



A Historiography of Victory: R.J. Rushdoony's Christian Philosophy of History as Constitutive of his Postmillennial Theopolitics

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Abstract

The twentieth-century Calvinist philosopher-theologian, Rousas John Rushdoony is considered to be the father of the 1950s Christian Reconstructionist movement in the United States—a movement dedicated to advancing the idea that Biblical ethics should be perpetually normative for all societies, including in the civil realm. In essence this was a social theory and Rushdoony based his Christian Reconstructionism on his idea of theonomy, which he considered to be the only alternative to the heresy of antinomianism, the rejection of Divine Law. His theonomic principle, the basis of his Christian Reconstructionist political position and engagement, was rhetorically sanctioned by a distinct eschatological optimism, which was in turn shaped by his distinctly Christian historiography—a philosophy of history for which he was, via the Dutch-American philosopher Cornelius van Til, largely indebted to the Christian-historicists of the nineteenth-century, in particular the Swiss scholar Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigne. By means of the phenomenological-narrative approach of the contemporary philosopher of history, David Carr, this article amplifies how Rushdoony's philosophy of history played an integral role in shaping his eschatological optimism or postmillennialism in which the expectation that the preaching of the gospel in the contemporary age will result in amazing revivals, and this will mean that before Christ returns, the world's inhabitants will for the most part, be considered to be Christian in orientation. Rushdoony consciously employed this notion as a narrative framework that sanctioned his distinct theopolitical position and engagement. The role of Rushdoony's distinctly Christian philosophy of history in terms of narratively sanctioning his postmillennial theopolitics, is thereby amplified in a novel way.

Keywords: Eschatology, historiography, Merle d'Aubigne, Jean-Henri; John, theonomy.

Introduction

Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001) was a Calvinist theologian and philosopher best-known as the father of the twentieth-century Christian Reconstructionist movement in the United States (Worthen, 2008:399-400). This movement's main concern was to establish the theoretical foundations for the socio-political implementation its core principle of theonomy in the public domain. Theonomy, derived from the Greek "*theos*" (God) and "*nomos*" (Law) is the idea that Biblical Law, including the Mosaic moral law, is the authoritative standard for every aspect of life (Ingersoll, 2015:14-15). Christian Reconstructionists hold to the idea that not only the moral, but also the civic ethics revealed in both the Old and New Testaments form the objective standard for all aspects of human life and are therefore also to be considered binding on modern societies (Zeidan, 2018:184).

Born in 1916 of Armenian immigrants to the United States, Rushdoony was descended from a long line of clerics in the Armenian Orthodox Church. His father, Yeghiazar Khachadour



Rushdouni (as the Armenian surname was originally spelled) however, chose to rather seek ordination in a Presbyterian Church. After Turkish forces killed Y.K. Rushdouni's parents he was left orphaned and homeless, and found refuge in an orphanage in Yan, Armenia, which was run by the American Presbyterian missionary George C. Raynolds. Under Raynolds' influence he converted to Presbyterianism. In 1916, when the family arrived in America after fleeing the Armenian genocide, he established an Armenian Presbyterian Church in Kingsburg, California (McVicar, 2015:20-21). R.J. Rushdoony, who was born in 1916 shortly after the family's arrival in America, gravitated towards the ministry like so many of his ancestors did. After graduating with a Masters' Degree in Education from the University of California in Berkeley in 1940, he enrolled in the university's Pacific School of Religion. Upon graduation he was ordained as a Presbyterian minister (Ingersoll, 2015:23-24). In 1965, in the midst of the increasing liberalization of American society, Rushdoony founded an influential conservative think-tank, called the Chalcedon Foundation.¹ The organization, dedicated to promoting the cause of Christian Reconstructionism, would be headed by Rushdoony until his death in 2001 (Lippy, 2006:63). Michael McVicar, a Religious Studies professor at Florida State University, emphasises the fact that Rushdoony's influence and impact extended well beyond the Christian Reconstructionist movement itself, however, to the extent that he is considered an important patriarch of the American "Religious Right", evidenced by the fact that by 1981 the widely-read magazine *Newsweek* identified his Chalcedon Foundation as the most influential think-tank within this movement (McVicar, 2015:5-6).

