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An Evaluation of Theonomic Neopostmillennialism

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Today Christians are witnessing "the most rapid cultural realignment in history." One Christian writer describes the last 25 years as "The Great Rebellion," which has resulted in a whole new culture replacing the more traditional Christian-influenced American culture. Is the light flickering and about to go out? Is this a part of the further development of the apostasy that many premillennialists say is taught in the Bible? Or is this "post-Christian" culture one of the periodic visitations of a judgment/salvation which is furthering the coming of a postmillennial kingdom? Leaders of the

1 Marilyn Ferguson, The Aquarian Conspiracy (Los Angeles J P Tarcher, 1980), p 23
2 Bernard Pyron, The Great Rebellion (Waco, TX Rebound Publications, 1985), p 11
Pyron notes that he has found 50 traits to describe the New Culture, all under the umbrella of the unifying emphasis on the narcissistic self
3 Schlossberg notes the changes in today's culture by collecting a long list of "post-" descriptors, concluding that society is "post-Puritan, post-Protestant and post-Christian" (Herbert Schlossberg, Idols for Destruction [Nashville Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983], p 1)
4 Chilton says, 'The eschatology of dominion is [not] a doctrine of protection against national judgment and desolation. To the contrary, the eschatology of dominion is a guarantee of judgment. It teaches that world history is judgment, a series of judgments leading up to the Final Judgment' (David Chilton, Paradise Restored An Eschatology of Dominion [Tyler, TX Reconstruction Press, 1985], p 220) North distinguishes between 'judgment unto restoration and judgment unto destruction' (Gary North, Unholy Spirits Occultism and New Age Humanism [Fort Worth Dominion Press, 1986], p 373) For a more complete discussion of this view see Herbert Bowsher, "Will Christ Return 'At Any Moment'?" Journal of Christian Reconstruction 7 (Winter 1981) 48-60
Christian Reconstruction Movement (hereafter referred to as CRM) clearly state how Christians should respond to these times. But what is the CRM? How did it begin? Who are its leaders and what are its goals? How should believers view this movement? This article seeks to answer these questions in an introductory and survey manner, as a means of stimulating further evaluation in light of God's Word.

History and Background

"Twenty years ago, the Christian Reconstruction movement did not exist." 5 However, today the movement has grown rapidly and is exerting great influence within Christianity. The patriarch of the movement is R. J. Rushdoony, son of Armenian emigrants to New York City. "Rush," as he is often known to his friends, is the latest in "an unbroken succession of fathers and sons or nephews who were pastors from the early fourth century until the present." 6 He holds BA and MA degrees from the University of California and received his theological training at the Pacific School of Religion. His PhD degree from Valley Christian University in Clovis, California is in educational philosophy. Rushdoony worked with Chinese youth in San Francisco and was a missionary to the Paiute and Shoshone Indians for about nine years. He then served as pastor of several Presbyterian churches. 7 He founded the Chalcedon Foundation in 1965 to promote "Christian Reconstruction." 8 Rushdoony's first book, By

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6 Rodney Clapp, Democracy as Heresy, Christianity Today, February 20, 1987, p 22 See also R J Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law (Nutley, NJ Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), p 782 Rushdoony says, "This writer comes from an ancient line of such hereditary Armenian priests, his father, the son of a priest, was a Presbyterian clergyman, as he is also". For another reference see R J Rushdoony, "The Vision of Chalcedon," Journal of Christian Reconstruction 9 (Winter 1982–83) 128

7 Michael D Philbeck, "An Interview with R J Rushdoony," The Counsel of Chalcedon (October 1983) 12

8 The Chalcedon Foundation publishes the monthly newsletter Chalcedon Report (P O Box 158, Vallecito, CA 95251) and the Journal of Christian Reconstruction Their publishing arm is Ross House Books Chalcedon has an expanding staff and board of affiliates which include Samuel L Blumenfeld (an expert on the history of public education), John Lofton (a columnist for the Washington, DC Times, and television commentator), Mark R Rushdoony (R J's son), Otto J Scott, and the investment counselor R E McMaster, Jr Chalcedon also has representatives in Europe and other parts of the world The Chalcedon News (1986) reported, "The Conservative Digest, now published from Colorado, has as senior editor Otto Scott, and as contributing editors John
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What Standard (1959), was the fountainhead of a steady stream of publications to come from his pen. In 1973 the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company published his controversial and influential book The Institutes of Biblical Law, which, because of its theonomic appeal to the Bible, drew fire from the establishment Reformed community. Because of the movement's influence Newsweek labeled Chalcedon "the think tank for the religious right." CRM Books are being published by major Christian presses, and their ideas have influenced mainstream Christian thinkers including Francis Schaeffer.

Gary North and Greg Bahnsen are the other major players in the movement. North, Rushdoony's son-in-law, considers himself a Christian economist. His major association with Rushdoony was in editing Chalcedon's Journal of Christian Reconstruction from 1974 until they had a falling out in 1981. North moved to Tyler, Texas in the early 1980s and launched what many call "the Tyler group."

The ICE (Institute for Christian Economics) was established there, and the sister organization Geneva Ministries followed.

Lofton and R J Rushdoony


11 Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," p 17. See also Gary North and David Chilton, 'Apologetics and Strategy," in Tactics of Christian Resistance, vol 3 Christianity and Civilization (Tyler, TX Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983), pp 124-27. Here North and Chilton said that Francis Schaeffer had been reading Rushdoony for 20 years. They compared some passages from the two, showing that Schaeffer clearly picked up the statements from Rushdoony.

