophy of Christian involvement.

[B]Dominion Theology – Present and Future

The answer to my question regarding the 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 in 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”, Word of Faith “dominionisms,” and the modern phenomena of “Christian

Nationalism.” 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 Rushdoony, Bahnsen, DeMar, and 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 Hebrew and Christian 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 dispensationalized 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.¹

There is also a position within the Reformed community which moderates this strict position. These are those who emphasize 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 would be argued for by strict Theonomists. Their epistemology tends to be far more situational and postmodern with an emphasis on the ethical quality of the narrative in the scriptures rather than seeing the scriptures as a normative and exemplary sourcebook.²

Next, dominionists like “Kingdom Now” or “Word of Faith” which have a fundamentalist, Pentecostal or charismatic heritage are generally far less epistemologically

¹ I expand upon this philosophical position in my *Foundations*.

² Cope, *God and Political Justice*, loc. 4427. Landa establishes the substance of her book on a theonomical basis with a thoroughly philosophically modern premise. I sense a change in emphasis to a more postmodern view as she attempts to demonstrate in later chapters how the apostles “interpreted” the law for their new situation.

self-conscious and tend to favor evidentialist apologetics with its implicit confidence in natural law and reason to convince and convict. Where it is theologically informed, it often favors a “covenant neutral” epistemology where “common grace” means truth is to be found in the redeemed and non-redeemed communities.³ The Bible ceases to be a document of continuous revelation applicable in all ages but is to be viewed in a dispensational sense. Ethics are essentially antinomian, emphasis is on the relational aspects of faith⁴ 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.”⁵ These are also characteristic of the churches on the more mystical wing of the prophetic movement, that often have weakly defined, postmodern positions in their doctrines.

Finally, “Christian Nationalism” is not really a distinct movement, coming into political parlance in the wake of Christian support for Trump which we have examined in detail elsewhere.⁶ It is generally used as a pejorative by opponents and tautologically by its proponents, “I love my nation and I am a Christian, therefore I am a Christian nationalist!” That is, Christian nationalists could be any of the above rather than a distinct category. Where it is becoming intellectually more sophisticated, it is recognizing the dangers to the Western Christian tradition by mass immigration (sanctioned and illegal) from nations with non-Western values. Recent immigrants from Islamic nations are seen to be particularly problematic as they have cultures frequently inimical to the West that deny freedom of speech, minority rights, the rights of women, and the separation of church and state. They do

³ Westminster theological seminary has been much criticized by Reconstructionists for moving in this direction away from a presuppositionalist position. “Common grace” is a term associated with the Reformed movements but the concept is present in evangelical theology more generally using different terminology.

⁴ God as my “Dad,” pastors as “fathers,” pastor’s wives as “mothers,” and together we are “God’s family.”

⁵ Coates, *Not Under Law*, 58

⁶ Macneil, *Politics*.

not believe assimilation into the host Western nation is desirable or required; it is these positions which are fertile ground for an emerging Christian nationalist movement.⁷

Thus, in 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,”⁸ it needs to rediscover its philosophical and theological basis in the Reformation tradition and have a renewed confidence in God’s law and epistemological self-consciousness.

A dominion theology that lacks a coherent political and social program with preference given to “governing in the heavenlies” by the operation of spiritual principles with no natural, physical outworkings is naïve and immature. The recent assassination of Charlie Kirk for being a conservative Christian interested in societal reformation should make very clear that our very survival as a civilization depends on us embracing the social, political, spiritual and wider responsibility for the whole of culture in the expression of our Christian faith. That is why I finished the discussion with the application of dominion theology with the outlining of a philosophy of Christian involvement; it is my belief that the believer who claims to be a prophet but does not vote or support those working to be in business, commerce, education, the arts, public service, or political offices, understands nothing substantive about dominion.