Within this new American Presbyterian context in which Rushdoony found himself, he was profoundly influenced by the thought of the Dutch-American Calvinist apologist Cornelius van Til (1895-1987) professor at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Van Til (1947:39) claimed that:

it is impossible to reason on the basis of brute facts. Everyone who reasons about facts comes to those facts with a schematism into which he fits the facts. The real question is, therefore, into whose schematism the facts will fit. As between Christianity and its opponents the question is whether our claim that Christianity is the only schematism into which all the facts will fit, is true or not.

This view of mutually exclusive axiomatic schematisms underlying all human thought emphatically resonated with Rushdoony, who noted that all facts in the universe can only be truly explained in reference to the Triune God (Rushdoony, 1965:32). Following Van Til, Rushdoony maintained that such an epistemic paradigm has profound ethical implications in that it entails that there exists no alternative between theonomy and human autonomy, defining autonomy as "self-law ... man's attempt to supplant God's law with his own, which, however much in many versions makes claims to be godly and moral, separates itself from the God of Scripture. Man becomes the 'determiner' of law, which is more opinion than law." In contradistinction, he argued, "[t]heonomy, which means God's law, takes law, and ultimate rule, out of the hands of man because it belongs to God", adding immediately that "there can be no understanding of Christian Reconstructionism apart from Van Til and his presuppositional thinking" (Rushdoony, 2017:527).

Rushdoony therefore argued for theonomy as the only alternative to what he considered to be the heresy of antinomianism, i.e. the rejection of God's Law. He regarded all human engagement in reality as inescapably proceeding from a given "intellectual and moral framework" which shapes "man and his acts at all times". Therefore, at the heart of this axiomatic epistemology which Rushdoony regarded as central to his political and social theory, was a high view of Scripture as providing the only true moral and intellectual framework by which to engage with and participate in socio-political reality (Rushdoony, 1974:32).

For Rushdoony, therefore, the idea of theonomy itself does not in the first place signify a political position, but rather the moral and intellectual principle that sanctions a particular political position.

¹ Named after the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.).



Yet in epistemologically rooting this principle in the Bible in accordance with the Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura*, he also inevitably rooted it in a source exhibiting a decisively historical and narrative structure through its central paradigm of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. In this regard Rushdoony's narrativized framework constitutes a classic example of what the contemporary Danish Religious Studies Scholar Jeppe Sinding Jensen (2013:61) describes as a foundational narrative through which religious cosmologies inescapably arise in the first place and which ultimately shapes the way in which religious experience become meaningful.

The Biblical narrative furnished Rushdoony with that which the contemporary American phenomenologist and philosopher of history, David Carr (2014:67—68) describes as the narrative framework that provides sense and meaning to human reality. Human action and socio-political positioning in particular, Carr argues, “derive their sense from their relation to the past and future, i.e., from their place in a temporal configuration in which they follow from something and lead up to something else. The idea of coherence in human affairs derives from the very way we experience and exist in time” (Carr, 2008:124-125). Carr asserts that (2014:214), one's philosophy of history not only pertains to the past, in the sense of being mere “metaphysical claims about the historical process, but as a kind of discourse more appropriately compared with the political-rhetorical kind of story-telling.” In other words, philosophies of history have the distinct rhetorical aim of describing the past in such a way so as to impact the future. This does not imply, however, that historical narrative functions as an *ex post facto* justification of a particular religious or political position, but rather that narrative itself forms the framework within which political constitution becomes possible. Narrative thereby constitutes the practical mode by which humans participate in reality, in that by consulting the past, it envisages the future and arranges the present as the passage between the two (Carr, 2014:110).

Rushdoony's theopolitical position was distinctly sanctioned from a narrative derived from Biblical paradigms, which in his case was particularly evident in his frequent eschatological references by which he appealed to his expectation of the future in defence of his political position and engagement in the present. Rushdoony namely rooted his political theology in an optimistic vision for the future, i.e. a postmillennial eschatology (Rushdoony, 2007:150). Postmillennialism can best be described as the positive eschatological expectation of the future period preceding Christ's return as being a golden age in world history and a time in which Christendom prospers on not only a spiritual, but also on a socio-political level (Ames, 2014:33).² Rushdoony (1977:77) wrote that:

[b]oth amillennialism and premillennialism are in varying degrees antinomian. They by-pass the law entirely, or reduce it to merely spiritual morality. 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 dominion, for godly authority and rule in every area of life. This anti-law attitude guarantees impotence and defeat to all churches who hold to it. They may prosper as convents or retreats from the world, but never as a conquering army of God.