12 North probably chose Tyler because he considered it to be one of the best locations in the United States for survival. He believes that the United States economy will soon collapse because of the nation's unbiblical practices. Therefore the best place for 'the remnant' to be is a rural setting, in an estate where one can be self-supporting, from which to rebuild the apostate civilization into the kingdom of God. He gets this model from feudalism after the collapse of Rome in the 400s. He holds that this approach rebuilt European civilization with biblical law, which the modern church has squandered, resulting in judgment and paving the way for the coming millennium.

13 For some interesting insights on this matter see "Publisher's Preface" by North in David Chilton, The Days of Vengeance An Exposition of the Book of Revelation (Fort Worth Dominion Press, 1987), pp xv-xxxii

14 The ICE currently publishes four newsletters Christian Reconstruction, Dominion Strategies, Biblical Economics Today, and Covenant Renewal (P O Box 8000, Tyler, TX 75711) North also publishes his economic newsletter Remnant Review, and Chipnotes (P O Box 8204, Fort Worth, TX 76124). His publishing companies include Dominion Press in Fort Worth and Reconstruction Press in Tyler.

15 Geneva Ministries is operated in the basement of Westminster Presbyterian Church, P O Box 131300, Tyler, TX 75713. On their desktop laser printing system they publish the monthly Geneva Review. Their publishing branch is called Geneva.
Other players under the North/Tyler umbrella include Ray Sutton, the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Tyler, Texas, and James Jordan, a "scholar-in-residence" who teaches at the Geneva Divinity School. David Chilton, who worked with North for about four years in Tyler, has written books on economics and eschatology. Chilton, now a pastor in California, was groomed by North to promote theonomy in relation to eschatology. Another rising star who is aligned with the Tyler group is George Grant, pastor of Believers Fellowship in Humble, Texas. Grant has developed Reconstructionist views on welfare, the poor, and literature. Others at Geneva Ministries include Michael Gilstrap, James Michael Peters, and Lewis E. Bulkeley.

The brilliant Greg Bahnsen, who read some of Rushdoony's works when just a boy, has emerged as the pointman on the theonomy issue. Unlike the other two leaders, he has not developed an organization but "currently pastors a small Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Orange County, California, and is dean of the graduate school at an area teachers college."17

Atlanta, Georgia is another center of the CRM. Chalcedon Presbyterian Church in Dunwoody, Georgia voted on February 20, 1983 to withdraw from the PCA, with which it had been affiliated since its founding nine years before. The church cited many reasons for withdrawal, but the most serious seems to be its charge that the PCA was not in keeping with the Westminster Standards because they were not interpreting the Standards according to theonomy and postmillennialism. Joseph C. Morecraft III is their Reconstructionist pastor. He ran for Larry McDonald's Congressional seat in the 1986 election, losing 2 to 1. Morecraft differs from other Reconstructionists in that he has never written a book; however, he does have a monthly publication. He even bemoans the fact that while

Press Christianity and Civilization is an occasional journal that Geneva Ministries also produces

16 Jordan and Chilton were students at Reformed Theological Seminary when Bahnsen was dismissed from the faculty because of advocating theonomy. Both left the school when Bahnsen did. Jordan graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary, but Chilton did not pursue further institutional training.

17 Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," p. 18. Bahnsen received his PhD degree in philosophy from Southern California University. His first love is apologetics within the Van Til tradition, and some have said he was considered by Van Til to be his best ever student. As Clapp notes, "He was also the first student at Westminster Seminary to finish both the master of divinity and master of theology degrees within three years."


19 The Counsel of Chalcedon, 3032 Hacienda Court, Marietta, GA 30066.
believing that the preaching of the gospel will be the key instrument for bringing in the kingdom, the CRM does not practice evangelism and the high standards of personal godly living which he sees consistent with their high calling.\(^{20}\)

Another of Bahnsen’s students at Reformed Theological Seminary was Gary DeMar, who in Atlanta heads up the Institute of Christian Government. DeMar leads conferences using his three workbooks on *God and Government*, from the Reconstructionist perspective.\(^{21}\)

Others in the movement include the South African Francis Nigel Lee, who has been associated with the Christian Studies Center in Memphis, Tennessee, and Joe Kickasola, professor of International Affairs at CBN University, Virginia Beach, Virginia. A graduate of Westminster Seminary, he teaches CRM views in his classes.\(^{22}\)

Gary North is certainly correct in saying that the Reconstructionist position cannot be ignored\(^{23}\) by those who do not fall in line with its perspective. What are the main beliefs that distinguish the CRM from many other theologies?

**Beliefs and Theology**

The relationship of Christian Reconstructionists to Meredith Kline seems to epitomize the way they view their theology. On the one hand Kline is the source of much inspiration and support\(^{24}\) for

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20 Joseph C Morecraft III, "The Future of Evangelism," cassette recording from the 1984 Conference on "Eschatology and Dominion," in Tyler, Texas Michael Gilstrap sounds a similar note, "It is my fear, however, that in our beehive of dominion activity, we often neglect the more personal and individual aspects of personal piety" ("Dominion from Our Knees," *Geneva Review* 36 [March 1987] 2

21 Gary DeMar, American Vision Press, P O Box 720515, Atlanta, GA 30328


23 North, "Publisher’s Preface," in Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, pp xviii-xxiii

24 See, for example, North, "Publisher’s Preface," pp xvii-xviii, where he credits Kline’s studies on the suzerainty treaties as a breakthrough This in turn gave rise to Sutton’s five points of the covenant, which were the key to Chilton’s understanding of Revelation Also it seems that Kline has had significant influence on the thinking of James Jordan, who praises Kline’s *Images of the Spirit* as a brilliant study in biblical theology in a review of that book North says that "Kline without Jordan produces confusion about biblical symbolism" ("Chilton, Sutton, and Dominion Theology," an essay in the January 1987 ICE monthly mailing, p 3) Kline’s work seems to have had
their ideas, but on the other hand he attacks them as being involved in "an old-new error." The CRM has grouped old ideas along with revived Puritanism.