⁷ A case in point is Abdullah Hammoud, the current mayor of Dearborn, Michigan the center of Islamic culture in the United States. Though he is a second generation immigrant, he denies the entire concept of a “melting pot”: https://www.newsbreak.com/jonny-c-224527595/4353430088816-dearborn-mayor-hammoud-the-entire-point-of-america-is-not-assimilating-to-culture-and-the-language?s=ws_native. He also labelled as “Islamophobic” a Christian minister that objected to the renaming of a street in honor of Osama Siblani who has repeatedly expressed public support for Hezbollah, HAMAS, and other Palestinian factions as “freedom fighters”; see <https://www.adl.org/resources/profile/osama-siblani-arab-american-news>.

⁸ Landa Cope speaking at the “Kingdom Solutions” conference hosted by Glasgow Prophetic center, 19th September 2014. Audio recording is available from GPA.

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[A]Appendix A – Post-Evangelicalism

It is beneficial to distinguish between the neo-evangelical position and the post-evangelical position, the former we have mentioned repeatedly whereas the latter has only been mentioned in passing. A “neo” evangelical is a broad designation that normally refers to evangelicals from non-traditional, often non-Western jurisdictions that have had some kind of conversion, revival or renewal to orthodox protestant Christianity; for example many Latin American Protestant and some non-classical Pentecostal churches¹ might be described in this way but the core of the various diverse expressions and practices is still a commitment to a set of ‘evangelical’ theological propositions. Post-evangelicalism was very different, its central concern is pastoral and relational, how Christianity should deal with culture. In this sense, it has something in common with Dominion Theology and notably the Social Gospel (which, as a historical movement, we considered in more detail in the main text) and thus is on the surface a potential competitor to them, which is why we take the time to mention it here.

Historically, there were some clear cultural and intellectual precursors to the view² but it was Dave Tomlinson, a onetime leader within the British charismatic movement during the 1980s, who popularized this term in his 1995 book, *Post Evangelical*. It is also important that a revised American edition came complete with a ‘critical’ commentary by some who had attempted to import the movement into the US where the sociological term “new emergent” had been applied; it was as an example of an exciting new movement that had emerged because of the shortcomings of the status quo. Thus, it was both driven by a pastoral dissatisfaction with evangelicalism and was intellectually interesting to the academy; Dave

¹ That is, those outside the historical Pentecostal denominations of the Assemblies of God (AOG), Foursquare, and Elim.

² Loydell, “The Evangelical Mind,” para. 1. <https://shipoffools.com/2024/05/the-evangelical-mind/>.

had initially hoped academics might pick the ideas up in this way and give some sort of rigorous expression to them.

The academy did indeed manage a small, single volume set of six essays edited by Graham Clay in 1997 as *The Post Evangelical Debate*, and they were bona fide academic essays. With the intense interest showed in it at once Christian festivals such as Greenbelt (Dave relates how people crowded into a tent to hear him speak), it appeared it was going to be a major movement; however, that did not materialize and the potential threat to dominion theology which was also asserting itself in the charismatic Christian conscience at the same time, evaporated. It is worthwhile understanding why this was the case.

As stated, as a matter of historical fact, it was Dave who really brought post-evangelicalism into the Christian mainstream consciousness because of his status and influence within British, American, Australian, and New Zealand charismatic Christianity. Dave, after leading a 15-person team and founding 50 charismatic churches for the best part of a decade, became “disillusioned by the theology and spirituality of the charismatic movement,” and in 1989 left, and not only that, became apostate from, the charismatic movement more generally which, at least formally, had maintained an evangelical commitment. Dave gives this compressed personal history here,³ which captures well the essence of his approach and the impetus behind the wider movement. To be clear, Dave still considers himself Christian and is now a Church of England minister, though on the (very) liberal rather than the charismatic wing of that broad church.⁴

To give him his due, spiritually, Dave I believe, is someone with an apostolic mantle, whatever he will choose to build will grow as a gift from God. As the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, we can just as effectively build because it is the ability to build

³ <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/person/dave-tomlinson>

⁴ <https://www.saintlukeschurch.org.uk/>

which is the gift from God, but in terms of this logic, what is built is not necessarily from God; in contrast to that which is established and successful because what is believed is sound theology reflecting metaphysical truths about the way the world really is and is successful because of that. What we mean there is similar to the paradox of the successful unbeliever, who like Paul describes have such a keen sense of conscience and thus in the understanding of the law of God, that they are blessed and succeed on that basis.

