

An Informed Reformed Theonomic Response on the extremely uninformed article “A Critical evaluation of Theonomist eschatology”

by Slabbert Le Cornu[\[1\]](#)

PART 1: Introduction & The unscholarly uninformed method of CETE and the two crucial main questions in this debate that are also of big importance for the reformed community in SA

“Abstract: Although *the extreme form* of Theonomism has only affected a small number of Reformed members in South Africa, it seems that Theonomist Postmillennialism has a greater underlying influence in the Reformed Churches in South Africa. General churchgoers in the Reformed Churches of South Africa generally confuse the Regulatory Principle (sic) with Theonomism and are uninformed about precisely what Theonomism is. Furthermore, signs of Theonomism as it developed in the USA are also visible in South Africa. Yet, there is great ignorance about the exact effect that Theonomism has on Reformed congregations in South Africa, especially regarding the eschatological views held by individual congregations.”[\[1\]](#)

“The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him.” (Proverbs 18:17)

Introduction

The first quote above is the ‘abstract’ summary of dr. Morne Diedericks’s[\[2\]](#) article, *Critical evaluation of Theonomist eschatology*[\[3\]](#), that were published in the the GKSA’s theological journal, *In die Skriflig*.[\[4\]](#)

The second quote is from Proverbs 18:17, and is the goal of this article.

There will be four parts in this response on the ‘Critical evaluation of Theonomist eschatology’ article (abbreviation from now on: CETE).

Part 1: The unscholarly uninformed method of CETE and the two crucial main questions in this debate that are also of big importance for the reformed community in SA

Part 2: What does Theonomic Postmillennialism teach themselves using the sources CETE mentions in its ‘references’?

Part 3: Theonomic Postmillennialism reformed roots through history, also in South Africa.

Part 4: A Plea for biblical scholarship and brotherly relations among reformed brothers in our Kingdom callings here in Africa for now and the future

Part 1: The unscholarly uninformed method of CETE and the two crucial main questions in this debate that are also of big importance for the reformed community in SA

“Once a movement or party gets a name, whether they give themselves the name or whether others give them the name, the name has two meanings - one meaning, in which the party or movement uses it itself, and (another) meaning, in which their enemies or adversaries engage themselves. - Perold

It is clear from the outset where the author of CETE stands - regardless of the fact that he quotes two authors that gives some positive appreciation (also) of Theonomy and/or the Christian Reconstruction movement, in the beginning and end of his article (Frame, p.1; Carter, p. 7). Everything in-between is nothing else than a big warning to stay away from this ‘extreme’ school of thought, by a author that unfortunately looks like he have not read the original sources of those he labelled as ‘extreme’, while leaning only on secondary sources by some of ‘Machen’s Warrior Children’ (Frame, 2003)[\[5\]](#) against the reformed theonomic brothers in the USA.

The author of CETE nowhere goes into discussion with theonomic scholars themselves, such as Rushdoony, Bahnsen, Gentry, etc., trying to understand these brothers, learn from them, and then give helpful robust critique from their own writings.^[6] His article is a one-sided non-scholarly non-objective quote from secondary sources aiming to write off and ignore other reformed thinkers, and no independent own study of the topic of theonomy and postmillennialism.

The crucial importance of the underlying debate

The importance of replying to CETE, is because fundamentally, the article's content is not only about a certain group of American reformed believers as such, but also about two underlying issues or questions that are related to CETE's content, that has been a question for the church through all the centuries, namely:

a) *What is the nature of the **Kingdom of God**? What is the calling of reformed believers, individually but also as a church in this world. It is a question about the Kingdom of God, what is our biblical calling in this world?*

b) ***By what Standard** should we then live when we are saved by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, to the glory of the triune God alone, a redemptive-ethical question: what is the standard or norm of our Kingdom activities, personally, family, church but also in all areas of life, specifically also in the socio-political areas of life, relationship between 'church and state' issues, etc.*

What is the Kingdom, what is the Kingdom's standard, and what is the Kingdom's relationship to this world. Is there absolutely no relationship (world avoidance - the anabaptist tendency?) or is there total uniformity (the social gospel ideas?), see prof. L. Floor's work, *Die Evangelie van die Koninkryk*.^[7]

The church of Christ, children of the Lord, have always wrestled with implications of the kingdom that **has already come in Jesus Christ** into this world, but is not of this world (John 17: 14-17). The already but not yet tension (1 Cor.15: 20-28).