The CRM criticizes dispensationalism for being a relatively recent development and claims that the CRM is the historically orthodox position of the church. CRM leaders certainly claim an old foundation for much of their theology. This is seen in Rushdoony's alignment with the Council of Chalcedon, his love for medieval culture and government, as well as the movement's overall claim to be modern Puritans loyal to the Westminster Confession. However, they often speak of innovation and "breakthroughs" in their theology. They seem to suggest that the basic categories of theology

some role in Jordan's maximalist' approach to biblical interpretation displayed in his work Judges God's War against Humanism (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1985), p xii See especially Sutton's Covenant What Is It Anyway? Covenant Renewal 1 (February 1987), in which he wrote, "In the next newsletter I shall discuss in what sense I've used Kline and in what way I've rejected him. The title of the essay is Kline vs Kline, (p 2, n 3)

25 Meredith G Kline, 'Comments on an Old-New Error," Westminster Theological Journal 41 (Fall 1978) 74-80

26 Bahnsen goes to great length to argue that the suggested novelty of theonomy is only 'apparent' 'Theonomic ethics does not then ask that something new be added to the Confessional understanding of God's law, but simply that we be consistent with its outlook—as were the Puritans. It is, therefore, inaccurate to speak of theonomic ethics as 'the latest approach to the law.' It is among the oldest, and therein lies its modern offense It is unpopular to support the Puritans in a secular age" ("The Authority of God's Law, Presbyterian Journal, December 6, 1978, p 9)


28 North wrote, "I see myself as a neo-Puritan" ('Preface to the Second Edition" in David Chilton, Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators [Tyler, TX: ICE, 1982], p 14)

29 Examples are North's recent claim that Sutton's 'remarkable, path-breaking discoveries' concerning the five-point nature of the biblical covenants is a key to understanding not only the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Revelation, but also 'Psalms, Hosea, Matthew, Hebrews 8, and several of Paul's epistles " North's excitement continues as he further observes, 'Sutton's thoroughgoing development has to be regarded as the most important single theological breakthrough in the Christian Reconstruction movement since the publication of R J Rushdoony's Institutes of Biblical Law, in 1973" ('Publisher's Preface," pp xvii-xviii) North and Chilton say concerning Van Til's philosophy, "His apologetic system marks the first total break with humanism in all its forms " And they added that Van Til "will be understood in the history of the church as equal in importance to, and probably greater than, the contribution of the scholastics or the Protestant Reformers" ('Apologetics and Strategy," p 112)
have been with the church since the Reformation, but that they need further development, arrangement, and perseverance, which their movement is giving. Then when that is supplied, the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

It is inconsistent for them to advocate legitimate "development" of their theology, but to disallow it for their opponents. Their "developments" presumably allow them to disassociate with the failures and shortcomings of their theological fathers, while on the other hand associating with their predecessors' strengths.

North cites five fundamental points on which the CRM rests: the sovereignty of God, biblical law, Cornelius Van Til's biblical presuppositionalism, biblical optimism, and the covenant. North and Chilton hold that these elements have to be blended together as a system to be effective. They "too often have been missing as a unit, from the days of the early church fathers until the 1960's." This is a bold claim. The two major areas that seem to drive the system of the CRM are theonomy and postmillennialism. Since there has been considerably more attention given to their view of theonomy, the

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30 Contrary to what many might think, Rushdoony often castigates Calvin's incomplete view of the law. For example in one place Calvin is cited for declaring that the OT Law is no longer in full force. Rushdoony calls this silly and trifling reasoning. (The Institutes of Biblical Law, p 653)

31 North, Chilton, Sutton, and Dominion Theology, p 3. Clapp, however, lists three presuppositional apologetics, theonomy (biblical law), and postmillennialism (Democracy or Heresy, pp 18-19). Jordan sees three ingredients under the sovereignty of God. What [Reconstructionists] have in common is a belief in three specific manifestations of the sovereignty of God: a triumphant eschatology (postmillennialism), grounded in a presuppositional philosophy (articulated best by Van Til), and guided by Biblical law (theonomy). (The Reconstructionist Movement, p 1) These three themes also are the main issues for Rushdoony and Bahnson.

32 North, Apologetics and Strategy; p 107

33 Ibid

remainder of this article concentrates on their eschatology.

POSTMILLENNIALISM

Optimism. Postmillennialism almost died out after the two world wars left only a handful of advocates. However, the last 10 to 15 years have witnessed a renewed emphasis on postmillennialism. The eschatology of the CRM may be called neopostmillennialism. Its proponents say it is similar to amillennialism. "Indeed, it is no accident," declares a Reformed writer explaining the recent rise of postmillennialism, "that both postmillennialism and theonomy . . . have sprouted in the soil of a strong Reformed revival." This may explain the initial spark; however, the recent spread into other circles, especially into the "positive-confession" charismatic realm, is better explained by the word "optimism." North notes the spread of postmillennial optimism into this branch of the charismatic movement as he critiques this same observation made by David Hunt in The Seduction of Christianity.

He [Hunt] implicitly associates New Age optimism with an optimistic eschatology. He recognizes (as few of the "positive confession" leaders have recognized) that they have become operational postmillennialists. He sees clearly that a new eschatology is involved in "positive confession," a dominion eschatology.