Thus, for our purposes here, what makes this so interesting is that “Post” is best understood for Dave and the post-evangelical “movement” as meaning “after,” in the historical, sequential sense. Once there was the evangelical, now we are “post” that movement and, most importantly, everything it intellectually stood for. So, for example, in Dave’s 2012 book, *How To Be A Bad Christian*, you will not find a statement of the imperative for repentance from the perspective that it is required for justification and thus salvation before a holy God, that we are required to believe the blood of Jesus was shed as an atonement for our rebellion (sin) against God that places us under condemnation, and that we are required to believe in our heart and confess with our mouth to receive salvation from it. In other words, you will not find some kind of exposition of the gospel as distilled in just two verses from the first eight chapters, by Paul in Romans 10:8–9.

Rather, for the post-evangelical, sin is not defined as something we need redemption from; in contrast, the mere use of the word “sin” becomes a narrative device, the purpose of which is pejorative; the focus on sin within Christian discourse for the post-evangelical becomes a stumbling block for some to receive the unconditional love of God. That is, the post-evangelical prescription is to throw any theological clarity into the bin of that historical religion and tradition that has gotten in the way of a relationship with the loving God, who loves all without prejudice and precondition; it is never defined as the mindset and heart condition that separates us from God and that it is required of us to repent to receive freedom

from, which would then allow us to experience the operation and working of the love of God. Repentance for Dave is recast as a psychological exercise necessary for mental hygiene, which of course it is, but it is also a necessary spiritual transaction, a precondition of our justification before God.

We would perhaps say that Dave's book really is a manual for the 'Bad Christian' because it never clearly states the "good news" of the gospel as deliverance from the dominion of the said 'sin,' preferring the sentimental "unconditional love of God" as a substitute for it. God's love in the salvific sense is *not* unconditional, rather it is *freely available* to all those who meet His *conditions* of repentance. The "Good Christian" recognizes that God so loved the world that He gave His Son for the purpose that those who repent and believed would be saved; a failure to comply with these preconditions really does mean permanent separation from God and an eternity in Hell, regardless of the removal of Hell from the Alpha Course and the evangelical consciousness, let alone the liberal Christians who stumbled .

So, as a wider theological method, post-evangelicalism with its nonjudgmental acceptance of all is brutally defective in terms of basic Christian theology but this was unimportant to the post-evangelicals themselves because it has always been much more about the practice of Christianity than any theoretical or theological account of it; a relaxed, non-confrontational, supremely liberal, friendly, 'inclusive' approach that creates a "community where all are welcomed and accepted." This passive stance, in thoroughly postmodern fashion, wants to parade its wares in the markets of the public square and hope that someone midway between the clothes and music stalls might stumble across our bench and then realize they had found what they were really looking for. In other words, all that post-evangelicalism was to offer was a sort of rarefied Alpha Course experience, which itself had

faced criticism as a sanitized, Hell-Free Christian option for professionals looking to actualize their spiritual life with this optional add-on of Jesus.

This, of course, is where we see the contrast with Dominion theology most dramatically and the explanation as to why Dominion theology has and will endure. For the Dominion theologian, it is about a complete, integrated intellectual and spiritual worldview, a practice flowing from a coherent and cogent theology that presents a narrative for every sphere of human culture. The subjective spiritual experience is fortified by the objective knowledge from the scriptures. In contrast, post-evangelicalism, at its very best, has a fuzzy subjective concept of the scriptures as an important relic worthy of veneration but subject to the enlightened intellect and practices of the modern world, free of all those ancient prejudices, bigotry, and arguments about the content of scripture and then further about the canon of scripture. With respect to the issue of canonicity, a genuine church merely *recognizes* the canonicity of books; it does not *decide* on them; the prerogative with regards to scripture is always with the author, not with humanity.