By contrast, he argues

² The two main alternative eschatological positions in Christian theology are known as amillennialism and premillennialism. The former is characterized by the conviction that the resurrection of Christ initiated a symbolic thousand-year reign of peace (the millennium), which is equated with the period between his resurrection and Second Coming. Premillennialism holds to the belief that future era of peace or the millennium will begin when Christ returns, and that Christ will reign for a literal period of 1000 years. Postmillennialists, on the one hand, believe in a future millennium like premillennialists, but on the other hand they resemble amillennialists in believing that the millennium occurs prior to the Second Coming of Christ and will not necessarily be a literal one thousand years in length. In contradistinction to both amillennialism and premillennialism, postmillennialism has an optimistic view of the future of Christianity here on earth (Saunders 2017, 4-5).



Postmillennialism holds that the prophecies of Isaiah and of all of Scripture shall be fulfilled. Scripture is not divided; it is not made irrelevant to history. There shall be, as Genesis 3:15, Romans 16:20, and Revelation 12:9, 11 declare, victory over Satan ... The postmillennial view, while seeing rises and falls in history, sees it moving to the triumph of the people of Christ, the church triumphant from pole to pole, the government of the whole world by the law of God, and then, after a long and glorious reign of peace, the Second Coming and the end of the world (Rushdoony, 1977, 14-15).

Rushdoony's optimism regarding the future successes of Christ's Church and Christ's Kingdom were thereby sanctioned his rhetorical appeal to be "future-orientated ... [and] bring every area of life and thought into captivity to Christ" (Rushdoony, 1991:750). This entails holding to what Rushdoony described as an "eschatology of victory" which he contrasted with what he considered to be an impotent and counter-productive "eschatology of death" (Rushdoony, 2017:54-56). Rushdoony understood one's vision of the future, and especially one's eschatology, to be intrinsically tied to both present engagement in the created reality as well as one's understanding of the past. He introduced his most renowned work on eschatology, entitled *God's Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Postmillennialism*, as follows: "Eschatology, the doctrine of last things, is also the doctrine of first thing because it is concerned with the goal of history. Of necessity, goals determine present-day action. We are not motivated to action unless we know the purpose of our action" (Rushdoony, 1977:6).

In following the phenomenological-narrative approach to historiography of Carr, which emphasises the inescapable narrative interaction and interconnectedness of the past, present and future, the central research focus of this article will be an investigation into the role of Rushdoony's philosophy of history in shaping his eschatology of victory, and how this in turn sanctioned his theopolitical positioning. In other words, the emphasis will be on the role of his distinctly Christian historiography in providing the framework that constituted his theonomic postmillennialism.³ In doing so I will first take a look at how Rushdoony exegetically sanctioned this optimistic eschatology from the Bible, the source which he openly admitted provided the framework of his understanding of reality. Thereafter, the emphasis will shift to investigating the narrative role of history within that framework, and finally the narrative interplay between past and present in Rushdoony's historiography as a means of constituting his postmillennial theopolitics will be amplified.

Rushdoony's Postmillennialism

Rushdoony (1991:226; 1977:13, 24) relied heavily on the concluding 6 chapters of Isaiah as Biblical foundation for his optimistic eschatology, arguing that the biblical prophet's visions for an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity—see for example Isaiah 60:3-5, 64:25 and 66:12—are to be fulfilled prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, as is the victory over Satan prophesied in texts such as Genesis 3:15, Romans 16:20 and Revelation 12:9, 11. Rushdoony also understood the petitions of the Lord's Prayer which reads "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10), to be a supplication for God to bless human action, based on a complete reliance upon God in the knowledge that human labours for his kingdom will not be in vain (Rushdoony, 1977:32).

³ The Dutch-American Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) described theonomic postmillennialism as the view where Christ's Church is "the divine vehicle from which the ever-advancing kingdom of God would bind Satan and subdue evil in the world. The emphasis of theonomic postmillennialism is that it is God who exercises dominion through his redeemed saints establishing his law-word as the standard for all of life" (Berkhof 1933:145).



Of great exegetical significance for Rushdoony's eschatological optimism, was his Idealist interpretation of apocalyptic texts such as those contained in the Biblical books of Daniel and Revelation as not being fulfilled in specific events or persons in history, but rather as symbolic narrative descriptions of the very nature of history itself, i.e. the conflict between good and evil or the kingdom of God and the forces of Satan (Brunt and Clark, 1997:530). Rushdoony (2001:131) therefore interprets texts such as Revelation 4, for example, as fundamentally being about the total sovereignty of God, from which:

providential government and authority go forth from the Throne in an unbroken circle of dominion and light [and] ... in terms of this, therefore, the expectation that history will culminate in the triumph of the Antichrist is not only a dualistic surrender of the material world to Satan, but also a direct offense against the announced power and supremacy of God in, through, and over all creation and history.