Does the Kingdom take shape or bear fruit **only** in personal lives, family life, the visible aspect of the church: teaching, service and discipline (1, 2 Tim, Titus), or does it have **more implications** or consequences for the whole life, every inch for Christ, **antithetically** (the vision of Calvin, Puritans, Covenanters, Voortrekkers, Kuyper, Bavinck, Totius, Stoker, PU vir CHO, etc)? Are our calling limited to certain areas of our life, our does it go out to all areas of life and thought?

*“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, **or whatever you do**, do all to the glory of God.”* (1 Co 10:31)

Is there, *for the reformed believer*, one law-standard at home and the church, but another (neutral?) law-standard for the world? The question is not 'what is', but what 'should be', our reformed calling, should the world be confronted **only** by the gospel, or by both law and gospel, each in its own rightful place and order according to the Scriptures (Matt. 5:1-20; Rom. 3:20-31; 1 Tim. 1:8-11). Or must we continue with the dualism of: on Sunday and at home it is all the law and gospel, but from Monday to Saturday it is all any law but God's law and some neutral kind of ideas that should rule, and maybe a gospel message thrown in for piety sake?

The 20th-21st century reformed debate in the USA must be carefully distinguished

The focus of this reply to CETE is not all the different kingdom and ethical views in the USA, but it is needed to understand Theonomy as a movement historically also and the reactions to it. The big discussion among reformed brothers in the 2nd half of the 20th century in the USA was (and still is)^[8], not **only** between 'pro or anti-Theonomic' reformed brothers, but, the bigger even more important discussion is between 'pro or anti-theonomic' brothers, i.e. between those (Theonomic and non-Theonomic, i.e. belonging or not belonging to the self-consciously Christian Reconstruction/Theonomic school of thought as a 'thinktank')^[9] who still see the revealed Word of God (esp. the Ten Commandments) as the final absolute standard for all of life, also in the socio-political areas of life, for both Church and State, and, those that want

some kind of natural law idea, i.e. not the explicit Word and God's revealed laws, as summarized in the Ten Commandments as a foundation of a society.

The latter group, are called the 'Two Kingdoms' theology view [\[10\]](#) (and by many of their critics they called, 'Radical Two Kingdoms' theology), are very hostile towards any kind of Theonomic and even theonomic views as the foundation of a Christian society, and foundationally they also very anti-Christendom, anti-Belgic Confession article 36, and also anti-theocratic, *as they specifically define and reject these terms.*

In CETE some of the hostile critique come for this '(radical) two kingdom' movement, may I also say 'extreme' group of reformed believers, who on the one side correctly sees many misuses and problems of 'Christendom, theocracy, BC art. 36, etc.', but now wants to throw out the baby (Christ's Kingship over *all* of live according to His Spirit and Word, God's revealed Word as the standard for all magistrates, civil governments, etc.) out with the filthy bathwater? [\[11\]](#)

So essential part of the discussion of the nature of the Kingdom and by what standard should we live in the Kingdom, is what *both* Theonomy and (Radical) Two Kingdoms movements bring to our 21st world questions of our Kingdom calling and according to what standard should we then live in all areas of life, and, not only at home and church, but also in a world out there who is getting more and more hostile to God, the Word, the church, etc.

Is the (radical) Two kingdoms view the biblical and 'best one' for today, or perhaps the theonomical-theocratic view, *both* of which strongly advocate grounds for their views from Scripture, the Reformed confessions and church history, and, as with Augustine who are claimed by both Rome and the Protestants, the same happens with Calvin for both Theonomist and non- and anti-Theonomists? [\[12\]](#)

Or is it not one of these options, maybe something in-between as many other reformed brothers will plead, correctly or incorrectly? It is important to know that many reformed theologians and scholars in the USA do not 'side' with either movement, they are critical of both movements on different levels and issues. [\[13\]](#)

My own view of the Kingdom (which I believe is also in essence the reformed theocratic-theonomic view)

Yes, the Kingdom of God has *already* come in Christ, is *essentially* the Lord's redemptive rule in and through Jesus Christ, the Supreme King (Ps. 2, 110), it is *essentially* a *spiritual* Kingdom by the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore not 'from this' world, did not originate from man of this world (John 18:36), it is all about the Saviour King of the Kingdom (Matt.28: 18), about the Triune God (Rom. 11:33-36). 'We', the church or believers *do not* 'bring in' the Kingdom of God, not politically or otherwise, it has been done by God Himself already through His Word and Spirit.