North later boasts of a specific inroad of their views into the ministry of "positive confession" minister Robert Tilton.

Mr Hunt understands far better than most observers what is really taking place. Indeed, it has already begun bringing together the postmillennial Christian reconstructionists and the "positive confes-

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35 According to a recent sampling of Christian Today readers, nine percent of those who responded said they think Christ will come after the millennium (February 6, 1987, p 9-1). This is certainly an 'optimistic' turn of events.

36 Chilton revises what constitutes a postmillennial and an amillennial. He calls optimistic amillenarians "postmills," and pessimistic amillenarians "premills." He says, 'The Millennium' is thus simply the Kingdom of Christ. In this objective sense, therefore orthodox Christianity has always been postmillennial. Orthodox Christians have always confessed that Jesus Christ will return after ("post") Christ's mediatorial reign has come to an end. In this sense, all 'amils' are also postmills' (Orthodox Christianity and the Millennial Heresy, p 3). Chilton wrote, 'What I'm saying is this. Amillenialism and Postmillennialism are the same thing. The only fundamental difference is that 'postmills' believe the world will be converted, and 'amils' don't. Otherwise, I'm an amill. Meredith Kline is a postmill. Got it?' (David Chilton to Thomas D Ice, December 17, 1986, p 4).


38 North, Unholy Spirits, pp 388-89
It began when Robert Tilton's wife read Gary DeMar's *God and Government* in late 1983, and then persuaded her husband to invite a group of reconstructionists to speak before 1,000 "positive confession" pastors and their wives at a January 1984 rally sponsored by Rev Tilton's church. The all-day panel was very well received.

Mr. Hunt sees that if this fusion of theological interests takes place, then the day of unchallenged dominance by the old-timed dispensational eschatology is about to come to an end. A new fundamentalism is appearing.

More recently North admits to some potential problems with misdirected optimism:

If all a person gains from the Christian Reconstruction movement in general is its optimistic eschatology, then he is skating on thin ice. Optimism is not enough. In fact, optimism alone is highly dangerous. The Communists have a doctrine of inevitable victory, so do radical Muslims. So did a group of revolutionary communist murderers and polygamists, the Anabaptists who captured the German city of Munster from 1525-35, before they were defeated militarily by Christian forces. Optimism in the wrong hands is a dangerous weapon.

This misguided optimism is a major error in neopostmillennialism. In the last century postmillennialism provided the optimistic climate in which the social gospel grew. Smith has argued that evangelicals were perhaps the leading force in many of the social gospel issues.

Evangelical Christians provided the example, inspiration, and principles for much of the Social Gospel, the evangelical ideology of the millennium merged without a break into what came to be called the social gospel in the years after 1870. These evangelicals worked as vigorously for social betterment as did the Social Gospel leaders.

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39 Ibid., pp 392-93. The March 17, 1987 issue of the *Austin American Statesman* published an article entitled "Born-again Christians, Kingdom Theology vs Communists" (p A-11). The story centered around Bishop Earl Paulk of the 10,000-member congregation at Chapel Hill Harvester Church in Decatur, Georgia. The article tells of Paulk's conversion to kingdom theology about six years earlier. Gary North was a keynote speaker at a recent conference at Paulk's church, and North serves as an adviser to one of the church's ministries. Paulk in his book *Held in the Heavens Until* (Atlanta: Kingdom Dimension Publishers, 1985) argues that Christ cannot come back to the earth until a certain amount of dominion (maturity) is achieved by the church. This appears to be a blend of postmillennialism with the old Pentecostal error often called the Manifest Sons of God teaching.

40 Chilton, Sutton, and Dominion Theology, p 4. Rushdoony acknowledged growth of their views among the charismatics also. So, years ago I came to the post-mill faith. NOW IT'S GROWING LIKE WILDFIRE ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. It is spreading into Baptist circles, as is theonomy. A very large section of the charismatic movement is becoming Reformed, theonomic, and postmillennial, also. (An Interview with R. J. Rushdoony, p 14, capital letters his)

Evangelical postmillennialism is to be distinguished from the liberal form. However, one cannot overlook the role that postmillennialism in general played in the rise and development of the "social gospel." Postmillenarians blame dispensationalism for creating a climate of retreat from social and political issues. Are they denying that postmillennialism, an eschatology which they say has had great effect on Western culture, contributed to the optimism of the 1800s? Chilton does admit to some postmillennial heresy. "Examples of the Postmillenarian heresy would be easy to name as well: the Munster Revolt of 1534, Nazism, and Marxism (whether 'Christian' or otherwise)."42 Nazism and Marxism are undesirable movements. Why then does Chilton not admit the relationship of postmillennialism to the "social gospel" movement?43

The wedding between certain errant charismatic theologies and current neopostmillennialism may be similar to the deterioration of Puritan postmillennialism into the social gospel movement. If this is happening, then one may expect to see the spread of optimistic eschatology at the expense of historic orthodoxy. And again the tendency of postmillennialism to raise false hopes will have occurred.