In reference to Daniel's fifth kingdom (Daniel 2:36-45), which supersedes the first four, Rushdoony (2001:18) also argues that it

succeeds where all its false messianic predecessors failed, so that any Christian concept of history which is defeatist or otherworldly stands under the condemnation of Daniel. The world is not merely a vale of soul-making, nor does it culminate in the sorry historical triumph of Antichrist as amillennial and premillennial interpretations would have it. The Fifth Monarchy succeeds not only in destroying its rivals, but also in accomplishing what they on false premises sought to do. The empires then, the modernists today, and the states of this age, are all in this one respect wiser than the church, in that they do not deny meaning or triumph to history, but seek it earnestly, if on false premises and in terms of autonomous man.

The fifth kingdom, for Rushdoony, amounts to the culmination of history in the rule of Christ in his true Messianic Kingdom which accomplishes to destroy and supersede all human-made and human-ruled predecessors. His emphasis on the political dimension of eschatology as sanctioned by one's philosophy of history, is both reminiscent to, but yet purposefully opposed to some of the most influential narratives underlying the political theories of modernity, such as that of the influential American political theorist Francis Fukuyama (1952-), who proposes as central historiographical proposition that there is "a fundamental process at work that dictates a common evolutionary pattern for all human societies – in short, something like a Universal History of mankind in the direction of liberal democracy" (Fukuyama, 2006:48).

Whereas Fukuyama's teleology presupposes a universal power in history driving the world towards increased democratization and liberalization (Munslow, 2006:233), for Rushdoony the destiny of the world—the eschaton—is teleologically rooted in his distinctly Christian philosophy of history. He interprets apocalyptic biblical books such as Daniel and Revelation as offering a narrative description of history, and bases his eschatological optimism in the sovereignty of God as manifested therein.

Rushdoony's Philosophy of History

Rushdoony and the Christian-Historicist Tradition

The aforementioned dichotomy between theonomy and autonomy that shaped Rushdoony's Christian Reconstructionism in all its facets, however, preceded Cornelius Van Til and for it the Dutch-American apologist was himself indebted to the Dutch Neo-Calvinist theologian, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) (Van Til 1961, ii). Bavinck shows close links between religion and revelation and such a relationship is one of the foundational elements in his theology.

In his work, *The Christian Worldview*, Bavinck (1913:101-102) posits that



the acknowledgment of truth as a force greater than himself ... is something that modern, autonomous man seems unworthy of. And it is this autonomy and tyranny that the Christian worldview resists with all its might. It proposes that man is never autonomous, but always and everywhere bound to laws not conceived of by himself, but prescribed unto him by God as rule for his life ... And while the autonomy of man destroys the bond between subject and object and thereby inevitably reduces everything to chaos, theonomy, taught by Scripture, gives unto every creature its rightful place and its true meaning. Then, after all, nothing in creation stands on its own authority. No creation is autonomous and no one can merely do as they desire, not man and not woman, not the parents and not the children, not the government and not the subjects, not the master and not the servant.⁴

Bavinck's proposition of theonomy as only possible alternative to autonomy in terms of providing meaning and purpose to historical subjects must in turn be understood in terms of the Anti-Revolutionary or anti-Enlightenment Christian-Historicist tradition that shaped his thought (Van Dyke, 2012:73). Late-eighteenth and nineteenth century representatives of this tradition characteristically opposed the Enlightenment ideal of a neutral or objective philosophy of history, embodied by the likes of Leopold von Ranke or Max Weber (McFalls, 2007:38). The historical narratives of Christian-Historicism purposed, above all, the communal self-positioning of traditional Christianity and called for appropriate Christian socio-political engagement, even in the context of an existential crisis effectuated by the rapid liberalization that characterized the nineteenth-century (Paul, 2016:13). At a particular historical juncture, when Enlightenment liberals regarded the days of (orthodox, historical) Christianity as numbered, Christian-historicists reacted by emphasizing Christianity as constitutive of Western Civilization itself (Harinck, 1994:126). As such their philosophy of history needs to be understood not merely as an epistemic reaction to the Enlightenment, but as a means of socio-religious and moral self-establishment in the midst of an experience of a time of crisis (Paul, 2016:30). One of the pioneers of the Christian-Historicist school was the German Lutheran historian August Neander (1789-1850), who strove to purposefully redeem history from what he considered to be these bonds of Enlightenment. Neander (1826:1) introduced his magnum opus, *A General History of the Christian Religion and Church* as follows:

It shall be our purpose to trace, from the small mustard grain, through the course of past centuries, lying open for our inspection, the growth of that mighty tree [i.e. Christianity], which is destined to overshadow the earth, and under the branches of which all its nations are to find a safe habitation.⁵

Hereby Neander evidently proposed a historical narrative, which, in its interplay with the future, embodied a distinct optimism regarding the future successes and global establishment of Christianity. Nineteenth-century postmillennialists such as the American Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), also expressly referenced Neander's historiography as sanctioning his eschatological optimism (Dorrien, 2011:86).

⁴ The original Dutch text reads: "de waarheid te erkennen als eene macht, die boven hem staat ... schijnt de moderne, autonomen mensch onwaardig te zijn. Het is tegen deze autonomie en anarchie, dat de Christelijke wereldbeschouwing met alle kracht zich verzet. Volgens haar is de mensch niet autonoom, maar altijd en overall gebonden aan wetten, die niet door hem zijn uitgedacht, maar door God hem ten regel van zijn leven zijn voorgeschreven ... En terwijl de autonomie van den mensch den band tusschen subject en object verbreekt en daarmee in beginsel alles in een chaos oplost, is het de theonomie, zoals de Schrift die ons leert, welke aan alle schepsel zijne rechte plaats verleent en zijne ware beteekenis schenkt."

⁵ The original German text reads: "Es soll unsere Aufgabe sein, zu betrachten, wie aus dem kleinen Senfkorne im Laufe der geschlossenen von unsere Augen liegenden Jahrhunderte jener grosse Baum wurde, der die Erde zu überschatten bestimmt ist und unter dessen Zweigen aller Völker derselben eine sichere Wohnung finden sollen."



Neander's narrative of history would have a profound impact on influential nineteenth-century Calvinist historians in the Netherlands such as the Swiss-born Jean-Henri Merle 'd Aubigne, who became the preacher of the Dutch Royal Court and the influential anti-revolutionary statesman-historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (Roney, 1996:51, 56). In following Neander, Merle 'd Aubigne (1846:263-264) stressed that history demonstrates that Christianity is to finally emerge victorious in the battle between the various worldviews. This notion of an eschatological victory of Christianity in world history was in turn rooted in the dichotomous conception of history as essentially the battle between the kingdom of God on the one hand, and the forces of Satan and darkness on the other, which was sanctioned by the historical narratives of both Merle d' Aubigne and Groen van Prinsterer (Van Dyke, 2012, 76). This historiographical optimism that shaped a distinctly eschatological optimism was rooted in the single historical event and reality that Christian-historicists understood as providing all of history, from its cosmological genesis unto its cosmological telos, with its true meaning and purpose: Christ's victory over Satan, sin and death through his resurrection and reign (Groen van Prinsterer, 1847:76-77; Merle 'd Aubigne, 1846:119).

This eschatological emphasis in the narratives of nineteenth-century Christian-historicists must also be understood in terms of the polemic aim of their works. Enlightenment philosophers from the eighteenth century had come to promote a more optimistic view of human nature than had traditionally characterized Christian doctrine. This optimism found its ultimate expression in the idea that an ideal human society could and would be established here on earth by means of a radical revolution against what they viewed as the moral limitations imposed upon mankind by traditional Christian doctrines (Schlebusch, 2020:149). Liberation from these limitations would entail constructing a new humanity on the principles of liberty and equality. Immanuel Kant, for example, viewed the kingdom of God as something that would be established by the moral and socio-political improvement of humanity, not as a Christocentric or Messianic kingdom, but rather as an anthropocentric one based on the judicial and moral development of human reason (Kant, 1793:88-92). Likewise, Jean-Jacques Rousseau viewed the social contract, and the independence from all authority it granted sovereign individuals, as the sole basis for the development of true liberty and freedom from all constraints (Rousseau, 1762:178). These sentiments were viewed by the likes of Neander, Merle d'Aubigne and Groen van Prinsterer as contradictory to the Christian view of history as culminating in the eschatological restoration of the pure moral state of a fallen humanity by means of the Second Coming of Christ (Dennison 1999:271).