This, the citizens of the Kingdom may and should not differ about, but what is the fruit and consequences thereof (of the absolute sovereign mediatorial rule of King Christ) for *every* field of life and thought, personally, family, church, society, etc.? What are the full implications of Christ becoming flesh, and His bodily resurrection (HC Sunday 1), yes, above all for eternity, but also what about the here and now of the Kingdom?

The implications and results of sin and rebellion was everywhere, what is the implications and results of grace now, for eternity and yes, also for this life (Gen. 3; Romans 5)?

Was Herman Bavinck (Ragusa: 2016) right or wrong when he in essence said, grace does not destroy but redeems nature, yes, yes, not everyone head for head, not everything in detail, by no ways perfect in this life, but as each area of life and thought were infected by sin, now each area of life and thought must be 'infected' by the gospel, by the Word of God, by King Christ through His Spirit and Word? Was Bavinck wrong in calling the Bible:

"... 'the book of the Kingdom of God', not a book for this or that century or only about the individual, but

about all nations, for all mankind, not for one time but for all times. This is an Kingdom book. And just as the Kingdom of God does not develop itself next to and above but in and through world history, so also Scripture must not be subtracted, considered in itself and isolated from everything, but it must be with our whole life, with the life of humanity is connected and employed to explain it. In short, Scripture is a book from the past, but also for the present and future... It comes to the family and society, to church and school. It is in one word: *the speech of God to mankind.*"[14]

THEREFORE, the whole debate is much bigger than just belonging or siding with any kind of so-called 'extreme' reformed group, whether 'Theonomic Postmillennialism' or 'Radical Two Kingdoms Amillennialism', or siding with your favorite theologian or camp in the USA.

This kingdom-ethical issue that CETE touches on is part of the much bigger discussion about what is the Kingdom, how does it relate to all of life, what is our calling in and towards this world, and the difference in that views are much more than being 'pro or anti-Theonomic', because there is many good reformed brothers *on both sides* we can learn a lot from.[15]

My plea as a Reformed believer from South Africa

"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." (Ac 17:11)

Therefore, my plea for South African reformed believers is to carefully read all original sources, both sides of these debates, distinguish also between the different lines and groups in these important debates, focus above all on the two main topics, what is our kingdom calling, and, by what Standard should we then live out or calling on each area of life and thought?

Do not get drawn into the sad personal sectarian battles and attack among these reformed brothers, unfortunately many from both sides, that divides brothers and churches in the USA, and it seem has blown over to the SA now? Focus on the important topics itself, try to walk the extra mile with the other reformed brother that has a different view and are really convince his view is from 'Scripture and the confessions', and see what we as reformed folks in SA can learn from all these reformed groups on these two crucial topics:

What is the Kingdom and how does it apply to all areas of life, and

By what Standard should we then live in all areas of life?

With reference to John Frame's article (*Machen's Warrior Children*) revealing some of the problems of our reformed brothers and churches in the USA, I have written on my blog the following under the title, *RS Clark, Calvin and Theonomy*[16], which can now also be applied to the CETE article of. dr. Diedericks:

"The biggest lesson for me in these kind of debates that I been following for 30 years, and especially now with Clark's actions in not allowing my comments (on his blog), is not whether one is pro- or non- or anti-theonomic as such, but that we should, no matter what camp we in, read and listen to both sides of views, debates, etc., especially if many on those debates are with fellow reformed brothers within the reformed camp.

Yes, we must beware of false doctrines, heresies, guard the true churches (BC art. 29), etc., but I do not believe pro or anti-reformed theonomic ethics (which I believe is *another*, not the *only* reformed ethic for God's law for today, which should be considered within reformed and presbyterian churches, *together with other reformed views on this topic*, that will be more or less non-theonomic/theocratic) is a area to die for on a reformed hill, I do not believe one should be seen as 'within or without the reformed camp' because of being pro- or anti theonomic (with theonomic here I mean specifically Rushdoony or Bahnsen's kind/version of theonomy, and not theonomy in general through history, which I believe all reformed should

be theonomic in general: pro-law in the traditional 3 uses of the law distinction sense, as is stated in our reformed confessions).”