Common grace. North and the "Tyler group" have taken an aggressive stand regarding their eschatology.44 They feel they can work with various groups, even though they admit those groups are wrong in many areas of theology.45 This is because theonomists be-

42 Chilton, Orthodox Christianity and the Millenarian Heresy," p 3
43 Chilton writes, The dominion outlook is equated with the liberal 'Social Gospel movement in the early 1900's. Such an identification is utterly absurd, devoid of any foundation whatsoever. The leaders of the Social Gospel movement were evolutionary humanists and socialists, and were openly hostile toward Biblical Christianity. It is true that they borrowed certain terms and concepts from Christianity, in order to pervert them for their own uses. Thus they talked about the 'Kingdom of God, but what they meant was far removed from the traditional Christian faith" (Paradise Restored, p 228). Why would Shirley Jackson Case (a social gospel advocate) write a whole book defining what he called postmillennialism, against the pessimistic premillennialism of his day, if he did not view himself as an optimistic postmillen-

44 North wrote, 'I am probably the person most responsible for devising a strategy for speeding up this drift toward postmillennialism, which I think Mr. Hunt is aware of' (Unholy Spirits, p 391).

45 North admits that people like Robert Tilton have some theological problems. 'Mr. Hunt points out that the language used by other positive confession' ministers is similar to the man-defying language of the New Age 'positive thinking' theology. There is no doubt that this accusation can be documented, and that some of these leaders need to get clear the crucial distinction between the imputed human perfection of Jesus Christ and the non-communicable divinity of Jesus Christ. This Creator-creature distinction is the most important doctrine separating the New Agers and orthodox Christianity' (p 388). Mr. Hunt implies that the poor wording of the positive confession charismatics' Christology reflects their eschatology. It doesn't. It simply reflects their sloppy wording and their lack of systematic study of theology and its im-

lieve common grace is increasing as the age progresses. They do not believe that apostasy will increase (as common grace decreases).[^46] They say God is gradually developing various tools in the church for bringing in the kingdom. Some examples are the development of a consistent biblical epistemology by Van Til;[^47] Sutton's view on the covenant;[^48] Rushdoony's innovation of law as the tool or blueprint for bringing in dominion;[^49] and North's interpretation that modern technology leads to decentralization (rather than centralization and one world government).

This enlightenment/breakthrough attitude is producing the opposite effect for this movement which seeks to provide the tools for furthering the kingdom.[^50] Rather than protecting CRMers from

[^46]: In a break with Van Til on the issue of common grace, North argues that God increasingly restrains evil as the current kingdom age moves toward a fuller manifestation of the kingdom. One of the means is the corresponding increase in what North calls 'common curse.' God's increasing curse of evil is one of the means of His restraint of evil (common grace). This is his explanation as to why the millennium does not appear to be on its way in. It is because Western civilization has retreated from its Christian foundation and God is disciplining her, much as He did Israel during her times of unfaithfulness in the Old Testament. See North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 3 (Winter 1976-77) 13-47. This article is reprinted in Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, pp 623-64. Also see Gary North, "Competence, Common Grace, and Dominion," *Biblical Economics Today* 8 (June/July, 1985), and Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987).

[^47]: The CRM believes that Van Til has solved one of the major roadblocks that hindered the New England Puritans from bringing in the kingdom. The Puritans have been purged of epistemological rationalism, with Van Til's biblically centered method. This is argued by Terrill Irwin Elmff, *The Guise of Every Graceless Heart: Human Autonomy in Puritan Thought and Experience* (Valle County, CA: Ross House Books, 1981). However, one of Van Til's foundational ideas is that one cannot reach the kind of logical certainty which their dogmatism on certain issues projects. In fact North bemoans the fact that Van Til never became either a theonomist or a postmillennialist. North said, 'Van Til was like a demolition expert, he spent his life blowing up bridges between covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers. But he offered no solutions. Thus, he gained few followers, and he offered no earthly hope. His amillennial pessimism was fully consistent with his cultural pessimism. He never trusted theonomic postmillennialism, which is why we search in vain for any public acknowledgement on his part of the existence of Rushdoony or me, or any favorable printed words for either of us. He regarded the Christian Reconstruction movement as a fringe movement, not the cutting edge." ('Cutting Edge or Lunatic Fringe?' p 2).

[^48]: See note 29

[^49]: North says, 'The missing element in 1967 was biblical law. Once the details of the theonomist' position began to take shape, Christian Reconstructionism became a full-fledged system. Biblical law establishes the basis of a positive alternative.' ('Cutting Edge or Lunatic Fringe?' p 1)

[^50]: See a series of essays on things like tape ministries, computers, television technology, and church newsletters in *Backward, Christian Soldiers* (Tyler, TX: Institute for
errors of the past, their overestimation of their own historical importance causes them to be closed to outside criticism. Therefore Rushdoony does not read reviews of his work, according to Joe Kickasola 51. North and others repeatedly say that everyone in 100 or 200 years will look back to developments in the CRM theology as a turning point in bringing in the kingdom 52. This may explain why the tone, especially of Rushdoony and North, is more like that of a communist propaganda assault than marketplace persuasion. One wonders if they believe God's grace will give them success or if they think success will come from their own development, defense, and proclamation of their views?

HERMENEUTICS

Theological presuppositions. The CRM makes much of theological presuppositions. As Taylor says,

The fatal weakness of the new postmillennialism is that its Scriptural support is derived precisely from those very passages which also form the backbone of the other views of what can be expected to happen before Christ returns.

When opposing views use precisely the same text for support against each other, it isn't the text which has produced the contrast, it probably was something else—newspaper exegesis, if you will, or theological presuppositions 53.

However, theological presuppositions should be tested by the "exegetical spiral," as Packer suggests.

Exegesis presupposes a hermeneutic which in turn is drawn from an overall theology, which theology in its turn rests on exegesis. The circle is not, of course, logically vicious, it is not the circle of presupposing what you ought to prove, but the circle, or rather the ascending spiral, of successive approximation. The circle thus appears as a one-way system from texts to doctrine, from doctrine to hermeneutic, from hermeneutic to texts again 54.