This polemic struggle against the Enlightenment thereby manifested in a narrative dichotomy for which Bavinck was indebted for his conceptualization of theonomy as sole antithesis to autonomy, as is evident from his express appreciation for both Merle d'Aubigne and Groen van Prinsterer's understanding thereof: "Through the preaching of Merle d'Aubigne ... [Groen came to believe in] the Gospel's ability to create order, liberty and prosperity, as is confirmed by world history: all that is of value and a blessing is fostered by the fear of God, whereas apostasy from God obstructs it (Bavinck 1904, vii, xi-xii)." ⁶

In other words, because the historical reality of the resurrection and the risen Christ's consequent legitimate claim to universal Lordship—a Lordship that provides meaning and direction to all human participation in history—there can be no neutrality and no alternative to either accepting or rejecting that Lordship in all areas of life (Van Til, 1967:242-243). Via Van Til, Rushdoony embraced this historical narrative proposition as a central tenet of his own historiography, and, in a striking echo of his Christian-historicist predecessors, writes in his work, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (1997:19-20) that: "The purpose of ... history is to trace the victory of Jesus Christ. That victory is not merely spiritual, but also historical. Creation, man, and man's body all move in terms of a glorious destiny for which the whole of creation groans and travails as it awaits

⁶ The original Dutch text reads: "door de evangelieverkondiging van Merle 'd Aubigne ... het vermogen van het Evangelie, om orde en vrijheid en welvaart te bewerken, was immers door de wereldhistorie gestaafd. Al wat den mensch nuttig en heilrijk is, wordt door de vreeze Gods bevorderd, door de verloochening Gods tegengewerkt."



the fullness of that glorious liberty of the sons of God (Romans 8:18-23). The victory is historical and eschatological, and it is not the rejection of creation but its fulfilment.”

For Rushdoony, the expectation of this victory, sealed by the bodily resurrection of Christ, has profound implications in terms of providing not only the framework for human engagement in history as both a material and a spiritual reality, but also shaping the nature and purpose of that engagement:

The Biblical faith concerning Jesus Christ involves and requires believing that He was raised from the dead in the same body which suffered crucifixion. Jesus Christ, by His resurrection, destroyed the power of sin and death. Moreover, He set forth His victory over the realms of both spirit and matter, conquering the enemy in every realm. If Jesus Christ had only risen from the dead as a spirit, as a ghost, then his only victory and his only saving power would be limited to the world of the spirit ... It would mean that his people would be helpless against the powers of this world and without law and recourse in this world.

But, because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, He is Lord over all lords, King over all kings, the Lawgiver and supreme Governor of all things, material and spiritual ... For this reason, from the days of the early church on, the Day of Resurrection has been a time of joy because it sets forth the certainty of victory in and through Jesus Christ ...

We then, who are people of the resurrection, must live in the joy and the confidence of victory. This is our destiny, victory. Life is rarely easy, but with Christ our King, it is always good. We are generally in a battle, because the enemies are many, and the forces of evil real, but our victory has been assured and manifested by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rushdoony, 2011:10).

In his appeal to the biblical narrative, he identifies in the implications of Christ's historical and bodily resurrection the antidote to the antinomianism which he considers to be inherent to both amillennialism and premillennialism (Rushdoony, 1977:77). The resurrection is, therefore, not only the inescapable reality that is central to providing a meaningful framework for human existence in history and society, but also that which gives it purpose. Wherever this reality remains unrecognized, humans artificially “seek to impose an idea of history to realize it, or to make it real” (Rushdoony, 1968:9). In following Bavinck, Van Til and his nineteenth-century Christian-historicist predecessors, Rushdoony (1968:9-10) thereby polemicized against what he considered to be the prevalent anti-historical social ontology of contemporary society rooted in the Enlightenment: “As against Biblical Christianity ... Humanism holds to a faith in man, in brotherhood and equality ... There is as a result, a marked hostility towards history. History as it comes from the hand of God has a pre-ordained meaning and direction, and it moves to a purpose neither decreed by man nor conducive to man's sin. As a result, man is in revolt against history. Man pits against history the imagination of his own heart.”