Thus, on analysis, post-evangelicalism becomes the religion of personal and collective preferences and survives based on its toleration by the hosting culture, it has no power to change or to set culture in its intellectual definition; or more correctly it is unable to direct culture because of its lack of any such definition. However, not wishing to take anything away from the post-evangelical mindset, it is certainly of note as a subcultural phenomenon of sorts which has some affection for an unoffensive ‘quiet’ Christianity in the public square which once mythically existed in the Judeo-Christian past cultural consensus of Western nations. However, in contrast to dominion theology, it has lost the intellectual essence of Christianity, trading it for the innocuous and ultimately false gospel of unconditional love, acceptance, and inclusion.

[A]Appendix B – The Late Jesus

This was an article I had written for a Christian publication summarizing many of the themes of this book.

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 lukewarmness,” a concept birthed in Dispensationalism viewing the containing passage of Rev 3 as a particular “sub-dispensation” within the church age. 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 to consider the theological credibility of the favorite “blessed hope” of the Dispensationalists, the “Rapture” doctrine. I include some references at the end for the other categories if you are interested.

With regards to the eschatological tenor of dispensationalism, Landa Cope, one of the founders of YWAM in the 1970s with Loren Cunningham, asserted 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.¹ 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 argues Peter and Paul expected return in their lifetimes and every Christian generation since has had those who adopted a similar position. Yet we must hold this important scriptural imminence in tension with our social responsibility as believers in line with the scriptural admonition to “occupy until he comes.” In her words, we must “build the kingdom” and not worry about the return for Jesus told us not to, we are to be about the King’s business and be ready to give an account of our works (Luke 19:13-27).² In my words, it should not distract us from exercising dominion and

¹ Cope, *Old Testament template and God and Political Justice*.

² 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.

subduing the Earth to God's law. To bastardize 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 favorite 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"³ 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. 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 their audiences shrieking in ecstasy. One friend of mine believed a minor earthquake that occurred in North Wales in 1990 (where we were both living at the time) 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.

For some, the Rapture could legitimately be delayed until 2007, for 1967 was the first time that Jerusalem had been in the hands of the Jews for two thousand years; this clearly a prophetic marker of some kind for anyone with true prophetic discernment (obviously). However, these passed as did the apocalypses predicted by the pagan astrologers with the unusual and rare alignment of all nine planets at around the same time. Even now in 2025, with a healthy dose of Jewish mysticism, some believe that the Rapture will be on the 21st September 2025. (Prudentially, I am editing this on that very date, and now also the 13th November 2025, so we can safely assume the Rapture did not occur unless Starmer is in fact the Antichrist's UK government representative, and I really was 'Left Behind.')

The Jewish prophet Jonathan Cahn explains forcefully why this is really a very weak mode of reasoning,

³ This is available from <https://ia801303.us.archive.org/19/items/ReasonsWhyTheRaptureWillBeIn1988PDF/14080011-88-Reasons-Why-The-Rapture-Will-Be-in-1988.pdf>

making the point also that other very similar prognostications just bring shame and disrepute on the church, and it should be stated that he believes in a Rapture!

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 of “special revelation” and prophetic insight concealed from the rest of us “Moabite evangelicals.”⁴

Remarkably there are still able scholars committed to the view who can maintain a critical view of the failures of their forerunners as “rapturists” or suffering from “rapture mania.” One such able scholar was Chuck Missler who I thoroughly recommend on most subjects.⁵ However, it was notable in his late work there was no mention of the “budding fig tree” as the reformation of Israel that has featured predominantly in previous prophetic iterations. According to his final 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 long-past and otherwise excellent *2011 Strategic Perspectives* conference. He separates previously dispensationalist harmonized “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, which made millions for its creators in the 2000s and was still

⁴ MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot*, 55–85.

⁵ Chuck has passed since I wrote this article, he went onto glory on 1 May 2018. His personal website is still available, <https://chuckmissler.com/> and the ministry he founded is still active at the web address <https://www.khouse.org/>.

having ‘behind the scenes’ YouTube videos made about it in 2018. 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.” Maybe there is a place for climbing to the tops of mountains and proclaiming to the powers and principalities the judgments of God, but I struggle with this; it would be far better if prophetic direction, admonition and maybe even rebuke could be given to our own apostate rulers. Let us think clearly and build the kingdom on Earth and within our vocations without distraction or condemnation that we are being “worldly.”

[B]Further Reading

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