Christian Economics, 1984), pp 171-226

51 Law and Society A Basic Course in Theonomy A Response to Rushdoony, and the Millennium cassette recording

52 One of the latest displays of this is North's Publisher's Preface in The Days of Vengeance in which he boasts, Someone had better be prepared to write a better commentary on Revelation than The Days of Vengeance. I am confident that nobody can From this time on, there will only be three kinds of commentaries on the Book of Revelation Those that try to extend Chilton's Those that try to refute Chilton's Those that pretend there isn't Chilton's (pp xxxii iii)

53 G Aiken Taylor Theonomy Revisited, p 10 (italics added)

This method of "checking your math" certainly fits into the Van Tilian tradition, which the CRM claims to have as its epistemological foundation, since the essay appeared in Van Til's Festschrift. While the CRM proponents do not spend much time discussing hermeneutical theory, they generally try to use their "Trinitarian epistemology" as their guide. Jordan has said many times at conferences that in all of life the one and the many are necessary. To stress one over the other makes one a rationalist. There is no conflict, as in humanistic, dialectical thinking, he says, between the one (interpretation/meaning/theology) and the many (data/exegesis of the biblical texts). Hermeneutically this means if a person comes up with theological presuppositions, he should be able to explain them from specific texts of Scripture. In other words an issue can be approached from either direction of the exegetical circle, from the one or the many, since they should not conflict. Chilton says that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 does not end with simply witnessing to the nations. Christ's command is that we disciple the nations—all the nations. The kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of Christ. They are to be disciplined, made obedient to the faith. This means that every aspect of life throughout the world is to be brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ: families, individuals, business, science, agriculture, the arts, law, education, economics, psychology, philosophy, and every other sphere of human activity. However, this passage does not say what Chilton wants it to say, unless a priori assumptions are carried into it. He is reading his theology into the passage and then citing it as proof for his theology. Why is this passage not talking about evangelism, as most understand it? Premillennialists certainly believe that all those things Chilton mentioned will occur, but they disagree with the postmillennialists on timing (these changes will occur after Christ returns, not before) and agency (just as in creation, the Flood, the Exodus, and salvation, Christ will accomplish this directly, not through secondary means). The rest of the New Testament contains the theology that the church is to teach the disciples to observe. But the New Testament does not give the agenda Chilton suggests. He lists two checks he thinks keep the interpreter from lapsing into speculation.

First, he must be faithful to the system of doctrine taught in the Bible. Second, the interpreter must keep in mind that the symbols in

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55 See R. J. Rushdoony, The One and the Many (Tyler, TX: Thoburn Press, 1971) for an explanation of what it means to think in a Trinitarian way.

56 Chilton, Paradise Restored, p. 213
in the Bible are not isolated, rather, they are part of a system of symbolism given in the Bible, an architecture of images in which all the parts fit together. If we honestly and carefully read the Bible theologically and with respect to the Bible's own literary structure, we will not go very far astray.  

A major problem with these two rules is that they are both subjective. This is like telling a child to stop eating ice cream when he thinks he has had enough. Children need a rule or "law" that says, 'You have had enough when you finish one scoop.' A good Van Tilian should know that a system (the "one" or interpretation) should be checked by exegesis (the "many" or data in the text).

CRM leaders are long on interpretation and theological presuppositions but short on exegesis of specific passages to support their theology. North is sensitive to this charge when he says, "For over two decades, critics chided the Christian Reconstructionists with this refrain 'You people just haven't produced any Biblical exegesis to prove your case for eschatological optimism.'"

Spiritualization The hermeneutical approach of neopostmillennialism is rightly said to be a blend of the literal and nonliteral approach to Scripture. Walvoord's criticism of classical postmillennialism still stands in relation to neopostmillennialism.

Postmillennialism is based on the figurative interpretation of prophecy which permits wide freedom in finding the meaning of difficult passages. As a system of theology based upon a subjective spiritualizing of Scripture, postmillennialism lacks the central principles necessary for coherence. Each postmillennialist is left more or less to his own ingenuity in solving the problem of what to do with prophecies of a millennium on earth. The result is that postmillennialism has no unified front to protect itself from the inroads of other interpretations. At best postmillennialism is superimposed upon systems of theology which were developed without its aid.

It appears to this writer that the particular brand of spiritualization used by those in the CRM to justify their eschatology is that of "statement." In discussing a passage they merely state their theology rather than developing it from the text. Examples are:

57 Chilton, The Days of Vengeance p 38
58 North, Publisher's Preface, in The Days of Vengeance p xxiii Chilton's exegesis of the 1,000 years in Revelation 20 is primarily an approach in which he calls his opponents heretics. He says, "The answer to this precise question [the millennium] cannot be determined primarily by the exegesis of particular texts." (The Days of Vengeance p 493) Chilton is correct that exegesis certainly will not yield a postmillennial view of the 1,000 years.
59 Kline, Comments on an Old-New Error, pp 182-83
60 John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), pp 33-34
found in James Jordan's lecture series on Matthew 24. His point is that the coming of Christ will not be at the end of history for it already occurred in A.D. 70.

In interpreting Matthew 24:30, "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory," Jordan refers to Daniel 7:13. Since "one like a son of man" does not go to the earth, but rather approaches the throne of "the Ancient of Days," Jordan reasons that Matthew was not referring to the Second Coming of Christ to the earth. Jordan transports the context of Daniel 7, which is heavenly and not earthly, into the context of Matthew 24 without comparing and contrasting the two. He simply declares that is the meaning and then develops his theology on the basis of that statement.