History itself can only be rightly understood in terms of this eschatological victory of Christ, which has been “assured and manifested” by the one event that provides history with both meaning and purpose, the bodily and historical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Narrative Paradigm of Creation, Providence and Redemption as Central to Rushdoony's Historiography

Rushdoony critiqued Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment historiography as, in denying this divinely-ordained meaning and purpose of history, imposing artificial mechanisms and false causalities upon the reality of history as created and directed by a Sovereign God. For Rushdoony (1997:15), the very concept of sovereignty in decree and predestination is inescapable to any philosophy of history, with the Enlightenment historiographers against which his predecessors polemicized simply replacing divine decrees with natural decrees. He continues to argue that by the twentieth century, academic historiographers' faith in natural laws and processes had been shattered, which led to the conception of historical truth and meaning



as “purely human categories of thought ... man’s creations which must be imposed on the universe” (Rushdoony, 1997:36). Rushdoony (1994:147) expressly refers to Merle ‘d Aubigne as the one outstanding Christian historian countering this autonomy of Enlightenment historiography: “D’Aubigne writes as a man of faith, not as an “objective” scholar. There is no pretence of a non-partisan approach in d’Aubigne. Where men believe in the autonomy of man and his reason, they will hold that man’s reason can impartially sift all the facts, subject them to an unbiased critical analysis, and determine the truth. D’Aubigne will have none of this. He is unabashedly Christian, and he believes that the truth is predetermined by God and his Word.”

Impartiality, Rushdoony argues, is an illusion. He also deconstructs the positivism of Auguste Comte, which largely shaped the nineteenth-century notion of “objective historiography” by noting that like Christian historiography, it begins with a fundamental act of faith, namely “the faith that God has nothing to do with history”—which is nothing more than a pre-theoretical axiom that is assumed prior to historiographic engagement (Rushdoony, 1997:77). He reduces Comte’s three stages of the development of knowledge to a decline in the value of knowledge culminating in a complete loss of true meaning (Rushdoony, 1977:78). For Rushdoony, therefore, one of the outstanding weaknesses of the modernist historiography that Merle d’Aubigne polemicized against is the fact that it loses itself in an endless search for causality in its attempt at providing a coherent historical narrative. This he attributes to the Enlightenment’s reduction of history to a mere naturalistic and immanent process, prophetically adding that this inevitable loss of meaning would lead to a time when “they will be unable to write history, because history will be for them no more than myth” (Rushdoony, 1994:47-148).

It is this loss of meaning, Rushdoony (1997:16) argues, that led to the twentieth-century integration of historiography within the social sciences. He maintains that the argument for history as a social science rests on the notion that because historians can never know the sum of all possible causes, they have an completely open situation when it comes to causal explanation and so need to provide room for concurring theories on causal factors. However, since these conceptions of reality are considered to be theoretical constructions, history therefore is understood to be in constant contextual change and without any universal character (Lorenz, 1998:243-244).

Rushdoony counters this separation of historiography from the theological conceptualization thereof by arguing that without a constant and transcendent principle governing it, history effectively becomes an instrument of control as opposed to something with meaning to be discovered and understood (Rushdoony, 1997:16-17). In contradistinction, he proposes that constant change is not the total sum of history, but that there is also a transcendent and ever-constant governing principle rooted the doctrines of creation, providence and redemption which encompasses the biblical metanarrative (Rushdoony, 1997:59). He therefore considers these doctrines as the starting point of the Christian philosophy of history:

The Biblical philosophy of history is clearly and irrevocably at odds with the modern faith. Basic to the Biblical philosophy is the doctrine of creation ... [which] asserts that the universe, time, history, man, and all things are the handiwork of a sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, and triune God [and that] the meaning of history is to be understood primarily and essentially in terms of that God. Time and history are created by God and therefore are determined and governed by God ... History is the battle of Christ versus anti-christ, and man’s basic need is redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ and then life in Christ and under God’s law, now no longer a bill of indictment against man, but a charter for life (Rushdoony, 1997:4-5).

The theonomic principle as a “charter for life” is, in light of the historical reality of the resurrection as both redeeming creation from sin and teleologically directing it towards the glory of Christ, narratively cast as providing sense and meaning not only to the Christian’s position and



engagement in history but also to their visions of the future, as will be seen as we continue to explore the manner by which Rushdoony's historiography shaped his eschatology.