What I mentioned there, is also my goal with this 4 part reply to CETE: the hope that reformed believers will return to *ad fontes*, back to the sources for all they agree and disagree with. By all means, read and study all critiques of theonomic postmillennialism, but like the Bible teaches, listen and study carefully both sides of a issue, debate, controversy, etc., especially if the debate and disagreement is with fellow biblical reformed confessional brothers.[\[17\]](#)

CETE is unfortunately very clear that it does not want to learn anything at all from the theonomic reformed ethics by using,

a) the labelling-and-write-them-off method to discredit other reformed brothers labelling them as ‘*extreme, cult-like fanaticism, anti-state, rebels, fanaticism, cause so much trouble in the local church, cause division, lack of love*’ and,

b) by downright misrepresenting theonomy’s views on many points, giving half-truth or unclear information, for example that they ‘*anti-state, rejecting the sovereignty of the state, want the Church to force Christocracy on world, want to take over the work of the Holy Spirit’s work, denying the Spirit’s work in the history, they wholly future orientated, etc.*’.[\[18\]](#)

Now, what sane reformed reader, even more so those that do not read the sources or both side of a debate, will even touch any reformed theonomic brothers works and want fellowship with them after that mouthful labels were burned onto them? Is that how we deal with each other, and yes, because of this kind of labelling there has been strong reactions by some theonomic authors also, which one cannot commend, but can understand. This is a very unfortunate stance of the CETE article which does not help serve the two broader very important points of the Kingdom calling and by what standard we must live.

See this very helpful article and my comments about the ‘art of labelling’: *Fundamentalisme – naam of brandmerk?*, prof. dr. A. Th. van Deursen[\[19\]](#)

In part 2 I will answer some of the critique given in CETE from the sources itself mentioned in the ‘References’ at the end of the article.

Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) Emphases added.

[\[2\]](#) Dr. Diedericks is from Department of Education and Biblical Studies, Faculty of Education, Akademie Reformatoriese Opleiding en Studies, Pretoria, South Africa.

[\[3\] https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/article/view/2753/7209](https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/article/view/2753/7209)

[\[4\] https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/issue/view/231](https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/issue/view/231)

[\[5\]](#) Dr. John Frame’s very important article on conflict in the American conservative Reformed circles: “I have enumerated areas of conflict occurring in American conservative Reformed circles from 1936 to the present. Under some of those headings I have mentioned subdivisions, sub controversies. Most of these controversies have led to divisions in churches and denominations, harsh words exchanged between Christians. People have been told that they are not Reformed, even that they have denied the Gospel. Since Jesus presents love as what distinguishes his disciples from the world (John 13:34-35), this bitter fighting is anomalous in a Christian fellowship. Reformed believers need to ask what has driven these battles. To what

extent has this controversy been the fruit of the Spirit, and to what extent has it been a work of the flesh?"
Read the full article here: <https://frame-poythress.org/machens-warrior-children/>

[6] See my own appreciation and critique of Christian Reconstructionism, Theonomy, etc., especially focusing on Rushdoony, here, delivered at a 'Christ and Culture' seminar in 2000:
<https://proregno.com/2010/02/01/verbondseminaar-2000-christus-en-kultuur/>

[7] See Floor, L. Die Evangelie van die Koninkryk,
https://www.christelikemedia.org/sites/default/files/Floor_L_-_Die_Evangelie_van_die_Koninkryk.pdf See this specific chapter, Die Koninkryk van God en die Aardse Ryke, <https://proregno.com/2017/05/11/die-koninkryk-van-god-en-die-aardse-ryke-prof-l-floor/>

[8] Walker, A.T., 2021, American Culture Is Broken. Is Theonomy the Answer?
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/theonomy/> Reply to Walker's article: Meador, J., 2021, Let's talk about Theonomy. <https://blogs.mereorthodoxy.com/jake/lets-talk-theonomy/> See also: Kline, T. 2021, What Theonomy Gets Wrong About the Law. <https://mereorthodoxy.com/theonomy-gets-wrong-law/> Hume, C., 2021. The Bondage of the Civil Law? <https://reformedhope.com/2017/06/28/the-bondage-of-the-civil-law/> Aitken, J. 2006. The Current Trends in the Theonomy Debate. <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/the-current-trends-in-the-theonomy-debate>

[9] Reformed theologians like John Frame, Vern Poythress and others are not part of the Theonomic school, appreciate Theonomy's contribution to 'reformed ethics and eschatology' discussions, but also gives their helpful critique on this movement. See Frame (1976, 2012), and Poythress (1995).