He fails to take into account the fact that Matthew 24 refers to the reaction of people on earth when they see the Messiah return in the physical sky 'with power and great glory." Power and glory are the language of a physical display by God, as seen, for example, in the Exodus (Exod. 7:3, 14:30, 15:1-18). As Carson explains,

We may imagine Jesus the Son of Man receiving the kingdom through his resurrection and ascension, his divine vindication, so that now all authority is his (28:18). Yet it is equally possible to think of him receiving the kingdom at the consummation, when his reign or kingdom becomes direct and immediate, uncontested and universal.

Jordan and Chilton try to justify their approach with a dialectic they call "sense" and "referent." Chilton explains,

While the sense of a symbol remains the same (the words white house always mean white house), it can have numerous referents (White House in Washington, D.C., the white house across the street, the green house that belongs to Fred White, etc.). St John's images do not mean anything you like, their sense can be determined. But they still have an astonishing multiplicity of reference.

Chilton cites examples from Isaiah 65:22, Amos 2:9, and Psalm 114 and concludes, "It includes the use of huge figures, a reign of forty years means a good long reign, and a kingdom of a thousand years means a good long kingdom."

It is wrong, however, to argue against literalness simply because there is a symbolic aspect in some sentences. True, the serpent is a
symbol of evil throughout history, but this does not rule out the presence of a literal serpent in the Garden of Eden. Forty connotes the idea of testing, but this does not rule out the fact that Christ was literally tempted in the wilderness for 40 literal days. Mountains often symbolically suggest rulership, but that does not mean the mountains mentioned in connection with rule in Scripture are not literal (e.g., Mount Zion is a real mountain, even though there is much theology attached to this theme). Therefore the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 can rightly be taken as literal (which some postmillenarians have held).

In relation to the interpretation of symbols, Chilton quotes Herman Bavinck’s *The Doctrine of God* to establish two points. "First, all creation is primarily symbolic. . . . The central value of anything is that it is a symbol of God. All other values and relationships are secondary. . . . Second, symbolism is analogical, not realistic. . . . The symbolism is analogical, not metaphysical."

Chilton is right in saying that the analogy of marriage used in the Bible to speak of God’s relationship with His people does not mean believers have physical sexual relations with God. But to carry that thinking over to days or years, as do CRMers in relation to the millennium is to add too much fluidity to symbolism.

It is inconsistent for CRMers to be so "literal" in applying every detail of the Old Testament law, but to be so fluid and flexible when it comes to interpreting prophecy. This is the type of philosophical idealism which is at the heart of the movement, rather than a correct application of biblical symbolism. As Johnson states, "The concept of 'literal interpretation' affirms that the meaning of a symbol is determined by textual and contextual considerations. It may appear that such a method would exclude figures and symbols altogether," but it does not.

Literal interpretation includes the development of symbols and themes which yield a rich premillennial theology. The darkness/light motif begun in Genesis 1 grows into a major theme as Scripture unfolds. The pattern of God separating light from darkness sets the precedent for how He views the makeup of a day and for the holiness/commonality theme. God’s day includes evening (darkness) and then morning (light). This was a preview of how God would bring individuals out of the darkness of sin into the light of His salvation.

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65 Ibid., pp 32-33 (italics his)
This theme of darkness and light shows up in many ways throughout the Bible. The ninth plague brought darkness on the Egyptians but not on the houses of the Israelites. The darkness symbolized blindness and sin, while light showed the favor and blessing of God. This theological meaning is based on the literal, actual event. This is also seen in Judas' betrayal of Christ. As John wrote, "[Judas] went out immediately, and it was night" (John 13:30). Judas left the light of the world, Jesus, and went into the darkness of sin, but it was also literally night. God sovereignly coordinates the theology with the actual circumstances and events.

Paul further developed the darkness/light motif in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. He wrote, "The day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night" (v. 2). The passage then develops the implications of that statement. "Day" refers to "the day of the Lord," and this present age is compared to "night." Therefore since believers are "sons of light" (those who will inherit the kingdom), even though they are living in the night (the period before the coming in of the kingdom, the day of the Lord), their behavior is to reflect their future. Therefore believers in the Church Age are working the "night shift." Even Daniel was not commissioned to bring in the kingdom, especially since the New Covenant had not unfolded. He was to be a faithful testimony to the pagans in Babylon of his God, even though the nation was largely faithless. Christ will bring in the "day" at the second coming, this is why He is called the "morning star" (2 Pet 1:19), which accompanies the dawning of the day (the millennium). The job of believers on the night shift is further clarified by Paul (Eph 5:7-14), who wrote that they are to expose (bring to light) evil, not conquer it, as the CRMers insist. Christ will do that at His coming. Kline speaks of differences between this age, in which common grace is functioning, and what the present age would be like if the church's mission is to bring in the theocratic kingdom.

To accept the Chalcedon theory, one would have to read the biblical record as though it were not the history of the particular kingdom of Israel but an historicized myth about Everynation. Chalcedon's mistake is that of sacralizing the other nations. And inevitably Chalcedon does the same to the concept of the nonholy, or common. It renders pointless and meaningless the biblical distinction between the holy and the common.

67 The neo-postmillenarians see this, however, as a reference to the period from Christ's ascension to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when the day/kingdom dawned.

68 Kline, Comments on an Old-New Error, p. 178
Dispensationalism teaches that after the rapture God will resume His plans for Israel. The millennial reign of Christ is a better explanation of the consummation of history than what the neopostmillenialists set forth.