Rushdoony's Eschatology as Sanctioned by his Historiography

For Rushdoony (1994:165), "eschatology is much more than a concern about the end, or the last times. Eschatology sets forth the goal of man and history and is thus inseparable from purpose". History as the manifestation of "God's plan for dominion" also provides the church as both historical and eschatological subject the character of a "conquering army of God" (Rushdoony, 1977:6). He describes eschatology as "a very practical concern," adding that "[q]uestions such as. Why am I here?; What is the meaning and purpose of life?; What should we do and why?; and, How will it all end?; all have to do with eschatology" (Rushdoony, 1994:165). His rhetorical appeal for the church to take up the theonomic postmillennial calling to conquer all the earth for Christ on a socio-political level—an appeal which lies at the very heart of Rushdoony's advocacy for the Christian Reconstructionist political theory—was therefore rooted in a theological understanding of the world as simultaneously historical and eschatological. In his work, *The Foundations of Social Order*, Rushdoony (1968:5) describes history and eschatology as inescapably bound together, meaning that one's philosophy of history not merely relates to the past, but also to one's positioning in the present and expectation of the future: "an eschatology, or doctrine of the last things, which renounces history, or sees it as defeat, is faithless to Christianity ... History culminates in God's plan and triumph, not Satan's victory".

For Rushdoony (1994:165), therefore, there exists an intrinsic link between historiography and eschatology, since history as the manifestation of the sovereign decrees of divine providence shapes eschatological expectation as rooted in the teleology of those decrees. History has meaning because God is sovereign, and because God is sovereign, man shapes the future under God only as a secondary cause (Rushdoony, 1997:44). Since God's decrees govern the future and since the "determination of all things within time is in terms of obedience and disobedience to God's law", he proposes that any historical subject—be it an individual or a collective—in refusing to obey God's law, inevitably places itself on an inescapable collision course with the historical and eschatological triumph of the covenantal Creator-God. For this covenantal paradigm, he appeals to biblical texts such as Deuteronomy 28 (Rushdoony, 1997:32).

Rushdoony (1997:44) therefore maintains that no human society can escape living in accordance with God's law as the only means of avoiding divine retribution in history itself, since God's law exists as an absolute and constant moral and axiological standard throughout all of history, over which He is sovereign. In this way Rushdoony's rhetorical appeal to theonomy as the basis of all civil ethics in harmony with the purpose and teleological culmination of world history, was expressly sanctioned from within an eschatological paradigm shaped by his historiography.

Conclusion

Rushdoony's eschatology of victory was constituted and sanctioned by a historiography of victory. Because God is sovereign over all of history, history's end is in line with His purpose for creation, namely the glorification of the Lordship of Christ. The central proposition underlying Rushdoony's Christian Reconstructionism, that of theonomy being the only alternative to autonomy or rebellion against God, was a dichotomy for which he was, via Cornelius Van Til, indebted to the nineteenth-century Christian-historicist tradition and which narratively shaped the framework for his Christian Reconstructionist political engagement. His advocacy for theonomy and rhetorical appeal to the Christian church to embrace this idea was ultimately rooted in his self-understanding of being called to participate of a grand narrative of divine providence, by which God sovereignly decreed the past, the present and the future. With a confidence in the



eschatological victory of Christ in history, Rushdoony called upon his Christian audience to engage on a socio-political level with the purpose of playing their role in the realization of that victory through history, and in so doing, remaining true to their divine calling. For the father of Christian Reconstructionism, it is that very participation in Christ's eschatological victory, assured and manifested by His historical resurrection, that provides true meaning and purpose to human existence in history. In this way, Rushdoony's theopolitical position known as Christian Reconstructionism, distinctly and uniquely exemplifies what the contemporary American philosopher of history, David Carr (2008:124-125) describes as narrative socio-political positioning in the present in light of both one's conception of the past and expectation the future.

As scholars such as Michael McVicar (2015:2) has shown, Rushdoony's impact on the Christian Conservative movement in the United States extends well beyond the confines of Christian Reconstructionism. Not only has Rushdoony's philosophy of history greatly impacted the curricula of various Christian colleges in the United States, his narratively-sanctioned theopolitics has remained a noteworthy phenomenon even in the current U.S. political landscape, with current senators such as Missouri's Josh Hawley even appealing to the very Neo-Calvinist historical narrative embodied by Rushdoony, its most prominent American representative, in positioning himself within the context of contemporary American politics (Hawley 2017).

By challenging influential modernist and secular historical narratives teleologically underlying many contemporary mainstream political positions, such as Fukuyama's paradigm of liberal democracy as the ultimate fulfilment or "end" of history, the Christocentric narrative paradigm and eschatological emphasis which characterized Rushdoony's historiography continues to be an important means of sanctioning and structuring Christian socio-religious and socio-political engagement through providing sensible teleological direction.

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