[10] See dr. Simon Jooste, (2013), Recovering the Calvin of 'Two Kingdom's'? : A Historical-Theological Inquiry in the light of Church-State discourse in South-Africa.
<https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/80065> Bradford Littlejohn, W. 2017, The Two Kingdoms: a guide for the perplexed. <https://davenantinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The-Two-Kingdoms-Preview.pdf>

[11] See footnote 13 for some American context of this debate, whether one agrees or disagrees with the author's evaluation of the debate. Michael N. Jacobs (2020) writes "To conclude, the Two Kingdoms perspective is clear: Christians should not attempt to transform the broader culture into the redemptive kingdom. Christians receive Christ's kingdom; they do not build it. However, while the parameters outlined by D. G. Hart and Michael Horton highlight biblically unwarranted forms of cultural engagement, they do not provide much guidance for how appropriate Christian engagement with the common kingdom should occur."

[12] See Jooste (2013). From a theonomic reformed, see Strevel, C.B. (2002) *Theonomic Precedent in the Theology of John Calvin*; De Mar, G. 2017, *Theonomy: an extension of Calvinism's judicial theology*.

[13] See McIlhenny, R.C. 2012. Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective, and Frame, J. 2011. The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology. N.T. Batzig writes: "The important thing to remember, as you seek to wade through these waters, is that the Two Kingdoms theology being promoted today is largely a response to the Theonomic movement/Christian Reconstructionism and the Christian America/God and Country influence. It is an overreaction to deviant theological movements. But, it is a reaction that is fundamentally good and necessary. Theonomy is an aberrant theology that is not upheld by Scripture, a healthy biblical theology, or the Westminster Confession of Faith. ... While proponents of Theonomy misrepresent Van Til in regard to the role of civil law for modern governments, they are correct to follow Van Til in regard to the Bible being authoritative for all of life. Since rulers are the Imago Dei, they are bound to enact righteous laws. The only way they can accurately discern those laws is by means of God's special revelation—His written word."
<https://feedingonchrist.org/theonomy-two-kingdom-and-a-middle-road/> There are many other reformed theologians and schools of thought that does not associate them with either '(radical') two kingdoms

theology or the theonomy movement, such as Ligonier Ministries, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, PRCA, PRTS, Reformed Theological Seminary, etc.

[14] Bavinck in his foreword in 'Kennis en Leven' and also in his foreword to Matthew Henry's Commentary, <https://sources.neocalvinism.org/bavinck/> See also this source under the title 'Christus en Kultuur by Bavinck: die Calvinistiese vs die Lutherse en anabaptistiese sienings' here, which also critiques the (modern) Two Kingdoms view from a non-theonomic reformed perspective: <https://proregno.com/2020/08/12/christus-en-kultuur-die-calvinistiese-vs-die-luthers-en-anabaptistiese-sienings-deur-herman-bavinck/> Other non-reformed critique from Ligonier Ministries: Matheson, K.A., 2010, 2K or Not 2K? That is the Question: A Review of David VanDrunen's Living in God's Two Kingdoms. <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/2k-or-not-2k-question-review-david-vandrunens-living-gods-two-kingdoms/>; More articles on Bavinck: <https://proregno.com/category/bavinck/>

[15] See Simon Jooste's article, for thoughts from a Two Kingdom perspective, and how it relates to SA's history and future calling as reformed churches, From Orange to Pink: A History of Politics and Religion in South Africa's Cape Town. <https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/articles/from-orange-to-pink-a-history-of-politics-and-religion-in-south-africas-cape-town/>

[16] <https://proregno.com/2020/01/17/rs-clark-calvin-and-theonomy/>

[17] Yes, many Christians, also non-reformed believers accept theonomy or some kind of theonomy, same with postmillennialism. But we talk here about the leading thinkers that should be studied, which I believe are: Bahnsen, Rushdoony, Gentry, North, De Mar. Of them all, I agree most with Greg L. Bahnsen.

[18] Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 43 112. WHAT DOES THE NINTH COMMANDMENT REQUIRE? That I bear false witness against no one, twist no one's words, be no backbiter or slanderer, join in condemning no one unheard or rashly; but that on pain of God's heavy wrath, I avoid all lying and deceit as the very works of the devil; and that in matters of judgment and justice and in all other affairs, I love, speak honestly, and confess the truth; also, insofar as I can, defend and promote my neighbor's good name. <https://confessionalism.wordpress.com/heidelberg-catechism/>

[19] <https://proregno.com/2017/08/15/fundamentalisme-naam-of-brandmerk/>

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