Other hermeneutical issues Other issues can be raised against neopostmillennialism, such as the following. At what point in the present age (the kingdom, according to CRMers) will the curse be removed? When will the lamb lie down with the wolf (Isa 11:6) and the human life span be more than 100 years (Isa 65:20)? How can one say progress is being made when the killer disease AIDS is increasing? CRMers say progress is gradual, but Romans 8:18-25 uses catastrophic/interventionist language. One dispensationalist raised two major objections to equating this current age with the millennium:

1. The interaction between group, individual and environment evidently is a lot more profound than even sociologists are willing to admit, so profound in fact that a catastrophic alteration is required for the perfect social order.
2. This being the case, even total regeneration of the human race would not be far reaching enough to establish the millennial vision. The physical environment must be totally changed (Rom 8:19-22).

How can CRMers say the gospel is conquering the world, since at the end of the millennium the Gog and Magog battle will take place in which Christ will directly intervene to rescue believers (Rev 20:7-10)? During the tribulation many will turn to Christ, and perhaps a majority of the world will be converted during the millennium. The gospel will penetrate the world, but not in the way CRMers envision. They cannot argue against the premillenarian schedule of events in principle (or as Bahnsen would say, prima facie), since they see a similar outline. The difference is one of timing.

Dispensationalism and social involvement North accuses dispensationalists of being defeatists, sitting around waiting for the rapture. However, social and cultural impotence is not endemic to dispensationalism. As already stated, believers are called to expose evil during the night. They are to be the light of the world shining in the current darkness, testifying to those in the night as to what

69 Charles A Clough, Dispensational Premillenialism and the Present Social Order (A paper presented to the Department of Systematic Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary 1966) p 11
the day will be like However, this does not mean Christians are in the kingdom during this age Their primary mission is evangelism, while looking for the coming of Christ Believers are to be like a steward left with a job to do during the absence of the owner of the house They are motivated by the future event—the desire to be found faithful when the householder returns The future motivates the steward in the present

This is the same basic philosophy North preaches in economics He says one must be future-oriented to be productive in the present Because a person's hopes and aspirations are ahead, he sacrifices in the present for the sake of future goals

A dispensational theory of the current social order has been proposed by Clough

A major insight of dispensational premillennialism is the picture it gives of the dynamics of evil There are three factors involved (1) the impact of regenerated and spiritually active people relative to the impact of the remainder, (2) the restraining ministry of the Spirit during the Church Age in suppressing total evil domination of basic social structures, (3) all-pervading domain of Satan over both the social order and its physical environment Factor (2) is relatively stable, and factor (3) in the realm of the social order appears to vary approximately inversely with factor (1). As is commonly recognized, then, the basic variable is the impact of the church

But the unique contribution of this eschatology is how it establishes realistic upper and lower limits on the variation of Satanic domination in the present social order The upper limit of which the pretribulational rapture is an integral part states, in effect, that no matter how small the church is in the world the general social order of the world will be graciously kept from total Satanic control until the rapture Satan's plans are held in temporary suspension while the human race is given opportunity to trust Christ (2 Peter 3:9) The lower limit of which Satan's reign over physical creation is an integral part states, in effect, that no matter how many are won to Christ in the world the general social order of the world will still remain under the influence of a corrupt physical environment Christ must return and redeem physical creation for elimination of this influence Thus dispensational premillennialism sets forth data from which it is possible to deduce a realistic picture of the working of evil in the social order today and why the perfect social order must be future to a supernatural realignment of the basic factors

This view leads to a certain degree of present social and political involvement during the Church Age Because the rapture could occur at any moment, the Lord's stewards are to be doing His

72 North, Moses and Pharaoh Dominion Religion versus Power Religion (Tyler, TX Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pp 259-60

73 Clough Dispensational Premillennialism, pp 17-18
business faithfully every day. If dispensationalists are not properly involved in issues today, they are unfaithful to their calling.

Dispensationalists believe in victory in history in every sphere of life. In fact they believe, in one sense, in dominion theology! Just as salvation is accomplished immediately by Christ's work, so will the consummation of the age be immediate, not mediate as the CRM preaches. McClain also notes that many accomplishments during the Church Age will be carried over into the kingdom.

The premillennial philosophy of history makes sense. It lays a biblical and rational basis for a truly optimistic view of human history. Furthermore, rightly apprehended, it has practical effects. It says that life here and now, in spite of the tragedy of sin, is nevertheless something worthwhile, and therefore all efforts to make it better are also worthwhile. All the true values of human life will be preserved and carried over into the coming kingdom, nothing worthwhile will be lost. Furthermore, we are encouraged in the midst of opposition and reverses by the assurance that help is on the way, help from above, supernatural help—"Give the king thy judgments, O God In his days shall the righteous flourish all nations shall call him blessed" (Ps 72 1, 7, 17) 74

**Conclusion**

The CRM, like most movements within orthodox Christianity, has some healthy aspects to it. It is causing believers to think through what the Bible says should be their view on many social and political issues. It shows that Christians must take Scripture and Scripture alone as the basis for formulating views on all of life. The CRMers have shown that one can be both intellectual and practical. They have made contributions to the study of biblical theology and philosophy. They have sparked a renewed interest in eschatology.

The major dangers of the CRM are theonomy and neopostmillennialism. The application of Old Testament law advocated by the CRM is a new phariseeism. Christians are not to insist on a militant working for and enforcement of the Mosaic Law. The eschatology of the CRM produces a misplaced perspective on history and God's timing of future events. In theory CRMers strongly believe in evangelism; however, in practice it is ignored. They are working to build a society that God has not purposed. There is the danger that they will become wrongly involved in this world's system in their zeal to make the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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74 Alva J McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN BMH Books, 1959), p 531